

THE LONG WAY HOME – APPENDIX

In order to fully see the importance of the entrance into Canaan *by way of the Jordan River* it is necessary to reach ahead into the book of Joshua. It is there that we have the record of that event. The following study of Col. 2:10 – 12 draws together the Colossian passage, the record in Joshua, and the entrance into Canaan anticipated in the last few chapters of Numbers. Hopefully it will enable us to better understand and appreciate all three portions of His wonderful Word.

Commenting on Colossians 2:10 - 12, Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote as follows. “One of the apostle's threefold divisions of humanity is ‘the uncircumcision’ with reference to unregenerate Gentiles, ‘the circumcision in the flesh made by hands’ with reference to Israel, and ‘the circumcision made without hands’ with reference to Christians. ... The important truth that the believer has been circumcised without hands, and wholly apart from the flesh, is the grace position which is now in view.” He wrote earlier in the same volume, “The right understanding of this Scripture depends largely on recognizing that the reference to Christ's circumcision is a reference to His death.”¹

In these verses Paul is saying that Christians today need neither circumcision (the vital issue in his day) nor water baptism (the actively debated issue today) to make us complete -- for we already have the reality, in Christ, which these two rituals only shadowed. We are *complete in him*.

When Paul uses the expression “the flesh” he almost always has the sinful nature of the believer in view rather than his physical body. Yet the very word he uses (“flesh”) brings the physical body to mind. There is a reason for choosing this word. While the physical body is not, in itself, sinful, it is the channel through which most temptations come, and the members of the body are, all too often, “instruments of unrighteousness to sin” (Rom. 6:13).

With this in mind, the solution, as regards the sins of believers, is simple. *Death is the answer*. It is fully effective and permanent. The most law abiding and totally harmless people in the world are those lying calmly in the cemeteries! “He who has died has been freed from sin,” Paul writes in Rom. 6:7. It is noteworthy that in Romans chapters six through eight (where he is speaking of our sanctification) he uses the word “death,” or its equivalent, thirty-four times! God has no plan to reform, improve or control the flesh.. His plan for it is death. It has already been crucified at Calvary, but is rendered powerless in our lives only as we, by faith, account it dead.

In recognition of this, the rite of circumcision was introduced. Recognizing that the fleshly nature deserved death, a safely disposable part of the fleshly body was cut off to die as a token, bearing testimony to this truth. That the body itself, in spite of its complicity in sin, was not the real problem, is indicated when it is allowed to live on after circumcision. The real culprit, the sinful nature, is addressed in several passages in terms

¹ “Systematic Theology” by Lewis Sperry Chafer, vol. III, pages, 250, 193 respectively.

of “circumcision.” “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deut. 10:16). “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.” (Deut. 30:6). “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts” (Jer. 4:4). “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you” (Acts 7:51). “He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:29).

Today we have no need of this circumcision made by hands, for we have the real and total circumcision, which was only faintly suggested in the ritual operation. This is made clear in Conybeare's translation of Col. 2:11. “In Him, also, you were circumcised with a circumcision not made by hands, even the off-casting of the whole body of the flesh, the circumcision [cutting off at Calvary] of Christ.” His footnote on this verse reads, “The casting off, not (as in outward circumcision) of a part, but the whole body of the flesh, the whole carnal nature.” It is this circumcision which Paul has in mind when he says, “For we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put *no confidence in the flesh*” (Phil. 3:3 -- NASB).

We also have no need of ritual baptism, for we have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). Being members of His Body we share, retroactively, in His history. When He died, we died; when He was buried, we were buried; and when He arose from the dead, we rose with Him. It is not that, in a water ceremony, we are but *pictured* as dying and being raised from the dead (almost two centuries after Calvary), but that *when He died, we died and when He arose, we arose*.

I did not die *like* Him, but *with* Him. It is this death which constitutes my circumcision, the “off-casting of the whole body of the flesh” (Col. 2:11 - Conybeare), for “I *have been* crucified *with* Christ” (Gal. 2:20 - NASB). My “old self was crucified with Him” that my “body of sin might be done away with” that I might no longer be a slave to sin (Rom. 6:6 - NASB).

