

The *Cheirographon* and Christ: Recent Scholarly Findings

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General Introduction

In his *Anchor Bible Dictionary* article on “Exegesis,” Douglas Stuart expounded on issues vital for an analysis, such as being undertaken in this essay:

In all lexical study, it is imperative that the meaning in the present context be given precedence over all other considerations. The fact that a word may be used 99 percent of the time it is found in ancient writings to mean one thing is essentially irrelevant if in the context of the biblical passage under study it is used to mean something else. Any author may choose to use even a common word in an unusual way. Thus the final question must always be “How is it used here?”¹

One additional matter, that of nomenclature relating to the categorization of biblical law, needs attention. The issue of the definition, meaning, and relevance of biblical law for the Christian is an ongoing enterprise, as recent publications attest.² While there has been

¹ Douglas Stuart, “Exegesis,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed., vol. 2: D-G (New York, NY: Doubleday), 1992. Stuart (ibid.) adds that the primary question in lexical analysis is “the question of meaning in its immediate context.”

² See, for example, Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017); Kim Papaioannou, *Israel, Covenant, Law: A Third Perspective on Paul* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017); David W. Jones, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, B & H Studies in Christian Ethics (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013); Joel B. Green, ed., *The New Testament and Ethics: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013); Joel B. Green, and Jacqueline E. Lapsey, eds., *The Old Testament and Ethics: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013); Mark F. Rooker, *The*

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some discussion as to the legitimacy of dividing up the requirements articulated in the Old and New Testaments into various groupings,³ Kent Van Til recently indicated that “theologians have often understood the laws of Scripture under the categories of moral, civil, and ritual.”⁴ As Mark Rooker succinctly summed up: “Moral laws are understood to have permanent validity. . . . The ceremonial laws [including ‘sacrifices, feast days,’ etc., ‘for the Israelites’] symbolize and foreshadow the nature of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross. . . . The civil laws pertain to those laws given to Israel by which they are to be governed as a nation.”⁵ While this essay will not become engaged in this discussion regarding how to identify the traditional categories of legal codes in Scripture, it will proceed along the generally accepted perspective that there is a distinction “between permanent and temporary”⁶ legislation in the

Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-First Century, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010).

³ For example, Geisler has alleged that “the whole division of commands into civil, ceremonial, and moral is postbiblical, questionable, and probably of late Christian origin;” (Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989], 92). See also, Dale Ratzlaff, and Verle Streifling, “The Undivided Law: The Law of Moses and the Law of God Are One” (*Proclamation*, October-December 2010), 22-27.

⁴ Kent A. Van Til, *The Moral Disciple: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 113. Jones basically concurred noting that “within the Protestant tradition the terms *ceremonial law*, *civil law*, and *moral law* have been used as interpretive categories;” (57, emphasis original).

⁵ Rooker, 185. Kaiser likewise identified a “threefold distinction,” and then explained the “civil,” “moral,” and “ceremonial” laws, respectively: “The ‘Covenant Code’ had a heading that referred to its laws as **Error! Main Document Only.** מִשְׁפָּטִים, ‘judgments’ or ‘cases’ for the *judges* to use as precedents (Exod. 21:1). Furthermore, they [i.e., the ancients] could see that the Decalogue carried with it no socially recognizable setting with its laws, and that the tabernacle material from Exodus 25 through Leviticus 7 (at least) had an expressed word of built-in obsolescence when it noted several times over that what was built was only a model (‘pattern,’ תַּבְנִיט, e.g., Exod. 25:9, 40);” (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983], 46, emphasis original).

⁶ At the end of his PhD, Cole noted: “In summary, this dissertation confirms that even if it is inappropriate to speak of three clear-cut literary divisions between moral, ceremonial, and judicial corpora, the Old Testament itself does distinguish between permanent and temporary aspects of the law, at least in the case of the Pentateuchal sacred times;” (H. Ross Cole, “The Sacred Times Prescribed in the Pentateuch: Old Testament Indicators of the Extent of Their Applicability” [PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1996], 352. Papaioannou (142), similarly recognizes two parts, which essentially coincide with Cole: the “legal code,” and the “ritual aspect.” Gane likewise

biblical materials—the former being seen as moral law, while the latter is applied to ceremonial regulations.⁷ David Jones noted that “the ceremonial laws are also called religious laws, ritual laws, [and] cultic laws.”⁸ This article may use all of these four terms interchangeably, in view of the fact that “the ceremonial law are laws given for the functioning of the sacrificial system, including tabernacle/temple operations, [as well as] religious festivals.”⁹

Theme and Focus of the Epistle

Writing to the believers in Colossae, Paul cautioned: Μὴ ὄν τις ὑμῶν κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῶν ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων· ἃ ἐστὶν σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ”¹⁰ (Col 2:16, 17). Douglas Moo cautioned that “a casual reading of this verse [i.e., vs. 16] would suggest that Sabbath observance is treated as entirely optional.”¹¹ Just two verses earlier, the apostle had noted that the χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν had been removed. The question has thus legitimately been asked: Is there a possible conceptual connection between the phrase χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν of verse 14 and the σαββάτων of verse 16? For this essay, however, the primary focus will

seems to emphasize the aspect of a “transcultural” law (e.g., chap. 7, 137-161), and later on the “ritual laws” (e.g., chap. 16, 367-397).

⁷ The aspect of (temporary) civil or judicial laws will not be addressed here, as it is not germane to this essay.

⁸ Jones, 57 (emphasis original).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ This is from the 27th edition of the *Nestle-Aland Greek Text* (London: United Bible Societies, 4th ed., 1993). According to the 1995 *Robinson-Pierpont Majority Text*, the only textual differences are that it has the Greek word ἢ (“or”) instead of the word καὶ (“and”), and in place of νεομηνίας (“new moon”), it uses the alternate spelling νοομηνίας, minor distinctions of no real significance to the main issue under discussion in this specific essay. In brief, “Col 2:16 does not present a problem of MS. readings, nor primarily of translation. It is a linguistic question of whether the word [σαββάτων] used here. . . should be translated as an English plural;” (*Problems in Bible Translation* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954], 230-231). The issue of σαββάτων (and whether a plural or not) dealt with in Chapter Six of Ronald Alwyn Gerald du Preez, “A Critical Analysis of the Word Σαββάτων in Colossians 2:16” (PhD dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2018).

¹¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 221. Curiously, despite his own caution, within about half a page, Moo himself (222) alleged that “Colossians 2:16 can validly be used, we think, to conclude that the observance of a Sabbath day is no longer a requirement of God’s people in the new realm.”

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be as follows: What general directions are recent scholars exploring regarding the χειρόγραφον?

While not much is known for certain about the church at Colossae, some hints as to its establishment can be found in Acts 19:10, and in the epistle itself (Col 1:7, 8; 4:12, 13).¹² Apparently, while Paul was in prison in Rome,¹³ Epaphras visited him (Phlm 23), and informed him of the spiritual growth of the Colossian church (Col 1:3-8; 2:5), as well as the heterodox teachings making inroads among some believers (Col 2:1-23).

It should be noted that the specific nature of this heresy is nowhere identified in the epistle, though scores of theories regarding it have been promulgated by scholars over time.¹⁴ However, since at least 1966 scholars have concluded that “it is no longer fitting to discuss a possible influence of ‘Gnosticism’ upon the Colossian Religion or its refutation.”¹⁵ While it may be that “identifying the heresy is not essential for understanding Paul’s basic message,”¹⁶ in his 2008 commentary on Colossians, Peter Davids pointed out that “much recent scholarship favors models involving thought patterns with which Paul was very much at home—that is, some form of Jewish spirituality rather than Gnostic speculation or mystery cult initiation,”¹⁷ though chapter 2:21

¹² See Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 17 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 9; Kevin L. Morgan, “Crucifixion Nails Through the Sabbath?,” *Ministry*, March 1993, 15.

¹³ Derek Tidball noted in 2011, that Colossians “was probably written from Rome;” (Derek J. Tidball, *In Christ, In Colossae: Sociological Perspectives on Colossians* [London: Paternoster, 2011], 11).

¹⁴ See James D. G. Dunn, “The Colossian Philosophy: A Confident Jewish Apologia,” *Biblica* 76/2 (1995): 153, footnote #2.

¹⁵ Markus Barth, and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Astrid B. Beck, trans., Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 32.

