

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us

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[0 : 00] I will now this evening for a short time to consider words you will find in the chapter we've read in Paul's epistle to the Colossians, chapter 2.

And we may read from verse 13. And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, have he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and to get out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

And having spelled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Especially verse 14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and to get out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

Now, Paul, as he writes to these Christians at Colossae, is writing to a church which he had not visited.

He had nevertheless heard of their faith. But he had not, at least until now, visited them personally.

[1 : 35] And yet, he knew an awful lot about them. He knew from various, from the testimony of various people, how not only they were standing fast in Christ, but how also their faith was being tested and tried on account of certain people's ideas and beliefs among them.

The Colossian church had not been established by Paul. It was, you might call, an outgrowth of his ministry in Ephesus. It was Epaphras and Philemon who were used of God, especially in the upbuilding of his cause in that part of the world.

But Paul is very concerned about the welfare of the church at Colossae. As he was concerned about the welfare of the church of Christ in general, he bore the church upon his spirit.

He prayed continually, not just for one small group, or even one small group here and there, but he himself testifies to the fact that he bore that burden of the whole church of Christ upon his spirit.

And you will notice he testifies here to the fact that he is among them in the spirit. He was a spiritually exercised man who was near to his God and undoubtedly was blessed of God with apostolic blessings that we know nothing about and we need not to know about.

[3 : 23] But nevertheless, having said that, surely we have in him one that we ought to seek to emulate, to seek the grace of God whereby we may bear one another's burdens also and be more broad-minded as it were in our understanding of the Catholicity or the world church, that is, the church, the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ that is scattered throughout the world.

Well, why was it that Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians? Well, there was a crisis in the church. False doctrines were rising in that church.

There was the Colossian heresy, as it is called, which was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, and that comes out truly in this chapter itself.

There was also an element of what theologians call Gnosticism there, meaning to know. There were those people who were in the know, theologically speaking, there.

There were what you might call the spiritual aristocracy of the church. There were such people as maintained that they had a particular close union with God that no one had achieved but them alone, that they had reached to a spiritual depth that no one else knew.

[4 : 55] There were also certain rules and regulations based on Jewish law. They believed that matter was evil and therefore the body was evil.

But strangely enough, although they believed that, they also believed that as all evil was, as all flesh was thus, all evil was permissible.

There was an awful mixture there. And this is the kind of situation that Paul was writing against. The circumstances were very, very difficult indeed, confronting the church at Colossae.

And God, the Holy Spirit, inspired Paul to write this wonderful letter to them. There was this awful mixture of Jewish legalism and Oriental philosophy, pagan astrology, mysticism, and even some Christianity.

And against this, Paul writes this wonderful letter, as I said. The theme of the epistle is the preeminence of Christ.

[6 : 18] Christ comes to the forefront here. Christ in the gospel message. Christ in his redemption. Christ in the church.

The glory of the Christ who died and rose again, which is always the answer to whatever heresy may encroach upon the liberty of God's people.

We believe that a full-erbed Christian ministry, that is a ministry wherein Christ, the centrality of Christ and the cross of Christ, has its proper place, that that is the only answer to whatever heresy may be confronting the church of Christ in whatsoever age.

That is why Paul, for example, in writing to the Corinthians, these Christians, they are confronted with difficulties and heresy also. What was it that Paul had to say to them?

He said, We preach Christ and him crucified. To the Jews a stumbling block. To the Greeks foolishness. But to those that are called both Jews and Greeks.

[7 : 35] Christ the power of God. Christ the wisdom of God. And I wish to turn with you this evening to consider the words before us here, which have to do indeed surely with what Christ has done.

He has written quite a lot before these verses about the person of Christ, about who he is. In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

And ye are complete in him. And so on. And then he goes on to, in the words before us, bring to us what Christ, in his infinite mercy, has done for such as we are.

You being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and to get out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

Now, I'm sure that you would all agree with me that one of the greatest blessings, if not the greatest blessing, you and I tonight could think of would be the forgiveness of sin.

[9 : 02] That is something I believe that all of us agree upon. That if we knew in truth that our sins are forgiven us, that that would be blessing indeed.

A wonderful blessing. It is a wonderful blessing in the eyes of all who seek it, but it is also a wonderful blessing in the eyes of all who have received it.

And to them, it is a blessing all the more precious when they contemplate the way in which sin has been forgiven.

