

<sup>13</sup> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Far too often we hear about hostages. In recent memory, ones that have made the news involved hostages in Japan, Africa, the Philippines, the Middle East and, sadly, in our own country. Sometimes the details of their ordeals are recounted in the news. The worst involve gruesome videos of hostages being killed. Occasionally we witness the release of hostages and we can appreciate the relief and joy and tears of happiness we see even if we cannot completely comprehend the feeling of freedom they enjoy.

But there is a freedom we enjoy and a captivity that we have been released from. The way God talks about it is even more than that—it's nothing less than a return from the dead! Understanding what God tells us in these verses from Colossians chapter 2, leads us to appreciate that WE ARE ALIVE AND SET FREE! This matters because it explains our relationship with God by faith in Jesus and it helps us know how to live our Christian lives.

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In this section of Colossians, the Apostle Paul is focusing on what it means for us that Jesus lived and died and rose from the dead. As he does so, he relates to us where we were without Christ. And he uses an explanation that may seem kind of strange. This is actually a continuation of his imagery. He speaks of circumcision—which makes us think of the elective medical procedure for a baby boy. But he's using the term in a figurative sense to picture the cutting away of the sinful nature. At the beginning of our text, he speaks of the UNcircumcision of our sinful nature—so the NOT cutting away of our sinful nature, or the attachment of sin to us—sin that makes us dead to God.

The infection of that sin we are born with, along with the tripping and deliberate trespassing over the boundaries God has established, brings death—eternal death. Paul says that this was our condition before the holy God. When you and I were in that hopeless condition with only death ahead, this is what God did: **God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.**

This is pure grace—pure undeserved love! God the Father looked out and saw people—people that he loved—in a condition where they could not live with him eternally. The corruption of sin made people unfit to be with the perfect God. The eternal life of heaven with the Lord was an impossibility. The eternal punishment and death of hell was a certainty. You and I are included in this because the corruption of sin is passed down from generation to generation. It was never going to change because it couldn't. People who were dead in sin could not bring themselves out of

that. But God would not let that stand! He sent his one and only Son into the world to pay the penalty for all that original, natural sin and all the breaking of God's rules too.

This is how he described the work of Jesus: **He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**

What made Jesus' death matter? This gives us some insight. The written code and regulations Paul points to here are all the things the perfect God expects to see in us. This would include the moral law, the Ten Commandments, so things like not letting anything be more important to you than God, using his name carefully, worshiping regularly, respecting authorities, sexual purity, no stealing, protecting the reputation of others, contentment with what God has given you.

On top of that, add every other thing God ever expressed his will about before Christ came, so things like how worship was supposed to be and how to conduct the religious festivals and foods that were considered "clean" and edible for God's people and the things that were not to be eaten. All of those other things served a purpose as God prepared to send a Savior from sin. They would all help God's people of the past keep their focus on God. Each day they would also reveal the sinner's inability to even do *those* things perfectly, driving home the message that they needed a Savior from sin.

From the time he was born, through childhood and as an adult, Jesus never had a moral lapse. He never crossed a boundary God had established. He kept every commandment, every worship regulation, every food requirement—he did everything perfectly every day of his life. He did what God expects from every person but never gets. So Paul is explaining here that when Jesus went to the cross and he was nailed to it, the guilt and accusations that the law makes against imperfect sinners were nailed to the cross too!

When Paul writes that Jesus "cancelled" the written code—that damning law—the word he used is kind of interesting. Picture a whiteboard or a chalkboard with all those demands written on it. Now picture an eraser rubbing out those words, wiping them off the board so that they have disappeared and cannot come back. Paul's word for what Jesus did was that he wiped away the law, he erased it, he made it disappear! The thing that accused sinners and haunted them and told them that death in hell was their future has been wiped off the board! And he did it with the cross.

In doing this, Jesus **disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.** The things that held power over sinners—sin and eternal death...and the devil who rules over such darkness—*those* Jesus defeated with the cross! And like a victorious war hero, he proclaimed his victory by rising from death on Easter, leaving death and sin trailing behind him, powerless for both him and all who put their confidence in him!

When we were dead, God made us alive in Christ! Our future is not the dark and dreadful enduring death in hell that our sin formerly made us destined for. We have been brought over from death to life! We are **ALIVE IN CHRIST** now and will be forever in heaven also.