¹⁶ Arthur G. Patzia, *Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians*, A Good News Commentary (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984), 46.

¹⁷ Peter H. Davids, *Colossians, Philemon*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 231. See, for example, Allan R. Bevere, *Sharing in the Inheritance: Identity and the Moral Life in Colossians*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 226 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 255, where he concluded in favor of the theory that “the Colossian philosophy was essentially Jewish.” See also Petr Pokorný, *Colossians: A Commentary*, Siegfried S. Schatzmann, trans. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 113, footnote #23. Robert McL. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 57, noted that “most recent proposals all in some way look back to Judaism in some form.” Ian K. Smith, *Heavenly Perspective: A Study of the Apostle*

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suggests that the restrictions proposed went far beyond the Jewish law.¹⁸ As David Garland opined, “Newly formed Gentile Christians in Colossae are being badgered about their faith by contentious Jews.”¹⁹ It appears that these false teachers were telling the Colossian believers that it was not enough to have accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but that they “needed to keep the Jewish ceremonial law;”²⁰ that is, that contrary to the basic conclusions derived at by the early church (as noted in Acts 15), they were “being called upon to observe times and seasons as somehow necessary for their salvation.”²¹ It appears that the allusive language in Colossians 2:16, 17 may assist in directing one to the fuller canonical

Paul’s Response to a Jewish Mystical Movement at Colossae (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), 205, essentially agreed, noting, “It has been our conclusion that the error arose from within Judaism.” For more on this view that the “heresy” was basically Jewish, see Chapter Two of du Preez, “A Critical Analysis of the Word Σαββάτων in Colossians 2:16.”

¹⁸ While “the precise details of these teachings at Colossae cannot be ascertained. . . unquestionably they contained Judaizing tendencies. . . The false teachers at Colossae. . . insisted on an extremely legalistic ceremonialism, following the Jewish pattern, and emphasizing circumcision. . . and observance of festivals. . . Not only is Paul concerned to refute Judaizing legalism, he also must contend with certain pagan elements that sought to degrade or eclipse the office of Christ;” (Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 7 vols. [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980], 7:184). The restrictions noted in Col 2:21 may have some similarity to the matter of the abstaining from foods on certain days, as discussed in Rom 14:1-12.

¹⁹ David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 27. Moo agreed, noting that “an Old Testament/Jewish derivation for the false teachers’ insistence on keeping certain religious ‘days’ is much more likely. . . There is, then, universal agreement that the false teachers’ insistence on observance of days was influenced by Judaism;” (Moo, 220). Pao, after pointing out that the “shadow of things to come” of Col 2:17 is best paralleled by Heb 10:1, concluded: “This strengthens our understanding of the significance of the Jewish context of the false teachers plaguing the Colossian believers;” (David W. Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012], 186).

²⁰ John MacArthur, Jr., *Colossians & Philemon*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1992), 118.

²¹ H. Dermot McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians & Philemon* (Waco, TX: Word, 1980), 88. See also, Pokorný, 143; T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, International Critical Commentary, C. A. Briggs, S. R. Driver, and A. Plummer, eds. (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s sons, 1897), xlviii; N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 27, 119; Nichol, 7:204.

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framework of the passage,²² which may in turn provide contextual clues for a more accurate understanding of the passage within its local context.²³

The major theological thrust of this epistle seems to be a correct view of Christ—“the visible manifestation of the invisible God”²⁴ (Col 1:15)—a Christology intimately related to salvation (Col 1:13, 14; cf. 2:11-15),²⁵ and redemption,²⁶ with profound implications for ethical

²² In accord with the biblical concept that “Scripture is its own best interpreter,” some scholars have been proposing a return to seriously examining the actual text of Scripture itself instead of being so dependent upon Talmudic or pseudepigraphal writings, especially extra-biblical reconstructions or speculations. See, for example, Smith, 38; Thomas R. Schreiner, review of *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface Between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae*, by Clinton E. Arnold, in *Trinity Journal* 20 (Spring 1999): 102; Roy Yates, “A Reappraisal of Colossians,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 [New Series] (1992): 100-101; Fernando Canale, “The Eclipse of Scripture and the Protestantization of the Adventist Mind: Part 2: From the Evangelical Gospel to Culture,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22/1 (2011): 132. While promoting the *scriptura sui ipsius interpretis* axiom, Davidson cautioned: “This does not mean the indiscriminate stringing together of passages in ‘proof-text’ fashion without regard for the context of each text. But since the Scriptures ultimately have a single divine Author, it is crucial to gather all that is written on a particular topic in order to be able to consider all the contours of the topic;” (Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Raoul Dederen, ed., Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000], 65).

²³ Reynolds suggested this helpful approach in an earlier version of his research, which he merely hints at in the later published revision; (Edwin Reynolds, “‘Let No One Judge You’: Col 2:16-17 in Exegetical Perspective,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 20/1-2 [2009]: 213).

²⁴ McDonald, 14. See also, G. H. P. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1967), 120-121.

²⁵ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians*, Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2003), 102, called it “a soteriological Christology.” He stated that “this highly Christological and soteriological section [of chap. 2:6-15] is at the heart and center of the letter.” Foster likewise described it as “a highly Christological letter;” (Paul Foster, *Colossians*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries [London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016], 106). Fields declared that “Colossians is the most Christ-centered epistle in the New Testament;” (Wilbur Fields, *Philippians-Colossians, Philemon: A New Commentary, Workbook, Teaching Manual* [Joplin, MO: College Press, 1969], 126).

²⁶ As Cannon put it: “The central theological focus of Colossians is upon Christology and the focal point of its Christology is the significance of the death of Christ;” (George A. Cannon, *The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983], 223).

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living (Col 3:4-4:6). As Sigve Tonstad cogently articulated, “It is on the platform of Christ’s role as Creator [1:15] that Paul built the case for Christ’s work as redeemer [1:18].”²⁷ The single great message of Colossians may thus be summed up in the declaration: “Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:11b).²⁸ Charles Talbert noted that “it is against the background of this salvific narrative that the arguments of the Colossian letter unfold.”²⁹

Chiasms in the Colossian Epistle

In his research on *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, John Welch pointed out “that chiasmus pervades Colossians.”³⁰ In basic accord, John Paul Heil’s scholarly research on literary structures in this epistle revealed that there are several microchiasms in Colossians, besides the fact that the entire book evinces the following macrochiastic structure:

- A** 1:1-2: Grace from Paul an Apostle by the Will of God
- B** 1:3-14: Thanking God When Praying for You to Walk in Wisdom
- C** 1:15-23: The Gospel Preached to Every Creature under Heaven
- D** 1:24-2:5: We Are Admonishing and Teaching Every Human in All Wisdom
- E** 2:6-23: Walk and Live in Christ with Whom You Have Died and Been Raised
- E'** 3:1-7: You Died and Were Raised with Christ from Living as You Once Walked
- D'** 3:8-16: In All Wisdom Teaching and Admonishing One Another
- C'** 3:17-4:1: You Have a Master in Heaven
- B'** 4:2-6: Pray for Us in Thanksgiving and Walk in Wisdom

²⁷ Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 269.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15. See also, H. Wayne House, “Doctrinal Issues in Colossians, Part 2: The Doctrine of Christ in Colossians,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (Apr-Jun 1992): 180-192.

²⁹ Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 181.

³⁰ John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 222.

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A' 4:7-18: Full Assurance in All the Will of God and Grace from Paul³¹

Looking at a micro-structure, Ralph Martin analyzed Colossians 1:15-20, and concluded that these “six verses have a literary and lexical stamp all their own.”³² This includes artistic evidence of the “careful positioning of some key phrases such as ‘firstborn,’ and the use made of the device of chiasmus (i.e., a criss-cross arrangement), as in verses 16c and 20:”³³

A All things **B'** And through him
B Through him and **A'** All things³⁴

In an exegetical study Ekkehardt Mueller has more carefully and precisely identified the intricate linguistic composition and hermeneutical import of the literary structure of the passage in Colossians 1:15-20:³⁵

A **He is** {the image of the invisible God,
 {the **firstborn** of all creation.

For in Him all things were created. . .
all things have been created *through Him* and for Him.

