

## Colossian Law-Keeping

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Have you ever read Edgar Allan Poe's detective story, *The Purloined Letter*? It used to be assigned in schools, but I do not know that it has been for a while. Poe is often credited with inventing the modern detective story and his sleuth, a man named C. Auguste Dupin, is seen as the precursor and model for very famous literary detectives like Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. But it is *The Purloined Letter*, written in 1844 along with two lesser known Dupin stories, that the nod is given as the first modern detective fiction and we have enjoyed them ever since, both in literature and on TV with all the detectives we see there.

Now, I am going to give you a summary of the story of *The Purloined Letter*. So, big spoiler alerts if you do not want to know what happened in the story. But I am going to basically tell you the whole thing in summary form.

The narrator and Dupin, a lot like Doctor Watson and Sherlock Holmes, receive in their rooms a French police prefect who has come to share the details of a case that has stumped the police. They really do not know what is going on here. But the basic facts of the case are that a letter containing delicate information has been stolen. An important woman was in her boudoir, her private rooms, when the letter arrived and presumably, we are never told this right out, the letter was written by the man she was having an affair with. But as she was reading the letter, her husband walks in the room, so she places the letter down on table.

Now, at the same time, very soon thereafter, a political minister identified only as "D," we do not know his name, he also arrives and first thing he does is spot the letter on the table and he recognized the handwriting on the letter. He then puts two and two together and he guesses her scandalous secret. While he is talking to the couple, he placed another letter on the table next to the

incriminating letter, and as things go on, he discreetly picks up the scandalous letter in full view of both of these people—the husband and the wife. The lady sees him do it but she cannot draw attention to the fact that he picked up the wrong letter because that would cause problems. And the husband would then demand to know what was in the letter and you could imagine what would go on from there. So she lets him leave with the letter.

Of course, she goes to the police to get the letter back. The police have been unable to find the purloined letter. So Dupin advises the police prefect to make another thorough search of the minister's rooms but the policeman says that it would do no good. But about a month later the policeman returns and says that they had undertaken another search of the minister's rooms but they could not locate the purloined letter. Dupin then asked him what the reward is for the return of this purloined letter and the policeman tells him it is 50,000 francs. That is a good amount of money. And so Dupin immediately shows him the letter, hands it over to him, and the prefect of course is shocked and overjoyed and he eventually then gives him the 50,000 franc reward.

As you know in all these detective stories, they have to tell you how they did it. So he goes on and tells them that he had worked it out in his mind what had happened, because Dupin, a lot like Sherlock Holmes, is a master of logical analysis. He knows how to deduce things and inform a correct conclusion.

He explains that he managed to solve the mystery because he remembered that there was a clever schoolboy he had grown up with who played a game called "Even and Odd" with his friends. Another boy would place either two or three marbles in his hands. So you have an even number and an odd number. And then the clever schoolboy would have to figure out how many marbles he had in his hand. He might guess wrong the first time. But he was almost invariably right the second time because he worked out whether the kid who had the marbles in his hand was clever or dumb as a post, and he could use that to figure out what he would do next. He is able to second guess his opponent.

Dupin says that worked here in this story—that the police prefect had misjudged this political minister. He misjudged the mind of the man he was dealing with. He kind of wrote off the minister's intellect because he had this bias against people writing poetry and he knew the the minister wrote poetry and so he thought he was kind of dumb, a fool. But Dupin had written poetry himself and he knew that to write fairly good poetry you have to be a pretty clever person, you have to be a thinker. So he knew that the minister was rather cunning and he would figure out how to hide this letter where other people would not find it.

So what Dupin had done is he had disguised himself and he went to visit the minister and he checked out the room himself while he was there and he spotted the letter pretty much immediately. And so he leaves his snuff box on the table so he has an excuse to come back the next day. He gets an accomplice. The accomplice is supposed to make a bit of a diversion while Dupin is in the room collecting his snuff box. Everything goes off well, the minister rushes away, he grabs the purloined letter from where it was "hidden" in plain sight on the mantelpiece. It had been turned inside out and put in a different envelope but he knew that was the letter. And so he replaced it with a facsimile and left the minister's lodgings.

