



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

What Do You Really Need? (Colossians 2:11-15)

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**Wednesday, June 26, at 12noon in
House Hearing Room #6.
Bring your lunch and join us.**

All our studies are important. But if there is one that I encourage you to read and to come to discuss, this is the one.

INTRODUCTION

Colossians 2:11-15 ... and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcison made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcison of Christ; ¹²having 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. ¹³When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcison of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Here are some general observations concerning the above passage. First of all, God did everything:

- v11—you were also circumcised
- v12—having been buried; you were also raised up
- v12—in the working of God
- v13—He made you alive; having forgiven
- v14—having canceled; He has taken; having nailed
- v15—He had disarmed; He made public

Secondly, God did everything through Jesus Christ

- v11—in Him
- v12—with Him; with Him
- v13—with Him
- v14—to the cross
- v15—through Him

Thirdly, God did everything through Jesus because man could do nothing.

- v13—When you were dead in your transgressions...

With these things in mind, the task in this study is to answer the question: What was done? In the answer, we will see the truth that God has taken care of the glaring need in the life of His children.

A CIRCUMCISED HEART (2:11-12)

In Genesis 17, God made a covenant with Abraham in which God promised to increase his family, give them the land that Abraham was living in, and that they would be His people and He would be their God. The sign of this covenant was circumcision and those not circumcised would be cut off from being of His people because they have broken the covenant.

Even with this sign, one could be of Abraham's family, and still not be one of God's children. Abraham himself was not saved by his circumcision, but rather by his faith (Romans 4). It was merely symbolic. The necessary work was a circumcision of the heart. Moses declared this (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6), as did Jeremiah (Jeremiah 4:4; 9:26). Paul later wrote that the true "Jew" or true "child of God" was one "who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart" (Romans 2:29).

The Apostle brings this to light in Colossians 2:11. People are in need of a circumcision "not made with hands." This phrase is used to show that it is a work of God on one's heart. And that which is cut off is not a piece of flesh, but the sin-filled, guilt-ridden heart and desires that had enslaved the person; or as Paul wrote "the body of the flesh" (cf. Romans 6:6; 7:24; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 3:5). With a circumcised heart, "Believers have been freed from sin's dominance and judgment..."¹

Baptism, in and of itself, is useless to save, just like physical circumcision. Instead, it pictures a unity with Christ. Water baptism symbolizes the reality of the spiritual union and the believer's identification with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Since it is only a symbol (an important one, nonetheless), the real power is from God who transforms the heart of His people.

And Paul continues this thought: the same power that raised Jesus from the dead also raises people who are dead in their sins and to life in Christ.

A SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION (2:13)

The Apostle Paul was quite consistent in his theology throughout his letters:

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is

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now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Colossians 2:13a is no different--When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh... In their natural state, people are dead, both spiritually and morally. Instead of following the commands given by their Sovereign Creator, they have followed after their own desires (Romans 1:18-32; Ephesians 2:1-4), have lived in animosity toward Him (Romans 3:10-18) and have been found to be His enemies (Romans 5:8-10). All have offended a holy God; thus all are spiritually dead to Him.

In the state of spiritual death, one is unable to respond to spiritual stimuli. One is unable to properly grasp the truth of Scripture, to desire holiness, to see their need for forgiveness, and to have the desire to please God on His terms. Ask a dead corpse if it would like to live again--the blank response would be the same when asking a spiritually dead person if they would like true life. Even if the spiritually dead wanted to do something about their condition (which is impossible), there is nothing they could do to change it.

But the good news is that the One who can do something has done something--He has made His children alive. Colossians 1:13b says that God "made you alive together with Him." And remaining consistent, Paul finished the above passage with:

Ephesians 2:4-5 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

Stating it another way, Paul wrote that believers are "a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17b).

But how are those dead in sin made alive in Christ? God has removed that which caused the spiritual death.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS (2:13-14)

John MacArthur writes: "That God forgives the sins of those who trust in Him and includes them in His eternal kingdom and glory is the most important truth of Scripture"² (cf. Psalm 130:3-4; Isaiah 1:18; 55:7; Micah 7:18; Matthew 26:28; Acts 10:34; 13:38-39; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 8:12). The word picture the Apostle paints in Colossians in describing how the

people of God are made alive shows the sublimity of God's forgiveness.

