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## Made Us Free Colossians 2:14-15

**Intro:** In our last study, Paul counter the allure of the hollow, deceitful philosophy of the false teachers by once again declaring the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is fully God, that He is actually God and His deity is a solid reality (9). Of course, this wonderful truth bears with it some wonderful consequences for all believers. Because Jesus is fully God, believers are complete in Him (10). Finding our fullness in Christ means all that we can know or experience of God is found in a relationship with Christ. In Christ, believers also receive a spiritual circumcision by putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh (11). It's our transition from the old nature to new life in Christ that identifies us as part of the people of God.

As believers, we identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ by surrendering to believer's baptism (12). Our baptism serves as a public example that we have indeed been made alive together with Christ (13). Just as Christ was raised from the dead to new life, we've also been raised from our own spiritual death, a death resulting in our separation from God because of our sin. But God, in His grace and by the work of Christ on the cross, has forgiven those who accept Christ as their Savior from all of their sins. To the same degree that we are complete in Christ, so too the forgiveness we enjoy in Christ is total: all trespasses. The reality that our forgiveness is both complete and definitive is the theme of the next verse.

**14-** As straightforward as this passage may appear, there is actually quite a wide array of interpretations associated with it. Some see this handwriting of requirements as being a list of our crimes or moral debt before God, a debt that no imperfect person could ever hope to pay. The term handwriting is a general term for a handwritten document. Some take it in a legal sense as representing the charges against a prisoner, or a confession of wrong made by a prisoner. Others take it in a financial sense, seeing it as a debit or ledger sheet that shows we are bankrupt before God. Some see the requirements as being nothing less than the 10 Commandments, the only real requirements for humanity, requirements that every human being has broken and are thus rendered guilty before God because of it.

None of these viewpoints are doctrinally inaccurate and they each have their own appeal to certain aspects of the gospel and are, in fact, closely related to the theme of the text but is this what Paul is actually talking about here? In the spirit of accuracy, I believe it's important for a better understanding of the text that we should dig a little deeper. In this verse, Paul presents 2 striking word pictures that accurately reveal how all-encompassing our forgiveness really is. The first word picture portrays a metaphorical document that all human beings have signed, an IOU as it were, in which we pledge complete allegiance to God. As we know, an IOU is a note that acknowledges the obligation to pay a debt; it's written down and signed by the borrower as a pledge of personal indebtedness. Paul's letter to Philemon provides a good example of one ([Philemon 19](#)).

Our sins stand as conclusive evidence that we've failed to give God our promised allegiance and so that document is against us and contrary to us. But God has taken that document and wiped it clean. In Paul's day, financial records were often kept on parchment and the writing could be washed off. Scholars tell us that the ancient Greek word that is translated wiped out is a compound of the word to anoint with the prefix that means completely. The idea is that something was completely wiped over. In the ancient world the term was used of whitewashing a wall or overlaying a wall with gold. It means that the accusations against us were completely wiped away and covered over.

Indeed, God has taken that document completely out of the picture. He has canceled the debt that we owed Him. The human failure to obey God leaves people indebted to Him and liable for any and all penalty clauses attached to His requirements. The basic penalty clause of sin is, of course, the breaking of our relationship with God and the subsequent abandonment to the consequences of sin. The consequences of sin are multiple and varied but they all result in destruction: of our emotions, intellect and physical body but ultimately, the Bible tells us that the wages of sin (what you pay for sin) is death ([Rom 6:23](#)). That separation from God that results from sin is experienced in this life by all human beings and if they fail to address it, if they fail remedy it, that separation from God will carry on over into eternity. The ultimate destruction of sin is spending eternity separated from the presence of God.

How does one remedy this separation from God? By coming to Christ and

accepting Him as your own personal Savior and allowing Him to accomplish in you everything that Paul has been saying since v10: making you complete, spiritually circumcised, identifying with His death, burial and resurrection and being made alive together with Christ. These blessings, or benefits, are only provided to those who are actually in Christ; those who recognize that they need a Savior and have repented of their sin. That's a critical aspect of salvation – you can't expect God to remove the penalty of your sin if you're not willing to see your sin as He sees it and turn away from it like the plague that it is.

One is not a Christian merely because they choose to call themselves one and we cannot inherit or receive salvation from other people. Each individual must choose to accept Christ for themselves and then walk in the blessings of that choice. But how is this change of status really accomplished? Paul illustrates this with his second word picture when he declares that this document that was against us was nailed...to the cross. This highlights both the completeness of the removal of our sin and the means by which it was accomplished. It was all wiped away by the cross!

