

The Cross (3) - How God Cancelled Our Death Warrant

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to look for some time at verses you find where we read in the scriptures in Paul's letter to the Colossians in chapter 2 and the verses there 13 to 15.

And you who are dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by cancelling the record of death that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to an open shame by triumphing over them in him.

From now to the communion, as you recall from the last two weeks, we're looking at passages in the scriptures dealing specifically with the cross of Christ.

And tonight we're looking at this reference to the cross that you find here in these verses, particularly in verse 14. Verse 9 indeed in this chapter you could take as itself really a summary of Paul's teaching in his letter to the Colossians.

[1 : 15] At least a summary of the burden of his mind as he wrote this letter to them. In verse 9 we find him saying therefore in him, that is in Jesus and Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

And you have been filled in him. Or you have been made complete in him also could be the sense of these words. In other words, what he's really saying is that Jesus has all the fullness of God. He's not simply a human being, but he is himself in that humanity still one who is God, who has the fullness of Godhood.

All that makes God, God is his, as Paul writes this. And on the other hand, he says that all of those who are in Christ, those that have come to trust in him, saved by him, you have been made complete in him.

And why is that an apt summary? Well, hope we'll come and see why that is after looking at these verses from 13 to 15. Because the situation in Colossae, as the church in Colossae, that the church in Colossae faced, as Paul wrote these words in this letter, was one where they were struggling against heresy, against false teaching.

[2 : 36] And you'll see in this passage itself the word philosophy that's actually used there in verse 8. Where Paul is saying, don't let anyone see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition.

And the word philosophy there doesn't have the ordinary meaning that it has for us nowadays. The word was used in Paul's day for a structure of ideas in which the spirit world were thought to be involved.

And where people would actually look to those spirit powers as having power over authority over human destiny. Not sure exactly what it was that Paul faced or the Colossians faced.

Some people think it was a later kind of heresy that came to be, to develop after the time of the apostles. He doesn't tell us exactly what it was, but we get a pretty good insight into it from some of the terminology that he uses.

And as he uses this word philosophy as well, it looks like he's actually taking or borrowing words which were used by the false teachers who had come to this church in Colossae and said, Well, you know, the things that you have in Christ are good, but they're not enough.

[3 : 55] You need something more than that. You need to actually have contact with these elemental spirits, with the spirit world, with what the pagan world called the gods who had this power and influence over life.

And that's why Paul, as we'll see, is saying in verse 14 here that the cross of Christ actually disarmed the rulers and authorities. There's no point in looking, he says, to the spirit world for any influence over your destiny.

That is in the hands of Jesus. As you have come to trust in him, you can safely leave all of that in his hands. Because by the cross, that is what Jesus has achieved.

He has achieved, on one hand, that which enables us to come to know forgiveness of sin or God to forgive our sins. And on the other hand, you've got this reference to disarming the rulers and authorities, by which he means in the spirit world and the spiritual world, similar to what he says in Ephesians chapter 6.

You can see how Paul also here is referring to these spirits or to that spirit world where he says in the first chapter of Colossians here in verse 13, that Jesus has, in fact, delivered us or God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and has delivered us and transferred us to or into the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.

[5 : 28] And for the church to have gone along with this false teaching would have, although it's a different kind of teaching, nevertheless, as we saw with the Corinthians, when we looked at the cross there as the wisdom and the power of God, what Paul was concerned for there, as indeed here, is the nullifying of the gospel.

It would have effectively destroyed the core issues of the gospel focused on the cross itself and how foundational the cross is for our complete redemption and our being made complete in Jesus Christ.

And it's important that before we look at the passage in detail that we see that the reference here actually is to God the Father who has done these things through the cross of Jesus Christ his Son. Because it's the Father that's referred to in the first chapter. It's the Father that's referred to here as well, where God is mentioned in distinction from Christ or from the Son.

You can see there that down through these verses he's talking there about the working of God, God in distinction from the Son, from Christ.

[6 : 39] And that's important because when you come to the teaching of the Bible, it's important that we take careful note of how precise the Bible is, how precise the apostle is in referring to the persons of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

One God, yet each of these persons with their own distinctive position or role in regard to our redemption, our salvation.

And what he's saying here is that God has made us alive, having been dead in trespasses and sins. He has made us alive, having forgiven us all trespasses by cancelling the record that was against us.

And he set this aside, nailing it to the cross. It's God the Father. Because in doing that, it's important that we give the Father the glory that's due to him, the praise that's due to him specifically for the work, for the actions the Bible tells us are specific to himself.

