

DATE: 9th June 2026. - "God has cancelled OUR record of debt" - Colossians 2 v 8-15

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits^[a] of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ 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, ¹² 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. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities^[b] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.^[c]

In today's passage Paul issues the first of several warnings and then sets out a positive explanation of God's work in Christ, and the Colossians' union with Him in His death burial and resurrection. The Colossians are to be on their guard so that they are not carried away from the truth into the slavery of error. Being captivated by worldly logic and deceived by opinions of those who have both feet in this world rather than looking to Jesus for His leading and directing.

As "Tradition" sounds authentic it would give a false message an air of respectability and authority even of revelation that Paul did his best to disprove, rejecting any suggestion of divine originality, thus proving its human grounding.

Verse 9 is perhaps the fullest affirmation of Christ's deity in Scripture. In Jesus of Nazareth, God was uniquely and bodily among us. Since the power of God rested in Jesus Christ, Christ overcomes all other powers. Jesus' mark is not physical circumcision. Rather, Jesus' circumcision is a symbolic expression to describe the excising of humanity's lower nature to bring the renewal of being in Christ. Baptism is the outward sign of this renewal.

Paul employed a series of metaphors to describe this cosmic Christ. To counter the heresy in Colossians of substituting inferior beings for Christ (v 8 and 16-17), Paul boasted of Christ's superiority in that the very essence of God dwells in Christ.

The theme of union in Christ continues as Paul describes how the readers are linked with the gospel events, i.e. Christ's death, burial and resurrection (v 11-13). It is not clear why Paul mentioned circumcision at this point unlike his letter to the Galatians where it was expected of them.

The circumcision done by Christ is a representation of His crucifixion, while "the putting off of the body of flesh" is best understood as describing His violent death (though some understand it to mean the putting off of a Christian's old nature).

The Colossians "were also circumcised in him", that is, they died with Christ in His death. In contrast to Jewish circumcision, theirs was "not done by the hands of men; it was a divine work in which God himself made the change from the old life to the new".

As the burial of Christ set the seal upon His death (1 Cor Ch 15 v 4), so the Colossians burial with Him in baptism shows that they were truly involved in his death and laid in His grave. A real death has taken place; so, the old life should be a thing of the past (Rom Ch 6 v 4). Christ's resurrection has already occurred; the Colossians 2 had been raised with Him as a past event.

The believer's share in the risen life of Christ finds clear expression in Colossians and Ephesians (Col Ch 3 v 1: Eph Ch 2 v 6) while "the power of God" is that same power which brought Christ back from the dead and which now energises all the members of Christ's body.

At this point the stance now changes; no longer are the Colossians viewed as having been joined with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. Rather Paul contrasts their pagan past with the present.

Dead (verse 13) points to the state of separation from God as a present condition of those outside of Christ. This dreadful condition had been caused by their "sins and the un-circumcision of their sinful nature". Sins are acts of rebellion against God, while sinful nature speaks of a permanent state of disobedience, the Colossians had been both heathen and godless.

But now because of the death of Christ, God has made them alive in Him. He has graciously forgiven all our trespasses (those of Jews and Gentiles alike) and therefore the cause of spiritual death has been done away. God has not only removed the debt, He has also destroyed the document on which the debt was recorded.

The Jews had agreed to obey the law, and in their case the penalty for not doing so and breaking the contract meant death (Dt 27 v 14-26, 30 v 15-20). Paul also assumes that Gentiles were committed, through their consciences to a similar obligation to the moral law insofar as they understood it (Rom Ch 2 v 14 & 15). The obligation had not been paid by either group so it "stood opposed to us", because of its accompanying regulations.

The debt was impossible to pay, but God dealt with it, He had blotted it out and cancelled the bond by nailing it to the cross. This vivid way of saying that because Christ was nailed to the cross, our debt has been completely forgiven.

The word of the cross was, and still is today in 2026, a message of hope for those who lived in fear of evil, super-natural powers. These principalities, who had possessed that “written code”, had kept us in their grip. Using the picture of a conqueror’s triumphal procession in which captives of war were displayed to magnify the victor’s glory, Paul states that God defeated and disarmed evil “powers of their authority”.

In making a public spectacle of them He (“God” rather than “Christ”) exposed to the universe their utter helplessness, leading them in Him (ie Christ, rather than “in it”, “the cross”) in His triumphal procession so that all the world might see the greatness of His victory.

Transcript of the presentation given by Deacon Rodney Burge and discussed at the church-based, morning home group on Tuesday 9th June 2026. All scripture is from the ESV Translation.

