A Brand-new heart in Christ

Colossians 2:11

May 24, 2026

Please turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2. Colossians chapter 2 and we are coming to some rich doctrines of salvation formerly studied under the heading of Soteriology, soteria referring to salvation and ology, the study of; so it's the study of the doctrines of salvation, the teaching of the Bible on salvation. Paul has, as we saw last time, he has warned against Christless philosophy, Colossians 2:8, and that leads to a profound and rather dense passage of doctrine that really teaches us what happened to us at salvation.

Something happened to us when we were saved and it takes really the rest of our Christian life and I would say into our eternal life to figure out what happened exactly and it is a great joy for us to figure that out. The key concept in this section on salvation is the believer’s union with Christ.

You don't find the word union in this text per se, but you do find the concept that's repeated in the expressions there in verses 9 to 15, in him, in whom, or with him. And all of those concepts really teach the concept of union with Christ, which is at the heart of this whole section from verses 9 to 15. One mark of Christian maturity is an abiding awareness of and a meaningful reflection on our union with Jesus Christ.

This union God was pleased to picture for us in baptism, the initiatory ritual of the Christian Church. We call it the entrance ordinance into the Christian Church, Christian baptism, water baptism. In fact, that's why I asked that this morning, that they were planning on a different section from the London Baptist Confession of Faith, I asked that they would do that one on baptism, so that we could confess that together and put it in our minds the meaning of baptism for us as Christians.

Our baptism is our confession. Our baptism is a public testimony, and it is not something that we are to leave behind once we pass through the front door of the church, never to be thought of again. Our baptism is to be a living, abiding picture for us. It's a testimony, a continual testimony, and a means of divine grace.

Christ gave baptism to us to instruct us and guide us and encourage us and sanctify us, not only at the point of baptism, but for the rest of our lives. So before we read our text this morning, I'd like you to listen to this brief description of baptism by the commentator JB Lightfoot. He says this, "baptism is the grave of the old man and the birth of the new. As he sinks beneath baptismal waters, the believer buries there all his corrupt affections and past sins; as he emerges thence, he rises regenerate, quickened to new hopes and a new life. This it is because it is not only the crowning act of his own faith, but also the seal of God's adoption and the earnest of God's Spirit. Thus, baptism is an image of his participation both in the death and in the resurrection of Christ."

Now JB Lightfoot was an Anglican minister, Anglican theologian, so his language on baptism is more strongly stated than what Scripture warrants. A bit of that spoke of baptismal regeneration, which is not biblical. We don't rise from baptismal waters, regenerate, as the biblical doctrine of regeneration makes very plain to us.

And yet, since baptism pictures what truly happened at our salvation, regeneration, conversion by virtue of union, by faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The reality that is

pictured in baptism is powerful and very true. Baptism is the grave of the old man and the birth of the new.

Baptism is an image of our participation both in the death and in the resurrection of Christ and so I wonder, dear Christian, how often you think back to your baptism, and how often you draw from the divine grace that's conveyed to you whenever you reflect in, an ever more deeply instructed faith on the doctrines that are involved in your salvation and pictured in your baptism.

Paul commends such a practice by virtue of what our text this morning teaches, as one of the ways that God edifies us by his grace and encourages our hearts and strengthens our faith, and as we see most immediately here, protects us from false teaching, if we would reflect daily on our union with Christ. One way to do that is to ponder the meaning of baptism, to meditate in faith on the realities that are portrayed in that baptism, right, that ritual. And I believe we would be more strengthened and encouraged and therefore more deeply satisfied and more fully contented in Christ.

Now, right here at the front, I've given you some application, right up front, so that you can understand why this section we're about to go through is so, so important for us as

Christians. So with that, let's read the full text together and we'll start back in verse 8. Colossians 2:8 through 15 says this, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells bodily, and in Him you have been filled, who is the head over all rule and authority; in whom you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. "And you being dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having graciously forgiven us all our transgressions. Having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of the decrees against us which was hostile to us, He's also taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. And having disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them in him."

We're going to focus our study this week on Colossians 2:11. There is enough in these verses to occupy the theological student for a semester of Soteriology or even a yearlong study. It's just packed with soul stirring, mind stretching, heart strengthening doctrine. It's so, so good. And as it is with many truths of Scripture, the riches here don't really lie on the surface. They're discovered by mining, by exegesis, by diligent digging, careful searching, careful sorting.

For example, look at that expression in verse 11. "Circumcision made without hands." Is this the removal of the body of flesh saying something about us? Or is it saying something about what happened to Christ on the cross? And you say, well, isn't that obvious? Well, maybe it is, but it has to do with what parallels may or may not be in the text, or how you interpret the next genitive phrase, "the circumcision of Christ."

Of Christ, what kind of a genitive is that? I know you've pondered that as you've done your daily devotions. What kind of a genitive is that? Good for you, for asking that question. Is, of Christ, an objective genitive or a subjective genitive? Both of those, by the way, are supposed, as being potential options of the kind of genitive, because, of Christ, is connected to a

verbal noun, could be a possessive genitive, could be an exegetical genitive explaining something more.

