

11. God's Cancel Culture

Col. 2:11-15

1. God's Words for Freedom

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, (Col. 2:11)

This verse establishes the context for the following topics particularly the phrase “made without hands.”

... Here you can really see not only Paul’s genius but also his sense of humor.

This is an allusion to the literal, physical circumcision that the false teachers in Colossae were insisting on.

Paul says, “the circumcision that you have isn’t physical, it is a ‘spiritual’ or ‘supernatural’ circumcision.

This is the first word that describes the freedom we have in Christ Jesus tells us the agency of our salvation.

- **WITHOUT HANDS**

Jesus is very clear in John 6:44 that no one comes to Christ unless the Father draws them.

In Acts 16:14 it is God who opened up Lydia’s heart to respond to the gospel.

In Phil. 1:6 Paul declares that God, who has begun this good work, will complete it.

Our salvation is entirely OUT OF OUR HANDS and absolutely under God's control.

³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." (1 Cor. 1:30-31)

... and Paul says that the proof of this “circumcision made without hands” is the “putting off the body of the flesh.”

What does that mean? ... in order to understand we need to look closely at the word's “body” and “flesh.”

The word ‘body’ is the Greek word ‘soma’ and flesh is the Greek word ‘sarx.’

Soma & Sarx

The word ‘soma’ translated ‘body’ is a general term that means any kind of body... the body of an animal, a body of work, a body of constellations, a church body.

The word ‘sarx’ translated ‘flesh’ is a very specific word and it really carries the exegetical weight here.

... **sarx** refers to the soft flesh and hard bones of the human.

- This includes the affections and desires that humans have. (Gal. 5:24)
- The will of man (Eph. 2:3)
- The human mind (Col. 2:18)
- This is the human nature apart from divine influence

- The part of us that is prone to sin and opposed to God.

In fact, the KJV and NKJV [incorrectly] adds to their translation translates this “the body of the sins of the flesh” ...

Paul says the proof of this “circumcision not made with hands” is the desire to put off of the whole body of sins that proceed from our corrupt nature.

having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col. 2:12)

The mistake that some commentators make here is they think every use of the word ‘baptism’ is referring to the ordinance of baptism.

... but we need to remember the context that Paul has established.

Just as circumcision in v. 11 is spiritual, in the same way baptism is spiritual ... and if we miss that we will make the same mistake in regard to baptism that the false teachers in Colossae made regarding circumcision.

... and to show how absolute this baptism/immersion is into Christ’s death Paul gives us a 2nd word to describe our freedom from sin.

- **BURIED with Christ**

To be buried with Christ is to die to self.

Why? Before there is ever a resurrection, there must first be a death.

Look at what Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:4)

Here in Colossians, as in Romans, Paul is not speaking of physical water baptism ...

Paul is saying that at salvation (the moment of redemption/new birth/regeneration) we are immersed into Christ's death, through Christ's blood, and raised through Christ's atoning work into newness of life.

That's exactly what Paul is saying, that at salvation we are "*raised with Christ.*"

This is Paul's 3rd word to describe our freedom.

- **RAISED with Christ**

As with circumcision and baptism, this raising is not physical resurrection ... this is a spiritual supernatural resurrection to new life.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal. 2:20)

... and here is the great thing.

This spiritual circumcision, spiritual baptism, and spiritual resurrection are all pictured in the ordinance of baptism—all of it.

And Paul says this “three-fold” supernatural transformation occurs *through faith in the powerful working of God*

Paul is being very specific ... it is the believer’s faith (not his decision, effort, or work) but in the powerful working of God that raised Jesus from the dead.

2. God’s Words for Forgiven

¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (Col. 2:13)

The false teachers claiming a “higher knowledge” wanted to discredit Paul’s teachings on grace by teaching that salvation required physical circumcision.

... in other words, these false teachers were saying that salvation was partially man-made.

Paul says, “NO!” Even when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh...

... even when this was your reality “God made you alive together with Christ.”

I love how Paul says “He made YOU alive” and then he says “having forgiven US” ...

... **Why the change:** ... Paul is building toward a spiritual crescendo.

Paul not only says that God has forgiven us ALL our transgressions ... he tells us how.

¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col. 2:14)

Here is God's first word for Forgiven:

- **CANCELED debt**

The phrase “canceled out” was used during the time of Paul for wiping out the memory of an experience, cancelling a vote, annulling a law, or erasing a debt.

And what is it that Paul says is canceling out?

