

The Book of Colossians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Dead and Raised with Christ in Baptism

Colossians 2:11–15

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage is one of the richest in the New Testament on the meaning of the cross and of baptism, and it is doctrinally weighty at several points. The teacher's central task is to present baptism exactly as Paul does: the place where, through faith in the working of God, the believer is buried with Christ and raised with Him to new life. This is a key baptism text, and it must be handled with confidence. Paul does not present baptism as a mere outward symbol of a salvation already received, nor as a meritorious work by which we earn salvation. He presents it as the God-appointed moment of union with Christ's death and resurrection, entered through faith in God's power, where God Himself does the saving work of cutting away the old life, making the dead alive, and forgiving all our trespasses. Connect it to the consistent New Testament pattern (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

The second major doctrinal point is verse 14, the canceled record of debt nailed to the cross. The teacher should present this as the Old Law, the written code with its legal demands that stood against us and condemned every lawbreaker, now set aside and taken out of the way through the cross of Christ. This is the same truth taught in Ephesians 2:14–16 and Hebrews 8 through 10: the first covenant has been fulfilled and removed, and Christians now live under the new covenant in Christ's blood. This sets up Lesson 8, where Paul applies it to food laws, festivals, and Sabbaths. A third point, verse 15, presents the cross as Christ's decisive victory over the spiritual powers.

The formational aim flows from the doctrine. A person who grasps that they have died and risen with Christ, that their debt is fully canceled, and that Christ has triumphed over every power will live free: free from old guilt, free from the treadmill of earning God's approval, and free from the tyranny of fear. So aim the lesson at both clarity and freedom. Send students home sure of what God did for them in Christ and at their baptism, and living as people who have truly died, risen, been forgiven, and been seated with the Victor.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says that in Christ you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh (v. 11). What is this spiritual circumcision, what is being cut away, and why does Paul connect it to baptism rather than to any physical ritual?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul reaches back to circumcision, the great sign of the old covenant, and says believers have received a better one: a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, the circumcision of Christ. Physical circumcision cut away a small piece of flesh as a sign of belonging to God's people. The reality it pointed to was a cutting away of the whole old sinful self.

Help students see that this is God's work, not ours, made without hands. We do not perform spiritual surgery on ourselves. In Christ, God cuts away the old self, the body of the flesh, the life ruled by sin. This is the inward reality of conversion, the decisive break with the old life.

Then note how Paul connects this circumcision to baptism in the very next breath. The cutting away of the old self happens as we are buried with Christ in baptism. Baptism is where this spiritual circumcision, this putting off of the old self, takes place. It is not a ritual of the flesh, like physical circumcision, but the appointed place where God does His inward work.

This already begins to answer the false teachers, some of whom may have been urging circumcision and law-keeping. Paul says the believers already have the true circumcision in Christ; they need add nothing to it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The new circumcision made without hands as God's work, not ours
- The old self (the body of the flesh) as what is cut away
- Baptism as the appointed place where this spiritual circumcision occurs
- Believers needing no physical ritual added to the reality they have in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What is being cut away in the circumcision made without hands?
- Why does Paul connect this circumcision to baptism rather than to a ritual of the flesh?
- How does this answer anyone who would add law-keeping to Christ?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul speaks of putting off the body of the flesh, the old way of life. What is one piece of your old self that you know needs to be cut away, something you have been carrying that does not belong to a person raised with Christ? What would putting it off actually look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes putting off the body of the flesh and makes it concrete. While the decisive break with the old self happened in Christ, the New Testament also calls us to keep putting off the remnants of the old life (a theme Colossians develops in chapter 3). There is usually some specific piece of the old self we are still carrying.

Help students name one piece honestly: a habit, a grudge, a pattern of speech, a hidden indulgence, an attitude that simply does not belong to a person raised with Christ. The aim is one specific thing, not a vague resolution to be better.

Then talk about what putting it off actually looks like. It is not mere willpower but living out of our union with Christ: reckoning ourselves dead to it (Romans 6:11), confessing it, removing its supports, replacing it with what belongs to the new self. Encourage one concrete step of putting off this week, taken in dependence on the God who already cut away the old self.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The ongoing call to put off the remnants of the old self (Colossians 3:5–10)
- Naming one specific piece of the old life rather than a vague resolution
- Putting off as living out of union with Christ, not mere willpower
- A concrete step of putting off this week

Discussion Prompts

- What is one piece of your old self that still needs to be cut away?
- What would putting it off actually look like in practice?
- How does our union with Christ make this more than willpower?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says you were dead in your trespasses, and God made you alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our trespasses (v. 13). What does it mean that we were spiritually dead, and what does it tell us about God that He is the one who makes the dead alive and forgives all our sins?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 13 states our former condition and God's remedy in the starkest terms. We were dead in our trespasses. Not sick, not weak, but dead, unable to give ourselves life, just as a corpse cannot raise itself. This is the honest diagnosis of life apart from Christ.

