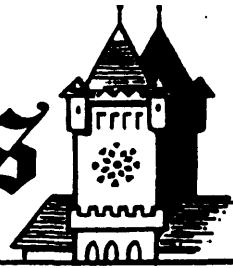


# The Geneva Papers



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## STUDIES IN BAPTISM

by Ray R. Sutton

### No. 15: Circumcision and Baptism I

*In whom also ye are circumcized 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 you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Col. 2:11-13).*

Circumcision and baptism raise some primary questions. Is one the replacement of the other? Does baptism extend circumcision such that infants of the New Covenant ought to be baptized? Many Christian writers have interpreted these rites as paralleling one another. John Calvin, for example, began his attack against the first Anabaptist confession, the **Schleitheim** Confession, with a justification of infant baptism on the basis of its replacing circumcision. The Scriptures, however, are above men. Let us examine the relationship of these two ideas in the Word of God.

First, circumcision and baptism are rites of death. The *putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ* refers to the death of Jesus. His Crucifixion was the reality of the Seed being cut off. The promise to Abraham was that a seed would be given. The sign God provides cuts man in the place from which the seed comes. Blood flows over the end of the organ portraying that the seed passes through blood. Thus, Abraham was being told that life would come through death of the Seed. By placing the sign on himself he was united to that death. If he broke the covenant, the reality would come to him and his seed.

Did Abraham know circumcision symbolized life to his seed through death of the Seed? He should have known from the first sacrifice. Life accrued to Adam and Eve through the shedding of innocent blood. Ultimately, it does not matter how Abraham perceived the rite. God knew its interpretation as revealed in Colossians 2:11 ff. Man's perceptions have nothing to do with the reality of God's meaning in divine revelation. In its application, circumcision pointed to the death of the Seed, and union between Christ's death and the recipient.

Baptism serves the same purpose. Jesus' death is called a baptism (Mk 10:38). His water baptism consecrated Him to this death. Paul speaks of baptism as a *burial with Him*

(Col. 2:12). Therefore, one who is baptized into Christ has been placed into union with His (Rem. 6:3ff.) baptism/death. Like circumcision, baptism is a rite of death. Both converge together at the death of Jesus. The cross establishes their continuity. In the Old Covenant, one was inserted into Christ's death through circumcision. In the New Covenant, he is united through baptism. Thus, one rite of death is replaced by the other.

Second, circumcision and baptism are cleansing rituals. "Cutting off" in circumcision is a means of cleansing. God told Abraham to circumcise the *flesh of his foreskin* (Gen. 17:11). His foreskin was unclean as was his entire body. Paul confirms the uncleanness of the foreskin when he equates death and uncircumcision (Col. 2:13). Thus, flesh is synonymous with foreskin, and represents man's need for cleansing. The case of the leper illustrates.

The leper was to be removed from the midst of the people. His "flesh" was unclean. Cleansing occurred one of two ways. One, he was cut off (Lev. 14). His removal was a circumcising process — the word for cutting off is the same as in Genesis 17. Two, he could receive ceremonial waters if his condition were not permanent. This cleansing is called baptism in the New Testament (Heb. 9:10). The leper, therefore, conveys a picture of the condition of man in general. He is fleshly, personifying death and impurity. The paradigms of purification are circumcision and baptism.

The flood also illustrates how the two concepts refer to purification. Significantly, God first tails man fresh at this point in history. He determines to remove him from the face of the earth. The Bible describes this action as cutting off (circumcision, Gen. 9:11), and baptism (1 Pet. 3:20-21). After the flood, God gives Noah the rainbow as a token (Gen. 9:12,13). The same word is used in Genesis 17:11 referring to circumcision. What was a token? In Genesis 1:14 God creates the lights as signs. Light in Scripture communicates the ideas of purity and holiness (cf. The Holy of Holies was filled with God's presense/light). Thus, the rainbow was a sign that peace and purity had come through the flood.

