

IN RESPONSE - CIRCUMCISION AND BAPTISM

by Dennis Prutow

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In this lesson we examine the meaning of circumcision and the meaning of baptism. And we will see, since they have the same meaning, baptism replaces circumcision in the New Testament. This being the case, and since the command to apply the sign of the covenant to children has not been abrogated, the baptism of the infants of believers is not only acceptable, it is required.¹

Scripture is very plain that the counterpart of physical circumcision is spiritual circumcision. Paul tells us, "But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit." Paul is explaining that real circumcision is not that done in the flesh but that which is accomplished on the heart by the Spirit. Physical circumcision is but an outward "sign" (Romans 4:11).

And what did this inward circumcision accomplish? "Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live" (Deuteronomy 30:6). The result of inner spiritual circumcision was to be a life of love and the gift of eternal life.

"This promise far surpasses all others, and properly refers to the new Covenant, for thus it is interpreted by Jeremiah.... In short, he reminds them that this would be the chief advantage of their reconciliation, that God should endow them with the Spirit of regeneration. There is a metaphor in this word circumcise; for Moses alludes to the legal sign of consecration, whereby they were initiated into the service of God. The expression, therefore, is equivalent to his saying God will create you spiritually new men..."²

Calvin points out that spiritual circumcision of the heart is regeneration. This is the counterpart of physical circumcision. This deeply spiritual work is promised by God through both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah 31:31-34 presents the promise of the New Covenant. Ezekiel 36:26-27 relates the promise of the new birth. Participation in the New Covenant and receipt of the new birth is equivalent to

spiritual circumcision of the heart which is signified by physical circumcision.

And because spiritual circumcision is equivalent to participation in the New Covenant, those Old Testament saints who placed faith in the promised Savior and were circumcised in their hearts were born again and participated in the New Covenant.

But let's not miss this point. Physical circumcision was an outward sign pointing toward inner spiritual circumcision. And inner spiritual circumcision of the heart is equal to regeneration or the new birth.

The same parallel is found in the New Testament. For example, Spirit baptism is discussed by Paul. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Spirit baptism is "the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6).

This inward work of the Spirit cleansing and renewing the heart is also called the seal of the Spirit. "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). And Paul warns in Ephesians 4:30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." A seal is a mark. And so believers are marked men and women, and boys and girls. They have the mark of the Spirit. This mark identifies them as the children of God. It is the mark of a changed life bearing fruit to the glory of God.

But spiritual baptism, which is regeneration, is pictured by physical, or water, baptism. There is little doubt about this. The result is, spiritual circumcision in the Old Testament is paralleled by spiritual baptism in the New Testament. And physical circumcision in the Old Testament is paralleled by physical, or water, baptism in the New Testament. Not only so, the parallel is completed when we realize spiritual circumcision, pictured by physical circumcision, refers to regeneration as does spiritual baptism which is pictured by water baptism.

Because of these parallels, the apostle Paul freely equates circumcision and baptism and indicates that baptism replaces circumcision. The text in which he does this is Colossians 2:11-12.

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by 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.

Paul says that Christians have received the circumcision of Christ. This is an inner circumcision without hands by the Spirit on the heart. Now just how was it that Christians received this inner spiritual circumcision? Paul is very plain and forthright. Those who have received the circumcision of Christ are described as "having been buried with Him in baptism." In this same circumcision, described as a baptism, "you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Two things should be noted here.

First, baptism and circumcision are specifically equated. Spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism are identical. By the same token, physical circumcision and water baptism point to the same work of the Spirit, regeneration. We keep the parallels just noted in view.

Second, if we read Paul correctly, we see that baptism has replaced circumcision. As noted by Calvin, the metaphor used in the Old Testament to refer to regeneration or the new birth was circumcision. In the New Testament the metaphor changes. Baptism is used to refer to the new birth or regeneration.

There is a change in language, a change in the metaphor, complimenting the change in the religious rite as ordained by God. Fleshly circumcision was the outward sign of regeneration commanded in the Old Testament (Genesis 17:9-14, Romans 4:11). Water baptism is the outward sign of regeneration commanded in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19). Paul reflects this change when he declares Christians were circumcised "by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism."

Since spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism are the same thing, they occur at the same time. But the grammatical construction used by Paul indicates spiritual circumcision has taken place by the means of spiritual baptism.³ The clear implication is therefore that baptism has replaced circumcision.

There has also been a change in metaphor because the outward rite has been changed. Remember, a metaphor is “a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other.”⁴ Physical circumcision and spiritual circumcision are closely related. Spiritual baptism and water baptism are also closely related. In fact, as the Westminster Confession of Faith explains, “There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.”⁵ This is true because a spiritual reality stands immediately behind the physical signs.

Because it is the same spiritual reality which stands behind the physical sign in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, it is easy to see why, when the metaphor changed by divine inspiration, the outward rite also changed by divine command.

Now we complete our argument. Circumcision and baptism mean the same thing. Baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of regeneration. And since the command to apply the sign of the covenant to children has not been abrogated, the baptism of the infants of believers is not only acceptable, it required.

Next time we’ll look at the fulfillment of baptism and its evangelistic office.

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⁴ *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the English Language*.

⁵ XXVII:II. WCF, XXVII:III goes on to say, “The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them, . . . but upon the work of the Spirit.”

¹ Some immersionists insist this statement, “The command to apply the sign of the covenant to the infants of believers has not been abrogated,” betrays a false hermeneutic. I shall show this is not the case in a later lesson.

² John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Grand Rapids: (Baker Book house, 1979), vol 3, pp. 284-285.