But all my point in saying, all that is to say this, the decision you make there on this point kind of affects the previous question about whether the removal of the body of flesh is about us or about him; about his death or ours. Paul joins the thoughts of verse 11, of those of verse 12, and here we see circumcision comes into contact with baptism. But what's the relationship between the two of them? Are they two separate things or is it the same thing pictured twice?

As for baptism, is Paul referring to water baptism here? That is the baptism ordinance in the church, or is this a baptism that is a metaphor to signify a deeper spiritual reality? If he is talking about the ordinance and in such close proximity to circumcision, are we going to see that baptism replaces circumcision as the sign and the seal of the covenant, as some people like to put it?

So you can see there's a lot here. If you'll stick with me and if God is gracious to grant his Spirit to help us, which I believe he's always faithful to do, we will discover the rich assurance of our salvation in this text. Because that's really the point, is to deepen our assurance in the salvation that God

accomplished for us in Christ. To protect us as a prophylactic against false teaching, the influence of false teachers and speculation and philosophy, which runs rife through the world in their day and in ours.

Many people drift away from Christ because of these very truths that are being dealt with right here, so stick with me. The better we understand this, the more steadfast and immovable we'll be, the more faithful, fruitful, joyful, grateful we'll become and this has been my prayer for you as I've been studying through the text.

Now, the way I intend to work through this section, we're going to start in verse 11, seeing that, in Christ, we have a brand-new heart. And then in verses 12 to 15, that, in Christ, we have a brand-new life. So new heart today, new life for next time, that's the big picture. But now, for today, we're going to dial in our focus on verse 11. So I could make a few introductory points before we get into the outline. Just to help you understand this.

Paul in verse 11 starts with a relative pronoun. It's the word, in whom. Whom, there, being a relative pronoun and that relative pronoun points back to Christ, who is the subject of verses 9

and 10, "For in Him all the fullness of deity dwells bodily, and in Him you have been filled."

And now verse 11, in whom, that's the same, him, as before, "in Whom you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ." Now, as uncomfortable as the subject may seem to be, to talk about this in public, we have got to come to some clarity on the meaning of circumcision. After all, Paul refers to it three times in one verse, so it's obviously quite important.

And I would guess sitting around your dinner table, the meaning of circumcision is not something that comes up. It's not something you talk about, think about too often, in polite company. If you do stop to think about it, you may wonder why it is that God chose this ritual of all things, which is so very private, which feels so terribly uncomfortable to talk about in public, as I'm doing right now.

So why is this a covenant sign? And how does this picture some spiritual good done to us? The verb *peritemno,* literally means, to cut around in. And everyone, ancient to modern, east to west, north to South, everyone seems to intuitively know what it is that is being cut around.

Circumcision refers to the cutting around of the male genitalia in a surgery to remove the foreskin. Why did God choose this to be the sign of the covenant that he made with Abraham? And for that matter, why is Paul bringing it up now? What does this have to do with us?

The procedure itself is bloody and painful and private, even an embarrassing thing to have to mention. And when we come to think about it, mutilating the body, doesn't that seem rather barbaric? Isn't circumcision a relic of an ancient past that we'd just as soon forget, or maybe relegated to like an artifact of history; happened back then after all.

If we consider today, the female genital mutilation that some cultures still practice, we all rightly consider it to be cruel and barbaric. If we judge the modern transgender cult to be returning to the same kind of thing, albeit with more sterile modern methods, chemically, surgically, rearranging the body parts. Look, it's still mutilating the human body, which we oppose.

So why are we for it, when it comes to Abraham and his descendants? Why do we accept circumcision almost without thinking about it, when it comes to Israel? How is it that circumcision becomes something that we now celebrate? Here as it

pictures, a brand-new heart in Christ. We can answer those questions if we take time to go back to the start and read the story of circumcision, discover its origin, and then learn about the rich meaning of circumcision.

So now I'll get into my outline. All that was introduction, but I've got several points for you this morning starting with this, number one: The sign, the sign, a physical circumcision. Number one: The sign a physical circumcision. We start with the sign of circumcision, or you could say the covenantal sign of circumcision, because the very first mention of circumcision in Scripture, Genesis 17:10, is given when God gave Abraham a sign of the covenant that he made with him.

It's a covenantal context. So you will want to warm up your fingers, get your hands ready, go back to Genesis chapter 17. Genesis chapter 17, God gives the Abrahamic covenant several times and he kind of progressively reveals and gives more fullness and more description. Genesis 12 is the first mention of it; Genesis 15, more elaboration, that's when "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

That's where righteousness was imputed to him on the basis of faith. Then Genesis 17, he recapitulates the covenant, explains it again, and gives the sign of circumcision. So we see the sign

of circumcision didn't come before he had faith, but after he had faith. But Genesis 17, let's look at this giving of the sign starting in verse 9, Genesis 17:9 and following.

