

I Intro. (Feb. 8, 1987, ACC; Feb. 11, 2007)

We come now to the completion of the paragraph in which Paul is correcting the practical implications of the Essenian, Gnostic, quasi Christian, syncretistic system. He does this of course by acknowledging the all sufficiency of Christ. In the broader context, this section is traceable to Col. 2:8 with its admonition to, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception.” In 2:13-14, we have a statement of the most profound life changing event of all, the new birth. In the immediate context, this is based on two things including the forgiveness of sins, and the cancellation of our debt. In 2:15, we are informed that Jesus also defeated of our enemy, the Satanic forces of evil spirits. So not only are we liberated from the internal force of our own transgressions, but we also find freedom from the external force of evil spirits. This certainly puts an end to any suggestion of the worship of such entities.

II Christ is Our Life and our Victory (Col. 2:13-15).

A. Christ is our life (2:13-14).

1. (vs. 13) This verse is connected to vs. 8, but rather loosely so. It is a further step in obeying the commanded to avoid being taken spiritually captive, “through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world” (vs. 8). On the practical side of things, building on vs. 12 in connection with the concept of being, “raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead,” Paul here further explained the things of the new birth, something that no Gnostic tradition or philosophy, no matter how mystical, “enlightening,” or esoteric, could *ever* offer. The new birth arose out of the most inauspicious circumstances for the Colossians. To them, Paul said that it happened, “when” or while “you (ὕμᾱς – emphatically near the beginning and occurring twice in the sentence; ὑμᾶς – ‘i.e. “you Gentiles.” This will appear from a study of the parallel passages 3:7, 8, Ephes. 1:13, 2:1 sq., 11, 13, 17, 22, 3:2, 4:17; see the notes on Ephes. 1:13,

and on τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ just below.’<sup>1</sup> [This fits well with the dispensational perspective on 1:27, though A. T. R. says, “the uncircumcision” used merely in a metaphorical sense,<sup>2</sup> which may well be true, but *hints* of other things *may* be in the background. See Eph. 2:11 ff. ‘The outward uncircumcision of the Gentiles is a type of their unchastened carnal mind.’<sup>3</sup> Then even Lightfoot agrees that, ‘though the literal meaning is not excluded, the spiritual reference is most prominent, as appears from ver. 11.’<sup>4</sup>]) were dead (νεκροὺς ὄντας)” spiritually, that is (Eph. 2:1; Rm. 5:12); “Death means separation, not annihilation...Cut off from spiritual life (the unsaved), still have human life.”<sup>5</sup> Many reformed theologians say that spiritually dead man cannot respond to anything spiritual *at all*. He cannot sincerely think, feel, or decide about spiritual things. Thus in order for them to respond they have to be born again *first* by a direct, sovereign act of God, and then they can believe. In their view being born again *causes* faith, but vs. 12 attributed being raised up with Christ, i.e., the new birth, to “faith,” just the opposite of reformed theology. Similarly, Peter said, “for you have been born again...through the living and abiding word of God” (1Pt. 1:23), i.e., they heard the word preached, believed it, and as a result, they were born again. See Paul’s statement; “So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rm. 10:17). So reformed theology with its sort of “cosmic determinism” winds up putting the cart before the horse. There is no question that we are saved by faith, not “faithed by salvation, i.e., the new birth,” to put it somewhat facetiously.

That they were “dead in” their “transgressions (παραπτώμασιν ‘in imagery of one making a false step so as to lose footing: a violation of moral standards, *offense, wrongdoing, sin*’<sup>6</sup>)” means that they were dead because of them and were therefore bound by them with no way to escape in and of themselves. They were slaves to sin. They were also dead in the “uncircumcision

1Lightfoot, Joseph Barber. Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. 8th ed. London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886. 183.

2Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) 1998, c1933.

3Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon., 8th ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886). 184.

4Lightfoot, Joseph Barber. Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. 8th ed. London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886. 184.

5Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

6William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 770.

of” their “flesh,” an expression that is consistent with the context in vs. 11, where we had the expression, “you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh.” It seems clear enough there that the circumcision which is, “the removal of the body of the flesh,” is essentially the antithesis of, “the uncircumcision of your flesh” here. The two are identical if we remove the prefix in “uncircumcision,” making it, “circumcision.” So, “the...circumcision of your flesh” is the same thing as, “the removal of the body of the flesh.” We noted that the, “circumcision made without hands (cf. Rm. 2:29), in the removal of the body of the flesh” essentially means that at the moment of faith by a direct act of God, the power of, “the body of the flesh,” or here, “the flesh,” is broken. As a result the believer is at liberty to say “no” to the flesh, which is, “that complex of evil desires arising from our as yet unredeemed body” (cf. Rm. 8:23), as we noted in the previous message.

In the middle of being dead in those awful circumstances, Paul said, “He made you alive together with Him.” Does “He” refer to the Father or to the Son? Lightfoot says, “There can be little doubt that ὁ θεὸς is the nominative to συνεζωοποίησεν.”<sup>7</sup> So it is in Eph. 2:4-5, which see. The NIV translation reflects this view, “God made you alive with Christ.” Robertson agrees, “Probably θεὸς...(God) is the subject because expressly so stated in Eph. 2:4f. and because demanded by συν αὐτῶ...here referring to Christ. This can be true even if Christ be the subject of ἦρκεν...in verse 14,”<sup>8</sup> which he does not believe is the case.

He made us alive only after, “having forgiven (χαρισάμενος) us all our transgressions.” Sin, the thing that caused spiritual death in the first place, has to be dealt with logically prior to the giving of life. The death penalty had to be paid first. Jesus paid it (vs. 14). Now forgiveness is possible, something that would otherwise have remained impossible apart from Jesus paying the price. To forgive is, “to give up resentment of or claim to requital for (<forgive an insult>)...to grant

relief from payment of.”<sup>9</sup> The price having been paid by the Son, the Father makes no claim on any believer to pay Him back. He lets it go *in Christ*. This parallels Eph. 2:4 ff. nicely. Please notice the extent to which transgressions are forgiven forensically. They are forgiven in their *totality*, “having forgiven us **all** our transgressions (bold added for emphasis),” past, present, and future. This is positional and/or forensic forgiveness for the penalty of sin, and does not rule out the possible need for the family forgiveness of 1Jn. 1:9.

2. (vs. 14) Forgiveness in turn is conditioned upon and could only happen logically after “having canceled out (ἐξαλείψας *aorist, active, participle*) the certificate of debt (χειρόγραφον).” The word for “having canceled out (ἐξαλείψας)” originally meant, “to cause to disappear by wiping...wipe away...wipe out, erase,”<sup>10</sup> then changed, “to the more general mng...to remove so as to leave no trace, remove, destroy, obliterate.” The word was a, “t.t. in the papyri for washing out a papyrus sheet.”<sup>11</sup> It was “the certificate of debt (χειρόγραφον ‘a hand-written document’<sup>12</sup>)” that was obliterated so that no trace of it was left. What is this “certificate of debt” and who owed it? It originally stood for a hand-written line in an accounting ledger that indicated a debt owed. It was, “written in one’s own hand as a proof of obligation, e.g., a note of indebtedness...The meaning in Col. 2:14, then, is a ‘promissory note.’”<sup>13</sup> If it were not paid, then obviously the debtor would be in trouble. Such was the case for Paul and his readers, and for all mankind for we owed just such a debt, though not financial in nature or some other material or mere earthly obligation. Our debt was said to be, “consisting of decrees (τοῖς δόγμασιν) against us.” The word for “decrees” is one from which we get our word “dogma,” meaning, “A doctrine or a corpus of doctrines relating to matters such as morality and faith, set forth in an authoritative

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 8th ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886), 183.

<sup>8</sup>Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) 1998, c1933.

<sup>9</sup>*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated) 1993.

<sup>10</sup>William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 344.

<sup>11</sup>William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 344.

<sup>12</sup>Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 1083.

