



The Cross— The Solution to Sin

[2:11-19]

Gene Cloer

“And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

“Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God” (2:11-19).

Christ is all and in all. Through the cross He became the answer to our needs. The cross is the central point of all human history. In Colossians 2:11-19 the cross is pivotal to all that is said. In the cross we have the forgiveness of all our sins.

In the cross the Old Testament law was done away. It is in the cross that we can place our ultimate confidence.

Who is this Jesus? He is the fullness of God in bodily form (2:9). He is the one in whom we are complete (2:10).

The Bible often speaks generally, that is, to all mankind. When it does, we have a tendency to get lost in what is said. We can easily apply the message to someone else. But the Bible also speaks personally. Paul in our text, after stating the general qualifications of Jesus, talks to the Colossians personally.

Three great thoughts are presented in these verses: an explanation of the circumcision that is in Christ, a taking away of the decrees against us, and a grave warning about letting others disqualify us.

AN ILLUSTRATION (2:11-13)

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (2:11).

Circumcision in the Old Testament applied only to the males. It was the cutting off of the foreskin of the sex organ, and it became the sign of being God’s chosen people. In this text a figurative use of the concept of circumcision is used. It is the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh. It is not done by men; it is a circumcision “made without hands.” It is done by Christ, by the cross.

Although baptism does not totally correspond to circumcision, a comparison can be made. Paul suggested that a figurative action of circumcision takes place in baptism: "Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (2:12). Baptism is the time when the working of God is performed. We are risen with Him. We are risen by the faith in the operation of God, not faith in the strength of the one who does the baptizing. My salvation does not depend upon any man! It depends upon the Lord! Something happens at baptism, something done by God, something only realized by faith. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, He can quicken me. Even though I was once dead in sins, God can bring me to life again.

A putting off takes place, a burial. A resurrection also takes place. At baptism, a dead body, dead because of sin, is quickened or made alive by God with Christ.

Circumcision has been used figuratively before in Scriptures.

Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more (Deuteronomy 10:16).

Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

... for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart (Jeremiah 9:26b).

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God (Romans 2:28, 29).

The action of putting off the old sinful man, burying him in baptism with faith in God to raise the person to a newness of life, is illustrated with the circumcision of the Old Testament.

AN AFFIRMATION (2:14-17)

Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a

public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (2:14, 15).

Notice some of the terms used in this passage: "having canceled"; "taken it out of the way"; "nailed it to the cross." Obviously, something was removed and is no longer binding. The question is "What?" It was "the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us." This was whatever stood against us being and living justified before God.

Jesus, by the cross, overcame "the rulers and authorities; He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." They thought they had won. Little did they know! How great was the victory of Jesus!

Paul said, "Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day" (2:16). You are no longer under restrictions about what you eat or drink. Old Testament regulations were strict about these things. We are no longer under specifications or restrictions about holy days. Do not allow anyone to judge you regarding these Old Testament restrictions. Even the Sabbath should not be a point of contention any longer. It was part of the Old Testament law. It was never bound upon any people except the Jews. It was only to last for a certain period of time (Galatians 3:19).

These, meat and drink, holy days, new moons, Sabbaths, are only a shadow of Christianity.

Which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ (2:17).

Who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things ... (Hebrews 8:5).

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near (Hebrews 10:1).

The Old Testament, in its entirety, was given only to a specific people, the Jews, and only for a specific time: "till the seed should come" (Galatians 3:19). And that seed was Christ! (Galatians 3:16).

Do not permit others to bring you under the Old Testament law! It was only a shadow of the reality, Jesus Christ. Jesus emphasized that all of it would be taken out of the way:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:17, 18).

If nothing could “pass” till “all be fulfilled,” and according to Paul, we are “delivered” *from* the law (Romans 7:6), then we are no longer under the law.

A WARNING (2:18, 19)

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God (2:18, 19).

Some thought that the more they abased themselves, the more they suffered, the more righteous they were. It simply was not true. Voluntary self-humiliation does not necessarily have religious value. Artificial humility does not necessarily build character. It is true that Jesus commanded that we be humble, but one can be humble without being religious. He can also subscribe to pseudo-humility.

Some were inordinately puffed up because of what they believed they had seen, heard, or

experienced. Paul even included the worship of angels. In Revelation John fell at an angel’s feet to worship him and heard these words: “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). John attempted to worship an angel and was rebuked *for* doing so. Paul stated it more strongly: “But even though we, or an angel *from* heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

Our focal point is the cross of Christ! To lose our focus is to lose the only hope of mankind. It is easy to allow false teachers or false ideas to lead us from the truth. We can be “beguiled” of our reward.

Please remember the connection that must be made. Christ is the head! When you lose your connection with the head, the body is dead. Maintain that connection.

CONCLUSION

How great is the beauty of the cross! Paul discussed circumcision by Christ, an operation of God known by faith, a removal of those things which were against us and contrary to us, and a warning not to lose our reward! The cross of Christ is the answer to our needs. Do not search elsewhere!

Applying Scripture to Life

Going It Alone

H. G. Wells in one of his novels has a picture of a big businessman, threatened with a complete physical and nervous breakdown. His doctor told him that his only hope was to get hold of something bigger than himself and to hang on to that, to develop within his nervous, tensed, frustrated life fellowship with God. The man answered: “What? Me have fellowship with that up there? I would as soon think of cooling my throat with

the Milky Way or of shaking hands with the stars!” To him the very idea of direct contact with the living *God* was unthinkable.

She Missed It!

A visitor to a great art gallery saw one of the cleaners at work polishing the floor. “Good morning,” he said, “there are some very wonderful pictures in this gallery.” “I suppose there are,” the cleaner answered, “if a body had some time to look up.” Sur-

rounded by beauty, she was so busy with the floor that she never looked up.

Hermeneutics

On a Christmas card the following verse was cited: “They exchanged gifts and made merry . . .” (Revelation 11:10). The context of the verse, which describes anything but what it appeared to mean on the Christmas greeting, is rejoicing over the death of God’s two witnesses at the hand of the beast.