The circumcision of Christ

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[0:00] On into Colossians chapter 2 and to words that you find in verse 11. Let us read verse 10 again.

Paul writes to the Colossians, And ye are complete in Christ, who is the head of all principality and power, in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And especially the words of verse 11, In whom, in Christ, in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.
Now, as has already been intimated, we have a baptismal service this morning, when a child of parents belonging to a congregation will be brought to the Lord's house, and we administer to him the sacrament of baptism.
Now, I often say from the pulpit, because I believe it to be one of the basic fundamental things of our faith, that for everything we do in the Church of Christ, we should have the warrant and the authority of God's Word.
[1:47] We are not ashamed to be called Bible-believing Christians. And so we take the authority for everything we do, and that includes our administration and observation of the sacraments that Christ has left in his Church.

And from time to time, I have looked with you at various aspects of the biblical teaching on infant baptism. And I want this morning to look with you at one particular aspect of the Bible's teaching on infant baptism.
I am not afraid to say, nor am I ashamed to say, that when I came into the ministry at first and was faced with the baptizing the first child, I was asked to baptize, and I was only three weeks in the ministry then, that I began, for the first time, to question the practice of infant baptism as I had never really questioned it in my mind before.
I had been taught infant baptism, among other things, in theological classes in the college, and I had just accepted what was said and taught.
But in September 66, when I baptized one of my eldest children in Aberdeen, I began a search of the Scriptures that lasted for some four years.
[3:21] And let me say again, quite unashamedly this morning, that I came to a very firm conviction that in baptizing the children of baptized members of the Church of Christ, I was following what was the warrant of Scripture and the practice of the New Testament Church.

I was then, and am now, fully persuaded in my own mind that baptism is something very precious and very wonderful for the person who is baptized in his or her own profession of faith as an adult. For people who have never heard the Gospel nor been converted until their adult years, then, of course, we admit them to membership in the Church not by allowing them to sit at the Lord's table, but by baptizing them.
No unbaptized passion, in other words, no member of the Church is ever allowed full membership in communion. But let me say this too. While it's very wonderful for a converted passion, converted in adult years, to be aware of all that is happening in their baptism, I believe it is also very wonderful for parents who by faith bring their children to Christ in this sacrament.
It is very wonderful for them also because they have been given a covenant promise by God that he will, in his own time and in his own way, by his Holy Spirit, perform within that child what is being symbolized outwardly in the washing of baptism.

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[5:17] That is the new birth of regeneration. We do not believe and we do not teach baptismal regeneration. In other words, we do not believe that baptism regenerates the soul of any person, adult or child.

But we believe that baptism symbolizes and shows the necessity and the reality of a new birth, a new heart, an inward washing of the Holy Ghost and of the cleansing from all sin of the blood of Christ.
Now that by way of purpose. Now this morning, I'm not going to lay before you what is a whole very wide range of biblical teaching bearing on the question of why we baptize infants.
I want to merely focus on one part. And as we focus on one part of our biblical warrant for baptizing infants, I want to outline two or three things which I believe are necessary for us to hold and to understand before we can even understand very clearly the aspect I want to emphasize this morning.
I want to make three statements of my beliefs about the Bible, about the nature of the Church of Christ and about the covenant of grace.
[6:55] Now these statements of belief are I believe statements which can be elucidated and established quite clearly from the teaching of Scripture.

I'm not doing it this morning in that way because it would take too long. but I firmly believe that it can be done and I have at times attempted to do it.
Now my first statement is about the Bible. I believe firmly in the unity of Scripture of the Old and the New Testaments.
They are one revelation from God. Without the Old Testament the New Testament is an incomplete revelation of God's saving grace.
It will be given to us in a vacuum. Let me illustrate the close tie between the two Testaments of Scripture by saying this.
[8:01] If you open your New Testament at the very beginning you will find that it immediately begins to talk about a man called Abraham.

