

Colossians 2:11-15 “United with Christ” Steve Harden 10/20/20

You can be turning with me in your Bibles, please, to Colossians 2. It is good to see you out this fall evening. I believe fall has broken and it’s cool! It is so good to see you. Colossians 2, we’ll be looking at verses 11-15 with emphasis on verses 11 and 12.

“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. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

This is the word of God. When approaching Scripture, we need to recognize that we all come with preconceived ideas or preconceived notions about what it’s going to say. It is something that we really never can escape, but we need to try and allow the word of God to speak for itself and try to devoid ourselves of preconceived ideas coming to the Scripture, let it speak to us instead of us speaking into it.

As I was thinking about this passage this week, I remembered a story that I heard of a family who had spent a beautiful weekend out in the woods and they picked some mushrooms and they had brought them home and cut them up and prepared them and they sat down to a marvelous dinner where they ate these mushrooms. And they were delicious! They enjoyed them and they enjoyed the fellowship that they had with one another and somehow, the family cat had gotten some of these mushrooms. So, they had cleaned off the table and were moving into the other room. Well someone noticed that the cat was having terrible, severe, agonizing stomach contractions. They started wondering. Were those mushrooms the kind of mushrooms that you could eat? Was this going to happen to us soon? And so, they called their physician and the physician said, “Well I don’t know but to be on the safe side you’d better go to the ER and have your stomachs pumped.” So the whole family troops out and they go to the hospital and do all the things that they needed to do and when they returned home, worse for wear, they came in the door fully expecting the cat to have died, but instead, they found that the cat was quite alright, was resting easily along with her five little kittens. The contractions that she felt were not because of the mushrooms, but because she was giving birth!

Assumptions can get you into trouble. Assumptions can lead you to the wrong conclusions. In our passage this evening, the temptation is to run to thinking about water baptism. The temptation is to run to that conclusion because it has circumcision and baptism all together in one verse. This is the only place in the Scripture to do that and we think that perhaps if we understand this passage well enough, it will unlock the mystery that theologians have debated for centuries about who is the proper recipient of water baptism. Is it infants or is it believers only? And it’s interesting that proponents of both positions on baptism often run to this text to prove their case. But tonight, I want to propose to you that this verse is primarily at least a dry verse. There are dry baptism verses and there are wet baptism verses and this one is a dry one. This passage is not primarily in my opinion, about water baptism, but rather, it is about our unity in Christ. It’s about our existence now, and for all eternity, as rooted in our oneness with

Jesus Christ That's what it's about. And then you can infer what you want from there. It's about new life in Jesus, the theological word for it is regeneration, new life.

I say that because of the context primarily. We have seen that here in Colossians the whole letter is about the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus and Paul has been addressing the false teachers and how they have been claiming that you have to have more than Christ to grow in Him, that you must have human traditions and rules and angel worship. But last time we spoke we saw that Paul summed up the essence of what it means to be a Christian in verses 6-7, "As you have received Him so walk in Him rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith." So, Paul is simply, here in verses 11-12, continuing in his thought. It reminds me of the book title "Jesus plus nothing equals everything." I love the book title. I can't recommend the book, don't know, haven't read it, but I love the book title. Jesus plus nothing equals everything. Paul uses pictures to convey to us this new life found in our unity with Jesus. He uses the picture of circumcision and he uses the picture of baptism.

