

A Debt Paid

Colossians 2:14

Compiled by Rachel Cory-Kuehl, April 9, 2014

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Scripture is from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

Matthew 18:23-35 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’

And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

In the passage, trespasses are presented as a debt owed. We still use the expression today. He has paid his debt to society, or his debt to the law. We mean that the person has completed his sentence in prison.

When someone sins against us, they owe us. When we sin against others, we owe them. We also owe God, because He feels the pain inflicted upon our victim. When we forgive others, we are dismissing the debt.

Galatians 5:1-3 “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.”

Before a Gentile could become a Jew, he had to complete an education process with a Rabi, and then take the vow of obedience, to keep the “whole law,” which included the written Torah and the Oral Torah traditions of the Pharisees. He would then be circumcised, and he could then enter the Temple to present sacrifices. It was called “the vow of circumcision.” Violations of Torah after this point were said to incur a “debt” to the Law. Vows were taken very seriously in the Ancient Middle East. They were not to be taken lightly. This was a vow to the LORD.

The Galatians were former pagans, not Jews. When Paul says, “do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage,” he is comparing their bondage under paganism (with all its ceremonies) to “bondage” under the Pharisaic law of Judaism (with its ceremonies). “You are trading one bondage for another.” That was the message. The ceremonies of Judaism cannot cleanse you of sin, any more than the ceremonies of paganism could please the gods.

Can “works of the Law” - ERASE a DEBT to the Law?

Short answer - No. Those who desired to be “under the law,” thought that by keeping all the ceremonies of the Law, they could be “justified” (declared righteous) in the sight of God (*Gal 4:2*). But they couldn’t. “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (*Heb 10:4*). They had sinned against God, and no amount of law-keeping could set things right again. They would have to keep the Law perfectly, which no one does, or ever did. No one has ever been justified by law-keeping (*Gal 3:11*).

1. Transgression is a debt to our Master - the LORD.
2. Breaking one commandment is the SAME as breaking all of them.
It is transgression of the law.
3. The “blood of bulls and goats” cannot take away sin (*Heb. 10:4*), and “no one is justified by the law in the site of God” (*Gal. 3:11*).

Any Gentile convert who was circumcised and who took the vow to keep the “whole law” of Moses, would very soon transgress - with nothing but the “blood of bulls and goats” to cover his sin. Such sacrifices were worthless, so far as cleansing the conscience. Paul called them “dead works” (*Heb 9:14*).

WHAT WAS NAILED TO HIS CROSS?

I’m going to quote the same verse from six different translations.

Colossians 2:14 “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;” (KJV)

Colossians 2:14 “. . . having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.” (NKJV)

Colossians 2:14 “having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out that way, nailing it to the cross;” (ASV)

Colossians 2:14 “having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (NIV)

Colossians 2:14 “having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (NAS)

Colossians 2:14 “erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross” (NRSV).

If all your sins have been blotted out and forgiven, and you stand justified before God - why would you need to present an animal sacrifice for a “sin offering?” You wouldn’t!!

In the church I attended many years ago, they used to teach that God wrote the Ten Commandments by hand (Deut. 4:13), but Moses wrote the “ordinances.” So we have to keep the Ten Commandments, but everything else is now obsolete. I think that was a complete misunderstanding of this passage! I don’t think that Colossians 2:14 has anything to do with keeping some laws and discarding others.

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THE RECORD OF OUR DEBT

I think you can tell from the ASV, NIV, NRSV and NAS versions, that the charges, or the debt, or the “bond,” or the record of our transgressions (according to the law) - THAT is what was “nailed to the cross.”

In the eyes of Heaven, OUR DEBT was posted over His head.
It was OUR DEBT which He paid.

Isaiah 53:6 “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (NKJ).

It was common in the Roman Empire, to post a placard over the head of the accused at his execution, which listed **the charges**. Paul is referring to this custom. The charges against Christ were posted over His head - nailed to His cross. “King of the Jews” it read. The Sanhedrin tried to get Pilot to change it, to “He said king of the Jews,” but Pilot refused.

As “king,” **Jesus could pay the debt for His people**. That was something commonly practiced in the Ancient Middle East. Newly crowned kings would forgive debts and enemies.

Jesus is “the anointed King” - “the Son of David” - and the rightful heir to David’s throne. For those who choose to serve Jesus as their king, the certificate of our debt, was nailed to His cross!

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