

## The Core: Living with Jesus at the Center Raised with Him Through Faith

Colossians 2:11-12

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11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. Col 2:11-12  
ESV

Last week we heard the warning from the Apostle Paul that we need to think about our thinking. We need to watch out for spiritual drift, the real possibility of starting to put our trust or confidence in things other than Christ. Even good things can become bad things when we place them on par with our trust in Jesus.

Think about your thinking – that was last week. The next two weeks we are going to learn about what we should be thinking or how we should think. Colossians 2:8-10 told us what not to think. Colossians 2:11-15 will tell us what we should think.

Central to all of this will be the need to see ourselves through a biblical lens of what it means to be “in Christ.” In other words, Paul is going to lay out a series of statements that describe who we are in terms of our spiritual position. And he does this for a very important reason and one that you cannot miss: The heart of practical Christianity is learning to live on the basis of your spiritual position.

Your spiritual position in Christ serves as the basis from which you live – every day. Therefore, there are three kinds of people on my heart today:

- Those who have no spiritual position in Christ because they've never repented and turned to him, and therefore have no real way to live (i.e., no power to change). I want you to see your need to run to Jesus.
- Those who know Christ as Savior but are unaware of significance of the position they have in Jesus. I want you to realize in your mind and heart the beauty and power of what Christ has done for you.
- Those who know Christ and know their position, but they do not understand how it connects to how they live every day. I want you to see how you live every day on the basis of your position in Jesus.

So there is something in this message for all three groups, and my prayer is that all of us will learn to live on the basis of our spiritual position. By the way, you realize that is what you will be doing for eternity, right? In fact, every person right now – whether you realize it or not – is living every day on the basis of your spiritual position.

Our text identifies two symbols that tell us something about our position, and then it points us toward one way to live.

## **Two Symbols: Circumcision and Baptism**

The two symbols that are identified here are circumcision and baptism; each of one has a very important place in biblical history and in the communication of the message of the gospel. Like all symbols, circumcision and baptism, represent something else. They were not meant to stand alone or to become the focus (like we talked about last week). As a symbol both of them remind us of a truth, and the symbol helps us to put handles on a concept that might be hard to understand without a visual illustration. Therefore, circumcision and baptism are God-given symbols or illustrations of very important biblical truths. Let's look at each of them.

### **Circumcision**

Verse 11 begins "in him also you were circumcised." So it is important for you to notice two things: 1) there is a symbol here: circumcision and 2) there is a direct connection to Jesus: "in him." There is a symbol, and there is an identification with Jesus.

In Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abraham, and circumcision was commanded as a token or sign of fidelity to the Creator God. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, and circumcision was the primary symbol which communicated a personal membership in God's covenant and Jewish community. It became the seal of membership into the people of God, the hallmark symbol of being a Jew.

What did the actual symbol really mean? It meant two things. First it was a symbol of God's covenant in Abraham to the Jewish people. Secondly, it represents a restoration of purity by the removal of flesh. Covenant and purity were the message. It communicated that the very act of creating another image bearer was seen as under God's rule and it communicated that the value of purity with the removal of flesh. Therefore, circumcision was designed to point people toward their need for purity and ultimately God.

However, spiritual purity, not external obedience, was always the goal. God wanted his people to see beyond the physical sign and pursue a circumcision of the heart (Deut. 10:16; 30:6). Therefore, God often calls his people to remove the foreskins of their hearts (Jer. 4:4). Spiritual circumcision was what they really needed.

Keeping that in the back of your minds, notice what Paul says about circumcision in Colossians 2:11.

- We were circumcised “in him.” This means that a removal of impurity happened through Christ.
- The circumcision was spiritual, not physical. The text says “made without hands.”
- Jesus himself became the removal of flesh that created purity. The phrase “by the circumcision of Christ” does not mean that his actual circumcision as Jewish child was somehow redemptive. No, he is saying something more.

Paul’s amazingly powerful point is that Jesus’ physical death became the “putting off the body of flesh.” Jesus’ physical suffering and his death were to putting off of the body. Jesus became the discarded flesh that created purity.

