

Redemption

Christ the Redeemer: Setting Captives Free

Introduction

My mom often sent me on my bike to the small grocery store around the block when I was a boy. In those days, many neighborhoods in our town had stores where personal service was the norm, and everyone knew you by name. At the end of each transaction, a little machine would print out green stamps, which my mom would collect from the bag when I returned home. These stamps could be pasted into a little book and collected until you had enough to redeem for free items. The word *redemption* that we often use today has significant theological applications that go to the basic foundation of Christian doctrine.

One of the best passages in Scripture that draws out the significance of the term is found in Ephesians 1.6-10:

In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding. He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ as a plan for the right time—to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him.

This is just an incredible statement of the significance of redemption and what it means. For God to bring us into our future inheritance, he had to redeem them. He had to buy them back.

The Concept of Redemption

Redemption is one of five legal words used from Greco-Roman vocabulary to describe the work of God in saving us.

1. **Justification** describes a sinner standing before God *accused*, but he is declared righteous.
2. **Forgiveness** is where a person stands before God as a *debtor* and receives cancellation of his debt.
3. **Adoption** is where a person stands before God as a *stranger* but is made a son or daughter.
4. **Reconciliation** is where a person stands before God as an *enemy* but is made a friend.
5. **Redemption** is where a person stands before God as a *slave*, and he receives freedom.

Let's look at redemption in-depth for a moment. What is it? Generally, it is the "deliverance by the payment of a price."

Theologically

In the Old Testament, the redemption of firstborn males provides crucial context for understanding Christ's redemptive work. Under laws in Exodus 13.11–13 and Numbers 18.15–17, God claimed every

firstborn male, human or animal, as his own. Clean animals were to be sacrificed to God, while unclean animals, like donkeys, could either be destroyed or redeemed by substituting a lamb as a sacrifice. The expectation was that people would opt for redemption, Numbers 18.15. Meanwhile, for firstborn male humans, redemption was compulsory. They had to be "bought back" from God by paying a redemption fee of five shekels of silver, equivalent to approximately two and a half ounces, Numbers 18.16. So, these Old Testament concepts demonstrate the fundamental understanding of redemption: paying a price to set someone or something free.

In Christianity, redemption is an act of God by which He pays the price for sin as a ransom, which has outraged His holiness. The concept of redemption is central to understanding the meaning of atonement and Jesus's crucifixion. Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood on the cross, to absolve us from the consequences of our sins.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many, Matthew 20.28.

This isn't only referring to the way he lived his life but specifically how he willingly gave it up to death. His blood, signifying his life given up in death, is seen as the cost of our redemption.

For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, 1 Peter 1.18-19.

In the New Testament, two words are used in the Greek language to describe it. One means to buy out of the marketplace, to purchase something, to buy something to make it yours. The other word carries more weight. It is the one used in Ephesians 1.7:

In Him, we have **redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

In the original language, this word is defined as: "to release or set free, with the implied analogy to the process of freeing a slave—'to set free, to liberate, to deliver, liberation, deliverance.'" Think of the significance of using this word in a Greco-Roman context. There were 6 million slaves in the Roman Empire. The buying/selling of slaves was widespread, just like you would buy/sell/trade animals. Sometimes, a person would purchase a slave to set them free. This was an extraordinary thing. And this is what the expression means, "to buy to set someone free." Redemption, then, is the deliverance by the payment of a price.

Think of it this way: Every person of responsible age and mental capability is in bondage. Jesus said *everyone who sins is a slave of sin*, John 8.34. In Romans 6.17, Paul echoes the same: *we used to be slaves of sin* and says we were once in *bondage to decay*, Romans 8.21. Sin is the captor of men and women. It demands the price of death to be paid to release its victim. This is why the Bible says, *without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness*, Hebrews 9.22.

Earlier in Hebrews, we learn that Jesus was born to die.

Now, since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death, Hebrews 2.14-15.

Jesus paid the price of sin to free the slave to set him free.

The Redeemer

Paul says in Ephesians 1.6 that grace has been *lavished* on us *in the Beloved One*. This, of course, is Jesus, identified by God's unique name for His Son. The same term is used in Colossians 1.13, where Paul discusses how we have been transferred into the kingdom. We have received grace because we are in Christ. Because of this, we have been made acceptable in the sight of God. In Him, we are his. We are loved. We are worthy. We are valuable. We were covered in grace on the day of our salvation. Jesus paid the price and repurchased us, making us one with Himself.

