



# COLOSSIANS

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**...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:14**

Where people go to get their theology explains where their theology stands. In the case of the Judaizers of the world, they would rather go anywhere than to Paul to get their theology. God gave the people of Israel a body of law which is termed "The Law of Moses." It was written down for the people, and maintained for their instruction and life-practice. It is what is known to us now as the Old Covenant. In the coming of the Messiah, a new covenant was promised. That is found in Jeremiah 31:31. With the introduction of the New, the Old was annulled (Hebrews 7:18), it was made obsolete (Hebrews 8:14), and it was taken away (Hebrews 10:10).

That is what Paul is referring to here. The Law of Moses was, as he says, "wiped out." The word in Greek is *exaleiphó*. It means to completely remove, obliterate, blot out, erase, wipe away, to cancel (such as when rubbing out a writing or seal impression left on a tablet). It was used to cancel obligations and/or entitlements to which extended benefits and entitlements. The explanation of the word is sufficient, but its use elsewhere testifies to the meaning. It is seen five times in the New Testament. Three are found in Revelation 3:5, 7:17, and 21:4. Each has the sense of either blotting out or wiping away.

In Christ, God has "wiped out the handwriting of the requirements that was against us." The law stood against us by bringing death. Paul explains this in Romans 7, summing up this principle in verses 10 and 11 -

"And the commandment, which *was to bring life*, I found to *bring death*. <sup>11</sup>For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed *me*." Romans 7:10, 11

The law is a body of commandments, both moral and civil, which brings death, not life. It stands opposed to us because we are incapable of meeting its demands. And so, God wiped out this handwriting – both moral and civil – that was against us, and "which was contrary to us." The word translated as "contrary" means to set over against, or opposite. It is used one

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other time in the New Testament. In Hebrews 10:27 it is translated as “adversaries.” Because of our fallen human nature, the law stood against us. It was hostile to us as is an adversary.

But it is God’s law, God’s standard. And so in order to rescue us from it, He did something marvelous by sending Jesus. Jesus lived the life we could not live, and then He gave that life up in fulfillment of the law which stood opposed to us. In that act, it says that “He has taken it out of the way.” There is a change in tenses here. The “having wiped out” was in the aorist tense. At a specific moment, the handwriting of the law was wiped out. In having “taken it out” the tense changes to the perfect tense. It is taken out completely and forever. As Christ said on the cross, “It is finished.” The debt is paid, it is paid perfectly, and it is paid forever.

And this was accomplished through the death of Christ, God “having nailed it to the cross.” The verb is found nowhere else in Scripture. It is an explanation of how Christ was affixed to the cross, and it is a metaphor for what also happened to the law. What Paul is saying is that Jesus’ body is metaphorically used as the law itself. As He fulfilled the law, He thus represents the law, embodying it. In His being nailed to the cross, the law was thus nailed to the cross. In His death, the law died. The law which stood opposed to us is done. The verb is again in the aorist tense. At that defining moment when Christ was nailed to the cross, the law was nailed to the cross.

Question: How can it be that you would desire to go back to the law which died with Christ’s death? What type of perverse, unholy attitude would you display towards the work of the Lord? Was what He did for you of so little value that you would tread upon His shed blood by reinserting a law which was annulled through His death? May it never be so!

As a point of doctrine: The law remains in effect for those who have not come to Christ. In Christ, we are judged by Christ’s perfect fulfillment of the law. For those not in Christ, they will be judged by the revelation God has given them. For Gentiles without the law, they will be judged by God’s general revelation. For those with the law, they will be judged by that specific revelation. In both such instances, only death can be the verdict. In Christ, only life can be the outcome.

Life application: The law is fulfilled and annulled. Get over it.

**Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.** Colossians 2:15

This commentary will be a bit long, but it is hoped that you will receive it gladly, despite the length.

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The first word of this verse in the Greek has brought about innumerable commentaries of great length and of endless speculation as to its true meaning. It is *apekduomai*. It comes from two separate words, joined together by Paul, to make a new word. *Apo* means “away from,” and *ekdyo* means “go down and completely away from.” Thus it means “to strip oneself.” HELPS Word Studies notes that, “The double prefixes (*apo, ek*) strongly emphasize *the depth of the renouncing*. This ‘renunciation (stripping right off) is very emphatic.’” Paul uses this word which he coined one more time in the New Testament, in Colossians 3:9. In that verse, there is little disagreement as to its intended translation –

“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,”

Because of the context of the words of this verse, scholars and translators alike have tried to come up with words which agree with their presuppositions about what Paul must be saying. As it is in the middle voice, it is to be taken as meaning “from,” not “for.” In other words, it would not mean, “He stripped for Himself something,” but rather “He stripped from Himself something.” The Pulpit Commentary notes that Paul employs compounds of *dyo* in the middle voice seventeen times elsewhere, and they are always in the sense of “putting off [or ‘on’] from one’s self.”

