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Redemption, Part 1

Biblical Overview of Redemption

Unlike adoption, the concept of redemption was not new to the Jewish people at the time of the writing of this epistle.

The concept of redemption goes way back, to the time of the Exodus when God delivered His people from slavery and so brought them to Himself that they might “worship [Him] in the wilderness” (Exodus 7:16). In fact, following the Exodus, God spent a significant amount of time instructing His people as to the Law of Redemption in Leviticus 25. He even devoted an entire book of the Bible to the subject, the book of Ruth.

Throughout Scripture, redemption pictures an individual bound by some sort of slavery. As such, the person is unable to loose themselves and so stands doomed, without hope of release. But then a benefactor comes along and offers to pay the purchase price in order to free the individual from his chains. That transaction, where a purchase price is given for the deliverance of a slave, is what is meant in Scripture by redemption.

Now that you might see that this is a relevant issue in our lives this day, consider the following passages:

Psalm 111:9, “He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.”

The ultimate context of redemption when it comes to this world is the slavery which Adam and Eve's sin brought upon mankind. Today all in Adam die as a result. Yet God "ordained His covenant" of grace such that He has delivered us who were held captive on account of our sin.

Psalm 130:7-8, "Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

God's redemption always has in mind the deliverance of His people from their sin!

Colossians 1:13-14, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Do you understand that every individual on this planet is born a prisoner, a prisoner to sin? It was for this reason Jesus came; to "save His people from their sin" (Matthew 1:21). And yet there is more to our redemption than just the forgiveness of sins. Paul, speaking of the down payment of the Holy Spirit wrote this:

Ephesians 1:14, "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

Ephesians 4:30, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

Here redemption is spoken about as something that is still pending! How is that so?

When Christ saved you by grace, He deposited into your being a down payment, the Spirit of God.

What does this down payment have as its objective?

The redemption of our bodies and the consummation of our adoption as God's children!

Romans 8:23, "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

Truly, redemption is not simply a theological term whose meaning has no bearing on your life today. It is our confidence, hope, and joy!

All this means that if we haven't ever considered this glorious doctrine and gift, we remain babes in our thinking. For truly redemption is a relevant, current, and unfulfilled promise which God currently is working out in this world. It behooves us to understand this glorious truth; the truth of our redemption.

Now brothers and sisters, there are a variety of passages at which we could look to understand this wonderful doctrine, yet we would be hard pressed to find a more helpful one than that which is before us in the book of Philemon. Whether you realize it or not, the book of Philemon is a book about redemption.

On Paul's third missionary journey, he spent time in Ephesus ministering to the brethren. Here he had

the opportunity to lead a man by the name of Philemon to the Lord. And then, he spent three years discipling this new convert, teaching him the things of Christ.

Well as you know, after Paul left Ephesus, Philemon went back home to his plantation in Colossae where he labored diligently among the brethren unto the growth of the church which had been founded while he was in Ephesus. As a wealthy individual, Philemon even housed the worship of this church in his living room.

But then it happened. A slave of Philemon escaped from his house and in the process did much harm not only to Philemon's property, but also to his home.

Could it be that on account of his own salvation that Philemon loosened the reigns of his slaves such that escape became an easy prospect? Could it be that Onesimus' escape was due to Philemon's grace?

We can't know for sure. But this we do know that Onesimus fled to Rome where he hoped to start a new life as a free man. While there, he bumped into the Apostle Paul through whom God truly gave this man a new life; eternal life! And then sometime during the ensuing discipleship it was discovered that Onesimus was a runaway slave from a household dear to the heart of Paul, Philemon's!

Accordingly, Paul sent this man back to Philemon that both men might be reconciled. In light of this you must see that the theme of Philemon is the theme of forgiveness, yes; but more importantly, redemption; the redemption of Onesimus not only from the he bonds of Roman slavery and the alienation that his rebellion produced between himself and Philemon but ultimately and most importantly, from the bonds of the slavery to sin.

Criminals Into Children

We are going to begin looking at the consequences of the redemption which God affected between Onesimus and Philemon making application as we go. Notice the first result, that redemption turns criminals into children.

Philemon 1:10, "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds."

This is a vivid statement. While Paul sat in a Roman prison, God gave him the blessing of a child, Onesimus. Now don't misunderstand Paul is not talking here about a literal baby. But through the preaching of the word, Onesimus was reborn spiritually as he was transferred from the realm of darkness into Christ's kingdom.

As such, Paul became a spiritual father, and more importantly Onesimus became a son! What a radical change of identity!

Do you realize that as a slave, Onesimus most likely received a brand which would identify him as the property of another person? And thus this mark would have comprised a large part of his identity! Everywhere he went, he would be known as a slave. No matter where he was or what he was doing, he always would bear the mark.

In fact upon a slave's release in Rome he would have received a document which would certify his release; a document which he would have carried on his person at all times! For to be suspected of being a runaway meant that the emancipated slave could be placed in bonds and then branded with a

large “f” on his forehead signifying that he was a “*fugitives*.”¹

Such were the identifying marks which Onesimus as a runaway slave would have dreaded, avoided, and yet ever and always lived in light of

- Hiding from the slave catcher.
- Forging release papers.
- Endeavoring to disguise his brand.
- Moving from this job to that if the heat were on.
- Always looking over his back.

But then something happened which defied his wildest imagination; he became the “child” of Paul. Now again, I don’t mean physically, but socially. Through the redemption of Christ, Onesimus in that culture now bore the name of Paul.