In other words, Jesus became your circumcision! He was the means by which you are made pure. Circumcision changed a person’s status from “stranger” to “family.” Jesus changed your status from “enemy” to “friend,” but he did it internally – in your heart – not just externally.<sup>1</sup> Jesus’ death is your spiritual circumcision; the old way is gone and purity; real spiritual purity is restored.

Do you see how circumcision is a powerful symbol? For those of us who have fled to Christ for our forgiveness, we live in a spiritual reality through him. He became discarded flesh. We are circumcised in him!

## **Baptism**

The second symbol is baptism. While circumcision symbolically connects us to the suffering of Christ and ultimately his death, baptism points us to his burial and ultimately his victory over the grave.

The scandal of heaven was the simple fact that the sinless Son of God died. The scandal of hell was the glorious fact that the Son of God rose from the grave. His death speaks of sufficient payment for sin. His life speaks of the conquering power to walk in newness of life.

Baptism as a symbol is closely connected to the resurrection of Jesus. It communicates that the old has past and the new has come. It declares that the strangle-hold of sin has been broken and that Jesus has conquered sin and death.

Now if you look closely at the text it says, “buried with him in baptism.” Some of you might think that this statement implies that it was the baptism that buried us with him, as if the act of

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 2:28 – “But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is as matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter...”

baptism created the burial. However, as with circumcision the symbol is pointing to another reality; baptism as a symbol points to a spiritual reality: our resurrection in Jesus. God's intent in the symbol of baptism was to picture your burial and resurrection with Jesus. The baptism symbol pictures a spiritual reality that you cannot see. There's more than just symbols here.

This is a very important key to understand here for two reasons:

1. Paul is fighting against those who would use rules, regulations, and spiritual activities as the means of spiritual improvement as if they could improve upon Jesus. In no way would Paul want to create more trust in symbols, rules, or regulations.
2. Chapters 2 and 3 are clarion calls to live by spiritual realities or spiritual positions that you cannot see. For instance: "If you have been raised with Christ..." (Col 3:1).

Paul's point here is very important because there is this clear sense that we are to live in light of our spiritual position. To live by circumcision or baptism or any other symbol, sign, or methodology is powerless and it compromises the gospel.

Our problem is that we would often try to live on things like circumcision and baptism, and we fail to see the immense power gap between those things and Jesus. The symbols were meant to point us toward a greater reality, and it is tragic when fail to see the bigger picture. It would be like going to the Vietnam War Memorial and being more enamored with the black granite and the height of the wall, missing the fact that there are more than 20,000 names of real people on the wall.

Baptism means that Jesus died in your place; when he died, you died. It also means that when he rose "a victor from the dark domain" that you rose a victor from the dark domain. Baptism is meant to help us understand that we are raised with him. And that in same way that Jesus walks in newness of life, we should as well.

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4)

So circumcision and baptism were given to help us understand a spiritual reality that we cannot see. We are circumcised in Jesus; he became the purifying discarding of flesh. We are buried with him in baptism; there is a real death and a real victory that we share, but only "in Him." The point of all of this is to help you see that there is a real spiritual position, and we need to constantly live in light of it.

Let me try to illustrate this for you. On June 25, 1993, my status in life radically changed. I went from being a single man to a married man. I told you on our candidating weekend how that changed my view of toilet seats. But there was something interesting that also happened.

There were moments when I forgot for a few seconds that we were married. For instance I remember waking up one morning in that groggy, early-morning fog and realizing that Sarah was sharing my bed. I remember a few seconds of guilt-ridden panic. I remember thinking, "What have I done! Why are we sharing a bed?" Only to remember, "Oh yeah, we're married!" My position changed, but for a moment I wasn't living in light of my position.

And the key that we find in Colossians 2 and 3 is to constantly live in light our position in Christ. If you have never received Jesus you need to change your position – from enemy to Son – by turning to him today. If you don't understand your position in Christ, you need to review the beauty and power of what Christ has done for you. And finally (I suspect this is where many of us are today) we need to learn how to live in light of the position that we have in Christ. It is to the way that we ought to live that we turn next.

