



# Truth in Grace

Truth in Grace Ministries

Dan Hayden, Director

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## HUNG on a TREE

### Dan's Desk

# H

Have you ever wondered why Jesus had to die on a cross?

An altar on some mountain top might have been more fitting from an Old Testament point of view. In fact, that is what God arranged for Abraham in the sacrifice of his only begotten son, Isaac (Genesis 22). Or why didn't the religious leaders just stone Jesus to death as they did with Stephen sometime later (Acts 7)? After all, that was the means of capital punishment in Israel, and Pilate seemed willing to give them permission for that (John 18:31-32). But the rulers of the Jews wanted more than death. What was it that caused them to press Pilate for the crucifixion of Jesus? It seems that the cross was destined to be God's altar of sacrifice, not a pile of rocks.

The Jews have always had a problem with that. How could Jesus be the Messiah and die as a criminal on a Roman cross? For them, that is too much to accept. Almost any other type of death would have had more dignity than that.

Consider the fact that crucifixion is, without question, the most humiliating and degrading form of public death ever devised. First of all, it was a very slow agonizing death. Often it would last

*continued on page 2*

for days as the victim died more from suffocation than from bleeding. Furthermore, hanging naked in public along some well-traveled road added immensely to the sense of shame. Fully exposed like a carcass hanging on a rack, the victim experienced long hours of pain and an interminable time of humiliation. Crucifixion was not only ugly, it was inhuman.

Now when we understand that God had planned this event from eternity past (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8), we are also confronted with the realization that God was in absolute control of everything that was happening. In God's plan, the timing was perfect (Galatians 4:4). The Romans were ruling in the Middle East and their method of criminal prosecution was crucifixion. It is what He wanted. He had chosen the Roman world as the stage of redemption and, therefore, the cross was no accident. It was perfect for what God had in mind.

### Roman Crucifixion

Crucifixion was a well-known and commonly practiced means of executing criminals in the ancient world. Herodotus, the Greek historian tells us that the Persians used crucifixion as a form of extreme punishment. Other sources reveal the practice among the Assyrians, the Scythians, and the

Thracians as well as among more distant European groups such as the Celts, the Germans, and the Britons. On one occasion, Alexander the Great had 2,000 survivors of the siege of Tyre crucified along the shores of the Mediterranean.

In the Roman mind, crucifixion was reserved for rebellious slaves, mutinous troops, vile criminals and insurrectionists against the state. Roman citizens, especially the upper class, were normally exempt from such an ignominious death no matter what their crime. The reason for this was that crucifixion was viewed not just as a means of death, but also as a means of portraying shame. Therefore only the most despicable were crucified. To be hung on a cross meant more than that a crime worthy of death had been committed. It meant that the accused was considered to be a lowly, vile, reprehensible person, in addition to being a criminal. He was not only bad — he was base.

It was for this reason that crucifixion was done in very busy, public settings. Part of the intent, obviously, was to deter others from committing such crimes. Gerald

O'Collins, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, quotes the Roman Quintilian (ca 35-95 A.D.) as saying, "Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear" (Vol. 1, p. 1208).

But the primary motive was to inflict the greatest amount of physical torment and public shame on persons of such reprehensible and detestable character. The Romans had more than retribution in mind. They were also expressing disgust and utter contempt.

### Jewish Practice

Although the Jews never practiced crucifixion as a means of capital punishment (except during a brief interval during the Hellenistic-Hasmonean Period), they did have a similar custom for expressing a high degree of contempt for undesirable persons. After a criminal had been put to death by some other means (i.e., the sword, stoning, etc.), the dead body would be strung up on a tree as a symbol of shame and dishonor. This public exposure gave the people an opportunity to express their venomous hatred for such a despicable criminal as they hurled their insults and mockery at the strung-up victim.

Earl Kalland, commenting on the law regarding Israel's practice of hanging a condemned person on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:22-23) makes the following observation:

**Hanging the body exhibited the person to public humiliation. The criminal was under the curse of God... the judgment that takes a person's life out of the covenant community as a perpetrator of the worst kind of sin and displays that judgment by the humiliation of hanging his body in public shows that that person is under God's curse.**

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Vol. 3, pp. 134-135

Stories are told in the American far west, of hunting parties combing the hills for a killer cat that had been raiding the herds and flocks — and perhaps even maiming members of the community who lived in outlying areas. As the mountain lion was found and killed, the irate citizens of the community would often hang the carcass on a pole in the center of town for a time, in order to give the people an opportunity to vent their anger on the devil cat. Anyone who wished could spit on it, strike it with a stick, punch it with their fists and in a variety of other ways express their anger at the despicable creature that had caused them loss and sorrow.

That is the same idea behind the Jewish practice of hanging a criminal's body on a tree. It was for this reason that Joshua hung the body of the king of Ai on a tree (Joshua 8:29) and the bodies of the five kings of the southern confederacy on five trees (Joshua 10:26-27). He was interested in more than their execution. Exposing them to public shame and ridicule was the primary motive for this practice.