We have to honor the Father in that way, just as we honor the Son and the Holy Spirit for their particular role in our redemption too. But let's come to what we find in these verses.

[7 : 58] And we'll look at it under two headings. First of all, the role of the cross in God's forgiveness of sin, or sins as it's put here in plural. And secondly, the role of the cross in God's defeat of the evil powers, or of the rulers and authorities, to use Paul's description there.

The role of the cross in God's forgiveness of sins, and the role of the cross in God's defeat of evil forces, evil powers. He says there in verse 13, Now there's a lot to take in in that verse, and we're going to deal with it in some detail, but obviously not in depth with all the terms and the descriptions that are used there.

But notice where Paul begins. You who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.

He begins with their deadness in their sin. He begins with their deadness in relation to how God sees them, or how God holds them, and what their sin, in fact, has caused, what our sin has caused.

It's deadness. Very similar to what he says in Ephesians chapter 2, as we mentioned Ephesians 2. That's exactly how he begins there too, as you recall. You who were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

[9 : 38] Because when the Bible talks about our spiritual deadness, death is separation.

Death is separation. Death is separation. Death in the physical sense. Our soul and body coming to be separated. They part from each other at death physically.

But the Bible goes into it to show that death is much more than just a physical thing. spiritual death, which we brought about by our fall, by our disobedience, by our sin against God.

That's in the opening chapters of the Bible, especially chapter 3 of Genesis. That is how we came to be alienated, separated from God.

And that separation due to our sin is, in fact, death. Because death, in Paul's writings, is described as the wages of sin in his epistle to the Romans.

[10 : 40] The wages of sin. It's what sin pays out. It's what we brought upon ourselves. It's what we are responsible for. It's what we are guilty in respect to.

What he's saying here is, this is what you were. You were dead in your trespasses. And the only solution, the only way in which that can be undone, is by bringing what is dead back to life.

You can't do it by religion. You can't do it by a self-made kind of way of trying to please God. You can't do it by any kind of ritual, such as the Colossians were being tempted to engage in, it seems, from what Paul is saying to them.

When he's saying to them, your deadness was not actually dealt with by any such matters, by any such doings on your own part, not by anything that anyone else did apart from God.

And so your deadness and my deadness, because that's what we are. We're born into this world, dead in trespasses and sins. I know we can engage in much activity and in a lot of things which we really associate with life.

[11 : 55] But in a spiritual sense, in terms of our relationship with God, we are dead. We have no life. And we need that to be fixed.

And the way it can be fixed, the only way it's fixed is by God, bringing what is dead, bringing us back to life. And that's what he's saying. You were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.

We don't need to go into that phrase just now, but it's part of that state of their deadness. But God made alive. God quickened. God brought back to life you who are dead.

He brought you back together. He brought you back to life together with him. That's one of the glories of the gospel. It doesn't just specify our sinfulness and our deadness in our sins.

It really is concerned with providing God's answer to that situation in his own quickening of his people.

[12 : 58] What he's saying is, you were dead, but God made you alive. God brought you back to life together with him. What does it mean together with him? It means bonded to Jesus.

There is no life, no undoing of the deadness without being bonded to Christ, without being united to Christ, without coming to have Christ as the basis on which we stand in our relationship with God.

That is why all through Paul's writings and indeed in keeping with the rest of the Bible, you find an emphasis on how impossible it is without faith, how impossible it is to please God.

Because faith connects us with Christ. And when faith connects us with Christ, the standing that Christ has, the righteousness that he himself has procured by his death on the cross, that becomes ours.

That becomes our property or it's put on our record. And then we come to be approved of by God. So it's joined to Jesus that we come to be quickened by God.

[14 : 23] We, of course, logically, the quickening itself comes first, then faith follows. But they're part of what the Bible calls out new birth.

We come to be born again. And where God brings us to life, where we come to believe in Jesus, where we come to be bonded to him. Although, of course, there is a sense in which God's people are united to Christ from all eternity.

I'm going to go into that just now, but it's an aspect of our union with Christ. But what Paul is saying is he's beginning with their deadness. You were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.

God brought you back to life, made you alive together with him. Are you trying tonight to somehow meet with God's approval without being joined to Jesus?

Without being bonded to Christ? Do you think you can make it on your own? Are you looking forward to life in this world or even leaving this world without Jesus as someone that you're closely bonded to, united to?

