

Colossians 2:13-15 • Forgiveness Found, Freedom Won

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Introduction

Have you ever been walking, perhaps a bit distracted, and suddenly found yourself face-to-face with an invisible barrier? I'm talking about walking straight into a glass door. One moment, you're moving freely; the next, you're jolted to a stop by something you didn't even see coming. It's a jarring experience, a sudden and often embarrassing reminder that there are forces at play, obstacles in our path, that we are not always aware of.

Similarly, we all face invisible barriers in our lives- barriers that are far more significant than a pane of glass. These barriers include guilt, shame, and the pervasive darkness that seeks to hold us captive. We may not always see them, but their impact is undeniable. They shape our thoughts, influence our decisions, determine the quality of our lives, and ultimately affect our experience of the afterlife.

How do we know these barriers exist? How do we recognize their presence in our lives? First, consider the nagging voice of our conscience, that internal moral compass pointing us toward right and wrong. When we deviate from this compass, making choices that violate our sense of integrity, we feel the sting of guilt. This guilt serves as a witness, a testament to the barrier separating us from a clear conscience and inner peace. It signals that something is amiss, that we have fallen short of the mark.

Second, look at the prevalence of fear, anxiety, sadness, and depression in our world. These are not merely fleeting emotions; they often represent the outward manifestations of a deeper, more profound burden – the burden of darkness. There exists a dark and oppressive force that seeks to diminish our joy, stifle our hope, and ultimately bring out the worst in us. It whispers lies in our ears, preys on our insecurities, and convinces us that we are unworthy of love and happiness.

This darkness is not just a psychological phenomenon; it is a spiritual reality. It is a force that aims to separate us from God, from one another, and from our true selves. This force thrives on division, discord, and despair. However, there is good news! There is a way to break through these invisible barriers, overcome the guilt and shame that plague us, and find freedom from the oppressive darkness that tries to consume us. This way is found in the message of Easter.

Big Idea: Easter is Forgiveness and Freedom. Easter is not merely a religious holiday but a wartime triumph against the forces of darkness and a declaration of reconciliation with God. It celebrates forgiveness and freedom, serving as a testament to God's power to transform lives and break the chains that bind us.

Passage

Colossians 2:13-15; And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt 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 open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

Death to Life

This passage is packed with meaning, revealing the profound impact of Christ's death and resurrection on our lives. Let's break it down. Paul begins by describing our condition before Christ. He says that we "were dead in our trespasses and the uncircumcision of our flesh." The phrase "uncircumcision of the flesh" refers directly to the Gentiles, those who were not part of the Jewish people. But Paul quickly broadens the scope, changing the pronoun to "us all" when he speaks of forgiveness. This tells us that both Jews and Gentiles were spiritually dead, separated from God by their sin.

Notice that Paul doesn't simply say we were "guilty." He uses the word "dead." This is a powerful image, implying that sin doesn't merely lead to punishment; it cuts us off from life itself. It separates us from the source of all life, which is God. However, the good news is that God made us "alive together with him." Through Christ, we are resurrected from our spiritual death and granted new life. This is not merely a legal transaction, just a removal of guilt. It signifies a restoration of life, a reconnection with God, and a transformation of our very being. God achieved this "new life" for us through forgiveness and freedom.

Forgiveness

The passage goes on to say that God has forgiven us "all our trespasses." This is a sweeping statement, encompassing every sin we have ever committed and every sin we will ever commit. It is a complete and unconditional pardon, a wiping clean of the slate. But how did God accomplish this forgiveness? Paul tells us that He did it "by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands."

What is this "record of debt"? In the ancient world, the term referred to an IOU, a written acknowledgment of an obligation to pay a debt. It was a legal document that could be used to hold someone accountable for their financial responsibilities. In this context, the "record of debt" signifies our sin and its consequences. It serves as the evidence of our failure to meet God's standards, the proof of our guilt.