If you don't know the Old Testament you will not even be able to understand the first few words of the first few verses of the New Testament. To divide strongly between the Old Testament and the New Testament is to tear asunder that which God has put together.
They are one. Now the second statement I'll just change them a little bit from the way I put it. The second statement that I want to make is this. I believe in the unity of the covenant of grace which the scriptures unfold.
The first inkling of a gracious covenant from God is given at the fall of man to Adam when there is a promise of a coming seed. The seed of the woman.
I want you to notice the word seed. God is going to bless his people and it is through seed, through children and through a particular child.
[9:15] That covenant was spoken of again to Noah. It was spoken of and revealed more fully to Abraham and Abraham was given a outward sign and seal or token of it from God.

God always recognizes in his grace that we're not merely souls. We are bodies as well. We live in a world of time and sense and one of the amazing things about God's grace is that he has adopted himself in Revelation to give us sensible outward tangible things that will be signs and seals of his inward spiritual work.
You see? And the sign, the tangible outward sign that was given to Abraham of the reality and the veracity of God's covenant promise was the sign of circumcision and it was to be given to himself on the basis of a faith which he had before he was circumcised.
Paul uses that in Romans 4 11. The faith which Abraham had God recognized and he gave Abraham a sign of the covenant that had produced that faith.
And not only was Abraham to circumcise himself but he was to circumcise all his male children. Circumcision remained in Israel that came from Abraham right through until the time of our Lord Jesus Christ who himself was also circumcised given outward the outward sign of membership within God's covenant himself.
[11:11] Now from Abraham on there was really an outward organized structured church of God in the world. It was not just a church it was a nation but it was God's Old Testament church.

Now watch the covenant of grace. I believe that on the basis of the same covenant every promise given to Adam to Noah to Abraham right down through the prophets Isaiah Jeremiah they all were

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the promises of the same covenant and they were essentially promises of the coming of Christ the Savior.
Right? The New Testament covenant as it is spoken of is not to be completely divorced from the Old Testament covenant. It is one and the same but it is a fuller clearer revelation.
Instead of speaking of a coming Messiah a coming Savior my friend wonderful it speaks of a Savior who has come. the unity of the Old Testament with the new of the covenant of grace and the unity finally of the church produced by the same covenant.
The covenant of grace produced a people of God in the Old Testament times who were the church of God in this world. And the church of the Old Testament in Athens and in nature is the very same church as the church of the New Testament.
[12:45] There are some differences between them in outward form and administration but in essence they are the same. The people of the Old Testament church were saved in the same way as the people of the New Testament church by a new birth from the Holy Spirit.

You can get that in many scriptures. A new heart also will I give you. new spirit will I put within you. And they were saved by faith in the same Savior only he was still to come.
And to differentiate again to split these two things the Old Testament church and the New Testament church and tear them apart as to some of what is really one.
Now these are essential basic things to what I'm going to say in our sermon this morning. That's a long introduction. Now what I want to say this morning is that the sign and seal of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament was changed with the beginnings of the New Testament church. circumcision which spoke of the need of cutting the cutting off of sin and of the shedding of blood and which spoke of the fact that sin was there in our very generation and that there is such a thing as original sin.
[14:28] The seal of the covenant which spoke very loudly and clearly of these things was changed to a fuller and clearer sign and seal. To the sign and seal of baptism.

Christ has died. Sin has been severed at its root. He has triumphed over it. And it's fitting now that the sign and seal of the covenant should speak of the cleansing which is freely available to every sinner through his precious blood and through the washing of regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
And it is quite clear that Christ himself left baptism not only as the door of admission to the New Testament church but as the sign and seal of the New Testament church of the covenant in the New Testament church.
And this is one place where the New Testament very clearly identifies these two things as meaning in essence one thing.
Circumcision and baptism. Now let me try and illustrate that from the text. It's to be seen in other scriptures as well but it is to be seen very clearly here and this is one of one link in the whole broad spread teaching of the Bible about the baptism of children.
[16:02] Now clearly from the text Paul is writing to help these Colossian believers about certain difficulties. Heresies were springing up among them and they're the kind of heresies we saw when we were studying Galatians last winter.