### Our Substitute

The Apostle Paul quoted from this Jewish law (Deuteronomy 21:22-23) as he described for us the reason for Christ's death on the cross, when he said, "*Christ redeemed*

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us from the **curse** of the law” (Galatians 3:13) [emphasis, mine]. You see, Christ not only died for our sins in a judicial sense, paying the required penalty for our crimes of disobedience; He also bore our “curse”, the utter shame associated with our blatant disobedience against the God of the universe.

When Jewish leaders pressed Pilate for the sentence of crucifixion, they were expressing their contempt for anyone guilty of the sin of blasphemy — the sin of which they were accusing Jesus. They were not only clamoring for Jesus’ death. Knowing that the Roman idea of crucifixion was paramount to their practice of hanging on a tree, they would be satisfied with nothing less than having Jesus crucified. They wanted Him put to shame. They wanted to demonstrate that He was cursed of God.

What they did not understand, however, was that Jesus was not dying for His own sin, but for their sins. As Paul, the converted Jewish Pharisee would one day seek to explain to them, Christ was bearing the very shame associated with their sin of willful disobedience against God.

And that is what we must also understand. Our sins of willful disobedience against a holy God are equally reprehensible. We are not only deserving of death, we are deserving of shame. You see, Pilate did not choose the cross for Jesus. Neither did the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin. God chose the cross, for it was the perfect means of inflicting death through the shedding of blood, while also expressing shame through public humiliation. No means of execution was ever more fitting to demonstrate the full punishment for sin. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but it also shows us that the horror of sin is in its ultimate shame — as it is written,

“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

When the writer to the Hebrews appealed to the death of Christ as an example for his readers to persevere in the midst of their trials, he mentioned three things associated with the death experience of our Lord. He said,

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2 — KJV).

You see, Jesus not only “*endured the cross*” as He suffered the physical torments of crucifixion; He also despised “*the shame*” as He hung in the place of ridicule. There were two things happening on that fateful day. Jesus was dying for our sins, but He was also bearing our infamous shame as He hung on a tree. Yet in doing that, He won an incredible victory over sin and death so that a third thing is said of him — He is “*set down at the right hand of the throne of God*”. That is the place of honor now occupied by the victorious Son of God. The death and shame were incredibly difficult, but the accomplishing of our redemption was the basis of His joy.

Therefore, as you worship the Lord Jesus during this Easter season, reflect on the full meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on your behalf. Thank Him that He has redeemed you “*from the curse of the law*” (Galatians 3:13). Express your grateful praise to Christ for not only paying the penalty for your sin, but for also bearing your shame. 🌳

**J**esus was dying for our sins, but He was also bearing our infamous shame as He hung on a tree.





# Behind the Scenes

**“Seeing is believing,” it is said.** Well, according to the Apostle Paul, hearing goes a long way toward believing, too (Rom. 10:17). So when seeing and hearing are combined, there is a dynamic of communication that is powerful. Knowing that, **Dirk Eichhorst** has devoted his life to producing Christian video that effectively portrays the truths of God’s Word.

Born and raised in suburban Detroit (Sterling Heights, MI), Dirk had aspirations to cinema and video early in life. At twelve years old he started making his first videos, and by the time he was out of high school he had already completed a dozen amateur video productions. For a short time he attended Columbia College in Chicago, majoring in Film/Video, but much of that was repetitious to the wealth of experience he had already accumulated. Leaving the pursuit of college, therefore, he went on to produce his first feature-length movie, and established his own video company.

During his college days, Dirk had faced the decision of whether or not to pursue a Hollywood career as a producer. His strong commitment to Christ, however, led him in the direction of ministry, and the consequent development of Cumberland Media Ministries. While finishing his Associate Degree at a local community college in suburban Detroit, he began giving himself to the ministry of producing promotional videos for Christian camps and other religious organizations.

One of those organizations was The Master’s Mission in Robbinsville, North Carolina. In 1996 Dirk spent one month in Kenya shooting footage for the mission as part of the process of producing their video project. Sola Scriptura, our parent ministry here at Truth in Grace, was doing the script for that project. Scott Holmgren, our Creative Director, was very impressed with Dirk’s creative abilities as a video productions specialist, and that eventually led to an invitation for Dirk to join our staff.

So in November of 1998, Dirk and his wife Agnes moved to western Michigan, where Dirk began his ministry with us as our Media Production Director. In addition to supervising all of our video productions, he serves as administrative contact for our internet website and assists Scott Holmgren as a staff writer and editor. Dirk brings a whole new dimension of ministry to us, and we are excited about the opportunities God is now opening for us in the areas of video and the internet.

Dirk and Agnes have been married for five years and just recently were blessed with the birth of their first child. We are all rejoicing with them in the birth of Tobias George Eichhorst. Congratulations, Dirk and Agnes!