That is the story. That is how he had found the purloined letter. The important point in this story is the use by both the woman and the political minister of hiding the letter in plain sight. She hid it in plain sight on the table. He hid it in plain sight on his mantelpiece. The trick is not only common, actually it is almost cliched in literature, but it is a factor in real life too. There are a lot of things that are hidden in plain sight that we just do not see. And they tend to be among the most difficult things to discover because those things that have been hidden in plain sight are so much a part of the landscape, so much a part of what we see every day, that the seeker's eyes pass right over it without noticing it. Whatever those things are.

See, our instincts, our experiences, and our training *precondition* us to see only what we expect to see and so we miss what is right under our noses. It

happens all the time. Government does this all the time. They put things out there in plain sight and go through with stuff and we do not notice that they are doing something that we probably would not support or we would think that it was totally, let us say, immoral or unethical.

Let us go to Colossians the first chapter, verses 24 through 27. I want to read something here from the epistle to the Colossians by the apostle Paul, where he speaks about something along this line.

**Colossians 1:24-27** I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

By the way, this is the section of Scripture where Herbert Armstrong got the idea for the title of his last major book, *The Mystery of the Ages*. He is talking about all of those hidden mysteries in the world that has been revealed to us. But they are right out there in plain language in the Bible, or they are right out there in our knowledge. For instance, the existence of God is plainly written all over this earth and all through the heavens and in many other things but we are so used to it, it is with us all the time, that we miss that great mystery, because it is hidden in plain sight.

This is also true in theology. There is a lot of theological things that are hidden in plain sight. And when Catholics read the Bible, they see Catholicism. They do not see the mystery. They do not see the hidden bits that Christ put there because they have been preconditioned to see Catholicism. Protestants see Protestantism, Evangelicals see evangelicalism, Deists see deism, the Messianic see just messianism. That is the way it is. That is what they are preconditioned, that is what they are thinking that they will see in there, and that is exactly what they see. They do not see the mystery that has to be revealed, even though it is there in black and white on the pages of the Bible. They have not had their eyes opened to the truth.

But we have to rise above this. We are to be seekers of the truth. We have to discover, as Paul puts it in Acts 20:27, "the whole counsel of God." We will be able to see the mystery if, as Mr. Armstrong put it so many years ago, we compare scripture with scripture and we look all through the Bible and find out what the whole Bible says about a certain subject. And, of course, God's revelation by His Spirit allows us to see the whole counsel of God on a certain matter. We may not understand it all at first, but over time we learn and grow in this mystery. These things are revealed to us. Or maybe put it this way, as Jesus puts it in Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God."

So we must learn the whole truth. Or as the old saying goes, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In that way we learn the mystery, we learn the hidden knowledge that is there but in plain sight. It is not what we prefer. It is not what we may expect to see in it because of our own upbringing, but it is the truth, and then we have to learn how to accept it from there and put it into practice.

But that is the thought I want you to have as we really get into the meat of this sermon. I am going to be going into the book of Colossians again because I thought I did not want to leave the book where I was the last time. I talked about the high Christology that is found there in chapters one and two. But I thought if I did not talk about chapters 3 and 4, specifically chapter 3, I would be guilty of doing the same thing that I accused the Colossians and Laodiceans of doing in my last sermon. That is, relying so much on the high Christology of Jesus Christ that they essentially ignored the Christian living and the Christian commands that were given by the apostle Paul in the later chapters of the book.

So I am going to be concentrating on the end of chapter 2 and into chapter 3, then a little bit on chapter 4 because that is where we get to the nuts and bolts of Christian living that come as a result of what Paul says in the first two chapters. We will be discovering, if you will, Paul's admonitions to them to keep God's law, which He has hidden in plain sight in the letter. And a lot of people, a lot of "Christians" have failed to see these things in Colossians, instead using it as a text for their "no works" religion, which is just silly.

