

Hearts United in Love

Bible Background • COLOSSIANS 2:1–15

Printed Text • COLOSSIANS 2:1–15 | Devotional Reading • 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10–17 5

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **CONTRAST** the deceptive philosophies and false unity of false teachers with true faith in Colossians; **EVALUATE** being rooted and built up in Christ; and **EMBRACE** our new standing in Christ as a guard against false teaching.

In Focus

In a medium-sized city in America, there were two pastors who were passionate about God and God’s people but had two very different approaches to reaching people. Pastor Jackson believed that the work of God was strongly oriented toward social justice. He was known to lead marches, challenge civic leaders, and push legislative policies that he believed would make his community better. Rev. Harris, on the other hand, had a different pastoral perspective. He believed that the church’s primary job was the business of saving souls. He was confident that the most important thing that he could do was preach the Gospel from the pulpit on Sunday morning. The congregation offered a weekly dinner to homeless people in the neighborhood, and he preached during the meal.

Pastor Jackson wanted to involve Rev. Harris in his most recent campaign critiquing racial profiling by the local police department. Rev. Harris said that he was not interested, but that he was looking forward to having Pastor Jackson come over and preach at his church. Late one Saturday evening, Rev. Harris called Pastor Jackson. He told him that his son, J.T. Harris, was stopped by the police and held at gunpoint because he allegedly fit the description of a burglar. He shared with Pastor Jackson that perhaps some police officers needed their souls saved, and asked about the next meeting for Pastor Jackson’s campaign.

How does a commitment to Christ demand unity that goes beyond meeting for weekly worship services?

Keep in Mind

“And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:6–7, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Heart *kardia* (Gk.) — In context it means either soul or mind.

B. Built Up *epoikodomeo* (Gk.) — To continue construction on an already established foundation.

Say It Correctly

Laodicea. ley-ohd-i-SEE-uh.

Principality. prin-suh-PAL-i-tee.

KJV

Colossians 2:1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;
2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;
3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
4 And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.
5 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.
6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:
7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.
8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.
9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.
10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:
11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:
12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.
13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;
15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

NIV

Colossians 2:1 I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally.
2 I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself.
3 In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
4 I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments.
5 For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.
6 And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him.
7 Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.
8 Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.
9 For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.
10 So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.
11 When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.
12 For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.
13 You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.
14 He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

15 In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

The People, Places, and Times

Gnosticism. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis* (guh-NO-seese), meaning “knowledge.” The Gnostics separated physical matter from thought. They concluded that matter was evil and formulated the idea that the possession of knowledge was the only requirement for salvation. This is why they did not want to attribute humanity to Jesus Christ because to them, material things were evil. Paul stresses that in Him (Jesus Christ as He appeared on earth) “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”(Colossians 2:9). Jesus was truly God in the flesh (John 1:14). As a result of their philosophical concepts—that the body is evil, for example—the Gnostics ignored or diminished the significance of the historic facts of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ simply because they were so apparent and too easy to understand. To them, all the secrets of God were in the mind or appearing in an immaterial identity.

Circumcision. Circumcision is the cutting off of the foreskin. Jewish baby boys are circumcised at eight days old by mandate of Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12:3). Circumcision marked males as belonging to God, and it was supposed to be more than an outward sign, signifying complete devotion to God (Deuteronomy 10:16).

When Gentiles began turning to Jesus, a big discussion arose as to whether Gentile Christian men needed to be circumcised. Paul pointed out that uncircumcised Gentiles had come to Christ simply by grace through faith. No one came to Christ through anything else. Because no one was able to keep the Law to perfection, it was obvious that the Law, including circumcision, did not save anyone.

Today, many baby boys are circumcised but not for religious reasons. Studies have shown the circumcised males are less likely to spread sexually transmitted diseases and other potential conditions, so sometimes circumcision is done for health reasons.

Background

The first readers of the letter to the Colossians fell into one of several groups of early Jesus followers attempting to determine their identity during a pretty dynamic time. The Jesus movement had provided a new lens to these believers for understanding the Torah (the Law in the Hebrew Bible), the prophets, and the traditions that had been passed down to them for generations. These traditions included rituals, such as circumcision, that went all the way back to Abraham, the first patriarch.

Also, the message of Jesus as Lord and hero/ Savior challenged the boundary that separated two groups. The first group was the Judeans or Jews who understood themselves as a part of a historical lineage that included the characters in the Hebrew Bible and was linked to Torah observance, Temple worship, and the land of Israel. The second group was the Gentiles. These were families of people whose history was linked to other narratives, practices, and places. Despite their differences, the message and movement of Jesus brought together these very different tribes and made them into one community. Paul encourages this community that has chosen to eliminate the unhealthy boundary that separated them. The author also continues to urge them to adopt a radical love ethic.

