

## The Lord's Voluntary Sacrifice for Cancellation of Debt; Deissmann's Discovery of the Greek Chi in Cancellation of Debt, Col 2:13-14

- (30) Let's note the sequence of events that is pictured in this verse. First of all we find that our "certificate of debt: *cheirographon*, was "canceled": *exaleiphō*, in eternity past.
- (31) Through omniscience, God the Father knew even before the creation of the human race that Adam would fall, the sin nature would be created by his act, and all his progeny would be born spiritually dead and in need of a Savior.
- (32) From the source of His perfect love, God devised a plan to remove the sin problem through the gracious provision of His Son.
- (33) Jesus Christ, the Son, volunteered to perform this sacrifice. Omniscience then placed His Incarnation, virgin birth, public ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection into the ROM chip of the divine decree.
- (34) In this way the "certificate of debt" was canceled in eternity past, however, its historical removal, the main verb *airō*, must be accomplished in time.
- (35) In the context of verse 14, the "certificate of debt (*cheirographon*) is what is "nailed to the cross (*prosēloō*).
- (36) The manner by which this was accomplished was through the imputation of our sins to Christ. Our certificate of debt was transferred to Him instead of remaining with us.
- (37) The imputation of our sins to Christ is illustrated by Paul's statement that our certificate of debt was "nailed to the cross."
- (38) Therefore, the cancellation of the debt and its being nailed to the cross both occur before it is taken out of the way: *airō*, the judgment of our sins in Christ resulting in His spiritual death.
- (39) Adolf Deissmann contributes interesting historical insight to the act of nailing certificates of debt to the wall:

It was at least the right instinct that led many commentators to conjecture that bonds were cancelled in antiquity by perforation with a nail. As far as I know, nail perforations have been found hitherto only on inscribed laden rolls [which were often nailed to walls], but the nails were not meant to annul the text. The main point with Paul is not the nailing in itself, but the nailing to the cross.

There must be an allusion to some custom which is not yet known to us. A. H. Sayce (The Nation, Supplement, Nov. 12, 1910, p. 296) thinks that: "Slips of wood on which the household accounts were kept have been found in Theban tombs of the second century, with the previous week's accounts similarly 'blotted out.'

The holes in the slips suggest that they may have been suspended on pegs or nails when not wanted for use, and so explain the reference to 'nailing to the cross' (Col. 2:14), to which Professor Deissmann is unable to find a parallel." Merely from this hint I am not able to judge the nature of the facts; but at present the parallel is not very convincing to me.

If we are unable to point to the source of "the bond nailed to the cross," it may at least be allowed in passing to refer to "*the cross on the bond.*" We have learnt from the new texts that it was generally customary to cancel a bond (or other document) by crossing it out with the Greek-letter Chi (Χχ). The letter Chi was identified with the shape of the cross in antiquity, and plays a great part in graphic representations. In the splendid Florentine papyrus of the year 85 A.D. the governor of Egypt gives this order in the course of a trial:—

"Let the handwriting [χειρόγραφον] be crossed out."

The same technical word, *χιάζω* [*chiazō*: to cross out, cancel a document<sup>1</sup>], "I cross out," occurs in other similar contexts in papyri of New Testament age, but the Florentine passage is especially valuable as showing that the custom of crossing out was not a mere private one, but also official.<sup>2</sup>

- (40) So we are able to perceive a phenomenal teaching aid: our sins imputed to Christ were permanently removed: *airō*, after they had been canceled in eternity past and after they had been historically transferred to Christ for judgment.
- (41) The Lord then permanently removed them through His spiritual death while on the cross, represented in the ancient world by the Greek-letter Chi: Χχ.
- (42) Our certificate of debt is canceled in time by Jesus Christ's work on the cross which resulted in its permanent removal.
- (43) This sequence of events presents the doctrine of redemption: our being purchased from the slave market of sin with a view toward setting us free.
- (44) Also illustrated is the doctrine of reconciliation, illustrated by the main verb *airō*: "He removed the debt permanently out of the way."
- (45) And finally, the imputation of our sins to Christ by means of our metaphorical "note of hand" being nailed to the cross.

<sup>1</sup> Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.: "χιάζω."

<sup>2</sup> Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 333-34.

**Colossians 2:13** - And as for you, being dead [ **spiritually** ] by means of your trespasses and by the uncircumcision from your flesh [ **old sin nature** ], having graciously forgiven us all our trespasses, He has given you life [ **eternal** ] together with Him,

**v. 14** - Having canceled the certificate of debt against us by means of the decree, which was hostile to us, He removed it permanently [ **main verb** ] out of the way, having nailed it [ **second aorist participle** ] to the cross.

- (46) Note in verse 13 that through faith in Christ our presalvation sins are forgiven and we are imputed eternal life.
- (47) Verse 14 then gives an analysis, by means of metaphors, of how this was accomplished: (1) we had a certificate of debt that had to be removed. (2) The debt was removed permanently by means of the transfer of our sins to Christ and their judgment in Him.
- (49) This is illustrated by a metaphor: our “certificate of debt,” being imputed to Christ and His work on the cross canceling it forever.
- (50) The application of these two verses to Romans 4:4 drive home the point that salvation by works is not credited to grace but to debt. Here is the translation of our passage as far as we have gone:

**Romans 4:1** - What then are we to conclude that Abraham our forefather has actually discovered?

**Romans 4:2** - For assuming that Abraham has been justified by means of works, then he has a basis for boasting, but not before God.

**v. 3** - For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham had believed God, and it was credited to his account for righteousness.

**v. 4** - Now to him who works for salvation, his compensation is not credited to grace but to debt.

The next verse takes up the polar opposite of what verse four presents: justification by faith:

**Romans 4:5** - But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. (NASB)

1. This verse begins with the postpositive conjunctive particle **δέ, de**, translated “But.” It is a conjunction of contrast between justification by faith in verse 5 and justification by works in verse 4.
2. These two concepts are in complete opposition to each other. Abraham believed God and it was credited to his account for righteousness. This is grace through faith.

3. The Judaizers insist on a gospel of human works such as circumcision and keeping the Law. God requires one to believe in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Legalism and grace are completely incompatible.