- The NASB translate this as the **certificate of debt**
- The ESV say the **record of debt**
- The old KJV **handwriting of ordinances**

The oddness of the KJV translation is because unlike most modern translators the KJV translators consulted the LXX choice of wording ...

... that is interesting because we see this same metaphor in what God says to the prophet Jeremiah in his condemnation of Israel for their sins.

The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus; With a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart And on the horns of their altars, (Jer. 17:1)

The metaphor used in Jeremiah and here in Colossians describes sin as an indelible ... a scar that cannot be removed ... a permanent tattoo on the tablet of their heart ...

... the “heart” is the seat of our affections.

We think that when a “deed is done” it is done with ... finished ... over.

No!

Every willful transgression of the law of God (sin) makes indelible marks on our character.

Every first willful act of sin makes the second act easier ...

There is an old saying “Habit strengthens inclination.”

Make no mistake about it Peter found denying his connection to Jesus three times, easier than doing it once.

The more you “do that thing” the easier doing “that thing” becomes.

... and not only that ... one habitual willful sin will soon drag in other sins along with it.

There is a gravitation force toward sins in the life of the disobedient.

Those sins become part of the persons memory, imagination, and conscience.

God says sin is “engraved upon the tablet of the heart.”

... I don’t know of any greater bondage.

Notice the 2nd place where ‘sin is engraved’ ... and this is pretty poignant.

On the horns of their altars

The altars of ancient Israel, both in worship to God as well as to false idols (like Baal) had horns on the corners of them.

That is how God commanded to make the altar in exodus, and when Israel began to worship false gods they made counterfeit altars that looked similar.

God was so incensed by this that in Amos 3:14 He told Israel that he was coming to cut off the horns of their false god altars.

God’s use of “horns of the altar” in Jeremiah is to say that sin (tolerated disobedience to God) shapes our worship.

How else can you explain the fact that popular segments of 21st Christianity are now embracing paganistic views of god such as open theism ...

... promoting Marxist beliefs like critical race theory and intersectionality

... this is why some preachers are spending more time promoting Social Justice than they do salvation by grace.

Listen to me: sin in the house of God has corrupted our worship of God.

To use Jeremiah’s metaphor, the very horns of the altar has been scarred by our tolerance of sin.

Here is the foolishness of it all ... we are tolerating and allowing sin when in reality God has already canceled the certificate of debt.

Our message is not “Don’t worry God overlooks your sin” ...

...NO!!! Our message is this: GOD HAS TAKEN THE DEBT OF YOUR SINS AWAY ... COMPLETELY!

... and not only the debt of our sins also the OFFENSE and THREAT of the law toward our sins.

- In **Romans 4:15** Paul writes that the law brings wrath
- In Romans 5:20 he writes the law increases transgression
- And in **Gal. 3:23** Paul says we are imprisoned by the law.

That is how it is with us ...

This is where Christ found us ... (ha) but listen to what Paul wrote to the Ephesians church.

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Eph. 2:14-16)

Paul tells the Ephesian church that through the cross the law's threat and condemnation of us has been put to death.

The word “condemned” had been engraved upon our hearts, but God has erased that word and in its place engraved the glorious word: FORGIVEN!

Here is God’s second word for forgiveness.

- **NAILLED IT to the cross**

“Nailed it” is the Greek verb *prosel-osas* [‘nailed it’]

This is the only place in scripture where we find this word.

This means that our sins and the condemnation of our sins is dead and non-existent.

In the exact same moment that Jesus died upon that cross our debt of sin also died with Him!

When Christ uttered those final words on Calvary “**it is finished**” all of Heaven cried with Him ... “**paid in full.**”

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE" -- ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:13-14)

Freedom means that we are redeemed from the curse of the law.

Forgiven means we have received the promise of the Spirit through faith.

3. God’s Words for Satan

¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Col. 2:15)

Here is God’s words for Satan:

- **DISARMED**
- **SHAMED**
- **TRIUMPHED over**

God has not just ‘beaten’ Satan ... God has publicly humiliated him.

I want to end with this hypothetical scenario

Imagine that Satan comes to you this afternoon and whispers in your ear,

“God is not really for you. How can you believe that when you have so many difficulties in this life.

Or this:

“How can you say you are forgiven, after all the bad you’ve done?”

“With all the difficulties of life how do you ever expect to persevere to the end.”

What could you respond? Here is how.

Yes, I have difficulties but spiritual, supernatural life I’ve been given is greater than them all!

My past is not my present. God has forgiven me of all my transgressions and removed every condemnation!

How will I endure? The answer is simply, Satan, my greatest enemy has been vanquished forever!