

Colossians 2:13-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-2/colossians-213-15/>

The incredible work of Jesus on the cross transformed the physical and spiritual world.

Paul is continuing to describe what it means to be in Christ. The incredible truth of the gospel, as Paul describes it to the Colossians, is that we have joined in partnership with Christ. Jesus is the head and all of creation is the body, and we have been made a part of the Body of Christ through faith. Jesus did all the work to bridge the chasm of sin between us and God.

The actions we take determine our stewardship of that gift. We have the privilege to work in partnership with Christ, and gain the full experience of the great gift we have been given. By walking in obedience, we are not earning our way into the body of Christ; that was granted to us through faith. What we are doing, however, is making the choice to walk in the reality of our new life, through the resurrection power of Jesus, rather than to continue to walk in our old, dead ways. When we continue in sin, we reap the consequences of the sin from which we were delivered, to our own detriment (Romans 6:1-2).

Paul starts this section with: *when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh*. There is a spiritual reality the Colossians must face up to. Our *transgressions* lead to adverse consequences. Paul describes the general category of the negative consequence of the *transgressions* from living in our *flesh: death*. *Death* means separation. The Greek word for *transgressions*, “paraptoma,” means “to fall away.”

The Colossians were once unbelievers, *dead in their transgressions*. They were not immersed in the body of Christ. They were not made new creations. They did not have the resurrection power of Christ dwelling within. In that condition, they were *dead in their transgressions*. They did not have a spiritual circumcision of the heart through faith in Christ (Colossians 2:11-12). Their natural condition as unbelievers was to dwell in the *uncircumcision of your flesh*. Paul is directing the Colossian believers to recall their old condition, prior to being redeemed through Christ.

As Paul has established so far, the Colossian believers have a new position. Things have changed. They are now redeemed. They have the resurrection power of Jesus dwelling within. They are made new creations in Christ, having been placed into His body.

So, now if they again walk in the flesh, they are choosing the old way, the consequences of which are *death* and separation. The Colossian believers have a new position, but can choose to walk in the old condition.

The false teachers attempting to deceive the Colossian believers might be telling them that, since they are redeemed, they can sin without adverse consequences. That is not at all the case. Sin always has negative consequences.

When believers walk in the *transgression* of the *flesh*, it creates a separation, a death. For one, we are separated from our connection with the resurrection power of Jesus. You might think of a battery that is “dead.” The power is disconnected. So it is when believers walk in the *flesh*, and fall away from the ways of Christ. When we sow to the flesh, we reap corruption (Galatians 6:7-8a).

There are two paths believers, like the Colossians, must choose between. One is the old way from which we were delivered, the way of the *flesh*. This leads to a consequence of death. The other way is the new way that leads to life. This is the way of living in the resurrection power of Christ.

The way of the *flesh* is a *transgression* against God, a perversion of the design for which all was created. This leads to walking apart from the power of God. If we live according to our own strength, we gain the corrupt rewards of the world. But when we walk in the new life we have been given, we gain true life in Christ, and gain the greatest of spiritual rewards.

The fact that Paul is having to explain all this tells us that it is often difficult to maintain a perspective that is true. We live in a fallen world. We still have our old flesh dwelling within (Romans 7:18). The world constantly feeds us deception. Paul is encouraging the Colossians to recall their old ways, and realize that Christ redeemed them from the deep pit of sin.

He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. All the sins of unbelievers are reconciled in Christ. There is no reason to rely upon religious rituals like circumcision. To do so is to say, “Jesus’s death on the cross was insufficient.”

Jesus, in a sense, brought the Colossian believers with Him during His death and resurrection (Colossians 2:9-12). He took all *transgressions* and their consequences with Him to the cross. He forgave these *transgressions*, forging a path of realignment for each human being. A way to be made *alive* again, to be in right standing and holy communion with God.

The death of Jesus brought believers into a new relationship with Him, *having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us.* A *certificate of debt* is a legal document. It is to ensure justice. In the spiritual realm, a *transgression* requires a payment. A price needs to be paid. The *certificate* consists of *decrees against us*. This means we are the accused. We are the guilty ones.

But Jesus cancelled this *debt*, and believers now stand justified before Him (Romans 5:1). Therefore, it no longer makes sense to seek to be justified through religious deeds (Galatians 2:17). If we seek to be justified through religious acts, such as physical circumcision, then we are neglecting the great justification we were freely given through Christ.

The law gave *decrees, which were hostile to us.* The *decrees* are not good for us, because they provide laws we cannot keep (Acts 15:10; Romans 8:3-4). The Greek word for *hostile*, “*hyphenantios*,” can mean “opposite” or “adversarial.” It is not the law’s fault; the law is good (Romans 7:13-14). The problem is that the law is the opposite of what we are capable of doing in our natural state, prior to becoming a believer (Romans 7:13).

But Jesus fixed the problem. Jesus has *cancelled* this indebtedness. He did it by meeting the required cost, thus fulfilling the justice. He did what we could not do. *And He has taken it* (our debt to the law) *out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*. Jesus removes this noose from our neck. The spiritual code of justice that we had transgressed is now taken care of. We do not have to spend one ounce of energy trying to repay the *debt*. It is taken care of. *Out of the way*.

Jesus did this by *nauling it* (our debt) *to the cross*, an allusion to Jesus' death. In essence, Jesus took this *certificate of debt* onto the cross with Him. It was nailed there, as Christ Himself was nailed. It was fulfilled as He was put to death.