<sup>13</sup>Kittel, Gerhard, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985. 1312.

manner by a church.”<sup>14</sup> That is perhaps an extension of our meaning here, which is, “a formal statement concerning rules or regulations that are to be observed.”<sup>15</sup> The primary reference is to Israel and her *failure* regarding the commandments of the Law of Moses. The term is translated “ordinances” in the very similar context of Eph. 2:14-16, where with reference to Jesus Paul said that He, “broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances (δόγμασιν), that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.” No, Israel did not literally sign by hand that she would keep the Law, but she did publicly and corporately say, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do” (Ex. 24:3b)! That certainly amounted to an obligation. Gentiles are not to be excluded here in Paul’s first person personal pronoun, “us (ἡμῖν),” since many in Colossians were Gentiles. As we know, Paul said to the Romans, “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus” (Rm. 2:14-16). Any time a Gentile says “yes” or “no” in agreement with his own conscience, he is effectively signing on in agreement with the principles of the law in his own heart. (This is particularly the case, when in connection with the typical thought pattern of the unsaved Gentile, this would be understood in connection with the elementary principles of the world, that is, he would naturally suppose that compliance therewith would mean his salvation.) Similarly Lightfoot says, “the ‘bond’ is the moral assent of the conscience, which (as it were) signs and seals the obligation.”<sup>16</sup> The extent to which any person

failed to live up to the proper moral standards to which he had obligated himself and failed to keep them, was the same extent to which those decrees were “hostile to” him. The expression “hostile to us” shows that again both Jew and Gentile are in view. “Hostile to” translates the Greek expression, ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, meaning literally, “*set over against, opposite,*”<sup>17</sup> and is, “a strengthened form of *enantios* (*en*, *in*, and *antios*, set against). The intensive force is due to the preposition *hupo*. It is translated ‘contrary to,’ in Col. 2:14, of ordinances; in Heb. 10:27, ‘adversaries.’ In each place a more violent form of opposition is suggested than in the case of *enantios*.”<sup>18</sup> This strong opposition in the form of hostility was inevitable because failing to keep the Law brought the condemnation of the Law, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM” (Gal. 3:10b; cf. Deut. 27:16). Yes even Gentiles know the penalty for violating the principles of the work of the Law written on their hearts, namely, death (Rm. 1:32). No wonder that Paul said, “The last enemy that will be abolished is **death**” (1Cor. 15:26 – bold added for emphasis).

Here is how God canceled out the certificate of debt: “He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” “Has taken (ἤρκεν *perfect, active, indicative*) it (αὐτὸ) out of the way (ἐκ τοῦ μέσου),” literally, “out of the middle”; This means as if it were an impassable barrier in the middle of the road to peace with God and/or salvation, though BDAD says, “*from among*”<sup>19</sup> is the sense; no translation that we have found reflects that view, except the Catholic, “from our midst.”<sup>20</sup> (There may be others.) This whole expression reminds us of the fact that what the blood of bulls and goats could never do, namely, “take away sin” (Heb. 10:4), Jesus did as He Himself satisfied the righteous requirements of God concerning every Jewish violation of the Mosaic Law and every Gentile violation of conscience. In so doing, our Heavenly Father

14The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Electronic version licensed from InfoSoft International, Inc. All rights reserved.

15William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 254.

16Lightfoot, Joseph Barber. Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. 8th ed. London and New York: Macmillan and co., 1886. 185.

17Thomas, Robert L. New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries : Updated Edition. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998, 1981. H8674.

18Vine, W. E., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.

19Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. 635.

20Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops and United States Catholic Conference. Administrative Board. The New American Bible : Translated from the Original Languages With Critical Use of All the Ancient Sources and the Revised New Testament. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1996, c1986. Col 2:14.

(Lightfoot says that Jesus is the subject here, Robertson probably correctly says that the Father is, consistent with the previous verse.) in the work of His Son on the cross, not only forgives all who believe in Jesus of their sins committed in violation of Law and conscience, He also takes the very “certificate of debt” “out of the way” as we saw, “having nailed it to the cross.” “Having nailed (προσηλώσας)” reminds of the nails that were used to hang Jesus our Lord on the cross. He was there absorbing the penalty for all failures of man regarding the certificate of debt. The author to the Hebrews mentions that we can draw near to God, “by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Hb. 10:20). As there, so also here, figurative language is used. Because Jesus’ body was yielded up in being nailed to the cross as an offering for these obligations man could never meet, it follows that the “the handwriting of requirements”<sup>21</sup> itself or themselves were nailed up and thus done away, as it were. It spells the end of the Law. Vine says, “The Death of Christ not only rendered the Law useless as a means of salvation, but gave public demonstration that it was so.”<sup>22</sup>