They are heresies that want to bring Christians under bondage to the traditions of the Judaism of the Old Testament church which have been pushed aside the Mosaic ordinances.
And one of the things that they want to bring back is an ordinance that goes back to Abraham circumcision. And Paul has just said in verse 10 now you're complete in Christ.
You don't need anything out of it. You don't need either Mosaic ordinances or Abrahamic circumcision.
You're complete in Christ. Here's a wonderful truth. Then he goes on to say in whom ye also are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands.
[17:11] Now let's stop there. Here is a contrast. We're going to see two contrasts in this text. Here is a contrast and it's on the very surface of the text. And it is a contrast between something that is outward and something that is inward.

It is a contrast between outward circumcision and inward circumcision. Or a contrast between a circumcision made with hands and a circumcision made without hands.
Now this is a place that Paul uses in one or two places. Made without hands. 2 Corinthians 5 he talks of the soul going to a tabernacle that is made without hands.

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If the earthly house of this tent dwelling is dissolved then we have a building of God a house not made with hands. Same thing here.
He's talking of a spiritual house. Here he is talking of spiritual circumcision. Circumcision not made with hands. What kind of circumcision is that?
[18:19] He goes on later on to call it the circumcision of Christ. So Paul says to people who are being asked to submit to outward formal ceremonial sacramental circumcision of the flesh.

Paul says to them you don't need that. Turn round and tell these Judaizers that you already are circumcised. And tell them that you are circumcised with the circumcision which is carried out without hands.
You're circumcised with spiritual circumcision. He's making a contrast between the outward and the inward. Let me put that just a little bit differently.
He is emphasizing the complete and utter importance not of the outward act of circumcision but of the inward reality of which circumcision was only an outward sign.
You see if you go through the scriptures you find that it wasn't Paul who made that first distinction first of all between outward and inward circumcision.
[19:48] It was God. for example in Deuteronomy 10 verse 16 it's made quite clear that although circumcision was an outward thing it spoke of an inward spiritual reality in its real significance.

That's what it was about. Listen to what God says there. The Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them and he chose their seed after them even you above all people as it is this day.
This is Moses speaking circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart and be no more a stiff neck people. So there was circumcision of the heart spoken of by Moses.
I mean he was saying to these people what is important is the heart not merely the cutting in the outward flesh. Deuteronomy 30 verse 6 we get Moses saying this to them and the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed to love the Lord thy God.
My friend what kind of heart does it need to love the Lord your God? It needs a regenerate heart. What is a circumcised heart? It's a heart that has been regenerated into which life has been implanted in the power and life by the Holy Spirit.
[21:21] That's what being a Christian is. To be a Christian is to have a regenerate heart. Let's use the language of God in the Old Testament to be a Christian is to have a circumcised heart.

heart. To be a Christian is to have that circumcision which is not made with hands. Do you see?
Let's come on to the New Testament where Paul so richly endowed with understanding of the Old Testament scriptures.
So powerfully inspired by the Holy Ghost where he is talking about the very privileges which Israel had. one of them was circumcision.
Romans 4 verse 11 now he says this that Abraham received circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet circumcised.
Now I want you to notice that Abraham didn't believe God. He didn't have faith because he had first of all been circumcised. Abraham was circumcised because he first of all had faith.
[22:35] See? So faith and circumcision while they're related are not identical. There is the outward token of an inward reality.

Go back to Romans 2 28 and Paul tells us that not everybody that had outward circumcision had inward circumcision said but true.
It's God that speaks Romans 2 28 Ah says Paul he is not a Jew but is one outwardly. Neither listen to this neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh but he is a Jew which is one inwardly.
he is a Jew in whom God has worked by his Holy Spirit to give a new heart.
Do you see? He is a Jew who is one inwardly and listen and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit and not in the letter.
[23:50] Now do you see the contrast that's coming out between outward and inward circumcision? Do you see what circumcision is a sign and token of? It's a sign and token of the new birth from a regeneration by God of circumcision of the heart.

