

This is clearly not a physical circumcision of which the apostle is speaking (It is "made without hands"), but a spiritual cutting off of "the flesh", accomplished by the circumcision of Christ. This spiritual circumcision takes place through baptism. However, it is not the ordinance of baptism that is referred to, since the baptism spoken of actually buries believers with respect to sin and raises them to spiritual life. Thus baptism circumcises and buries and makes alive. It is not the external ordinance, but the spiritual baptism that accomplishes this effect. This baptism is called Spirit baptism, since it is the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ through faith and circumcises us and makes us spiritually alive.

The teaching of this passage in an abbreviated form is thus: "you who were dead and uncircumcised were circumcised and made alive through union with Christ (as accomplished by the Holy Spirit)." Once again, this passage can be used rightly in connection with the subject of water baptism only if the ordinance signifies Spirit baptism.

(2) Baptism signifies cleansing from the pollution of sin

(a) Colossians 2:11-13 (previously quoted in (1) (c))

This passage, in addition to its emphasis on union with Christ, also speaks of spiritual circumcision -- a cutting off of "the flesh" by the circumcision of Christ. If "flesh" represents our sinful nature, then in some sense we are cleansed from depravity by Spirit baptism. Since in our union with Christ we die decisively to the ruling power of depravity, and are made alive decisively to the ruling power of righteousness, we can properly speak of this first phase of subjective sanctification (regeneration) in terms of cleansing from the pollution of sin. Water baptism signifies this cleansing from depravity.

(b) Titus 3:5 -- "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

Although the word BAPTIZO is not used in this verse, nevertheless the "washing" spoken of can be and frequently is mentioned in discussions of baptism. Here it is regeneration that washes or cleanses us from the pollution of sin. Water baptism signifies cleansing from depravity.

(3) Baptism signifies cleansing from the guilt of sin

(a) Colossians 2:13 -- "And you, being dead in sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive together with Him, forgiving us all the sins."

In the act of Spirit baptism the believer is not only spiritually circumcised and buried to sin and raised to spiritual life; he is also forgiven all of his sins. Forgiveness speaks of being cleared of