

*Colossians 2:13-15***PREFACE**

What did we look like before we came to Christ? How would we describe ourselves? My guess would be that even if you wouldn't say it out loud in a Sunday School class, you think you weren't that bad—certainly not as bad as *others* of your acquaintance. Especially if you were born and raised in the church, as so many of us were; I mean, how truly sinful can you be if you're still just a kid?!

I can't think of any place in God's word where it says something like, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins—unless you were only seven years old." We are *born* dead in our sins; we are born "bad."

Sidebar:

Regarding infants who die, note John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) and Bathsheba's child (2 Samuel 12:23).

Have someone read Ephesians 2:1-3.

If God looks upon the redeemed and sees the righteousness of His Son, it is equally true that God looks upon the unregenerate and sees their sin—no matter how "good" they are by earthly standards—because they are "children of wrath."

So Far

The apostle Paul began this paragraph (vv8-15) by warning the Colossians not to fall prey to "hollow and deceptive philosophy" (v8). Paul proceeded to detail a number of very good reasons *why* they should not (or need not) follow the traditions of men, the elementary principles of the world, rather than Christ—beginning with a description of Christ Himself. In contrast to the empty, hollow philosophies with which they were being tempted, Paul offers the "fullness" of Christ Jesus and declares that the Colossian believers themselves have been "made complete" in Him, who is the "head over all rule and authority" (vv9-10). Drawing upon the imagery of two Judeo-Christian symbols, he then details how believers—at the moment of conversion—were spiritually circumcised in and by Christ, and were spiritually baptized (buried and raised up) with Him "through faith in the working of God" (vv11-12).

Now, as we close this paragraph in vv13-15, Paul expands on all Christ Jesus did for us, drawing it to a dramatic, cosmic, triumphant conclusion.

Have someone read Colossians 2:13-15.**vv13-14**

It is an ugly picture that opens v13, one that can be read in a couple of ways—neither mutually exclusive. First we must note the mercy and grace of our God: we did not raise ourselves up to Him, thus receiving life, but He stooped to us *while we were still dead* and graciously brought us to life. It is a moment so graphically portrayed in the oracle given to the prophet Ezekiel concerning Jerusalem's abominations.

"When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you *while you were in your blood*, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you *while you were in your blood*, 'Live!'" (Ezekiel 16:6)

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh

The first way all our common versions translate this is, literally from the Greek, “in [en] your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh.” That is, when you were dwelling **in the sphere of** your sin. Once again we have an example of all the translations presenting it one way, and virtually every commentator saying it should be something else. Go figure. They suggest the better way to read this is, “When you were dead **because of [or through, or by reason of]** your sins.” You were spiritually dead **because of** your sins—or, more precisely, you were spiritually dead because of the sin nature with which you were born, because of the original sin of Adam. Either interpretation works; both are true.

The first part of v13—“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him”—is essentially a restating of v11, but with a difference.

Question: What two things are added in v13?

dead = *nekros* = from an apparently primary *nekus* (a corpse); dead (literal or figurative; also as noun) :- dead.

made...alive together with = *syzōopoieō* (sood-zo-op-oy-eh'-o) = from <G4862> (sun) and <G2227> (zoopoieo); **to reanimate conjointly with** (figurative) :- quicken together with.

Absent the circumcising of Christ, we are all just a bunch of walking corpses. Physiologically, at the moment of our birth we begin the process of dying: a steady, relentless march into death. Spiritually, at the moment of our birth we are *already* dead; the flesh just doesn't acknowledge it. Fallen flesh simply refuses delivery on the truth that each of us is “dead in [our] transgressions and the uncircumcision of [our] flesh.”

Only one person can reanimate dead flesh—not Dr. Frankenstein, but God.

Just think of the irony: The only way for us to be given real life is by and through the living Son of God. But the only way this is possible (in God's economy) is through the *death* of His Son.

Have someone read Hebrews 2:14-15.

having forgiven us all our transgressions,

Note again the time-frame: God the Father made us alive with Christ *while* we were still sinners. And the two clauses that follow that incredible statement make it clear that two things were a part of that reanimation process (bringing to life someone born dead). We don't want to super-irrigate this, making it sound intensely conditional. But the text—in all but the NIV—suggests not just a relationship between life and forgiveness, but that the forgiveness and cancellation of debt occurred *prior to* the reanimation (“having”). Which makes perfect sense; we do not have that new life until God through Christ forgives us our sin.

Question: What is the best, the most wonderful word in that forgiveness clause?

transgressions^{nasb}, **trespasses** = *paraptoma* = from <G3895> (parapipto); a **side-slip** (lapse or deviation), **i.e. (unintentional) error or (willful) transgression** :- fall, fault, offence, sin, trespass.

*having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us,
which was hostile to us*

Verse 14 offers us details into the extent—the “fullness,” as it were—of our forgiveness in Christ.

When we purchased our first home in San Diego, Linda and I gulped twice and signed over our lives to the bank. As I recall, we had three jobs between us just to qualify for the \$25,000 loan. By signing those papers we were signing an IOU to the bank: we promised to pay them back the money they had advanced us for the purchase of the house. If we had ever reneged on that promise, they would have summarily confiscated the house from us. We owed them a debt, and one way or another that debt would be repaid.

Similar to the bilateral agreement we had with the bank (so long as we made our monthly payments, they would let us live in the house), Israel *explicitly* signed a contract with God; they agreed to a bilateral covenant with Him: If they would hold up their end of the agreement, He would hold up His end.