The Redeemed

Who are the redeemed? It is the "us" and the "we" in Ephesians 1.6-7a. This is amazing when we consider our former condition. Before our redemption, we were enemies of God, Romans 5.8-10, and dead in our sin, Ephesians 2.1. Several passages describe who we were and our desperate situation *before* our redemption:

- Ephesians 2.1 – dead in trespasses and sin, under the influence of the world, Satan, and our flesh.
- Ephesians 2.3 – by nature, we were children of wrath.
- Ephesians 2.12 – We were separated, alienated, and strangers without hope and God.
- Ephesians 4.18-19 – We were darkened in our understanding, alienated from the life of God because of our ignorance and hardness of heart. We were callous and gave ourselves up to sensuality and were greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

This is who we were. And it is God, by His grace, who has made us who we are.

The Price

In him we have redemption through his blood, Ephesians 1.7a. This is how it happened. This is how the bondage was broken. This is the price that was paid. Someone had to die. God provided the substitute by sending Jesus in our place. Jesus poured out his life by his sacrificial, substitutionary, and violent death for *our* sins. Justice demanded our death. But Jesus stepped in and served the sentence on our behalf. His blood set us free from the guilt and condemnation of sin, and not only that, it set us free from sin's power, penalty, and, one day, its presence.

What Redemption Brings

1.7b: The Forgiveness of Our Trespasses

Here, *forgiveness* essentially conveys the meaning of "to send off," "to release," "to let go," or "to allow to be." This is understood from Old Testament customs when two goats were involved in the purification process. The blood of one goat was sprinkled on the altar, while the sins of the people were symbolically

placed on the head of the other goat. This sin-burdened goat was then led into the wilderness, never to return, illustrating that our sins have been dispatched and will not return, Leviticus 16.7-10.

This is truly the most incredible news. For anyone defining themselves by their past mistakes, it's crucial to understand that God has permanently dismissed your sin from His thoughts. Scriptural support for this is seen in these Old Testament passages that celebrate God's capacity to erase our transgressions utterly.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us, Psalm 103.12

I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like a mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you, Isaiah 44.22.

Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger forever because he delights in faithful love. He will again have compassion on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea, Micah 7.18-19.

The gospel's power lies in its promise of total forgiveness. It absolves us from all the sins committed before knowing Jesus and all the sins we commit after coming to know Him:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, "We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one. He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world. This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. I am writing to you, little children, since your sins have been forgiven on account of his name, 1 John 1.9-2.3, 12.

God's acceptance exceeds our appearances, intellect, connections, and actions. His acceptance is based on His grace alone. Hence, you are accepted, cherished, and loved by Him.

Sometimes, people struggle with the idea of self-forgiveness, thinking they are beyond redemption. However, refusing to forgive oneself implies an erroneous belief that our standards are higher than God's, which is far from the truth. Instead, we must remember our identities as God's children who are constantly under His care and continuously forgiven. God's forgiveness is bountiful, unlimited by the riches of His grace high above our wrongdoings. Therefore, no sin is too wicked or beyond God's potent forgiveness. Regardless of what you've done, His grace is always sufficient.

1.8 – Wisdom and Insight

Some translations use the term *lavish* in 1.8. The CSB says grace has been *richly poured out on us*. The passage you provided is from the Bible, Ephesians 1:8. The original word means to "overflow" or "abound." God has given us an abundance of grace and blessings.

In addition to this, we have been given wisdom and insight. *Wisdom* refers to knowledge about theology, which includes life, death, God, man, sin, eternity, and time. *Insight*, on the other hand, refers to knowledge about day-to-day living. God has given us everything we need to understand and walk with Him daily. In other words, He has given us what we need to know to make our faith work. All of these things have been poured into our minds so that we can live for God in a world like ours.

Finally, we have spiritual discernment, which is the ability to perceive and differentiate between the influences of the divine, human, and evil forces in one's life, actions, thoughts, and emotions. It is also the ability to evaluate situations and choose courses of action while staying aware of the moral implications of all options. Spiritual discernment is a helpful gift in various situations in our lives. It's the ability to evaluate situations and choose courses of action while staying aware of the moral implications of all options.

1.9-10: Why Has God Done This?

He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ as a plan for the right time—to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him.

