

COMPREHENDING OUR COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST – Part 3 (Colossian 2:14-15)

Walt Disney World in Florida has several theme parks, one of which is Epcot. Inside Epcot is a place called “Cool Club.” Why is it called the “Cool Club”? Because you go in there to “cool-off” in the air conditioning—and to **drink free soda!** They have stacks of small cups in various places—and people wait in line (if it’s busy) to walk up to the soda dispensers and **take a sip** of the various flavors they have **from different countries.**

It’s quite **an experience**—especially the first time you go there! **Kids are running all over** the place taking a sip of Viva Raspberry from Moldova...and Sprite Cucumber from Russia... and Royal Watermelon from the Philippines! And the more sips they take, **the faster they run!** Needless to say, it is anything but a **calm, relaxing, meditative** kind of atmosphere!

In many ways, **social media** is a lot like the “Cool Club”—everyone is “running around” **taking a sip** of what this person has to offer, then **scurrying off** in another direction to taste a sip of what so-and-so **has in their “dispenser.”** Sadly, I’m afraid there are **many people that bring** this same kind of “here a sip, there a sip, everywhere a sip-sip” kind of approach into how they **read the Bible**—and how they want **sermons to be!**

The result? It is sometimes hard for them when someone wants to **slow down the pace**—like I’ve been doing as we go through Colossians!

But I believe there **are benefits** in us doing that! Psalm 104:34 says, “My **meditation** of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord.” It’s pretty hard for our **thoughts of God** to be sweet—meaning affectionate, fond, and pleasant—if we don’t **take the time to meditate**—to reflectively think about—Him! So—in essence—I’m forcing us all to **slow down and drink deeply** from the well instead of just taking a little sip from a small cup!

If you’re not there yet, please take your Bibles and turn once again to Colossians 2. Verse 10 says, “And ye are complete in Him”—meaning Christ. Paul follows that up with **five pictures** that help us better understand **what it means** to be complete in Christ.

Here again are the pictures we’ve looked at so far.

1. We have spiritual surgery in vs 11
2. Waterless baptism in vs 12
3. Coming back to life—after being dead in vs 13
4. The blotting out of a debt in vs 14

Notice again what it says in vs 14 – “Blotting out the **handwriting of ordinances** that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross;”

Last week I mentioned that there are **differences of opinion** regarding what the “**ordinances**” are that are against us and that we were going to be looking at a **different view** today. You may also remember me saying that I **didn’t tackle it last week** because we didn’t have time and it would make “our head hurt.”

Usually when I use that phrase, it is because the concept or thought **is difficult to understand** or explain. That is not the case today. In fact, the truth is fairly easy to understand!

The challenge is that **it may go against** what you have been taught most of your life! On the other hand, some of you may think afterwards, ‘I’ve always believed that, Pastor! Why did you make it so dramatic?’

First, let’s consider... **1. A second look at what was nailed to the cross (vs 14)**

As mentioned last week, to “**blot out**” means “to erase, rub out, or wipe away.” The Greek word is used in Revelation 7:17 and Revelation 21:4 regarding God **wiping away** all tears.

And—as also mentioned last week—the “**handwriting**” often referred to a certificate of debt. It was a **legal document** acknowledging money had been received **for safekeeping**—or in the **form of a loan** to be paid back at an appointed time.

What are “the ordinances that are against us, that are contrary to us,” that have been taken out of the way because they were nailed to Christ’s cross? **Last week** we looked at the suggestion that it is the **pages and pages of the lists of our sins!** Those sins have been taken away—forgiven and no longer held against us—because they were **nailed to the cross** and paid for by Christ’s death!

But there’s a **second** suggestion as to what Paul had in mind when he wrote of the **handwriting of ordinances** that was against us, and it is this: **the law of Moses** as found in the first five books of the Bible—which includes the Ten Commandments!

‘Pastor, are you saying that you believe that **all the commandments God gave to us through Moses** have been taken away because they were nailed to the cross!’ That’s exactly what I’m saying—and there is more than one reason I believe that to be true!

A. The possibility of “ordinances” referring to the law

1) The meaning of the word. The word “ordinances” comes from the Greek word “dogma” and is used **five times** in the Greek NT. In the KJV Bible, it is translated “ordinances” **twice**—and “decree” **three** times. One of the more familiar uses is Luke 2:1 “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a **decree** [an official order] from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.”

With that meaning in mind, let’s go back and look at vs 14. If God through Paul is saying that our **sins are blotted out**, the verse would be understood like this: “Blotting out the written record of our debt because of our failure to keep the decrees”—or something to that effect. That—in my opinion—is focusing too much on the meaning of “handwriting”—and not enough on the word “ordinances” (decrees).

2) The context. Look at vs 16 “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday...” All the things listed here in vs 16 have to do with the law of Moses. Why shouldn’t we be judged in those things? It makes more sense not to be judged by them because **they have been nailed** to the cross—**rather than the sins for not keeping** them being nailed to the cross.

Now, vs 20. “Ordinances” here is **not the exact same word**—but it is the **verb form** of the **same word!** And here Paul is saying don’t subject yourselves—don’t put yourself under—decrees of “touch not; taste not; handle not...” Why? Because those rules have been nailed to the cross!

