# **How Did the Cross Disarm the Devil?**

John Piper:

Colossians 2:15 tells us our Savior Jesus Christ ‘disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them.’ Great text! But what is here meant by ‘disarmed’? Was there something they were wielding then that they do not wield now? If so, what is the weapon Paul speaks of here in this text?”

I love this question because I love the glorious truth, not only of Colossians 2:15, but the way verses 13 and 14 prepare for it and put a massive foundation under it. So let’s read the whole unit, and then I’ll give a couple answers to the question, In what sense did the death of Christ strip Satan and his demons of their weapons? Here are the verses:

You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him [Christ], having forgiven us all our trespasses [how?] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside [how?], nailing it to the cross. [And here comes the key verse we’re being asked about:] He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him [in Christ and in the cross]. (Colossians 2:13–15)

Forgiven and Made Alive

This is one of the greatest passages, I think, in the Bible about what really happened when Christ died. So let me describe six terrible and wonderful things in the order in which they happened in this text, and end by describing the glorious disarming of rulers and authorities.

1. Legally Condemned

We were dead in trespasses and sins. All human beings are spiritually dead and blind to the reality of the glory of Christ. We are as dead to spiritual truth as a human corpse is dead to being touched. Paul describes the legal nature of this condition in Colossians 2:14 with the phrase “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.” In other words, we’re not only spiritually impervious to God’s touch, but we are legally condemned by the long record of sins that stood against us.

2. Debt Nailed

God took that long list, that record of sins, and put it in the hand of Christ, and drove a spike through it and through his hand so that he became a substitute for us, bearing the punishment for the record of our debts in his own death. He nailed it. The text says, “nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

3. Debt Canceled

Then verse 14 makes explicit that this nailing of the record of our debt to the cross canceled — “canceling the record of our debt” (Colossians 2:14). It is canceled. The debt is canceled because the debt of punishment that we owed to the justice of God has been paid in the punishment of Christ on the cross.

4. Record Set Aside

Then Paul adds, “This he set aside” (Colossians 2:14). Literally, it says he “took it out of the midst” — very unusual thing to say. In other words, in the courtroom of heaven, where our record of debt guarantees our condemnation, nobody can find it. It’s taken. Where did it go? This was in the folder here just a minute ago. It’s taken out of the midst. It’s gone. “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12).

5. Forgiven

Then he makes explicit that the effect of our sins being nailed, and the record of debt being taken out of the way, is that we’re forgiven (Colossians 2:13). He applies to us personally what Christ accomplished perfectly. When we are united to Christ by faith, his punishment becomes ours and his righteousness becomes ours, and God counts our sins against us no more.

6. Made Alive

Paul says in verse 13, therefore, “God made [you] alive together with him.” Because our sins are forgiven, he makes us eternally alive. Now, we’re no longer a corpse that can’t be touched by spiritual reality. We see Christ for who he is, and we are moved to prefer him and prize him and treasure him and love him and trust him above all things.

Devil Disarmed

And now, on the basis of those six terrible and glorious realities, we see in verse 15 that something amazing happened to the rulers and authorities, to Satan and his “cosmic powers . . . in the heavenly places,” as it says in Ephesians 6:12. This is Colossians 2:15: “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” The word translated disarmed means literally stripped. It’s used one other place — namely, in Colossians 3:9, where the Christians are to strip off their old nature.

So, what we see first in verse 15 is that just when people thought Jesus was being stripped of his clothing, and shamed in nakedness at his final trial, and led in triumphal procession to Calvary, what was really happening was the reverse. Namely, Satan and his demonic forces were being stripped. They were being shamed. They were being led in triumphal procession. I’m going to mention two ways (there are more) that the achievement of the death of Jesus in verses 13 and 14 brings about this stripping (or this disarming) of Satan and his rulers.

No More Condemnation

First, we know from Revelation 12:10 that Satan, by the very meaning of his name, is the great accuser. Satan can do a lot of damage to us physically, emotionally, and relationally in this world, but he can only condemn us or damn us or bring us to eternal ruin in one way — namely, by a valid accusation of our sins before a holy God.

If he can do that, we’re done for. If he can make our sins stick in the courtroom of heaven as he accuses us before the judge of the universe, we’re doomed; we’re hopeless. And the point of verses 13 and 14 is that the record of debt that Satan could use to accuse us and condemn us has been nailed to the cross. The one damning weapon that he has — namely, unforgiven sin, with which he could accuse us — has been stripped out of his hands.

This is what Paul meant, I think, when he said in Romans 8:33–34, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died.” So, the first way that the demonic world was stripped and disarmed by the cross is that the power to accuse God’s people successfully has been taken away. That sin is already punished. It was nailed to the cross. We can’t be accused with it.

No More Fear of Death

And the second thing, the only other thing I’ll mention, is a glorious thing experientially now — namely, Satan was robbed. The powers and the rulers, the authorities, were robbed or stripped of their power to hold us in slavery to the fear of death. Now, I get that straight out of Hebrews 2:14, which is an absolutely amazing, wonderful verse

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood [that is, we’re human], he himself likewise partook of the same things [he became human], that through death he might destroy [nullify, abrogate, revoke, abolish] the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

When Christ died in our place, he took the sting out of death because he took sin out of death. He took condemnation out of death. And so he took fear out of death, which means that the second great weapon of the devil that was stripped from him is the power to hold us in bondage, which is what the next verse in Hebrews says: he held us in bondage through fear of death our whole life long (Hebrews 2:15).

He can’t do that anymore. He has been disarmed of the weapon of fear of dying, because the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, and all of it has been satisfied and punished on the cross.

Glories of the Cross

So, you can see why I love Colossians 2:13–15. The riches of these verses are infinite. I encourage you to spend hours pondering the glories of what God achieved for us on the cross, especially as it relates to the devil and the evil rulers and authorities — and I’ve only mentioned two. There are other ways that Satan has been stripped, but these two are wonderful. Power to condemn us with sin stripped. Power to terrify us with death stripped.