### **One Way to Live: By Faith**

We are rooted in him (2:6), built up in him (2:7), filled in him (2:10), circumcised with him (2:11), buried with him (2:12), and raised with him (3:1). Further, we are to put off the old man (3:9) and put on the new man (3:9). All of this is a work that God has done for us in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Spiritual transformation happens through Jesus **by faith**.

To receive Jesus means that by faith you believe that his life and death can be applied by God to you. In theological terms this is called the vicarious atonement of Jesus. Vicarious means to take the place of another or to live through another. The way that you came to God in the first place was through the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus; he took your place. Or to borrow from the text of "Man of Sorrows"

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
**In my place condemned he stood;**  
Sealed my pardon with his blood:  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Vicarious atonement means that Jesus took my condemned place. But the problem is that many believers think that that is where it stops. On the contrary, the cross was the place where vicarious atonement began, and everything from the cross is a constant connection back to that: I can't, but Jesus can!

Therefore, I live vicariously through Jesus all the time. He took my sins but that is not all. I am circumcised with him. I'm buried with him. I'm raised with him. There is a direct connection from his activity to my soul; it is an umbilical cord of grace. My life comes from him.

Colossians 2:13 tells us how we do this: "through faith in the powerful working of God." I place my faith in the fact that God has promised to take Christ's death and count it as sufficient

for me. You see “in my place condemned he stood” was not my idea. It is God’s idea, and the Bible calls me to believe! So the life that we now live is a life of faith (see Gal 2:20). It is life where I believe in a positional reality that I cannot see. It is a lens through which I look at the symbols of circumcision and baptism, and I see the beauty and the power of Jesus.

### **So how do I do this?**

1. **I must know Jesus.** I must have received him as Savior. I must know what he did, how he lived, why he did it, and what it all means. I must set my heart to know him, to have a relationship with him, and to worship him. If you don’t know him you’ll not know how to live by him.
2. **I must learn to live by faith.** Paul said, “...the life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me...” (Gal. 2:20). I have to really come to terms with the fact that faith in Christ began at the cross, and faith continues for the rest of my life. Christianity is a life of faith in the promises of God.
3. **I must live through Jesus.** I have to see that everything I am, do, or ever hope to be only happens **through** Jesus. Jesus took my place, and now I live through him. I must preach the biblical truths of Jesus’ victory to my heart. I live through him. The Christian life is a life of vicarious attachment to Jesus. Therefore:
  - I shouldn’t believe lies about myself
  - I should saturate my mind and heart with the truth of the Word
  - I should pray for the power of Christ in me
  - I should declare war on all forms of pride and self-sufficiency
  - I should find my security in Christ not people or position or knowing the future
  - I should rejoice when I’m stripped bare because His grace is sufficient

There are some of you here that have never received Jesus, and today needs to be that day. There are others who really needed to know about your position in Christ. And there are others who need to take this message and learn to live every day in light of your position – rehearse it, sing about it, but most of all preach it to your heart.

God has given us some great symbols, but they pale in comparison to the spiritual reality that we have in Jesus. We are circumcised with Jesus. We are buried with him in baptism and we are raised with him **by faith**.

Ebay has become a household name in America. It is shopping experience like few others. You find the product you want to buy, bid on it, and wait to see if you have **won**. I have found myself pounding the table saying, “No, we lost” and I was determined not to lose again. The Ebay experience is competitive shopping. Which is why I thought their ad campaign last year

was brilliant. It featured people running around a race track like greyhound dogs but the object wasn't a fuzzy rabbit. It was an antique radio. And the guy who crosses the finish line wins! That leads to their tag line: Shop Victoriously.

Do you remember what theological word I taught you this morning? Vicarious. It means to live through someone else.

This morning I want to call you off the race-track of personal performance, false guilt, misplaced hopes, crushed dreams, legalistic standards, and misguided spiritual confidence.

Instead, here's my charge: The heart of practical Christianity is learning to live on the basis of your spiritual position...LIVE VICARIOUSLY. LIVE THROUGH JESUS.

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