

Colossians 2:14

Is Colossians 2:14 about the Moral Law?



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The King James Version renders the important reference, Colossians 2:13, 14 as follows: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 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."

THE PROBLEM

"It is generally agreed that the reference here is to the Law" (Expositor's Greek Testament), which is to say the Ten Commandments. The burden of this research is to determine whether this inference is correct. We shall deal with both the original Greek and the context.

The controversy revolves about the phrase (SEE PDF). Standard lexicons define (SEE PDF) as "handwriting," "a written form," or "a manuscript." Being composed of the Greek words for "hand" and "writing," this was the original sense. But in time, a (SEE PDF) had come to mean a promissory note, a written acknowledgment of debt. This connotation was universal at the time of the apostles, and that it came into acceptance long before then is shown by its use in the Apocrypha, in the fifth and ninth chapters of Tobit, where (SEE PDF) is rendered "receipt" (Goodspeed) or "note of hand" (Rheims-Douay). Instances from secular manuscripts could be cited; the word "is very common in the papyri for a certificate of debt or bond."—ROBERTSON, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.

Regarding the context, we should say first that Paul's writings were intended as essays, and to isolate any one verse from those before and after is not safe. One has only to read Colossians 2:8-15 in a modern translation to note how evenly and smoothly one thought succeeds another. The separation between verses 13 and 14 may well occur in the midst of a thought, resulting in two ideas where Paul intended one. By this I mean that the first phrase of verse 14 is a repetition of the last phrase of verse 13, a common method of emphasis much like the poetic parallelism of Proverbs and Psalms. This idea is not new. Several modern versions translate it with this in mind, notably Goodspeed:

"He forgave us all our misdeeds, canceled the bond which stood against us, with its requirements, and put it out of our way."

APPLICATION TO THE MORAL LAW

God is the author of the Ten Commandments. They were written upon stone in His very handwriting. If we are to apply the term (SEE PDF), which is a statement of indebtedness, to the commandments, we must first assume that the Author of them is the debtor in question. And to whom does the Creator owe anything? This is admitted, though it is done rather grudgingly, by the Expositor's Greek Testament:

"It is generally agreed that the reference here is to the Law. . . . That those under the Law did not write the Law has been pressed against this. It is true that (SEE PDF for Greek text) means strictly a bond given by the debtor in writing."

APPLICATION TO THE GUILT INCURRED BY SIN

Most Christians agree that we live under a covenant by which we have become partners with God. God has never deviated from His part of that covenant, but man has. Our part of the agreement entails obedience, pure and complete. But in this we have woefully failed. By our failure we have forfeited the blessing that would have been ours had we lived up to our part of the covenant, that blessing being immortality. Figuratively, we have signed away our claim to eternity. We have turned in a confession of guilt, an acknowledgment of defeat, a duly signed forfeiture of the promise, referred to by Paul as our (SEE PDF). This is our certificate of guilt, a bond that must be paid. And the required payment is our very existence. Thus the apostle speaks of "the bond which stood against us with its legal demands" (R.S.V.). It is this which is flaunted in the face of sinners by "the accuser of the brethren." However, by His life and death, Christ "*forgave* us all our misdeeds, *canceled* the bond which stood against us, with its requirements, and put it out of our way when he nailed it to the cross" (Goodspeed).

APPLICATION TO THE CEREMONIAL LAW

Ellen G. White has applied Colossians 2:14 to the sacrificial ceremonies that met fulfillment at Calvary. And though this is correct, there is also a larger application, which in no way conflicts with this. We all believe that the Lord by His death canceled the sinner's debt. When He did that He also canceled the rites and ceremonies that pointed forward to that great event and that were thereafter no longer meaningful. It is not necessary to adhere to

great event, and that were therefore no longer meaningful. It is not necessary to adhere to the one view as though the other were false. The contract, or covenant, to which man agreed, contained many articles—those dealing with the theocracy, its government, its temple sacrifices and the great motive behind them; everything, in fact, that made the Jews a nation set apart. All this was "blotted out," was fully met, by the crucifixion of our Lord.

THE LARGER VIEW

But Paul's statement in Colossians, although including all this, would seem to encompass much more. The death of our Lord concerned not only the Jews and the theocracy; this was but the smaller print on a document whose principal burden was for the whole of mankind. The primary meaning of the words Paul used is seen to be the guilt man has incurred by his traffic in *sin*. In his letter to the Romans he said, "The wages of sin is death." And these wages we have fully earned. "But the gift of God is eternal life." Our "certificate of debt" has been transfixed to the cross of Christ—paid in full.

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