The way in which sin has been pardoned. If forgiveness of sin is precious, the means whereby sins are forgiven becomes even more precious, I believe.

because God has not simply pardoned our sins by an act of his will.

[10 : 23] That is, as a creditor remits the debt of a debtor. God willed to pardon his people's sins. But that wasn't sufficient to pardon our sin, to bring about our pardon.

God's justice, which we had violated, had to be satisfied. And that is the great question confronting us tonight as we consider the forgiveness of sin.

How can a just God forgive the sins of any man? Scripture clearly teaches us that God is just, God is true, God is righteous, God is holy.

How can such a God forgive our sins? forgiveness. Now Paul has been speaking here of the great love of God in forgiving sin.

And he goes on here now to add, as it were, the foundation of this forgiveness. And the means by which it has been obtained.

[11 : 47] Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, he took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

I want to consider with you, in the light of these words tonight, first of all, briefly, what this handwriting was, and secondly, how God blotted it out.

First of all then, the handwriting that was against us, or the obligation that we find here, Scripture brings out so clearly.

Now, in these words, Scripture speaks of sin as a debt. It likens sin to a debt.

Elsewhere, sin is spoken of as wages. The wages of sin is death. Here, Scripture likens sin to a debt. And, so it does elsewhere.

[13 : 02] You will remember in the prayer that our Lord taught his disciples, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Herein, forgive us our sins or our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us. And, we can find other Scriptures also which emphasize this side to sin and transgression.

So that as a debt obliges a person to payment, so also does sin oblige a person to punishment.

We may think very little of sin. We may play with it. We may try to water to water it down, as it were, in its severity and in its consequences.

But the fact is that God saves, not man, not me, not any other man. The soul that sinneth, it shall die.

[14 : 13] And as a debt gives the creditor a certain power over the debtor, sin, so sin leaves the offender under the law of God.

We are under God's law, and God has the same right to punish the sinner as the creditor has to make his debtor pay. Oh, that we would realize that tonight.

This is our great need. we may have come in here conscious of many needs that we have. Many needs we think that we have and are not needs at all.

But if we would only realize tonight that our greatest need is to know ourselves as sinners in the presence of a holy, a just, a righteous, and a true God.

This is what's happening to us as a people. We're forgetting the offensiveness of sin to a holy God. We're forgetting that sin is that awful thing that God cannot abide.

[15 : 24] He is of purer eye than that he should behold iniquity. And my friends, let us remember that not one of us tonight dare even suggest that we have not sinned, in that scripture tells us that all have sinned and come short, of the glory of God.

There are none that doeth good, no, not one. Whoever we are, whatever we are, this is what is true of us, whether it's this leveling out in the sight of God, of all mankind before him, as they are in their natural state, they are sinners before God.

And God has a right to punish us as sinners. I've already said that God has the same right to punish the sinner as the predator has to make his debt or pay.

But there is one important difference, my friends. Debts owned by one man to another may remain unpaid. and that happens so often in our day.

But God's justice never leaves sin unpunished. That cannot be. Not even when the offended party, that is God, forgives the offender, that is the sinner.

[16 : 50] Sin does not go unpunished. And we mustn't go away with the idea that one sin of which you and I are guilty can possibly go unpunished because God is God.

Where sin to go unpunished, God would cease to be God and that cannot be, that will not be. What's wrong with us is that we equate God with man.

But God is not like man. God is above man and above everything man has ever comprehended. sin.

Now it is in this sense of sin being a debt that Paul uses the term the handwriting of ordinances that are against us.

The handwriting of ordinances. Now the word as used originally we are told meant any acknowledgement signed by us, by any person that is, by which we confess we owe a man a certain sum and bind ourselves to pay that man back.

[18 : 17] Now we all know about that don't we in this modern age of ours we all know about the credit card and some to their shame know much about that.

I didn't dwell upon it. we know what it is to owe that sum for which we have signed away so much.

So I needn't go into detail about that matter. That was really the original usage of the term we are told. The man is bound to pay and is liable to his creditor as you and I are if we have a credit card in red.

Now what is the handwriting that God that Paul is speaking of here? Well in the context Paul is using this terminology with regard to God's law.

he is using it with regard to God's law. This is the instrument of our condemnation in the presence of God.

[19 : 46] It is that which condemns us. The law of ordinances. That is the Mosaic law. The law of God.

The same term is used by Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 where he states that he that is Christ abolished in his death the enmity even the law of commandments contained in ordinances.