Then comes the gospel in three words: made alive together. God did for us spiritually what He did for Jesus bodily. He made us alive together with Christ. The same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the tomb raised us from spiritual death. Salvation is, at its root, a resurrection.

Note that this is wholly God's initiative. Dead people contribute nothing to their own resurrection. This guards us against pride; our new life is entirely a gift. At the same time, avoid the Calvinistic conclusion that the dead cannot hear or respond to the gospel call. Scripture pictures the spiritually dead as genuinely summoned to life through the gospel (consider Ephesians 5:14, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead), and able, by God's grace, to respond in the obedience of faith.

Paul adds, having forgiven us all our trespasses. The making-alive comes with complete forgiveness, all our trespasses, not a partial pardon. Help students feel the totality of it. There is no sin left on the books that God has not dealt with in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual death as the honest diagnosis apart from Christ
- Salvation as resurrection: made alive together with Christ by God's power
- New life as wholly God's initiative and gift, guarding against pride
- The gospel call genuinely able to be answered, against the Calvinistic denial of human response
- Complete forgiveness of all trespasses, not a partial pardon

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that we were dead, not merely weak, in our trespasses?
- How is salvation a kind of resurrection?
- What does it mean to you that God has forgiven all your trespasses, not just some?

Question 4

Student Question:

God has forgiven all your trespasses, holding nothing back. How does living as a fully forgiven person change the way you carry old guilt? And since you have been forgiven so completely, where might God be calling you to extend that same forgiveness to someone who has wronged you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes complete forgiveness and presses it in two directions. First, toward old guilt. Many believers intellectually affirm that they are forgiven while still emotionally carrying sins God has long since dealt with. They keep paying a debt that has been canceled.

Help students bring a specific old guilt into the light of all your trespasses. If God has forgiven all of it, then continuing to drag a particular sin behind us is, in a sense, doubting His word. The remedy is to take God at His word and lay it down. Where sin needs confessing or making right, do that; but where it has been confessed and forgiven, stop carrying it.

Second, turn the question outward. People who know themselves forgiven so completely are equipped to forgive others. Where forgiveness is hard, it usually helps to remember the size of our own canceled debt (Matthew 18:21–35). Encourage students to name one person they need to forgive and one step toward releasing that debt this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Carrying old guilt that God has already forgiven
- Taking God at His word about complete forgiveness and laying the burden down
- Forgiving others in light of our own canceled debt (Matthew 18:21–35)
- A concrete step toward releasing a debt we are holding against someone

Discussion Prompts

- What old guilt are you still carrying that God has already forgiven?
- How does dragging a forgiven sin behind us amount to doubting God's word?
- Who is God calling you to forgive in light of how much you have been forgiven?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says God canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, setting it aside by nailing it to the cross (v. 14). What was this record of debt, and what does it mean that the Old Law, with its demands that condemned us, was taken out of the way and nailed to the cross of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 14 is one of the most important verses in the New Testament on the relationship between the old covenant and the cross, and it deserves careful, confident teaching. Paul says God canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, setting it aside by nailing it to the cross.

Explain the image. The phrase refers to a written certificate of indebtedness, a handwritten record of obligations, here pictured as the law with its decrees. This is the Law of Moses, the written code with its commands and ordinances, which stood against us because none of us kept it perfectly; it documented our guilt and pronounced our condemnation. It was, in effect, a list of charges with our names on it.

Now hear what God did with it: He canceled it (wiped it out), set it aside (took it out of the way), and nailed it to the cross. The very cross that bore our sins also bore the law that condemned us. Help students feel the vividness: the certificate of debt was pinned up with Christ and put to death with Him. This is the same truth Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:14–16, that Christ abolished in His flesh the law of commandments, and that Hebrews 8 through 10 develops at length: the first covenant is fulfilled, made obsolete, and removed in Christ.

Be clear about what this means and does not mean. It does not mean God's moral character changed or that righteousness no longer matters; the new covenant in Christ's blood carries its own commands, and Christ fulfilled the law rather than discarding it carelessly (Matthew 5:17). It does mean that we are no longer under the Old Law as our covenant, that we are not justified

by keeping its ordinances, and that its specific requirements (which Lesson 8 will name: food laws, festivals, Sabbaths) no longer bind the Christian. We live under the new covenant in Christ.

