

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "Your Baptism in Christ" (Colossians 2:12)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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## **Paul's Tremendous Statement**

I want to call your attention once again to the tremendous statement that the Holy Spirit has given us through the pen of the Apostle Paul, in Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eleven. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eleven:

In Him [that is, in Jesus Christ] you [that is, you the believer in Christ] were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [that is, in the cross of Christ].

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. (Colossians 2:11-17)

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## **Two Great Facts That Legalism Denies**

Now this passage declares two great facts. Fact number one is this: Jesus Christ is preeminent – He is everything – in our salvation. Fact number two in this passage is the opposite of this: Legalism has no place in our salvation. Legalism denies the preeminence of Christ in our salvation. Legalism denies that “Jesus paid it all.”

In previous messages in this part of our series, we have seen that there are people and groups today who are spreading the false teaching that the person and work of Jesus Christ are not enough for salvation. They are spreading the great lie that Jesus’ perfect law-keeping righteousness is not enough. They say that you must add some kind of law-keeping righteousness of your own. Some of these people and groups even teach the lie that the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is not imputed to you as a sinner when you receive Christ.

And so we have seen the Bible’s answer to that lie. In our last message we saw that Isaiah chapter 61 verse 10 tells us that those who are in Christ do indeed wear the robe of His perfect righteousness.

And we also looked at Second Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21, which tells us that when we are saved, a double imputation takes place. Our sins have been imputed to Christ. They were placed on Christ at the cross, and He bore the wrath of God in our place. But not only have our sins been imputed to Christ, His righteousness has been imputed to us. Christ “who knew no sin, became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

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Notice those last two words of Second Corinthians 5:21. Believers have been "made the righteousness of God *in Him*." In Christ! "In Him"! Believer, that is how closely, how intimately, you are identified with the Lord Jesus Christ in the eyes of God the Father. You are not just "alongside Him." You are "*in Him*." When God the Father looks at you, he sees not a sinner standing naked and guilty, but a sinner who has been placed *in Christ* through the blood of His cross, a sinner who wears the robe of the perfect and complete righteousness of the Son of God.

Now, notice that Paul uses the same kind of language here in Colossians chapter two that he uses in Second Corinthians chapter five. Five times here in the passage before us, Paul speaks of the same kind of intimate identification with Christ. Notice verse 10: "You are complete" – that is, you have been filled with all fullness – "*in Him*." Notice verse 11: "*In Him* you were circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands." Notice verse 12: You have been "buried *with Him*." And later in verse 12: You have been "raised *with Him*." And then notice verse 13: You have been "made alive together *with Him*."

Dear friend, this is the key difference between being in legalism and being in Jesus Christ. There is no legalism "in Christ." Christ and legalism are mutually exclusive.

And this, dear friend, is your position if you are a believer in Him. You are truly *in Christ*. But you are not in Christ through the Law or through legalism. You are not in Christ because of physical circumcision or physical baptism. You are in Christ because *God has placed you in Christ*.

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## **Spiritual Circumcision, Spiritual Baptism**

In our last message we saw this reality in verses 11 and 12. We saw that the circumcision of which Paul speaks in verse 11 is not a physical circumcision. It is, he says, a “circumcision made without hands.” It is, Paul says, “the putting off” – literally, the stripping away – “of the body of the sins of the flesh.” It is the breaking of the bondage of the flesh. It is release from the bondage of the sin nature.

And likewise, we saw that the baptism of which Paul speaks in verse 12 is not a physical baptism. Now, many of you may have questions about this. You may be thinking, “Well, Paul does use the word ‘baptism’ in verse 12. How can it mean anything but water baptism? And if it doesn’t mean water baptism, then just what does it mean?”

Well dear friends, those are very good questions, and they are very important questions, and today we are going to answer them by searching the Scriptures together.

### **The Meaning of the Greek Word *Baptisma***

First of all, we need to understand the meaning of the Greek word that is translated “baptism” in verse twelve. The word in the Greek sounds very much like the word in English. The Greek word is *baptisma*. The only difference between the noun in the Greek and the noun in English is an extra letter “a” on the end in the Greek. *Baptisma*.

