

## The Blessing of Redemption

A couple years ago Renae heard a cat meowing and looked out the kitchen window to see a mother cat fretting over her kitten which had become entangled in the kids soccer net. The little kitten, no doubt curious and playful had jumped on the strings flapping in the wind and found herself hopelessly ensnared. In her struggle to free herself, she only managed to get more tangled up. Her neck was caught in one twisted loop and all four paws were snagged as well. The mother cat was helplessly meowing as though scolding her little kitten for getting into this impossible predicament. If left alone, the kitten would have died. Thankfully, super mom came to the rescue and freed the little kitten from the net and reunited the kitten with her mother cat. Apart from Christ we are like that little kitten, hopelessly ensnared in the web of our sin. The more we struggled the more frustrated we became at our defeat. Even now, many who have been saved by Christ find themselves beset by sin. Many have been told enough of the gospel to know that they are to trust God for eternal life, but they haven't been told anything about the Christian life and the war with sin. Many continue to live as though in bondage to sin, because they haven't learned to "reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. The good news of election and predestination to adoption and all that entails for our new life leads to the gospel truth that ***God blesses us with freedom from the tyranny of sin through the lavish grace of the death of Christ.***

**God purchased our freedom from the tyranny of the guilt and penalty of sin.** Paul defines our redemption, first, as "the forgiveness of our trespasses." Two things are noteworthy in Paul's choice of the term trespasses. First, is the use of the plural. Quite often, Paul refers to "sin" in the singular to speak of the condition of fallen humanity in rebellion against God. Here, Paul speaks of "sins" or literally "trespasses" in the plural, focusing not on the condition of sin, but on all of the many evils we produce in our fallen condition. The emphasis is on the many acts themselves, not just on the condition from which they arise. These are the bits of evidence that stand against us to condemn us every day of our lives.

Second, note the term Paul uses to describe these evil deeds, "trespasses." This means to cross the boundaries God has given us. As any loving parent gives boundaries to his children, such as, don't play in the road, God gives boundaries to us that give life. However, when we cross those boundaries, or trespass, we invite death. It's like the old line in the sand when the Sheriff drags the heel of his boot across the dirt and says to the outlaw, "I dare you to cross that line. Cross that line and I'll make you pay." And when pride gets the best of the outlaw and he steps across that line, the Sheriff gives him the old one-two. John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress, said, "'Sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, and the contempt of His love'"

Such contempt for the holy God brings guilt and a consequent penalty. "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sins, it shall die." Jesus said that the death of the soul is hell, where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies. John called it the second death and the lake of fire. The awfulness of this punishment shows us the awfulness of sin that it should deserve such punishment. The worst description of the penalty of sin is found right here in Ephesians 2.12 "without God."

Thank God that, in Christ, we have redemption, namely, the forgiveness of our trespasses. Forgiveness means a legal release or liberation from the penalty of our sins. Forgiveness means that God doesn't make us pay our debt to His justice, but releases us from it. The use of trespasses in the plural lets us know that it is not just original sin that is forgiven, but all of our sins. Now, forgiveness alone would not be salvation. Forgiveness is a means to an end. The goal of salvation is to be with God. Remember, apart from Christ we were without God in the world. Salvation is reconciliation with God so that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. The penalty of sin, separation from God, is removed by the redemption we have in Christ. Notice how closely adoption and redemption are in this text. We see a similarly close relationship between

redemption and adoption in Galatians 4.5 where it is said that Christ was born under the law “to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” You were redeemed, your sins forgiven, so that you would have God as your Father. But does this freedom from the penalty of sin give me a license to sin? Absolutely not!

**God purchased our freedom from the folly of sin.** Not only are we free from the penalty of sin, we are also free from the power of sin. We are free from the control that sin once exercised over our wills.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night; thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray; I woke the dungeon flamed with light; my chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed thee.*

Now, our freedom from the power of sin does not mean that we aren't tempted to sin. It doesn't mean that we're not able to sin. We are still able to sin, but by God's grace we are also able not to sin. I can say no. “Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom 6.14). Not only has God freed us from the dominion of sin so that we can say no, but His Spirit is at work in us to help us discern and choose what is most excellent in His sight. This is what Paul gets at when he says in verse 8 “in all wisdom and insight.” Now, I'm going to disagree with the punctuation in the ESV and NASB, and throw in my lot with the KJV and NIV. The ESV punctuates the text so that the words “wisdom and insight” go with verse 9 “having made known to us.” This reading makes perfect sense, but it ignores Paul's practice of ending one unit of thought with an idea that is taken up and developed in the next unit of thought. Verses 9-10 deal with the revelation of the mystery of God's will, namely, His plan to unite all things in Christ. This hidden wisdom that is now revealed is alluded to and introduced with the words at the end of the last unit “in all wisdom and insight.” I might even prefer to translate the preposition “with” rather than “in” just to make clear that wisdom and insight is not describing the action of God, but the gift of God given to us.

