

51-03-04.wpd —Baptism's Call to Death

baptism, body, Gnosticism, Cross, death, nakedness, clothing

Col 3:5-11

Faith in Christ brings new life, but only through death and resurrection.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (text as Scripture reading)

—Years ago I preached a series on the Tabernacle. It was fascinating to see how its structures and rituals were so full of symbolic meaning.

When I learned about the early church practicing, I was skeptical until I read the descriptions given about it by early Christian leaders. The symbolism behind it was also rich with significance. Knowing this has helped me see why Paul extended his discussion of baptism from Col. 2 into Col. 3. He was using baptism as a metaphor for the Christian life.

— My last message spoke of "Baptism's Call to New Thinking." This one is **Baptism's Call to Death**. This 2<sup>nd</sup> concept builds on the 1<sup>st</sup> one seen in the verses preceding our **text [read v.1-4]**. Our **faith in Christ**, who now in Heaven preparing for His return, **brings us to a new life, but only through death and resurrection**. These are both visibly symbolized in the baptism of our physical bodies, which are to be temples of His Holy Spirit.

### **I. Baptism Means Dying to Worldly Ways, v.5-7**

A. Sin spoiled creation with death, and continues to ruin the life God created us to live. So, God tells us to choose another kind of death— **v.5-6, Put to death**, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Sin got God's full attention; death gets ours. But some see these destructive behaviors as "Really living!" God hates them and wants us to **die** to them.)

B. A. T. Robertson: "Paul boldly applies the metaphor of death pictured in baptism to the actual life of the Christian [who is to avoid] the...Gnostic extreme of [living as if] the soul is not affected by the deeds of the body. Paul's idea is that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." Paul had a solution for any Colossians under the spell of Gnostic heresy: *for them to bury their physical bodies in the death of Christ* (This was the statement of faith that was being publicly proclaimed in baptism.)

C. Paul brings our wills right up to the water's edge in v.7— *You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.* [The believer standing at the

river's edge was at a literal **Cross**-roads. Would he leave his cloak on the sand and step naked into a watery grave to join Christ who died naked on the Cross. Was he willing die to his old way of living? That was what baptism meant.]

1. Both *baptism* and the *Lord's Table* brings us to the brink of a certain kind of death . . . a death to anything and everything that cannot pass through the Cross into resurrection.
2. NASB of v.5 says, "consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed..." This *mortifying of worldly ways* is not done by the will, but by faith in the power of Christ's death— Rom 6:6-7, For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (Baptism buries our bodies in the death of Christ by faith).

**TRANS:** Death strips us bare and cuts us off from cares and concerns in this world. People in Bible times, when they went to mourn a deceased friend, were able to visualize the words of Job, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart." [Read the story of Dorcas in Acts 9. When she died they washed her body and laid it in a room where friends could come and weep over her before it was wrapped for burial. Displayed in that room were lovely garments she had made, but they were of no use to her naked body that awaited the grave. When Peter arrived he knelt by her body, prayed, and told her to get up, taking her by the hand and showing her to her friends. To anyone who had witnessed her baptism, I bet they were having a flashback. She had gone down into the water as naked as they had seen her in death, and had come up from the water to start a new life in Christ as naked a newborn baby.] Baptism meant death, and the symbol of nakedness in the early ritual made its meaning inescapably clear to everyone who witnessed a person's baptism.

### **II. Baptism Means Stripping Off the Habit of Deceit, v.9**

- A. When Paul said in **v.9**, *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices*, he was probably intentionally reminding the Colossian believers of the day they chose to be baptized.
- B. The characteristic Paul was pointing to in the old self, the behavior that needed to be stripped off like clothing before baptism was deceit. (Next to *unbelief*, it's the oldest sin, because through Satan's deceit our first parents broke faith with God, and their second sin was to imitate Satan's deceitfulness by trying to hide the truth from God under the lie of fig leaves and excuses.)

- C. Lying is such a common human sin because we do it to influence how others see us or think about us. It gives us a false appearance, instead of being *real* . . . being *honest* . . . being *naked*.

**TRANS:** I've discovered in hospital nursing that there's a kind of physical honesty in nudity. It's a healthy dose of reality for unrealistic expectations about the body. (Pornography in our society is directly related to a deceptive *imagination* that creates those expectations.) I've discovered among Christians that there's a kind of *spiritual honesty* in *confession*. It's a healthy cure for unrealistic expectations about the Body of Christ. *It strips off our false self and puts our vanity to death.*

### III. Baptism Means Putting on a New Self

- A. [In ancient times the believers went down into the water naked, but when they waded back to the riverbank dripping wet, they were wrapped in a white robe, a gift from the church to symbolize the righteousness provided in Christ.]
1. It was not a robe to hide in like Adam and Eve did in fig leaves, but a symbol to display that the new life in Christ came by His grace, not their own works— **v.10**, [you] *have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*
  2. Knowledge from the forbidden fruit was about independent ideas of *right & wrong, fair & unfair, politically correct & incorrect*, which brought on human conflict— but the *new self* we put on in Christ is being restored to a divine knowledge that puts us back into sync with our human purpose of being made in God's image.
- B. Both nudity and death are said to be the great levelers of humanity [Victorious armies of old used nudity to reduce all the survivors of a conquered land to the same social level of captives slaves, no matter what their rank or social status.] The common baptism of ancient times was Christ's victory in conquering various levels of social pride... as Paul sums it up in **v.11**, *Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

### CONCLUSION:

–But Christ's victory, won by His death, is resurrection! His Cross allows us not only to die to the ways of the old self, but to take the *old self* off, so we can put on the *new self* of life in Him. **Faith in Christ brings that new life, but only through death and resurrection.**

Col 3:5-11 (NIV) Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. {6} Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. {7} You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. {8} But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. {9} Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices {10} and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. {11} Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.