Land it on freedom and gratitude. The list of charges that stood against us is gone, nailed to the cross. We do not stand before God as debtors anxiously trying to clear an impossible account. The account has been settled by Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The record of debt as the Old Law (the written code with its legal demands) that condemned us
- The law canceled, set aside, and nailed to the cross in Christ (parallel to Ephesians 2:14–16; Hebrews 8–10)
- Christians no longer under the Old Law as their covenant, nor justified by its ordinances
- Christ fulfilling rather than carelessly discarding the law (Matthew 5:17); the new covenant carries its own commands
- Freedom from the list of charges as ground for gratitude and rest

Discussion Prompts

- What was the record of debt, and why did it stand against us?
- What does it mean that the Old Law was nailed to the cross?
- How does living under the new covenant differ from living under the Old Law?

Question 6

Student Question:

If the record of debt against you has been canceled and nailed to the cross, then your acceptance before God does not rest on keeping a list of rules. Where do you still find yourself trying to earn God's approval through performance, as though the debt were not already paid? What would it mean to rest in the finished work of the cross instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question applies the canceled debt to the believer's ongoing struggle with performance and approval. If the record of legal demands has been nailed to the cross, then our standing with God does not rest on keeping a checklist. Yet many believers still live as anxious debtors, trying to earn an acceptance that has already been given.

Help students spot the performance treadmill in themselves: the sense that God is pleased with them on their good days and disappointed on their bad ones, the quiet bookkeeping of religious activity, the fear that they have not done enough. This is to live as though the debt were not really canceled.

Be careful to distinguish this from license. Resting in the finished work of the cross does not mean obedience no longer matters; it means obedience flows from gratitude and sonship, not from an attempt to pay a debt already settled. Encourage students to identify one area where they are striving to earn what Christ has secured, and to consciously rest in His finished work there this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living as anxious debtors despite the canceled debt
- Spotting the performance treadmill: God pleased on good days, disappointed on bad
- Resting in the finished work without sliding into license
- Obedience flowing from gratitude and sonship rather than debt-paying

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you still try to earn God's approval through performance?
- How can you tell the difference between obeying out of gratitude and obeying to pay a debt?
- What would it look like to rest in the finished work of the cross this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says that on the cross Christ disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them (v. 15). What does it mean that the cross, which looked like defeat, was actually Christ's victory over the spiritual powers, and how should that shape the way we face evil and fear?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 15 turns to the cosmic dimension of the cross. Christ disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in the cross. The image is a Roman triumph, the victory parade in which a conquering general led his disarmed and humiliated captives through the streets for all to see.

Help students grasp the great reversal. The cross looked like the defeat of Jesus, the powers of evil and the rulers of this age seemingly crushing Him. In reality it was their defeat. At the cross Christ stripped them of their weapons and led them as a defeated army in His triumphal train. What appeared to be His lowest moment was His coronation.

Identify the powers. These are the spiritual rulers and authorities the Colossians were tempted to fear and appease, the same forces behind every tyranny, every fear, and ultimately death itself. Their chief weapons against us were sin and the guilt of the law, and verse 14 has just

shown those weapons removed. With the debt canceled, the powers have nothing left to accuse us with; they are disarmed.

Apply it to fear. Christians do not face the powers of evil hoping for a victory that is still in doubt. We face an already-defeated enemy. The decisive battle was won at the cross, and we live in the light of a triumph already accomplished.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as Christ's victory, not His defeat (the image of a Roman triumph)
- The spiritual rulers and authorities disarmed and publicly defeated
- Sin and the guilt of the law as the powers' weapons, removed by the canceled debt
- Facing an already-defeated enemy rather than fighting for an uncertain victory

Discussion Prompts

- How was the cross, which looked like defeat, actually Christ's victory?
- What weapons did the powers hold against us, and how were they removed?
- How should an already-won victory change the way we face evil and fear?

Question 8

Student Question:

Christ has already triumphed over every power that could threaten you. Where are you living as though some power, a fear, an addiction, an enemy, a dread of death, still has the upper hand? How would it change your week to live as someone on the side of the Victor?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes Christ's triumph and presses it into the places where we still live defeated. The objective truth is that every power has been disarmed; the subjective reality is that many believers live in bondage to fears and forces that have, in fact, already been conquered.