B And He is before all things,
C and in Him all things hold together.
B' And He is the head of the body, the church;

³¹ John Paul Heil, *Colossians: Encouragement to Walk in All Wisdom as Holy Ones in Christ*, Society of Biblical Literature: Early Christianity and Its Literature, number 4 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 37. As noted in Chapter Five of du Preez, “A Critical Analysis of the Word Σαββάρων in Colossians 2:16,” this essay will be using the nomenclature suggested by Heil in his seminal study: “Macrochiasm,” for large swaths of work, such as an entire book; “Microchiasm,” for distinct units; and “Mini-chiasm,” for sentences [or perhaps even phrases]. See Heil, 37, 104.

³² Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 115.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ekkehardt Mueller, “Focus on Scripture: The Firstborn (Col 1:15),” *Reflections: A BRI Newsletter*, October 2005, 7.

A' He is {the beginning
{the **firstborn** from the dead ...

For in Him it was His Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell, and *through Him* to reconcile *all things* to Himself

Significance of Structure for Interpretation

Mueller pointed out that the term "firstborn" is used twice in the above pericope. He then noted:

As Jesus is the firstborn of creation so He is the firstborn of the dead. The second phrase, which explains the first, makes it clear that the issue is not birth. Jesus was raised from the dead but not literally born from the dead. Second, He was not first in a temporal sense. Others were raised before Him. He was the first in the sense that all resurrections whether past or future were and are dependent on His resurrection. . . . As in Psalm 89, so here too, being "firstborn" is associated with having supremacy.³⁶

Furthermore, since the text and immediate context directly state that through Jesus, the image of God, all things were created, it is clear that "He Himself is not created."³⁷

In brief, the literary structure is key to the correct understanding and translation of the term πρωτότοκος (i.e., "firstborn"). When the passage is diagrammed as above, it becomes quite clear that the Greek term πρωτότοκος does not refer to the order of the literal birth of Jesus by Mary, or to Him allegedly being created by God or emanating from God in ages past. Rather, πρωτότοκος "points to Christ's exalted position as the supreme king and ruler of the universe."³⁸ The literary structure enables one to accurately determine the actual meaning of a specific term. Regarding the significance of literary structures in Colossians, Welch noted: "By appreciating the divisions and development of these thoughts within this significant letter, one may follow Paul's thought

³⁶ Ibid., 8.

³⁷ Ibid., 7

³⁸ Ibid., 8.

with added clarity.”³⁹ If the actual form of the passage is so vital here in Colossians 1, it seems that a proper understanding of the literary structure of Colossians 2, would similarly elucidate the meaning of Colossians 2:14.

Inverted Parallelisms in Colossians 2⁴⁰

When dealing with the “Central Argument of the Epistle,” Ian Thomson’s microchiastic outline of Colossians 2:6-19 is noted below, as “it lies at the heart of the letter. Its analysis as a chiasmus enriches our understanding of the movement of Paul’s thought.”⁴¹

First, the value of this microchiastic pattern is that it shows “how Paul develops his thought logically and consistently.”⁴² But second, and more importantly, recognition of such literary forms assists the reader in better understanding the message intended by the writer. In addition to the macrostructure of the entire epistle, and the microstructure of specific units, Heil’s research demonstrates that Colossians 2:6b-7a has a mini-chiasm, with sub-elements that help the reader and/or listener to understand the meaning better:

- A in him (ἐν αὐτῷ)
- B go on walking (περιπατεῖτε)
- B’ having been rooted and being built up (ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι)
- A’ in him (ἐν αὐτῷ)⁴³

In addition to the above examples of intricate literary structures, just five verses beyond the tripartite phrase of verse 16, Colossians 2:21 contains a brief inverted semantic pattern of chiasmus. This three-part

³⁹ Welch, 225.

⁴⁰ Heil (22) observed that “an A-B-C-D-D’-C’-B’-A’ chiastic pattern secures this fourth unit’s (1:24-2:5) integrity and distinctiveness.” The end of this microchiasm (in vs. 5) dovetails well with the next one, which Thomson outlined, beginning in vs. 6. See Ian H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 111 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 152.

⁴¹ Thomson, 152.

⁴² Ibid., 184.

⁴³ Heil, 104. Instead of lowercase letters used by Heil (a, b) capitals have been used here (A, B).

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phrase can be considered as a simple mini-chiasm,⁴⁴ with a basically synonymous concept in A' echoing that of A:⁴⁵

- A "Do not touch" (μη ἅψη)
- B "Do not taste" (μηδὲ γεύση)
- A' "Do not handle" (μηδὲ θίγης)

Aware of the presence of such Hebrew literary structures in Colossians, as well as their potential significance and import for interpreting and understanding the text, we now turn to the broader matter of the major argument being made in this short letter.

Central Argument of the Epistle

Immediately after laying down a christological foundation, and moving into the main body of the letter (Col 2:6, 7), Paul begins with the imperative Βλέπετε ("beware," vs. 8), thus drawing attention to what Christ has already done for any who belong to Him.⁴⁶ Paul then links this section (vss. 8-15) with the word "therefore" (vs. 16), so as to challenge the false teachings arising at Colossae.⁴⁷ Not to be missed though is the fact that, "verses 12 and 13 are central to the appeal of the letter,"⁴⁸ and evidently "contain the argument of the entire epistle."⁴⁹ Emphasizing the sufficiency of salvation in Jesus Christ, Paul states this truth, in a typical Hebrew poetic parallelism:

⁴⁴ This is from the NKJV.

⁴⁵ For example, Bauer interpreted μη ἅψη as "you must not touch or handle;" (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., Frederick William Danker, ed. [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979], 102).

⁴⁶ Pao, 149.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians and Philemon*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 81; Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 118. Some commentaries see only verse 15 as the focus of the word "therefore:" MacDonald, 110; McDonald, 88; Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 89. Others see only verse 14 as the focus: Nichol, 7:205; Abbott, 263; J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Revised Text with Introductions, Notes, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (London: MacMillan and Co., 1884), 192.

⁴⁸ Bonnie B. Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1995), 44.

⁴⁹ Pokorný, 126.

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- 2:12 “**Buried** with Him in baptism, in which you also were **raised**. . .”
2:13 “**Dead** in your transgressions. . . He made you **alive** together with Him. . .”⁵⁰

One of the central assertions of this epistle is that God grants forgiveness and blessings to all who have been baptized into Christ.⁵¹ In agreement with those who view verses 12 and 13 as pivotal in this chapter, the research of Thomson has shown that these two verses are structurally the double peak of a microchiasm, that extends throughout most of Colossians 2, as follows:⁵²

Introduction: 2:6 “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”

- A 2:7 “**Rooted and built up** in Him and established in the faith”
B 2:8 “**Beware lest anyone** cheat you⁵³. . . **not** according to **Christ**”
C 2:9 “In Him dwells ... the Godhead **bodily**;” 10a “You are complete in Him”
D 2:10b “Who is the head of all **principality and power**”
E 2:11 “Circumcised with the circumcision made without **hands**”
F 2:12 “**Buried** with Him in baptism, in which you also were **raised**”
F’ 2:13 “**Dead** in your transgressions. . . He made you **alive** together with Him”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Verse 13 is from the NASB.

⁵¹ Sumney noted that the following two verses then identify “the crucifixion as the means of forgiveness and of release from the powers that formerly held them captive;” (Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008], 143). Concurring, Hay noted: “In verses 14-15 the writer presents a series of assertions concerning Jesus’ death, as an elaboration of the claim at the end of verse 13 regarding forgiveness;” (David M. Hay, *Colossians* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000], 92).

⁵² See Thomson, 153-156.

⁵³ The first part of verse 8 is from the NKJV, based on the Greek verb *συλαγωγέω*, which can mean “carry off as booty,” “as a captive,” or “rob;” (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., Frederick William Danker, ed. [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 776).

⁵⁴ This is from the NASB.