Now, I want to go back and review my earlier sermons just a little bit. Remember that Colossae and Laodicea are just ten miles apart. They are very close so it stands to reason that the two churches, who were probably pastored by the same minister, Archippus, who is mentioned at the end of Colossians, shared similar histories and they had similar problems. They were in the same basic environment there in Asia Minor.

So, seeing Paul's letter to the Colossians and Christ's letter to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3, I asked myself how these people, these same general people in Colossians and Laodicea, move from good, but doctrinally beleaguered in the 50s and 60s AD in Paul's day, to the wretched and miserable condition of the Laodiceans at the end of the first century. How did they progress in about two generations from being a pretty good church that had a few problems when Paul was addressing them, to going to a state where the our Chief Apostle Jesus Christ pretty much castigates them for their lack of love for Him? Their lackadaisical works. Their lukewarm attitude. That was in just a few years within the lifetime of one person.

Using II Peter 3:16, that is where Peter says that Paul's letters have been twisted, his words have been twisted to come up with some very undoctrinal and ungodly things, I have posited, theorized, that Paul's argument in the first couple of chapters of Colossians about the high Christology covered in the last sermon, which he gave against this Colossian heresy that everybody has been trying to figure out, evolved into a belief similar to what we know as the mainstream Protestant "once saved, always saved" doctrine. That because they relied so much on the high Christology in chapters 1 and 2, they thought they had it made because of what Christ had done for them and they were very lackadaisical then about doing any kind of works. They did not think they had to. Why should they when Christ had done it all for them?

This doctrine today is called the "doctrine of eternal security" and it encourages faith alone. You are saved by grace through faith *alone*. And essentially what comes out at the other end is you do not have to do any works. Now, your faith in God and your belief in how great He is could make you, and should make you, turn and do nice things for people, but they are not required at all and they do not really serve any purpose in the "doctrine of eternal security." It is just a reaction out of gratitude for what

Christ has done and nothing more. It is not a means by which they could grow in character.

What is described then in the letter to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3 is what we see in nominal Christianity around us. We see people who think that they have it made, they think they are rich and increased with goods, yet Christ sees them as wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked because they do not have any works. Their works are at best lukewarm. He would rather see them either hot or completely cold. Let us go to Revelation 3. I know Ted [Bowling] was here just a few minutes ago, but I want to read this again so we have this letter fresh on our minds as we go through this. Remember, this is the end state of the people of Colossae and Laodicea.

**Revelation 3:14-22** "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'""

I think this is something we need to be aware of and concerned about because many people in the church have come out of Protestant churches that teach this "once saved, always saved" doctrine. And we found, over the past generation or so, that many of the people who once professed to be in the Worldwide Church of God had a tendency to go right back to it. This is what is all around us in the religious communities and we are kind of

saturated with it here in America. So we need to be careful because this is a very strong tendency of people at this time, in this place.

We need to have our guard up, as it were, so that we do not fall into this same condition. Hopefully we are not in this condition. Hopefully we have gone beyond this and we have repented and we are moving forward and are more like the Philadelphians or the Smyrnans, rather than the Laodiceans. But you have to judge where you are on the line toward the Kingdom of God.

So, in a generation or two, the church members in Colossae and Laodicea thought they were in wonderful standing with Jesus Christ due to their wealth and their high living, but He looks at the same thing and judges them as spiritually poor, blind, and naked, and their works are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot. We see they have no fervency, no zeal to grow in righteousness by imitating Him or they do not have a deep and close relationship with Him, and probably both because they go together. As I said before, why should they? Since according to their distorted high Christology, He has done it for them already.

If it is already done for you and you are assured a place in heaven, as they would put it, why should you care? Why should you do anything? What is there in that religion to spur you to good works, the repenting of sin? There is nothing there. So you just stand on what He has done and do not try to do anything. That is why we have so many people in this country that only go into a church on Christmas or Easter. Maybe sometimes both, but they still think they are Christians and they still believe they are going to heaven because they answered an altar call when they were 14 or something. They think that is all that is required and now they are assured, that is their blessed assurance, that they are going to be in heaven when they die. That is the scope, the extent of their religion, many of them believe.