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Now in English, when we think of baptism, the first thing we usually think of is water. But listen carefully: The Greek word *baptisma*, in and of itself, has nothing to do with water. It is not limited to water. The Greek word *baptisma* can mean "immersion" or "submersion" or "a placing into" something or "an overwhelming" by something. But in the Greek language the word is not limited to "immersion" or "submersion" or "a placing into" physical water. It can also signify an "immersion" or a "submersion" or "a placing into" something other than water. The meaning of the word *baptisma* in the New Testament always depends on the context in which the word is used.

### **New Testament Uses of *Baptisma*: Not All Involve Water**

Now that we understand this, we can take the next step and look at the specific ways that the noun *baptisma* is used in the New Testament. And we also need to take note of instances where the verb form of the same word is used, which is *baptizo*. Of course the words *baptisma* and *baptizo* are used many times in the New Testament to mean water baptism. We have the various references to John's baptism in the Gospels and in the book of Acts. And we also find many places where the word refers to Christian baptism. Jesus said, "Go therefore and teach all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

But then there are other uses of the Greek words *baptisma* and *baptizo* in the New Testament that have nothing to do with water baptism. Let me give you three very important examples of this.

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The first example is in First Corinthians chapter ten, verse two. Paul tells us that the Israelites in the wilderness were all “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The “cloud” speaks of the cloudy pillar, the visible presence of God, that led the Israelites under Moses through the wilderness. The “sea” speaks of the Red Sea. It speaks of the passage of the children of Israel between the parted waters of the Red Sea on dry land. Now notice carefully what Paul says here in First Corinthians 10:2. He says that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses.” They were, literally, “*placed into Moses.*” Now the context tells us that this had nothing to do with water baptism.

What does this signify? It signifies the fact that the people of Israel were placed into that kind of a close and intimate union with Moses in the eyes of God, so that they all passed through the Red Sea on dry land with Moses, and they were all led by the cloud through the wilderness with Moses. The identity and relationship between Moses and the children of Israel was that close, that intimate.

Another passage where the Greek word *baptisma* is used without any connection to water baptism is in Mark chapter ten, beginning at verse 35:

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to [Jesus], saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.” And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” They said to Him, “Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.”

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[Now now notice what comes next.] But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:35-38)

What is the “baptism” of which Jesus spoke here? Clearly, once again, the context tells us that it is not physical baptism with water. Jesus had already been baptized by John at the beginning of His public ministry. So what is the meaning of the Greek word *baptisma* here?

We find the answer in Jesus’ own statement. Notice that He speaks of “drinking the cup that I drink” and then He gives the parallel statement of being “baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.” Both the “cup” and the “baptism” that Jesus speaks of are His sufferings. What did Jesus say to the Father when He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane? He said, “Father, let this cup” – the cup of Your wrath against sin – “let this cup [of suffering] pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus is saying to His disciples, literally, “Are you disciples able to experience the total immersion into the full force of God’s wrath, the suffering for sin that I am going to experience?” And for emphasis, Jesus uses the word baptism not once, but three times. And here again, clearly, this baptism has nothing to do with immersion in water.

Let me give you yet a third example of this, and this example is the most significant one for us, as we seek to gain a proper understanding of Paul’s use of the word “baptism” in Colossians 2:12. Turn with me to First Corinthians chapter

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twelve, beginning at verse twelve. First Corinthians chapter twelve, beginning at verse twelve. In this passage Paul is setting forth the doctrine of the church as the Body of Christ. And he says this:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. [Notice what comes next.] For by one Spirit [God the Holy Spirit] we were all *baptized into* one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

What is Paul saying here? The context tells us that he is not speaking of water baptism. If Paul were saying that, he would be saying that water baptism saves sinners and places them in the Body of Christ. And Scripture plainly teaches that this is not the case. But Paul is not speaking here of being placed into water. He is speaking of being *baptismaed*, or placed into, one body – the body of Christ, the true church of Jesus Christ. And how has that come about? Not by physical baptism with water, but by the work of the Spirit of God who places believers in Christ, in the body of Christ, which is His true church, the invisible church made up of believers only.