Many scholars believe the "legal demands" refer to the Mosaic Law. While Paul doesn't explicitly mention the Law here, his language is similar to that found in other parts of his writings where he discusses the Law. For example, in Colossians 2:20, he uses similar terminology to refer to Mosaic dietary laws, and in Ephesians 2:15, he directly associates "ordinances/legal demands" with the Law.

The Mosaic Law was given to the Israelites as a guide for righteous living. It was intended to show them how to please God and to live in harmony with one another. However, the Law also revealed their sinfulness. It showed them how far they fell short of God's perfect standard.

The problem was not the Law itself but our inability to keep it perfectly. The Law became a constant reminder of our failure, a source of condemnation and guilt. It highlighted our sinful nature and our inability to earn God's favor. The law wasn't the problem; instead, it was the tool that revealed the problem: our sinful nature. The law itself has not been canceled, but its condemning effect on humanity in their sin.

So, how does the cross set this debt aside? Paul tells us that God canceled the record of debt by "nailing it to the cross." This phrase refers to the Roman custom of affixing a statement of the convicted person's crimes to their cross. This practice is illustrated in the Gospels, where we see that a sign was placed above Jesus' head, proclaiming Him to be "The King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37, John 19:19). In a similar way, God the Father recognized the sins of humanity on the cross, while bystanders only observed the sign "The King of the Jews." The debt was placed on Christ on the cross, which aligns with Galatians 3:13 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. This is a beautiful exchange: He takes our sin, and we receive His righteousness.

Easter is about forgiveness, the removal of guilt, and the giving of righteousness. But the courtroom is not the only place our minds should go when thinking about Easter's effects. We should also think of war, the liberation from the dark, oppressive force over us.

Freedom

Paul continues in verse 15: "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." Who are these "rulers and authorities"? They are evil spiritual powers and their human counterparts. Both Satan and Caesar. Because of sin, all humanity is under the power and influence of the demonic realm (Ephesians 2:1-3). These forces seek to enslave us through fear, guilt, and shame. Satan wields the power of the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). He uses this fear to manipulate and control us, preventing us from living fully and freely.

What does it mean to "disarm" these rulers and authorities? The term "disarm" has a military implication, suggesting that God has stripped them of their weapons and power. The phrase "disgrace/open shame" carries a more political connotation. Both ideas may be present here. The concept of stripping or disarming can also refer to removing politically significant clothing that shows one's status of power. God's act of "stripping" these evil powers implies that we should no longer fear or worship them. God in Christ has delivered a decisive blow to their authority and power. The term "triumphing" is associated with a spectacle of shame and success familiar to many at that time. This alludes to the practice of Roman generals, who, after defeating an enemy, would announce their

victory by parading their defeated foes through the city in chains, exposing their weakness and humiliation for all to see.

From a purely physical perspective, Christ was the one stripped (“disarmed”) by human authorities aligned with dark spiritual powers and publicly shamed on the cross. Yet, spiritually, God was both stripping and shaming the powers that opposed His Son through the cross. God has triumphed over the spiritual forces of darkness and exposed their powerlessness. He has shown them to be defeated and humiliated, stripped of their authority and influence. Easter was the day humanity was liberated from its ultimate dark enemy. It was the day that the chains of sin and death were broken, and the captives were set free.

Conclusion

The connection between the forgiveness of sin and deliverance from darkness is first mentioned in the first chapter of Colossians. *Colossians 1:13-14 states, He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” Christ is our redeemer and deliverer. Our sins held us captive in a space of satanic oppression. In this land, the degree to which we hurt ourselves and others was amplified by dark forces. Through his death and resurrection, Christ removed the burden of our sin that kept us down in this dark place, and He has now brought us up to live in the light.

Steps

So, what does all of this mean for us today? How do we respond to the forgiveness and freedom that Christ offers us through His death and resurrection? How will you address your guilt and rise above the darkness? Two inevitable and invisible barriers await us all. Our guilt will eventually confront us, and the darkness will engulf us if we do not turn to Christ.