"God said further to Abraham," he says further to Abraham, because I've already been talking to Abraham, giving him a recapitulation, a reexplanation of the covenant that he's making with him. But, "God says further to Abraham," in verse 9, "'Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after you, every male among you shall be circumcised.

"And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, one who is born in the house, or one who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your seed. A *servant* who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall be surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

Okay. For Israel, from this point on, circumcision is a thing, and it's a very important thing, signifies the covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed after him. So serious, it is that all who would be identified as children of Abraham must be circumcised and any who were not circumcised are going to be cut off from the people, cast out, treated as heathen, treated as foreigners, no longer part of the people.

May surprise you to find out that circumcision is not distinctive to Abraham and to Israel. Circumcision was actually practiced throughout the ancient world in a vast number of societies and cultures in different parts of the world. That's why this text, this sign, the mention of circumcision kind of elicits no surprise or explanation from God. He knows exactly what it is. Abraham understands what God is getting at.

Earliest evidence of circumcision is from Egypt. It was at a time that was contemporaneous with Abraham. Probably predates Abraham, but in Egypt and there is not a lot of remaining evidence for this, but there is evidence, seemed to be a mark of sacred distinction upon the males in Egypt. It was exclusive to priests and the higher castes of society. They granted them mystical access to all those who are initiated by this right into sacred mysteries of the divine.

But again, there's evidence of circumcision not just in Egypt, but from all over the world, in both hemispheres, in the Middle East, in Africa, Asia, the Americas, even Australia, according to one source, even among the Fiji Islanders. Where did circumcision come from? I mean like who in their right mind?

Many theories there are about the origin of this practice, everything from a coming-of-age ritual to marking tribal belonging, like a really extreme tattoo or a severe form of body piercing. All kinds of theories. Fourth century BC Greek historian Herodotus. And since Herodotus, many throughout history, and to this day, believe that circumcision was, kind of like, a sanitary practice; you had hygienic concerns, maybe a prophylactic caution against spreading disease, especially venereal disease or sexually transmitted diseases.

This continues to this day to be a modern medical debate as to whether that's effective or not. But the most honest consideration of the evidence is that the practice did originate as a religious right. Not because of sanitary reasons or rite of passage into manhood. Nothing like that.

But according to some, circumcision became kind of like a vicarious substitute for full blown human sacrifice, kind of like consecrating a part of the body and giving that over to the

divine to signify consecrating the whole body. And yet still there was pain. Still there was a blood sacrifice offered to the deity. The evidence seems scanty on that point, as far as I can tell, but this view is coming closer to the point that this is originating as a religious right.

More to the point, we have to ask the question, so why the male genitalia? According to one source, it says, "We must look for the significance of this right. In this, the corruption of sin manifests itself with peculiar energy in the sexual life and the sanctification of the life was symbolized by purifying the organ by which life is reproduced. As spiritual purity was demanded of God's chosen people, circumcision became the external token of the covenant between God and his people. End Quote.

Is that the reason God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision there, to signify the covenant? Was it about just sexual purity? Some people have thought that maybe it's because for every Israelite who gets that done to him, every time he's thinking about going into a woman of another nation, he has to think about the covenant as he engages in that act. Is that what's going on?

Is it about purity? Why not, in the words of Jesus, why not gouge out the eye? The eye is a vehicle for all kinds of sin, is

it not? Maybe that could be the mark of God's chosen people. Seems to me that while it's an interesting explanation, I think it's still arbitrary. When we go back to Abraham in Genesis 17, we can't help but notice that God gave the sign of circumcision to signify his covenant right after Genesis 16.

But what happened in 16? What was going on there? That's the record of the fiasco of Abraham and Sarah trying to fulfill God's promises by means of the flesh. Sarah, you remember, sent her husband into the arms of her slave Hagar, and Ishmael was born. Abraham and Sarah were in full agreement on this little plan, but their thinking was according to the flesh.

They thought that they possessed the power to fulfill the promise of God, and they sought to bring about God's will by means of their own prerogative and their own progenitive procreative power exercised according to their own will, on their own time, in their own way, according to natural thinking. And they were wrong. They were so wrong about that.

And the world has lived and died, we could say, from the consequences that arose from that error ever since. Because the people of the slave woman and the people of the free woman are at odds, are they not? Does not the Middle East still draw the

attention of the entire world, as the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Isaac are at war?

But back in Genesis 16, after God graciously provided for Hagar and the child Ishmael, God went back to Abraham in Genesis 17 to recapitulate his covenant and to give him what is, get this, the most fitting sign of this covenant. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, Genesis 17:11. The sign is fitting, appropriate in light of what had just happened.

The sign provided a tremendously important lesson about the nature of covenant fulfillment, about the nature of promise fulfillment that Abraham and his offspring needed to learn and remember and remember in perpetuity. God's promise is fulfilled by his grace through faith. Even after this when God gives the sign to Abraham, Abraham protested, he still is not getting what god is laying down here.

Listen to this starting in verse 15, after giving him the sign, "God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. And then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.'"

