

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Jan.1, 1863 leading in time to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, guaranteeing that “*neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall exist*” in the U.S. It was bought at the price of a great Civil War and even the life of Lincoln himself. Considering that terrible price what Shelby Foote reports in his great history of that war was especially tragic. He tells how a slave from Alabama was asked what he thought of the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln. He replied, “*I don’t know nothing ‘bout Abraham Lincoln. And I don’t know nothing ‘bout emancipation either.*” [Tidball, pp.102-103]

What a tragedy! A free man who knows nothing of his freedom or his liberator. All Christians are free, but some ‘don’t know nothin’ ’bout it’, so they live as slaves of rules, in hobbling shackles of habits and besetting sins, with a cowering eyes-down, earthbound outlook, with never a joyful shout of exultation or night of peaceful freedom. ‘*Don’t know nothin’ ‘bout it.*’ ***Could that be you?***

- B. **Christian: you may be more alive than you know, more free than you imagine.** Our need, just like the slave in that story, is not to win freedom, but to understand and accept the freedom that is already ours. So Paul explains our emancipation to us in Col. 2.
- C. Our text today begins with **v.13**, “*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.*” **We were doubly dead.**
1. “*When you were dead in your sins.*” We are all killed by sin because by sinning we deliberately cut ourselves off from the God whom we constantly disobey and dishonor. We were dead like an astronaut whose tether

and lifeline are cut during a spacewalk. He'll last as long as his battery pack and air, but that astronaut is already a dead man. Still breathing for a while, maybe, but dead. No help. No life support. No hope. Death is just as inevitable when people are cut off from God.

2. "*When you were dead... in the uncircumcision of your flesh.*" He means that as Gentiles we didn't even have access to God's covenant of love. It isn't too strong to say that we were "godless heathens" [Lucas]. We were so cut off from God we didn't know what we were missing. The Jews were God's prodigal sons and daughters but Gentiles were not even related to him.

D. When you were doubly dead "*God made you alive with Christ.*" Notice that preposition: "*God made you alive with Christ.*" That is, when Jesus rose from the dead we were made alive **with** him. Jesus didn't raise himself from the dead. God the Father, having accepted Christ's death for the sins of the world, raised Jesus to life. Not really *back* to life, because he wasn't resuscitated to the same life he'd had before the cross. God gave Christ a whole new kind of life; human immortality of a different quality altogether. When we ask Christ to be our Savior, God confers that new life to us, even while we live in this dying shell.

- E. What follows here is a concentrated description of our Emancipation Proclamation so that we might live free.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. [Read again, aloud together.]

That is the Christian's Emancipation Proclamation.

Our life in Christ required the power of forgiveness, an ingenious legal strategy, and a dramatic divine ambush.

I. WE ARE MADE ALIVE BECAUSE GOD FORGAVE THE SIN THAT KILLED US (v.13b)

A. We have already seen that sin killed us by severing our lifeline to God. God’s forgiveness mends that severed relationship and gives us life. Like the prodigal son we walked out on God, demanding to live life our own way. In the process we considered God as good as dead to us, squandered his resources so generously given to us, leaving us hungry in some faraway pigsty. Yet when we turned homeward he saw us while we were still “a long way off,” ran and welcomed us without measuring our apology or calculating the damage we’d done.

B. The word ‘forgave’ is literally a word full of grace. The Gr. root of this word means *grace generously given*—an **undeserved gift with no strings attached**. This is the heart of Christian praise, isn’t it? *Jesus forgave my sin. “My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought—my sin, not in part but the whole, was nailed to thee cross and I bear it no more! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.”*

Illus.: I’m reading the remarkable story of **Thomas Tarrants**. As a teenager in Alabama he became enmeshed in an especially violent arm of the Ku Klux Klan, virulently racist and anti-Semitic. He was caught in the act of setting a bomb for a Jewish leader and was shot multiple times by the police. His accomplice was killed. He went to prison, but six months later escaped with two other inmates. That ended in another blazing gun-battle, with one of the other men killed. His sentences was jacked up to 35 years. He read voraciously, slowly moving from his racist ideas to classical philosophy and eventually to the New Testament. He writes,

[A]s I read the Gospels in my prison cell, my eyes were opened in a way that went beyond simply understanding the words on the page. As the true meaning of God's Word became clearer, so did its relevance to my life. I had been blind to spiritual reality all my life and was now beginning to see.

As this process unfolded, my sins came to mind, one after another. Conviction grew, and with it tears of repentance. I needed God's forgiveness. And I knew it came only through trusting Jesus, who had given his life to pay for my sins. One night I knelt on the concrete floor of my cell and prayed a simple prayer, confessing my sins and asking Jesus to forgive me, take over my life, and do whatever he wanted to with it.

The next morning, I awoke with a deep hunger for Scripture and a desire to pray and to live for God. As I read the Bible daily, a whole new world opened up to me, and I couldn't get enough! [\[Christianity Today, 8/19/19\]](#)

We are made alive because God forgave the sin that killed us.

In order to forgive us, God had to solve an almost impossible legal problem. We were guilty of his own law and it was a law he could not simply suspend no matter how much he loved us. To suspend his law would suspend divine justice. So to forgive us was not as easy as it sounds. How did he do it? **V.14**, “*He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*”

II. WE ARE MADE ALIVE BECAUSE WHEN CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS HE ANNULLED THE LAW THAT CONDEMNED US (v.14)

- A. Our problem was “*the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us.*” In other words, we faced airtight indictments against us in God's court of law.

