

Col. 2:9-15, Our Position in Christ
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Overview

1. Three themes in 1:21-23
 - a) 1:21-22, our Position in Christ
 - b) 1:23a, our Practice
 - c) 1:23b, Paul's ministry

2. 2:4-4:1 works out the first two themes, chiastically. The Practice sections are marked by imperatives, and also make reference to the believer's Position in subordinate clauses.
 - a) 2:4-8, Practice
 - b) 2:9-15, Position
 - c) 2:16-4:1, Practice

3. 2:9-15 in turn is chiastic. It first states three things that we are in Christ (Complete, Circumcised, Baptized), and then explains what God has done to achieve each of these.

A. 9-12, What We Are in Christ

Each of these is marked by a finite verb, with "you" as subject, modified by "in him" or "in you"--"you are complete in him; in whom you are circumcised; in whom you are [buried and] raised." This spatial metaphor gives rise to the notion of our "position" in Christ.

1. Fulness: 9-10

Our description as "complete in him" comes between two descriptions of Christ's completeness. He is complete, and because we are in him, we partake of his completeness: Jn 1:16, "And of his fulness have all we received."

 - a) How is Christ complete?
 - 1) His internal fulness, with respect to deity: "In him dwells all the fulness of Deity, bodily." As clear a statement of the incarnation as the Scriptures give us.
 - a> All the fulness of Deity: all that God is. Jesus Christ is in no way secondary to God. "He who has seen me has seen the Father." It is with good reason that the NT writers give him the title "Lord," the OT YHWH. The false teachers err if they wish to reduce him to one of a series of angelic intermediaries. He is fully God.
 - b> Bodily: He is a physical human, not just a spirit or an apparition. Cf. John's emphasis that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (1 John 4:2,3; 2 John 7).
 - c> Dwells: Note the present tense. Our Lord's deity is not just a historical fact, but a present reality. He

continues to wear a human body in his present role in heaven, and will forever unite our human nature with that of God.

2) His external authority: "the head of all principalities and powers," "rulers and authorities." The angels, in their roles as administrators and rulers of creation. Specifically refers to the angels responsible for the various nations, as in Dan. 10 and Ezek. 28:12 (cf. 2), as well as to the human rulers under them (Titus 3:1). Because all that is in God is in him, he has authority over every other bearer of authority.

b) What does this mean for us? The emphasis is on our position in him: not "you are complete in him," but "you are in him, complete."

1) "Complete" is a perfect participle, "filled up." It appears only one other time in the NT in this absolute construction, in Phil. 4:18, "I am full." I don't need anything. Because we are united with Christ, who as God is over every created authority, we are complete. No one can touch us, or challenge us, or hurt us, unless he permits it for his glory and our greater blessing. Recall the old joke: "Do you want to fight me buddy? He's me buddy."

2) Perfect tense indicates something that is accomplished. The instant we become a child of God, we enjoy this tremendous position of victory.

3) *Skip in sermon? needs more work.* Contrast this passage with Eph. 3:19, which says that we are being filled with all the fulness of God.

a> Does not make us identical with Christ.

1> "Fulness of God" is not the same as "fulness of Deity." God can be in you without your being God; but when all of the divine attributes are yours, you are God by definition.

2> These attributes dwell continuously in him; the fulness of God only fills us over time.

b> Present tense vs. perfect is practice vs. position, the outworking of what we have.

2. Circumcision: 11

What is this "circumcision without hands"?

a) Rom. 2:29, Paul uses it to distinguish outward religion from inward nature.

b) He is following an OT lead: Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4, both recognize that we need ethical surgery to be able to serve God. The unsaved nature is corrupt and opposed to God, the "body of the flesh," and it must be removed if we are to live holy lives.

- c) It is "the circumcision of Christ," in contrast with that of Abraham or Moses (or, for that matter, of Judaizing teachers who sought to compel Gentile believers to receive physical circumcision as a condition of salvation).

3. Baptism: 12

Baptism is our identification with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

- a) Cf. Rom. 6:3-11 for the most detailed exposition of baptism in the life of the believer.
- b) The physical ceremony is only a picture of the spiritual event. Note the mechanism emphasized here in Col: "through faith in the operation of God." We are baptized into the body of Christ by the HS, and thus made partakers of his DBR, when we believe on him. Water baptism is then appropriate as a symbol of our new position. It is commanded, thus very important; but it is the picture, not the reality.
- c) The imagery of DBR is implicit in immersion, which all agree was the mode in the primitive church. (develop)
- d) Note how this goes a step beyond (spiritual) circumcision. The ceremony of Circumcision envisions only the death of the body of sin; Baptism includes that and goes beyond to illustrate resurrection to new life.

