

Nailed to the Cross, part 1

Valley Center SDA Church

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Our study today comes from the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, written to a church in Asia Minor, what we call Turkey today. It was not far from the city of Laodicea. In this passage is a phrase which contains a beautiful Gospel message, but this phrase has been used by some to declare that the Decalogue has been abolished. You've probably heard the phrase at some point "nailed to the cross." Some argue that it's speaking of the Ten Commandments and that they were "nailed to the cross," meaning that they were nullified and have no place in the Christian's life. This phrase then becomes a critical text to understand.

Every Seventh-day Adventist should have a solid grasp of what this text says. Someday you'll hear this text quoted in support of the idea that God's holy Sabbath day is not important, because the Law was "nailed to the cross." Is that really what Paul meant? We'll give thought to that question. But I hope that the take away from this study won't be merely an analysis for the purpose of having something to answer when someone refers to this text and uses it to say that God's Law was nailed to the cross. I hope that we leave our worship service today with a renewed appreciation for God's great love and the free grace and forgiveness He offers to us lost sinners. Because the passage is so rich, we'll have to divide our study between what we cover today and the next time.

We'll read the passage, then study carefully its words and phrases to see exactly what Paul said and what he did not say. Understood correctly, there is a beautiful message of God's love and mercy, which doesn't do away with the Ten Commandments but gives sinners like you and me hope that God is willing and able to forgive and cleanse us of sin. Understood incorrectly and it undermines the very foundation of God's government and can be used by the arch-enemy of God, Satan, to mislead souls to destruction.

Because this topic deals with God's Law, we wish to reiterate at the beginning that our keeping of the Law does not entitle us to heaven. We can't earn God's favor through our obedience. That's

legalism. That's impossible. That's Old Covenant thinking. It doesn't work. It would be a huge mistake to think that we "deserve heaven" because of our good works. Did you hear what former New York Governor Michael Bloomberg said a couple of weeks ago? He actually said that he thought he deserved to be in heaven because of the positive programs he initiated while serving as governor. He said, "I'm not waiting to be interviewed" when I get there; "I deserve to be in heaven. It's not even close." Sad, incorrect thinking!

That was the type of thinking that confronted Paul by Jewish teachers in his day. They felt that their obedience to the Law qualified them for salvation. That's what the rich young ruler thought when he approached Christ. "All these things I have done from my youth up," he said. That's what the Pharisee in the temple revealed when he prayed. That's what Paul thought in his pre-Christian days. "As touching the law," he said, he was "blameless." Wrong! Only Christ's blood makes us "blameless" and acceptable to God. "All of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," it says in the Bible. Isaiah 64:6. The Old Testament does not teach legalism. It teaches righteousness by faith. But Satan had twisted the Scriptures and led teachers to believe that your works merited eternal life.

Along with that, note that the New Testament deals with two laws; the moral law and the ceremonial law. Actually, there are many more laws than that (dietary, hygienic, civil laws, etc.), but the moral and ceremonial laws are given emphasis. You can appreciate the fact that they could be "blended" somewhat in Paul's thinking, because after all up until that time they were both binding on God's people. They both had to do with God's plan of redemption; the moral law defines sin, and the ceremonial law reveals His solution to sin.

Besides that, in Paul's day there were misconceptions and challenges regarding both. Interwoven within the passage we're studying and throughout the New Testament, we have the teaching that the ceremonies, types and symbols given to illustrate the great Sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary came to their end when Jesus died on the cross. Try to appreciate the change in thinking required for a Jewish person becoming a Christian back then. "What? It's no longer required to attend Passover? I no longer have to bring a lamb to the temple to be sacrificed?" For a faithful Jew who became a Christian a radical change in thinking was required, and the New Testament records this change and adaptation. There were then "issues" with both laws in Paul's day, the moral and the ceremonial law. There was a misconception regarding the role of the Ten Commandment Law, and a

misunderstanding regarding the temporary nature of the ceremonial law.

So keep carefully in mind two concepts that Paul addresses; that the keeping of the "Law" (including the Ten Commandments) does not earn salvation; and that the ceremonial laws were fulfilled when Christ hung on the cross. This was clearly shown by the fact that an unseen hand ripped the veil of the temple from top to bottom when Jesus offered His life as the Sacrifice for sin. So we have two laws to keep in mind; the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, which cannot save, but remains in place as the Standard of God's holy requirements, and the ceremonial law, which prefigured the death of the Savior and came to its end at the cross.

There is plenty of evidence in Scripture to establish the different systems of law, and that clear distinction has been recognized by the Christian church through the ages, though the line of demarcation has become somewhat blurry in the minds and teachings of a few in the last century.