Now I suspect that the Laodiceans and the Colossians, like modern Protestants, eventually read the epistle of Paul to the Colossians with a rather jaundiced eye. They only saw what they expected to see. They are expected to see Christ magnified and glorified, and well He should be. But they also saw, like modern Protestants do, that He nailed the law to the cross. (We will look at this in just a few minutes.) Paul's later admonitions in chapters 3 and 4 became then, over the years, just good advice for Christian living rather



than apostolic commands based on adhering to the moral and behavioral standards found in God's law and portrayed in the sinless life of our Savior Jesus Christ.

If we would go back and carefully read Colossians 1 and 2, we would see that it reveals that Paul shies away from mentioning God's law or works. Remember, it is all about how great Christ is—how wonderful He is, what authority He has, how He was there from the beginning, He is an eternal being, He was our Creator—and all those other good things that we learned in chapters 1 and 2. In fact, all the fullness of Deity resides in Him bodily. We see that in Colossians 2:9. So Paul really pumps up Jesus Christ, and well he should. But he does not talk about anything having to do with God's law or any kind of works that need to be done. Not in chapters 1 and 2.

In those chapters, he writes about things like the truth. He makes it kind of general that way. Or the Word of God or the knowledge of His will, or the knowledge of God, or as we saw there in chapter 1, verse 27 when he talks about the knowledge of the mystery of God. See, he is not talking about things in the way that we might put it, we might talk about the law, the Old Testament, things like that, but he does not use those kind of words. And I think he did this purposely. He does not use those code words, if you will. Those trigger words, as the modern leftists like to talk about, because the Colossian heresy that he was fighting had some Jewish influence in it. It had some people out there promoting Jewish ideas, trying to bring them back to the Old Covenant, in a way. And he did not want to give them any credence whatsoever so he avoided any kind of terminology that might make people think that these Jewish enemies were right, even in part. He is trying to steer away from all of that.

He is using good psychology. Paul was a master psychologist, by the way. All you have to do is read his letter to Philemon to figure that out. He used a lot of good psychology to get Philemon to accept Onesimus back as a servant and a brother, rather than as a slave. But Paul does this frequently and a lot of times we do not catch it because we are looking for something else. But here he does this, I believe, so there is no indication that there is anything Jewish about what he is teaching. Like I said, he does not want to give these false Jewish teachers any credence whatsoever.

With that kind of a background let us go to Colossians 2, and we are going to read verses 11 through 17. It is here in this passage where Paul explains the Christian's current position before God and Christ.

**Colossians 2:11-17** In Him [meaning in Christ] you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands [Now, as soon as he starts talking about circumcision, he is getting into an area that is obviously Jewish, if you will. But he is talking about something radically different if you just follow the argument here.], by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 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, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

I read that as is without making too many comments there or inserting words like we understand it. This is just how the New King James has translated it, and it is not perfect, as we will see. Now, Protestants and many scholars of that ilk, believe Paul tells the Colossians, in this passage, that the law is done away, but this conclusion that they come to exposes their bias. They *want* to see the law done away. They want to say that Christ has nailed the law to the cross because they do not want to obey the law of God. That is exactly what Romans 8:7 says—that they have an enmity against God and they cannot keep the law of God. Their minds have not been open to it, which is what Paul is talking about in this passage.

Now, by using the phrase "the circumcision made without hands" there in verse 11, Paul essentially tells the Colossians that they have made the New Covenant with God. The New Covenant is based on spiritual realities. That is why he uses the phrase "without hands." It is not something that can be

done by a rabbi or a priest. A rabbi or a priest can do a circumcision, but no rabbi or priest can do a circumcision without hands. That is something totally different.