4. Notes on the relation between Circumcision and Baptism.

- a) The reformed churches conclude from this passage
 - 1) that Baptism is the NT equivalent of Circumcision, replacing it as the seal of the respective covenant;
 - 2) that therefore Baptism should be applied to the same group as Circumcision was (namely, children of believers as well as new converts).
- b) Circumcision is NOT the seal of the covenant of the Law, nor is Baptism the seal of the new covenant. Thus the *tertium quid* on which the comparison rests (that the two occupy the same symbolic role in their respective covenants) is ill drawn. Many of God's covenants are identified with seals (OT ot)
 - 1) Noah: Rainbow, Gen. 9:12, 13, 17
 - 2) Abraham: Circumcision, Gen. 17:11
 - 3) Sinai: Sabbath, Exod 31:13, 17 (NOT circumcision! Circumcision persisted under the covenant of Sinai, but not as the sign of that specific covenant.)
 - 4) New covenant: Holy Spirit, Eph. 1:13,14.No covenant theologian would want to argue that the covenant with Abraham is abrogated! Gal. 3:16,17 argues that Abraham's covenant continues in effect. That's why Moses circumcised, and that's why Paul practices it for believing Jews under the New Covenant, Acts 16:3; cf.

21:20-26 (which by the way shows that it hasn't been replaced by anything! Timothy would have been both circumcised and baptized.)

- c) Col. 2 does not present the two as replacements. It uses them to emphasize different aspects of our position in Christ; putting away the flesh (circumcision), and joining in Christ's DBR (baptism). "You are in him, complete; you are circumcised in him; being buried with him in baptism, you are raised with him." Both do indeed deal with "the body of sin" (2:11; Rom. 6:6), but are different pictures of the same operation, rather than one's being viewed as replacement for the other.
- d) So far as mode and recipients are concerned, we are much better guided by observing the practice recorded in the NT than by elaborate theological deductions. That practice gives no evidence for infant baptism and in fact always predicates baptism on personal faith; and all parties agree that NT baptism was by immersion.

B. 13-15, What God has Done

Three indicative verbs, each with several associated participles: he made us alive, he took the indictment out of the way, he made an open show of P&P's. Each may be correlated with one of the three positional statements in vv. 9-12.

1. 13a, He has made us alive.

- a) The nature of our former death: Paul mentions both "Sins," the outward manifestation, and "Uncircumcision of your flesh," the inward nature. NB: People are not sinners because they sin; they sin because they are sinners. "The carnal [fleshly] mind is enmity against God."
- b) The remedy: he has made us alive together with Christ. Cf. Eph. 2:1-7 as the amplification of the idea of this verse.
- c) Relation to the three positional statements: being quickened together with Christ is the heart of the image depicted in baptism.

2. 13b-14, He has taken away the indictment against us.

- a) What has God taken out of the way?
The object of the finite verb, *auto* "it", refers to "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us."
 - 1) "Handwriting of ordinances": not the law itself, but a list of the laws that we have offended; the indictment that enumerates our sins.
 - 2) "against us," that is, it applies to us. It is our indictment; it correctly describes our sins.

- 3) "contrary to us," hostile, inimical to us. The indictment is not just a passive listing of our misdeeds, but an expression of the wrath of God against our sin. God is angry with the wicked every day (Ps 7:11); he hates all workers of iniquity and abhors the bloody and deceitful person (Ps 5:5,6; 11:5).
- 4) Summary: each of us is under an indictment, a formal charge from the court of heaven that enumerates our sins. Cf. Rev. 20:12, "and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."
- b) How has God taken it out of the way?
Two images.
- 1) He has "blotted it out," "wiped it away," as the Lord will wipe away the tears of the redeemed (Rev. 7:17; 21:4). Used in business documents of obliterating or removing an entry; derives from use of wet ink, which can be smeared or wiped away. Image: the court officer removes the charge against us.
- But how can this be, without subjecting God to the charge of winking at sin?*
- 2) He has nailed it to the cross of the Lord Jesus. It was the custom to nail to the cross of a condemned criminal the offense for which he was put to death. Cf. Mt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; both of which describe the legend over Jesus' head as his "accusation" (lit. "cause," that is, of his crucifixion). Paul's use of this image is complex:
- a> This is our indictment, the record of our sins.
- b> Yet it is nailed to the cross of the LJC, and thus becomes his indictment, the reason for his death.
- c> Thus the imagery sets forth the concept of substitution. Christ dies under our indictment, suffering the penalty for our sins, satisfying the claims of a holy God, and thus the indictment loses its power over us.
- c) The third participle states in plain language what these two figures imply: he has forgiven us all trespasses.
- d) Relation to the three positional statements: forgiveness is the complement to our circumcision; the one deals with the underlying sinful nature, the other with the guilt that results when we yield to that nature. Cf. Deut. 30:6,7. Removing our sinful nature is paired with removal of the indictment that it earned.