Your redemption serves a broader purpose. It's a critical step in realizing the ultimate goal of history, where God unifies all things in Him. All who rebel against Him will be expelled from His presence. God's intention reflects a persistent and flawless purpose where everything eventually converges harmoniously in line with the completion of history.

If you have been redeemed, I hope you are filled with gratitude. God has accorded to you everything within His capacity to provide. He devised this divine plan in the past and has been actively working on it in the present, ensuring that you taste the fullness of it in the future. This comprehensive plan of redemption becomes yours through faith in Jesus Christ.

Anyone who turns to Jesus, surrendering in faith, can receive this gift of redemption. It is obtainable by anyone willing to surrender to Jesus, demonstrating that God's redeeming love and grace are accessible to all.

What's In This For Us?

1. **Understand Redemption:** Recognize what it means to be redeemed - repurchased or set free by paying a price. Just as it was done in biblical times, God has paid the price for our sins through the death of Christ, setting us free from the bondage of sin.
2. **Accept Forgiveness:** Know that God's forgiveness is total and covers all our sins, past and present. Opposed to dwelling on past mistakes, accept God's grace in forgiving our sins and understand that they no longer define us; God has permanently dismissed them from His thoughts.
3. **Let go of Self-Unforgiveness:** The act of not forgiving oneself implies our standards are higher than God's. Instead of dwelling on past mistakes or failures, accept God's forgiveness and remember your identity as God's beloved and forgiven child, assured of His continual loving care.
4. **Recognize God's Lavish Grace:** Acknowledge the richness and abundance of God's grace that He has poured upon us. Apart from redemption, God, in His wisdom and insight, grants us the knowledge and understanding necessary for theological comprehension and practical, day-to-day living.

5. **Surrender to Christ:** Establish a relationship with Christ by acknowledging and surrendering to Him in faith. Regardless of one's past, any person willing to surrender to Jesus can receive the gift of redemption and the assurance of God's love and grace.

Conclusion

The theology of redemption is central to Christianity, outlining the unparalleled sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who laid down His life to offer us complete forgiveness for our sins. As a son or daughter of God, we must fully understand and wholeheartedly accept this redemption and the liberating power it embodies. We must let go of past mistakes and failures, accepting the totality of God's forgiveness while recognizing the richness of His grace that abundantly overflows into our lives. Ultimately, our redemption serves a broader divine objective, leading toward God's ultimate goal of unifying all things in Him.

No matter what we've done or how far we think we've strayed, God's redeeming love and grace remain accessible to anyone who willingly surrenders to Jesus Christ in faith. God's plan of redemption is a continuing source of hope, freedom, and renewal for every believer.

For Class Interaction and Discussion

Lesson Outline

1. The Concept of Redemption
 2. The Price of Redemption
 3. The Redeemer and the Redeemed
 4. The Benefits of Redemption
 5. Accepting and Embracing Redemption
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Think and Discuss:

1. How would you explain the concept of redemption in your own words?
2. In what ways do the sacrifices described in the Old Testament illustrate the idea of redemption?
3. Explain the significance of redemption in the context of Jesus's crucifixion.
4. How does understanding your redeemed status impact your perspective on past mistakes and failures?
5. Discuss the concept of God's forgiveness and how it relates to self-forgiveness.
6. How does the idea of God's lavish grace comfort or challenge you?
7. How can you apply God's wisdom and insight in your everyday life?
8. What does it mean to you that God wants to bring everything together in Christ?
9. How does being redeemed give us a sense of belonging and unconditional acceptance?

10. Why is surrendering to Christ a crucial step toward experiencing redemption?

Group Activities:

1. **Group Discussion:** In groups, write down instances or examples from the Bible where God redeemed individuals or nations. Discuss and reflect on how these acts of redemption contribute to the larger redemption story.
 2. **Dear Younger Me:** Write a letter to your younger self from the perspective of you as a redeemed person. What advice would you give? What hopes would you share? In the group, discuss the change in your perspective before and after understanding redemption.
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Encouraging Final Word:

Always remember no mistake is too big, and no path is too deviated for God's redeeming love. God, in His abundant grace, has repurchased us at a price we could never pay. Let the knowledge of your redemption be your strength and motivation, assuring you that you have been set free, are continually loved, and have an everlasting place with Him. Let this understanding of God's redemptive grace empower you to live freely and abundantly.