So, first picture, circumcision, well we know circumcision is the removal of the foreskin of baby boys. This rite was given by God to Old Testament Israel. It was a physical mark to distinguish God's people from everyone else. You know, to the Old Testament Jew, there are only two kinds of people in the world. There are Jews and everyone else, known as Gentiles, right? And so, the Jew recognized that they were God's chosen people and physically marked so. God intended for circumcision to point out so much more than a physical demarcation. It was given to them to point to much deeper spiritual truths. It was given to them to decry the circumcision of the heart. The spiritual reality of this circumcision was lost on most of them. But it was to identify the true spiritual children of their father, Abraham, a physical sign that points to a spiritual reality, not unlike what Jesus gave us in the Lord's Supper. The bread and the wine are physical elements that point us to the spiritual reality of the cross. In much the same way, this is what God gave to them regarding circumcision. In the Old Testament in at least two different places it speaks of circumcision of the heart. In Deuteronomy 10:16 it says, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn." Have a heart change so that you're not stubborn, he says. In Jeremiah 4:4, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts." Circumcision then reflected on the outside, the inner spiritual change of disposition that they needed on the inside.

Now, to bring it into New Testament era. In the book of Colossians, Paul is writing to a Gentile church, a band of believers in the new covenant era, and he brings forward this picture of circumcision of the heart by calling it the circumcision that is made without hands. He describes then what is happened to these new covenant believers. Let me read verse 11 to you again, listen: "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." When Paul said that they were circumcised with a circumcision without hands, he was saying the reality of the old covenant circumcision had become true in them. Not because somehow, they had been made Jews but because they had been born from above, born again, brought into unity with Jesus. God had granted them new life and now they could see the spiritual reality of a changed heart! He takes them from a position of being separated from God to becoming God's own chosen people. Then he continues to say, "by putting off the body of flesh." Putting off is a word here that means stripping down, stripping off, though it be clothes or armor. It's that stripping off of the old man, the old nature and putting on a relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible calls it regeneration. Paul tells them that this circumcision made without hands was brought about by the reality, there in verse 11, of the circumcision of Christ. Now, isn't that an interesting thing to say? Now obviously he's not

talking about the little baby boy Jesus circumcision, but he's talking about something much more profound. He is talking about the literal death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary where he was stripped away from His outward flesh. We can have the change of heart, the change of disposition, the change within solely because Jesus died on the cross and His flesh was stripped away from Him. It is this union with Christ, our association with Him, our association with His death and our association with His resurrection that makes all the difference in the world. That's what makes us believers and followers of Jesus! It is this circumcision of the heart, or the circumcision that is made without hands. So, you see, it's a beautiful picture that He describes as he brings and sums all this together to show the Colossians that it really is Jesus and He is all they need.

But then he has another picture there in verse 12 and that's baptism: "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." Now, I'm going to give you a little word study, okay? Because I think it's so rich, we need to understand it. The word baptism here in this text is the Greek word in the original language: "baptidzo." There are two words that our translations translate the word baptism, they use "bapto" and they use "baptidzo." And you say, okay Steve, what difference does it make? I hope you're asking because I'm going to tell you and I think it's fascinating. "Bapto" means to moisten, or to dip, or to cover it with fluid. If you're talking about water, you're making it wet, okay? And that's really all that means. But this "baptidzo," is a different thing entirely. "baptidzo" means the placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else and this union alters its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition. It changes it. Let me explain.

Okay, in the classical Greek literature of the day it was used in two ways. One of the ways it was used was in the work of a blacksmith. Now I've not personally been a blacksmith, but I've watched them work and at least I've watched some good western tv shows, right? So a blacksmith heats up the iron until its red hot and if he will plunge that red hot iron into water, what happens? Well that iron is tempered. It hardens. There is molecular change in it. It's different than it was before. It was "baptidzo" into the water. It was changed. The other picture and my favorite is found in a document that was written by Nicander, a Greek poet and physician in about 200 A.D. and what he did was he wrote down a recipe for making pickles and why it's so fascinating is because he uses bapto and baptidzo in the same document. What Nicander says is that if you're going to make pickles you put the vegetables first "bapto" into boiling water, when you do that then you have hot vegetables, it doesn't change them. But you're dipping them into the hot water. If you take them out, and then you plunge them into a vinegar solution, you "baptidzo" them into the vinegar and those vegetables change from a vegetable, I think of a cucumber, into a pickle! It's different than it was before. You've placed it into union with something that has changed it.