Let's never stop preaching. Let's never stop believing the need of a radical change in the nature of man. Whether we're talking about circumcision or baptism there's the basic essence of it.
Let me say this baptism won't save anybody. adult or infant. Judas was baptized and my friend Judas is in a lost eternity. And there was a thief on the cross who never saw the waters of baptism

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and he's shining in the glory.
So let's not be confused about the essence of these things. And people are confused about them. Baptism whether adult or infant is not a saving ordinance.
Although it's a means of grace. Salvation comes only in the regeneration of which circumcision was the first sign and seal under the old dispensation of the covenant.
[25:17] Go on now to Philippians. Philippians chapter 3. I don't need to quote it. Surely that chapter you've got off by heart. If you don't you should have. To write the same things to you to me indeed is not grievous.

This is why I preach on things like this again and again and again. To write the same things to you to me indeed is not grievous for you are the saved. and then he says beware beware beware watch out my friend you've got a soul to look after.
Father bringing your child here today your child as a soul that will be saved or lost and much of it will depend and how faithful you as a father I as a father the other fathers here are to their baptismal vows.
beware he says first of all of dogs and the word means the dogs that run around the dumps of the cities and the towns the ravagers beware of dogs beware of evil workers beware of the concision you know what the concision is?
Paul is playing off as he so often does he's playing off the word circumcision beware of the slashers beware of those who only glory in the outward forms of religion that's what he calls them slashers beware of the concision it's a play on the word circumcision Paul coins it beware of those who only want to exercise outward religious rights and again you see he is talking about the same pleasure that was being put in the people at Philippi as Galicia as Colossae Judaizers coming and saying now you must be circumcised it's alright to be a Christian and to believe in Christ but carry on God and you see we can understand these
[27:27] Judaizers and some of them were Christians without a doubt how slow you and I are to reject traditions of the fathers that weren't as well founded as was the tradition of circumcision house flow they were perhaps to recognize that circumcision although it was not a Mosaic but an Abrahamic institution was to pass over because Christ had brought in something better to replace it now the contrast is there on the very surface of the text circumcised with the circumcision made with our hands contrast between outward and inward circumcision but there's a deeper contrast too and that contrast we can begin to see if we pause for a moment to think of the words the circumcision of Christ now he says you have been circumcised by the circumcision made without hands what is that circumcision

Paul answers the question it's the circumcision of Christ and now he's contrasting circumcision and baptism and he's contrasting them in order to identify them to show that they are the same just imagine these people reading this verse for the first time and say but Paul when were we circumcised with the circumcision of Christ listen to his answer you were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands the circumcision of Christ when you were buried with him in baptism wherein also you are risen with him through the faith in faith by faith in the operation of God who raised him from the dead now Paul is saying this that their baptism is the
Christian circumcision these people of course were not Jews they never were circumcised outwardly in the flesh but they were baptized on a profession of the faith now what is baptism well I hope you're beginning to understand I know it's difficult to grasp and let me say what I said the other night the last Sabbath evening I believe that we are all very ill taught about the sacrament of baptism yes even in the free church where we pride ourselves on knowing our Bibles on knowing our doctrine baptism is sadly misunderstood what is baptism well I hope that you're beginning to see that baptism is an outward sign of an inward worth it is an outward sign of the washing of regeneration it's an outward sign of the soul being cleansed from sin through the only cleansing agent the precious blood of Christ it's a sign of our union with Christ it's our sign a sign of our being one with him in his death crucified with him buried with him risen with him in newness of life sign of our being incorporated in the totality of his saving worth not only happens and it always happens in regeneration so baptism you see is an outward sign of an inward worth do you notice something it's the very same as circumcision circumcision was an outward sign of an inward worth do you notice something else it is an outward sign of the identical inward worth baptism is a sign of the very same work of

