

The Book of Colossians

Lesson 7: Dead and Raised with Christ in Baptism -- Colossians 2:11-15

Stand for a moment at the edge of an open grave. Few places feel so final. Whatever was true of a person, all their plans and debts and failures and unfinished business, the grave seems to close the book on all of it. Now hold that image, because Paul is about to take you down into a grave and back out again, and he says it already happened to you. You were buried, he says. And then, astonishingly, you were raised. This is the heart of the gospel pressed into five dense, glorious verses, and at the center of it stands the moment of your baptism.

Paul says that in Christ you were circumcised, not in the flesh, but with a circumcision made without hands, a cutting away of the old life that only God can do. And how did it happen? You were buried with Him in baptism, and in baptism you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised Jesus from the dead. Picture it. The water closes over a person like the earth over a grave, and the old self is left behind. Then they rise, dripping and breathing, into a brand new life. Baptism is not a small ceremony tacked onto faith. It is the very place where, trusting God's power, we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Then Paul shows us what God did to make this possible. You were dead in your trespasses, he says, and God made you alive together with Christ, forgiving all your sins. And he uses a vivid picture for how the slate was wiped clean. There was a record of debt that stood against us, a written list of legal demands we could never satisfy, the Old Law that condemned every lawbreaker. And God took that record, the certificate of debt with all its charges, and He nailed it to the cross. The very nails that pierced Jesus pinned up the law that pinned us down. It is canceled, set aside, gone.

And there is more. On that same cross, Christ disarmed the rulers and authorities, the spiritual powers that held humanity in fear, and made a public spectacle of them, leading them in His triumphal procession like a defeated army. What looked like His defeat was His coronation. So when you came up out of the water, you were not joining the losing side. You were raised with the Victor. Read these verses slowly. They tell you how you got from the grave to glory, and they invite you to live like someone who has already died and risen with Christ.

Group Discussion: Paul places baptism at the center of how we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus (vv. 12). Why do you think baptism is sometimes treated lightly or as a mere symbol today, and what is recovered when we see it the way Paul does, as the place where, through faith, we are buried and raised with Christ?

Personal Reflection: Paul says you were buried with Christ and raised to new life. Think back on your own baptism. Are you living as someone who has died to the old life and been raised to a new one, or has the reality of it faded? Where does the resurrection side of your baptism need to show up more this week?

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 6:1–11, buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life; Acts 2:36–41, repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins; Galatians 3:26–27, baptized into Christ and clothed with Him; Ephesians 2:1–10, dead in trespasses and made alive together with Christ; Hebrews 8:6–13, the new covenant that makes the first obsolete.