These truths find illustration in the book of Joshua.

When Israel entered the land, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, they had to cross the Jordan River. Just, as in the crossing of the Red Sea, Israel had been baptized unto Moses (1 Cor. 10:1, 2), so, in crossing the Jordan, they were baptized unto Joshua -- and ‘Joshua’ is the Old Testament word for ‘Jesus.’ Going down into the Jordan speaks of death, while coming up out of it denotes resurrection. It is notable that the Ark of the Covenant – typical of Christ - went into the Jordan alone, except for the necessary priests to carry it. Then, while the Ark was in the Jordan, the people marched past it. Only when “All the people had crossed completely over the Jordan” (Josh. 3:17), and when “everything was *finished*” (Josh. 4:10),² was the Ark brought to dry land (Josh. 4:18). The people did not go down into that place of death *after* the Ark had

² Compare “when He had by Himself purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3) and “It is finished” (John 19:30).

completed the crossing, but *while it was reposing there*.

Two memorials were erected that day. Each of them consisted of twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel, and they represented the people who crossed the Jordan. Twelve stones were taken from the shore and set up in the midst of the river, where they remained when the waters returned (Joshua 4:9). They could look at that memorial, or recall it if the waters covered it, and say, “That is where the Ark was -- and I was there with it!”

Then twelve other stones were taken from the riverbed and erected on the Canaan shore. Looking upon these stones they could say, “The Ark was in the midst of the river, where these stones were, but it was brought up out of it -- and I came out with it.” In Gal. 2:20 (KJV) Paul voiced the realities pictured but dimly here when he said, “I have been crucified with Christ [the memorial in the river], nevertheless I live” (the memorial on the riverbank).

This crossing of the Jordan does not picture the believer dying physically and going to heaven – we won’t have to fight for our home in heaven as the Israelites did in Canaan!. Rather, it illustrates for us the glorious day when we finally despair of pleasing Christ in our Christian lives by a determined and legalistic exercise in “dead works” (Heb. 9:14). When we account ourselves dead unto sin but alive unto God (Rom. 6:11), we find our heavenly ‘Joshua’ a sufficient provision for our walk -- as we earlier (at our conversion) found Him the sufficient provision for our salvation.

It is important to see the link between the crossing of Jordan and the circumcising of the people. The stones taken out of the river were placed in, or near, Gilgal. It was named Gilgal (which means, “a rolling”) because there the reproach of Egypt was rolled away through the circumcision (Josh. 5:9). They had not practiced circumcision in the wilderness even though Moses had commanded it. Only after being baptized unto Joshua was it carried out. On the basis of their identification with the Ark in death and resurrection they began to practice that which symbolized death to the flesh (circumcision) -- and only then did they eat of the “old corn of the land” for which they had waited so long (Josh. 5:11, 12 -KJV).

There is also a link between the baptism of Col. 2:12 and the circumcision of Col. 2:11. This is made clear in Conybeare's translation. “In Him, also, you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, even the off-casting of the whole body of the flesh, the circumcision of Christ; *for* with Him you were buried in your baptism, wherein also you were made partakers of His resurrection, through the faith wrought in you by God, who raised Him from the dead.” The circumcision of verse eleven is without hands (not brought about by a priest's knife). So also the baptism of verse twelve is the working of God, not a ritual administered by a pastor or priest.

Just as the death and resurrection of Christ stands as the single basis for our *justification*, so our identification with Him in that death and resurrection is the solitary basis for our *sanctification*. All of the other elements in our daily walk of faith find their

source and reality in that work of Christ and our identification with Him in it. This is emphasized in the context of the Colossian passage under consideration. Notice “If you died with Christ-” (Col. 2:20 & following) and “If ... you were raised with Christ, -” (Col. 3:1 & following). The rest of Colossians is built firmly on these two considerations and their impact on our daily life.

Our completeness in Christ is not found in rituals, however important they were before they were replaced by the realities they shadowed, but by the realities themselves!