With that background in mind, let's start back in verse 12 of Colossians 2. "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened (or, "made alive") together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 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; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of any holyday or of the new moon, of the Sabbath days which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Colossians 2:12-17, KJV.

It is true that a casual, superficial reading of this text might lead someone to believe that God's law was "nailed to the cross" and therefore abolished, but is that what Paul meant? Were the Ten Commandments removed by the cross? We will see, by the time we're finished, that the phrase, "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" is simply a repetition of the thought that precedes it, namely "having forgiven you all trespasses." Those two phrases are saying exactly the same thing. Paul explains and amplifies the one by the other.

Let's ask the question one more time. Is this passage speaking of the Ten Commandments or the ceremonial law? Was it speaking of the moral law or the ordinances and services that pertained to the sacrificial system? The answer is, both! It's true that the passage incorporates the idea that the sacrificial system came to an end when Jesus died. We'll spend just a minute or two focusing on that aspect of the text before moving on. Yes, this text is most certainly highlighting the fact that the ceremonial law came to its end when Jesus died. It is for that reason that Paul said a few verses later, "Therefore 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." Colossians 2:16, 17.

That's talking about the ceremonial law. How do we know that it's addressing the ceremonial "sabbaths" and not the seventh-day Sabbath? We confess that if the text read, "Let no one judge you in regard to the Sabbath," with the sentence coming to an end with a period right there, we would have to look at the passage in a different way. But it doesn't do that.

Here are 4 brief reasons to support the conclusion that the seventh day Sabbath is not what Paul is addressing. First, notice the way it's combined with "food and drink" and "festival and new moon." These pertained to the sacrificial system. He's speaking particularly of food and drink *offerings*. See Hebrews 9:10. Meal and drink offerings typically accompanied the sacrifice of the innocent animals in the sanctuary service.

Second, notice that it's in the plural form; it's "sabbaths." Why is it in the plural form? Because there were many "sabbaths" associated with the festivals as described in Leviticus 23. Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles all had their "holy convocations" or "sabbaths" connected with them that were different from the seventh-day Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment.

Third, notice the important word "which," which serves as a qualifier, a limitation. It is a most critical word! For example, if I say "Go to the parking lot and write down the license plate numbers of all the cars that are there," that's one thing. But if I say, "Go to the parking lot and write down the license plate numbers of all the cars *which are from out of state*," it's a whole different matter. The qualifying phrase that begins with the word "which" has reduced and

specified the ones in the larger category. It's carved out of the larger "circle" a specific portion.

So it is in this text. It's not talking about all "Sabbaths;" it's referring to those *which* were a "shadow of things to come." The term "shadow" and the phrase "things to come" are huge! "Shadow" means that it was a type, symbol or illustration. A "shadow" isn't the real thing, but in some ways it's like it. The sacrificial system was a "shadow" illustrating the death of Christ. That's why he says, "The body (or Substance) is of Christ." The sacrifices only illustrated the death of Jesus. They were temporary models of redemption; destined to be removed with the real event happened. "To come" means that they pointed forward in time to some great event; namely, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In Old Testament times, when sacrifices were mandated, the cross was still in the future.

The "sabbaths which are a shadow of things to come" cannot refer to the seventh-day Sabbath because it was not instituted as a "shadow of things to come," but as a reminder of an event in the past, namely the creation of the world by Jehovah God. Read the fourth commandment. The very first word is "Remember," which points you backward in time, not forward. You don't say, "Remember what I will do three weeks from now;" you say, "Remember what I did three weeks ago." Then within the commandment itself it explains why we are to honor the Sabbath: "For in six days the LORD *made* heaven and earth." It's highlighting something that took place in the past. On the other hand, the types, symbols and ceremonies of sacrifice celebrated in Old Testament times were just that; a "shadow" pointing forward to Calvary; an illustration or a pre-figure of the cross. Now that the cross has become a real event in history, the illustrations of animal sacrifices are no longer necessary.

Fourth, compare the language of this passage with Hebrews and you will see that when Paul speaks of the food and drink, festival, new moon and "sabbaths which are a shadow of things to come," he is referring to the components of the sacrificial system, and not the seventh-day Sabbath. Notice the usage of the same word "shadow" in Hebrews and the repetition of the phrase (good) "things to come."

"Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary

that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.' It (the earthly sanctuary) was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect." Hebrews 8:1-5; 9:9-11; 10:1. By comparing these passages, it is clear that in Colossians 2 he is most certainly making the argument that because Jesus died on the cross the sacrificial ceremonies are no longer binding on the Christian. Not an easy transition for a Jew who became a Christian in Paul's day!