The obvious conclusion from the nailing of our IOU to the cross is that Christ took upon Himself our debt of sin and expunged it with His own death. His death on the cross was critical. How could a holy God remain a just God if He arbitrarily canceled out our debt of sin? He couldn't! Today, if a judge sets a person free who is guilty of a crime, that unjust judge cheapens the law and leaves the injured party without legal restitution. It would rightly be considered a travesty of justice. But God didn't arbitrarily cancel our sin debt; Jesus Christ, His Beloved Son, paid the full debt of our sin when He died on the cross. He did everything possible to make certain that the handwriting of requirements that was against us could no longer accuse us.

Now, some have objected that this idea of Christ's payment of our sin debt makes God immoral in that He takes out on Jesus what is really deserved by others. This objection has no force, however, since Paul has taken great pains to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is God's incarnate self – God in the flesh. So the real story of the cross is about God taking upon Himself the consequences of sin of His own creation, to bring that creation back into a right relationship with Him. It was in this way, and only in this way, that God could be both just, and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus (Rom 3:26). It was by means of Christ's death on the cross that God could retain

His holiness and still offer justification to all those who, by faith, accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza of Horatio Spafford's much-loved hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" beautifully captures the point of this 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!" When Romans crucified criminals, there was generally a placard or parchment fastened to their cross, above their heads, that listed their crimes against Rome. You remember when Jesus was crucified, Pilate put an inscription over His head that declared "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Luke 23:38). But Paul, looking at the cross, saw there instead the inscription that expressed the charge against all of Jesus' people, the written code that stood over against them, disqualifying them from a relationship with God. And it was God, not Pilate that put it there.

**15-** With this verse, Paul brings to a conclusion his explanation of how we have been made complete in Christ (10). In a nod to a key concern of the letter, 15 ends as the section began, focusing on principalities and powers. In v10, Paul simply asserts that Christ is the head of those spiritual powers. Now he shows how that headship has been manifested, as God, through the cross of Christ, has won a victory over the rebellious powers. Note the progression of Christ's work on the cross as Paul describes it: having forgiven you (13b), having wiped out (canceled) the handwriting (14a) by having nailed it to the cross (14b), having disarmed all malevolent spiritual powers (15a). This one event, as horrible and dreadful as it was, accomplished so many things that are a benefit to believers.

The first consequence of Christ's redeeming death for these rebellious spiritual powers is that they have been stripped of all their power. The word translated disarmed is a rare verb, which doesn't appear anywhere before this letter, actually means strip off, or take off [clothes]. We saw it in v11 and it appears again in 3:9, where it refers to believers stripping off the old self. In all 3 places where Paul uses the term in Colossians, the basic sense of taking off [clothes] has the extended metaphorical sense of stripping off of power. Christians strip off the body of flesh in conversion and are thus freed from its power. After salvation, Christians likewise strip off the "old self" and are freed from its controlling influence. So too, God in Christ has stripped the spiritual rulers of their power, disarming them.

Paul is providing us with a behind the scenes look into Jesus' crucifixion on Golgotha, a scene that was not visible to any of the spectators that were present. This image captures what Paul calls the hidden wisdom of the crucifixion in [1 Cor 2:6-8](#) and it drips with so much irony. The greatest powers of the earth at that time – Rome, the greatest governmental power and Judaism, the greatest religious power – conspired together to put the Son of God on the cross. Jesus' captors dragged Him through the city, stripped Him naked, held Him up to contempt and nailed the charges against Him to His cross. What they failed to realize was that God was doing the same thing to them! The great paradox of the cross is that the victorious Jesus took the spiritual powers that were animating these earthly powers and stripped them of their power, held them up to contempt and publicly triumphed over them!

We can only imagine how Satan and his wretched demon attacked Jesus as He hung on the cross on our behalf, as if He were a guilty sinner. One theologian put it this way: "As He was suspended there, bound hand and foot to the wood in apparent weakness, they imagined they had Him at their mercy, and flung themselves on Him with hostile intent. But, far from suffering their attack without resistance, He grappled with them and mastered them, stripping them of the armor in which they trusted, and held them aloft in His outstretched hands, displaying to the universe their helplessness and His own unvanquished strength" (Bruce). Paul wrote in [1 Cor 2:8](#) that if the rulers of this age – both the spiritual powers of darkness and their earthly representatives – had known what would happen on the cross, they would never have crucified Jesus. They were defeating themselves and they didn't even know it!

