

**Readings:** *Genesis 18:20 – 32; Psalm 137(138) 1 - 3, 6 - 8; Colossians 2:12 – 14, Luke 11:1 – 13.*

Today's reading from Saint Paul's letter to the Colossians is an essential link in his argument.

A fortnight ago we heard his doctrinal teaching about the supreme role of Christ in creation, redemption and the life of the Church.

Last week we heard of the place his work and sufferings have in the continuation of Christ's work. Today we hear of Paul's conviction that all members of the Church – particularly those to whom he is writing – share in that work. In this passage Paul is contrasting the ideas of false teachers, who argued that pagan converts were obliged to observe Jewish laws, and his own conviction that Christ has freed Christians from that obligation.

He writes here (as he does in Romans 6 and Galatians 3) of the identification of each Christian with the crucified and risen Christ in baptism. Each is *buried with Christ* and *raised up with him* through faith *in the power of God*.

There is an underlying contrast between physical circumcision, which strips away only a small part of the body of flesh, and the 'stripping away' of Christ's whole body of flesh in his crucifixion. By baptism the Christian shares in this 'spiritual circumcision' of Christ, and so is freed from sin and the obligation to keep the Jewish Law.

But the phrase '*cancelled every record of the debt we had to pay*' widens the effect of Christ's death. It refers to a signed acknowledgement of an obligation to pay – an IOU.

For the Jew it is an obligation to observe the Law of Moses. For the Gentile it is an obligation to do whatever is known of God's will. But it is clear that Jew and Gentile alike have failed in their obligations and so would be under sentence of death – but for one thing.

*Christ has cancelled every record of the debt* – and, in a striking image – *he has done away with it by nailing it to the cross*.

*(For this interpretation see Professor CFD Moule's commentary)*

Our reading omits the following verse, which links Christ's victory on the Cross with the earlier description of his supremacy (see reading for Sunday 15): *Christ disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the cross*.