

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 2:11-12

YOU DIED 2000 YEARS AGO



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

On this Palm Sunday, as we approach Easter, do you sometimes feel a distance and detachment from Christ's death and resurrection?

It was so long ago, it's distant history. "How," you ask, "can it have any impact on the present?" It was 2000 years ago, so what possible connection can that have with April 2020? How are the dusty streets of Jerusalem relevant in hi-tech Grand Rapids? Why is the single death of Christ more important than all the Coronavirus deaths put together?

Or, maybe the disconnect is more personal. It's not just the question of how such distant history can have any connection with the present. It's how does another person's life, death, and resurrection connect with me? I read the biography of Christ, but how is that relevant to my own biography? In the age of TikTok and lockdowns, how does a naked, bloodied, and bruised body, hanging on a wooden cross outside Jerusalem, have any bearing on my life?

Solution?

Do you sometimes feel that disconnect? Do you identify with this distance and detachment from Christ's death and resurrection?

The Apostle Paul saw the Colossians suffer with this problem too and addressed it in Colossians 2:11-12. Let's use these words to connect the past with the present, history with today, and Christ's life, death, and resurrection with yours.

Whether the gap is six feet, six miles, or 2000 years, I want to close that gap to zero. I want to show you, child of God, that you died 2000 years ago. Indeed I want to show you that you were present on Palm Sunday.

CONTEXT

The Gnostics (the Know-it-alls) said that the Colossians believers needed something more than Christ. Faith in Christ, conversion to Christ, was not enough.

Paul has just explained how complete Christ is and how complete the Colossians therefore were in union with Christ (2:9-10). Christ is enough; Christ is more than enough. Therefore, the Colossians had enough, they had more than enough.

In verses 11-12, he explains how this can be by teaching that the Colossian believers (and all Christian believers) were united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Paul, first of all, asserts they (and we) died in Christ.



1. WE DIED IN CHRIST (11)

Christ was circumcised

“...by the circumcision of Christ” (11b).

Circumcision was a painful procedure performed on 8-day-old Jewish boys. It involved cutting off a small piece of flesh and throwing it away to die.

God originally used circumcision to initiate entry into his covenant relationship with Israel. It was a badge of membership. But he also used it to teach his people a number of lessons. Here, for example, it is used as a picture of Christ's death. Not just a small piece of flesh, but his whole body was violently cut off and thrown aside to die.

The “circumcision of Christ” is not a reference to his circumcision as an infant (Luke 2:21), but to his death as an adult. But what did this violent circumcision accomplish?

We were circumcised with Christ

In him: Believers were in Christ when he was circumcised (cut off) on Calvary. They were united to him. He was representing them so perfectly that they are regarded as having been as present as he was.

You were also circumcised: If we were present at Calvary, we would have seen, with our physical eyes, one circumcision (meaning "crucifixion") taking place. But, here, Paul tells us to look at Calvary with the eyes of faith and see multitudes being circumcised (crucified) at the same time. Whatever was happening to Christ was also happening to his people. You were violently cut off for your sin at Calvary.

With the circumcision made without hands: In other words, this was not a physical circumcision of you, but a spiritual circumcision (without human hands). You were not present in your body, you did not actually die a violent death, you were not really cast aside to die. Only Christ was there, only Christ died, only Christ was cast aside. But, because you are in Christ now by faith, you are regarded as having experienced everything Christ did.

By putting off the body of the sins of the flesh: Christ bore our sins in his own body on the tree (1 Peter. 2:24), and that sin-bearing body was put off by the circumcision of crucifixion. But again, there was much more happening there than physical eyes could see. Every single believer is to regard their body of sinful flesh as put off to die at the same time as Christ's sin-bearing body was put off at Calvary.

This is a far greater circumcision than Jewish circumcision. This is a far greater cutting off than the cutting off of a small piece of flesh. "We were circumcised in Christ" means we died and were cut off in Christ. That's how God viewed it, that's how Christ viewed it, that's how Paul viewed it, and that's how we should view it. We were full participants in Christ's circumcision. Therefore no further circumcision is required. It's redundant. You have everything you need in Christ.

CHRIST'S DEATH WAS SO EFFECTIVELY FOR US THAT IT WAS OUR DEATH. HE DIED IN OUR PLACE SO TRULY THAT WHEN HE DIED, WE DIED."

JOHN WOODHOUSE.



APPLICATION

♥ See Christ suffering in your place. He suffered so much pain and agony that it is portrayed as a whole body circumcision. The cutting off of his life was a violent blood bath. He was cut off out of the land of the living (Isa. 53:8), and, even more painfully, cut off from his Father (Matt. 27:46). Worship and adore this Suffering Savior.

♥ See yourself suffering in Christ. Christ died 2000 years ago, but so did you. Can you see that? Can you believe that? Can you place yourself there?

♥ Use your past circumcision in Christ to effect present circumcision for Christ. Physical circumcision was always a symbol of a greater spiritual circumcision (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 9:24-25; Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 5:6). You died 2000 years ago, therefore die to sin today.

♥ If you are not a believer, you have a terrible circumcision still ahead of you. You will be cut off from the land of the living, cut off from God, cut off and cast aside to die eternally. This does not need to happen. Christ's cutting off 2000 years ago can save you from being cut off forever.

OUR EYES SEE A TERRIBLE MURDER,
OUR FAITH SEES A WONDERFUL MASSACRE



If I died in Christ, does that mean I was buried with him too?



2. WE WERE BURIED IN CHRIST (12A)

"...buried with Him in baptism..." (12a)

Christ was buried

The physical burial of Christ was the seal or proof of Christ's physical death. He really died.