Help students name the power that still seems to have the upper hand in their lives: a besetting fear, an addiction, a controlling relationship, the dread of death, a sense of being haunted by the past. The point is not to deny the struggle but to reframe it. We fight from victory, not for it.

Encourage one concrete shift this week: facing the feared thing in the light of Christ's triumph, refusing the lie that it is undefeated, taking a step of obedience that a conquered enemy cannot finally prevent. Be sensitive that some struggles (addiction, trauma) also call for wise help and support within the body; victory in Christ does not exclude using the means He provides.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living in bondage to powers that have already been defeated
- Naming the specific fear or force that seems to hold the upper hand
- Fighting from victory rather than for it
- Using the means and support Christ provides within the body

Discussion Prompts

- What power still seems to have the upper hand in your life?
- How does Christ's triumph reframe that struggle?
- What step could you take this week as someone on the side of the Victor?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says you were buried with Christ in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God (v. 12). How does this passage describe what happens in baptism, and how does it hold faith and baptism together, so that baptism is neither a work we do to earn salvation nor a mere symbol added after we are already saved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and one of the clearest baptism texts in Scripture. It should be taught with clarity, warmth, and confidence, because baptism is widely misunderstood. Paul says you were 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 (v. 12).

First, establish what Paul says baptism does. In baptism we are buried with Christ and raised with Christ. This is not Paul's only place to say it; Romans 6:3–4 says the same, that we were baptized into Christ's death and buried with Him, so that we might walk in newness of life. Baptism is the appointed moment of union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. It is not a bare symbol of something that happened earlier; it is the place where God joins us to Christ and makes us alive (the very making-alive of verse 13).

Second, hold faith and baptism together exactly as Paul does. Note the phrase raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God. Baptism is not a magical rite that works apart from faith, and it is not a meritorious work by which we earn salvation. It is the act of a believing heart trusting God's power to do what only God can do. The one being baptized contributes nothing of merit; he simply trusts God and submits to be buried and raised. This is why baptism is never a work that earns: the working is God's, not ours.

Third, place this within the consistent New Testament pattern, so students can answer the doctrine of faith only. The gospel response is not faith only but a believing, obedient faith that comes to Christ God's way: hearing the gospel, believing in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repenting of sin, confessing Him, and being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:36–38;

Galatians 3:26–27; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Galatians 3:27 says it plainly: as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Scripture never separates saving faith from the baptism in which that faith lays hold of Christ.

Be careful to keep the emphasis where Paul keeps it: on God's powerful working. Baptism is precious not because of the water or the act in itself but because it is where the believer, trusting God, is united with the crucified and risen Lord and raised to new life. Help students see baptism not as a human achievement to boast in, nor as an optional symbol to minimize, but as the God-appointed, faith-filled moment of death and resurrection with Christ. And let those already baptized rejoice afresh in what God did for them there.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Baptism as the appointed place of union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4)
- Faith and baptism held together: raised through faith in the powerful working of God
- Baptism as neither a meritorious work that earns salvation nor a mere symbol added afterward
- The full gospel response (hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, being baptized into Christ) against the doctrine of faith only (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26–27; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21)
- God's working, not ours, as the reason baptism is never a work that earns
- Baptism by immersion pictured in burial and resurrection

Discussion Prompts

- What does Paul say actually happens in baptism?
- How does this verse hold faith and baptism together without making baptism a work we boast in?
- How would you lovingly answer someone who says we are saved by faith only, apart from baptism?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these verses. Paul takes you down into the grave with Christ and raises you to new life, shows you your debt nailed to the cross, and seats you with the Victor over every power. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Colossians 2:11–15 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole sweep of the passage: down into the grave with Christ, raised to new life, the debt nailed to the cross, the powers disarmed. The student's task is to name one specific way Christ is forming them through it.

Walk back through the movement as a prompt. Some students most need to recover the wonder of their own baptism. Some need to lay down old guilt that has been forgiven. Some need to step off the performance treadmill and rest in the canceled debt. Some need to face a fear as someone on the side of the Victor. Let each name what meets them.

Close by reminding students that the goal is formation, not information. Paul wrote so that buried-and-raised people would actually live as buried-and-raised people, free, forgiven, and unafraid. Invite each to carry one truth into the week and let it shape how they walk in their new, risen life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The arc from grave to new life, canceled debt, and disarmed powers
- Formation, not mere information, as the goal
- Carrying one concrete truth into the week
- Living out the reality of our baptism into Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage most needs to take root in you this week?
- How should remembering your baptism change the way you live now?
- How can this group help you live as someone raised with Christ in the days ahead?