

In our culture, we redeem *coupons*; in the Bible, they redeemed *slaves*. This means that it's too easy for us to underestimate the glory of our redemption. This is also the first reminder in the book of Ephesians that your condition (apart from Jesus) is absolutely desperate. Paul began by blessing God for the blessings He gives us in Christ, but when he brings up just how desperate our circumstances *without* those blessings, it makes what God has done that much more wonderful! Jesus doesn't just make an already good life better; He rescues you from oppression and death. Apart from Jesus, you are *enslaved*. You need to be *redeemed*, bought back from this slavery.

And what a price is paid! When we buy things today, we pay with paper or digital promises, but Jesus paid for you with His blood. Your situation was desperate, so blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus for planning, ordaining, carrying out, and completing not just any redemption, but a blood-bought redemption!

Here's the significance: you do not remember half the purchases you make with your credit cards. You'd *probably* remember if you ever paid for something with actual gold. But there is *no way* you would *ever* forget buying something *with your blood*. There are no "impulse buys" paid in blood. Whatever you buy with blood, you treasure it! You can be sure that God's redemption of you was carefully planned out beforehand, intentionally carried out, and you can be sure that God will never neglect His blood-bought children. God chose you in Christ, and Jesus redeemed you with His blood.

One other thing about redemption. When Paul was writing, it was expected that if you were enslaved or kidnapped, your *family* would be the ones to redeem you. Maybe you've heard the term "kinsman-redeemer", making this point. This is where predestination is such good news: even before you were part of God's family, back when you were "sons of disobedience", since God had *chosen you in Christ before the foundation of the world*, and *predestined you for adoption as sons*, He *acts* like a Father even before He *is* your Father, and Jesus redeems you as an older brother even before He is your older brother, because of the *certainty* of God's eternal choice. You are sons and daughters by election, and you are graciously redeemed because of it. God wasn't obligated to redeem you. He chose to redeem you in Christ according to the riches of His grace.

V. 7 further explains this blood-bought redemption as taking place through *the forgiveness of our trespasses*. Where *redemption* deals with *oppression* and *slavery*, *forgiveness* relates directly to *sin*. Some people try to shift the focus of redemption away from sin, so that God is primarily seen as a *liberator of the oppressed*, and humanity's main problem is that we are tyrannized by forces outside of us, *rather than* sin inside of us.

But Ephesians won't let us go there. Paul ties the two ideas of slavery and sin together, because it is sin that enslaves us! Our sin earned for us the wages of death, and we are subjected to lifelong slavery through the fear of death. It is not an accident that the prince of the power of the air and other spiritual forces came to rule over us; we chose to serve them through our sin! And so we can't separate the ideas of sin and slavery; they are two sides of the same coin. In order to be redeemed out of slavery, our sin must be dealt with.

And Israel's Exodus from Egypt gives us our clearest picture of this, as the blood of the Passover Lamb caused Israel to be spared God's judgment, and only then did she go free from her slavery. And see this, too: it has been wrongly taught in the past that the redemption-price that Jesus paid for you was paid to Satan, as if God has to make a deal with the Devil for your release. People argue this way in order to avoid the reality of God's wrath, but once again the pattern of the Exodus sets us straight: the blood ransom wasn't given to *Pharoah*; it was offered up to *God*, so that God's avenging angel would not put the firstborn of Israel to death.

Christ's atoning blood does not satisfy the Devil's demands; it propitiates *God's* wrath, so that your sins against God might be forgiven. (This is confirmed in Romans 3, btw, esp. vv. 24-25). God's justice demands atonement, in His love, Christ offers Himself as the atoning sacrifice that redeems you, and by His grace, God forgives *your* sins on the basis of Christ's *blood*.

That's the *theology* of redemption; but Paul is pressing that theology into the service of *doxology*, of praise! Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for our trespasses have been forgiven! And this is the glory of Christ's redeeming work – what can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! There is nothing else in all the world valuable enough to pay this price, but thanks be to God, Jesus shed His blood, your ransom was paid, and all of your sins have been forgiven in Christ. This is the good news! Praise God!

