

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION

Read Ephesians 1:7-14

Introduction

Last week, in the first part of Paul's introductory section we considered some of God's blessings. He has blessed us in viewing us as holy and blameless and with the expectation that we live our lives as holy and blameless. He has blessed us with adoption and the full inheritance of his own sons. He has blessed us by predestining us to live for his glory. And now another "spiritual blessing in heavenly places" -- redemption.

Redemption through His Blood

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence" (vv7-8)

In Him we have redemption and nowhere else. There is no possible redemption outside of Jesus and His redeeming blood. Redemption always implies a price being paid for the freedom that is purchased. It uses the ancient Greek word "loutro", which means, "to liberate on the receipt of a ransom." "Redemption" originally referred to "buying back" a slave or captive, that is "making free" by payment of a ransom. Here it means release from a captive condition, "release, redemption," figuratively of the release from sin that comes through Christ.

This figure is based squarely on the Old Testament sacrificial system of a lamb or other animal being slain for the sins of the people. Animal sacrifice for atonement of sin was God's way of teaching principles of holiness and sin, forgiveness, and grace to the early Israelites. In the New Testament, the concept is mentioned numerous times. Peter put it this way:

"... knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19).

If you remove Christ's blood from Christianity, his death becomes a mere symbol, sin becomes only human frailty, the results of sin an earthly tragedy, and love and grace are present without any righteousness or justice.

I believe we must take Paul quite seriously when he says rather plainly, *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7)*. A price has been paid to set us free from the bondage of sin, and that price is Christ's death on the cross. His death bought our freedom. Jesus does not redeem us by His sinless life or His moral example, but only by His death in our place - by His blood. "Observe, it is not redemption through his power, it is through his blood. It is not redemption through his love, it is through his blood."

Grace Lavished on Us

The redemption and forgiveness given to us comes according to the measure of the riches of His grace. It is not a "small" redemption or forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross. It is immense. The great prize was won, however, at a staggering cost. What an immense act of grace and courage and mercy!

What does it mean "according to the riches of His grace"? "Grace" is the noun "Charis", "a beneficent disposition toward someone, favour, grace, gracious care or help, goodwill." Grace, simply, is favour

towards someone. Not an earned response from a superior, but favour bestowed simply because it pleases the Giver.

Paul is saying that our redemption and forgiveness are "in accordance with" or "to the extent of" the wealth, riches, or abundance of God's favour. God has not just gone through the motions, just enough to get by, but his grace has been "lavished upon us." The picture we are given is of overflowing love, surpassing grace, a cherishing by God that is much more than enough for us -- and certainly undeserved!

The mystery of His will.

"... having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth—in Him." (vv9-10)

Part of what belongs to us under the riches of His grace is the knowledge of the mystery of His will, God's great plan and purpose which was once hidden but is now revealed to us in Jesus. Through the Apostle Paul, God calls us to consider the greatness of God's great plan for the ages and our place in that plan. What is this mystery? In both Ephesians and Colossians, the mystery refers to the ultimate fulfilment in the end times of God's plan of salvation in Christ that Gentiles along with Jews are being saved. The mystery is universal in scope.

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:24-27)

God's ultimate plan is to bring together - to ultimately resolve - all things in Christ, either through Jesus as a Saviour or Jesus as a Judge; this will happen in the fullness of the times. The word for "gather together" has the idea of "to unite" or "to sum up." It was used for the process of adding up a column of figures and putting the sum up at the top. Paul's idea is that God will make all things "add up" at the end, and right now He is in the process of coming to that final sum. Everyone will fall in either category – Jesus as Saviour or Jesus as Judge... and it will be summed up at the end of times.

Predestined for Praise

"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory." (vv11-12)

For believers, Jesus is not a judge, but the One in whom we have an inheritance. Believers are predestined for this according to the counsel of His will - again, the reasons for His choosing reside in Him, not in us. In verses 5, 9, and 10 we considered the words "predestined," "plan," "purpose," and "will." Here, notice the purpose of this predestination: "that we ... should be for the praise of his glory." Our purpose is praise: "the act of expressing admiration or approval, praise, approval, recognition.

Have you ever wondered why you are here? Why were you spared in some dangerous accident? Why you are still living, even though you might have lost your mind? We don't know everything God is doing, but we do know this: He has destined us to live for his praise. When people look at you, Jesus intends that they see God.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”
(**Matthew 5:16**)

God has placed you and me as lights. God has made us to be a mirror -- to reflect his glory and help people see a glimmer of his greatness living in human flesh. You have an important purpose on this earth, no matter how unimportant you may feel. You have been placed here to bring praise to God!

The Holy Spirit as a Guarantee

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” (**vv13-14**)

That you might be sure that you are included, he has put his mark on you -- the Holy Spirit. The phrase "marked with a seal" (NIV, NRSV) or "sealed" (ESV, KJV) is a verb meaning, "to mark with a seal as a means of identification, mark, seal."

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (**Ephesians 4:30**)

Paul has a two-fold analogy for the Holy Spirit: (1) as a seal and (2) as a deposit. The phrase "deposit guaranteeing" (NIV), "guarantee" (ESV), "earnest" (KJV), and "pledge" (NRSV) is the noun *arrabōn*, a legal and commercial technical term meaning payment of a part of a purchase price in advance, "first instalment, deposit, down payment, pledge," which secures a legal claim to the article in question or makes a contract valid.

The Holy Spirit has a way of bringing a bit of heaven into our lives here on earth. Through the Holy Spirit, God can speak to us and we to God. In the Holy Spirit the incredible power of the Kingdom of God can work in and through us. The Holy Spirit was obviously someone of whom the Ephesian Christians were aware of in their lives.

You as God's Possession

Here is another reminder, Christian friend, that you are "God's possession" (NIV), "purchased possession" (KJV), and "God's own people" (NRSV) -- as in 1 Peter 2:9 and Malachi 3:17. The Greek noun means, "that which is acquired, possessing, possession, property." "You are not your own, you were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This is another reference to the redemption of slaves.

Full Citizens

Some people think that Ephesians was written to help Gentile Christians get over their inferiority complex and understand that they are every bit as much God's people as the Jewish people -- and I think I agree. As individuals, too, we can have an inferiority complex -- a feeling that we aren't good enough. That if only God knew what we were really like he wouldn't love us. Our passage is designed to help you get over your inferiority complex.

Let the words of this passage remind you that this is no illusion, but a glorious fact -- called, chosen, forgiven, redeemed, adopted, sealed with the Holy Spirit. God's great blessings are for us who do not deserve them. That is what grace is about. That is what the Gospel is about. And that is why this grace and gospel are so amazing and wonderful.

All you need to do is confidently walk according to your new identity and the requirements of the kingdom to which you now belong. If you are no longer your own, you lose the right to choose to live your life just the way you like. You live it according to the requirements of your new Master.