### **Paul's Use of *Baptisma* in Colossians 2:12**

And so with all of this in mind, we come back now to our question: What is Paul speaking of when he uses the word "baptism" in Colossians chapter two, verse twelve? Paul says that you as a believer have been "buried with Christ in baptism, in

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which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” Literally, Paul is saying, you “have been entombed together with Christ in the immersion [the *baptisma*] in which you also were raised together [from the tomb] with Him through the faith of the working of God who raised Him from the dead.”

There is no water in this picture. But there is a cross in this picture. There is a tomb in this picture. There is a resurrection in this picture. We are in Christ. Paul repeats that thought five times in these verses. Our identity with Christ is so close, so intimate, that in the eyes of God we were crucified with Christ, we were placed into the tomb with Christ, and we were raised from death to life with Christ.

Our crucifixion with Christ was the circumcision made without hands, verse eleven, the circumcision that stripped away the body of the sins of the flesh, and released us from the bondage of sin.

Our burial with Christ made possible our being raised from the dead with Christ “through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead,” verse twelve. “You,” Paul says, verse thirteen, “being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He [God the Father] has made alive together with Him [with Jesus Christ], having forgiven you all your trespasses...”

This is how our salvation was accomplished. Now, how is that salvation applied to each of us as individuals? We have the answer in a statement that Jesus made to His disciples: “John indeed baptized with water,” He said, “but you shall be baptized

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with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 11:16). Paul says the same thing in First Corinthians chapter 12 verse 13: “For by one Spirit [God the Holy Spirit] we were all baptized into [placed into] one body” – the body of Christ, the true church of Jesus Christ.

This is not water baptism. It is Spirit baptism. We need to be very careful to maintain a clear and definite distinction between water baptism and Spirit baptism. We need to make that distinction because Scripture makes that distinction.

Today for the sake of time I want to mention just one passage that points this out to us. In First Corinthians 1:17 Paul says this: “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.” What is Paul saying? Paul is making it very clear that water baptism is not part of the Gospel. *Water* baptism saves no one. *Spirit* baptism is the way in which God applies Christ’s saving work to sinners.

This is the distinction that the Bible makes. If you don’t maintain that distinction, you enter into the realm of legalism. If you embrace any teaching that says that water baptism has a saving effect in any sense, you enter into the realm of legalism. If you say that water baptism saves someone, or if you say that water baptism *signifies* *God’s promise* to save someone, or if you say that water baptism allows us to *presume* that someone is saved, then dear friend, you have entered into a dangerous realm. Scripture makes a clear distinction between God’s work of salvation when we are baptized with the Spirit, and our act of testimony to that work of God within us, when we are baptized with water.

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## **Credobaptism and Paedobaptism**

Water baptism is exclusively an act of testimony on the part of someone who has already been baptized by the Spirit of God, someone who already possesses saving faith in Jesus Christ. That is what theologians call the credobaptist position, or the believer's baptism position. I believe that Scripture teaches that water baptism has no other purpose, and no other significance.

Now I have many good friends, true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who take a different view. These are men who minister in the pulpits of churches that are true to the Gospel of Christ. They practice what the theologians call paedobaptism, or infant baptism. They practice the baptism of the infant children of believing parents, as well as the baptism of adult believers.

Now let me be clear. These are people and churches who do not believe that infant baptism saves anyone. They believe that salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. But they believe that water baptism has a different significance. They believe that water baptism has to do with admission to membership in the visible church. That is how they interpret these verses in Colossians chapter two.

Now I must tell you that I was saved in a church that held that view. I was ordained as a ruling elder in a church that held that view. I was ordained to the Gospel ministry in a church that held that view. But after a great deal of intensive study of the Scriptures, I came to believe that the paedobaptist view is not what the

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Bible teaches. I came to the credobaptist position. I believe that God's Word teaches that the exclusive purpose of water baptism is testimony of saving faith in Jesus Christ, and therefore water baptism is for believers only.

Now this is an important issue, and there is much more that needs to be said. So the Lord willing, we'll take up this question in our next message: Who, according to Scripture, are the proper candidates for water baptism, and why? I hope you'll join us next time as we study this important question.

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