I want to show you the Old Testament background for Paul's writing of it in this way. First we are going to go to Deuteronomy the 10th chapter. Here in this chapter, God through Moses is telling them about how the law really is. They took it as a physical thing. But God had spiritual realities behind the physical law that was written on the tables of stone and was given as part of the Old Covenant. I want to read verses 12 through 17 here. The New King James has this headed in my Bible, "The Essence of the Law." So this is what God says is behind the physical law there.

**Deuteronomy 10:12-17** "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good? Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it. The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is to this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your **heart** and be stiff-necked no longer. For the Lord your God is God of Gods and Lord of Lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

Notice, he talked about the circumcision of the heart and what God wants is inner change. He wants spiritual change, character change.

Let us go to another just a few chapters away in Deuteronomy 30 and we will read the first ten verses here. This is a prophecy of what is going to come upon Israel, but it applies to the spiritual Israel very much so.

**Deuteronomy 30:1-10** Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you [all the bad things in chapters 28 and 29], the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call

them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.

Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. [that is an important word—that you may **live**.] Also the Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today. The Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

This is where Paul is getting this idea of circumcision of the heart or circumcision made without hands.

Let us go to Jeremiah 31 and the well known verses about the New Covenant. This is also brought into the picture.

**Jeremiah 31:31-34** [another prophecy] "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them

by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity [Now notice these words. What is a big part of this New Covenant?], and their sin I will remember no more."

Now if you want any confirmation that this is what actually happened, this is what the writer to the epistle of Hebrews talks about in Hebrews 8. He quotes the Scriptures and says this is what has happened to us. This is what Jesus Christ did as that great sacrifice. That He opened up to us the opportunity to make this New Covenant so our sins are forgiven. We have been given forgiveness and grace by God, and by our acceptance of all of this, our baptism and the laying on of hands that is done there at baptism, we vowed to keep this—our part in the New Covenant. We have signed our name to it and we have, therefore, responsibilities to God because of it. We also have access to Him and we have all the promises to look forward to that are part of that covenant.

This is what Paul is talking about in Colossians 2 when he talks about the circumcision made without hands. It is a circumcision of the heart and we are supposed to understand from what is said about the New Covenant and the circumcision of the heart, that we have to keep the commandments. This is what I am talking about in terms of Paul is writing things, the truth, the mystery, and he is hiding it in plain sight. He is putting it in words so that those of us who have our eyes opened can see what he is talking about, what he is referring to. We can understand that if we go back to the Old Testament, we are going to see this exploded in some of those passages that I have just read.

So, while circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant, baptism is the sign of the New, which he talks about here—being raised with Christ from that watery grave, and the baptism itself is an outward indication of our inner

change of heart. It indicates that we have left this world. We have put off all of those old sins that had plagued us, that we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, and that we have put our mark, as it were, on the New Covenant, and we are then bound to follow its dictates in our worship of God throughout the rest of our life. This is what we have signed up for. This is what Paul is telling the Colossians—that this is the next step in understanding once we understand how great our Savior Jesus Christ is.

So, having died to sin, being forgiven of our sins, we are raised from the dead, as he talks about here. That is, we are raised from spiritual deadness to a new life in Christ. You need to understand this. Remember when the man came to Jesus and he said, "Let me go bury my father before I come and follow You." And He says to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead." He was talking about spiritual deadness. Let the spiritually dead bury their dead. That is something that is not as important as following Christ. Because Christ is alive and He has the ability to make us alive too, spiritually alive. We are all obviously physically alive, but spiritually those in the world who have not been called are dead spiritually. But He has made us alive with Him.

That is, in essence, what we see in Colossians 2:11-13. But then we get to that old bugaboo in verse 14, where people think Christ nailed the law to the cross. Now consider what he had been talking about here. He had been talking about our sins and our trespasses being forgiven. What do you think about when you hear sins and trespasses in terms of the law? What did Paul say in Romans was the law's purpose? It was to reveal what sin is. The law is there to tell us what not to do, in most cases. There can be some positive ways of putting that, but in the Ten Commandments most of them are negative: "You shall not." You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, those sort of things. You shall have no other God before Me. God put most of them in a negative way. There is a couple positive ones—honor your father and mother, and remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. But most of them are negative—what not to do.