Paul, however, was concerned about them developing a healthy, external boundary between the community and the forces that attempt to destroy the harmony and love that they share. Negotiating both boundaries was of primary importance, as they forged their new identity together.

At-A-Glance

1. Shared Values (Colossians 2:1–5)
2. Shared Vision (vv. 6–12)
3. Shared Victory (vv. 13–15)

In Depth

1. Shared Values (Colossians 2:1–5)

The author shares that the community has access to the true spiritual treasures of wisdom and knowledge, but those treasures are linked to the community's values. Two values resonate throughout this and other letters written by Paul: love and faith. In this passage, unity through love is the key that grants access to the best that God has to offer humanity. God's treasures are hidden in Christ and activated by individuals loving each other. The passage suggests that the treasures of true wisdom and knowledge cannot be accessed alone, but they must be sought together in community. This is directly connected to faith. The faith that the community shares is deeply rooted in Christ, but its strength is measured by how the Colossians weather challenges together.

Why is it important for us to receive God's truth in community rather than in isolation?

2. Shared Vision (vv. 6–12)

The author suggests that the Colossians should be focused on one thing: development in Christ. The passage also implies that this type of development and growth does not happen solely at an individual level. The second person plural pronouns in the Greek text, translated as "you" meaning "you all," highlight the fact that the writer is imploring the community to grow together. Two keys to growing together in Christ are the ability to ignore voices that undermine growth and to challenge traditions that prevent development. The standard for growth is Christ, which is immeasurable, because all of who God is in Christ. Therefore, that goal should prevent them from paying attention to the progress or lack thereof of others around them, because they recognize that they can only reach such a goal themselves by the power of God. Such power is available through a dedication and faith that can see the invisible and believe the impossible. That type of faith grants access to the type of power that can raise the dead. Believers know this power because it has lifted them from spiritual death into sharing Christ's life.

What does it mean to be "spiritually circumcised?"

3. Shared Victory (vv. 13–15)

The image of Christ's victory and the erasure of the record of sin against believers is particularly powerful because it takes the language of the empire and turns it on its head. Christ is portrayed as disarming the forces of oppression and triumphing over them like a Roman emperor would celebrate victory over enemies. Christ does not replace the oppression with His own but instead renders oppression itself as ineffective. Christ conquers what has attempted to conquer the community, and the community shares in that victory. This shared victory is also captured in the idea that in spite of our trespasses and sins, through faith, God has made us alive together with Christ.

The author uses the idea of "uncircumcision of flesh" to represent a very contentious issue that was used by members who had been circumcised to oppress those members of the community who had not been circumcised. The author employs this specific example to illustrate Christ's victory from cosmic forces in spiritual places to the human forces in local places. This is the victory that believers share.

How have you seen Christ's victory show up in your life?

Search the Scriptures

1. What does this passage teach us about Christ (Colossians 2:2–3)? Who He is? What He does?
2. What are some boundaries Paul encourages the community to set (Colossians 2:4, 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are some useful strategies for creating unity in Christ-centered relationships and communities?
2. How does Christ's victory relate to how believers are supposed to engage with each other and the world?

Liberating Lesson

All cries for unity are not created equal. From political discourse to church disagreements, unity is frequently evoked as the preferred position often without any justification. It is especially dangerous when unity is synonymous with uniformity. This is treacherous when calls for unity demand individuals to give up their identity, look past their injury, or to support wrong with complicity. To this end, unity should not be sought for its own sake. Unity, instead, should be a tool for promoting a cause that is working to bring about the reign of God in the world.

True unity in love looks like criminal justice reform, mentoring young people, providing healthcare for the sick, standing up for the safety of the marginalized, mobilizing disenfranchised people to wield their right to vote, etc. If a community, even a church community, cannot build unity around destroying oppression and uplifting those in need, then perhaps they are not looking for the sort of unity Jesus taught us.

Application for Activation

1. Building boundaries is important both in collective and individual life. The people with whom we choose to build community tell us about who we are. Who are the five people with whom you have the least amount of boundaries? How do you manage the boundaries? How do you keep others from infringing on those boundaries?
2. In any relationship, it is important to place boundaries to both protect and limit the relationship. Write down two relationships where you need to do a better job of managing the internal boundaries. Where do you need to improve the external boundaries that define the relationship?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Colossians 2:1–15

The previous chapter ends with the purpose of Paul’s labor and striving: to be able to present every man perfect in Christ with all the might given him by the power of God that works in him (1:28–29). The next seven verses express Paul’s concern about the state of the church, and his wish that the members would be united in love, having a fuller understanding of the mystery of the Father and of Christ. This anxiety is based, as we shall see later in this study, on the heresy being perpetrated by false teachers. He warns the church and urges it to remain faithful in Christ (vv. 1–7).