3. 15, He has made an open show of Principalities & Powers.

- a) Who are P&P? Recall v.10; the angelic authorities that stand behind earthly political powers.
- b) The main verb and participles are drawn from a military metaphor. After a battle, the victorious general would lead his captives in a parade to show his superiority over them. Here, God is said to make such a display of P&P's. Modifying participles:

- 1) "having spoiled P&P's": he disarmed them, stripped them of their possessions. The verb form emphasizes that he did this for himself (middle; see G&G p. 265; D&M p. 159). We were set free in the process, but that is not the point. The focus here is on God's glory, not our deliverance.

Application: We too often take a selfish view of the drama of redemption. God did it out of love for us, but also as a means to display his glory, Eph. 2:7.

- 2) "triumphing over them in it/him": "triumph" is the standard verb for such a victory parade. The new information here is the phrase "in it," which would refer to the cross, or "in him," that is, Christ.
 - a> "In the cross" is hardly obvious. The cross appeared to be a mechanism of defeat, not a show of triumph.
 - b> *en autw* throughout this section refers to Christ.
 - c> In its only other NT occurrence (2 Cor. 2:14), the verb is used with "in Christ," which seems best here also. Thus God achieved this triumphal display in the Lord Jesus. The cross was certainly part of the mechanism, but the resurrection and ascension were the more obvious manifestations.

- c) Relation to the three positional statements: takes us back to the fulness of 9-10, which also referenced our Lord's superiority to P&P's.

C. Summary

Our threefold position in Christ is supported by three divine actions on our behalf. Arranged chiastically.

- 1. We are complete in Christ (9-10), because in Christ God has demonstrated his complete victory over angelic forces (15), and has made his son head of all principality and power.
- 2. We are circumcised in Christ, thus setting us free from the old nature (11), and as well delivered from the guilt into which that nature led us (13b-14).
- 3. We are baptized into Christ (12), thus sharing his DBR and in particular being made alive from spiritual death (13a).

Analysis

Note abundance of "in him" phrases.
Successive amplification.

A. 9-12, What We Are in Christ

1. Fulness: 9-10

Two descriptions of Christ on either side of the implications for us

- a) First description: his internal fulness
o(/ti e)n au)tw^| katoikei^ pa^n to\ plh/rwma th^s qeo/thtos swmatikw^s,
- b) Implications for us:
kai\ e)ste\ e)n au)tw^| peplhrwme/noi,
- c) Second description: his external authority
o(/s e)stin h(kefalh\ pa/shs a)rxh^s kai\ e)cousi/as,

2. Circumcision: 11

e)n w(^| kai\ perietmh/qhte

- a) peritomh^| a)xeiropoih/tw|
- b) e)n th^| a)pekdu/sei tou^ sw/matos th^s sarko/s,
- c) e)n th^| peritomh^| tou^ Xristou^,

3. Baptism: 12

12b e)n w(^| kai\ sunhge/rqhte

- a) 12a suntafe/ntes au)tw^| e)n tw^| baptismw^|,
- b) 12c dia\ th^s pi/stews th^s e)nergei/as tou^ qeou^ tou^ e)gei/rantos au)to\n e)k nekrw^n:

B. 13-15, What God has Done

1. 13a, He has baptized us by making us alive.

... sunezwopoi/hsen u(ma^s su\n au)tw^|,

- a) 2:13 kai\ u(ma^s nekrou\s o)/ntas [e)n] toi^s paraptw/masin kai\ th^| a)krobusti/a| th^s sarko\s u(mw^h,

2. 13b-14, He has circumcised us by invalidating the indictment against us.

14b ... kai\ au)to\ h)^rken e)k tou^ me/sou

- a) 13b xarisa/menos h(mi^h pa/nta ta\ paraptw/mata,
- b) 14a e)calei/yas to\ kaq' h(mw^h xeiroy/grafoy toi^s do/gmasin o(\ h)^h u(penanti/on h(mi^h,
- c) 14c proshlw/sas au)to\ tw^| staurw^|:

3. He has filled us by triumphing over Principalities & Powers.

15b ... e)deigma/tisen e)n parrhsi/a|,

- a) 15a a)pekdua/menos ta\s a)rxas kai\ ta\s e)cousi/as ...
- b) 15c qriambeu/sas au)to\s e)n au)tw^|.