1 Corinthians 4:15, “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.”

In Judaism, a discipleship relationship created a bond so close that the teacher and student referred to each other as “father” and “son.”² Now while this fell short of a literal father/son relationship, nevertheless you must see that the nomenclature went beyond simply “a term of endearment.” Onesimus entered Rome branded as a slave. He left, according to the Jewish culture of his day, a child of Paul!

Now did some of the disciples of the early church take this too far? No doubt they did:

1 Corinthians 1:11-13, “For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”

Indeed at times some made too much of the relationship forged on account of discipleship. Yet from this we see that there was something to be said about Onesimus’ new standing in the world. Yes he was Philemon’s slave, but Philemon must never forget, Onesimus was Paul’s son in the faith! And to anyone familiar with Judaism (and who cared about Paul) this meant something!

Now it clearly was not Paul’s intention to push this relationship too hard! Yet brothers and sisters, you must see that what happened between Paul and Onesimus is what actually happened the day you became a child of God!

The Context of Redemption

Now, notice the context of redemption.

Ephesians 2:1-3, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of

¹ This is the Latin word for fugitive.

² Compare also 2 Kings 2:12; 1 Corinthians 4:14,17; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Galatians 4:19

the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

This is what all of us were prior to our redemption. We were slaves, dead in our transgression and sins, without hope, without love, without a future. In fact the picture here is vivid!

- Stumbling along in the darkness.
- Running after the fulfillment of our flesh.
- Enslaved to sin.
- Children of darkness.

That’s what we were! Yet Paul continues:

Ephesians 2:4-5, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).”

Through the glorious grace of our Lord we were redeemed from slavery to sin and Satan such that today we are alive in Christ!

And do you know what that makes us?

That makes us children of God!

Galatians 4:6-7, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Do you see the glorious work of Redemption?

The individual goes from living without hope to being alive in Christ! One goes from being a slave of sin and Satan to being a child of the Living God! And that is what you have become in Christ! A child... a son... a daughter of the Savior! Whatever you may have been before, this is your new identity!

And yet, because of our default programming which was hard-wired into us at creation we live believing that in the end all that matters is what we’ve done for God. Many of us live as orphans and slaves!

The Debtor’s Ethic

Have you ever heard of “the debtor’s ethic” or “the orphan’s outlook”?

These phrases speak of a mentality which is so common amongst the people of God. The orphan or slave has no standing or worth except what they themselves provide to the orphanage or plantation. As such, they spend the majority of their waking hours tortured by disquieting thoughts:

- Have they done enough?
- Do they need to do more?
- When the time of reckoning comes, will they be in trouble?

Their status as slaves/orphans places them in competition with their brethren such that all that matters is how they look in comparison to others. There is no assurance or joy, just fear, distrust, anxiety, and worry.

Slaves and orphans are not known for their love and affection toward their masters. Rather their relationships are characterized by alienation, suspicion, and distance. This ethic and outlook has taken over many a child of God.

The Prodigal Brother

At the advent of Christ's third year of ministry, our Lord told the parable of the Prodigal Son,³ In the parable we are introduced to two very selfish boys. One wasted his father's wealth, came to the end of himself, and then repented. He returned expecting nothing more than the life of a slave. Yet his father received him with joy and rejoicing. His son had returned!

The other boy was the responsible one. While his younger brother was out playing, he was out in the fields working. During the time of his brother's rebellion, he was the one laboring to keep the family farm together. Now the activity of the first boy, the prodigal son, is understandable and predictable, since this is how so often we have lived in our lives as it pertains to God, His kingdom, and His grace.

It is the Prodigal brother and his statement in Luke 15:29 that is shocking! When the older brother came in from the fields and heard the celebration over the return of his brother, and then he was told what all the commotion was about, he reacted:

Luke 15:29, "And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve⁴ thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends."

The Greek word rendered here *serve*, could be rendered *slaving for you*. Behold, the debtor's ethic. All the time the father thought he had a son, yet to the older son, his household spoke of slavery. Accordingly, he did not work in the fields out of love for his father and a sense of duty to his own household. Rather, he worked in the fields to earn his father's love and money and when he didn't get what he thought he *deserved*, he rebelled!

That is the debtor's ethic... that is the orphan's outlook... and that sadly is what characterizes many a Christian's outlook as members of the household of God!

As children of God

- Can you identify?
- Have you succumbed to such thinking?
- Does your walk with Christ reflect the mentality of a Son or an Orphan?

Oh, Don't Miss It! If you've been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, you are not an orphan, but a son. And if a son, then a treasured possession of God with whom He is well-pleased. You need not live in worry of whether God approves of you. You are His child whom He loves! No longer are you in

³ Compare Luke 15:11-32

⁴ δουλεύω douleuo

competition with others to prove your worth. Suspicion gives way to assurance: You Are His!!!

Be done with the “Debtor’s Ethic”... the “Orphan’s Outlook!”

John 15:13-14, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

Don’t look to your works to verify if this is true of you- that’s the debtor’s ethic. No! Look to the cross! If that is your only hope, then you are a child of God!

Romans 8:38-39, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Do you see it?

It is not the labors of your hands which fulfill the law’s demands. Christ in His love has reconciled you to God! You are loved of God this day! Thus

Galatians 4:6-7, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Romans 11:33, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”

In Redemption the slave has become a son; a son of the living God!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [Slave or Son?](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

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