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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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*Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD*

# EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

## Chap. 2, verse 12

*Suntaphentes autō en tō baptismati* (having been buried with him in baptism). The theme of verse 11 is the death of Christ as expressed in the figure of circumcision. The believer's spiritual circumcision took place at conversion, when he also became identified with Christ in His death to sin. "This circumcision was first experienced by Christ on the cross, and what happened to (the Colossians) ideally then is realized through union with Him now" (Peake).

Then follows appropriately the reference to baptism. If we have part in Christ's death, so also do we have part in His burial and resurrection. Romans 6:4-6 is most illuminating on this point. Paul here deals with the literal baptism—that is, the act of obedience on the part of one who is already a believer. It is his public confession of the work of saving grace having taken place in his experience. In baptism he expresses his death to sin and his rising with Christ to "walk in newness of life". Here *baptismos* refers to the act in process; whereas *baptisma* is the result of the process and is not here in view.

But an important point arises when (as by some commentators) the 'circumcision' and the 'baptism' are viewed as contemporaneous. Grammatically they are connected but "only loosely", as A. T. Robertson indicates. Actually, to make them contemporaneous is equivalent to making the spiritual 'circumcision' take place in the act of baptism, which in our view is a confusion of ideas and therefore (in this instance) of doctrine. As A. T. Robertson says: "That indeed would make Paul a sacramentalist like the Jews he was condemning". The putting off the 'old man' and 'putting on the new' is not effected by any rite or ordinance *per se* but solely by faith in the atoning work of Christ on the cross. "For by *grace* have ye been saved through faith . . . not of yourselves . . . it is the *gift* of God; *not of works*, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). This is *illustrated* to our inward consciousness by the *figure* of circumcision, and we outwardly *demonstrate* it in the act of baptism.

"*Ideally* the moment of believing is the moment of baptism, for in the *act* of being baptized the believer sets forth in symbol what happened when he *first* trusted in Christ. But in *actual*

*experience* the baptising takes place at a time later, by more or less, than the moment of believing" (Hogg and Vine, *Galatians*, p. 173; our italics). It is only as viewed *ideally* that circumcision and baptism can be said to be contemporaneous. In practical experience, and as apprehended by the generality of believers, the 'figure' (circumcision) precedes the 'act' of baptismal public confession.

*en ho kai sunēgerthēte* (wherein ye were also raised with him)—the *en ho* refers to baptism not to Christ, as most commentators agree (including Calvin). Baptism implies not only immersion but emergence, e.g. "they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him . . . they came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38, 39). The whole is expressive of the believer's burial and resurrection *with* Christ—having already died with Christ (see Gal. 3:27; also Col. 2:20; Eph. 2:5, 6). But the *practical* import of the teaching must be always kept in view also, e.g. as given in ch. 3:1, "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above. . .". (The whole passage to end of v. 11 is relevant).

*dia tēs pisteōs tēs energeias tou theou tou egeirantos outon ek tōn nekron* (through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead). Faith here is not subjective but objective—the faith which *rests* in God who raised up Christ. In thus introducing the Resurrection again the apostle focusses thought on the mighty divine dynamic available to faith, directly in contrast to the spurious and mystical philosophies of the false teachers. This fittingly leads to the subsequent warnings of vs. 18 and 19 (also cf. Rom. 6:10, 11; Phil. 3:10; Eph. 1:19–21).

#### Verse 13

*Kai humas nekrous ontas tois paraptōmasin kai tē akrobustia tēs sarkos humōn* (And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh). The "and *you*" does not necessarily imply distinction between the Gentile Colossians and Jewish Christians, although the mention of "uncircumcision" is read by some to refer both to the physical and the spiritual state of the Colossians. We prefer (following Moule and others) to regard the 'and' as copulative—"you too with Christ" were quickened—thus carrying on the thought from v. 12, but pausing on the 'you' to make a new statement regarding their *former state in sin*.

“Being dead” is suggested by the occurrence of the word in the previous sentence, but using it in a different sense. There it refers by implication to the believer’s *death to the old life* in union with Christ. Here death is the moral state of the *old nature* before their conversion, the state common to all who are unregenerate, Jew and Gentile (see the close parallel Eph. 5:1 and 5).

Then he further elucidates what this state is: It can be read in two ways, either (a) as revealed in individual acts of transgression, “your trespasses” being the symptoms and *evidences* of the “death” (so A.V. and Moule); or, (b) the *result* of these trespasses and their unregenerate *nature*—something more radical than mere symptoms, taking the dative as instrumental (the view favoured by L. Williams, Peake and others). We much prefer to adopt this latter because of the whole context.

“*Trespasses*” are the fruits of the root, the whole evil nature itself expressed in the figure “uncircumcision.” (See v. 11 above).

*sunezōopoiēsen humas sun auto* (you, I say, did he quicken together with him). The subject is God rather than Christ, being more in accord with Pauline usage. Abbott gives good reasons for this and is supported by Alford, Lightfoot, Meyer, etc. The ‘quickenings’ is the Resurrection of Christ, which is always stated to be the work of God Himself. “After the actual Resurrection there does not appear to be a single text which attributes this to Christ Himself. Even those passages which seem doubtful in the English are quite clear in the Greek, teaching that *He was raised from the dead*” (Griffith Thomas). It was the manifest evidence of God’s vindication and acceptance of the work of the Son. (See the parallel passage in Eph. 2:4, 5, R. V.). The Christian in turn is thus raised to life in an abiding union with Christ, and lives daily the true resurrection life. Note the *humas* is repeated for emphasis, as in R. V.