¹ For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

Our passage opens with a titanic struggle. Paul speaks of a powerful inner “conflict,” using the Greek word *agon* (ah-GOAN), from which we get our word “agony.” You could say that the theme of the book of Colossians is found in 2:17: “Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” Paul is confronting a mixture of Jewish legalism and Gnostic teaching. Both fall short and are but “shadows,” for different reasons, of obtaining the fullness of what Christ brings to His church.

We can now understand the inner struggle Paul feels for what the Colossian Christians and those at Laodicea are going through. We learn that they have not met Paul (“see one’s face in the flesh” is another way of saying “see one face to face”). As a result, the apostle must rely on reports of their faith toward Christ and their love for one another. Knowing how quickly such faith can be set aside or compromised by professed believers, Paul agonizes in prayer over the Colossian believers.

We will discover in the following verses both his fondest hopes and his deepest fears concerning them.

² That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

The word “hearts” in the Greek is *kardia* (kar-DEE-ah) and refers to the soul or mind, thought by the ancient Greeks to be “the fountain and seat of thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, and endeavors.” The Greek translation for the phrase “might be comforted” is *parakaleo* (pah-rahkah- LEH-oh), and it means “to encourage, strengthen.” Paul’s prayerful “agony,” we see here, concerns the spiritual health of those to whom he writes.

He desires for them, first, a profound inner comfort—not a comfort founded in self-reliance or external circumstances but in hearts “knit together in love.” Next, Paul prays for believers to have a solid insight into the mystery of God, describing such an understanding as “riches.” We see Paul striving to articulate the spiritual wealth that comes to those who are in Christ. For after all, Christ Himself is the greatest treasure.

The point of the next phrase is that Christ is the mystery of God. God’s “mystery” is not something hard to figure out; rather, it is something that had been previously unknown but now is revealed. One of the most helpful explanations of “mystery” in the New Testament comes in Ephesians 3:1–13. Christ’s coming was, of course, promised time and time again in the Old Testament, but what was unknown was that Jesus would unite Jew and Gentile into one body, and that the Holy Spirit would dwell in that suffering body, the church, until Christ’s delayed return. It is this mystery—and all the comfort, encouragement, power and focus it brings to those whom Christ has joined to His one body—that Paul prays for the Colossians to understand.

³ In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

This small but powerful verse taps into the longings and expectations of God's people for generations before the coming of Jesus. As pointed out by commentators focusing on Colossians 2:2–3, God's people have long considered wisdom the greatest of all treasures. In the Greek, the word “hid” is *apokruphos* (ah-POH-kroo-foce) and means “hidden, secret, stored up.” Clearly, the Old Testament authorizes God's Law as the source of all wisdom, for it reveals God to His people, at least in a limited way. But Paul's point here is that Christ reveals God in a full, unlimited way; Christ possesses every treasure of God, all wisdom and all knowledge that can be gained. And so Jesus Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), the revelation of God to a people walking in darkness. It is no wonder that Paul prays for the Colossians to understand such a profound truth!

⁴ And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

In the Greek, the phrase “should beguile” is *paralogizomai* (pah-rah-low-GEED-zoh-my) and means “to deceive, delude, circumvent.” The Greek word for the phrase “enticing words” is *pithanologia* (pee-thah-no-low-GEE-ah), and it refers to discussion meant to mislead others into error. It was common at the time of Paul's writing for people trained in the art of rhetoric to seek to persuade others without any regard for truth. The mere act of convincing another person of something was considered worthwhile, whether the one persuaded ended up fortified by truth or deceived by falsehood. Based on verses 4 and 8, as well as 2:20–23, we can observe that the Colossians were indeed in danger from false teachers, particularly from those who taught the dangerous mix of Jewish legalism and Gnosticism. It was these wolves in sheep's clothing about whom Paul had great concern, lest the purity of the Colossians' devotion to Christ be compromised.

⁵ For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

“I am with you in spirit” is a phrase to be unpacked. Paul could not possibly visit all the Christian churches as the Gospel was bearing fruit and the faith was exploding throughout the Roman Empire. For him, communication through epistle was critical, to the point that he believed his carefully chosen words represented his actual presence among the hearers. So when he speaks of being “absent in the flesh” but “with you in the spirit,” he is probably not focusing on the idea of being connected to them spiritually. The way he “beheld” their order and steadfastness to Christ was through the reports that disciples like Tychicus brought to him (Colossians 4:7). We should note, too, that the things which pleased Paul so deeply were not miraculous revelations or demonstrations of God's power, but the simple, ordinary work of “order” and “steadfastness.”