Tokens also refer to purification which comes through judgment. The blood on the doorposts at passover is tailed a token (Ex. 12:13). When God judged the land of Egypt, He passed over the houses that had tokens, symbolizing purification through sacrificial blood. Israel had been judged unto life. The same idea appears in the tokens of virginity. The Hebrew word for token is related to the direct object marker. In the English text, the word token is italicized. The references where tokens of virginity are located (Deut. 22:15ff.) do not have the noun, token, in Hebrew, only the word in the form of a direct object marker is found. The

**emphasis**, however, seems to be a play on words. The implication is apparent. The parents took something to the elders to prove virginity. And the text in Deut. 22 can be read to indicate that the parents brought these tokens. Thus, it became a process of judgment. If her purity were questioned, this judgment rendered purification.

Circumcision was a sign of purification through judgment. When the foreskin was removed, Abraham and Sarah bore the promised seed. Life was a mark of purity before God (Deut. 28). Moreover, a woman was unclean after a child was born. If the infant were a male, she became partially clean when he was circumcised (Lev. 12:1 ff.). Thus, circumcision is a token which purifies, as is baptism.

More time has been devoted to circumcision as a cleansing ritual than baptism. The latter is fairly obvious. Circumcision, on the other hand, is overlooked as a means of cleansing. Nevertheless, both rites imply purification. By noting this continuity, we can see how baptism extends circumcision. Paul says that man outside of Christ is in the "uncircumcision of the flesh" (Col. 2:11-13). To be circumcised, the New Covenant man is buried with Christ in baptism. Thus, the latter is a transfigured form of circumcision. At the Cross, circumcision, along with the entire Old Covenant, was transformed by the death and resurrection of Christ. They were not done away, therefore, but transfigured. In their transfigured state, the signs of the New Covenant are changed. In our next study, we will continue to study the relationship of circumcision and baptism.

## AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

by Gary North

### No. 16: Publication Paths or Private Corners

*I lead in the way of righteousness in the midst of the paths of judgment: That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures (Prov. 8:20-21).*

The first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs serve as an introduction to the practical, concrete applications of God's proverbial wisdom to the affairs of life. These introductory remarks cover the fundamental principles of life. They build the foundation. The main theme is this: *attaining and applying biblical wisdom is the chief end of life* (4:5-7). All that follows in Proverbs rests on this basic presupposition.

There are practical aspects of these early remarks. The themes of power, wealth, fame, and long life are not absent. The overriding themes are not these, however. What matters most are righteous judgment, covenantal faithfulness, avoiding the harlot, honest dealing, and the commandments of God. Above all, the commandments of God.

Wisdom is a guide in the way of righteousness—not an impersonal guide, but a living guide. Wisdom in Proverbs is an anthropomorphic representation of God. God guides men along the way of righteousness, as an experienced traveller guides a newcomer. Step by step, the traveller advances behind wisdom, who in this case is the original pathbuilder. There is no possibility that the guide will lose her way.

The imagery of the pathway is explicit in Proverbs 8:20. This same imagery is used to describe the requirement of the people of Israel to follow strictly all rulings imposed by the priestly judges "According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall show thee, to the right hand, nor to the left" (Deut. 17:11). The path is obviously narrow no deviation is permitted. Christ reaffirmed this in His Sermon on the Mount: "Enter ye at the strait [narrow] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

The concept of the path of righteousness refers to personal righteousness, clearly. The focus of concern for the father is the moral righteousness of his son. Nevertheless, this path also refers to public righteousness, including law enforcement. Self-government first; then comes the application of biblical law to areas of life under the jurisdiction of the righteous man. How could it be otherwise? If self-government under biblical law produces wealth and influence, then the extension of the rule of biblical law proceeds outward, from self-governed individuals to others under their lawful jurisdiction.

Question: Does self-government under biblical law produce wealth and influence? Proverbs 8:21 affirms that it does. More than this: wisdom leads men along the path of judgment *in order to* cause those behind her to become prosperous. Those who love wisdom will inherit substance; those who love wisdom will have their treasures filled.

This does not mean that all wise men will get rich. The true wealth is wisdom herself (God Himself): durable riches, fruit that is more valuable than gold (w. 18-19). But if men who follow wisdom are promised the better wealth, then one testimony of God to the reliability of His word is that men will inherit earthly wealth, as an affirmation of God's ability and willingness to deliver even greater riches.

We see an analogous example of this principle—God's delivery of lesser earthly riches, which testifies to God's ability to deliver greater, heavenly riches—in Jesus' healing of the palsied man. First, He said to the man, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2 b). Certain scribes murmured within themselves, "This man blasphemeth" (v. 3). "And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. And he arose, and departed to his house" (vv. 5-7).