Look at the words Paul used:

- Forgiven (*charizomai*) -- This means to show favor and give freely. God has freely shown His people favor by removing the transgressions that made us dead.
- Transgressions (*paraptōma*) -- Literally translated this is "a false step, a trespass." That which has been forgiven are the false and wrong steps people have taken which were in opposition to God.
- Canceled (*exaleipho*) -- The following certificate of debt has been "wiped out". The writing on the document is erased and obliterated.
- Certificate of debt (*cheirographon*) -- This is an official, handwritten document, a legal note or bond. It is to be understood as a legally binding document.

Understanding, though, what was written on that certificate of debt is vital to the beauty of this picture. The decrees are "an opinion expressed with authority."³ Just like a judge's opinion concerning the law carries more weight than a mechanic's, this authoritative opinion carries much weight for it is the opinion of God Himself.

It might even be said that he took the document, ordinances and all, and nailed it to the cross as an act of triumphant defiance in the face of those blackmailing powers that were holding it over men and women in order to command their allegiance.

--FF Bruce

God has decreed that men have broken the contractual covenant with Him by their false steps. Due to these false steps and trespasses, a debt is owed and each person has an "IOU" which must be paid. But one cannot ever pay the debt; thus, the legally binding document is against and hostile to him or her. This is God's judgment. And since there is no authority above Him to overrule His opinion, His opinion will stand.

But God showed favor to His people and wiped away the handwriting of decrees against them by "nailing it to the cross." The imagery is quite clear: God took what was owed to Him and had it paid by the death of His sinless Son on the cross. Jesus Christ took the certificate of debt of each one of God's people and wiped it clean by paying with His blood the debt owed (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 1:17-19; Colossians 1:18-20). Thus, "God has not only removed the debt; He has also destroyed the document on which it was recorded."⁴

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Consider Douglas Moo's comments on this passage:

Paul's first word picture portrays a document that all human beings have signed, an 'IOU', in which we pledge complete allegiance to God. Our sins stand as conclusive evidence that we have failed to give God that allegiance, and so that document is 'against us' and 'condemns' us. But God has taken that document and wiped it clean; indeed, He has taken it completely out of the picture. He has, in fact, in a second word picture that both highlights the completeness of the removal and the means by which it was accomplished, 'nailed it to the cross.' The third stanza of Horatio Spafford's hymn *It Is Well With My Soul* beautifully captures the point of the verse:

"My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more.
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul."⁵

What do all people need? Whether you realize it or not, friend, you have a certificate of debt which you owe to your Creator due to your sins and rebellion toward Him. For those whose faith and trust is in Christ, He has paid for and canceled that debt. For those of you who are trying to pay the debt yourself through your own good deeds and works, you will NEVER be able to pay any of it off. For those who think you are not all that bad or that it is no big deal, think again: the debt you owe is there and if it goes unpaid, you will have to suffer the punishment when the due date arrives (and no one knows when their "due date" will come).

VICTORY OVER OPPONENTS (2:15)

And to think it could not get better, God not only makes spiritually dead people alive, He also gives them the victory over those who desire to keep them in spiritual bondage.

When the Apostle Paul referenced the "rulers and authorities" in his letters, he talked about those in the spiritual world--such as angels, Satan and

demons (cf. Colossians 1:16)--with the emphasis on those who are opposed to God.

It is these who are against God that Paul says are "disarmed" and on "public display." When the victorious Roman army would return home to much fanfare, they would parade the leaders of the defeated foes in shame through the streets in front of cheering crowds.

In similar fashion, God has triumphed over and publically shown the opposition to be weak, feeble and not to be feared. And how did He triumph over His foes? In that which looked like sure defeat--through the crucifixion of His Son on a despised, shameful cross.

Hebrews 2:14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Paul wrote elsewhere, "Oh Death, where is your victory? Oh Death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55) The grave has no victory for the child of God, because it has been thoroughly whipped, conquered and shamed; whipped by the power of God in the work of His Son—Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion, friend, is quite simple. What everyone really needs is to be forgiven, made alive and victorious. God has provided all of this for those who will, in faith, go to Him and trust in His Son for their salvation.

God can truly forgive all your sins--are you interested?

¹ John MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 108.

² MacArthur, 109.

³ W.E. Vines, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 274.

⁴ Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 44 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1982),

⁵ Douglas Moo, *The Letters to Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 208.