Sarah incorporates the hayah verb, which is the verb, to live, for life. So she's going to be the mother of nations. She's going to be life bearing. "Abraham fell on his face and he laughed and he said in his heart, 'Will *a son* be born to,' me, 'a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who's ninety years old, bear *a son*?' Abraham said to God, 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before you!'"

Oh God, please accept a child of my works. "God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, you should call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. As for Ishmael, I've heard you; behold, I will bless him and I will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become a father of twelve Princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.' And so He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham."

And then there's the record of Abraham circumcising his whole household, all the males himself included, at ninety-nine years old, Ishmael at thirteen. Imagine trying to take your teenager, explain that, tough. What's God saying there? Believe me

Abraham, trust me, I will do exactly as I've said. My word is my promise. Believe me.

This is how this all started in Genesis 15:6, when God originally cut the covenant with him. "He believed in Yahweh and Yahweh accounted it to Him as righteousness." There's the doctrine of imputation right there. A reckoning, an accounting to and so the sign of circumcision is a most fitting sign, most appropriate to signify that God will fulfill all his promises to Abraham, not by means of his works, not by means of even of his understanding and what he can imagine to be possible, but God will fulfill his promises to Abraham by his grace and by means of his faith.

God will fulfill that promise through the righteousness Abraham had by faith, giving to Abraham and Sarah the child that he had promised them, Isaac the child of faith, not Ishmael the child of works, born of the will of the flesh. So this is a most fitting sign, as I said, to cut into the tender flesh of Abraham's procreative instrument, and to him and all of his seed; all of his offspring, would be a perpetual reminder that the promise of grace would be fulfilled through faith, apart from works; by faith, not by flesh, by God, not by man.

In Genesis 15, God cut a covenant with Abraham and he cut a covenant with Abraham; to ratify the covenant in the ancient world, required the shedding of blood and so there was the shedding of blood. God told Abraham in Genesis 15:9 to take several three-year-old animals and cut them in half: A heifer, female goat, a ram.

So take two birds, turtle dove, a young pigeon, not cut them in half. I mean, that's just a bloody mess with feathers and blood and all that. They were to be sacrificed, but not cut in half. And Abraham did his sacrifices, sacrificed the animals. He cut the heifer, the goat, the ram in half, killed the birds, and he separated the pieces. And then he fell into a deep sleep in Genesis 15.

You remember in Genesis 15, God came, he showed up and predicted to Abraham the sojourn of all Abraham's descendants in Egypt. They would be there 400 years, and then God passed through the pieces of the sacrificed animals by himself. Usually in cutting a covenant, the two parties of the covenant would pass through the pieces together to signify, thus be it to you and to me, should we not uphold the agreement of this covenant. That is, let me be cut in half.

God passes through, he passes through the pieces as a smoking oven and a flaming torch, kind of a mini picture of what would later happen at Sinai and he passed through alone. Genesis 15:17, says by this God is demonstrating his intent to fulfill the covenant promises by himself. Thus God cut the covenant with Abraham and was, by the shedding of blood, God's part in the covenant, to fulfil the promises.

Abraham's part in the covenant believe, trust God, believe his word, take him at his word and that is why in Genesis 16, when Abraham tried to fulfil the covenant promise to bring about a child of his own, on his own, God restates the covenant in Genesis 17:1 through 8. Then he gives the sign and blood is shed and a cut is made in his own flesh.

The covenant is cut into his own procreative member, literally and painfully, which is to be a perpetual reminder that God will fulfill his gracious covenant and our part, have faith, believe him, trust him. So did that do the trick? Did Abraham who received the sign of circumcision, as Romans 4:11 says, he received it as a seal of the righteousness of faith, the faith that he had in Genesis 15:6 before he was circumcised in Genesis 17:23 to 27.

So did all Abraham's posterity understand the sign? Did they follow Abraham in his faith? I think you know the answer to that question. And this brings us to a second point in our outline number two: the need. Number two: the need, a spiritual circumcision. The need is a spiritual circumcision. Though they were marked, though they were marked as a circumcised people, circumcision, after the sojourn in Egypt, fell into disuse among Israel during the wilderness wanderings.

In fact, when God sent Moses back to be the redeemer, to be the one who would be the mediator and the redeemer, and to affect the exodus from Egypt and lead God's people out, you remember that his wife, Zipporah, she basically saved Moses life. God was going to put him to death because he had not circumcised his own sons.

He was not faithful even in his own family, to honor this sign of solidarity with Abraham's faith. And so God was going to put Moses to death, as Zipporah comes in, takes a flint knife and circumcised her sons. And she threw the foreskins at his feet and said, you're a husband of blood to me. She's revolted by it. It's a painful thing to do to her own children.

Why didn't he do it? Now she has to do it. Why does she have to be faithful and he's not? Husbands, take note. Don't put your

wife into the position of being the spiritual head of the home. You be the man, you lead. You lead out. You say what goes spiritually for the family and lead your family in righteousness. Do what's right, lead your family and bless them.

