

Colossians 2:14 Explained!

Taken from YAIM

"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 tree."

At some point in your scriptural studies you probably entered into a discussion with someone who had a different view of a verse of the Bible. Perhaps during the course of the conversation you were stumped by one particular Scripture in a barrage of verses the other used to support his interpretation.

If the subject concerned our obligation to observe Yahweh's* laws, you probably were cited Colossians 2:14-17, which is used to show that we are no longer to keep the law in our time.

*The true name of the Savior of the Bible, Yahshua, and His Father's name, Yahweh, are restored in these pages. Superstitious scribes and misguided Bible translators took away these true names and substituted titles - God, Lord, Adonai. The Sacred Name is easily proved in good encyclopedias and dictionaries under the heading "Yahweh," "Jehovah," "God," or "Tetragrammaton." You may also request our free booklets, "The Heavenly Father's Great Name, and "The Missing J," which prove these names conclusively from common sources and Scripture.

To understand the truth of this controversial Scripture, we must first know a few general but important facts concerning the Colossians to whom Paul wrote. Paul wrote this epistle when the city of Colosse was under Roman rule. Prior to that it was under Greek dominance. These two nations and their pagan system of worship had influenced the lives and thinking of the people in that region.

We also must realize that the Book of Colossians was not a letter written to the general public, or to the priest, or to the synagogue of the town. Colossians 1:1-2 informs us that Paul was addressing "the saints and faithful brethren in Messiah which are at Colosse." They were familiar with Scripture and also knew of Yahshua the Messiah.

Besides pagan custom and idolatrous worship, the Greeks also indulged in schools of logic and philosophy. Paul had been instrumental in gaining converts to the Messiah from among people steeped in heathen worship and man-made ideas. They had forsaken the customs of Rome and Greece and accepted Yahshua as their Redeemer.

Paul Warned of Mind Manipulation

Paul was writing to the Colossians because he knew how they could be affected by the prevalent religion of libidinous Diana worship and the influence of the Greek philosophical reasoning. He knew the dangers of them both on the fledgling assembly.

Those brethren in Colosse and in Ephesus are not so far removed from those today in that they were in the minority in their beliefs, and that a much larger counterfeit religion overlapped their own.

Paul warned the Colossian brethren of the dangers of man's persuasive rhetoric that would be used to argue against living a scripturally prescribed life. "Be careful, lest any man [person] spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit [pretensions, Goodspeed] after the tradition of men, after the rudiments [elementary teachings] of the world [following the material ways of looking at things, Goodspeed] and not after the Messiah ..." Colossians 2:8.

He tells them to be on guard, and not to let their minds be captured by intellectualism and high-sounding nonsense (Phillips). His concern was that hollow and delusive speculations (NEB) would lead many to stray from the truth of Yahweh's Word.

The Verse in Question

Let us heed Paul's warning as we examine the verse used so often by those contending for the abolition of Yahweh's law. This widely misunderstood verse reads: "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 torture stake," Colossians 2:14. The key phrase that must be analyzed is, "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances." Whose ordinances is this referring to, Yahweh's or man's? Remember, verse 8 was warning against man's devices. Are Yahweh's ordinances against us?

Yahweh's Laws for Our Good

According to the Book of Deuteronomy, His laws were for our good. "And Yahweh commanded us to do all these statutes [Strong's Concordance Hebrew Dictionary No. 2708, 'chuqqah' feminine of No. 2706 which means an

enactment, hence an appointment] to fear Yahweh our Mighty One, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive ..." Deuteronomy 6:24.

And we read further in chapter 10 of Deuteronomy, "And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your Mighty One require of you, but to fear [reverence] Yahweh your Mighty One, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Yahweh your Mighty One with all your heart, and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of Yahweh, and His statutes [chuqqah-the same word used in Deut. 6:24], which I command you this day for your good," Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

Ordinance-the Pivotal Word

A New Testament study on the word ordinance as used in Colossians 2:14 reveals that the word is from the Greek "dogma" and refers to man's rules and regulations, not Yahweh's. Throughout the New Testament where ordinances has been translated from dogma, the meaning is a civil, ceremonial, or ecclesiastical law, Strong's Greek Dictionary No. 1378. The word has been used in only five other places in the New Testament and always refers to man-made laws. Let's examine each instance.

·"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree [dogma] from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed," Luke 2:1. This verse could just as easily have been translated, ". . . there went out an ordinance from Caesar .. " Caesar wrote the ordinance, not Yahweh. As ruler, Caesar enacted a man-made law for his subjects.

·"And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees [dogma] for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem," Acts 16:4. The decrees ordained by the apostles and elders referred to here were those found in Acts 15:20 and 29-the "no small dissension and disputation ..." on circumcision. James' summation (with the whole assembly taking part) was that the Gentiles "abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood." Again we see here that the "decrees" agreed upon were the decisions of the Apostles and elders, aimed especially at those coming out of heathen worship. They were to observe more carefully Yahweh's laws as prescribed and commanded in Scripture and to set aside their own rules.

·". . . whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees [dogma] of Caesar," Acts 17:7. This speaks again of the "dogma" of Caesar, but the important point to note is that man made the ordinance, not Yahweh.

ordinances [dogma] ..." Ephesians 2:15. Paul is now warning the Ephesian brethren of the same danger that he warned the Colossians about - man's ordinances. These were man-made laws or ordinances made for the separation of Israelite and Gentile in worship Yahshua abolished the hatred of enmity resulting in these man-made ordinances, and has made both Jew and Gentile a part of the Body of Messiah. See Companion Bible note on Ephesians 2:15.

· The fifth place where the word ordinances appears is Colossians 2:20. The word ordinances here [dogmatize] refers to the same ordinances in verse 14, and regards being willingly put under rules of man. Verse 22 spells it out, ". . . which all are to perish with the using; after the commandments and doctrines of men."

What Dogma Means

Bible scholars and commentaries have offered varying opinions concerning the Greek "dogma." They are:

1. The law of Yahweh as embodied in the Ten Commandments (as is the popular notion)
2. The ceremonial law, as pertained to temple worship with bloody offerings and sacrifices;
3. The laws by the Scribes and Pharisees, which entailed many dos and don'ts, and for which the Messiah castigated them severely, Matthew 23;
4. The broken laws of the Colossians in disobedience to Yahweh. These ordinances were written in a ledger and a tally of these broken laws (unforgiven) was kept on each individual;
5. Man-made laws and rituals that were carried out through pagan worship and have their roots in heathen idols.

Let's take a closer look at each of these ideas in sequence.

1) If one were to say that these blotted-out ordinances were the total law of Yahweh, then we would be living in a totally lawless society. We are told in 1 John 3:4 that sin is the transgressing of the law. If we take away the law, we have nothing left to transgress; consequently, there is no sin.

There would be no need of a Redeemer because there would be no law to transgress. With no law to transgress, there would be no need of forgiveness. If the Savior came to do away with the Ten Commandments, there would be no sin. But that cannot be the case, for all men have sinned and have come short of the glory of Yahweh, we read in Romans 3:23.

The handwriting of ordinances could not be the Royal law, the Ten Commandments. As already stated, these laws are given for our own good.

2) These ordinances may have been the ceremonial law having to do with temple worship, that is, animal sacrifices. The end portion of Colossians 2:14 reads, "... took it out of the way, nailing it to the tree." The commentary on Colossians by Albert Barnes says that this is speaking of the ceremonial laws only, meaning the laws governing animal sacrifices. Although the word ordinances as used in Scripture does not refer to "divine" laws in any other case, if this is the first instance where dogma is used of Yahweh's law, it could only be the ceremonial laws. The entire thrust of chapters 9 and 10 of Hebrews is that Yahshua's one-time, self-sacrifice replaced animal sacrifices. Animal sacrifices foreshadowed the Messiah's atoning work.

This interpretation, however, would not apply to the Colossians because they had not been involved in temple worship. They were not in contact with the Pharisees and Scribes who were enforcing rabbinical laws upon the people. Therefore, Barnes' interpretation poses problems.

3) Another argument extended is that ordinances means the extra-biblical laws added by the Pharisees. Included would be the prohibition of walking more than a Sabbath's day's journey, limiting the times one could pick up and set down a burden, and washings. These rules were a part of their tradition, Matthew 15:1-6. The 23rd chapter of Matthew fully explains the Messiah's castigation of the Pharisees and their devised laws that Yahshua said were "a burden and grievous to be borne."

It is unlikely that the Colossians would be made subject to such laws of the Pharisees because they did not meet in the synagogues with these Jewish leaders for worship. The Jews were adamant about getting the Gentile converts baptized, but nowhere do we find they had gone beyond that and tried to get the people to adhere to the other self-made laws of the Pharisees.

4) The handwriting of ordinances could be the broken laws of the Colossians before they had come to the knowledge of the truth. Some scholars believe that the breaking of the laws results in a heavenly recorded tally of every broken law. As people continually broke the law, more and more handwriting of ordinances were tabulated as a debt that they could not overcome. This would be a spiritual bookkeeping by Yahweh, paid by Yahshua.

But it is unlikely that the Colossians' sins were referred to by Paul as a handwriting of ordinances, for this concept was foreign to Paul. Blotting out means to erase. Paul did not say "forgiving of your sins," which would be much more in keeping with his message throughout the New Testament.

The Accurate Meaning

5) The handwriting of ordinances refers to the rules and regulations made by unconverted people in their heathen worship. This is probably the correct understanding. This handwriting of ordinances is again referred to in verse 20. Paul asks that if the Colossians are dead with the Messiah (meaning in baptism) why do they still subject themselves to ordinances? He is here pointing out that the pagan ordinances they were at one time in obedience to are no longer binding on them. The word in the Greek is the verb dogmatizo, and means to impose dogmas upon.