So, when the Protestants look at this passage of Scripture here in especially verse 14 of chapter 2, they are doing really bad analysis or, if you will put it in a theological term, bad exegesis of what Paul is saying here. I mean it is just bad reading of the text. All along here he has been talking about getting rid of sin, of being dead in trespasses, of God forgiving our sins. And

suddenly they say that Christ is doing away with the law, which tells us what sin is. That does not make sense. If you take away the law, there is no more sin, because the law tells us what we should not do. It just does not make any sense. So without talking about law, he is confirming the law. He is talking about sin and trespasses, but he is really letting us know that the law is there and is still in force because there is still sin and it needs to be forgiven.

And then they say in verse 14, he suddenly tells them that Christ did away with the law! It just really does not make any sense. And it is not what the Greek text says. It is a difficult phrase here. But honest scholars tell us that this "having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that is against us," really means something like "having wiped out the self-written record of debt or of trespass that accuses us." What he is talking about, we can phrase it a little differently: that He wiped out the certificate of debt or of infraction that accused us.

Have any of you ever been stopped by a policeman, pulled to the side of the road, and he comes up to your window and he says, "You were going 80 in a 55 mile an hour zone." And what does he do? He proceeds to write you a certificate of infraction that accuses you of speeding. That is what he is talking about here. He is telling you that Christ has wiped out the indictment or the citation or the formal accusation that is against you. What is that? What is he talking about? Having wiped out the record of our sins. That is what happened at baptism. You went before God and asked Him to forgive your sins. And then you went through the the formal process, the ritual of showing everyone that that was your heart and your mind, through baptism. And Christ obliged! He wiped out, totally, the record of your *past* sins. They are no longer there, they have been forgiven.

And as it says here, that He took them out of the way. What does that mean? That means He bore them away. He bore our trespasses and He took them away so that they are no longer in sight. Our sins have been removed as far as east is from the west. He took them on Himself, His blood covered them, and He bore them away so they can no longer come back. They are gone, they are dead, they are forgiven—all of those past sins. That is what He did.

Let us think about this another way. What was nailed to the cross when Christ was crucified? Obviously He was, His hands and His feet were nailed

to the cross. But there was something else nailed to the cross. You remember that placard that Pilate wrote? Let us go to see that. It is in John 19.

**John 19:19-22** Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross and the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am King of the Jews.'"" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

What that placard did normally was tell everybody who came by and saw the person being crucified, what the person was being crucified for. It might say, Jesus Barabbas, he was a rebel and a murderer. But it did not say that. He was let free. What they put on the cross was, This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. That is what He had been accused of, of being the king. Is that not what they came before Pilate and said, "This man is a traitor. He called himself a king. We have no king but Caesar." So what was nailed to the cross? Jesus Christ and what He was accused of. And Paul is using the same imagery to say the same thing happens to us when we are forgiven of our sins. That that accusation of our sins, what the death penalty has been decided against us for, has been totally taken away.

So, Christ nailed the record of our sins to the cross, taking them upon Himself, taking our sins out of the way, and in that way, as He goes on here to say, he triumphed over Satan and the demons, and in effect rendered their work to get us to sin or get us off the path as futile and He took away also their biggest threat, which is the fear of death, because now we have hope of eternal life.

Then we get to verses 16 and 17 of Colossians 2 where he talks about:

**Colossians 2:16-17** So [therefore] let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.



The therefore is very important here. If you have reached the state where Christ has taken your sins out of the way and He has then given you the new life, the regeneration through the Spirit where you have gone from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive, if you have come to that point, then "therefore" let no one judge you about these things. He is saying that since we are under the New Covenant, since we have been translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, as he says in chapter 1, verse 13, since our sins have been forgiven and removed, since Jesus Christ triumphed over the demons and all their false ideas and philosophies, we should not let anybody tell us that our practices are wrong.