Men can see the results of righteousness. Christ had healed the palsied man. "But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men" (v. 8). This strengthens the public authority of the righteous man. In Christ's case, it led to even greater resentment on the part of the religious leaders of His day, who saw the transfer of political power involved in Jesus' demonstration of His lawful authority under God.

God wants to honor publicly those who honor Him publicly: "...for them that honour me I will honour..." (1 Sam. 2:20). One way is to grant them riches and honor (Prov. 8:18). To internalize these references to economic wealth

is to minimize the power of God to manifest His reliability and sovereignty, in time and on earth. Such a "spiritualizing" interpretation is too often governed by an impulse which is related to the hostility displayed by the religious leaders of Israel against Jesus. They deeply resented Jesus' ability to heal men before the gaze of the multitudes. He was manifesting His power in public. They would have preferred Him to work His miracles privately, or not at all. They would have preferred to face a religion of strictly "internal" blessings, influence, and power. Such a religion would not have resulted in a public confrontation — the kind of confrontation that the Pharaoh of Moses' day so deeply resented.

Paul understood the impact of a religion of publicly manifested power: "But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:25-26).

Pietists, like atheists and Satanists, prefer a version of Christianity that sits in a corner, not drawing attention to itself or to the God of might and power who controls all of life in terms of His decree. They prefer durable riches alone to durable riches with wealth and public honor. They sing, "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold," while we sing, "I'd rather have Jesus and silver and gold." They prefer a world of reduced public confrontation and minimal dominion. They prefer to pray in a corner and to avoid the paths of civic judgment. They prefer cultural impotence to cultural responsibility.

Men generally achieve their goals in the long run when they are willing to pay the price; pietists are no exception. They have already achieved their goal of public irrelevance. While they continue to specialize in cultural irrelevance, dominion-oriented Christians can begin to specialize in occupying the paths of righteous public judgment. Pietists get what they want; they should stop complaining because we expect to get what we want.

## CHRISTIANITY AND THE CALENDAR

by James B. Jordan

### No. 21: The Moon

As we saw last time, the measurement of time provided by the phases of the moon is distinct from and ultimately incommensurate with solar cycles. In this essay we want to examine what the Bible teaches about lunar typology, and then raise the question as to whether it would be a good idea for us to observe new moons as Lord's Days in the New Covenant.

#### Lunar Typology

The month begins when the first crescent of the moon appears. From there the moon gradually becomes brighter and brighter until it is full, and then it lessens to darkness again. The new moon, accordingly, is a time of beginnings,

and the full moon a time of climaxes or of judgments. A glance at the Old Covenant festivals will show that they were arranged with a view to lunar cycles. Passover took place at the full moon, when the lunar light was most bright (Lev.23:5-6). Similarly, the feast of Tabernacles began at full moon (Lev.23:34; Psalm 81:3). The Divine Husband comes to have a feast with His bride at full moon, though He may find she has been unfaithful (Prov.7:20, in broader application). The light of the full moon exposes sin, among other things.

Modern science has yet to explore fully the effects of light. An essay in *Christianity Today* a couple of years ago pointed to evidence which indicates that children enter puberty earlier if they are exposed to a lot of light as youngsters (staying up at night, watching television). Similarly, an essay in *Science Digest* about a decade ago (I wish I'd saved it) pointed out that there is a significant rise in crimes of violence during the full of the moon, and not just of nocturnal crimes. Research is needed in this area. Perhaps we shall one day understand what Psalm 121:6 means when it speaks of the moon striking by night. There seems to be a heightening of tension associated with the full of the moon. If so, an increase of both criminal and festal activities could be expected. The point is that Biblical typology is not mere (nominal) symbolism, but is related to the way God has structured both His universe and human psychology. We may come to find that our lives are fuller and richer if we structure Christian festivals at the time of the full moon.

Also of interest, studies have demonstrated that 17-25% more babies are born during the waxing period of the moon than during the waning phase. Why this is so is unknown, but it does square with a typology of seeing the brightening of the moon as a time of conception, birth, and growth. (Cf. Dewey and Mandino, *Cycles*, p.177.)