Paul goes on to point out what these are. Verses 21 and 22 say they are the ascetic observances of the type often seen in India. There, for example, is the caste system in which an upper-caste person does not allow even the shadow of a lower-caste person to come near him. He will not touch certain things touched by a lower-

caste Hindu, in order to remain ceremonially clean.

Paul continues in verse 23 that such things have indeed a "show of wisdom in will-worship." The words "will worship" mean self-imposed worship. It is something that people do to appear pious and holy, including man's ideas of punishing the body to purify the soul. Continuing, "and humility and neglecting of the body;" some of the translations use severity to the body or torturings of the body.

Some use the term "ascetic discipline of the body." This is simply a ritual, again much like we find in India where someone lies on a bed of nails, or sits cross-legged and stares at the sun. Paul goes on to say that there is "not any honor to the satisfaction of the flesh [in no way check or stop fleshly passions]." These practices do no honor to Yahweh, but build up man's pride.

Paul's point here is that doing all these things does not really help us to overcome our carnal nature.

In chapter 3 he shows the answer is to be risen from the watery grave, in baptism in the Messiah, and washed in the newness of life, Baptism into Messiah results in a new person. Sins are washed away and a new life is begun, as opposed to pagan ordinances and ritual.

False Worship Spawns Man-made Laws

It is clear that the teaching of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2:14 does not refer to any of Yahweh's law. The word ordinance has the meaning of man-made laws and the laws he refers to are those laws and customs followed by the Colossians prior to their conversion. They had not followed Yahweh's laws until Paul witnessed to them.

There is no doubt that pagan worship has its roots in the worship of Satan. Any time we do not worship Yahweh, we are used by Satan. Paul warns that we should be careful lest man beguile us with enticing words, Colossians 2:4.

In Colossians 2:14, Paul is saying to the Colossians that when the Messiah died on the tree he obliterated the heathen ordinances that they were hallowing before. They had been dead in trespasses and sins, verse 13. Now the Colossians no longer do these practices. Now even the record of their former disobedience in unholy customs and tradition does not exist. It has been blotted out of their record by the blood of Yahshua the Messiah. Such a record was nailed to the tree when the Messiah was put to death. His death paid the price of their sins when they accepted Him as their Head through baptism.

By dying on the tree and being resurrected, Yahshua "spoiled [disarmed, robbed] principalities and powers," 2:15. What he was speaking of here is the domination of the demonic powers over the people who worship contrary to Yahweh's way of honoring Him. He robbed these demonic powers of their prey and rid Himself of the powers of evil. He triumphed over them by paying the ransom price publicly as He died on the tree. Those having accepted Yahshua as their Redeemer are no longer subject to the forces of evil.

Carnal Man Chooses His Own Worship

Paul continues in verse 16 that we therefore should not let any human being judge or tell us what to do about meat, drink, holy days, new moons or Sabbaths. We are not to allow man with his heathen customs make the determination of whether or not we are to keep the laws of clean meats, holy days, new moons or Sabbaths.

Take special note of verse 17, which says these all foreshadow future events. All of these observances foretell the future, and no wonder, for they all point to the coming Kingdom. Clean food laws, new moons, holy days, and Sabbaths will all be observed in the Kingdom. There will come a time when all people will be keeping the laws of Yahweh.

Notice the last part of verse 17 of Colossians 2, "but the body is of Messiah." The word "is" commonly is printed in italics in Bibles, showing that it was added by the translators. It does not belong there. These words finish out the thought Paul is making, that the Colossians should not let man (outsiders) judge whether or not we should be keeping these things, but the brethren or saints who are in the Body of Messiah are to make that judgment. How clear! The saints who have studied the Bible are qualified to make the judgment concerning clean food laws and Yahweh's holy days.

Finishing the chapter, Paul speaks of maintaining union with the Head (Yahshua), verse 19. And in verse 20 he asks that having died with the Messiah from the rudiments of the world, why do the 'Colossians continue to live the life of the world, allowing it to dictate to them? Beginning in verse 21 he explains that some of these are ascetic observances (verses 22 and 23).

Accept Pure Worship

In the following third and fourth chapters, Paul encourages the Colossians in the higher life, in the spiritual walk with Messiah. They are to forget their old pagan ways, the ordinances (dogma) of heathen, worldly principles and teachings not of Messiah. They are to continue the upward spiritual walk with Messiah as the Head.

If you read the Book of Colossians with the facts of the people's pagan background, noting what Paul says concerning new life in Messiah, you will realize that the "handwriting of ordinances" has nothing to do with abolishing the Ten Commandments. He was speaking of the heathen, elementary teachings of demonic worship that was contrary to being a good disciple of the Messiah Yahshua.