

THE MERCIES OF GOD: Redemption

“knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” — 1 Peter 1:18-19

Introduction

The importance of understanding the atonement correctly cannot be overstated. As Leon Morris argues, “The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith. Unless we are right here it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere” (*The Cross in the New Testament*, 5). It is in the doctrine of the atonement that one’s understanding of God (theology proper), humanity (anthropology), sin (hamartiology), and Christ (Christology) all converge.

The previous study focused on the concept of *propitiation* and its relationship to atonement. “Propitiation” was defined as “the satisfaction of God’s wrath and the acquisition of His favor.” Thus, **propitiation is an aspect of the atonement that is particularly directed towards God**. Before the riches of His mercy could be poured out on unworthy sinners, His wrath—a necessary response in light of His righteousness—over their rebellion must be exercised and satisfied. Jesus did this on the cross by bearing this wrath on behalf of sinners.

We turn now to the concept of *redemption*. Whereas propitiation focuses primarily on the relation of the atonement to God, **redemption is an aspect of the atonement that is particularly directed towards man**. In the words of John Stott, “Propitiation focuses on the wrath of God which was placated by the cross; redemption on the plight of sinners from which they were ransomed by the cross” (*Cross of Christ*, 173).

“There is no one of the titles of Christ which is more precious to Christian hearts than ‘Redeemer.’ . . . It gives expression not merely to our sense that we have received salvation from Him, but also to our appreciation of what it cost Him to procure this salvation for us. It is the name specifically of the Christ of the cross. Whenever we pronounce it, the cross is placarded before our eyes and our hearts are filled with loving remembrance not only that Christ has given us salvation, but that He paid a mighty price for it.” —B. B. Warfield, “‘Redeemer’ and ‘Redemption’”

A. Key Terms and Definitions

Redemption. The word “redemption” is often used loosely today to refer to “deliverance” or “rescue.” But the biblical usage of the term is much more specific. MacArthur and Mayhue define “redemption” as **“that by which man is redeemed from the bondage of sin and the law through the payment of Christ’s shed blood as a ransom”** (*Biblical Doctrine*, 353). In other words, the key idea of “redemption” is that of *a ransom paid* for the liberation or purchase of someone in bondage.

**Key idea:
The payment of a
ransom for the
liberation of a slave.**

The Greek terms used in the New Testament are particularly descriptive. For example: λύτρον, *lutron* – “a ransom”; λυτρόω, *lutroō* – “to free by paying a ransom”; λύτρωσις, *lutrōsis* – “the experience of being liberated”; ἀπολύτρωσις, *apolutrōsis* – “release from a captive condition”; ἀντίλυτρον, *antilutron* – “ransom”; ἀγοράζω, *agorazō* – “to purchase in the marketplace”; and ἐξαγοράζω, *exagorazō* – “to secure deliverance of.”

The terms were commonly used to refer to the purchase of *prisoners of war* or for the purchase of *slaves*—to acquire them either for service or to purchase their freedom (a process called “manumission”). The terms for “redemption” commonly found in the New Testament clearly **evoked the image of the marketplace**. One historian noted, “When anybody heard the Greek word λύτρον, ‘ransom,’ in the first century, it was natural for him to think of the purchase-money for manumitting slaves” (Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 327).

In the Old Testament, the concept of “redemption” is somewhat different, though it communicates the same basic idea as in the New Testament. Whenever the word is used with *men* as the subject of the action (e.g. “kinsman redeemer”), it always includes the sense of paying a price to bring about release. Whenever the word is used with *God* as the subject of the action, it loses some emphasis on a price paid, and instead emphasizes the power or effort God exercises to liberate. Nonetheless, the concept of “payment” is still present, for in these instances where God is the Redeemer, the emphasis is often on the *strength* or *power* He exercises in order to redeem. In other words, the “cost” He pays is the exercise of power.

- **Exodus 6:6; 15:13; etc.**

B. Essential Characteristics

The concept of “redemption” must be viewed from several angles to gain a greater appreciation for its profundity.

1. The Plight of the Enslaved. Believers have been ransomed *from what*?

- **Titus 2:13-14** – “. . . who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed . . .”
- **Hebrews 9:15** – “. . . for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed . . .”
- **Galatians 3:13** – “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law . . .” (see 3:10).
- *From what* have believers been redeemed? Two things in particular: (1) enslavement to transgression and sin (see John 8:34; Rom 6:6); and (2) the condemnation pronounced by the Law. Leon Morris writes,

“Viewed from this aspect the atonement looked to them like a process of ransoming. Christians were men who had been under sentence of death (Rom 6:23), they had been enslaved to sin (John 8:34; Rom 6:17; 7:14). Now they were ransomed from the death sentence (free ‘from the law of death,’ Rom 8:2, and cf. 1 Cor 15:54f; 1 John 3:14; 2 Tim 1:10; etc.), they were free from sin (John 10:34-36; Rom 6:6f, 18, 22). Processes which were familiar to them from their ordinary daily life gave a vivid picture of what had happened to them in the spiritual realm when the Savior gave His life for them” (*Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 52).