⁶ As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: ⁷ Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

We should remind ourselves that this is a letter of encouragement to the church at Colosse to remain steadfast in its belief in spite of the dangers that were threatening the church. In verse 6, Paul encourages the members of the Colossian church to continue leading a life consistent with their belief in Christ. The phrase “received” or “accepted” Christ describes the new relationship that takes place when a person comes to the knowledge of Christ. To Paul, receiving or accepting Christ is just the beginning; the follow-up is to live in Him through our lifestyle, conduct, and faithfulness.

The words “built up” translate the Greek *epoikodomeo* (eh-poy-koh-doe-MEH-oh), which has the idea of the continuing construction of a building of which the foundation has been laid. It is figuratively used here to describe the believer's constant increase in relationship with and knowledge of Christ. No building can stand without a firm foundation, and a foundation without a building is worthless. When both take place, then the house would be established (Gk. *bebaioo*, beh-bye-OH-oh) or stabilized.

To complete this four-fold cycle of victorious living (in Christ) is the exhortation to abound in thanksgiving. In several of his letters (especially in the opening sections), Paul always expresses his gratitude to God and to Christ, and urges or challenges his readers to give thanks always to God. This type of thanksgiving can be spontaneous, such as an outburst of praise, worship, and singing often found in African American or African churches, where gratitude to God is expressed based not only on what we have materially but rather on who we are in Christ and on His blessings of redemption. It comes deep from within.

This attitude of thanksgiving—resulting from the firm foundation of the increasing knowledge of Christ by faith in the Gospel—will protect the believer from all type of threats, deceptions, and falsities. This is explicitly expressed in the following verses.

⁸ Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Paul continues with a strict warning and cautions the Colossians to be careful of the heresy that is going around. With the clause, “Beware lest any man spoil you,” Paul shows his love and concern for the spiritual wellbeing of the Colossian brethren. “Beware” (Gk. blepo, BLEH-po) means “to take heed, or look out,” as one looks out for impending danger in crossing a busy street, or looking out for dangerous snakes walking through the woods. Verse 8 employs a battle or war term: “spoil” (sulagogeō, soo-lah-go-GEH-oh), in which the defeated are carried away captives and their goods are carried away as plunder. The goods are the spiritual blessings of salvation and its benefits, which believers enjoy in Christ. Paul readily explains how one can be robbed of Christ’s benefits: through philosophy and vain deceit. The word “philosophy” is a direct transliteration of the Greek word philosophia (feelow- sow-FEE-ah), which simply means “love or pursuit of wisdom,” and is used only here in the Bible. Paul uses it to describe the false theology of certain Jewish Christian ascetics. Paul insists that this philosophy is contradictory to the teachings of the Gospel based on Christ Jesus. The teachings are man-made, humanistic, and worldly rather than spiritual and Christ-centered.

Paul then adds that this type of teaching is according to the rudiments or basic principles of the world. Here Paul probably refers to the elementary rules and principles of the world system and of the Jewish religion, which tend to seek salvation through personal efforts and human wisdom rather than through faith in Christ. Although Christ’s death had nullified this belief, some Jews tried to combine faith in Christ with man-made traditions and Pharisaic ordinances. The philosophy based on “the rudiments of the world” here probably also refers to the study and worship of the heavenly bodies, which would be similar to our modern astrology and new age metaphysics. These teachings contradict and fall short of what Christ offers, His works, and His teaching. They tend to take men away from Christ, weaken their trust in Him, and limit their relationship with Him.

⁹ For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. ¹⁰ And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

Paul makes a bold assertion regarding Christ, His person, and His work in relationship to humanity’s redemption. Paul says in effect that in Christ alone can be found the fullness of God—the real representation of God in a bodily or physical form. The word “Godhead” (Gk. theotes, theh-OH-tace) means deity, state of being God or “God-hood.” It appears only once in Scripture and relates to the deity of God. Christ is the personal and physical manifestation of all the fullness of God’s power and blessings to humanity. Therefore, God is found not in the philosophies or human traditions of the Jews and Gentiles, nor in worldly principles. In Christ, we have the entire essence of God concentrated in a human bodily form.

