

# “THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS”

## COLOSSIANS 2:11-12

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### INTRODUCTION

We have the best of both the old covenant—in spiritual circumcision—and also of the new covenant—in baptism; “the best of both worlds.” We have been cleansed, transformed, changed—we are a “new creation in Christ Jesus.” We have been buried with Christ once having died with Him, and then have been raised up with Christ—no longer under bondage to sin, death, hell, and Satan. We don’t trust in our ability, power, accomplishments; we trust only in “the working of God—the working by which He raised His Son from the grave! We already saw last week that you are complete in Christ. Now we see how and why that is true. You have God’s best in Jesus Christ. Don’t wish or ask for anything/anyone better! **YOU HAVE DIED, BEEN BURIED, BEEN RAISED UP FROM DEATH IN CHRIST—LIVE EACH DAY FOR HIM!**

#### I. THE SIGN OF THE OLD COVENANT—CIRCUMCISION (11)

- Phil. 3:3 states that believers are “the true circumcision,” and in Rom. 2:28-29 Paul points out that true circumcision is a matter of the heart.
  - Already in the OT Moses and others were using “circumcision” metaphorically of the cleansing of the heart (see Dt. 10:16; cf. Jer. 4:4).
- A. The place/sphere of the action: “In Him” (lit. “in Whom”)
- B. The Action taken—“circumcised.” See Gen. 17:9-14—Sign of the covenant made with Abraham.
- C. The Character of the action—“circumcision made without hands”
- No human involvement; an action by God; cf. Eph. 2:11 of the literal circumcision with hands.
  - Mk. 14:58 has “made without hands of the resurrection body of Christ—in contrast with the earthly body “made with hands—human involvement.
  - II Cor. 5:1—of heavenly body of believers.
  - Heb. 9:11 has “not made with hands” of heavenly tabernacle; 11:24 of earthly made with hands.
  - Stephen points out that the Most High God does not dwell in houses “made by human hands” (Acts 7:58); cf. Paul also in Acts 17:24.
  - In the LXX the expression “made with hands was exclusively used for idols/idolatry.
  - OT circumcision was limited to males; now such distinctions between circumcision and uncircumcision and thus also between male and female are not relevant.
- D. The Extent of the Action—“the removal of the body of the flesh.” (noun used only here)
1. Not a reference to the physical body of Christ  
Arguments against this view
    - The phrase “body of flesh” here in v. 11 is more naturally connected with the subject of the sentence—“you”, i.e. Christians rather than with “Christ” who is only mentioned at the end of the verse.
    - Can become dangerously close to heresy—a sort of idea “in which Christ’s body is a negative encumbrance to be disposed of rather than a neutral, albeit weak, vessel destined for transformation through resurrection—correct theology.
  2. It is a reference to the removal/putting off of “the Old Man”
    - Its verbal root appears twice—in Colossians: 3:9—taking off and laying aside of the “old self/man”, and in Col. 2:15 of Christ’s “taking off/disarming” of the rulers and authorities.
    - Rom. 6:6—“our old man/self was crucified with Him that our body of sin might be done away (note also the baptismal context of vv. 1-5), Eph. 4:22-24—laid aside the “old man” and “put on the new man”.
    - Not merely a part of the “flesh”; the entire body of it, as if of an old and dirty garment. The believer now is not of the flesh and does not walk after the flesh.

- E. The Author of the Action—Christ (“by the circumcision of Christ”)
  1. Not a reference to Jesus physical circumcision when 8 days old.
  2. Not best taken as a direct reference to His death—putting off of his physical body (see above).
  3. Could be agent/source—He is the one doing the circumcision.
  4. Likely is simply possessive—it is the circumcision He owns—He is responsible for it.

## II. THE SIGN OF THE NEW COVENANT—BAPTISM (12)

The emphasis of v. 12 is not on the analogy between circumcision and baptism; that concept, though implied, is soon dismissed. Too many have taken this verse to teach that baptism is a parallel with circumcision, and if babies were circumcised then babies can be baptized. The fact is that the NT never mentions babies or small children as being the subjects of baptism. Moreover, **the NT never calls baptism “the seal” of the covenant—that honor goes to the Holy Spirit.**

The verse puts the **emphasis upon the exercise of faith** in the powerful working of God—not in the automatic power of a ritual act of baptism as though it were some kind of magical rite. Rather, it is an act of obedience in which we confess our faith and symbolize the essence of our spiritual experience. Faith is the instrumental cause of that experience and, apart from real faith, baptism is an empty, meaningless ceremony.

- A. The Time of the baptism—contemporary with the circumcision, maybe the means of the circumcision. It is when we were buried with Christ’ that we were circumcised.
- B. The kind of Baptism spoken of here—spiritual baptism, just like spiritual circumcision
  1. This baptism is effective—not merely external; many have had water baptism who have not been genuinely saved. Not all who are water-baptized are literally saved and have died, have been buried, and raised with Christ. Paul speaks here of spiritual certainty—the believer has been united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.
  2. Yet literal physical baptism stands behind it and a necessary accompaniment of salvation. Baptism is part of the “conversion-initiation” process found in the NT—involving the salvation of the believer and introduction into the new Christian community. The key factors of such a conversion/initiation were faith, repentance, the gift of the Spirit, and baptism.
- C. The Effects of Baptism
  1. Buried with Him:
    - The burial indicates “the reality of the death which the old man had undergone.”
    - The verb “bury together” occurs only here and in the similar Rom. 6:4 of the burial with Christ through “baptism into death.” The Romans passage also goes on to speak of both Christ’s resurrection (raising) and that of the believer in the words “walk in newness of life.”
  2. Raised up with Him
    - “Wherein” refers here to in baptism, not in Christ. Note Christ’s statements about His impending death in terms of “baptism” in Mk. 10:38-39 and Lk. 12:50.
    - The form “raised up with” appears only here in 2:12, in Col. 3:1—also of the spiritual resurrection of the believer in Christ, and in Eph. 2:6 where Paul speaks of the believer having been “raised up with Him” and also of having be “seated with Him in the heavenlies.”
    - We see here the “already/not yet” dimension of the believer’s participation with Christ in His resurrection. We have died, been buried, have been raised—yet we have a future resurrection awaiting us!
- D. The Mode of Baptism—immersion
  - Not directly stated here.
  - It is the only method that symbolizes burial and resurrection.
- E. The Means by which baptism is made possible and effective—Faith

Simple **trust and commitment**—in the person and finished work of Christ.

1. Faith is in the “working of God.”

Eph. 1:19 speaks of the working of the strength of His might” and then greatly elaborates on its application in the resurrection, session, rule, and headship of Christ.

2. Specifically in God’s working in the Resurrection of His Son.

- The Son was raised out from among the dead—no longer held by death.
- His resurrection makes possible our resurrection—spiritual and physical.
- Sin and its powers of death and hell have no control any longer. Faith in the God who powerfully worked in the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the typical emphasis of the Gospel as shown in Rom. 10:9—“believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead.” A believer will not receive the benefits of the resurrection if he does not believe in the resurrection of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

One who has faith in God’s working in the resurrection of His Son has tapped into omnipotence—an omnipotence that is sufficient for his justification, his sanctification, and his glorification, and thus for meeting all of his needs throughout his life. Eadie states, “If I believe in that power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead, I believe in a power which might righteously have crushed me, but is now mercifully wielded to save me; which has set its seal on the work of Christ and will now distribute and apply its rich results” (p. 153).

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