It is the exact same idea that he uses there. The ordinances of God's law written by God through Moses.

that is that which declares the debt which we owe God. We believe that this is at least one of the senses in which Paul uses these words when he speaks of the law as their schoolmaster to lead us to Christ.

It teaches us certain things. What does it teach us? It teaches something about ourselves and it teaches us something about God. it teaches us that God demands certain things.

[20 : 56] It teaches us that God requires certain things of us as his creatures. And as we examine ourselves in the light of this instruction we find certain things true of ourselves.

And if we were to this night come to recognize something of the spirituality reality of this law of God we certainly would not feel very comfortable in his presence.

We're all so comfortable to sit back and we're so pleased with ourselves and we can go home and we say that was a wonderful sermon. But friends if only God the Holy Spirit would apply this law to us that we would see it for what it is.

We would understand something about ourselves that would leave us crying out and leave us anything but comfortable with ourselves and our condition and our state before God.

We'll realize that we're under the condemnation of God's law. This ordinance he tells us is against us.

[22 : 11] It is against us. The whole of the law of Moses was no other than an obligation against us. It is the instrument of our condemnation and we stand condemned before God tonight in the light of God's law as sinners.

Oh that we would realize this that that is our state. That is our awful state before God. This is that which evidences our sin.

It is that which indeed justifies our punishment. You see until such time as we come under a consciousness of the holiness of God and of his law we will argue and try and justify ourselves.

Oh no God is not really this kind of God at all. He is a God of love. He is not going to punish sin if there is a God. He is not that sort of God surely.

And we say well really on the other hand maybe I am not really all that bad after all. There are all sorts of arguments we put up in order to justify ourselves before God but when we are confronted with what I have already spoken of as the spirituality of God's law.

[23 : 33] The holiness of this law. The demands of this law. Oh we cease to argue. because we have no argument left. We did say God would be wrong not to punish me or that we would come to that place.

That we realize that tonight instead of excusing our sins. Instead of trying to justify ourselves. Instead of giving ourselves a little pat on the back as it were and saying oh well you see really it may be that I have done a little wrong but God wouldn't punish me for that.

No this law of ordinance is against us. The law of God it is the ministration of death and of condemnation.

Why? Because as scripture puts it by the knowledge by the law rather was given the knowledge of sin and hence forth we're without excuse.

God tells us the truth concerning ourselves and we are debtors to God. We're debtors to God.

[24 : 54] You see the law offers no hope. no hope whatsoever or encouragement it demands judgment without mercy and if you are outside of Christ tonight you are under that law and that law demands judgment it demands perfect obedience which we have not rendered.

I wonder if there's anyone here foolish enough tonight to believe that he or she has not or is not coming short of the demands of God's law.

You say is it possible for one to believe? I believe it is. Of course it is. The Pharisees of our Lord's day were like that. There are still Pharisees around. There are still people like that who maintain that they are better than others and they can do this and they're doing that and doing the other thing.

But that's simply because they have never been confronted really with the spirituality of God's law and the demands of God's law in a spiritual sense. What is it? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God not just part of you but with all your strength with all your might with all your heart your mind your will your every faculty has to be engaged 100% in the service of God in loving God to come up to the requirements of the law.

And can any of us tonight dare any of us even suggest that we do that and why then are we so foolish as to believe that we're not debtors in this sense.

[26 : 56] This law we are told was contrary to us. It was contrary to us. Now of itself the law is good and is holy and is profitable to man it is that which would lead man to life but because of sin it is contrary to us it is against us it is that which condemns us it is that which brings us down it's our enemy which gives the evidence or gives evidence of our crime of our debt again it burdens us with our yoke of bondage we're in bondage and all this why because of sin ah my friend I feel for you tonight if you're outside of Christ and know nothing of the liberty for with

Christ makes one free you're in an awful state you're in a fearful state but you're in a pitiful state also there's no one to be pitied more in the world tonight than any man woman boy or girl who is outside of Christ under the curse of a broken law oh my friend that is the state of all of us whoever we are either in Christ or out of Christ we're either redeemed from the condemnation that is due us for our sins according to this law or else we've been made free but I want to notice secondly with you tonight how this handwriting was abolished and that's a wonderful truth that we have before us here blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us which was contrary to us and to get out of the way nailing it to his cross this is the wonderful truth which

