

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 5

Every Spiritual Blessing – Redemption And Forgiveness of Sins

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Ephesians 1:7-8

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:7-8. We have been looking at Paul's extended eulogy where he begins to expand on exactly what God has done for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We've talked about election and adoption and this morning we are going to talk about redemption. Let me read to you from God's Holy and inspired Word.

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:7-8. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Sometimes words get used so much for so long that they actually become disconnected from their original meaning. Let me give you an example; if I said "9/11" to you, you would immediately begin to associate that in your minds with all kinds of imagery and memory. Then suppose we began using that word in our community; I might say: "This is our 9/11 moment" or "we all have our own 9/11's". We might use that language, with all of its cultural symbolism, for so long that eventually a generation might arise that still uses the expression but has no actual memory of what it originally meant. For them to really appreciate the term they would need to go back and watch news footage of what actually happened on 9/11 and in a sense that is what we need to do this morning. The word "redemption" is one of the most heavily freighted words in the Bible and yet we have used it for so long and in so many ways that most of us have completely lost touch

with what that word would have originally meant when Paul's readers heard it back in Ephesians 1:7. So what I want to do this morning is re-freight that word. That's going to take a few minutes but then once we've done that work I want to drop the word back into this verse and then let it hit us the way it would have hit them. That's the plan.

Re-Freighting The Word "Redemption"

If we want to "re-load" or "re-freight" the word redemption we need to start with the 1st century Greco-Roman cultural context.

The Greco-Roman Context:

This word had a meaning outside the church – in fact the church used this word BECAUSE it had a meaning outside the church. We don't use the word redemption in our day in many non-religious contexts – maybe when we "redeem" coupons, but that's about it; but in the 1st century Greco-Roman world this word MEANT something and we need to go back and get that. In the first century world slavery was not about race or colour; slavery was usually about money. They didn't have bankruptcy protection in those days so if you went into debt and you couldn't pay your bills you got sold into slavery. But slavery was not necessarily permanent. You could buy yourself out. There was a process for that. You could take the money to the local priests and give it to them and they would go to your owner and buy you from them. You would then become property of the gods – you were free with respect to your debts and free with respect to your former owner but you now had certain obligations to the gods. Usually it would be stipulated that you had to show up at the temple where this transaction occurred three times a year with an appropriate sacrifice or some such thing. We have lots of examples of this practice, let me just read you from one; this particular one traces back to the temple at Delphi; it says on such and such a date:

"Apollo the Pythian bought from Sosibius of Amphissa, **for freedom**, a female slave, whose name is Nicaea, by race a Roman, with a price of three minae of silver and a half-mina. Former seller according to the law: Eumnastus of Amphissa. The price he received. The purchase, however, Nicaea hath committed unto Apollo, **for freedom**."¹

¹ *Light From The Ancient East* (London, 1927), p. 323. Cited in Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*.

Obviously this girl Nicaea or one of her relatives came up with sufficient money to pay the temple of Apollo who then went as the middle men to Eumnastus and bought her freedom. She would now be required to worship at the temple at certain times and festivals, but other than that, she was a free woman. It is absolutely indisputable that this cultural context is regularly imported when the New Testament authors talk about redemption. Sometimes they even echo the traditional wordings; listen:

¹**For freedom** Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1. ESV)

The “for freedom” is an intentional echo of the legal wording. Paul assumes that his readers understand that when they hear the word “redemption”.

The Old Testament Context:

The second place we need to look for abandoned or forgotten freight is of course the Old Testament. Look at Exodus 6:6:

⁶Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. (Exodus 6:6. ESV)

The Exodus – God setting a bunch of Hebrew slaves free from their Egyptian overlords – is the major piece of Old Testament freight that has to be reattached to our understanding of this word “redemption”. That’s the big one but there are two more that are important also. Look at Exodus 13:12-13:

All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD’s. ¹³Every firstborn of a donkey **you shall redeem with a lamb**, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. **Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.** (Exodus 13:12-13. ESV)

The Bible says that the first born of every person or animal within the covenant community belonged to the Lord – remember that he killed all the first born in Egypt to set them free but passed over the Jewish houses if they had put the blood of a lamb upon the doorpost. So those first borns belonged to God and you had to buy them back at a price. So the word “redeem” means to buy back at an equivalent or fair price.