- *You are accused of willfully ignoring the Lord God Almighty, your Creator. You have not loved him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.*
- *You are accused of disobeying his commands countless times.*
- *You are accused of the deadly force of pride, thinking God owed you his kindness.*
- *You are accused of not bowing before Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

We had not just offended God or been a terrible disappointment to him. We had broken his laws and thus **were in debt to his justice**. We say of a criminal, “*he has to pay his debt to society.*” All of us were faced with an unpayable debt to the Lord God Almighty.

Illus.: I remember a story of a court case in Pennsylvania where the defense attorney objected to the presence of the Ten Commandments on the wall because they biased the case against his client. That’s exactly right. God’s commands *should* make us better but they actually condemn us. God’s commands become our indictments.

- B. God “cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness.” **But how?** The holy and righteous God can’t just forget about our sins! He can’t just pretend they never happened! How? “He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.” Jesus, the sinless Son of Man and the priceless Son of God paid for it all. He took all our sin into himself. He literally became guilty in our place—all of us. He was not a victim when he was crucified. He was God’s own Son, given as a willing and loving sacrifice in our place, to pay our price! *“Jesus paid it all! All to him I owe.”*
- C. We went into God’s courtroom dead to rights, guilty as sin, dead men walking. But we depart as free people with a

whole new kind of life before us, never again to fear the condemnation of God's Law.

*“My chains fell off; my heart was free.
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.”*

But wait! Standing between us and new life there was still another terrifying obstacle: **the diabolical powers and authorities** determined to destroy us in order to destroy the glory of God. But God has taken care of that Satanic threat as well. **V.15** describes a **kind of ambush accomplished by Christ on the cross**, *“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*

III. WE ARE MADE ALIVE BECAUSE GOD DISARMED THE DIABOLICAL POWERS THAT THREATENED US (v.15)

- A. “The powers and authorities” are vast Satanic forces bent on the defeat of Christ and the destruction of his people.
- B. But when Jesus died on the cross and then God raised him from the dead, God *“disarmed the powers and authorities”* of the devil. How? By *“cancelling the charges of our legal indebtedness to God. Our “legal indebtedness” was the devil’s leverage over us.* The Bible calls him *“the accuser of our brothers and sisters”* because he shames us with our sins and he waves our indictments in God’s face as a kind of mockery: *“You may have created them but I own them!”*

Furthermore, the devil and his vast forces, were like **shyster lawyers** using God’s own Law and our inescapable **indictments to tempt, torment, and accuse us and we had no reply.** We couldn’t afford to defend ourselves.

But God subverted Satan’s scheme, turning the Law **against him.** He did it like this: when we repent of our sin we, in effect, plead guilty to all the charges against us. We sign our name to all those charges against us and trust Jesus to pay it all. **F. F. Bruce** sums up Paul’s point like this:

[Jesus] took that signed confession of indebtedness which stood as a perpetual witness against you, and cancelled it in his death; you might actually say that he took the document, ordinances [i.e., God's commands] and all, and nailed it to his cross as an act of triumphant defiance in the face of those blackmailing powers who were holding it over you as a threat.

Let they dark powers scrutinize our lives for breaches of the Law (“*I’ll sue you for lying. I’m bringing charges for pride. I’ll tell God that you yelled at your kids.*”), but our answer is that the Law is dead, that we don’t live in that jurisdiction any more. We obey out of love and “*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” We are always welcome at God’s throne of grace.

Every debt that you ever had

Has been paid up in full by the grace of the Lord!

Be ye glad! Be ye glad! Be ye glad!

Illus.: A long time ago I was introduced to a girl who was about 18. She had been raised in the Jehovah’s Witnesses, a strict and legalistic cult. She told me that by the time she was 13 she had already sinned so defiantly that she knew she was condemned and would never be included in the 144,000 allowed into heaven. The effect on this girl was that, since she had no hope of heaven, she might as well throw off the pretense of being good and do whatever she felt like doing.

That is exactly what Satan does. He used her faulty grasp of God’s Law against her, driving her more and more deeply into sin and despair. She described those years as being deep darkness. Hopeless.

Then her aunt shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with her and she understood that her sins would not be counted against her if she put her faith in Jesus. She did that, and

the change from darkness to light was evident on her face. She shone with freedom and hope.

- C. God also triumphed over the powers and authorities by using their scheme to kill the Son of God against them. The devil didn't see that God was nailing the whole Law to that cross, that all the penalties of the Law were being paid by Christ there on Golgotha, that this death would not mean the end of hope for all who would serve God, but the very means of our salvation. **Derek Tidball** writes, "*Having done their worst, they overreached themselves. Having played their trump card, they were trumped. In the cross the enemy is outwitted and vanquished.*"

Here is the amazing part: God does not defeat "the powers and authorities" by sheer force (tho' he surely could have) but by absorbing their best shot. Their greatest strength was no match for his greatest weakness, the Son of God dying in shame on the cross, rejected by his own people! How can an omnipotent God be weak? He can't! Even the 'weakest' possible act of the omnipotent God is overwhelming in infinite power.

Furthermore, there on the cross, God stripped all those demonic powers of their one great weapon against us, their great threat against our freedom.

*And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.*

- D. So you see how God "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." But when were these powers and authorities put on public display?

- They are publicly humiliated when sinners are not cowed by their accusations, and even celebrate our salvation by confessing what once we were.

- They are humiliated when such former weaklings as ourselves pray against them and defeat them through our faith in Christ's power.
- They are humiliated when they cannot frighten us with death or blackmail us with our past.
- They are humiliated when we put a cross in our church, when we sing joyfully of Christ's death, when we speak of our own death as our home-going and the grave as our gate.
- They are humiliated when we are baptized to celebrate our own death and resurrection in Christ, and when we come to the table of the Lord where we remember again that his blood and body are cleansing and health for our souls.
- They are humiliated when I preach so, and when you say Amen!

Jesus has prepared for us a table in the presence of our enemies!
Let us feast with him.