The ceremonial law is absolutely part of the discussion. But it is a "blended" discussion of two laws, the ceremonial and the moral law of the Ten Commandments. Paul had both in mind when he wrote this. It was natural for him to do so, since they both had to do with God's solution to the sin problem. The moral law defines sin, and the ceremonial law reveals God's solution to sin, with its symbols pre-figuring Christ's victorious death on the cross.

There were issues with both laws; a misconception regarding the temporary nature of the ceremonial law, and a misunderstanding regarding the role of the moral law. Both laws are being discussed, but we believe that the primary emphasis in verse 14, when he states that He "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us," is on our violations of the Ten Commandment Law.

Our sin and the solution for it is illustrated by many models in the Bible. Our sin created a "debt" which needed to be satisfied. Our sin was a "crime" against heaven, which resulted in charges brought which are against us, and the punishment for which was taken by the Son of God. Verse 14 is addressing primarily the Ten Commandments, the breaking of which brought about a "handwriting that was against us and was contrary to us." That's because it is in the moral law that

we find sin identified. It is the record of our sins that was against us, contrary to us and needed to be blotted out.

First, we're going to take a careful look at the word "handwriting" and see what it meant to Paul's audience. Then we'll analyze the sentence from a grammatical perspective to see what light we might obtain. Then we'll compare some other passage in Scripture to see what we can learn about the Ten Commandments and whether they are still valid or not.

We'll learn a little Greek today. Don't be intimidated; it's just one word, and easy to pronounce. Plus as you'll see, there are English words that come from the two parts of this word, which makes it easy. And there's a great blessing in knowing its meaning once you understand it. There's a great Gospel message of hope in this text!

We're speaking of the word "handwriting" as it appears in this text. It is a most interesting word. It is a compound word, made up of two parts. In Greek it is *cheirographon*. Can you say that? *Cheirographon*, with the accent on the second syllable. The first part, according to modern Greek pronunciation, sounds like "hero," with the "h" having a guttural emphasis. The two "r's" are slightly "rolled," as you would in Spanish. *Cheirographon*. This is a combination word, made up of two familiar parts, *cheir* meaning "hand" (as in "chiropractor," one who works with his hands; you can see the root for "practice," "pragmatic" and "practical" there), and *graphon* meaning "something written," which is associated with hundreds of words in our language, such as "telegraph" ("distance writing"), "phonograph" ("sound writing") and "photograph" ("light writing"), etc.

So *cheirographon* means "hand writing," and is so translated. But here's the question. What do the two familiar parts mean when they are combined into a compound word? Is there a special meaning that we should see? There are combination words in our language, as well as in theirs that could fool you. Though the component parts are familiar and recognizable, when put together they may take on an independent and special meaning that might not at first be identifiable.

To illustrate this point, we're going to do a little interactive exercise. For this part of the study I'm going to ask that you intentionally "forget" what you know about some compound words or word combinations used in our language. I'm going to suggest some compound words that you're all familiar with, but I'm going to ask that you try your best to imagine that you don't know what the compound

word means; you only know what the individual parts mean. Try to imagine that you're transported centuries into the future, and now you're reading a letter that you've found in an old trunk which contains some words which may or may not be used in the English language of the future. However, you know what the components of the compound words mean, but what does the term mean when those familiar parts are put together into a compound word or word combination? Are you with me on this?

Why are we doing this? The whole point is that we're trying to show that the term that is the subject of our study, one of the key terms in the chapter, "handwriting" contains parts which are familiar and easy to understand. The question is, What does this term mean in its combined form? We've seen that *cheirographon* is a word in which *cheir* is "hand" and *graphon* means "written." But what does the word mean when it combines those two parts into one. Does it take on a special and unique meaning that might possibly not be seen from a distance?

Here are some examples in our language of compound words or words used in combination that could trick you if you encountered them in the future and didn't already know their special meaning. Are you ready? Try to take the two parts slowly, individually, and then as they are put together.

"Blood drive." What's a blood drive? It's when there's a special promotion to invite people to give their blood for a charitable purpose. You see the "bloodmobile" parked out in front of a hospital or in some other location. That's another term we could examine. "Bloodmobile." What if you saw that word 200 years from now and knew what "blood" was and you knew what "mobile" meant. But what's a "bloodmobile"? We know what it means. We know what a "blood drive" is. But try to imagine if you lived centuries from now and you knew what the word "blood" was, and you knew what the word "drive" meant, but had never seen the term "blood drive" before. What would you think it meant? Can you imagine the weird and wrong possibilities that could come to mind?

Here's a few more. "Thorough;" you know what that means, don't you? "Complete," "finished." Now for the next part. "Fare." What's a "fare"? It's a ticket for travel; the price paid to ride on transportation. Just how long would it take someone to figure out that "thoroughfare" meant a "boulevard," a "highway"?