Notice it does not say this indebtedness comes off the cross. Only Jesus came down from the cross. He dies, is buried, and arises. The *debt* is still nailed to the cross. It is forever settled there. Therefore, there is no reason to ever seek to be justified through religious acts. These are just traditions of men (Colossians 2:8). For the Gentile Colossians, if they are to believe false teaching that says, "You have to add to what Jesus did, and be circumcised and follow Jewish religious rules in order to be justified," they would be saying that there are sins still needing to be covered. As if Jesus didn't get them all; some "fell off the cross" and we now need to take care of them.

Paul fought this battle in both his letter to the Romans as well as his letter to the Galatians. In each case, Gentile believers were being told that Jesus's death on the cross was insufficient for them to gain righteousness. They were told they needed also to be circumcised. But Paul makes clear here that justification in the sight of God comes one way, and one way only: through the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

This raises a paradox. On the one hand, through faith in Christ, we are forever forgiven of every sin. This includes past, present, and future sin. That means that if we sin in the future, it is already paid for. It is like a prepaid credit card with no limit.

However, Paul is making clear to the Colossians that it is completely not in their interest to "use that credit card" and continue in sin. Why? Not because it will overtax what Jesus did on the cross. It is clear here that every sin was nailed *to the cross* along with Jesus. The reality is that using the credit card is not good for them; it is not the fullness of life. To choose this path is not only an act of disobedience to God; it is also an act of foolishness and inefficiency for the person.

However, it still remains for us to choose whether to follow our flesh (and the adverse consequences) or God's Spirit (and gain the reward of life). We are justified in the sight of God regardless of what we do. But the experience of our life completely depends on our choices. A further paradox is that the law, which we could not keep, is fulfilled when we walk in the Spirit (Romans 8:4). But when we attempt to keep laws in order to be justified, we separate ourselves from reliance upon God's resurrection power, and lose blessings.

The implications of what Jesus did on the cross in justifying us, and satisfying all debts due to our transgressions, reverberates throughout the fullness of the spiritual realm. When Jesus died on the cross as a human, He defeated Satan, the accuser (John 16:11).

With this in mind, Paul says next: *When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities*. When Jesus died on the cross, and paid the debt for every sin, He *disarmed* Satan's ability to accuse ([See commentary on Psalm 8:2](#)). These *rulers and authorities* in the spiritual realm have been defeated. However, they have not yet been removed; that will occur at a later time (Revelation 12:12).

The Greek word for *disarmed*, "apekdyomai," can mean "spoil" or "cast aside." So, what does Christ cast aside with His death and resurrection on the cross? Paul says it is *the rulers and authorities*. Just a few verses prior to this one, in Colossians 2:9-10, Paul said,

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority."
(Colossians 2:9-10)

As covered in the commentaries on [Psalm 8](#) and [Hebrews 2](#), it seems that when humanity fell, Satan regained his authority to rule over earth (John 12:31). When Jesus rose from the dead, defeating sin and death, He ascended over all *rulers and authorities*, as a human (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 3:21).

Paul has established that Christ is the head of all *rule and authority*. The Greek word for *rule* (in both verse 10 and here in verse 15) means "beginning" and the word for *authority* means "power" or "energy to act." Therefore, if Christ has now *disarmed* all other rulers, most notably Satan. He is the beginning (*rule*) and the power (*authority*) behind all justice. And, indeed, of all things.

It is, therefore, compelling to trust Him, and Him only, for our justification in the presence of God. He bore all our sins, which were nailed to the cross. So why would we perform religious rituals seeking to be justified? To do so, because of demands by other people, causes us to stray from our trust in the True Head. That is useless and destructive (Galatians 2:17).

Alternatively, when we retain our reliance upon Jesus, it makes sense to trust Him to know what is for our best. With this mindset, it becomes compelling to follow Him in complete obedience. He has our best interest in mind, and when we follow in His ways, we escape destruction.

Jesus did not merely defeat the rulers and authorities, *He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him*. Jesus made a *display*, or show, of these alternative possessors of rule and authority, most notably Satan (John 12:31). He pulled back the curtain, and showed these authorities as instruments of death and destruction.

The Greek word for *public* here in the phrase *public display* is "parresia." It means "openness" or "unreservedly." Christ is often spoken of as the revelation of God to the world. It is the full manifestation of Deity. God did this openly in the physical world for us to observe, record, share, and reflect on—and, ultimately, to base our action, attitude, and existence around.

The persecution and death of Jesus did not just play out in the spiritual world; it happened on earth, in full view of Heaven. Jesus was crucified in the presence of all, then raised to life,

appearing to many witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:6). He ascended to heaven in the presence of witnesses (Acts 1:9-11).

Through His death and resurrection Jesus did all this, *having triumphed over them*. That is, he won. What happened on the cross is a victory over sin, and a victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57; 1 John 5:4).

The word for *triumph* here is the Greek word “*thriambeuo*.” It is a compound word that includes elements of a noisy song, a public procession, and a victory.

In the Roman world at the time, a *triumph* was a sort of parade. A procession through Rome celebrating a military victory. Caesar, for instance, received a *triumph* after conquering Gaul. Colossae had been a Greek colony that was eventually grafted into the Roman Empire. Accordingly, they would have observed or been familiar with the notion of a *triumph* procession.

So, in one of the great ironies of reality, the greatest *triumph* was made by Jesus, who was not just a man. Jesus was both God and man. And His *triumph* came through death and resurrection, not a parade of laurels. The greatest victory of all time was a victory over death, and it came through the conquering king making Himself a sacrifice.

Jesus’ death met the requirements of our legal, spiritual indebtedness. It also revealed the supremacy of Christ, to the shame of all competitors or usurpers to *rule* and *authority*.

Biblical Text

¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having 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. ¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.