

REV Bible Commentary for: Colossians 2:14

having wiped clean the **certificate of indebtedness** that was against us, which was hostile to us by means of the regulations, and he has taken it away, having nailed it to the cross.

“wiped clean.” The Greek is *exaleiphō* (#1813 ἐξάλειφω; pronounced “ex-al-’ā-fō”), and in its basic meaning it refers to wiping something clean until no trace of what was written before exists, “to cause to disappear by wiping.”^a In the ancient world, writing materials were scarce and expensive, so many of them were reused. Papyrus was sometimes washed clean and then rewritten on. In this case, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God wiped clean the certificate of debt that was against us. Moulton and Milligan write that *exaleiphō* “...is the technical term for ‘washing out’ the writing from a papyrus sheet. So complete was the forgiveness which Christ by His work secured, that it completely canceled the old bond, that had hitherto been valid against us, for it bore our signature (χειρόγραφον), He made the bond as though it had never been ([Exod. 32:23ff](#); [Rev. 3:5](#)).”^b

Some English versions read “erased,” and while that is not a bad translation, there were not pencils and erasers in the ancient world, so the reader may get the wrong impression. “Wiped out,” which some versions have, is fine if people do not get the wrong impression from the common use of “wipeout” today. The essence of what this is saying is the handwriting written against us is no longer there to be held against us—it is gone.

“certificate of indebtedness .” The Greek word is *cheirographon* (#5498 χειρόγραφον), a compound word made up of “hand,” and “writing.” It refers to a handwritten document, but every document at the time was handwritten. *Cheirographon* is used in ancient literature of a bond of debt,^c which is why so many versions have something about debt, such as “certificate of debt” (HCSB), or “record of debt” (ESV). While *cheirographon* was used of other things besides certificates of debt, including deposits, labor contracts, business agreements, and even authorization to act, the scope of the New Testament thought about sin and debt makes a certificate of debt fit well here. The Scripture and commands of God ensured that everyone would be a sinner: “both Jews and Greeks...are all under sin” ([Rom. 3:9](#)). The commands of God made not only the Jews, but the whole world, guilty before God ([Rom. 3:9-20](#)). Furthermore, those commands were in a sense “God’s handwriting,” for some of it came directly from the mouth of God and by the hand of God. ([Exod. 20:1](#); [Exod. 32:16](#)). Not many people are aware that some of the Law was spoken from the mouth of God directly to the people, but it was. ([Exod. 19:9](#); [20:1](#); [Deut. 4:10-13, 15, 36](#); [5:4-6, 22-27](#); [18:14-16](#); [Heb. 12:18-21](#)). The only reason God stopped speaking the Law to the people was that they asked Him to stop and to speak just to Moses ([Exod. 20:19](#)). After that, God spoke to prophets who wrote down the words of God.

When people sinned against God it created a debt that had to be repaid, and we humans had no way to repay it except by our death, since the wages of sin is death ([Rom. 6:23](#)). But then, by the grace of God, Jesus Christ, a sinless man, died in place of us ([Rom. 5:8](#)). When he did, and when we accepted him as Lord and believed God raised him from the dead ([Rom. 10:9](#)), God canceled our debt. Like the king in [Matthew 18:23-27](#) who forgave a debt that was impossible to repay, God forgives us on the basis of the death of Christ and forgives our sin.

“which by means of its regulations.” The two-word dative phrase τοῖς δόγμασιν has been translated in numerous ways and is the reason that almost every version varies in its translation of this verse.

“regulations.” The Greek is *dogma* (#1378 δόγμα), a noun that occurs 5 times in the New Testament and means: a formal statement concerning rules or regulations that are to be observed; an imperial declaration, a decree; something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief, doctrine, dogma.^d This word is used of the Law both here and in [Ephesians 2:15](#). In this context, “regulations” is a good translation for the tenets of the Law (cp. [commentary on Acts 16:4](#); cp. NIV). Sin, which was evil, used the Law, which was good, to cause us to sin ([Rom. 7:13](#)), at which point a certificate of indebtedness was drawn up due to our sin. That certificate was nailed to the cross of Christ and is no longer against us.^e

“hostile.” The Greek word is *hupenantios* (#5227 ὑπεναντίος), and it means “against, opposed, contrary, hostile.” In this case, “hostile” seemed like a good translation, because while God in one sense meant the Law for good ([Rom. 7:12](#); [Gal. 3:24](#)), He also knew that it would mean that everyone would become guilty when judged by its standards ([Rom. 3:20](#); [8:3](#); [Gal. 3:11](#)), and therefore the Law brought a curse on people ([Gal. 3:10](#); [Deut. 27:26](#)). Thus the Law is “hostile” (“openly against”) people, because there is no way to live by it and be safe from judgment and death.

“taken it away.” The Greek phrase is ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, literally, “has taken it out of the midst (or middle).” This is a time when the Greek literature shows us that the phrase was used idiomatically for something being “removed.”^f When Jesus Christ died on the cross for us, God took the Law, which was hostile to us due to all the regulations that we could not keep, and He “removed” it, He did away with it. Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the Law, and God nailed it to the cross when His Son was nailed to the cross, and when Jesus died, we died to the regulations of the Law as a standard for righteousness.

BDAG, s.v. “ἐξαλείφω.”

Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, viii.

BDAG, s.v. “χειρόγραφον.”

BDAG, s.v. “δόγμα.”

Cp. O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon* [WBC], 124-26; Dunn [NIGTC]; Melick, NAC.

Cp. *Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament*, 308; J. B. Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 189, cp. Lenski.
