

Neither the Law of God nor the Law of Moses Was Nailed to the Cross

Description

Neither the Law of God nor the Law of Moses Was Nailed to the Cross

A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 4rd Quarter
Present Truth In Deuteronomy
Week 3
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This week's lesson is entitled, "The Everlasting Covenant," and relates the everlasting gospel spoken of in Revelation 14:6 with "the idea of the covenant as expressed in the book of Deuteronomy."

One of Friday's discussion questions asks,

"Why do you think so many Christians say that the gospel nullifies the need to keep the Ten Commandments?"
Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Friday, October 15, 2021

Well, for many, it is from a misunderstanding of Colossians 2, which, starting in verse 13 reads,

13 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, 14 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. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. – Colossians 2:13-15

Many use this verse to say that the law was nailed to the cross, thinking that the "handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us" refers to the law of God. But what part of God's law is contrary to us? The law against killing? Lying? Stealing? Would we really want these laws abolished? Would that benefit us? No, of course not. That would be like saying that murder is no longer an issue because Jesus did away with the law against murder. Some people think that by doing away with the law that defines sin, Jesus solved the sin problem. But it doesn't take much thinking to realize that the nature of the act of murder does not change if the law against it is taken out of the way – nailed to the cross, as they say. Murder is murder, whether there is a law against it or not. So, taking away the law that defines sin does nothing to solve the

problem of sin. It is not the law that is the problem, it is sin that is the problem.

Jesus did not nail the law of God to the cross. In Matthew 5:17-18 Jesus said,

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."

In commenting on this verse, Ellen White said,

"Speaking of the law, Jesus said, 'I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.' He here used the word 'fulfill' in the same sense as when He declared to John the Baptist His purpose to 'fulfill all righteousness' (Matthew 3:15); that is, to fill up the measure of the law's requirement, to give an example of perfect conformity to the will of God.

His mission was to 'magnify the law, and make it honorable.' Isaiah 42:21. He was to show the spiritual nature of the law, to present its far-reaching principles, and to make plain its eternal obligation." Ellen White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 38-39

So, for Jesus to say that he came to fulfill the law means that he came to keep the law to its fullest, as an example for us to follow.

But most SDAs know these verses in Colossians 2 as the verses that some mainstream Christians use to negate the perpetuity of the Sabbath (and the feast days) after the cross. Let's read from Colossians 2 again starting in verse 13 but going until verse 17. It reads,

13 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, 14 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. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

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

So, with this, most Christians will point to this and say that the Sabbath was nailed to the cross. But some Seventh-day Adventists will argue that the sabbaths spoken of here are referring to the Sabbaths of the Feasts – not THE Sabbath contained in the law of God – the Ten Commandments. But is this what the author of Colossians is saying?

So, to answer this, let's first look at a popular modern SDA argument made in regard to this verse in Colossians.

This argument is that it was the law of **Moses** that was nailed to the cross. They posit that the “handwriting of requirements that was against us” refers to the handwritten law of Moses that was placed beside the ark of the covenant, as described in Deuteronomy 31. Starting in verse 24 it reads,

24 So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, 25 that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying: 26 “Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you; 27 for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord, then how much more after my death?
– Deuteronomy 31:24-27

So, the idea is that because Moses hand wrote the ceremonial laws that contain the feast days and sabbaths, and also dietary laws and sacrificial laws (among other things), and placed them beside the ark as a witness against the people, that these are the laws that are the “handwriting of requirements that was against us” being referred to in Colossians 2 which Jesus nailed to the cross. But, is this the handwriting being spoken of here by Paul? Before we get to our other handwritten options, let’s look more closely at these verses in Deuteronomy to see whether or not we can rule this one out.

First off, do we really think that these handwritten laws originated with Moses? No! They originated with God, according to Deuteronomy 31:19. Does the fact that Moses wrote them down by hand somehow negate their importance? Of course not.

Secondly, we can see that verse 27 of Deuteronomy 31 explains why Moses said that this handwritten law was to be put beside the ark as a witness against them. It was because they were rebellious, even while Moses was alive. And if they were rebellious while he was alive, and would likely be even more rebellious after his death, they were going to need the help of the ceremonial system. Basically, Moses was saying that they were going to really need these laws since they were rebellious and were finding ways to not apply the principles of the laws he had already given. Thus, the law needed to be reiterated with further specifications in order to make plain how to keep the law. For example, the 10 commandments say to not steal, but some might try to weasel around that and cheat someone by using dishonest measures all the while convincing themselves that they aren’t stealing. Well, Deuteronomy 25:13-16 solves that by specifically forbidding using dishonest measures. In no way were these laws against us – to the contrary – they were written in order to help guide us to keep not just the letter of the law, but the principle also. So, it elucidated the moral law more fully. In these laws, they could find hope for redemption and release from the penalties of their sins – the curses of the [moral] Law that they had broken.

Ellen White said,

“The principles of the ten commandments existed before the fall, and were of a character suited to the condition of a holy order of beings. After the fall, the principles of those precepts were not changed, but additional precepts were given to meet man

in his fallen state. ...The transgression of God's law made it necessary for Christ to die a sacrifice, and thus make a way possible for man to escape the penalty, and yet the honor of God's law be preserved. The system of sacrifices was to teach man humility, in view of his fallen condition, and lead him to repentance, and to trust in God alone, through the promised Redeemer, for pardon for past transgression of his law. If the law of God had not been transgressed, there never would have been death, and there would have been no need of additional precepts to suit man's fallen condition." Ellen White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 261, 262.

