



Conducted by
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“Could you please explain what Paul means in Col. 2:14 when he says, “Blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us”

It is difficult to understand the import of Paul’s letter to Colossae without some background knowledge of the situation as it was when the letter was written. You will no doubt remember that when Paul was at Miletus he called the elders of the church at Ephesus to him and warned them about the ‘grievous wolves’ which would enter

into the Church, not sparing the flock (See Acts 20:17-31). He had done battle with the Judaizing teachers, and now he has to ward off the onslaught of others who were trying to destroy the Church.

Paul was acutely aware of the peril to the Gospel by Gnosticism. The Docetic Gnostics held that Jesus did not have a real body, but a phantom one. They could not accept the concept of absolute purity being encapsulated in an impure body of flesh. In v8 of Col. 2, he warned against this deceitful Philosophy, **“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”** In Phil. 2:5-11 he had set out in clear terms both the humanity and the deity of Jesus, and in a letter to Colossae he does so again, **“For in him (Jesus) dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”** (v9). Isn't it surprising that even today there are many who try to deny the deity of Jesus Christ; they say He was just a 'good man' and nothing more. The message of the N.T., however, is clear and unambiguous, as we shall see when we look at the evidence. Jesus was Son of Man and Son of God.

PAUL'S ANSWER TO GNOSTICISM

Paul's answer is that Jesus is supreme, and that His Headship and authority far exceed 'all principalities and powers', and that all who accept Him as Saviour are 'complete' in Him. This word 'complete' is the Greek word **PLEROO**, and literally means 'to be made full; the teaching of Paul seems to be that we can only be 'made full' in Christ, and that only because of His fulness. Remember that Paul asserts that the fulness of the Godhead is embodied in Christ, and this at once tells us why He has the authority and power to speak and act as He does. We ought to look a little more closely at this because it impinges very much on the answer to the question.

In Col. 1:17-19 Paul is quite definite about the status of Christ, **“And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell”**. This statement at once dispels the notion that Jesus usurped authority and power from God, and that of His own volition He grasped at things which were not His by right and gift. It is only when we begin to know Christ as the Saviour, with power to save, that we can apprehend God in the completeness of His Being, as Paul explains in Eph. 3:19, **“And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”** Well might John say at the beginning of his Gospel record, **“And of his fulness (Christ's) have all we received, and grace for grace”** (John 1:16).

In Col. 2:12 we can see the complete unity and co-ordination of purpose toward those who acknowledge Jesus as Saviour and are obedient to His directives regarding salvation. The true circumcision, as Paul explains in v11, is that demonstrated by Christ, i.e., the circumcision of the heart. When this happens, there is a complete surrender by the individual to the Lord, which in effect says, **“Lord, what will you have me to do”?** It is this surrender which puts to death the 'old man' of sin in the rites of believer Baptism, and brings to glorious reality the God-life of the 'new creation in Christ Jesus', as v12 says **“Buried with him (Christ) in baptism, wherein also are ye risen with him through the operation (working) of God, who hath raised him (Christ) from the dead”**. Let no one say that immersion into Christ in baptism is merely a 'sign'! Therefore understanding the united power of God and His Christ, we can have full assurance of the reality of what follows, namely,

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

According to Paul the situation, **apart** from Christ, is that every person is dead because of sin, and therefore alienated from God. It is sin which alienates, so consequently the sin needs to be forgiven so that cleansing can take place. Fundamentally,

because of the sin of Adam, mankind has become flawed; that flaw needs to be removed, and according to the teaching of the Bible this can only be done by accepting Christ as Saviour and relying on the efficacy of the sacrifice which He made on our behalf on the Cross at Calvary. WE have to become 'dead to sin' and we do this by being 'buried with Him in Baptism'; it is then that we meet, metaphorically, the blood which He shed for us on the Cross, and so we are cleansed in the blood of the sacrificial 'Lamb'. This should not be looked upon as a 'mechanical' formula for salvation by merely conforming to the 'letter' of what is required of a person for salvation; it must be preceded by true repentance from the heart with a corresponding willingness and intention to go on 'confessing Christ' all through one's life; I am fully persuaded that without this, the overt act of being immersed in water is meaningless. I believe we are now in a better position to appreciate what Paul means in Col. 2:14.

COMPLETE ERASURE

Samuel Bagster in his Englishman's Greek N.T. renders this verse, "**having blotted out the handwriting in the decrees against us, which were adverse to us, also it he has taken out of the midst, having nailed it to the cross**". To 'blot out' means to wipe out or wash out completely. The idea behind the words is quite interesting.

Some ancient manuscripts were rubbed or scraped and written over again; these were called 'palimpsests'. Hence, the original writing was 'blotted out' and some thing new took its place. The word 'handwriting' is the Greek word CHEIROGRAPHOS (CHEIR, hand; GRAPHO, writing), and this word is rendered 'bond' in Col. 2:14; so what we have is, "**Having blotted out the bond in the decrees against us**". This 'bond' or 'debt' had to be paid, and the responsibility devolved on the person(s) who accepted the bond; Paul gives a clear explanation of this in Philemon 18, 19; "**If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it**". Paul accepted the bond or debt relative to Onesimus. The legality of the bond was not in question; it had to be met.

Now it is quite evident that so far as the Jews were concerned 'the bond in decrees' was the Mosaic Law; it was 'against' them because they had accepted it. Exodus 24:3 says, "**And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgements; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do**". Therefore, the 'bond in Decrees' was against them. That this bond (the Mosaic Law) was taken away by Jesus is made clear by Paul in Eph. 2:15, "**Having abolished in his flesh (by His sacrifice on the Cross) the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances**".

You will note, however, that Paul says, "**the bond in decrees against us, and this is evidently referring to Gentiles also**. It is obvious that the Gentiles did not come under the Mosaic Law, but Paul explains that they gave moral assent to God's law written in their hearts (See Rom. 2:14-16); so that was against them. Therefore, he can say in the Ephesian letter that the sacrifice of Jesus was "**to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby**" (Eph. 2:15,16). So in obedience to the Gospel, both Jews and Gentiles can come into the Church, and can constitute the New Israel of God. Jesus took the bond which was against us, which should have been met by us; He took it 'out of the midst' and nailed it to the Cross: it was as if He had written across it, "**PAID IN FULL BY ME**". Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Never be ashamed that you belong to such a God and Christ.

And don't forget. Paul says that the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross 'spoiled' (stripped off) the principalities and powers; He made a show of them; He triumphed over them. The powers of Satan and darkness were trampled under foot by the power of God and His Christ. It was done 'openly' so that all might see. You, perhaps, who read this and have not bowed the knee to Christ, "Do you see it"? If you do, then

you ought not to hesitate to accept the victorious Christ as your Saviour.

Well, dear questioner, I hope my explanation has helped you a little; it's done me good, anyway.

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