

Colossians 2:11–14

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

The Circumcision of Christ — Putting Off the Body of the Flesh

Physical circumcision under the Old Testament was a partial token — a sign, as Genesis 17 calls it, of the covenant. What we have in verse 11 is total, complete, and made without hands: the putting off not of the sins of the flesh, but of the body of the flesh itself. Not a token but the whole thing, cut off in its entirety from before God by the circumcision of Christ — that is, by identification with His death. The correction of the King James rendering is important here: Darby reads *the body of the flesh*, not the body of the sins of the flesh. To say the sins of the flesh waters it down. It is the flesh itself, as a whole entity, that is gone.

This is positional truth. Before God, what we were in Adam has been put off — we are so identified with the death of Christ that the whole of what we were as fallen men is removed from before Him. The practical outworking follows in

chapter 3: *put to death therefore your members* — Darby's rendering — with a marginal note: have it done with. The doctrine of chapter 2 becomes the ground of the command in chapter 3. We are to act in accordance with what we already are in Christ.

We Are the Circumcision — Philippians 3

Philippians 3 sheds further light on this. The apostle Paul, warning against those who pressed circumcision as a religious requirement, writes: *for we are the circumcision, who worship God by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*. The word he uses for those pressing physical circumcision for religious ends is concision — a mutilation. What they were calling circumcision was, spiritually, nothing more than a cutting in the flesh. For we are the circumcision — the real thing, the complete thing, the thing without hands — because we are identified with the death of Christ. Everything that circumcision in the flesh claimed to confer has already been perfectly conferred in Christ's death.

Buried and Raised — Jordan and Gilgal

Verses 11 and 12 move together in a single sentence in the original: circumcision and baptism are placed side by side. Circumcision points inward to the positional putting off of the flesh; burial in baptism points outward to the same death expressed publicly. In baptism, the one baptised is identified with Christ's burial — and with His resurrection. The connection with the children of Israel crossing Jordan is instructive. There, twelve stones were laid in the midst of the river, buried under the water — and twelve were taken up on the other side as a memorial. The Jordan crossing gives us the aspect not of the Red Sea (deliverance from Egypt) but of death and resurrection with the risen Christ, entering the inheritance. Colossians takes us through Jordan and to Gilgal.

Ephesians takes us into the land proper and into the heavenly places.

The resurrection in verse 12 is through the faith of the working of God who raised Christ from among the dead. God the Father raised Christ from the dead. All three divine persons are operative in the resurrection — as Christ Himself said, *I have power to take it again* — and as Romans 1 speaks of the Spirit of holiness. The unity of the Godhead is seen in these great redemptive acts. And it is the same God who raised Christ who has quickened us together with Him.

The Handwriting of Ordinances — Nailed to His Cross

Verse 14 speaks of blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. It is important not to substitute the word law here for handwriting of ordinances — the apostle did not write that the law was nailed to the cross. The doctrine of Scripture is that the Christian has died, and is therefore no longer under the law — as Romans 7:1-4 makes clear in its introductory verses. It is the Christian who has died, not the law.

What was nailed was the handwriting — the document of obligation that stood against us. Darby's marginal note is precise: *obligation to which a man is subject by his signature*. Israel had signed on at Sinai: *all the words which the Lord hath said will we do* (Exodus 24:3). That was their handwriting — their binding signature to the terms of the Mosaic covenant. It was against them, contrary to them, because they could never keep it. That document — that obligation — was taken out of the way and nailed to His cross. And with it, the principalities and powers that had held men in bondage through the fear of death and condemnation were stripped of their weapons and publicly displayed as a defeated enemy, led in triumph by the cross.