3) Other uses. Mark your spot here and turn to Ephesians 2:15. This—in my mind—“seals the deal.”

--Vs 15. “Having abolished in His [Christ’s] flesh the enmity...”

--Now the end of vs 16. “...having slain the enmity thereby:”

So the **enmity**—meaning that which was against us and hostile to us (like an enemy)—was abolished and slain.

What is the enmity—the enemy—that was abolished and slain? Verse 15 spells it out—“**the law of commandments** contained in **ordinances**”—which is the same word “decrees” used back in Colossians 2:14! So here it is **not the sins** that are abolished and slain—it is **the law!**

How was **the law** abolished and slain? Verse 15 says it was done through His (Christ’s) **flesh**; verse 16 refers to the **cross**. **So the law was abolished and slain** through the death of Christ on the cross! And that is why I believe “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us”—that was **nailed to the cross** according to Colossians 2:14—was **the law of Moses!**

And this is **not the only place** in the Bible that teaches us we are **no longer under** the law of Moses!

B. The pronouncements that believers are no longer under the law

We’re in Ephesians; I want us to turn to one more place before we go back to Colossians. Go toward the front of your Bibles to II Corinthians 3.

Notice what it says in vs 7. **What** was written and graven in stones? The 10 commandments! Was it glorious? Yes; it plainly says that! But it also says that it brought about **death**.

Now vs 9. What is the “ministration of condemnation”? The same thing as “the ministration of death”—the 10 commandments—referred to in vs 7! It is still glorious—but the “ministration of righteousness” is **greater** in glory.

Now vs 11. “For if that which is done away was glorious....” What was done away? That which brought about death and condemnation—and was written in stone—meaning the 10 commandments! So if the law has been done away with—having been nailed to the cross—believers are not under the law!

Here are some other references that teach we are no longer under the law.

Romans 6:14b “...for ye are **not under the law**, but under grace.”

Romans 6:15a “What then? shall we sin, because we are **not under the law**, but under grace?”

Galatians 5:18 “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are **not under the law**.”

I’ve said it a couple times already, but here it is again: As believers—we are not under the law! That means **we are not under** the rules and regulations and sacrifices and teachings of the law of Moses, to include the 10 commandments. And—as mentioned earlier—that may or may not be something you’ve heard before!

Earlier we sang the song “Once for All.” Not sure if you caught it or not, but the very first words of the song are: “Free from **the law**—O happy condition! Jesus hath bled, and there is remission...”

But how do we **practically** apply the truth that we are “free from the law” and no longer under it? Can we “live it up”—by “sinning it up”—because we are no longer under it? Obviously not!

C. The practical and spiritual application of not being under the law

So what is the **believer’s relationship** to the law? Way more than I can give you in a subpoint of a sermon! But I do want to share a few thoughts from Alva McClain’s excellent booklet entitled “Law and Grace.”

1) The law is good—but needs to be used “lawfully”—meaning **properly!**

Notice on your outline I **Timothy 1:8-9** “But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; ⁹ Knowing this, that the law is **not made for a righteous man**, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,”

--According to vs 9, the law is **not made** for who? “A **righteous** man.” **Who** are “the righteous”? Those that are “**right with God**”—because they’ve come to God the **right way**—through Jesus who is the **Only Way!** Can it be any plainer than this? The law **is not made for those** that are born again!

--**Who** is the law made **for**? “The lawless and disobedient”—meaning the unsaved; those that have not received Jesus as their Savior and are not born again. So the law is to keep the unsaved “in check”—and to show them that they are **guilty before God** and need to **be saved from** the penalty of their sins!

2) The law is inspired by God—and is therefore “**profitable** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” according to II Timothy 3:16. There is profit in reading and studying **all parts of the Bible** because they help us **learn more** about Jesus! Jesus Himself taught us that after He rose from the dead! **Luke 24:44** “And He [Jesus] said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written **in the law of Moses**, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, **concerning me**.” Jesus made a similar statement in Luke 24:27.

Keeping the law can’t **save us**—and **keeping the law** **doesn’t grow us**—but **reading the law** helps us see more of Christ! McClain wrote: “...it is the privilege and highest duty of the Christian to discover and behold the face of the Lord Jesus in Scripture—**everywhere!**” (pg 68; emphasis mine)

3) We are under a higher law than the law of Moses!

In Matthew 22 we have the account of a lawyer who approached Jesus with this question: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Mt 22:36). Many of you will recognize Jesus’ response as I read it. Mt 22:37-39 “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ³⁸This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt **love thy neighbour as thyself**.”

Love thy neighbour as **who?** Thyself! Now look at **John 13:34** “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; **as I have loved you**, that ye also love one another.” Why did Jesus call this a **new** commandment? Wasn’t it an **old** commandment?

Although it **seems like** the old commandment, there is one huge difference—we are to love others the way **Christ loved us**—not the way we **love ourselves!** And Christ’s love is **infinitely greater**, isn’t it?