So, we can clearly see that the law handwritten by Moses was in no way against us. It contains both moral and ceremonial precepts, all of which are for us. The moral law simply defines sin – it shows us what not to do. But it doesn't show us the solution for sin. The ceremonial law, on the other hand, contains the message of hope and salvation – it shows us the solution for sin. How could any of these God-given laws, whether moral or ceremonial, be against us?

They aren't against us. Neither the moral law nor the ceremonial law is being referred to in Colossians 2.

The letter to the Colossians is written to Gentile believers. We can know this from verse 13 of Colossians 2 which identifies the Colossians as being "uncircumcised in their flesh," which identifies them as non-Jews. These Gentile converts were getting flack for keeping the feast days and Sabbaths in the wrong way – the wrong way, that is, according to the rules of man (see verses 8 and 22). Paul was telling them that they were not to let others judge or criticize them for keeping the feasts and sabbaths as they were doing, that is – as Paul's own convert, Epaphras, had previously taught them.

As you can see, instead of negating feast keeping and sabbath keeping, Colossians 2 is an attestation to the fact that the early Christians were actually keeping the feasts and sabbaths after the cross. This can also be known by the fact that Paul describes the feast and Sabbaths as a shadow of things **to come** in verse 17, meaning that the antitypical fulfillment of some of the feasts was still future from Paul's time. As Seventh-day Adventists, we should easily be able to relate to this idea, as our movement was born on the day of Atonement, on the tenth day of the seventh month, 2300 years after 457 BCE, which was October 22, 1844, well after the time of Paul.

Hebrews 7:11-12 says there was a change in the law, which shows us that some of the things in the ceremonial law that applied to the Levitical priesthood have been changed. The Levitical priesthood was ended at the cross, and the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek commenced – this was the priesthood to which Jesus was anointed High Priest (See also Psalm 110:4). Remember, Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi – and because of the dereliction of duty on the part of the Levites (See Hebrews 7:18 and Malachi 2), their priesthood was taken away, and a new priesthood was instituted. See Hebrews 7. These facts have many implications, too numerous to cover in this short video. Please see our study, "A Change in the Priesthood, a Change In the Law," by Trent Wilde for more information on this.

So, what was handwritten and nailed to the cross? As we are about to show, it was our record of past sin that we have turned from that was nailed to the cross. This we will now prove by reading verses 13-15 with this in mind. Again, it reads,

13 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, 14 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. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. -Corinthians 2:13-15

First of all, how could nailing the law of God OR the law of Moses to the cross make a spectacle of the evil powers and principalities? Again, to the contrary, doing away with the law of God or Moses would actually make a spectacle of God if you think about it. This is just what Satan wants to do – and has pretty much done. Christians say the law of God was nailed to the cross, and many modern SDAs think the law of Moses was nailed to the cross, making God, the giver of both laws, appear like a waffling fool.

Secondly, we can clearly see from reading these verses that “having forgiven them all trespasses” is the same thing as “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against them, which was contrary to them.” They both are two ways of saying the same thing. When we have repented of and turned from our sins, they are atoned for and forgiven, the record of them, which is obviously contrary to us, is wiped away. Let’s read another translation to see this even more clearly.

The NASB reads,

13 And when you were dead in your wrongdoings and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our wrongdoings, 14 having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. - Colossians 2:13-14

Many translations read similarly. We know that our record of sin is indeed a certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us. We need it to be canceled or we are in big trouble. And Paul was using the analogy of it being nailed to the cross to communicate the level of forgiveness that is ours in Christ Jesus. Consider this question: What was nailed to the cross besides Jesus, (who was of course ****not**** taken away from us, but rather was raised in glory, given back to us for eternity if you will)? Yes, it was the ordinance of the crime Jesus was accused of – “King of the Jews.” This ordinance that was written against Jesus, his “crime” was nailed to the cross above Jesus’ head. All four gospels record this, but let’s read about it in John 19:19-22. It reads,

19 Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was:
JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

20 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.

21 Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but [write], 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews.'""

22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." – John 19:19-22

This wasn't some special thing done only in the case of Jesus. It was common practice to write the accusation against a crucified victim on a placard and nail it on their cross. This served as a warning against anyone who would think to commit the same crime. The King of the Jews was a position that only Rome had power to grant. Herod, for example, was appointed by Rome as the King of the Jews. Since Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, and the Messiah was the King of the Jews – he was subverting Roman authority, which they didn't tolerate. So what this passage in Colossians is saying is that our sins are crimes, and the record of them is like a placard against us. When we take the death of Jesus as our own, causing it to put an end to our sins just as truly as our own death would if were we to die, his death becomes a substitute for our death and it is as though our crimes were nailed to his cross and he died for them.

So, it is not any part of God's law that was nailed to the cross, it is the record of our sins that Jesus wipes if we repent and turn from our sins. This is what Paul was saying, and what good news it is! For more on this, please see our study, ["Nailed To The Cross, But Raised In Glory,"](#) by [Doug Mitchell](#).