The waxing and waning of the moon, like the rising and setting of the sun, also serves typologically as a sign of the impermanence of the first creation, and should lead men to know that a permanent Day of the Lord is coming in the New Creation (Gen.1:14,16; Is.60:19-20).

The moon rules the night (Gen.1:16; Ps. 136:9; Jer. 31:35). As I pointed out in numbers 2 & 3 of this series, the Old Covenant is pictured as night, and the coming of the New Covenant with the resurrection of Jesus Christ is pictured as the rising of the sun and the dawning of the day. This being so, maybe we should see the moon as a ruler of the Old Covenant, and the sun of the New Covenant. If so, then the moon's service as a clock and ruler has been done away in the New Covenant, and the Church has rightly ignored lunar cycles and stuck exclusively with solar ones.

If we look at the Bible, however, we do not find any evidence to support this inference. Covenant Night has indeed given way to Covenant Day, but not moon to sun. Those passages which speak of the darkening of the moon also speak of the removal of the sun, and those passages which speak of the Covenant as established as long as the moon endures, also speak of its lasting as long as the sun (Ps.72:5-7; 89:36f.).

Colossians 2:16,17 tells us that new moon observance, like sabbath observance, is no longer required in the New Covenant. As we have argued, however, everything in Scripture points us to observing the Lord's Day according to a sabbatical pattern; and nothing indicates that new moons are not part of that pattern.

## Lunar Observance

God appointed special offerings for each new moon (Num.28:11 -14; 2 Chron.8:13). Holy convocations were held on the new moon, just as on the sabbath day (2 Ki. 4:23; 1s.1:13; Hos.2:1<sup>1</sup>). The new moon was kept as a day of rest (Amos 8:5). It was also a time of festivity (1 Sam.20).

In two places, observance of the new moon is said to characterize worship patterns in the *New Covenant*: Is. 66:23 and Ezk.46:1-3. From what I can find, and the reader can sense I am somewhat tentative here, all indications are that if we keep the Lord's Day according to a creation-sabbath pattern, we should also keep it according to a new moon pattern: the first day of each lunar month. The fourth commandment, by singling out the seventh day as preeminent, does not negate the other days required in the Old Covenant, but rather establishes them in principle. If the fourth commandment is relevant to Lord's Day observance, then it must be taken in its Biblical context and meaning, and not ripped out of context. Sun and moon still endure; they still regulate time as God's creation-clocks; their patterning is still relevant to Christian life.

The problem comes in the fact that the Christian Church has never, to my knowledge, ever observed new moons. I have argued in earlier essays that the observance of Lord's Days according to a sabbatical pattern is not necessary for the *being* of the Church, but is necessary for her well-being. I argued that there is no sin in working seven days, if that is forced upon one by a heathen- culture; one would have to observe the Lord's Day to the best of one's abilities, as the early church did, and as did Israel in bondage. At the same time, Christianity should always seek, where pos-

sible, to establish God's patterns of life in the world

The early church argued against sabbath keeping and against the observance of new moons (when it addressed the subject, rarely) because these were regarded by apostate Jews and by pagans as necessary religious events, and the New Testament plainly teaches the avoidance of superstitious observance of days. Later on, when the Church was able to reform society and the calendar, it used the Julian (Roman) calendar, which was exclusively solar in orientation. The festivals at the winter solstice and at the vernal equinox were reformed to the Biblical standard, and so was the observance of the sabbath (on the Lord's Day). Pagan new moon festivals, however, were simply eliminated and were replaced with nothing, since the Julian calendar took no notice of lunar months.

At the time of the Reformation, superstition again abounded in the observance of sabbath days and saint's days. Thus, the Reformers to a man opposed sabbath-keeping, and reformed the calendar to keep only the major Christian festivals, eliminating saint's days as "Romish accretions." As a result, none of the Reformers, as we have seen, give us a healthy view of the Lord's Day. Protestantism soon, however, reaccommodated the Lord's Day to the sabbath pattern, and except for the Puritan movement retained the major festivals. Again, however, the lunar festival was not dealt with. Also, since Protestantism was divided nationally and theologically, it was never able to attain the power or the catholicity to reform the social and calendrical system of an entire civilization, as the Church had previously done at the end of the Roman Imperial Age.

Thus, the matter is still to be dealt with.

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