That is what he is telling us. We should no longer let outsiders judge us about how we practice our religion. Why? Because they are spiritually dead and we are spiritually alive, They do not have a dog in the fight. That is what Paul is telling us. These things—eating, drinking, Sabbath, New Moon, festivals—all of those are in the purview of the church of God, not of the world. They do not have a thing to do with those practices and so they do not get a say in what we do. Paul essentially says here, do not let anybody judge you on your religious practices but the body of Christ. That is how we should read that. It is the church that has the ability to judge us on these things, not the world, not some outsider.

Then he says in verse 18 and onto the end of the chapter, do not let anyone undermine you by telling you that you have to do other things not required by God in His Word. Do not let people come into your midst that talk about outside things that you have to do in order to be part of the Kingdom of God. That is strictly church business, not an outsider business.

Now, we come to chapter 3. This is where the letter transitions from being doctrinal to practical, from going to theology to Christian living. The book of Romans does this in chapter 12, Galatians does this at chapter 5, Ephesians does it at chapter 4. Paul does not teach high-level theology without showing how it plays out practically in a Christian life. He always pairs the two together. Theology is great, but it is essentially worthless if it remains purely academic. We might have all the knowledge of God in our heads but if it is

not translated into action and practice, then it does no good. *It must be lived.* You are only going to grow in character if you live what you have been taught. So Paul begins chapter 3 as he does here.

**Colossians 3:1-4** If then you were raised with Christ [what he was talking about at the end of chapter 2], seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

So Paul begins chapter 3 with an "if then" statement. If this is true, then this is true. Or if this is true, then you need to do this. He reaches back into the second chapter for this, talking about being raised with Christ and such. That is, if you have been raised with Christ, you have been raised from the dead, as it were, through baptism, which is a kind of like a resurrection out of the watery grave. And if that is the case, then you have been made spiritually alive from the point of being spiritually dead. So through the Holy Spirit now you are alive with the life of Christ in you, that is where you are now. If you are in this condition, what do you do? That is the "then" part. If you are in this condition of being spiritually alive through Christ, then what steps do you take? What is your practical reaction?

The overall advice that he gives, our goal he mentions first: Seek those things which are above. All of our efforts from that point on need to be oriented towards things above. We have to have our gaze lifted from what is going on in the here and now and the around and about, to what God is doing, what God is preparing, what God is seeking in us. So we have to be oriented toward heavenly things or spiritual things or godly things, however you want to put it.

This word seek in Greek is *zeteite*. It covers both desiring and striving toward. It implies set your heart on. Everything about us, our attitudes, our allegiances, our agendas, our ambitions, our interests, all of those things, all of our acts have Christ and the things of God at their core *at all times*. Once we are in this spiritually alive state, then our physical life becomes secondary and we should do nothing that does not have Christ and God and godly things as part of them. What God has done for us has to reach into every

aspect of our lives. In fact, the verb tense here is present imperative. So we could say he is saying "be constantly seeking" or "keep on seeking the things that are above."

And then he says, "set your mind on things above." Or we could say "*think* on things which are above." It is very similar to seek those things which are above but it focuses more on your inner disposition. Theologian J. B. Lightfoot of this verse writes, "You must not only seek heaven, you must also think heaven." Or put it in our own terms (we would probably not use the term heaven), but you must not only seek the things of God, but you must *think* the things of God. That is, our governing tendency of our thoughts and will are always toward God, not towards things of this earth. William Barclay, the commentator, explains it this way, "From now on, the Christian will see everything in the light and against the background of eternity." Or maybe we could put it this way, "We will see everything in the light and against the background of the Kingdom of God."

Now, it must be this way because our lives as errant, individual, uncommanded humans are over. They died in the waters of baptism. That is the dead man, the old man. Our life is integrated so closely with Christ, as he goes on to say in Colossians 3:3-4, that it is like He has completely engulfed us. We have been totally covered in Him. He is in us and we are in Him and that is just the way it is. He is our life! There is no separation and this unity is only to become closer and closer and more intimate as we approach Christ's return, when we will appear with Him in glory and be like Him, as it says in I John 3.