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- E'** 2:14 “Wiped out the **handwriting** of requirements that was against us”
D' 2:15 “Having disarmed **principalities and powers**”
C' 2:16 “Let no one pass judgment;” 17 “The **body** that cast the shadow is Christ”⁵⁵
B' 2:18 “**Let no one** keep defrauding you;”⁵⁶ 19a “**Not** holding fast to the **Head**”
A' 2:19b “**Nourished and knit together** by joints and ligaments, grows”

The Χειρόγραφον τοῖς Δόγμασιν

In relation to the issue of forgiveness, as well as the meaning of the tripartite phrase in verse 16, it would be well to explore Colossians 2:14, which begins: ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ’ ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν. That first term, ἐξαλείψας, means to “wipe out” (as in Acts 3:19; Rev 3:5), or to “wipe away” (as in Rev 7:17; 21:4). Curtis Vaughan indicated that “in secular literature it was used of blotting out a writing or of abolishing a law.”⁵⁷ While there is general agreement with regard to ἐξαλείψας, as recently as 2012, David Pao pointed out that “the exact meanings of the words ‘written decree’ (χειρόγραφον) and ‘regulations’ (δόγμασιν) remain a subject of scholarly debate.”⁵⁸ Or as Moo put it more strongly, the meaning of these two Greek words “is hotly contested;”⁵⁹ this, despite the fact that δόγμα is a common term, while χειρόγραφον (“a word little used in classical Greek”⁶⁰) is literally “an expression used of

⁵⁵ This is from the CEB.

⁵⁶ This is from the NASB.

⁵⁷ Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 201.

⁵⁸ Pao, 170. In one sense, this “scholarly debate” can be seen from the manner in which translators have rendered the entire phrase in various English versions. For example, older versions generally provided a more literal translation, as in YLT’s (1911) “handwriting in the ordinances” (see also, GNV [1560], DCB [1609], KJV [1611]) – the only real modern versions being the MEV (2014), the NKJV (1991), and the NIV (1978). Generally, since the 1930s most English versions have rendered this phrase as in the NET’s (2001) “a certificate of indebtedness,” or the RSV’s (1951) “the bond which stood against us with its legal demands” (see also, NAB [1970], NEB [1972], NRSV [1989], REB [1992], ESV [2001], etc.).

⁵⁹ Moo, 209.

⁶⁰ Ceslas Spicq, “Χειρογραφον,” *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, James D. Ernest, trans. and ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 508.

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any document written by hand.”⁶¹ Though written decades ago, it is still true that “scholars are divided on the meaning of this term [χειρόγραφον] and the proper interpretation of the entire phrase.”⁶²

Ian Smith perceived that “the difficulty of interpreting the χειρόγραφον is compounded by the lack of specific background for its use in a Christian environment.”⁶³ While Murray Harris aptly noted that the suggested identifications of χειρόγραφον are numerous,⁶⁴ it appears that many scholars see this as a reference to a “certificate of debt” (NASB), i.e., specifically, “the notion of sin as debt”⁶⁵—the record of which was wiped clean by God, due to Christ’s crucifixion.⁶⁶ In basic agreement with many, Pao pointed out that the primary understanding of the word χειρόγραφον (a *hapax legomenon* in the κοινή Greek

⁶¹ Vaughan, *Colossians*, 201. So also, Francis W. Beare, “The Epistle to the Colossians” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. XI (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1983), 198. H. C. G. Moule called it “an autograph;” (H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon with Introduction and Notes* [Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1932], 106).

⁶² Patzia, 43. In his commentary, published in 1984, Patzia listed five views (ibid.): “(a) the Law of Moses, (b) the covenant between Adam and the Devil, (c) a certificate of debt, such as an I.O.U., from mankind to God, (d) a heavenly book on which God recorded human sins, of (e) Christ himself.” About a decade earlier, Carr had listed the first four views; (Wesley Carr, “Two Notes on Colossians,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 [1973], 492). In 1990, Yates first elaborated on the following six views: (a) The Law of Moses; (b) A Pact with Satan; (c) An IOU from Mankind to God; (d) A Heavenly Book; (e) Penitential Stelae; and (f) Theophany Visions; then offered his own proposed solution of a “metaphor of atonement;” (Roy Yates, “Colossians 2,14: Metaphor of Forgiveness,” *Biblica* 71 [1990]: 259).

⁶³ Smith, 101.

⁶⁴ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 118. See, similarly Pao, 107.

⁶⁵ Nijay K. Gupta, *Colossians* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 96. So also, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “Epistles: Twisting Scripture?” *Perspective Digest* 5/2 (2000): 5.

⁶⁶ This is apparently an ancient perspective, from the ante-Nicene Fathers (as early as AD 236) onwards, as Hippolytus wrote: “He who taketh away the sins of the world. . . . But who has blotted out our transgressions? Paul the apostle teaches us, saying, ‘He is our peace who made both one;’ and then, ‘Blotting out the handwriting of sins that was against us;’” (Hippolytus *Fragments from Commentaries*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers V, Part I, “On Daniel II: 15”). See also, Origen *Commentary on Matthew*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers X, Book XIV: 20; Origen *Commentary on John*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers X, Book VI: 37; Ambrose *Concerning Repentance*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers X, Book II: ii 9; Ambrose *Letters*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, XLI: 8; Jerome *Letter to Oceanus*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers VI, Letter LXIX: 7; Augustin *On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers V, Book II: 49.

Testament) is derived from the fields of commerce and law, as well as deuterocanonical works.⁶⁷ While “the particular language of atonement is absent here,”⁶⁸ Jerry Sumney’s summary of this view is nonetheless appropriate: “The forgiveness and new life that believers receive at baptism has its basis in the cross, the means by which God expunges the record of sin and removes it from interfering with their relationship with God.”⁶⁹ Though in essential accord with the crucial theological tenet of the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross, a reasonably legitimate question may be raised as to whether this generally accepted contemporary understanding of the χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν necessarily comports best with the immediate and broader contexts, especially from an inner- and intra-biblical, textual perspective.⁷⁰

Linguistic/Conceptual/Structural Implications

To begin with, it should be noted that Pao recognized that “there may have been a play on words with the use of ἀχειροποιήτω (‘not performed by human hands’ v. 11) and χειρόγραφον (‘written decree’).”⁷¹ This

⁶⁷ Pao, 170-171. See also, Moo, 208-212; Sumney, 144-146; Hay, 97-99; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 164. The extra-canonical references cited as supportive evidence for the basic “certificate of debt” interpretation, include the *Testament of Job* 11:11, Tob 5:3; 9:2, 5; Jub 39:6; 1 En 100.10; the (Jewish) *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 3:6-9; the (Christian) *Apocalypse of Paul* 17; a (contemporaneous papyrus) MM, 687; Plutarch *On Not Lending* 829A; Polybius *Hist.* 30.8.4; etc.

⁶⁸ Gupta, 96.

⁶⁹ Sumney, 146.

⁷⁰ For example, Carr (492) challenged this view from a grammatical perspective. Also, Carr (*ibid.*), and Yates (“Colossians 2,14,” 250-251) challenged the “Pact with Satan” view, as being anachronistic (as are also the “Penitential Stelae,” and “Theophany Visions” interpretations; (Yates, “Colossians 2,14,” 255-256). Furthermore, contra Wink (see Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*, vol. One: *The Powers* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984], 55-56), Carr concluded that the “Heavenly Book” theory is too obscure (*ibid.*). Others, such as Yates, “Colossians 2,14,” 254, and Rodríguez, 5, have challenged the “Heavenly Book” view. Smith (100) has challenged both the “Heavenly Book” view and Blanchette’s idea that the *cheirographon* is Christ Himself (see Oliva A. Blanchette, “Does the *Cheirographon* of Col 2,14 Represent Christ Himself?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 [1961]: 306-312), as “unlikely,” and a view that “makes impossible demands upon the reader.”

⁷¹ Pao, 171. Hamm noted: “Reading this passage in Greek, one cannot help but notice a playful resonance between *acheiropoiētos* (‘not administered by hand,’ that is, administered by God) and *cheirographon* (‘hand-written document. . . .’);” (Dennis Hamm, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013], on Col 2:11-14). Similarly, Hay wondered whether

semantic pun synchronizes with Thomson's chiasmic outline, which identifies a linguistic connection between "the **handwriting** of requirements" (of verse 14) and "the circumcision made without **hands**" (of verse 11).⁷² Besides a direct linguistic link, these two lines also imply a conceptual parallel—verse 11 points to the *absence* of "hands," while verse 14 focuses on the *removal* of a "hand-written" document. In addition, Allan Bevere noted that the verbal link may also be expressing a relationship between the χειρόγραφον and the Law—since those in Christ are circumcised "without hands," this may suggest "that the circumcision 'done with hands' is no longer necessary because the hand-written document requiring such a practice was eradicated through the cross of Christ."⁷³ This lexical arrangement may thus serve to nudge the interpreter towards a more formal translation of the χειρόγραφον, as a literal "written code" (NIV [1978]),⁷⁴ or a "handwriting" (NKJV, MEV, etc.).⁷⁵ Acknowledging that this term is derived from the two Greek words *hand* and *write*, commentator Ernest Campbell postulated: "Paul is

perhaps the term "in 2:14 (Gk. *cheirographon*; literally a 'handwritten text') alludes to the idea of a circumcision 'made without hands' in 2:11, and thus to the Jewish Law, but the phrasing of verse 14 suggests something more general than the Mosaic legislation."