Nonetheless, you can see a hint there, in Moses, that he was not faithful even after the Exodus and during the wilderness wanderings. We see evidence that Joshua, in Joshua 5:2 through 9, he had to stop before he entered into Canaan with the people and before God started fulfilling those promises, they had to have the sign. He stopped and circumcised all the males and Yahweh said in verse 9.

"Yahweh said to Joshua, 'today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.' So the name of that place is Gilgal to this day." Gilgal means a rolling away. So in restoring the covenant sign and, by the way, I should say this and add, that during the wilderness wanderings, with circumcision falling out of disuse, isn't it interesting that all those who left Egypt in the Exodus, they didn't fulfill the sign.

They didn't circumcise their children, and God let their bodies lay strewn all over the wilderness. He takes these things seriously. He wants obedience from the heart. So he didn't punish the children, he punished the parents. Joshua, he

circumcised the males according to God's command, before he goes in. Before any of those promises are fulfilled, before God fulfills his promises by grace, they need to have the mark, of by faith, in the foreskin of their flesh.

in restoring the covenant sign of the faith of Abraham, in cutting the covenant, by shedding blood in this new generation, in marking the most tender part of a man's body, which ironically is his procreative power, God reminds Israel, how would it be, that he fulfills his promises again, by grace through faith.

So God removes their reproach by means of circumcision. So did that do the trick? is that it? did that last? Again, we know that it did not. Moses knew it wouldn't, in recapitulating the law in Deuteronomy chapter 10. In Deuteronomy, it means second law; it doesn't mean God-given additional law. It's just a recapitulation of the first law at Sinai.

But basically, Deuteronomy is like one long sermon and he's basically preaching the law to them. He's preaching the covenant to them. In fact, if you would go to Deuteronomy chapter 10 and in recapitulating the law to the people of Israel before they go into the promised land of Canaan as they're standing in the

plains of Moab, Moses knew that Israel did not learn their lesson, that they'd have to learn it yet again.

So he draws Israel's attention, before they enter into Canaan, to their true need for an internal inward spiritual circumcision, so that they would remain within God's blessing, so they'd receive his favor. Look at Deuteronomy 10, starting in verse 12, "So now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God ask from you?" Is it works of the flesh, or is it the attitude of faith? It's the latter.

What does he ask from you? "But to fear Yahweh your God, and to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of Yahweh and His statutes which I'm commanding you today for your good? Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, and the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did Yahweh set His affection to love them. He chose their seed after them, *even* you above all peoples, as *it is* this day. So circumcised your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer."

Skip down to verse 20, "Yahweh your God, you shall fear; Him, you shall serve, and to Him, you shall cling, and by His name you shall swear. He's your praise and He is your God who has

done these great and fearsome things for you which your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt, seventy persons *in all,* and now Yahweh your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven."

What's he saying? He saying believe him, Israel. Just like you said to Abraham, believe God; Abraham believed God, Israel. It's not about doing God's will in the flesh, it's not about gaining favor by your works, it's not about accomplishing his will in your works, it's about faith. And so trust him, believe him, Israel, and he will reckon you righteous, and then all of his blessing will flow upon you.

Moses, as he preaches this sermon, he speaks with sadness in his heart. He knows that only a few of these people, Joshua and Caleb among them, only a few of these people in this second generation after the Exodus, were men and women of Abraham's faith. There was a remnant there, but not many. And Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 28 and 29, that Israel would fall away, that Israel would fall under God's judgement yet again, and at this time they would be banished out of the good land that God promised to give them.

And as time went by and through the time of the banishment and the exile, and then after they returned, isn't it interesting

that the sign that signified the need for grace through faith, they turned into the works of the law. Isn't it interesting that what was intended to promote humility in them, they turned into an occasion for pride.

They looked at the sign that God gave them by grace through faith. They took pride in it, and they looked down on, on the rest of the world. Don't men, in their sin, always do that to God's goodness and God's word. Don't they subvert all of his good intentions and all of his good works? Even so, and turn over to Deuteronomy 30 to look at this.

Moses looked ahead to a time of restoration. He looks far beyond the conquest of Canaan and far beyond the division of the land, far beyond the days of the judges and the kings. And he looks to a time when God would become fed up with the faithlessness. He'd send them as prophets. He'd send men of God to go and preach to them and teach them and call them back to covenant faithfulness and call them back to the law.

They'd stiffen their necks, harden their hearts, indicating yet again they don't have circumcised hearts. They have circumcised flesh only. And so God would banish them from the land and here in Deuteronomy 30, Moses is looking ahead to that time prophetically, by God's revelation. And he says this starting in

verse 6, "Moreover," and he's saying, moreover, in the sense of God will return you to the land. He's going to restore you even after he judges you and exiles you. He's going to bring you back Israel.

And "moreover," get this, "Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. And Yahweh your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you shall return and listen to the voice of Yahweh, and you shall do all His commandments which I'm commanding you today. Then Yahweh your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body."

You know where the procreative power is? In God, not in them. He'll prosper "the offspring of your body, the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground." And "Yahweh will return to rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers, when you listen to the voice of Yahweh your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the Law, when you return to Yahweh your God with all your heart and all your soul.