*charisamenos hēmin panta paraptōmatu* (having forgiven us all our trespasses;). Note the change from ‘you’ to ‘us’ according to the best MSS = *all* believers; “the apostle is eager to claim his share in the transgression, that he may claim it also in the forgiveness” (Lightfoot).

Is the forgiveness synchronous with the quickening? Moule, Peake, and L. Williams believe it is because of the force of the tense, but others (Radford, Robertson, Abbott) stand by the R. V., “having forgiven”—implying a “logical sequence” in which for-

giveness *precedes* the quickening, as the aorist participle also allows; grammatically both are in order. Incidentally, the word *charisma* is used here in the general sense, as in Rom. 5:15, 16, the granting of a kindness, to make a gift. It is also used in a particular sense as illustrated by 2 Cor. 1:11, for the impartation of individual gifts.

## Verse 14

*exaleipsas to kath' hēmon cheirographon tois dogmasin, ho hēn hupenantion hēmin*, (having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us). The apostle proceeds to enlarge upon the idea of forgiveness by the use of another aorist participle, *exaleipsas*. Its real sense is vividly illustrated in Rev. 7:17; 21:4, where is described the 'wiping away' of all tears (see also Acts 3:19; Rev. 3:5).

God (who is still the subject of the clause) not only forgives, but *erases* the record of sin, and so 'remembers it no more' (Isa. 43:22; Heb. 8:12).

*Cheirographon* meant technically a written acknowledgment of a debt, and was so used in Roman legal terminology. *Dogmasin* always means in the N.T. 'decrees' (Lk. 2:1; Acts 17:7). The clause is best considered as a whole—'the bond written in ordinances', i.e. consisting in ordinances, conditioned by them (Eph. 2:15). The reference is possibly to the Mosaic ceremonial Law, but without doubt it has a much wider application, for the Colossians as Gentiles were never under the Mosaic Law. Paul never makes a distinction between the moral and the ceremonial law. "To him the law was a homogeneous whole, because it was all the revelation of the will of God for the guidance of man" (Maclaren). In whatever manner law is conveyed, whether by revelation or conscience (Rom. 2:12-15), it reflects the standard of the divine precept of holiness and will for man's acceptance. And, as Moule observes, "man's assent, however imperfect, to the *rightness* of that precept, is as it were his signature of obligation to the 'bond'". Now man's refusal to conform to that standard has turned that bond into an "adversary" against himself. The Gk. *hupenantion* is a stronger word than the phrase *kath' hēmon* preceding, "implying not merely that the bond had a claim against us, but that it was *hostile* to us" (Peake). Moule also adds that the compound form of the word gives the thought of "a close and grappling opposition"; (see an illustration in Zech. 3:1). The word occurs again in Heb. 10:27 = "adversaries."

And yet the false teachers desired to bring the Colossian Christians back under such a yoke of bondage from which they had been delivered!\*

*καὶ αὐτὸ ἐρῆκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, προσελῶσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ* (and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross). The 'it' is emphatic, the very bond itself. There is a sudden change of construction just here, (1) from a participle to a finite verb, *ἐρῆκεν*, introducing a new thought into the passage, viz. the removal of the bond itself, which is further enlarged upon by the participle *προσελῶσας* ("nailing"); (2) then the perfect tense of the verb instead of an aorist, emphasises the *present* and *abiding* character of the removal—the bond is cancelled between us and God *completely*. Lightfoot suggests that the change of construction may be due "to the feeling of relief and thanksgiving which rises in the apostle's mind at this point."

The figure of the nailing "comes wholly from the Crucifixion", says Moule, and he (with others) rejects the supposed allusion to a "legal custom" of nailing a cancelled decree up in public for all to see. It refers to the fact that Christ on the cross so dealt with sin that He discharged all our liability, tore the bond up as it were; "and the tearing up is vividly described as the piercing of it with the nails which had affixed Him to the Cross" (Moule).

A. McD. R.

\* Note here incidentally Paul's strong and habitual antagonism to all such attempts to get back under the Law as revealed in his Galatian epistle, e.g. ch. 5: 1-4, etc.

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### VALUES COMPARED

Longfellow could take a worthless sheet of paper, write a poem on it, and make it worth \$6,000—that's *genius*.

Rockefeller could sign his name to a piece of paper and make it worth a million dollars—that's *capital*.

Uncle Sam can take silver, stamp an emblem on it, and make it worth a dollar—that's *money*.

A mechanic can take metal that is worth only \$5.00 and make it worth \$50.00—that's *skill*.

An artist can take a 50c piece of canvas, paint a picture on it, and make it worth \$1,000—that's *art*.

But . . . God can take a worthless, sinful life, wash it in the blood of Christ, put His Spirit in it, and make it a blessing to humanity—**THAT'S SALVATION!**—*The Compass*.