Since the fullness of God is resident in Christ, it makes no sense, Paul seems to argue, to look elsewhere for help or salvation. Christ is the source of all things, so we do not need any other. In Him, we have attained the full measure of all things for this life and the one to come. Since Christ is the full bodily expression of the invisible God, with all His attributes, He is therefore the head of each and every principality and power. Christ

is the head in the sense of possessing supreme authority and control. All powers and principalities are subject to Him, and He controls all their activities because He is their Creator. The good angels cannot affect salvation for believers, and the bad angels are limited in what they can do to the believer. This idea is reemphasized in verse 15. It is in Christ, who is the full manifestation of the Godhead and controls all spiritual beings, that we are complete and fulfilled.

¹¹ In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: ¹² Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Speaking of Christ as the head of all principality and power, Paul continues his argument, "...in whom also ye are circumcised." Paul introduces the theme of circumcision, which seems to suggest at this point that there is confusion about the subject among the Colossians. Probably, among the false teachers, were some Jews (Jewish Christians) who were making the ritual of circumcision a condition for salvation as in the Galatian churches (Galatians 5:2–3; cf. Acts 15:1). Rather, the type of circumcision they have received is of Christ, which Paul describes as putting off (apekdusis, opp-EKdoo- seese) the sins of the flesh, i.e., laying aside the evil nature, rather than the removal of the physical foreskin.

Paul alludes to the ritual of baptism as a symbol for spiritual circumcision, which is signified by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. By baptism, we identify with and partake as it were, in the death, burial, and consequent resurrection of Christ. Christ's death and resurrection offers us redemption, whereby all our sins are forgiven.

¹³ And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; ¹⁴ Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

This verse describes the effect the work of God has in the life of the believer. It describes the former state of all humans, the Gentile Colossians in particular, and contrasts it with their present state after the transformation through Christ's death on the Cross. This transformation is all the work of God. They were all dead in sins but now alive in Christ. Apart from the eschatological bodily resurrection of all believers at the end time with Christ, the forgiveness of sins is a type of resurrection, symbolized by the historical, physical, and bodily resurrection of Christ, which all believers experience.

Paul employs another metaphor to describe God's work of redemption through Christ. Not only has He quickened us (i.e., brought us to life) and pardoned our sins, He has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. Using computer language, it means to delete from existence the written document of the Law and its rigid regulations, which confront and condemn man because of man's inability to keep them. Since no one is ever able to keep the Law, both in its moral and ceremonial aspects, God in His mercy has rendered it non-binding. He annulled the Law and its demand when Christ through His death satisfied the demands of the Law and bore its curse on Calvary. It has been figuratively nailed to His Cross. Our righteousness is not dependent upon what we do, or on our efforts to keep the Law, rather it is dependent on who we are now, and on our trust (faith) in and acceptance of the finished work of Christ on the cross on which the Law has been nailed.

Christ says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Therefore, the abolition of the Law does not imply that man's responsibility has been nullified to do right. The Law that demands that we love the Lord and our neighbor still has eternal relevance (cf. Romans 13:8–9; Galatians 5:14).

15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Paul argues here that Satan or powerful demonic forces know humanity's inability to keep the Law, and so he uses it against them, accusing them before the Father. Therefore, the abolition of the written Law, which hitherto has been a snare to man, renders Satan's strategy against humans ineffective. Hence, Paul says: "and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." The Greek word translated as "spoiled" is *apekduomai* (ap-ek- DOO-oh-my), which means "to strip off," as in pulling off clothes. It is different than the use of the word in verse 8 but similar to verse 11.

"Principalities and powers," we noted earlier, are demonic forces who war against us. Here, Paul says that by blotting out the written Law and the ordinances that entangle man, satanic forces have been stripped of their power. They have been rendered impotent and powerless. They cannot hold believers any longer to ransom and bondage because of the Law (Romans 7:5–25). They are not only disarmed, but they are also put to open spectacle and ridicule. Paul applies military language in which the defeated are disarmed and stripped of their clothes, and humiliated as prisoners of war. This is what Christ did by His death on the Cross. His death means defeat and open humiliation for the accusers of believers. The crucifixion of Christ—which enemies meant for public shame, humiliation, and ultimately death—turned out to be for their own public defeat and shame (Acts 3:15). The enemy's defeat means victory for believers, and so believers need not be afraid.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Christ, the Source of Life
(1 John 5:6–12)

TUESDAY

Pursue Unity in the Church
(1 Peter 3:8–12)

WEDNESDAY

All Peoples United in Christ
(Ephesians 2:11–22)

THURSDAY

Christ, the Image of God
(Colossians 1:15–20)

FRIDAY

Paul's Ministry in the Congregation
(Colossians 1:24–29)

SATURDAY

Maintain Your Union With Christ
(Colossians 2:16–23)

SUNDAY

United With Christ and One Another
(Colossians 2:1–15)