"For this commandment which I'm commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it far *from you*. It's not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us and make us hear it, that we may do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us and get it for us and make us hear it, that we may do it?' The word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it.'"

What is that word? According to the apostle Paul in Romans 10:8, citing this very text, it is "the Word of Faith which we are preaching," namely this, "If you confess with your mouth, Jesus as Lord, if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved," right? Familiar words to us. "With the heart a person believes," verse 10 of Romans 10, "resulting in righteousness and with the mouth, a person confesses resulting in salvation."

Now, did the Colossians make that good confession? You bet they did, Colossians 2:6. We've covered this. Paul says you received, here's the confession, Christ Jesus the Lord. That's the confession. Moses predicted it; they confessed it. So how does all of this answer the questions that we were asking about Colossians?

Let's go back to Colossians 2:11 and find out. Colossians 2:11., "In him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands and the removal of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ." In Speaking of a circumcision made without hands, he's obviously not talking about literal circumcision. He's not talking about ethnic Jewish ritual of circumcision, though that is the background that sets the theological soteriological foundation to help us understand Paul's point.

Paul himself was a Jew, very familiar with the history of the failures of his people, Israel, to keep the covenant of God. Though they had been circumcised in the flesh, all their failures could be summed up in this: failed to believe God. Paul himself was a Pharisee familiar with the historic human tendency to put confidence in the flesh and regard the flesh and trust in the flesh rather than trust wholly in God.

So Paul knows from history, he knows from personal experience what these Colossians are being tempted to do; to trust in the flesh, not to walk by faith in Christ, but to trust in themselves and trust in their own intuition, to believe in speculation. They're being summoned by the siren song of the false teachers to follow what are very familiar ways of the

flesh. And they dressed up their faithless teaching and sophisticated packaging philosophy, the love of wisdom.

But at its core and in its heart, it is nothing but empty feudal speculation and a poisonous, toxic departure from Christ. But it's in Christ that God's promises to Abraham are fully realized. It's in Christ that Moses hoped. It is in Christ that Paul believed. It is in Christ the Colossians believed. And by faith in Christ, they were made.

Watch this. It's by faith they proved to be Abraham's true children, his legitimate issue, his true spiritual offspring. So it's by faith they were circumcised, as the text says, by God. Passive voice in verse 11, "you were circumcised." This happened to you and the hidden subject, the implied subject of the verb there performing the circumcision. Who is it? God.

So it's by faith that the Colossians, it's by faith, that all Christians are made partakers of the circumcision Moses said had to happen and that that he pointed to was revealed later in the new covenant. What Israel needed was not a new start, but a new heart. And God knows it's what we all need. Not a new start, not a do over, we need a new heart.

Jeremiah 31:33, "This is the covenant which I will cut with the House of Israel after those days, declares Yahweh. I'll put my law within them and on their heart I will write it, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. They will not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying know Yahweh. They'll all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares Yahweh."

The prophet Ezekiel, his version is in Ezekiel 36:26, "I'll give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, and I'll remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, one that trusts, one that believes." One is alive, living. Paul writes here in Colossians 2:11 of a Christian circumcision.

That's what he means by the circumcision of Christ. It's talking about a Christian circumcision, which is a spiritual circumcision, which is promised in the New Covenant, fulfilled in the inauguration of the New Covenant, accomplished by the Word of God in the work of Christ.

So what makes this circumcision successful, where all other past attempts by all others in history have failed? Why should this one succeed? Because it does what only God can do. He surgically removes what he can only surgically remove. The

removal of the body of the flesh and the word, removal, there means to strip off, as with clothing, to strip away.

Some quite mistakenly see a parallel in the phrase the body of flesh, and they join it to the similar expression in Colossians 1:22, the body of the flesh which refers to Jesus' flesh, his flesh which died on the cross. So they see Colossians 1:22 as really interpreting the same expression used in Colossians 2:11.

So they say this means the circumcision of Christ refers to his own body of flesh being stripped off at the cross. Not only does that have a strange way to express what happened at the cross, if that were the expression, that would be the only place in Scripture that that's ever described that way.

God stripped away the fleshly body of Christ or removed it like clothing. Is that what happened? That kind of opens the door for dualistic heresies that would later plague the church throughout the first five centuries of the church. It's not how Paul describes it. Paul's not talking about removing, stripping, taking off the body that clothes Christ.

But more to the point, the circumcision that he speaks of here in Colossians 2:11 is different than what he spoke of in

Colossians 1:22, the body of the flesh. Circumcision here is performed on us, not on him. It's performed spiritually, without hands, dealing with something that's internal to us. So what is Paul's meaning then?

What is this body of the flesh that God removes and strips off of us, in Christ? This is another synonym. Paul's talking about the sin nature, that concept. He has several ways of referring to it in his writing. He uses different metaphors to describe it. Romans 6:6, it is our old man, and then in the same verse, our body of sin. In Ephesians 4:22, it is again the old man, but then it's the old man that is corrupt in the lusts of deceit.