[15 : 34] How can you possibly, or I possibly, think of pleasing God by our own efforts when we are dead in trespasses and sins? And as we'll see, when we have, in fact, God's death warrant written over us.

You see, what he's saying is here is God's answer to our deadness. He has the capacity, the power to bring us to life. But he's not just leaving it at that.

He made us alive together with him or bonded with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses. And again, of course, logically, forgiveness follows being quickened and brought to life and believing in Jesus.

But he wants to emphasize that this forgiveness that God has and bestows is complete pardon, having forgiven you all, us, all our trespasses.

for God to forgive is not turning a blind eye to our sin, nor is it just simply to make a declaration without something being provided that meets his demands and the demands of his broken law and this death warrant that we have, as we'll see in a minute, that's written over us.

[16 : 52] But what is emphasized here for the moment is this, that all our trespasses when God forgives our sins, they are all forgiven.

His pardon is complete. It is full. There is nothing left out. Any aspect of our sin that needs to be forgiven that is not covered in God's forgiveness.

It's a full and proper pardon. What a great privilege that is. You might say, what an unexpected privilege that is for people who are dead in trespasses and sins and in enmity against God, that God would actually have forgiveness for us, that there is mercy with him, that there is such a thing as complete pardon available to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Does that amaze you? Is that not really something really to wonder at? That this God, this perfect God, this God against whom we have sinned, this God that rightly holds us to account, this God that we cannot now please by our own efforts, that he would say to us through the gospel and through what he has done as we'll see in Christ, here is a full and complete pardon.

It's yours. It's yours for the taking. Come and avail yourself of it. Come and take Jesus to yourself and therefore have this pardon in your possession too, on your record too.

[18 : 33] But how can God do that? not just saying that you were dead in trespasses and sins, he says, God made us alive together with him having forgiven us all trespasses.

What's the basis of that forgiveness? How in fact has God brought that about? Well, that's the next part of it, isn't it? He's saying, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

Now, the word record there is a word that can mean either bond, it could mean regulation or law as well. It's either thinking of our relationship to God in terms of being bonded to God or having a bond that we should seek to honour but which we have broken by our sin or else you could take it as, indeed I think it's probably better taking it as a reference to the law of God, to the moral law, to that which God actually holds us to or holds to us as something that we have transgressed.

That's the word transgressions or trespasses there is going beyond the boundaries that God has set and that is revealed to us especially in his moral law as it's summarized for us in the Ten Commandments.

So there's this bond or there's this law and when you think of God's law and God's moral law as something that we have broken what is the result of that?

[20 : 06] What is, what then is the consequence of that? Well it's this, what you might call this death warrant. We mentioned that death is the wages of sin but what this is saying to us is that God has written a death warrant against us and he is just in doing so.

It's what we deserve. He has made out that death warrant. The Bible uses the word condemnation. It's not very popular.

We don't like it ourselves until God shows us the meaning of it. Until God shows us ourselves, our sinfulness. But that is God's death sentence.

It's a solemn thing to think that you and I when we come into this world in our natural sinful state we are actually on death row. The death warrant has been made out.

It's signed against us as Ephesians chapter 2 puts it we are the children of wrath even as others. We all lived in this he says in the passions of our flesh and of the desires of the body and the mind and whereby nature the children of wrath like the rest of mankind and then there comes this tremendous answer to that dilemma but God who is rich in mercy because of the great love with

which he loved us.

[21 : 35] So similar to what you find in Colossians here. So here he is saying this is the warrant that God has made out but what happened to it? In order for forgiveness to be in our possession or on our record well he says God cancelled the record of debt that stood against us.

Stood against us because it was actually held as something that was contrary to us that was accusing us rightly of what we had done against God.

And he is saying that he has cancelled he has forgiven us all our trust by cancelling this record of debt this warrant this death warrant that stood against us with its legal demands.

You see a full pardon can only take place if the warrant has been lifted out of the way. If the death warrant is gone then pardon comes into the picture.

And that's what he is saying God has forgiven us all trespasses and whereas a full pardon is on the basis of the death warrant actually being removed.

[22 : 51] It's no longer in place what he means here what he means literally there is he has taken it away. He cancelled it he took it away this record of debt this death warrant against us.

What an amazing thing that is that God would remove such a thing that God would remove such a thing how did that come about?

Forgiveness came about by his removing of the death warrant. How did the removing of the death warrant come about? How could God do that without compromising himself?

