
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **What does the Bible mean in Col 2:11 when it speaks of a "circumcision made without hands" and then calls it the "circumcision of Christ"?**

The passage under consideration reads as follows:

Colossians 2:11-12

11 In Him you 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,
12 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.

Some people believe this passage is saying that NT baptism replaced OT circumcision. But this is not what the passage is saying.

OT circumcision was required of all male children on the 8th day after their birth. Listen to the passage:

Leviticus 12:2-3

2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean.
3 And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.'

Jesus Himself was circumcised 8 days after He was born to Mary according to Lk 2:21.

Now ... listen carefully: If OT, physical circumcision was replaced by NT baptism, then that would mean only men should be baptized because only men were circumcised.

This of course is wrong. According to the NT both men and women were baptized:

Acts 8:12

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **both men and women were baptized.**

What have we learned so far? We learned that only men were circumcised in the OT, but we learned also that both men and women were baptized in the NT. Therefore, OT circumcision was not replaced by NT baptism.

Q: What, then, does Col 2:11-12 mean?

A: Here's the answer: According to the Bible there were two kinds of circumcision.

- There was physical circumcision performed upon male children.
- But there was a spiritual circumcision called "circumcision of the heart."

Deuteronomy 10:16

16 Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

Deuteronomy 30:6

6 And 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, that you may live.

Many other passages could be given, but this is enough to prove the point.

Just because someone was circumcised physically, this did not mean they were circumcised in the heart. "Circumcision of the heart" meant having your heart devoted to following after God. It meant having your sins cleansed away from your life.

With this in mind, listen again to Col 2:11-12:

Colossians 2:11-12

11 In Him you 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,
12 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.

This passage is speaking about spiritual circumcision or "circumcision of the heart." According to this passage, one becomes circumcised in heart when he is baptized.

Physical circumcision meant having part of the flesh cut off from the body. "Circumcision of the heart" means having sins cut off from your life. Spiritual circumcision is an operation made "without hands." In other words, this is something God Himself does.

- Physical circumcision was done with human hands. Human hands operated upon the body and cut off flesh.
- Spiritual circumcision was done without human hands. God Himself operated and cut off sins from a person's life.

Q: When does God perform this operation?

A: According to this passage, when a person is baptized in water – this is the occasion when God performs the operation and cuts off the sins of a person's life.

This fits with what other passages say about baptism. For example:

Acts 2:38 (KJV)

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Mark 16:16 (KJV)

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Acts 22:16 (KJV)

16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

1 Peter 3:21 (KJV)

21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ...

All of these passages are saying the same thing: Baptism is the occasion when a sinner is saved by the blood of Christ. Baptism is the occasion when God operates upon the sinner and cuts off the sins he has committed.

This is why we at the church of Christ teach baptism in water is essential for salvation.

- Sinners are **not** saved by faith only.
- Sinners are **not** saved by saying the "sinner's prayer."
- Sinners **are** saved when they have faith in Christ and are baptized for the purpose of having their sins washed away.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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