Colossians 3:9 it's the old man with its evil practices. Paul expands the language in Romans 7:17 and 20, calling it the sin which dwells in my members, and he describes it there as a principle of evil within him, verse 21. He describes it as a law of sin in verse 23, having lawlike tendencies, where the law promises good to those who keep it and harm to those who do not keep it.

Sin entices and deceives us in the same way as it entices us. It promises good to us if we'll just follow its bidding, and it promises harm if we don't give in to that impulse. So it's a law of sin. It has law like principal and tendency. Romans 7:23 uses

a really strong metaphor. In Romans 7:24, he calls it the body of this death, picturing there, when murderers were called to account for murdering their victim. They would take the body of the victim, sometimes strap it to the murder, and let him walk around for a while.

All these metaphors are Paul's way of explaining the sin nature, which he is here to assure us God removed it in Christ. Cut it away. God sets believers free from their sin nature once and for all by virtue of spiritual regeneration, spiritual circumcision, stripping off, casting away. It's like a vile piece of dead skin after a surgical procedure.

The corrupting power of the old self, the dead nature, God takes that, casts it away, cuts it off, throws it in the trash. He burns it in a wretched pile of medical waste. God, in Christ, has spiritually circumcised us all. He's cut off and removed the body, stripped it off, cast it away and the body is a body of flesh, not a literal reference to a physical body of flesh, it's a figurative expression that portrays our sin nature.

In concrete terms, this is a thing. It’s a thing that we can't get to, but God can, and in Christ he did. By the Spirit he did. This thing got surgically removed, this body of the flesh, as one put it, “with all its corrupt and carnal affections.”

Another describes this circumcision, "as a divesture of the old man, the removal of the enveloping, enervating power of our fleshly nature or propensity."

That's what happens in circumcision, the poetic language of Charles Wesley, 'Love divine, all loves excelling.' He says this take away our love of sinning. Alpha and Omega be, end of faith as its beginning. Set our hearts at liberty." He's praying there in that song, in that verse for what God has already accomplished in the circumcision of Christ.

It's exactly what God has done and you say, but how did God do that? What tools did he use in the surgical process? What were the steps of the procedure? Frankly, this is where our human knowledge bumps into human limitation. It's where we have to accept by faith, what we really can't comprehend. May as well ask how God created the heavens and the earth. What were the steps? What were the procedures?

How did the incarnation happen? God and man join together. How could Christ possess a human and divine nature and yet without confusion, change, division, or separation? We might, as well, ask to understand the ineffable. So if we can't answer that question, we have to accept our limitation. Then we can ask this, How does spiritual circumcision relate to baptism? Very

closely indeed. But make no mistake, in respectful but very firm disagreement with our Presbyterian friends, baptism is not the counterpart to circumcision.

Christian baptism does not replace physical circumcision in a one to one correspondence. They are two different things. The sign of circumcision, we'll see this more next time, we come back in to talk about baptism in detail. But the sign of circumcision which God gave to Abraham has been fulfilled in Christ, in the inauguration of the new Covenant and giving us a brand-new heart that has been affected. That has happened.

So the true counterpart to physical circumcision, what Paul calls in verse 11, "a circumcision made without hands." Spiritual circumcision: Theologically, the counterpart is regeneration, to be born again, giving us a brand-new heart in Christ. Never is regeneration described as baptism in Scripture.

Regeneration, being born again or born from above, so vital, it's what Jesus said to Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel. He said, "you must be born again." Don't go back to Genesis 16 and keep acting that way, Nicodemus. You can't affect the promises of God by your works, by your ingenuity, by your learning even; you need a new heart.

You need circumcision of the heart, a brand-new heart from God. And the really new good news is this, after God performed that procedure on us in Christ, the body of flesh has no more power over us. It is dead, cut off, castaway, never to be reattached.

So a final point, give you some implications here, number three: the heart a true conversion, the heart a true conversion. Just a few points and I'm done. This brand-new heart which we received by spiritual circumcision, which is by God's initiative, which gives us a heart that believes, a heart that understands, a heart that embraces the promises of God in faith; it accrues to our good in several ways.

I've got five points for you and I, I really could have just kept going on this list, but we're out of time and number one: A brand-new heart means our old heart is dead and gone. Our old heart is dead and gone and for this we can encroach into Colossians 2:12. Having been buried with him in baptism, dead and gone. The old man is dead. It's buried in a locked tomb, sealed never to be revived, that old man never getting out.

Therefore, we're separated or cut off from our former corruption. We're no longer to be identified with our past sins. We're no longer defiled, no longer degraded by our former corruption. Practically speaking, there's no longer any true

hook the devil can latch onto. There's no longer any true leverage that false teachers and false teaching has over us, not really. Not if this spiritual circumcision has happened.

What we were has been stripped away, cast off, castaway forever, and we're no longer defined by what we were. And isn't that good news? Some of you were saved very young, by God's grace you didn't have the opportunity to defile yourself so thoroughly and completely as some others have. But it is good news that you're not defined by your sins. You're not defined by them; no longer defines you.