For those of you that **watched the memorial service for Charlie Kirk** last Sunday, you saw that kind of Christ-like love from Erika Kirk when she publicly forgave her husband's killer!

What, then, is **our relationship** to the law? We are not **under it** in the sense of **having to keep it** because it has been done away with; it has been nailed to the cross of Christ! But it is **profitable** because we see Christ in it! And it **does not mean** we are lawless because we have a **higher law** to follow—love like Christ!

We're in II Corinthians 3; let's turn back to Colossians 2 and look at our last picture...

2. **Triumphing over enemies (vs 15)**

A. The physical explanation of the picture

For the sake of time, I'm not going to go through the verse and explain each word. Instead, here's a quote from **Arthur Patzia** that sums it up well: "[It is] the imagery of a victorious general leading his captives home in a victory procession in which their defeat would be proclaimed publicly" (*NIBC, Eph, Col, Philemon*, pg 59).

B. The spiritual explanation of the picture

What's the **spiritual explanation** of this picture? That God "spoiled"—meaning stripped of power—"principalities and powers"—a reference to Satan and his evil, demonic helpers. But that's not all! God also openly and publicly displayed **His triumph** over Satan! That's the picture Paul paints here for us—but the picture **also raises some questions**. **Like, how** has Satan been stripped of power—especially in light of Ephesians 6:12 that says we still wrestle against principalities and powers? **And when** was Satan publicly shamed as a defeated enemy?

1) **What** power has been stripped from Satan?

Hebrews 2:14b "...that through death He [Christ] might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;" So the devil had the "power of death." Did Satan—in his arrogance—believe he defeated Jesus at the cross? I believe he did! Maybe he even said to himself, 'Jesus is dead; I bruised His **head**—not His **heel**!' But Jesus rose from the dead, didn't He? So Satan had **lost his power** over death because Jesus conquered death!

There's a **second aspect of power** that has been stripped from Satan—the **power of fear**. We see that in **Hebrews 2:15** "And deliver them who through **fear of death** were all their lifetime subject to bondage." We don't have to be **in bondage**—we don't have to **be held captive**—to the **fear of death** because if we have Christ, **we have life!** We have **passed from death** unto life—and we shall **never perish!** And to be **absent from** the body is to be **present with** the Lord—which is something we should look forward to—**not fear!**

And there's yet a third **aspect of power** that has been stripped from Satan and it is this—his power to **accuse us**. How can Satan accuse us about our sin **when it has been paid for** by the blood of Jesus? Satan can—and will—accuse us, but **Jesus the Judge** is satisfied with what He Himself did as **Jesus the Savior**, so the accusations fall on deaf ears! And we should ignore the accusations, too!

2) **How** was power stripped from Satan?

We already talked about it, right? Power was stripped from Satan based on **Christ's death** on the cross for us—and **His resurrection** from the dead! But let's not forget what else was nailed to the cross with Jesus! According to Ephesians 2:15—and I believe Colossians 2:14—"the law of commandments contained in ordinances [decrees]." In other words, the law **can't accuse us** because the law was **nailed to the cross!**

Imagine Satan saying, 'Throw the book at him, Jesus—he's guilty as sin...of sin!' And Jesus responding back with, "I can't throw the book at him because there is no book!"

3) **When** was Satan publicly shamed as a defeated enemy?

Satan hasn't been **physically, publicly shamed** yet, has he? That will happen in the future! He'll be cast **down to earth** for good at the mid-point of the seven-year Tribulation—and he will be cast into the lake of fire—forever—after the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth according to Revelation 20:10.

But in the **spiritual realm**, Christ's triumph over Satan was openly displayed when Christ rose from the dead—even though we don't know the details of that! And—to a certain degree—I would argue that every person that **becomes a child of God** is a public display of God's triumph over Satan!

Lastly, C. The spiritual application of the picture

How should we apply the spiritual reality that God has stripped Satan of his power through the death of Christ?

- 1) Don't fear death
- 2) Don't listen to Satan's attempt to throw the book at you because there is no book!
- 3) And don't be deceived by demonic forces—or false teachers—that promote the lie that Christ is not enough!

What is it that God would have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, have you been delivered from the bondage of the fear of death?

Why do people fear death? There are several reasons, but the most important is this: they are afraid to meet God the Judge! They are sinful—and God is holy—and in their “heart of hearts” they know they are guilty!

How do many people try to get rid of their sin and guilt? **By keeping rules!** They get baptized as a baby...and go to church...and give money to the poor...and help people as much as they can! They even read their Bibles and pray in hopes of having their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds so they can “squeak in.”

But they have no assurance and no peace because they really don't know if they've done enough!
How do you get out of that bondage of fear?

Come to Christ for forgiveness and mercy and salvation! The prodigal son did that...and the publican in the temple did that...and the thief on the cross did that. Have you?

2. Second—if you are truly a believer—you are not under the law of Moses—you are under a higher law! Be motivated by love, though—not fear!

--The love of Christ constrains us—it compels and motivates us (II Corinthians 5:14-15)

--"I beseech ye therefore brethren by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice"

(Romans 12:1)

--"We love Him because He first loved us!" (I John 4:19)