³ The Greek Paul uses is an aorist passive participle. “The participle may indicate the means, manner, manner of employment, and similar circumstances of the action.” [William Sanford LaSor, *Handbook of New Testament Greek*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1973), vol. 2, p. 177.].

IN RESPONSE - WOMEN IN THE OFFICE OF PASTOR/TEACHER, PART I

by Dennis Prutow
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There are two Bible texts which nag many evangelical Christians on both sides of the issue of so called biblical feminism. They are 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34. The following quotations are from the New American Standard Version of the Bible. And the texts in question are given in their immediate contexts.

Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness. Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression (1 Timothy 2:8-15).

And:

For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church (1 Corinthians 14:31-35).

But, these texts seem to contradict the directions of Paul given in 1 Corinthians 11:4-5.

Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved.

The Bible does not contradict itself. Rather, we affirm the prohibitions of 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:24 do not include "praying or prophesying."

This is so because the apostle allows these types of speech.

But another difficulty immediately arises. Paul tells Timothy very explicitly, "I do not allow a woman to teach." If women may "prophesy," and if this prophesying is synonymous with preaching, then the apostle is again contradicting himself. This cannot be. Teaching and prophecy must not be the same. And if this is the case, to what does Paul refer when he speaks of prophecy? This question must be answered.

This brings us to another critical question. How do we handle the prophecy of Joel when he predicts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the prophesying of "your sons and daughters," and that "both men and women...shall prophesy"? And how do we handle the explicit examples of women designated "prophetesses" (Acts 21:9)?

The evidence seems to be enormous that women, because of the gift of God bestowed, are privileged to preach and teach. But if such a position leads to Scripture contradicting Scripture, there is a problem. Perhaps we do not properly understand the nature of prophecy. Perhaps we do not properly understand Paul's injunctions against women speaking in the church. Or perhaps we do not rightly understand either. I am inclined to think it is the latter.

At any rate, I shall attempt to address these questions and come to some resolution regarding 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34.

We have already stated that the type of speech excluded by Paul in our two texts is not prayer and prophecy. This means 1 Corinthians 14:34 is not an absolute prohibition. It cannot be. The prohibition, which seems so broad, is narrowed in 1 Timothy 2:12, "I do not allow a woman to teach." The particular kind of speaking Paul has in mind involves teaching.

That the prohibition does not involve all types of teaching is also taken for granted. It is a form of speaking "in the churches" (1 Corinthians 14:34) or "in church" (1 Corinthians 14:35) which is prohibited. More specifically, the directions given in 1 Corinthians 14 are to the assembled people of God where "the spirits of the prophets are subject to

prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). The implication is that the people are gathered for public worship. In such a context, Paul does "not allow a woman to teach."

In addition, Paul does not prohibit women from all teaching within the Christian community. For example, Paul exhorts the older women to teach the younger women,

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.

And outside of the context of the gathered church we find Priscilla, with her husband, guiding the fledgling Apollos in his faith. "But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). And so women are not denied any place of teaching within the Christian community.

It seems the teaching the apostle Paul has in view in 1 Timothy 2:12 is the official and authoritative proclamation of the Word on behalf of the church and the setting forth of the teaching of the church in public before a watching world. In other words, we have teaching here in a more technical sense where the teacher is the designated representative of Christ commissioned by the church and authorized by Christ through the church to represent the church. This is the standard interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12. As Calvin, among a host of others, says, "Paul is not taking from women their duty to instruct their family, but is only excluding them from the office of teaching."¹ That is, women are excluded from the office of pastor-teacher (Ephesians 4:11) and from taking to themselves the duties of the pastor-teacher in the public assembly of God's people.

But what about the women within the church who were given apostolic direction to prophesy? What is this gift of

¹ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, Torrence and Torrence, Editors (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964), vol. 10, p. 217.

prophecy? When Peter explains the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, he refers to the prophecy of Joel. He tells the people they are witnessing manifestations of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of tongues and prophecy and special knowledge are signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Acts 10:44-46 confirms this.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.

Speaking in tongues, prophecy, and words of knowledge were signs of the presence of the Spirit. And women along with men were and are recipients of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the prophecy spoken of in 1 Corinthians 14 is the special spiritual gift of prophecy which Paul is regulating. This gift is listed among the special revelatory gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11.

But Paul goes on to say, "If there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Beyond doubt, Paul predicted the cessation of these gifts which were signs of the presence of the Spirit. When do these gifts cease? When are they done away?

These special gifts ceased when the Scriptures were complete and we were given in the Bible the complete picture of what the Holy Spirit looks like in a human life. Today the special gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are no longer needed as signs of the Holy Spirit. We have a far better picture of the presence of the Spirit given to us in Scripture.

This means the prophesying which took place in the infant church was of an ecstatic revelatory nature. And to compare this gift with teaching and preaching is to compare apples and oranges. The former gifts of the Spirit are no longer extant. The latter functions are carried out week by week within the church and are normative. Paul emphatically includes women within the sphere of the operation of the Spirit. They received these special operations of the Spirit in the infant church. They, no more than men, are recipients of these special gifts since their operation within the church has ceased.

On the other hand, the specific kind of speaking women are restricted from is that to which the pastor-teacher is called.

The argument in favor of women assuming the office of pastor-teacher rests upon a misunderstanding of the significance of the prophecy of Joel and the equating of prophecy and teaching.

Having given the argument in summary form, it remains to confirm that Paul is speaking about an official type of teaching; to confirm the prophecy mentioned has actually ceased; to deal with an internal question regarding 1 Timothy 2:8-15, to look at the question of authority; and to deal with the influence of Gnosticism on Paul's prohibitions. In this fashion, I shall appropriately fill in the argument.

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