How can God forgive sin and yet be the just God that he is? What a great question as it is in theology. Because reparation must be made.

We are still in debt to God. He demands an atonement for our sin. We cannot give it to him. Can there be forgiveness without an atonement? No. Without the shedding of blood says Hebrews there is no remission there is no forgiveness.

[24 : 01] So where is God going to find someone to pay the debt that we owe to God? Where is God going to find someone who will take this debt and pay it in death?

What is God going to do with this death warrant that must be answered somewhere if it is not going to be applied to us as we deserve?

Who is going to pay the debt? Who is going to take the warrant that God has lifted off so that we don't have to have death applied to us?

Well the answer amazingly is God himself is going to do it and has done it. Because the emphasis in the passage is he has done this.

Not something that the world is waiting for to happen. It is something that he has done. Where has he done it? He has done it in the cross of Christ. He has set this aside. He has actually taken it out of the way.

[25 : 04] But he hasn't actually torn it up as if it is no longer relevant. As if he could pronounce forgiveness without this warrant actually being applied somewhere. Because that would mean that what God says about sin is no longer really a serious matter.

He cannot treat sin any less seriously than he has been and than he has treated all along. And so you see this is the wonder of what he is saying.

He cancelled. He took away the record of death. The death warrant that stood against us with his legal demands. Nailing it to the cross. I see there is there is God's way of taking it out of the way out of our record.

He actually put it on the record of his son. He nailed it to his cross. It's interesting that in crucifixion this may well lie behind the imagery that Paul is using here in nailing this to the cross as of course his spiritual action on the part of God.

But it's interesting that in crucifixions it was commonly the case that the accusation or the charge against the person being crucified was on a plate of some kind and it was nailed to the cross.

[26 : 34] And you remember when Jesus was crucified Mark tells us especially in his version in his account of the crucifixion Mark 15 and verse 26 that the accusation is the word he used was written above him.

This is Jesus the king of the Jews. Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews. That was his accusation that was a charge against him. And if we take that imagery and I think it's right to take it in line with what Paul is saying the death warrant that God had made out against us justly for our sin and rebellion and offence to him which we can never measure in all its fullness.

he didn't just tear it up and not apply it somewhere he applied it to his own son he applied it to Christ he nailed it to his cross and when you go to Galatians the language there is perhaps even more remarkable when writing to the Galatians in chapter 3 Paul said in verse 10 for all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse for it is written cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law to do them.

You see there is the death warrant cursed be everyone who cannot or does not abide by the things written in the book of the law to do them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith or the spirit of promise through faith.

Why did Jesus die? Why is the death of Christ such as it is? Why did he speak on the cross of being forsaken by God?

[28 : 42] My God, my God why have you forsaken me? What is that forsakenness about? Even if we cannot penetrate it very far we can certainly go so far as to say in the words of the apostle to the Colossians it is Jesus answering the death warrant that you and I should rightly have had applied to us.

He nailed it to his cross. He cancelled it in that sense of it. It's no longer against us it's against his son and he's paid he's paid it in full.

It's the same death warrant the same broken law the same demand of God but this time Jesus met it and answered it and satisfied it and overcame it for his people.

Why did he come? So that in the words of Galatians we might receive the promise of Abraham the spirit of God to come and live and set up home in our lives that we be saved that we no longer be under condemnation that's why he's saying in his epistle to the Romans there is therefore now no condemnation there's no sign of the death warrant to those who are in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation.

Now come back to the problems or to the the teaching that the Colossians were facing the false teaching where they were being drawn aside from the completeness of Christ and their completeness in Christ and Paul is saying to them all you've got to do is look at the cross and see what happened on the cross and see what God did in applying this death warrant to his son and in seeing how completely he met it and took it to himself how can there be any condemnation how can there be any need to go beyond this Jesus and this cross and this God who has done this by the cross of Christ how can there be any need or any meaningfulness to go into the spirit world for your completeness there no he's saying you are complete in him nobody who has faith in Christ should doubt of whether they are complete in him nobody should really think that something else is necessary for them to be right with God for them to have the life for which Jesus died the death of the cross it's all ours in him that's why it's so significant when we come to remember him in the Lord's Supper we take everything that the Bible says about his completeness his fullness and all that God has done by the cross we say this is actually mine by the grace of God