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This new life we have with God through the sacrifice of Jesus includes being set free from those many, many laws which God established to prepare his people for the Savior who was to come.

Some of this can be a little confusing for us and for others. For instance, some people say that if we believe the Bible to be God's Word, then why don't we do **EVERYTHING** it says in the Old Testament too, including weird things like a guy having to marry his brother's wife if he should die and they had no children...or sacrificing lambs to God...or any number of things we don't do. It kind of seems like picking and choosing what you want to do from the Bible. Again, these words help us understand what our life as God's people is to look like. Let me explain.

We sometimes refer to the Ten Commandments as God's Moral Law. They are recorded in the Old Testament and Jesus and the writers of the New Testament make it clear that they stand forever. All the other laws regarding religious ceremony and those pertaining to the government of God's people are not things we are expected to follow. These words of Paul in his divinely inspired letter to the Colossians help us to understand that.

Notice that he says **God made you alive with Christ...forgave us all our sins... canceled the written code, with its regulations...** He proclaims Christ's victory and then says, **Therefore...** *"Because of that,"* he says, **do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.** He's saying that Christ has set us free from those laws!

He picks out just a couple of examples. God had declared certain festivals to be celebrated annually, monthly and weekly. Passover and the Festival of Booths were a couple of the annual ones. New Moon celebrations may sound weird to us, as if they were worshiping the moon. I assure you they were not! In fact, God had implicitly forbidden them to do so because there was a moon cult among the non-Israelite community. Joining in that was punishable by death! No, each of Israel's months began with the new moon (a lunar calendar) and God commanded them to give special offerings to him at the time of each new moon. That was the monthly one. And the Sabbath Day was the weekly observance—a rest day, a day to follow God's example set at Creation and to worship him.

These were all very important for the believer and his or her relationship with God. These things set an order to worshiping God and connected the people's lives to their Creator. But these kinds of things as direct commands from God to be obeyed were only for a time. How does Paul explain it? **These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.** So...**do not let anyone judge you by them.** The same goes for the clean and unclean eating requirements.

Jesus explained that he came to fulfill those laws because sinful people could not keep them, could not please God by performing them perfectly. Their purpose was to draw the attention of sinners to God their Savior. It was like watching a shadow. If you were standing around a corner and you could see a shadow of someone coming, you wouldn't keep watching the shadow after the person rounded the corner! And so it is with Christ. We don't keep looking at those laws, we look at the real fulfillment of those in Jesus!

Our focus is now on Jesus who sets us free from those requirements. We don't have to watch for the New Moon and give a special offering. We can eat all the bacon we want! We don't have to save our worship for the seventh day—Saturday; we can join for worship anytime. (God still wants us to do so, but there is no particular day commanded.) We have a tremendous amount of freedom! Paul is saying that we should live that freedom with a clear conscious—**do not let anyone judge you**. This is also why we don't teach that a person **MUST** give 10% as an offering like God commanded in the Old Testament. That was part of these rules. We may take our cue from that previous command, but we are free to give whatever we wish, joyfully from our heart and according to New Testament encouragements that may even move us to give more than that!

For those early Christians Paul wrote to, this was quite a dramatic change to their lives. Imagine trying to embrace that kind of freedom after doing things a certain way for so long! He had to assure them that Jesus sets us free to live for God, no longer chained to those commands and the guilt and accusations that came from them. That can even be hard for us sometimes. We might think that in order to please God, we **MUST** do things in a certain way when it comes to church or our lives, when we actually have a great deal of freedom. We can be guilty of making laws that God has not given. We sin against others too if we suggest that they will be “better” Christians if they do these things. Binding ourselves or others to new laws for a Christian to follow is the old sin of the Pharisees, whom Jesus condemned for it. These are all ways we sin against the freedom Christ won for us. Those really deny Christ's victory and rob him of his glory.

Fortunately, we know that the cross is the place to go, as Paul reminds us here. There we find the fulfillment of the law laid down for us, the payment for sin made, and the victory of Christ proclaimed! We confess our sins against the still-standing moral law and our sins of creating new laws that take us hostage again, denying the freedom Christ won for us. In our repentance we find forgiveness from Jesus. And we look forward to our promised eternal life in heaven, where complete freedom and joy will be ours and we will be with the God of grace who loves us and saved us. Until that time comes, live as people who are truly **ALIVE AND SET FREE** by Jesus. Amen.

**Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**