Against the believer, what weapons do demonic spirits have now? These ranks of hostile angelic beings don't have the same weapons to use against Christians that they have against those who are not in Christ. They are effectively disarmed except for their ability to deceive and create fear. These are not tangible weapons at all but they are still effective weapons. Demonic spirits only have power towards us that we grant them by believing their lies. Satan cannot harm the believer who will not harm themselves. It's when we cease to watch and pray (like Peter did) that Satan can use his flimsy weapons against us. The reality is: all true spiritual weapons are in our hands, not theirs! We have the truth of God's Word in our hands and hearts,



the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the power of Jesus Christ at our immediate disposal. One day we will be able to look back and see just how afraid these spiritual powers were of us.

We see in this verse that Paul is pulling out all the stops to make it as clear as he can that God has removed any claim or power that the spiritual powers might have over us and that He has done so clearly and publicly. But, if all this was going on behind the scenes of the crucifixion, how did He make a public spectacle of these newly disarmed spiritual powers? It certainly wasn't in the crucifixion; that's where they thought they had finally defeated Christ. No, the public humiliation of these spiritual powers came by way of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. God made them a public spectacle by showing how utterly impotent they were before the divine demonstration of love and forgiveness revealed in the cross and how utterly helpless they were to resist the divine power that raises the dead.

This understanding fits perfectly with other NT texts. In [Ephesians](#), Paul asserts that God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavenly places, far above all principality and powers and might and dominion...([1:20-21](#)). In [Rom 1:4](#), Paul teaches that Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection. In his Day-of-Pentecost sermon, Peter similarly argues that it is the resurrection that demonstrates the reality of God's presence in and with Christ ([Acts 2:32-33](#)). This pattern suggests that we have a progression in the text: it was on the cross ([14b](#)) that God disarmed the rebellious spiritual powers, but it was in Christ's resurrection and ascension that God put on public display the reality of that victory over those powers.

The final image of the text is the phrase triumphing over them in it. Paul used similar phrasing in [II Cor 2:14](#), where he had in mind the Roman victory parade where a conquering general who had won a great victory on foreign soil, had taken many captives and much loot, and had gained new territory for Rome, was honored by an official parade known as the Roman Triumph. It was in this parade that the victorious general led his defeated captives through the streets in shackles and chains to graphically and publicly demonstrate both their humiliation and his triumph. Paul used this same image in [Eph 4:8](#) where, quoting [Ps 68:18](#), he applied it to Jesus by saying, When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive or, He led captives in His train.

Again, the irony is striking! The paradox of the crucifixion is placed in the strongest light: triumph in helplessness and glory in shame. If this is the difficult path Jesus had to trod to achieve ultimate victory over Satan, death and hell; how could it be any different for those who follow in His footsteps. It can't be, in fact, Paul assures us in **II Cor 12:9** that the Lord's strength is made perfect in our lives through our weakness. If we attempt to serve the Lord in our own strength, we will burn out and be defeated but if we recognize our lack of strength and petition the Lord daily for His strength, then it will be made perfect in our lives and in our ministries.

God has triumphed through Christ's death on the cross over every spiritual power and authority. The rulers put Him to death without knowing that through His death He would conquer them and escape their rule. They have been disarmed, stripped of their dignity and consigned to bring up the rear in Christ's victory procession. They sit at the judgment bar like the war criminals who were brought before the Nuremberg tribunal at the end of World War II and are exposed as weak, beggarly and pathetic; their powerlessness displayed for all to see. Christ reigns supreme over all these rulers and authorities (**1:16**) and all those who are in Christ never need to fear them and should never attempt to venerate them. Christians belong to Christ, who governs the cosmos and secures us from all threats.

The death of Christ was not only a pardon for us; it also manifested might. It not only canceled a debt; it was a glorious triumph! As believers, we not only walk in the light of Christ's kingdom, in the grace and forgiveness He accomplished on the cross but we also walk in the power and might that it brings to our lives. Christ is victorious, Satan is defeated and the only weak link in this equation is our flesh, our old nature. That's why Paul is constantly exhorting believers to put off the old nature, the old man and put on Christ, put on and walk in both the righteousness He provides to us as well as the strength and might.

We are already victorious in Christ and we cannot allow adverse circumstances to distract us from that truth. When things don't go the way we expected, when life takes a turn for the worse, we remember that Jesus is victorious, He is Lord over all the powers that are arrayed against us as well as Lord over our lives. He is in control and He has allowed these adverse circumstances to come into our lives, and it could be for a number

of different reasons but the ultimate reason is for us to glorify His name in the midst of them by our actions and attitudes. 😊