You're no longer identified in them. God has cut it off, removed it, thrown it away, never to be reattached. Number two, a brand-new heart means that the old affections are dead. They're rendered powerless, ineffective, unable to hold on to us. With our old heart, the body of the flesh, with that cut off, stripped away, we're set free from the influence of the flesh. And that means we're no longer enslaved to do the deeds of the flesh.

We're no longer bound to do its bidding. We're no longer enslaved to its corruption. We don't look to the flesh as Abraham mistakenly did to accomplish the will of God. We know what to expect from self-made religion and self-abasement,

severe treatment of the body. Colossians 2:23, "put no confidence in the flesh." Number three, instead a brand-new heart means we have brand new affections.

Number three, a brand-new heart means we have brand new affections, the old ones are gone. They're replaced by new affections of a new heart, new will, new understanding. We now love and hate things we'd never loved and hated. What we love and what we hate and what we like and what we no longer like, it's all new and as we progress in holiness, we keep on discovering how new and how good it is.

We are regenerated, Deuteronomy 30, verse 6, now with hearts that are bent to love God wholly and fully, with all of our souls satisfied and content, our hearts are joyful and grateful. We cheerfully worship, and we love and serve God in Christ by the Spirit. This is not driven by works, it's driven by faith. And now with brand new hearts, we discover a whole new set of affections, affections that aim far higher, appetites that are only and always nourished and satisfied by what God feeds us.

And so number four: a brand-new heart means, we possess what the sign signified, a believing heart of genuine faith. Physical circumcision, to which the record of history of Israel attests. Physical circumcision did not hold God's people to God. They had

the sign of circumcision, but it didn't seal them, as faith is the substance, faith is the same thing signified.

Faith is thus the true seal of God's people. Faith is what holds us fast. Sealed by God through spiritual circumcision, equipped now as we are with believing hearts of genuine faith, or sealed by the Spirit of God himself; adopted into the family of God, joined to Christ in baptism, which he's about to get into. That'll be the subject of our study for next time.

With this invisible seal, believing heart of genuine faith, we always hold fast now to God, because he has done the internal work of spiritual circumcision, and what God does, he does not undo. So we know, that by his grace and through our faith, we will continue in him, sealed and guarded by the Spirit of God, protected by the good shepherd, and thus untouchable and invincible, guaranteed the good of God's promises. We're now able to walk in holiness and in purity and in dignity of the king.

Which brings us the one more implication, number five, a brand-new heart means a new life that's full of fruitfulness. Here's with the procreative progenitive work, power of God by the Spirit and his grace, bears fruit, it's not a fruit of our own doing; fruits of our own doing, produce Ishmael's, not Isaac's.

So what did Abraham discover about the procreative power of God? How productive was his faith? Remember God had brought him outside and said, hey, look up to the heavens, go ahead, number the stars, if you're able to number them. And God said, "Abraham, so shall are your offspring be. Abraham believed in Yahweh and he counted it to him as righteousness."

Here we are today, beloved. Here we are, four millennia later, on the other side of the world. We come from a vastly different culture. We speak a very foreign language. By faith so shall your offspring be. That's us, we are them. And like Abraham, we too continue that procreative spiritual work as God bears the fruit of his promises through the exercise of our faith, which is of the same kind as Abraham's.

We now grow by holding fast to the head of the body of the church, which is Christ Jesus our Lord. And by holding fast to the head, we're closely connected to him and his body, supplied as verse 19 says in Colossians 2, "supplied, held together by the joints and the ligaments." We grow with a growth which is from God, procreative, fecundity, fruitfulness, all coming by God's grace in the exercise of our faith.

Well, I know that was only one verse, but it was enough for today. Amen. Listen, may God strengthen you in his grace and

especially on this, as you meditate on what you've come to understand today, maybe in a fuller way than ever before, and as you read ahead for next week and you think and pray about this matter of baptism and how God edifies you and encourages you by the truths that are portrayed and pictured in your baptism.

It's always with you as a picture of new life by Gods' saving grace. You can always draw on that imagery and always draw on the reality of what God has done for you in Christ by meditating on these truths. It'll edify, encourage, strengthen you, make your heart nourished in the truth. Let it abound with thanksgiving, and you will walk with joy as God produces fruit through your life. Let's pray.

Our Father, we pause to give thanks to you with hearts that are full of, maybe today, a better understanding of your truth than we had before. We've been talking about what's happened to us. When we come back tonight at 5:00, we're going to talk about what, what Christ has intended and what he wants to accomplish, how he came to save and to sanctify, to save and serve his brothers. That's us, we being the true children of Abraham by faith.

We thank you so much that you now belong to us and we belong to you. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and his perfect

atoning work on the cross, his propitiatory work to satisfy your wrath that was due to us rightly. We thank you that you have cut off the old man, that body of flesh that really was tying us to this fallen world, that's been castaway and we're no longer held fast by it. We're now held fast by your love. Thank you for your love for us. Thank you in Christ. Amen.