If you are already a follower of Christ, I encourage you to remember the complete and finished work of Christ that has forgiven your sins. When shame overtakes you, remember the forgiveness Christ has won for you. When darkness presses heavily upon you, and you find yourself in a place of fear and sadness, remember the freedom that Christ has secured for you. Don't let the enemy regain a foothold in your life. Stand firm in the truth of God's Word and resist the temptation to return to the bondage of sin.

If you are not yet a follower of Christ, I urge you to please reflect carefully on what He offers you through His death and resurrection. I believe your conscience and experiences reveal the need for forgiveness and freedom. Don't give in to the idea that the way your life is now is the way it will always be. You can live a life that is not dominated by shame, guilt, fear, and sadness. Next week, we will explore Jesus' teachings on anxiety and worry, and I trust you will find wisdom in His words. Consider the possibility that there is a better way- a way of forgiveness, freedom, and new life.

Easter reminds us that we are not alone in our struggles. God has not abandoned us to darkness. He sent His Son to break the chains that bind us and to set us free. Embrace the forgiveness and freedom He offers, and experience the abundant life He has promised.

Life Level Application

Head: Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Paul speaks of two things happening in this verse, one concerning Christ and the other concerning us. What are they? How does this verse relate to Galatians 3:13-14? How do these verses influence your understanding of the cross and your identity?

Heart: Read Ephesians 2:1-3, 4:26-27, 6:10-20. The sermon discusses a “dark and oppressive force” that aims to diminish our joy and bring out the worst in us. How have you encountered this force in your life? What specific tactics does it use to try to discourage or defeat you? How can you actively resist this influence?

Hand: Read John 10:10. How has your life changed since coming to Christ? If you haven't come to Christ yet, how would you like to see your life change?

Habit: Read Colossians 4:8-11. What are some things you have been tempted to become enslaved to in the past? How did these things ultimately disappoint you or fail to satisfy your deepest needs? How has knowing God helped you break free from these enslavements?

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Journey Kickoff: Spring Term 2025 | Vision Night Tues. Apr 22!

Join us for the 10-week Sonrise Journey this Spring, powered by ROOTED! This small group experience will help you connect with God, the Church community, and your purpose through daily devotions, prayer, serving, and more. Whether you're new to the faith or a longtime believer, commit to attending all 10 sessions for a life-changing experience. Groups begin with Vision Night on April 22nd. Sign up through the Church Center App or connect with Martye at martyeh@isonrise.com.

Sonrise Youth: UNITE | Sun. Apr. 27 | Rolling Hills Church

Youth Group: Join youth around the greater Portland area for a worship night on April 27th at Rolling Hills Church. Sonrise youth will meet at Sonrise at 4:15 pm and will return at 8:45 pm. Dinner is provided! For more info, please contact Pastor Daniel at danielj@isonrise.com.

Cultivating Christ Centered Relationships | Fri. May 9 | 6:30–8:30 PM

All women are invited for an evening of connection and growth exploring the beautiful and sometimes challenging landscape of relationships. Learn practical ways to foster deeper, more meaningful connections. Dessert provided. *\$5 suggested donation to cover costs*. Details and sign-up on Church Center.

Men's Breakfast | Sat. May 10 | 8-9:30AM | Dining Hall

Join our monthly gathering for men of all ages to get together around tables for a meal and meaningful conversation.

Family Campout | Aug. 7-10 | Mt. Hood Village RV Resort

Join us for the Sonrise Family Campout this year at Mt. Hood Village at the base of Mt. Hood. Bring your family, dog, and neighbor for some mountain fun! Registration will close on July 16th. Nonrefundable after July 31st. For more info, please contact Emily Kukis at 503. 309.3534 or email at coreyandemilykukis@gmail.com. Additional details can be found on Church Center.

Songs from this morning:

Graves Into Gardens – Brandon Lake

Firm Foundation – Cody Carnes

King of Kings – Hillsong Worship

Death Arrested – North Point



For more info or to
register, visit isonrise.com
or explore events/groups
on the Church Center App.