How about "shoe horn"? Everybody knows what a "shoe" is and what a "horn" is. But when you put those two together into "shoe horn" it comes out with a meaning that may not be readily visible. Or how about the term "ear shot"? You might say something like, "I didn't quite hear what he had to say; I wasn't within ear shot. "Ear shot"? Imagine someone trying to figure out what that means if they didn't already know. Yes, they might know what the word "ear" means. A "shot" could be the firing of a pistol or it could be a hypodermic syringe. So what does the term "ear shot" mean? Would you ever guess, without outside help, that it's talking about "range of hearing"?

What about the familiar baseball term "short stop"? Or "side arm"? Would you know that referred to a gun? If you didn't already know, what would you think the term "drive train" meant? That would be a locomotive engineer, wouldn't it? No! Here's an interesting one. What about the term "fire cracker"? You knew what "fire" was. And what's a "cracker"? That could be a saltine wafer or it could be something that cracks nuts. How long would it take to know the real meaning of what a "firecracker" is to us? Here are some more. What about "paperboy"? You know what a "stage" is. And you know what a "coach" is too. But how does that come together as "stagecoach"?

What about "pot hole" and "headlock"? Think of someone trying to figure out "pen name" or "dead line." What about "side walk" or "jumper cables." How about "kitty corner"? The list could be endless because it's such a common thing to do. We take familiar words and put them together to make a compound word or a combination phrase which then takes on a special meaning. *Such is the case with the term cheirographon, "handwriting."* We need to make sure that we don't just know what the individual parts mean by themselves, but what they mean together as a compound term. This is vital! Some people say, "Well, let's see. 'Handwriting.' I know that God wrote the Ten Commandments with His own hand, so the 'handwriting' must be the Decalogue that was nailed to the cross." Wrong!

How could you learn what the special meaning of a compound word is? Well, you could see how it's used in other places and then ascertain from the context what its definition is. How many other times does the Bible use that term, and what can we learn from those other occurrences? Here we have a bit of a challenge because it isn't used anywhere else in the Bible. Not once! Colossians 2:14 is the only instance it appears in Scripture.

However, we are blessed to have documents from secular sources from the times of Paul and the early Christian era which clearly demonstrate what this term means. We don't have to guess. And once you know what its special meaning is, you will say to yourself, "Sure. Of course. I can see that," just as you do with most of the combination words in our language today.

Here's what the evidence shows as far as what *cheirographon* meant in Paul's day. Actually there are two applications; one coming from what we call civil law, as in a situation involving a contract. The other comes from criminal law, as when someone has committed a crime. Both, as we mentioned, are models used to illustrate salvation. Most of the evidence points to this first usage, having to do with contractual agreements. And what exactly did "handwriting" mean in that context? It meant, in simple terms, "evidence of debt." It was, in the common way of speaking, an "I.O.U." In other words, when a transaction was made for which the purchase price was not immediately advanced, the creditor received a note *written by the hand* of the debtor, giving evidence of the debt and promising to pay for it. This promise to pay the debt was a "hand-writing," a *cheirographon*. That's what was nailed to the cross when Jesus died for our sins.

Yes, there's much to learn from this text in a technical and analytical way. But don't overlook the great Gospel message that shines brightly, which is the message of hope that Paul wanted us to see day! Jesus died for our sins! By accepting Him, our record is cleared! We stand "not guilty" before God when we are in Christ. Yes, we know this is undeserved. Yes, we know that we merit eternal death for our sins. But praise God that He has made a way of salvation for every single person. "Jesus paid it all." Please, friend, take this wonderful gift and let it bathe your soul in the peace that only He can give. Let Him take your guilt and sorrow and replace it with the "joy of salvation," knowing that God has loved you with an everlasting love, and that He wants desperately to live with you forever!

Years ago a man watched his wife and children sail away on a ship, only to learn later that the ship sank with the loss of all on board. This man arranged to go on a ship that traveled in a similar direction, asking the captain to notify him when they reached the spot near where the other ship sank, a request that the captain honored. Being a Christian, the man was deeply affected by the experience, and finding assurance in the Gospel he wrote this beautiful hymn in response to his ordeal. The second verse of this familiar hymn states accurately

what Paul was communicating to the Colossians. It wasn't God's law that was nailed to the cross, it was our sin. "My sin—O the joy of this glorious thought—My sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more; Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul." Because he rested in the confidence of the Savior's grace, though he had been deprived of his family he could sing, "It is well with my soul." May it be "well" with out souls today, resting in the assurance of God's saving and forgiving grace.