

TEXT: “**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace...**”

Dear Friends in Christ, Our Redeemer,

After being found guilty of a crime, a man was given the option of paying a large fine or spending a year in prison. Because he couldn’t pay the fine, he went to prison. But when he found out that his wife and children couldn’t visit very often, the man became very depressed. One day an unknown person went to the court and anonymously paid the man’s fine. The jailer came to tell him that his punishment was paid. He was free. The anonymous person’s payment had bought back the man’s life; it had redeemed him.

In our text this morning Paul reminds the Ephesians and all of us that Christ came to buy us back, or to redeem us from eternal death. His work, by which he bought us, is called redemption. Today let’s ask the question: **HOW DID CHRIST REDEEM US?**

Paul says that we have redemption “in him.” The “him” refers to the One described in the previous verse. Paul talked about the grace which he freely gave us “in the One he loves.” “The One he loves” is, of course, Jesus. Jesus is our Redeemer. Thinking about the illustration in our introduction Jesus is the one who paid the penalty that freed us from sin and death.

Through Jesus we receive “**redemption**,” Paul says. The word “redemption” comes from the verb *redeem*, which means *to buy back*. The believers of Paul’s day understood immediately what Paul meant with that word. They were familiar with the Greco-Roman practice of redemption. Slaves were freed by the payment of a ransom, like the man in our illustration who was freed from prison after his fine was paid by an anonymous benefactor. Similarly, Paul says that the Ephesian believers (and us) were freed by the payment of a ransom. What was the payment? Paul says, “**We have redemption through his blood.**” Peter taught the same thing when he wrote, “**For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect**” (1 Peter 1:18). The payment, the ransom, was the precious blood of Christ. Christ’s blood is precious because he is holy, without sin, a lamb without defect, to use the picture from the Old Testament. Christ redeemed us by first of all living a perfect life so that when he offered his life for ours as a substitute his life would be sufficient to buy us back from our punishment.

Only Jesus could do this. “**No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—that he should live on forever and not see decay**” (Ps. 49:7-9). Wealth cannot buy escape from death. Only God himself can redeem a life from the grave! Jesus is God, the holy and perfect Son of God. He redeemed us with his blood, his death, as a payment for our sins.. That death resulted in the forgiveness of our sins, Paul says. “**we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.**” John wrote, “**...the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all sin**” (1 John 1:7). When John said “us” he meant everybody! He tells that when he says a few verses later, “**Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**” (1 John 2:2). God’s holiness demands punishment for man’s sin. Out of love God sent his Son to make substitutionary atonement for man’s sin. In this way the Father’s wrath is propitiated, that is, satisfied or appeased; his wrath against mankind’s sin has been turned away because it was directed toward Christ on the cross. Forgiveness through Christ’s atoning sacrifice is not limited to one particular group only; Jesus is the

Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. It must, however, be received by faith. Jesus said, **“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life”** (John 3:16) The Bible does not teach that ultimately all people will be saved (universalism). Christ redeemed all people, but some do not receive the gift of eternal life because they reject it in unbelief even though their sins were redeemed. In unbelief the gift bought and paid for by Christ on the cross goes to waste because they do not receive and apprehend it by faith.

Why did the anonymous donor pay the penalty of the man in jail? Why did God send Jesus to pay the undeserving sinner’s punishment? Why did Jesus undertake the difficult, yes, painful work of our redemption? He did not redeem us because he needed us or was forced to do it. As God he needed nothing and no one. As God he cannot be compelled by anyone or anything outside of himself to do anything. It is also clear that Christ did not carry out the work of redemption because he owed us that work. He owed us nothing, except wrath and punishment on account of our sinfulness.

Paul tells us the one prompting cause, the one reason that God sent his Son and that his Son did what he did, grace! Paul tells us it was **“grace.”** **“...in accordance with the riches of God’s grace...”** God is in his very nature, in his essence, gracious. The words grace and gracious denote a special kind of love, a love that is ultimately unique, found purely in God alone. Grace is that love which is caused by the one who loves, not by the person or thing loved. Human love is usually caused by its object. We like a certain kind of food because it tastes good. The taste is the cause of our liking it. We love certain people because they love us, are good to us, or have certain traits that make them lovable to us. The cause of our love is in the ones we love; that is, it is caused by the object of our love. However, God’s love is gracious, that is, God loves not because we, the object, are lovable but because he is loving. When the Scriptures speak of grace in the matter of our redemption, the word is most simply defined as “the undeserved love of God (favor Dei). He loves us, not because we deserve it; he loves us freely because he chooses to. In Romans 5:8 Paul says that God shows us his love (this unique love which we call grace) by dying for us while we were still sinners. Thus, the cause of his love is and must be outside of us and in him alone!

Paul puts God’s grace in the sharpest contrast with our works in the matter of redemption. He said, **“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”** (Romans 3:22-24) That all have sinned is the constant in our condition; there is never a time this side of eternity when that is not the case. The cause, therefore, of God’s love for us and our redemption must be in God, since on account of our sinful nature and condition the cause of our redemption can never be in us. It is alone in the grace of God in Christ Jesus! (Deutchlander)

John Newton had been rebellious as a young man and had lived a wicked life. At one point, he had been the captain of a slave ship. Later in his life, the Holy Spirit converted his heart and he repented of his sins. He was so amazed that God would forgive a sinner such as himself. He knew that he didn’t deserve to be freed from the guilt and punishment of sin. As an expression of his amazement, and in thanks to God, he wrote the familiar hymn “Amazing Grace.”

What is true of John Newton is true of all of us. We don’t deserve to be freed from the guilt and the punishment of our sin. Yet, in his grace, Christ has redeemed us. John Newton’s words are our story: *“Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.”*
Amen