## News & Reviews



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## A Word from the Word

Gal 3:13

ἐξαγοράζω

# PURCHASED FOR HIS GLORY

**Climbing to the top of the Areopagus is a challenge.**

Centuries ago steps had been chiseled into the massive rock, but weathering and incessant tourist traffic have worn the steps so that they are slippery and slant forward, making the climb a precarious adventure. Only the brave and the foolish venture the climb.

Nevertheless, there I stood in the very place where Paul had made his defense of the Gospel to the Athenians (Acts 17:22-34). The panoramic view of suburban Athens from the Areopagus plateau was spectacular. Just to the south was the majestic Acropolis, crowned with the ruins of the great Temple of Diana. Looking over the ledge to the east, however, down into the sprawling city, was another ruins of ancient Greece. Resembling a miniature architect's model, I could just make out the numerous remnants of pillars and tumbled rock projecting from a large rectangle area. I was looking at remains of the old Athens' Agora — the market place.

That's what the Greeks called their market place — "the Agora." To this day, we refer to a person who is fearful of venturing into public places as having "agoraphobia." Actually, the word **agora** is used 11 times in the Gospels and the Acts to refer to the market area where people would do their shopping. When people bought things in the agora, the Greek verb used for that activity was **agorazo**. They used the very word for market place to describe the action that went on in the market place — much like when we refer to what we do in the "shops" as "shopping". Although the verb **agorazo** is commonly used in the New Testament to refer to the idea of buying something in the market place (twenty-five times), the word is also used by God to describe what He did when He saved us — He "bought" us (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). In fact, John uses this word three times in the Book of Revelation, when he talks about those who have been "purchased" (or, redeemed) by the blood of Christ (Revelation 5:9; 14:3-4).

The Apostle Paul took this word to another level, however, when twice in the Book of Galatians he described our redemption in Christ as being **exagorazo**. He added the preposition **ek-** (or **ex-**) meaning "out, or out of" to the front of the verb

**agorazo** to express the idea that we were being redeemed from something. In Galatians 3:13, for instance, he says that we have been redeemed (**exagorazo**) "from the curse of the law." Then again in Galatians 4:5 he refers to those who have been redeemed (**exagorazo**) out "from under the law".

**Exagorazo** means "to buy out or from" and in those verses tells us that we have been purchased by Christ out from under the crushing weight of a condemning law. It is as though the law was about to destroy us, but Christ purchased us out from that horrible situation, so that we are no longer in danger of being hurt.

Years ago one of our cars was totaled in an accident and was hauled away to a junk yard. It was completely ruined and was destined for the crusher to be sold for scrap metal. As the car lay in the junk yard awaiting its demise, a local mechanic who had come to buy a used part from the junk dealer, spotted the condemned car. He had a body shop and was an expert at repairing wrecks. For some time he had been looking for a salvage vehicle that he could fix up as a gift for his teenage daughter, and our wrecked Fairlane Ford was exactly what he had in mind. So he bought the car for the price of scrap metal and proceeded to transform it into a beautiful present for his daughter. He purchased that car (**exagorazo**) out from the junk yard and from the curse of the crusher.

That is what Jesus Christ has done for us. He found a condemned sinner in the junk yard of humanity and purchased us out from under the curse of the law for the purpose of transforming us into a new creation. Paul put it this way,

Christ redeemed (**exagorazo**) us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, "cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

Praise the Lord! We have been purchased by Christ for His glory (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Have you placed your faith in Christ to be your Savior? Are you redeemed — purchased out from under the crushing effects of the law?

# Truth in Grace

## Bits & Pieces

...Grace Church recently enjoyed a wonderful missions conference (March 11-14). Our featured speaker was Steve Saint, son of the martyred missionary Nate Saint. God has continued to use Steve in special ministries with the Huaorani tribe in Ecuador (formerly known as the Aucas). Two of the native Huaoranis accompanied him and shared their testimonies of personal faith in Christ. What a tribute to the power and grace of God!

...In the providence of God, our radio ministry appears to be taking final steps toward actual broadcast. A number of stations, including a major local station, have expressed positive interest in including us in their programming — praise the Lord! Our format is a two-minute devotional built around word studies from the Scriptures. We call it “A Word from the Word.” Please pray for us as God opens this new door of opportunity.

...Dan Hayden continues to teach conferences for Zion’s Hope Ministry and to write articles for *Zion’s Fire* magazine. If you would like to know more about this excellent ministry or wish to receive their outstanding *Zion’s Fire* magazine, their address is: Zion’s Hope, Inc., P.O. Box 690909, Orlando, FL 32869. Or call (407) 872-2272.

...Truth in Grace is in the beginning stages of producing our first video — “Mindful of the Truth.” This video will stress the importance of memorizing God’s Word and will highlight a special process for stretching retention time. The video will amplify and illustrate information that is presented in our little booklet by the same name.

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