⁷² MacDonald (106) suggested that, "the reference to 'circumcision' may indicate circumcision was among the practices being recommended by the false teachers; these practices clearly included many Jewish elements (2:16-23)."

⁷³ Allan R. Bevere, "The *Cheirographon* in Colossians 2:14 and the Ephesians Connection," in *Jesus and Paul: Global Perspectives in Honor of James D. G. Dunn for His 70th Birthday*, B. J. Oropeza, C. K. Robertson, and Douglas C. Mohrmann, eds. (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 203.

⁷⁴ In basic agreement with the original NIV rendition, Beare (198), contended that, "like γράμμα (II Cor. 3:6-7), it [i.e., the χειρόγραφον] represents simply the law as a written code."

⁷⁵ Lenski pointed out that the term *cheirographon* can refer to a debtor's bond, a labor contract, a document giving authority to act, or even a business agreement. But literally, it simply means a "manuscript." See R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretations of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1946), 114. The type of written document in Colossians 2:14 must be determined by the immediate and larger contexts. Thayer concluded it is "metaphorically applied, in Colossians 2:14 (where R.V. bond) to the Mosaic Law;" (John Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996], s.v. "χειρόγραφον"). Weiss noted that there is "an exegetical tradition which links the word *cheirographon* (Col 2:14) to the law of Moses and understands *ta dogmata* (Col 2:14) as the ordinances of that law;" (Herold Weiss, "The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 [July 1972], 294).

obviously using this word here to refer to the *handwritten Mosaic Law*⁷⁶ –a matter to be further analyzed here.

The unique term χειρόγραφον is immediately qualified by τοῖς δόγμασιν, a phrase that has also been disputed.⁷⁷ Though also often debated, the basic meaning of δόγμα in the New Testament is that of a decree or ordinance.⁷⁸ More than half a century ago, Gerhard Kittel averred that “the usage of Hellenistic Judaism would thus refer the τοῖς δόγμασιν to the Mosaic Law and its demands as the content of the χειρόγραφον.”⁷⁹ Bevere’s scholarly essay, published in 2009, alleged that two major popular interpretations of the χειρόγραφον have failed “to take seriously the essentially Jewish nature of the Colossian philosophy,”⁸⁰ especially since the Jewish elements (of circumcision, food laws, festival observance, etc.) “contain the very essence” of this philosophy.⁸¹ He noted that “the χειρόγραφον as the Law of Moses is seen explicitly in the practices outlined in the polemical core, which are Jewish in character. These are the halakhic regulations (δόγμα) of the Law (χειρόγραφον) being referred to in 2:14, and the μὴ οὖν in 2:16 suggests this as well.”⁸²

Some Intra-Textual Considerations

Since it is believed to have been written by the same author, covering similar issues, sent via the same messenger (Tychicus, Col 4:7, 8; Eph 6:21), to recipients of the same region, some researchers have concluded that Ephesians 2:15 throws light on Colossians 2:14,⁸³ thus making “a

⁷⁶ Ernest R. Campbell, *Colossians & Philemon* (Silverton, OR: Canyonview Press, 1982), 105 (emphasis original).

⁷⁷ Smith (103-104), pointed out that the dative case “presents several possibilities of interpretation,” six of which he explained.

⁷⁸ Bauer (1979), 201. Incidentally, the term δόγμα, was likewise contemporaneously used by Josephus and Philo to refer to the Mosaic law. This usage of δόγμα for the Mosaic law also appears in 3 Macc 1:3, where it talks about a “Jew by birth who later changed his religion and apostatized from the ancestral traditions [δογμαίων]” (NRSV).

⁷⁹ Gerhard Kittel, “δόγμα, δογματίζω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. II, Gerhard Kittel, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. and ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 231.

⁸⁰ Bevere, “The *Cheirographon* in Colossians 2:14,” 200.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 202.

⁸³ See, for example, Moo (210), who stated: “A more likely interpretation [for the meaning of τοῖς δόγμασιν] arises from comparison with Ephesians 2:15, the only other place where the word [δόγμα] occurs in Paul. Here Paul uses it to describe the commandments of the Mosaic law as consisting in ‘decrees.’” Likewise, Harris (107) held, “the most probable being the Mosaic law itself (cf. Eph.

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reference to the Mosaic Law.”⁸⁴ As a recently paraphrased Dutch version (de Basis Bijbel) renders Colossians 2:14b: “Hij heeft namelijk de wet van Mozes, die beweest dat we schuldig waren, aan het kruis gespijkerd.”⁸⁵

Reflecting on the lexical term δόγμα in Colossians 2:14, Moo postulated that “a more likely interpretation arises from comparison with Ephesians 2:15, the only other place where the word occurs in Paul. Here Paul uses it to describe the commandments of the Mosaic law as consisting in ‘decrees.’”⁸⁶ In addition, as Pao indicated, in Ephesians the apostle Paul focused on the barrier between Jew and Gentile, while in Colossians he emphasized the obstacle between God and humankind, caused by the spiritual forces.⁸⁷ Furthermore, both epistles challenged

2:15.” See also, Nichol (6:1009), where Eph 2:15 is explained thus: “Law of commandments. This is generally thought of as referring to the ceremonial law.” See also, Nichol, 7:204.

⁸⁴ Charles R. Hume, *Reading Through Colossians and Ephesians* (London: SCM, 1998), 44. See also, Thurston, 45; MacDonald, 102. Harris (108, emphasis added) maintained that the connected phrase, το**Error! Main Document Only.**ἰς δόγμασιν, “probably refers to the demands of the Mosaic law.” See also, Robert D. Brinsmead, “Sabbatarianism Re-Examined, Chapter 5: Colossians 2:16,” *Verdict* 4/4 (June 1981): 27-28. Bird pointed out that the Mosaic law is sufficiently implied in the passage itself, despite the lack of an explicit use of the term νόμος; (Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon*, A New Covenant Commentary [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009], 84). Bird directly stated: “I reject the view of DeMaris 1994: 51 [Richard E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy: Wisdom in Dispute at Colossae*, JSNTSup 99 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994)], that there is no polemic against the Mosaic law in Colossians;” (ibid., footnote #30).

⁸⁵ Others who see Col 2:14 as referring to the Mosaic (or Jewish) Law include: Verlyn Verbrugge, ed., “σάββατον,” *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 1136; Anthony L. Ash, *Philippians, Colossians & Philemon*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994) 184; House, 189; Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 110-113; Vaughan, *Colossians*, 201; Wilfred Stott, “Sabbath, Lord’s Day,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 3:410; Frederick Brooke Westcott, *Colossians—A Letter to Asia: Being a Paraphrase and Brief Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Believers at Colossæ* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 112; John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, Classic Commentary Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1957), 159.

⁸⁶ Moo, 210. Then he added (ibid.): “Colossians, of course, lacks any reference to the Mosaic law, but it would be typical of Paul’s theology of the law to extend the word to include all those ‘decrees’ of God that regulate human conduct.”

⁸⁷ Pao, 171.

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“the reliance on regulations associated with the written law.”⁸⁸ As William Hendriksen argued: “In the clearly parallel passage (Eph. 2:15) what has been abolished through the cross is not ‘a certificate of indebtedness with our signature on it,’ but ‘the law of commandments with its requirements.’”⁸⁹ Likewise, Kittel stated: “The construction and train of thought are much the same in Eph. 2:15, namely, that the Mosaic νόμος τῶν ἐντολῶν, which consists in δόγματα, is set aside by Christ.”⁹⁰ As Bevere quite appropriately pointed out: “The imagery conveyed in both letters is so similar that it is not unreasonable to suggest that both refer to the same thing.”⁹¹

Others concur that linking these two passages helps to better interpret the χειρόγραφον.⁹² Some have noted that “most of the Greek

⁸⁸ Ibid. Besides these similarities, Beale indicated that there may be a further connection between the passage in Eph 2 and that in Col 2: “The reference to ‘circumcision made without hands’ (Col. 2:11) implies a contrast with ‘circumcision made with hands,’ which Paul refers to in Eph. 2:11 (‘circumcision in the flesh made by hands’);” (G. K. Beale, “Colossians,” G. K. Beale, and D. A. Carson, eds. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007], 861).