The next phrases of vv. 7-8 remind us that this redemption was by no means anything we could have expected or demanded. This isn't our birthright, for we are not sons of God by right, but only by gracious promise. The grace that God shows to us is not appropriate or fitting. It doesn't make sense, and actually seems to fly in the face of logic and reason, if not justice itself!

*Grace* is the word for God's favor; *rich* grace is found in that God not only pitied our oppression, but acted to deliver us, and that rich grace is *lavished* on us when we consider that God is not simply showing mercy to oppressed slaves, but to *trespassers and sinners*; not to trespassers in a general sense, or sinners who have committed vague "crimes against society"; in our sin, we have directly rebelled against the very God who gave His only Son for our redemption!

God's grace is not lavished on His beloved Son, which is what we would expect; what happens is that God *gives* His beloved Son so that He can lavish the riches of His grace on the *rebellious trespassers* who *murdered* His Son so that we might become adopted sons! Who is a pardoning God like Thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?

And there is encouragement hidden in the preposition: God's grace has been lavished on us, not merely *out of* His riches, but *according to* His riches. What's the difference? If the richest man in the world gave you five bucks, he has given to you *out of* his riches. But if the richest man in the world gave you all the money you would ever need for the rest of your life, that would be a gift *according to* his riches.

So which has God done for you? He hasn't chosen to overlook a few of your sins. He has completely, fully, finally, and utterly forgiven them all from top to bottom! *That* is a gift *according to* the riches of His grace, and God lavishes that grace upon you in Christ! Praise God!

Then, in verse 9, Paul introduces an idea that he will explain later in ch. 3: *the mystery of the gospel*. For now, though, he simply lists it as a reason for praise: God in His wisdom and insight has made known the mystery of His will, which was previously hidden for many generations, but, thanks be to God, now everyone knows God's plan!

In the Bible, a mystery is not a whodunit that needs to be solved by someone clever; a mystery is something that *cannot* be solved. It can only be *revealed*. And so when we encounter a

biblical mystery, we don't look around to see if anyone can figure it out. We can only wait and hope that the answer will be revealed. And Paul is saying that God, in His wisdom and insight and of course, His grace, has chosen to reveal this information, this mystery, concerning His plan so that we can *know* it, *live* in light of it, and *praise* Him for it.

In particular, this mystery is that Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews, sharing in the promise that God gave long ago to Abraham to bless the world through His offspring. Jew and Gentile are united to God through Christ, and united to one another in Christ, because God's plan is to unite everything in Christ, now that the fullness of time has come. Our reading from Acts about Peter and Cornelius is an example of this mystery in action. God's work in history has reached its climax. All that God is planning to do in and with the world has now been made known: God is summing up *everything* in Jesus.

And so by being united to Jesus, you are participating in God's great plan. You have purpose and meaning, you are doing exactly what you were made to do, you are working with God, not against Him, and you are caught up in the central plotline of all of history.

If you are part of Christ's church, loving God, loving your family, loving your neighbors, then you're right where the action is, at least, the action that will echo into eternity. Doctors, actors, scientists, politicians and artists are not the ones living significant lives. Life has meaning in Christ alone. Everything in the world is summed up in Christ, and if something is tangential or irrelevant or opposed to Jesus, then it is meaningless, and you should stop wasting time on it.

But if it relates to Jesus, if it connects with Jesus, if it comes from Jesus or goes back to Jesus, if it serves or glorifies Jesus, then do that! Treasure that! Hold on to that! God says that everything is about Jesus. And since you've been redeemed from a wasted and Christless life by the blood of God's beloved Son, then you've been given everything you need to live your life in light of God's great plan. God has made Jesus the center of everything, and according to the riches of His grace, He's made *you* one with Jesus. You are blessed in the Beloved, so let us hear and believe this good news, and bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*