We were buried with Christ

What does "baptism" mean here? Greek words beginning with bapt- had a range of meaning long before the root was associated with any religious rite or ceremony. Words beginning with bapt- can mean "engulf, overwhelm, wash, dip."

So is it a figurative meaning like "engulf or overwhelm," or is it a literal meaning like "wash, dip"? Given that circumcision in the previous verse had a figurative meaning, it's reasonable to assume that baptism should be treated in the same way. Therefore, baptism here is referring to an overwhelming or engulfing experience.

This is the sense in which Christ uses it in Mark 10:38, where "the baptism that I am baptized with" means "the overwhelming experience with which I am overwhelmed." In verse 39, Jesus said that James and John would also be similarly baptized (or "engulfed"), meaning that they would share in his suffering and death.

Returning to Colossians 2:12, therefore, we can say that the "baptism" in view is the overwhelming experience of Christ's death, especially his being engulfed in burial or entombment. Baptism here has nothing to do with water. John Woodhouse translates this verse: "as having been buried with him in the overwhelming experience." It's telling believers that they not only participated in Christ's death but also in his burial. In Christ, believers have fully and completely shared in his death and burial. We were involved in his entombment (see Gal. 2:20. Rom. 6:6.7).

APPLICATION



If you are a believer, I want to challenge you to read the Easter narratives in a much more personal way this year. See yourself on the road, in the garden, on trial, found guilty, condemned to death, dying on the cross, and buried in the Garden. You are not a mere spectator; you are a participant.



If you are not a believer, you have a terrible burial ahead of you. You will be buried not just under the earth, but under the wrath of God. You will be engulfed and overwhelmed. What is happening to your body in the grave is but a pale imitation of what's happening to your soul in hell. This is so unnecessary. Christ's burial 2000 years ago can save you from eternal burial.

OUR EYES SEE A LONELY GRAVE,
OUR FAITH SEES A MASS GRAVE



If I died and was buried with Christ, was I resurrected with him too?



3. WE WERE RAISED WITH CHRIST (12B-D)

(12)...in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Christ was raised

If the burial was proof of his death, the resurrection was proof of his life. We'll take a closer look at Christ's resurrection next Sunday (D.V.).

We were raised with Christ

We were on the cross on Easter Friday. We were in the tomb on Easter Saturday. We were in the garden on Easter Sunday. God's power raised Jesus from the dead. By faith in the same divine power, we were raised with him. Faith unites us to Christ's resurrection. Just as Christ left death behind and started a whole new life, so faith in Christ accomplishes the same thing.

APPLICATION

♥ You not only died and were buried 2000 years ago, you also rose from the dead 2000 years ago. In Christ, you conquered sin, guilt, death, the devil, and the grave. In God's eyes, you were there as much as Christ was. Receive the assurance of pardon, therefore, and the confidence of eternal life. My grave is going to be a place of great victory, because Christ's was.

♥ If you are not a believer, you did not rise with Christ or in Christ. You have no hope of a resurrection. Your body will rise, but not to a state of new life, rather to an eternal experience of death. But there is still time. You can "put yourself there" by faith in Christ, and everything he did is then yours.

Up From the Grave He Arose

Low in the grave He lay, Jesus, my Savior,
Waiting the coming day, Jesus, my Lord!
Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes,
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever, with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Death Was Arrested

Our savior displayed on a criminal's cross
Darkness rejoiced as though heaven had lost
But then Jesus arose with our freedom in hand
That's when death was arrested and my life began

King of Kings

And the morning that You rose
All of Heaven held its breath
'Til that stone was moved for good
For the Lamb had conquered death
And the dead rose from their tombs
And the angels stood in awe
For the souls of all who'd come
To the Father are restored
And the church of Christ was born
Then the Spirit lit the flame
Now this gospel truth of old
Shall not kneel, shall not faint
By His blood and in His name
In His freedom I am free
For the love of Jesus Christ
Who has resurrected me,



OUR EYES SEE ONE EMPTY TOMB
OUR FAITH SEES OUR EMPTY TOMB



CONCLUSION



FURTHER STUDY

Online Articles

- [Do You Know Union With Christ?](#) by Justin Taylor
- [Bibliography on Union with Christ](#) by Phil Gons

Books

- [Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God](#) by Rankine Wilbourne
This book is highly recommended.
- [Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology](#) by Robert Letham
- [Found in Him: The Joy of the Incarnation and Our Union with Christ](#) by Elyse Fitzpatrick

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Easter season special to you?
2. How do you try to close the history and distance gap between events in Jerusalem 2000 years ago and your own life today?
3. Why is circumcision a powerful metaphor for Christ's death?
4. What are some of the other ways circumcision is used to teach spiritual lessons in the Bible?
5. How does union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection help you spiritually?
6. How will you use this truth to help you grow in assurance, peace, and joy?
7. How will you use this truth to help you resist temptation?

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COLOSSIANS 2:11-12

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FOR US THAT IT WAS OUR DEATH.
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JOHN WOODHOUSE



Christ's death and resurrection can feel very far away

- Past history
- Impersonal history

Biblical answer?



We died with Christ

- Christ was circumcised
- We were circumcised with Christ

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Buried too?



We were buried with Christ

- Christ was buried
- We were buried with Christ

OUR EYES SEE A LONELY GRAVE,
OUR FAITH SEES A MASS GRAVE

Resurrected too?



We were raised with Christ

- Christ was raised
- We were raised with Christ

OUR EYES SEE ONE EMPTY TOMB
OUR FAITH SEES OUR EMPTY TOMB

Action?



Believe you died, were buried, and raised with Christ and you'll enjoy an Easter that is close and personal.