So, now that he has gotten this introduction on the practical areas of Christian living, how should we act? How should we live? How should we behave?

**Colossians 3:5-17** Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you

have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

And let me just throw in verse 20,

**Colossians 3:20** Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

I added that one in there for a purpose.

Because we have the godly heavenly goal and mindset we have to do these things. We have to do the negative things of getting rid of our sins and we have to do the positive things of putting on character and behaving like Jesus Christ. So we have to kill or put to death or reckon as dead everything that reeks of earthiness or deadness—spiritual deadness, if you will, that was part of our old life apart from God. We have to get rid of that because we are new. We have a new life and new goals, a new way of doing things, a new heart. And what it comes down to is we have to get rid of all that fruit of human nature, which is sin. We have to get rid of it, put it out of our lives, and never go back to it.

Notice here, in all that we read, that Paul does not mention this in terms of law or commandments. He even shies away from using the word sin or anything that might hint at the Old Covenant or any kind of Jewish practices.

He comes at it from a different angle. But you know what? The Ten Commandments are there. They are hidden in plain sight. I mark my Bible up and I make sure that the Ten Commandments are part of my marking system. I use a little triangle with a number inside and I make it point to where those commandments are mentioned.

In this chapter alone, chapter 3, he mentions eight commandments. He does not talk about Sinai or the Ten Commandments, he just mentions the sins that are the breaking of those commandments. All Ten, except for number four, the Sabbath commandment, and number eight, the commandment against stealing. And he mentioned several of the commandments a couple of times, especially the ones about sexual sins, number seven, and the ones about bad use of the mouth, number nine. And then back in chapter 2, verse 18, he mentioned number four, the Sabbath and the festivals. In the end, the only commandment that he does not mention specifically in the book of Colossians is number eight, "You shall not steal."

The Ten Commandments in the book of Colossians are hidden in plain sight. I find it amusing that another hidden in plain sight reference here, that Paul tells them to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Boy, that says a lot. If you think that the law is done away, you might also think that the Old Testament is unimportant. But what is the word of Christ? Christ's teaching, what He talked about. And if you go back in the gospels and see what He taught, you will find, you do not even have to really look very closely, that He heartily endorsed the Old Testament and the law of God. He endorsed the Ten Commandments. He both endorsed and showed Sabbath keeping and a whole lot of other things that the once saved, always saved crowd believe are no longer in force for Christians. And by the way, Christ Himself is the Word of God, is He not? So that opens up a whole other line of instruction that should dwell in us richly.

Let us go to chapter 4, verse 17 because I want to end right here. I want to make this personal.

**Colossians 4:17** And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

This is essentially how he ends the book of Colossians. This man Archippus, he calls him out and he gives him specific instructions to say "fulfill your ministry." No one knows why Paul did this. It is conjectured, as I have mentioned before, that he was the pastor of the Laodicean church and possibly pastored the Colossian and Hierapolis churches as well. So a great deal of responsibility would fall on him as the pastor of those churches to ensure the faithfulness and integrity of the church members in those areas. He had a great responsibility to take what was written to the church from Paul and turn it into a continual teaching and instruction.

But I want us to take the place of Archippus in terms of this command. "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." Think about that. We live in a materialistic world, a time of unbelief, strange philosophies, sinful practices, nihilism, godlessness, and just plain weirdness. I know I saw a lot of weirdness coming up here to Portland. Yet we have been raised with Christ to a new life in Him, and He has given each of us a ministry, a mission, a purpose which is to become living sacrifices and be transformed into His image, as Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2.

So I have to ask you: How are you doing in filtering out all the anti-God noise from this world and seeking Him and setting your mind on heavenly things? We should all take this admonition to heart that Paul gave to Archippus: Take heed to your God-given purpose and work that you may complete it.