[31 : 58] I have that completeness in Jesus Christ but he's also just in a closing really the second point I spent a bit longer on that but the second point is the role of the cross in God's defeat of evil powers he dealt with a death warrant he set it aside he nailed it to the cross and he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to an open shame by triumphing over them in him or you could say in it the cross it doesn't really come to anything different if it's it or him it's still the cross it's the death of Jesus or Jesus in his death what did he do?

well by the cross he disarmed the rulers and authorities the very things that the Colossians are being taught or called on to go towards and to dabble in and in an occultish sense to look to for the completion of their salvation or the security or their assurance that everything is right between them and eternity he says he disarmed the rulers and authorities and by disarmed he means he stripped them bare now the imagery behind this is really what happened in Roman times when the Roman legions or the army came back from a campaign successful campaign they would come through their home city wherever it would be wherever it would be in the empire and as the generals and the leaders of the army paraded through the streets they would be dragging behind them often in chains and stripped of their armor the defeated soldiers of the enemy that they defeated they would be put on open display so that nobody seeing that would doubt whether it was a real victory or not it wasn't in theory there was the evidence here is the defeated army of those the Roman army went out to conquer and conquered and they're being dragged behind the chariots of these Roman

generals and soldiers and what a bedraggled lot they look they're thoroughly defeated and this is what

God did through the cross of Christ I think it's better to still maintain the emphasis on the father he disarmed the rulers and authorities he stripped them of the basis on which they could come with accusations to God's people this death warrant that Satan could lay his hands on and say look that's really still not been taken out of the way God has still not found something by which adequately and comprehensively that death warrant would be removed from you well now it's no longer the case because God has removed it by applying it to his son and Satan has no longer anything to take hold of he's defeated he's been nullified and the armies of hell as they assist him are dragged behind the cross of Christ behind our great commander the indictment is removed and Satan is vanquished he made a show of them he put them to an open shame you know a public spectacle is what's meant and remember all of this took place in history yes the cross is situated in an actual position and place in this world at Golgotha on a remote hillside a historical event but the cross has cosmic dimensions because the effect of the cross reverberates throughout the spirit world and the rulers and authorities are vanquished by it they are defeated by it

Satan lost whatever position he had it's no longer his and he's been put in the presence of that whole spirit world he's been made a public spectacle of and put to an open shame because God has triumphed over all of these powers in the cross the triumph of the cross has that cosmic dimension to it but what does it have by way of effect in your own heart if it reverberates throughout the spirit world God has indeed put on display there the defeat of Satan and his army how is it within your own soul surely that's the case in your life too when the gospel is telling you that God has dealt with the death warrant that was against us because of our sin when God has said that he has taken it out of the way by applying it to his son when God has said that the cross has been effective in overcoming and vanquishing the powers of evil of Satan and his army why is it if there is such a heart here tonight why is it that Jesus is not king in your heart too must this not be for you tonight your greatest encouragement and hope for eternity that God has dealt with your death warrant so effectively and that by trusting in

Christ you are complete in him let's pray heavenly father we give thanks for your work through the cross for your provision of that great transaction between you and your son we thank you lord for the way in which the cross has been so dynamic and successful in dealing with that broken relationship between sinners and their God we thank you tonight for the way in which the gospel holds out for us that life that is in abundance found in Jesus Christ oh lord we pray that as we contemplate these things and seek to bring them to heart may our hearts rejoice may we come to serve you who is so deserving of our service for all that you have done and giving your only begotten son to that death of the cross lord make us increasingly dependent upon you and assure us each day of the truthfulness of your word when it brings these things to us continue with us now we pray for

[39 : 28] Jesus sake amen let's conclude now by singing in psalm 24 psalm number 24 again singing from sing psalms that's on page 28 and singing the verses 7 to 10 the tune of st.

George of Edinburgh you ancient gates lift up your heads your doors be opened wide so may the king of glory come forever to abide but who is this exalted king what glorious king is he it is the lord of strength and might the lord of victory psalm 24 verses 7 to the end of the psalm we'll stand to sing you ancient gates lift up your heads gruddled so may the king of glory come forever to abide and the exalted king

What glorious King is He! It is the Lord of strength and might, the Lord of victory.

It is the Lord of strength and might, the Lord of victory.

You ancient kings lift up your heads, your doors be opened wide.

[41 : 52] So may the King of glory come forever to abide.

But who is this exalted King?

Who can this sovereign be? The Lord Almighty, He is King of glory, none but He.

The Lord Almighty, He is King of glory, none but He.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

[43 : 07] Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen!

I'll go to the main door after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen! Amen! Amen!