Lastly let's look quickly at Ruth 2:20:

²⁰And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "**The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.**" (Ruth 2:20. ESV)

In the Old Testament if you fell into slavery or lost your land due to financial hardship one of your close relatives might take pity on you and pay the ransom that would return your land to you or pay the ransom that would purchase your freedom – such a rich relative was called your "kinsman redeemer". That beautiful imagery has to be reloaded onto our understanding of the word "redeemer" when we meet it in Ephesians 1:7.

Let me summarize what we have re-attached in terms of contextual freight to this very important word that is used so frequently in the New Testament.

Summary:

In the first century, people living in a Greco-Roman culture as regular readers of the Old Testament, hearing the word "redemption" would have immediately understood that to mean the following:

- 1. We have been purchased out of slavery**
- 2. We have been purchased FOR freedom**
- 3. We have heightened obligations towards God**
- 4. A fair price was paid for our freedom**

All of that would have come very naturally into their minds – that's what the word redemption meant! That is the cultural and Biblical freight assumed as connected and carried forward. Now that theological and cultural freight implies some things about the way those people would have thought about God, about sin and about the intended life of a redeemed person that we need to capture as well. If that's what redemption meant to them, then they obviously thought some stuff about God and sin and free life that we need to think to follow Paul's argument in Ephesians 1:7-8, let me just lay those implications out for you.

That understanding of redemption suggests that:

- i. God looks upon us with familial affection and obligation.**
- ii. God shows mercy in a way that is consistent with his justice.**
- iii. God has to take the initiative in our salvation.**
- iv. Sin is bondage – primarily mental and moral bondage.**

You see that all over the Bible, in a few weeks we are going to see it in Ephesians – Paul says that we are DEAD in our sins. Sin robs us of the ability to think straight. Sin warps our perceptions and deadens our minds. We think we are doing right when we are actually walking further and further into dark and ruin. Sin is madness, confusion and darkness in the Bible. It leaves us UNABLE to respond to God as we were created to do. The old doctrine of “inability” sounds so foreign to our modern day self improvement, human potential worldview doesn’t it? The bible doesn’t think you need “help” or “advice” or “encouragement” – the Bible says that you are a slave to sin, that you are a captive, that you are powerless, that you are in a dungeon of dark and deception and that you need REDEMPTION! You need a rich, and benevolent kinsman to take pity on you or you will die in the dungeon of confusion without even ever knowing the true depths of your own despair. That’s what the Bible says. Sin is like slavery. The Gospel is not about helping people – it is about saving people. You aren’t sick – your dead. You aren’t off track – you are in the pit. You aren’t down – you are OUT! That’s what the Bible says and that’s why redemption is good news.

Fifthly, their understanding of redemption suggests that:

- v. Sin is primarily against God**

Who must be paid so that we can be set free? Not the devil. You don’t owe the devil anything. It is not the demands of the devil that must be satisfied it is the demands of God. In the Bible sin is always AGAINST GOD! That is so important my friends. When David sinned in the Bible; when he stole his friends wife and slept with her and then killed his friend to cover up her pregnancy – David hurt a lot of people didn’t he? He messed up Bathsheeba, Uriah, not to

mention Bathsheba's father who was one of David's advisors – he messed up all of those people and yet listen to his confession; under heavy conviction he cries out to the Lord:

⁴ **Against you, you only, have I sinned**
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment. (Psalm 51:4. ESV)

God is always the most wronged party. It was his law David transgressed, it was his daughter David violated, it was his son David murdered, it was his son David dishonoured and it was his name that David blasphemed before the nations. David understood that, I wonder if we do. The liberal church talks about sin primarily in terms of how it effects other people – sin is harm and hurt, which flipped on its ear means morality is whatever you do that doesn't hurt anyone else. The modern day prosperity Gospel people go even further. Sin for Joel Osteen for example is not primarily against God or even against other people – sin is against yourself. Sin is failing to give yourself the best chance at happiness and prosperity. Sin is robbing yourself of the joy God wants you to have. The Bible says otherwise. The Bible says that sin is against God. In Leviticus the ransom gifts – the bull, the burnt offering – is brought TO THE TEMPLE. The ransom is paid to God, not to the neighbour and not to yourself because sin is against God! The people in Ephesus knew that and we need to know that to make sense of this verse.