⁸⁹ William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on Colossians & Philemon* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 121, footnote #90.

⁹⁰ Kittel, “δόγμα, δογματίζω,” 231.

⁹¹ Bevere, “The *Cheirographon* in Colossians 2:14,” 204. Besides noting that both Ephesians and Colossians use the term δόγμα, Bevere (ibid.) identified the following parallels: “In Ephesians, Christ’s death nullifies the Law together with its commandments and regulations. In Colossians, the χειρόγραφον (the Law) with its regulations is erased as it is nailed to the cross of Christ. In Ephesians, the cross abolishes the Mosaic Law as a dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile; and while the language of division between Jew and Gentile is not explicit in Colossians, the χειρόγραφον as a barrier that stands in the way is obvious—it is ‘against us’ (τὸ καθ’ ἡμῶν) and ‘hostile to us’ (ὁ μὴ ὑπεναντίον ἡμῶν).”

⁹² See, for example, Wilson, 208; Verlyn Verbrugge, ed., “δόγμα,” *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 343; Pokorný, 137-138; Hans-Helmut Esser, “δόγμα,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 1: 330-331; Gerhard Kittel, “δόγμα,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 178; F. F. Bruce, “Colossian Problems, Part 4: Christ as Conqueror and Reconciler,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (Oct-Dec 1984): 295; W. E. Read, “More on Colossians 2:14, Part 1,” *Ministry*, January 1973, 46-47; Idem, “More on Colossians 2:14, Conclusion,” *Ministry*, February 1973, 42; Hendriksen, 121, footnote #90; Westcott, 112; Robert John Floody, *Scientific Basis of Sabbath and Sunday* (Boston, MA: Herbert B. Turner, 1906), 171.

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Church Fathers”⁹³ supported the notion that the Mosaic Law is in view here,⁹⁴ and that this interpretation “is grammatically without problems,”⁹⁵ though some have recognized that “a strict identification with the Mosaic Torah cannot be made.”⁹⁶ The NIV originally translated this phrase as, “the written code, with its regulations,”⁹⁷ which structurally appears to parallel the reference to the regulations of circumcision—the covenant sign of ancient Israel.⁹⁸

These “regulations” that were “contrary to us” appear to allude to the laws in the Old Testament that stood as “a witness against you” (Deut

⁹³ Barth, and Blanke, 328.

⁹⁴ For example, Yates (“Colossians 2, 14,” 250) stated: “Following the lead given by the Fathers of the School of Antioch a number of modern commentators have proceeded to interpret the cheirograph in the light of Eph 2, 15 as the law of Moses.” Bevere concluded: “In considering the internal evidence from Colossians itself, and the related evidence from the Book of Ephesians, it appears that the best explanation for the identity of the χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 is that it is *primarily* and most specifically a reference to the Law of Moses;” (Bever, “The *Cheirographon* in Colossians 2:14,” 206, emphasis original).

⁹⁵ Barth, and Blanke, 328. In other words, Paul may have intentionally connected the assurance of full forgiveness through Christ (vs. 13b), to both the “written code, with its regulations” (vs. 14), which required sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, as well as to the death of Christ, by which these ritual requirements were ultimately fulfilled, and thereby abrogated. In short, by His death, Christ consummated the ritual system. Admittedly, it has been claimed that, “The idea of the law nailed on the cross with Christ would have been unthinkable for Paul;” (Charles Masson, *L’Épître de St. Paul aux Colossiens*, Commentaire du Nouveau Testament, vol. 10 [Neuchâtel: Delachaux, 1950], 128). Challenging such thinking about Paul, N. T. Wright has aptly concluded that “the explosive force of Paul’s theology lies just here. . . . [in that] he writes simultaneously of fulfillment and of something radically new—something shocking, something until that point unthinkable;” (N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009], 28). While his comments were dealing specifically with Col 1:15-20, Wright’s overall point can be appropriately applied to Col 2:14-17 as well.

⁹⁶ While he maintained that Paul is not suggesting that the Torah is nailed to the cross, and while he held that this χειρόγραφον is most likely a “record of debt,” Pao concluded in his 2012 exegetical commentary (171) that, “even though a strict identification with the Mosaic Torah cannot be made,” the χειρόγραφον “should be understood in relation to the Mosaic law.”

⁹⁷ This 1978 edition of the NIV takes into account the fact that Paul did not use the genitive, but rather the dative case, το**Error! Main Document Only.**ἰς δόγμασιν, hence, “with its regulations” (associative dative, or dative of accompanying circumstances); see Harris, 109. The 1999 version of the New International Reader’s Version similarly rendered the first part of the verse: “He wiped out the written Law with its rules.”

⁹⁸ It seems that if the term χειρόγραφον is classified as a “metaphor,” such would nullify the microchiasm; for, as it stands, vs. 14 is already a clear metaphor—it echoes the spiritual metaphor of the “circumcision without hands” notion, of vs. 11.

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31:26),⁹⁹ and which the apostle Peter later (in Acts 15:10) referred to as a “yoke” (NASB, ESV, etc.), or a “burden” (CEB, CEV, etc.).¹⁰⁰ It may be significant that in the immediate context, the LXX notes that Moses recorded these laws, by “writing” (γράφων, Deut 31:24)—a possible lexical link to the χειρόγραφον of Colossians 2:14. This nomenclature of “hand” and “writing/written” related to the Mosaic law is not unknown in post-exilic literature. For instance, when Ezra was asked to “bring the Book of the Law of Moses” (Neh 8:1, NKJV), and from which he then read, the Hebrew text literally states: “And they found *written* in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by the *hand* of Moses. . .” (Neh 8:14).¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ This use of God being “against us” or “contrary to us” can be seen repeatedly in the counsel Moses gave Israel before he died. For example, Lev 26:17, 21, 23-24, 27-28, 40-41; Deut 28:48-49; 29:27; 31:17, 19, 21, 27.

¹⁰⁰ Referring to the ceremonial law, that some were trying to foist on the new Gentile converts, Peter said: “Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (Acts 15:10). Barnes concurred: “The meaning here is, that the burdensome requirements of the Mosaic law are abolished, and that its necessity is superseded by the death of Christ;” (Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [London: George Routledge and Co., 1851], 265). Then Barnes (*ibid.*), referencing Peter’s “yoke” statement, noted that these requirements were “burdensome.”

¹⁰¹ Moreover, centuries after the writing of Deuteronomy, when that very Book of the Law was found in the temple, King Josiah recognized “the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written *concerning* us” (2 Kgs 22:13, emphasis added). Significantly, the Hebrew term וְעָלֵינוּ translated “concerning us,” or “for us” (YLT), has been rendered in the Septuagint as καθ’ ἡμῶν. A similar phrase is seen in 1 Cor 15:15, ὅτι ἐμαρτυρήσαμεν κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, and is rendered as “because we have testified *of* God” (NKJV, emphasis added), “because we have testified *about* God” (ESV, emphasis added); “for we have witnessed *concerning* God” (DBY, emphasis added). In brief, κατὰ can be rendered as “with respect to,” (see Bauer, *σάββατον* [2000], 407), or synonyms, such as seen in the English versions above, and must be translated according to the context. Paul may have selected this very phrase, καθ’ ἡμῶν, from this context of the Book of the Law, and connected it with the χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14. While καθ’ ἡμῶν has been translated mostly as something “*against* us,” it is also linguistically legitimate to render this as “the handwriting *concerning/for* us.” See Liddell-Scott’s Lexicon, where among other terms, they indicate that κατὰ can be rendered “concerning.” In other words, the ceremonial regulations were given by God *concerning/for* the nation of Israel, in order for them to know how to obtain forgiveness of sins, through the sacrificial system. Should Israel depart from the requirements of these ritual regulations (which were given “for” them), that law would become a witness “against” their apostasy, and thus be seen as even

“The Mosaic Law in Its Ritual Part”¹⁰²

Since Paul refers to the Old Testament law as νόμος more than a hundred times in his writings, it is likely that he refrained from using νόμος in Colossians so as to avoid the impression that the entire Mosaic law had been abrogated.¹⁰³ Addressing this very issue, Roy Yates noted: “In the process of attempting to give adequate expression to Christian belief in the crucified and risen Lord new metaphors were sought, new vocabulary coined and old words filled with new meaning.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, since the universal moral principles enumerated in the Torah were to continue, Paul apparently coined the unique phrase χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν, with the specific purpose of drawing attention to the ritual law of the Jewish nation.¹⁰⁵ As Alexander Maclaren explained: “Of course, by *law* here is primarily meant the Mosaic ceremonial law, which was being pressed upon the Colossians”¹⁰⁶—evidence of which can be seen in the listing in verse 16 of various elements of these cultic regulations of Israel, thus corroborating this more carefully nuanced understanding of

“contrary” to them. See also, Donald E. Mansell, “Thoughts on Colossians 2:14-17,” *Ministry*, December 1971, 27. Harris (116) concluded that the broken laws stand “as a silent testimony against us,” “a witness hostile to us.” As C. F. D. Moule put it: “This χειρόγραφον is ‘against us’ because we have manifestly failed to discharge its obligations;” (C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary [Cambridge: University Press, 1958], 97).