Paul says, "by faith you were buried with him in baptism and raised with him." You were buried with him in "baptidzo" and raised with Him. The Christian is one who has been plunged into union with Jesus and you will never, ever be the same again. You're different than you were before! This union results in a permanent change in us. We are not what we were before. We are different. Our identity now is so wrapped up in His death and resurrection. What is true about Him is now true about us. We are different! We are brand new! We are pickles! When He died, we died with Him. When He was resurrected, we were resurrected with Him. We are in union with Him and it's all through faith! We accept it to be true because God's word says, "It is true." It's by faith. It's true in the spiritual realm. This is our position even when we can't see these

truths experientially. You and I both know sometimes we don't feel in union with Jesus, but it doesn't change a thing. Because positionally we are in Him, in union with our Savior.

Now, Steve, what are the implications? What can we glean from this truth that we are now pickles? That we're now in Christ? Let me suggest three things. First of all, regeneration is at the heart, the essence, if you will, of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It's at the very center. The Christian is one who has been spiritually united to Jesus. Christianity is not primarily about a change in philosophical position. It's not about a new code of ethics or a change in moral behavior. It's about a changed heart! You have been given a new heart, a new disposition. Your motives have changed. Everything has become brand new because you have received that circumcision that has been made with hands, a new heart. It's all about being transformed. Being pickled! And incorporated into Him. In union with Him in His death, and in union with Him in His resurrection. It's at the very heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

The second implication that is true is that regeneration results in spiritual growth. Regeneration results in spiritual growth. The picture that comes to mind for me is a baby, a little tiny baby. When a baby comes into the world, he is given life, brand new. He's been alive for a long time in the womb, but it is a life that is changed now, right? He has been given new life. And as he grows, and as he matures as a child, his behavior corresponds with his mental and his emotional and his physical capabilities. It's just natural. That's the way it works. As your child grows and matures, so do his behaviors, and if they don't, something is wrong. There are some behaviors that are very natural and expected for a baby that are not acceptable for a teenager. You generally don't clap for a teenager that rolls over! And you sure don't expect him to mess his pants. That would be ridiculous, right? That's outside of any expectation. As a child grows and matures, so his behavior grows and matures. When God gives us a new heart and we become alive in Him, we start as a baby, a baby child of God. Everything is brand new. This is a radical transformation of the soul because the Holy Spirit has made us new. But my friend, there's something very wrong, just like a baby, if we don't grow and mature in our faith, in our understanding and our attitudes and our behaviors, for that is natural for a child to grow! This new life is marked by a longing to please Him and to obey His commands and over time if that longing is not there then we need to wonder if that new life was ever given! So, this regeneration, this new life results in spiritual growth. My friend, that's not legalism. That is a simple principle of growth and maturity.

But the third implication that I would see is that regeneration guarantees eternal security. Regeneration is a decisive act, it's a one-time act, it occurs, and we grow. We cease to be the person that we were before; we've become a new person. Once having been placed into union with Jesus, we can never ever go back and not be in union with Jesus. A pickle can never become a cucumber again! A butterfly cannot ever become a caterpillar again. A child of God who has been given a new heart and a new disposition can never go back! We are a child of God and we can trust Him to continue that work until the day we see Him. Guys, this truth about our regeneration and new life and our unity in Christ and His death and resurrection is massively important to our understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ and it dwarfs in importance the discussion of when and who is physically baptized in water. Baptized into Christ, in union with Him in His death and resurrection is life changing! Please don't miss the forest for the trees in this text. This text is written for your encouragement, to look at your rebirth and your unity with Jesus as your only hope of being with Him forever. Let's pray.

Father we can often take secondary things and make them primary. Save us from that, oh God. Help us to understand that You have created us brand new, that we're new creatures in You

with new hearts and help us to grow then to maturity until the day that we see You face to face and become fully like you. I ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.