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God in the soul of man as was circumcision that is why Paul identifies them here why he can say to these people you have the circumcision of Christ you got it when you were baptized into when he's talking first of all not of water baptism but that baptism of the Holy Spirit that baptism of regeneration read Donald MacLeod's article in this month's monthly record and there you'll see that the baptism of the Spirit and the regeneration the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit are one and the same thing under different names I don't agree let me say this and that will make you read the record all the more carefully I don't agree with everything that Donald MacLeod says I'm very bold I'm a professor but I don't quite agree with everything he says but I certainly agree with that so get a hold of that article and read it and it shows that the baptism of the
Spirit and that's what Paul is talking about first of all it's by the work of the Spirit that baptizes us into the personal union with Jesus that we are converted and saved and if we're baptized after our conversion as adults on a profession of our faith we're only acknowledging what has taken place and if we were baptized as infants before that has taken place we are only acknowledging our need of it and acknowledging the covenant promise of God to give it so that even when we differ with our dear evangelical Christian brethren in the baptist denominations we don't differ with them nearly as radically as we think we do and now we're saying of an inward work now what has all of us got to do with infant baptism well I don't really have time to go on but I hope that you'll be able to go on yourself and make the application what was said to Abraham about circumcision he was to circumcise himself and then he was to circumcise his feet why because
[34:18] God said the promise the covenant of which circumcision is a sign is not only to you Abraham it's more gracious than that it's more full and more wonderful than that it's for you children as well it is to thee and to thy seed and God is only emphasizing what he emphasized in the very first promise the seed of the woman that seed was to come through the seed of Abraham he emphasized it to Noah too and if you come forward to the very beginning of the new chancen church to the day of Pentecost Acts chapter 2 verses 38 and 39 Peter using language there that is I believe absolutely modeled on not just modeled on but taken from Genesis 17

Peter saying the promise is to you and to your children why do we baptize children and let's ask the question why did Abraham circumcise his children and why did every Jew circumcise his child because they were commanded to by God and they were commanded to by God because they were within the covenant promise now that didn't say that every Jew and every Jewish child who was circumcised was necessary to partake of the circumcision of heart it wasn't so but they were to enjoy the outward privileges of the covenant so that meant that when a Jew was converted in the New Testament and he was baptized he would expect something what would he expect he would expect his child to share in this new sign and seal of the covenant and he would be a very annoyed Jew indeed if his child was not allowed to share in it I believe that is the reason the only reason that we do not have in the whole of the New Testament an explicit exhortation or command to baptize a child it was so fully understood so clearly understood that the covenant standing standing with God of a parent gave the covenant right to the child I can't take time this morning to elaborate that perhaps you're saying something that has been said to me when I've preached on this subject before well circumcision was alright it was for the male children what about the females how can you follow through and identify circumcision with baptism well that reminded us of two things first of all this that the
New Testament covenant is clearer and is fuller and has provisions that the Old Testament covenant did not and could not have and one of the differences is this that women were given a place in the New Testament church that they did not have in the Old Testament church and they were given that place because Christ had come the Old Testament church from the beginning right down from Adam right down the father of the family stood not only as the father but as the priest and mediator between the family and God that's why there were these that special sort of emphasis on the circumcision of the male children I want you to read I want to read you just a few words from Galatians before I close on this point Paul in Galatians 3 is writing about the privileges that Abraham enjoyed under the Old Testament covenant and he talks of the those who are the children of Abraham by faith the seed of Abraham and then in verse 26 he says you are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ for as many of you many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ and notice what he's talking about now he's talking about saving faith and being in Christ and then he brings in baptism why ask yourself that question well I think it's because he's going on to say this there is neither Jew nor Greek there is neither born nor free there is neither

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male nor female for you're all one in Christ
[39:37] Jesus one of the questions one of the things that will be fostered these Galatians when they refuse to accept circumcision you see by the Judaizers would be that they were missing out on a privilege Paul is giving them something with which to reply that privilege is no longer a privilege we are our greater and one that has done away with the middle walls of the petition that were there even in Israel now he says there is neither male nor female why does he say that because of the relationship between circumcision and baptism why do we baptize children because we are part of the church of God and the church of God has always had a place for children in it it has always had an outward sacramental door of admission into it that was true in the Old Testament dispensation and it is true in the

New the Old Testament dispensation the door was the doorway of the covenant sign and seal and circumcision and I believe on the basis of the Bible of the doorway in the news is the doorway of baptism different sign and seal of the same covenant speaking of the same blessing

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