¹⁰² This is the language of Eadie, 163.

¹⁰³ Donelson stated: “The terminology in 2:14-15 is a little unusual. This is not a common way to talk about the Jewish law;” (Lewis R. Donelson, *Colossians, Ephesians, First and Second Timothy, and Titus*, Westminster Bible Companion [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 40).

¹⁰⁴ Yates, “A Reappraisal of Colossians,” 105. In the above statement, Yates was including both “the cheirograph [vs. 14] and the triumph [of vs. 15];” (ibid.). In a somewhat similar manner, but commenting here on Paul’s address at the Areopagus, Kistemaker noted (specifically concerning Acts 17:28): “By quoting these poets Paul is not intimating that he agrees with the pagan setting in which the citations flourished. Rather, he uses the words to fit his Christian teaching;” (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 637).

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Gordon H. Clark, *Colossians: Another Commentary on an Inexhaustible Message*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 89-90.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Maclaren, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and Philemon* (New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1899), 214 (emphasis original).

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“Mosaic law.”¹⁰⁷ Commentator Gordon Clark noted that the ceremonial law is “a more plausible view.”¹⁰⁸

After concisely expounding on five different types of offerings required by the Mosaic Law, and observing that “none of these sacrifices had any value or significance apart from Christ,”¹⁰⁹ John Phillips, in 2002, commented on the χειρόγραφον: “All of this ‘handwriting’ in the Mosaic Law has been ‘blotted out’ by Christ. His death for us on the Cross renders all of the Old Testament types and pictures obsolete.”¹¹⁰ In fundamental accord, Richard Leonard stated: “Christ himself had offered the only efficacious blood sacrifice (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:1-10) and in his death and resurrection had cancelled the decrees of the *ceremonial law* (Col. 2:13-14).”¹¹¹ In brief, it was essentially the levitical services that “Christ abolished at the cross.”¹¹² Conclusions such as those of Phillips, Leonard, etc., though not frequently seen in contemporary scholarship, should not surprise one, as this was “the common view” across the centuries,¹¹³ as Eadie recalls: “Not a few understand the apostle to refer [in Col 2:14] to the *ceremonial law*, or the Mosaic law *in its ritual part* or aspect. Such is the view of Calvin, Beza, Crocius, van Till, Gomar, Vorstius, Grotius, Deyling, Schoettgen, Wolf, Bähr, and others. . . . It is true that it was abrogated by the death of Christ on the cross.”¹¹⁴ As the

¹⁰⁷ See Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 25-26. Pao (171) aptly cautioned that χειρόγραφον “should not be identified entirely with the Torah.” Somewhat similarly, but discussing the δόγματα, Yates (“Colossians 2, 14,” 257) stated: “Some of the prescriptions of the law of Moses may be included in these regulations, but not the Torah as such.”

¹⁰⁸ Clark, 89. He added that, “verse 16 lends credence to this interpretation;” (ibid., 90).

¹⁰⁹ John Phillips, *Exploring Colossians & Philemon: The Expository Commentary*, John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002), 129.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Richard C. Leonard, “Background to the Christian Festivals,” *Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1: *Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, Robert E. Webber, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 1:194 (emphasis added).

¹¹² Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament*, vol. 15 (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1985), 70.

¹¹³ Already in the 17th century it was noted, by James Fergusson, that this “handwriting of ordinances,” was “the ceremonial law unto the Jews;” (James Fergusson, *Brief Exposition of the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* [London: Thomas Ward & Co., 1978; from original editions, 1656-1674], 351). He held (352) that the seventh-day Sabbath was part of this ceremonial law. So also, Thomas B. Brown, *Thoughts Suggested by the Perusal of Gilfillan, and Other Authors, on the Sabbath* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1870), 45.

¹¹⁴ Eadie, 163 (emphasis added).

Dutch commentator, J. A. C. van Leeuwen, acceded almost a century ago: “Bij het door ‘document’ vertaalde woord, letterlijk ‘handschrift,’ doch met de beteekenis van een ‘officieel,’ rechtskracht bezittend geschrift, moeten wij denken aan de ceremonieele wet van Israel.”¹¹⁵

Extra-Biblical Documentary Data

This interpretation of χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν, as employed to identify the “Mosaic law in its ritual part” (i.e., “the ceremonial law”), has received some significant extra-biblical support in a scholarly article published in November 2017.¹¹⁶ Kyu Seop Kim has analyzed quite an abundance of ancient Greek papyri and ostraca written between the second century BC and the third century AD, in which the term χειρόγραφον appears (together with its cognates, χειρογραφία and χειρογραφεῖν). His research unearths documents that imply that, “χειρόγραφον does not [simply] refer to a debt certificate,”¹¹⁷ contrary to Adolf Deißmann’s argument; but, it “can be defined as a main certificate type of ancient private law,”¹¹⁸ such as that of “a lease contract (P.Fouad 40, AD 35), house sale contract (P.Louvre 1:10, AD 75-99), farm sale contract (P.Mich. 5:272, AD 45-46), and loan contract (P.Gen. 2:1:24, AD 96).”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, in accord with Ludwig Mitteis’s 1891 conclusion, Kim’s study reveals that “χειρόγραφον could also be employed with regard to a public situation,” such as seen in P.Aberd. 49

¹¹⁵ J. A. C. van Leeuwen, *De Brief aan de Colossensen: Opnieuw uit den Grondtekst Vertaald en Verklaard*, Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift: Met Nieuwe Vertaling (Kampen, Holland: J. H. Kok, 1923), 41.

¹¹⁶ Kyu Seop Kim, “The Meaning of Χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14 Revisited,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 68.2 (2017): 223-239.

¹¹⁷ Kim (229) maintained: “Even when the term χειρόγραφον is associated with the certificate of indebtedness, it was not directly meant as the certificate of indebtedness or the bond: it simply refers to the document or the certificate with regard to a handwritten declaration.” As evidence Kim (ibid.) refers to P.Mich. 11:614 (AD 256): “‘And we wish that from two copies of the handwritten contract (ἀπὸ τοῦ δισσοῦ χειρογράφου), a single copy will be made public. . . ;’” as well as that of SB 24:16265 (ca. AD 259), which basically echoes that of P.Mich.: “‘And I wish that from two copies of the handwritten contract (ἀπὸ τοῦ δισσοῦ χειρογράφου), a single copy will be made public. . . ;’” (ibid., 230). Kim concluded (ibid.): “Thus, χειρόγραφον does not refer to a debt certificate itself, but to a handwritten declaration, even when it is used in respect of a loan or a bond.”

¹¹⁸ Kim, 226.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 226-227. Kim added (ibid., 229, and provided the evidence), that “the term χειρόγραφον was used in the document of a slave sale (P. Oxy. 60:4058, AD 158-159).”