Sixthly, their understanding of redemption suggests that:

vi. Sin robs God of what He is due

There is an interesting little ritual in Leviticus that brings this to the forefront. The different sacrifices that made up the religious life of the Old Testament Jews each taught something different about sin. The burnt offering teaches about substitution and ransom, the sin offering teaches about defilement and how hard it is to live with a Holy God, the guilt offering or the reparation offering teaches about debt. Sin robs God of what He is due and therefore has to be paid back. Look at Leviticus 5:15-16:

¹⁵“If anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD, he shall bring to the LORD **as his compensation**, a ram without blemish out of the flock... for a guilt offering. ¹⁶He shall **also make restitution** for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and **shall add a fifth to it** and give it to the priest. (Leviticus 5:15-16. ESV)

So the ram represented fair payment and then on top of that you had to add 1/5 in recognition that sin ROBS God of what He is due. God created you to bring him glory, when you sin you rob God of glory and that needs to be paid for. God is owed that. Sin robs God and that debt has to be paid for you to be on good standing with a Holy God. They understood that, in Ephesians 1, we need to be reminded of that.

Additionally, these people, grounded in the Old Testament worldview understood that:

vii. The wages of sin is death

Think back to the redemption or ransom price that was paid in all those Old Testament rituals. When you redeemed your first born son with a lamb the lamb didn't become the family pet of the priest. You, the worshipper had to slit its throat before the alter. The priest didn't do that for you – you did it. You needed the reminder that the wages of sin is death. That is why for every individual in the Old Testament church the primary sacrifice – the primary ransom – was the burnt offering. The whole animal was consumed. You slit its throat and then it was burned whole on the altar. Imagine you went with your daddy to temple to make that sacrifice. You watched him slit the throat of that ram or lamb and then you watched its body burned. Your family hasn't eaten meat in months – you only could afford to eat meat, two or three times a year and you just killed and burned an entire lamb – why? Because the wages of sin is death. You rebelled against your creator – you sold yourself into slavery – and that is serious business. You slit the throat of that lamb because God wanted to remind you that a serious price was going to have to be paid. The wages of sin is death.

In terms of the life of the redeemed person, these folks understood that:

viii. Redeemed people have heightened obligations to God

They understood that because it was woven into their culture. People bought out from slavery were technically the possession of the gods – everyone knew that. If pagans purchased out of mere physical slavery had heightened obligations to a god, how much more do we who have been

purchased out of spiritual slavery have an obligation to THE GOD – the only God who has set us free in Christ? You can hear that logic in Romans 12:1:

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1. ESV)

Paul says: “Think of what God has done to set us free! Now, don’t just show up at temple 3 or 4 times a year – that might be fine for the pagans but our redemption is so much greater than theirs, therefore we will live everyday as a living sacrifice! We will be slaves to Christ who set us free!” The response of a redeemed person is gratitude and service.

Lastly,

ix. Redeemed people should manifest mental and moral liberty

It is for freedom that he has set us free. This idea is all over Paul’s writings. Right after he says in Romans 12:1 that we should live lives of sacrifice in gratitude for our salvation he immediately connects that to progressive mental and moral liberty:

²Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2. ESV)

Listen to me friends, true conversion, real salvation, shows up FIRST in transformed thinking and increasing mental and moral liberty. Sin is mental and moral bondage – we are deceived and confused and held captive to habits and patterns we actually abhor! We do the very things we hate and we justify that with convoluted, irrational thought processes that give evidence to the thoroughgoing depravity of our minds. That is the condition of our lostness, therefore the most obvious sign of our redemption is when we begin to think clearly, we begin to see and understand God’s goodness, we begin to desire righteousness and holiness as indeed any rational person would. That is liberty! Where the Spirit of the Lord is THERE IS FREEDOM!

All of that; all of that glorious and marvellous freight would have been naturally loaded and associated with the word “redemption” in the minds of those Paul is addressing in Ephesians 1:7-

8. With all of that meaning reloaded, lets drop the word back into the text and let it lead us in praise of his glorious grace:

Ephesians 1:7-8

⁷In him we have redemption

Hear that now as they would have heard that. In Christ we have redemption! We have been purchased at a price out of slavery and we are free now! Free from the curse of sin with all its natural hostilities. Free from the penalty of sin which is death. Free from the confusion and the deception and the self-justifying dementia that held us captive and kept us enslaved to sin and death. We are free now to see God for who he really is. We are free to respond to his beauty and goodness and we are ABLE now to worship him and to serve him and to enjoy him forever as we were indeed created to do. We are free! Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom! We are free men and women now; but our freedom was not free – it was not cheap. It was costly beyond all human understanding. In him we have redemption:

through his blood,

That was the ransom price. The word for redemption actually evolved out of the word for ransom. The word redemption literally means “to set free with a ransom”.

⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and **to give his life as a ransom** for many.” (Mark 10:45. ESV)

That’s the Greek word *lutron* and in Ephesians 1:7 Paul uses the word *apolutrosis* – same word. *Apolutrosis* literally means “freedom from ransom paid”. The life and death of Jesus is the means by which we are set free. His blood – which symbolizes both his life; we use the term “life-blood” even in English – and his death somehow squared our account with a Holy God. That means two things I want you to catch so that you can worship with content around the table in just a minute:

1. It means that the death of an infinitely holy man is sufficiently valuable to purchase a multitude of sinners.

In Leviticus one of the things you notice is that the more important the sacrifice then the more valuable the animal whose blood was spilled. There was a correspondence between value and effect. One of the things people will say is how come in the economy of God the death of one man can pay for the sins of a multitude of people? The answer is in the value of the blood. That is why it matters that Jesus is God in the flesh. The blood of a good man or even a great man could not pay for a multitude of sinners – but the blood of the God man is sufficient for the sins of the world! Behold the Lamb of GOD who takes away the sin of the world!

2. It means that the life of an infinitely righteous man must be sufficient to compensate God for what a multitude of sinners have withheld.

Remember that sin robs God of what he is due and if we want to be at peace with God we have to pay that back plus compensation. That is what the justice of God demands for himself just as it is what the justice of God demands for you. If a man robs another man in the Bible and if he confesses to that sin then he restores what was taken and he adds 1/5 as compensation – if God’s justice demands that for humans who have been robbed, how much more is it right for him to demand that for himself? What that means then, is that the perfect obedience and altogether pleasing and righteous nature of the life of Jesus Christ was sufficient to compensate God for all the glory we withheld from him. Do you remember the catechism question with all the commas in it?

1. What did the eternal Son of God do for His people?
 - a. Christ, the Son of God, became man in order to obey and suffer for us.

You were saved not just by Christ’s suffering on the cross but also by the beauty of his life and obedience. The glory he made of God more than compensated for the blasphemy you heaped upon his Name. In that value, you are redeemed. That is why we must speak often of the beauty of Christ’s life not only the ugliness of Christ’s death. You are redeemed by his blood – his life and his death. It is for us:

the forgiveness of our trespasses,

Scholars generally suggest that this mention of the forgiveness of sins is “appositional” meaning that it is a definitional parallel. It is another way of saying the same thing. You are redeemed in

that your sins are forgiven. It was your sin that was keeping you chained in bondage, it was your sin that separated you from God, it was your sin that made you hostile to God and to your fellow man, it was the filth and stain and outrage of your sin that made you unfit for holy service. And now, in Christ, it's gone.

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12. ESV)

¹ Blessed *is he whose* transgression *is* forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.

² Blessed *is* the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit *there is* no deceit. (Psalm 31:1-2. NKJV)

That's you now if you are in Christ. In Christ you are redeemed, your sin is gone, the offence is removed and your spirit is no longer captive to deceit. You are free:

according to the riches of his grace,

You didn't do this. You didn't pay the price. You didn't initiate anything – you were locked in a dungeon of confusion and deceit and you didn't know which way was up. But a Rich Man came looking for you; a Good Man came to find you. Your Kinsman Redeemer paid the price and set you free. He paid a handsome price; **he lavished his grace upon us:**

⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:7. ESV)

In English that almost sounds like God's grace was wise and insightful and I suppose you might say that but that isn't what Paul is saying here. Paul is saying that this rich grace of God MOVES us into wisdom and insight. The blood of Jesus Christ sets us free from the darkness and bondage of sin and opens our minds to see the truth of God's beauty and grace. Now we are free! The veil is removed, the cloud has passed and we SEE! No one can see the kingdom of God unless he be born again but when we are born again, when we are bought out of death and made alive in Jesus Christ we SEE! I once was blind but now I see! I am set free UNTO ALL WISDOM and INSIGHT! Now and increasingly as we all with unveiled faces behold the glory of the Lord we are transformed by one degree of glory to the next. This is the work of the Lord, the Spirit in us and it is good. It is reason enough to praise his name.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And all God's people said, amen.