So according to this understanding of “with all wisdom and insight,” Paul is saying that we have been redeemed, set free from sin, and have been given wisdom and insight. In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and certain Psalms, the wise person is contrasted with the fool. Of course, the problem with the fool is not a lack of intelligence, but a rebellious heart toward the Lord. The fool says in his heart “there is no God” (Psalm 14.1). When God redeems us, He rescues us from such folly. Sin is folly. Sin is foolishness. God not only rescues us from the consequences of foolish choices. God gives us wisdom and insight, or wisdom and discernment. It is in light of this gift from God that Paul prays with such confidence for the Philippians that “your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil 1.9-10). In setting us free from sin, God grants us wisdom for using our freedom for His glory. So, Paul says in Galatians 5.13 “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Change does not generally come into our lives all at once. God patiently works within us to conform us to the image of Christ. But this patient work must begin with breaking sin's bondage of our will. Do not buy the lie that you cannot be free from sin. Don't buy the lie of biological determinism that says you have inherited certain genes from your parents that make it impossible for you to deny certain impulses. Do not believe the lie of environmental determinism that says you are simply the product of everything that anyone has ever done to you. Do not use these as excuses for your sin. Do not let these lies discourage you from resisting sin and temptation. Fight with the sword of the Spirit, knowing that God has determined that you will be holy and blameless before Him. Avail yourself of the ordinary means of grace and see how God patiently changes you as you experience more and more freedom from sin. Abide in the Word of God. Be steadfast in prayer. Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves

together. Don't neglect the sacraments as signs and seals of God's covenant with you. In these gracious provisions you will find, as 1 Corinthians 1.30 says, Christ "became to us wisdom from God."

**God purchased our freedom by the lavish grace of the death of Christ.** Paul says that this redemption was purchased according to a standard of wealth. God's ransom payment was consistent with His wealth. "According to" indicates a standard to which the redemption payment conformed. That standard was the riches of His grace. We see something similar quite often. When Abraham was going to buy the cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place for his wife Sarah, Ephron offered to give the field to Abraham. Not wanting to be indebted to the Hittites, and being a man of great means because of the Lord's blessing, Abraham insisted on paying the full price for the land. Abraham wanted to honor his wife and buy a burial plot commensurate with his means. So he weighed out four hundred shekels of silver, according to the valuation of the land by Ephron (Gen 23). Similarly, when David was going to build an altar and make sacrifice to the LORD at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, Araunah offered to give the oxen and the place to David for free, but David, being a man of means, and wanting to honor the LORD by giving according to his means, said, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver (2 Sam 24). Just as Abraham would honor Sarah and David would honor the LORD by making a purchase according to their standard of wealth, so the LORD would honor His own justice and holiness by purchasing the redemption of sinners according to His standard of wealth—the riches of His grace. "We have redemption . . . according to the riches of His grace" (1.7).

Well what payment could God give that would be considered lavish in light of His wealth? In Psalm 50.10-12 God says, "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine." Echoing the theology of God's self-sufficiency, Paul says, in Acts 17.24-25, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." God doesn't need anything, according to Paul, because He owns everything! "Who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?" asks Paul, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Rom 11.35-36). If the price of our redemption is "according to the riches of His grace," what could He give to meet that standard? What would be lavish and generous for a God who owns the universe? Jesus said the widow's two mites were more than all the gifts of the wealthy, because she, out of her poverty put in all she had to live on (Luke 21.1-4). But God is not poor. So what would be considered a generous gift from a wealthy God?

The answer, of course, lies close at hand. "In Him we have redemption **through His blood.**" The price of our redemption was the blood of Jesus—the sacrificial death of Jesus in our place. The Lord Jesus Christ is "the riches" of God, "the riches of His grace." In 2 Corinthians 9.15 Paul calls Jesus "His inexpressible gift!" There were no words in all the Greek, Hebrew, or Latin languages in which Paul was fluent that could express the worth of this gift—the gift of God's Son dying on a cross for sinners. A thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise could still not match His worth! "You were ransomed," says Peter, "not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the **precious** blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1.18-19). When we consider the cost of our redemption according to the standard of God's riches, we begin to see why Peter calls Christ's blood—His sacrifice—precious."

We determine the worth of something by at least two criteria: inherent value and attributed value. Inherent value is determined by the objective value of something in itself. Often something is considered inherently valuable based on its uniqueness or rarity. How hard is it to find or make? What if William gave Hannah a ring

that he said was diamond, but was really Cubic Zirconium. So one day she's showing off this big rock to her friends, and they're all gushing about how much he must love her to give her such an expensive ring on a farmer's salary. Then, one of her friends who works in a jewelry store says, "Wait a minute! Let me see that ring." And upon closer examination she determines that it is in fact not a diamond but a cubic zirconium. William is going to have some 'splainin' to do! A diamond has high inherent value because diamonds are hard to come by and usually require intense mining labor to extract. Cubic Zirconium, on the other hand, is a low cost alternative to diamonds because they are easy to manufacture with abundant resources. Jesus Christ has infinite inherent value. In His humanity, He is perfect. Hebrews 4.15 says that he was tempted in all ways like we are, yet without sin. Perfect, sinless humanity—that's what Jesus is. What's more, He is perfect in Deity. Hebrews 1.3 says that Jesus "is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature." John's Gospel says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1.1). The Word is the One who became flesh in verse 14, namely Jesus. One has well summarized the inherent worth of Jesus saying "He is God's perfect man, and man's perfect God." Perfect in humanity—Perfect Deity. There is no one like Him. He's as rare and precious as any you will find. Infinite inherent value.