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(AD 158), P.Col. 7:145 (AD 335), and P.Oxy. 10:1252 (AD 288-295).¹²⁰ After providing evidence that χειρόγραφον was used as an official membership report for a guild (in P.Mich. 5:244, AD 43), and a declaration of an official delegation (in P.Fay. 34, AD 161), Kim concluded that “χειρόγραφον could be utilised to express public and official declarations, not simply private contracts.”¹²¹ Verbal and similar formulaic statements provide,¹²² as Kim noted, “many pieces of evidence that, contrary to Deißmann’s definition and the present consensus. . . χειρόγραφον does *not* simply refer to a private debt certificate, but was. . . used in both private and public situations.”¹²³ Similarly, based on his research into “chirographic documents in the legal and papyrological traditions” of this basic era, Julien Ogereau recommended in a volume published in 2018, that “the systematic designation of the *cheirographon* as a ‘certificate of debt’ should probably be avoided, as it somewhat misrepresents the documentary reality”¹²⁴—for, the “*cheirographon* comprised a wide range of documents.”¹²⁵ After analyzing “χειρόγραφον in inscriptions,” Ogereau concluded: “Overall, the epigraphic evidence herein reviewed does not fundamentally alter our general understanding about chirographic documents, but rather confirms what is already basically known.”¹²⁶

In view of the plethora of contemporaneous materials, and since there is no expression found in Colossians 2 that identifies any debt, Kim’s conclusion seems reasonable: “It is unlikely that Paul expected his

¹²⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹²¹ Ibid., 233.

¹²² Here Kim (234-235) included P.Hib. 2:247, P.Oxy. 18:2185 (AD 92), O.Petr. 309 (3rd century AD), BGU 16:2562 (8-7 BC), BGU 16:2570 (8-7 BC), BGU 16:2565 (3-2 BC), P.Oxy. 57:3907 (AD 99), P.Ryl. 4:572 (2nd century BC), P.Oxy. 2:260 (AD 59), P.Tebt. 3:801 (134 BC), as evidence of his conclusions on this point.

¹²³ Ibid., 235 (emphasis added).

¹²⁴ Julien M. Ogereau, “Χειρόγραφον in Colossians 2:14: The Contribution of Epigraphy to the Philology of the New Testament,” in *Epigraphical Evidence Illustrating Paul’s Letter to the Colossians*, Joseph Verheyden, Markus Öhler, and Thomas Corsten, eds. (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck), 105.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 118. Curiously, Ogereau nevertheless later concluded that “the term was understood by the original author and audience as a kind of *debt certificate*,” despite admitting that “it remains somewhat unclear how it is supposed to function. Who is indebted to whom? In what respect? For what reason? The author simply provides no explicit clues and seems to have assumed that the audience would have easily read between the lines and grasped its significance;” (ibid., 121, emphasis added). The above essay seeks to provide a better explanation than that proposed by Ogereau.

readers to understand this term as the bond between God and humanity.”¹²⁷ Incidentally, regardless of “whether the false teaching [in Colossae] contains Jewish features or not,” Kim averred that “it seems obvious that δόγμα in Colossians 2:14 refers to the religious regulations required to [*sic*] the Colossian believers, and that it is related to ascetic regulations.”¹²⁸ At minimum, this research of Kim indicates that there is enough evidence from ancient documents that “χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν refers to χειρόγραφον with respect to the religious regulations”¹²⁹—a technical definition that accords well with the inter-textual and inner-biblical deductions proposed above.

Current Standard Adventist View

The above scriptural reflections and extra-biblical information appear to provide some additional support for the longtime standard understanding of the χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν among Seventh-day Adventists. For example, in the 2018 edition of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, as published by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, this “biblical exposition of fundamental doctrine”¹³⁰ states:

At the death of Christ the jurisdiction and the function of the *ceremonial law* came to an end. His atoning sacrifice provided forgiveness for all sins. This act “wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14; cf. Deut. 31:26). Then it was no longer necessary to perform the elaborate ceremonies that were not, in any case, able to take away sins or purify the conscience (Heb. 10:4; 9:9, 14). No more worries about the *ceremonial laws*, with their complex requirements regarding food and drink offerings, celebrations of various festivals (Passover, Pentecost, etc.), new moons, or ceremonial sabbaths (Col. 2:16; cf. Heb. 9:10), which were only a “shadow of things to come” (Col. 2:17).¹³¹

¹²⁷ Kim, 236.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹³⁰ See *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 3rd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2018), title page.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 280 (emphases added).

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In a similar vein, the scholarly *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, produced by the Adventist Church's Biblical Research Institute in the year 2000, affirms: "The context of Colossians 2:14 indicates *regulations* having to do with *ceremonial celebrations* and food (v. 16)."¹³² Also, this volume indicates that, "With the death of Christ the *ceremonial* system that pointed forward to Christ as the culmination of the entire *legal system* came to an end."¹³³ A decade later, in 2010, the Biblical Research Institute's *Interpreting Scripture* noted that "Colossians 2:14 is a divine declaration that the ritual requirements have come to an end, because Jesus the Messiah had died on the cross as the antitypical fulfillment of the sacrificial system."¹³⁴ Furthermore, the above-mentioned conclusions comport well with Ellen White's clear statement in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (365.1), regarding the ceremonial law: "The ceremonial system was made up of symbols pointing to Christ, to His sacrifice and His priesthood. This ritual law, with its sacrifices and ordinances, was to be performed by the Hebrews until type met antitype in the death of Christ, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Then all the sacrificial offerings were to cease. It is this law that Christ 'took. . . out of the way, nailing it to His cross.' Colossians 2:14."

As increasingly recognized by scholars, "it does seem likely that the Colossians were being asked to adopt some Jewish practices as additions to what they had received in Christ."¹³⁵ Paul informed the Colossians that Christ's death on the cross spelled the end of the χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν, that is, the ceremonial law. Henceforth, they no longer needed to worry about observing the ritual aspects of the Mosaic Torah, as all of

¹³² Mario Veloso, "The Law of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Raoul Dederen, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 477 (emphases added).

¹³³ Ibid. (emphases added).

¹³⁴ Ron du Preez, "Is the Seventh-day Sabbath a 'Shadow of Things to Come'?" in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, Gerhard Pfandl, ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 392. On the back page the following is noted: "Although each article is signed, they have been reviewed and revised by the members of the Biblical Research Institute Committee, a committee of about forty scholars and administrators from around the world. Hence, no part of this volume is the work of a single author. The individual chapters and the book, as a whole, profited from this cooperative approach."

¹³⁵ Davids, 275. See also, Nichol, 7:184, where it is stated that at least part of the challenge was that "The false teachers at Colossae. . . insisted on an extremely legalistic ceremonialism, following the Jewish pattern, and emphasizing circumcision. . . and observance of festivals. . .;" (as noted above in footnote #18).

the Old Testament types (including the “pilgrim feasts, new moons, and ritual sabbaths” [Col 2:16]) had been fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ.

Summary and Conclusions

By way of summary, the following can be said: The setting showed that it was in the context of a soteriological Christology that Paul addressed the false teachings making inroads among the Colossian believers. Taking into account intra- and inter-textual, structural, conceptual, semantic and linguistic factors (including data from extra-biblical documents and epigraphical evidence), it is being proposed that various recent scholarly findings indicate that the highly debated χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν of Colossians 2:14 may be better understood and interpreted as the “Mosaic law in its ritual part” (i.e., the ceremonial law), which has been fulfilled at the Cross through Christ. Based on the above considerations, it seems reasonable to have Colossians 2:14 translated in the way that the 2014 Modern English Version has rendered it: “He blotted out the **handwriting of ordinances** that was against us and contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross”—an interpretation that accords with recent standard Adventist publications, as well as that of Ellen White.

John Woodhouse contended that Colossians 2:14 has “one of the most vivid descriptions in the New Testament of what happened when Jesus died.”¹³⁶ In his 2010 analysis of Colossians, Heil opined that, “the metaphor is convoluted, but presumably reflects again the idea of Christ’s death as a sin offering”¹³⁷—which reminds one of the ritual system as fully elaborated to ancient Israel in the ceremonial laws in Scripture—a system in which forgiveness of sins took place through the death of sacrificial animals, especially the lamb. Verse 15 then shows, as commentator Dermot McDonald rightly observed: “Christ the crucified is Lord; and all the hostile powers of the universe have become subjected to him. In Christ’s cross the demonic hosts of evil have met their Conqueror.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ John Woodhouse, *Colossians and Philemon: So Walk in Him* (Ross-Shire, England: Christian Focus, 2011), 140.

¹³⁷ Heil, 119, footnote #43.

¹³⁸ McDonald, 87. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 114 (emphasis original), succinctly summarized the overall point of verse 15: “Paul is asserting that, because of what Jesus did on the cross, *the powers and authorities*, are a

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beaten, defeated lot, so that (by implication) neither the Colossians nor anyone else who belongs to Jesus need be overawed by them again.”