As noted, there are a long list of ideas as to the meaning of the first clause because of this unusual word. Some see this as having “put off the body of His flesh.” This would mean that He put off His physical body, and in the process He disarmed the principalities and powers which held sway over the physical body. This then would closely align with the thought of Colossians 3:9 above where the old man is stripped away. However, Christ did not possess “the old man” in His flesh. He is the new Man. The context cannot be speaking of this.

Others see this as having stripped away the angelic hosts through which the law was given. This would stand against the false teaching of the Judaizers. Others see this as Christ having divested the armor of the “infernal powers of darkness” (Gill). But this would not suit with the middle voice of the verb. On and on commentators have gone, attempting to translate this verb in order for it to make sense. Charles Ellicott gives one possible translation as, “...having unclothed Himself, He made a show of principalities and powers.” After saying this, he goes on to say that there is want of a connection to the phrase except to define it as “putting off the flesh” as was noted above. But, as we have shown, this makes no sense. Christ was sinless.

What needs to be done is to take the verb in its obvious, simple form. This is what Ellicott has done, except he then made an incorrect supposition as to what is “stripped.” It should thus be translated as, “Having stripped Himself, He made a show of principalities and powers.” With this translation, there is no need to then allegorize the action by saying it must be referring to the flesh of His body. Instead, it should be taken exactly as one would expect – He stripped

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Himself, and was thus naked. Instead of there being a want of a connection, the connection is perfectly obvious if aligned with the fall of man in the first place –

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Genesis 2:25

This lack of shame was because of their state of innocence in regard to sin. But after the fall, this was no longer the case –

So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. **7** Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

<sup>9</sup> Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where *are* you?”

<sup>10</sup> So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

<sup>11</sup> And He said, “Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” Genesis 3:6-11

Immediately after the giving of the law, these words were spoken by the Lord to Moses –

“Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.” Exodus 20:26

In this verse of Exodus 20, it is not speaking of mere physical nakedness, but of what that nakedness implies, based on what occurred in Genesis 3. Shame of nakedness is how sin first manifested itself. And it was the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life *by which* that sin came about. Man wanted to be like God, rising to His level. The earthen altar of Exodus 20 was to be without steps because man *cannot* rise to the level of God.

The higher the altar, the greater the sin is revealed, and thus the more nakedness is exposed. God instead made it known that He would condescend to become a Man and meet us on our own level. In Revelation 3, as Jesus speaks to the churches, He says this -

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.” Revelation 3:18

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The nakedness of the body only pictures our revealed sin. Christ came to take that away and to cover us with His righteousness. It was He who hung naked on Calvary's cross so that we could be covered by Him. This is what Paul is referring to here. It is a literal stripping of Himself, exposing the innocence of the Lamb of God who bore no sin. In this He did make a show of "principalities and powers."

Christ's sinless nature, seen in His exposed flesh, thus exposed the darkness of these forces for what they truly are. In so doing, "He made a public spectacle of them." What Adam and Eve had attempted to hide, and what the priests of Israel were commanded to keep hidden from the presence of an infinitely holy God, is the sin-nature of man. What Christ demonstrated was a sinless nature, proving He is God. His naked, body, there on the cross, demonstrated this to them. He publicly shamed those powers and thus in stripping Himself, He stripped them, "triumphing over them in it."

The final words of this verse in Greek are *en auto*. They are translated one of two ways, "in it," or "in Him." "It" would refer to the cross itself; "Him" would refer to Christ. As God is the subject throughout the passage, it is certainly referring to Christ, and it should be translated as "in Him." God made a public spectacle of the principalities and powers, triumphing over them in Christ. The Seed of the woman, promised just a few verses after the account of the hiding of the nakedness of Adam and Eve, had done exactly what the Lord had promised. The head of the serpent was crushed, sin was defeated, Christ had prevailed. This then is the correct translation and interpretation of what is otherwise a wholly misunderstood verse –

"Having stripped Himself, He made a show of principalities and powers; He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in Him."

Life application: Isn't the word great! It tells us of the marvelous work of Jesus, promised since the beginning of time. And He came right on time to do what was promised. Take time today to thank the Lord for this marvelous gift we call the Bible which in turn tells us of the most marvelous gift of all – our Lord Jesus Christ.

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