Have someone read Deuteronomy 28:1-2.

Have someone read Deuteronomy 28:15.

And on more than one occasion Israel agreed to those terms. They signed the papers. But which path did Israel take? They reneged on their agreement with Yahweh. And, even with His forbearance and longsuffering with Israel, eventually He kept His end of the agreement they had signed and kicked them out of their house.

But what about Gentiles? We didn't sign any contract with God, did we?

Have someone read Romans 2:14-16.

Gentiles *implicitly* signed an agreement with God. As R. Kent Hughes puts it, “The Gentiles had countersigned through their consciences to keep the moral Law as they understood it.”

So the “certificate of death,” or “handwriting of ordinances” stood against every one of us, and by its measure we were all profoundly guilty.

hostile to us^{nasb}, contrary to us^{kjvs}, stood opposed to us^{niv} = **condemned us**

...and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Remember what was nailed on the cross above the head of Jesus? In three languages so all could read it, “Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19-20).

Something else was nailed to the cross that day: There was, as it were, a document listing every law we had failed to obey, every debt not repaid, every mortgage with a remaining balance, every sin we had committed against a holy God. And across that document of debt was stamped—not in ink, but in the Savior’s blood—“Paid in Full.” Then, once the epochal moment was past, that document fell from the blood-stained wood and flew away, far over the horizon, never to be seen again. [[“taken out of the way” = airo = used for weighing anchor and sailing away](#)]

v15

In v15 Paul concludes his discourse on the believer’s fullness, or completeness in Christ. He also completes the circle he began in v10, where he stated that Christ is “the head over all rule and authority.” In v15 he closes the circle by telling us what was done to those “rulers and authorities.”

Read v15.

There is one more tie-in to an earlier verse—at least a recycling of same imagery. In v11 Paul says that

...in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the **removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;**

Also translated “put off,” *apekdysis* [[ap-ek'-doo-sis](#)] is the noun form of the verb used in v15. Once again Paul employs the imagery of stripping off clothing when he writes, in v15,

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities...

apekdyomai [[ap-ek-doo'-oh-my](#)] is a verb meaning to divest, to despoil, or to strip off. And, once again, one can interpret this verse several different ways; because of time constraints, I’m going to cut right to the chase. [[and everyone said, “Amen.”](#)]

All of v15 is rich with imagery, and is a dramatic—I would say even *cinematic*—conclusion to this treatise on the fullness of Christ, our completeness in Him, and the Godhead’s lordship over every created being—including the unseen, darker forces. Douglas Moo makes a pretty good argument for turning our purple “He” in the handout to blue. That is, he argues that it is God the Father doing everything in v15. So here’s the picture:

Remember the scene in the movie *Ben-Hur* when the victorious Roman consul Quintus Arrius, [[played by Jack Hawkins](#)] returns to Rome with his now adopted son, Judah ben-Hur. They ride together in a magnificent golden chariot in a huge triumphant procession through the streets of Rome, awarded the admiral in recognition of his defeat of the enemy at sea. Not shown in the film, is that typically following the victor would come, in chains, the humbled, defeated captives. The victorious Roman would be publicly paraded in honor, while the defeated slaves would be publicly paraded to their shame and dishonor.

God the Father stripped the defeated “rulers and authorities” of their armor and weapons—and their dignity—and behind His own golden chariot He paraded them through the streets for everyone to see that they, indeed, had no power over them.

Now, there are two possible interpretations for how this verse ends—and I dare not gloss over these, because both are feasible, but express slightly different things.

God did all this to the “rulers and authorities” (depending on your translation) either “**through** [or **in**^{esv}] **Him**”^{nasb} or “**in it**”^{kjvs}. That is, either in or through Christ Jesus, or in the cross.

“Through Him” refers either

- to the person Christ; the image being that, as with creation, God performed all this through the agency of the Son, or
- to the resurrection and ascension of Christ [Douglas Moo]

“In it” refers to the cross; that is, the work accomplished by the cross-kind-of-death of the Son. [ties back to the end of v14]

Now, no doctrine is threatened by choosing either of these possibilities. Douglas Moo himself admits it is “very tough” to choose between the two (Him or it). I can comfortably accept either one.

through (in) Him

The bodily resurrection of Christ Jesus and His return to the glory of heaven to sit down at the right hand of the Father is the most dramatic and powerful statement imaginable for Christ’s defeat of death and Satan.

This agrees with Ephesians 4:8, which quotes Psalm 68:18:

Therefore it says,
“When He ascended on high,
He led captive a host of captives,
And He gave gifts to men.”

in it

At the same time, while still on the cross, Christ cried out, “It is finished!” The work was done; the once and final sacrifice was now completed. At this moment the dark spiritual forces in opposition to Him could only hang their head in defeat and shame. They had lost.

I guess I favor “in Him” (ESV) for one simple reason: What is the common denominator in these two possible interpretations? Christ, which harmonizes with everything Paul has been writing up till now. It wasn’t the blood-stained tree of wood; it was *Him*. It wasn’t the supernatural resurrection itself; it was the *Son of God, Savior of mankind* being raised from the dead. It wasn’t the supernatural lifting of Him into the clouds; it was *our great High Priest* of His own once and final sacrifice, returning to glory—the only high priest who ever sat down, because now there would be no need for further sacrifices (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Let’s close with a passage from 1 Corinthians.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26.