Paul here brings before us the same truth that is brought before us again and again in the word of God in scripture it is in fact that thin red line that you will find throughout scripture from Genesis to Revelation what is it it is the mercy of God to sinners who have forfeited every right to the least of God's mercies and who are according to the law debtors to God and yet unable to meet their debts you may be here tonight I don't know there may be someone here tonight and that's one of your problems in life's way how on earth are you going to meet your debts to your fellow man but all that would realize or ask yourself the question how are you going to meet your debts to

God well Paul here answers that question for us in so far as those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are concerned Paul tells us that God has abolished this obligation which was against us how by the cross my friends by the cross blotting out the handwriting of ordinances against us which was contrary to us he took it out of the way nailing it to his cross he tells us that this handwriting was blotted out remember going back to the original meaning of this handwriting that as

I did and the signing of the agreement as that agreement stands and whilst that handwriting is there the debt remains but this is what Paul is bringing to us here God in his word is bringing to us tonight this truth this truth that God has blotted out or erased this handwriting just as a man raises the name of a debtor which was on his book together with the son that was old this is the truth of scripture my friends with respect to what God has done for sinners such as you and I and the person of his son

[32 : 09] Jesus Christ so Paul tells us God has done with our sins my friends with reference to us and our sins he has blotted out our sins but even more Paul adds that he has taken it out of the way he has taken it out of the way as if he had torn up the paper on which our debt had been written just perhaps in case the marks of the erasing might remain God has taken this out of the way how how has he done this he has done this by the cross of Christ he has disemmeld it he has nailed this to the cross that is the hope of the sinner tonight whoever he is or she is this is our hope what

God has done in Christ Christ has nailed this to the cross he has disarmed it the same nails that pushed and tore the hands and feet of our Lord Jesus Christ tore and cut in pieces the obligations which were against us that's what Paul is saying that's what God's word is saying remember he is writing not only to comfort the Christians in regard to the standing in Christ but he is writing also in order to refute the legalism that was creeping into the church of Colossae in that heresy that was among them and he was emphasizing the centrality of the cross the fact that we are justified by faith in Christ in the finished work of Christ alone it is Christ who has done the work it is

Christ who has nailed this to the cross the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ in other words has disarmed the law it has disarmed the law it has vested the law of that killing force which it had against us wherefore my brethren ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ that ye should be married to another even to him who is raised from the dead that we should bring forth fruit to God Paul says in writing to the Romans how my friends what has happened is this that those who were under the covenant of works are now under the covenant of grace they are married to another remember how clearly Paul argues that case also in Romans isn't it where he speaks of the husband and the wife that if the wife marries another she's an adulteress whilst her husband liveth but once he dies that cannot be cannot be and so it is with the church that is united to

Christ oh we are the bride of Christ united to him forever we're no longer under the curse of a broken law for Christ was made a curse for us he bore that curse when he bore our sins in his own body upon the tree when he was nailed there God was dealing with our sins but he was dealing with his people's sins and with them there on that cross of Calvary Christ by his death has slain the law he slew that which was in a very real sense alive and demanding demanding from us that which we could never pay he took upon himself to bear the curse of the law what was that that was death so that he might slay it and friends he arose gloriously alive

I feel as Christians that is where we are losing out so much in our own day we need the spirit to that end I know that we may glory more in the living Christ having broken the curse forever he rose again Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law having been made a curse for us his blood bloated out forever the sentence of our condemnation there is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death there is no condemnation nor indeed ever can be why because Christ has borne the condemnatory judgment of God's people once and for all

[38 : 11] Christ as our surety has cancelled our debt he has paid what we owed every penny of it if you like has been paid sinner will you not flee to the cross of Christ or to the Christ of the cross you who perhaps have sought and is seeking to work your own way back to God you're only adding to your condemnation therein because therein you are indeed rejecting the provision of

God in Christ and you are not only rejecting you are neglecting the great salvation that is in Christ alone because were you to live to the age of Methuselah in endeavouring to fulfil the demands of God's law you cannot do it but this is what the truth of God brings to us that what we cannot do God has done in Christ believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and what he has done and you will be saved believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved there is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved where do you stand tonight are you standing condemned by the law in debt to

God or are you standing in Christ with the debt paid the obligation rubbed out torn in pieces free forever for if the son shall make you free you shall be free indeed and my believing friend if you have trusted your soul to this Christ who met all the obligations of God's justice and law then flee to him tonight and rest in him as the only saviour amen may God bless his word to us let us pray grant pour man all into start to serve him thy grace that we may look to thee and may all this night each and all of us come to trust in him who bore our sins in his own body upon the tree and take away our sin for jesus sake amen