Christ is also of infinite attributed value. Attributed value is not necessarily connected to inherent value. Attributed value is the value something has "to me." Linus's blanket, in the Peanuts cartoons, had no inherent value, but try to take it from him and you will find that it has great attributed value. Linus cherished what his sister would have tossed away with the rags. He loved his blanket. Jesus has attributed value. His heavenly Father loved Him with an everlasting love. Jesus referred in John 17.24 to the love the Father had for Him "before the foundation of the world." When the Father presented Jesus to the public He said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3.17). The Father has beheld the Son and loved the Son and delighted in the Son for all eternity. Jesus could say, "I always do what pleases My Father" (John 8.29). Everything about Him and everything He did pleased the Father. Infinite attributed value.

Jesus had infinite inherent value and infinite attributed value. When God the Father pays our ransom out of the riches of His grace, He gives for us His most valuable treasure, He gives His Son. And when we say "He gave His only begotten Son," we mean that He put Him forward as the sacrifice for our sins. "Gave" means sacrificial slaughter. Everything that happened to Jesus in that hour of darkness in which Jesus was arrested, falsely accused, beaten, and crucified, happened according to the Father's plan to redeem us. The early church prayed in Acts 4.27-28 "for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." Isaiah 53.10 says that it was the will of the Lord or it pleased the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief.

When the eyes of our hearts gaze upon the bloodied form of our Lord Jesus, bruised and marred by the angry blows of men, bearing our sin, suffering the wrath of God for our redemption, we hear the Father's voice resounding from the waters of the Jordan "This—THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED!" Here is the Father's treasure, the riches of His grace. He redeemed us "through His blood." This, of course, was not just to show how rich in grace God is, although it does that. This was necessary for our redemption. This was the price that was required.

Who required this price? Whose demand was met by the death of Christ? Some have thought that God paid the ransom to Satan. This misconception of redemption says that Satan held us in bondage and owned us rightfully because of our sins. If God wanted us for Himself, He had to make a square deal with the devil. This idea should be cast into the lake of fire where it came from. God owes no one anything. God, especially, does not owe the devil anything. God doesn't need the devil's permission to do anything. God doesn't deal with the devil. Jesus came to destroy the one who through the fear of death held men in lifelong slavery. He didn't

deal with Him by a ransom, but by a deadly blow to the head. So, if not the devil, to whom was the ransom given? The death of Jesus Christ in the place of sinners was not to satisfy any devil, but to satisfy the just demands of God's law, God's righteousness. God could not sweep our sins under the carpet and still be good and righteous. He had to deal with our sins. The debt for our sin had to be paid according to God's perfect justice. His justice soars higher than the heavens. No one could scale its infinite heights. Now, there is no way God can violate His righteousness by clearing the guilty without judging their sin. So, Jesus Christ our mediator who represents us before the Holy God, takes our sin upon Himself and suffers the punishment that we deserve so that God's justice will be satisfied and we will be forgiven. Paul says in Romans 3.26 of the death of Christ for our sins, "It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." What payment could possibly satisfy infinite justice? Only an equally infinite payment—a payment "according to the riches of His grace." Only Jesus Christ is worthy to make such a payment. Only His blood, His precious blood, would do.

Our redeemer said, "For 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). Dear Christian, you've been set free from sin by your Savior. Out of the riches of His grace, you are redeemed. Glorify God in your body. Praise the Lord! Give thanks to Him! 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. Sing of His grace. Tell others of the riches of His grace in kindness toward us who believe. Enjoy this freedom you have as the redeemed sons and daughters of God—a freedom to know and love and enjoy and serve your heavenly Father.

Dear friend, if you have never experienced this freedom from sin, I say to you today, look to Christ. Consider God's right to rule you as His special creation. Consider your rebellion against His rule, as you have determined to run life your own way. Consider the legitimate claim of God's justice against your rebellion. You and I deserve hell for what we are and what we've done. Now, consider this—Jesus, the righteous servant of the LORD, the very Son of God, beloved of the Father, gave His life as a ransom for sinners. He is the only refuge for sinners against the deluge of God's righteous judgment. He's the only one who can free you from the penalty of sin. Consider your frustration with sin. You want to be free from the sinful habits that control your thoughts and waste your time. You want to be free from the power of sin. My friend, look to Christ. "Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed'" (John 8.34-36). How will you use the freedom God purchased for you by the precious blood of Jesus Christ?