B. Jesus defeated our enemy, the Satanic forces of evil spirits (2:15).

1. (vs. 15) (It needs to be acknowledged that, “Modern scholars differ radically”<sup>23</sup> about almost every aspect of this verse, but the NASB translation seems accurate enough and we will follow it.) Part and parcel with obeying the command of 2:8 to not permit anyone to take us “captive,” a military term, “through philosophy and empty deception,” is to realize that when Jesus completed His work on the cross, our “adversary, the devil” (1Pt. 5:8) was defeated, and with him all those demons whom he swept away at his initial fall from heaven (Rev. 12:4). That defeat is described here to encourage us in our spiritual fight: “When He,” God the Father, “had disarmed (ἀπεκδυσάμενος *aorist, middle, participle; probably better, aorist, deponent, participle*, thus weakening the possibility for the

sense, ‘divested Himself’ of either good angels as in connection with their mediating with ref. to the Law [bec. at the cross He did away with it], or with ref. to their assistance in our Lord’s earthly ministry; or evil angels in the sense that He defeated them primarily with regard to their effort to prevent Him doing the work of the cross itself.),” or better, *after* “He had disarmed” them, that is, “the rulers (ἀρχὰς ‘of angelic or transcendent powers, since they were thought of as having a political organization’<sup>24</sup>) and authorities (ἐξουσίας),” with both these terms to be understood in the sense of Eph. 6:12; “disarmed” has the basic sense of, “*take off, strip off* of clothes,”<sup>25</sup> used metaphorically in 3:9 (its only other NT occurrence), where it is translated, “laid aside,” but here the picture is of a defeat in spiritual conflict. Satan had hoped for a defeat of Christ at the cross. However, instead *he* was defeated because Christ successfully paid for all sins, and through His death the Father reconciled, “all things to Himself” (Col. 1:19). Further His resurrection (cf. 2:12) verifies His victory and Satan’s army’s defeat (cf. Hb. 2:14).

The expression “He,” still the Father, “made a public display (ἐδειγμάτισεν in the sense, ‘*mock, expose*’<sup>26</sup>) of them” comes from, “The metaphor of a triumphant Roman general who strips his foes and leads them as captives behind his chariot in his victory procession is used to describe how God in Christ stripped from the powers of evil their control over the lives of men.”<sup>27</sup>

The Father did this only *after*, “having triumphed (θριαμβεύσας – verb, aorist, active, participle) over them through Him.” The KJV and NKJV substitute “it,” i.e., the cross for “Him.” The Greek pronoun can go either way being either masc., Him, or neut., it. We choose “Him” because we maintain that the “Father” is the subject throughout the three verses. Switching subject in vs. 14 is extremely awkward and unnecessary notwithstanding Lightfoot and others.

21 *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

22 W.E. Vine and F.F. Bruce, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* : W.E. Vine ; Old Testament Edited by F.F. Bruce, electronic ed. (Old Tappan NJ: Revell, 1981; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996), 99.

23 Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) 1998, c1933.

24 William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 138.

25 Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 100.

26 Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 214.

27 W.A. Criswell, *Believer's study Bible [computer file]*, electronic ed., *Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1991 by the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies.

### III Conc.

When we were at our very worst, “dead in” our “transgressions and the uncircumcision of” our “flesh,” God did His very best, “He made” us “alive together with Him.” This was conditioned on the forgiveness of sin, which in turn was conditioned upon the cancellation of everything connected with the Law and its condemnatory judgments, which He, the Father, “out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Moreover, the forces of “these evil powers which inspire legalistic rules about foods and festivals,”<sup>28</sup> and whom the Gnostics worshiped were thoroughly routed by God in Christ’s death on the cross. Therefore we are free from legalistic tyranny having been made alive spiritually because on the basis of the forgiveness of sin because all our obligations with regard to our failure in respect to the Law things are satisfied, the Law itself having been done away.

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<sup>28</sup>Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.