2. The Price of the Redemption. Believers have been ransomed *with what*?

- **Matthew 20:28 // Mark 10:45** – “the Son of Man [came] . . . to give His life a ransom for many.”
- **1 Peter 1:18-19** – “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold . . . with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.”
- Note the references to “**blood**” as the “ransom”: **1 Pet 3:18-19; Acts 20:28; Eph 1:7**.
- “Blood” is the word-symbol for “death” (see Deut 12:23; Lev 17:11). “Blood” paid as a ransom = the giving of life in order to pay the price necessary to ransom captives.

3. The Recipient of the Ransom. *To whom* was the ransom for believers paid?

- The answer to this question according to many in the early church is known as the “Ransom to Satan Theory”—the view “that in the atonement Christ paid a ransom to Satan to redeem us out of his kingdom” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1253). This view teaches that a great cosmic battle has broken out between God and Satan. Satan lured mankind into sin; God must pay to free them back to Himself.
- For example, Origen (AD 184-253) wrote: “Now it was the devil that held us, to whose side we had been drawn away by our sins. He asked, therefore, as our price the blood of Christ” (*Commentary on Romans*, 2:13).
- The view was also implied in C. S. Lewis’ book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when Aslan (a picture of “Christ”) offers his life as a ransom to the White Witch (a picture of “Satan”) in order to release Edmund (a picture of the “enslaved sinner”).
- There are three serious problems with the “ransom to Satan” theory of redemption: (1) It grants Satan too much power—believing that he “owns” people, that God is “obligated” to satisfy his terms, etc. (2) It views the cross as a transaction between God and Satan, with Christ being the payment. (3) It potentially makes the cross a form of deception (God lured Satan into a trap through the cross). For example, Gregory of

Nyssa (AD 335-394) wrote “God . . . in order to secure that the ransom in our behalf might be easily accepted by him [the devil] who required it . . . was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh, and thus, life being introduced into the house of death . . . (the devil) might vanish.”

- Certainly, the power of Satan was *defeated* in and through the cross. However, the cross is never described as a transaction with the evil one; Satan is never mentioned as a recipient of a “ransom.”
- **1 Timothy 2:5-6** – “For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.” “Mediation” with respect to the ransom was directed toward *God*, not toward *Satan*.

“God’s Son is not beholden to Satan that he should make payments to him; Satan himself is God’s chief captive and thus is in no position to make demands on God.” —MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 534

4. The Status of the Redeemed. Believers have been ransomed *to what*?

- Redemption *from sin and the condemnation of the Law* is not redemption to independence.
- **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** – “. . . For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”
- **1 Corinthians 7:22-23** – “. . . You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.”
- **Romans 6:22** – “But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God . . .”
- John MacArthur writes, “Slavery to Christ is much more than mere *duty*; it is motivated by a heart of loving *devotion* and pure *delight*. Because God first loved us and sent His Son to redeem us from sin, we now love Him – longing from the heart to worship, honor, and obey Him in everything. Our slavery to Him is not drudgery but a joy-filled privilege made possible by His saving grace and the Spirit’s continued working in our lives” (*Slave*, 208).

5. The Breadth of Its Application. The ransom was paid *for whom*?

- For *whom* did Christ shed His blood as a ransom? The difficulty in answering this question arises from the presence of both unlimited and limited language in texts speaking about redemption.
- Example of *unlimited/general redemption*: **1 Timothy 2:5-6** – “For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.”
- Example of *limited/particular redemption*: **Matthew 20:28 // Mark 10:45** – “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”
- No evangelical would argue that the redemption Christ achieved on the cross brings about *universal salvation*. That is the view of *universalism*, and it is heresy. The Bible clearly teaches the reality of heaven and hell, and that hell (eternal judgment) will be populated by human beings. Obviously, not all are saved.
- Therefore, some kind of “limitation” must be attached to Christ’s work of redemption.
- Either redemption must be limited in the *extent* of the those it purchased, or redemption must be limited in the *efficaciousness* of its actual accomplishment.
- Either we are to believe that redemption was intended and efficacious for the elect and therefore limited/particular in scope, or we are to believe that redemption was intended for every human being, but not necessarily efficacious, for not all are saved in the end.
- *Question*: Which “limitation” is more biblical? **The limitation of redemption’s extent, not efficacy.**
- Redemption is inseparable from such concepts as “substitution” (Gal 3:13, “Christ redeemed us . . . having become a curse for us”); “forgiveness” (Col 1:14, “redemption, the forgiveness of sins”; cf. Eph 1:7); and “adoption” (Gal 4:5, “He might redeem . . . that we might receive the adoption”). Redemption is an “eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). Redemption’s purpose is “to purify for Himself a people” (Titus 2:14). Redemption results in the state of “belonging to God” (1 Cor 6:19-20). Redemption serves as the basis for “justification” (Rom 8:34). These are not things we could use to describe the non-elect.
- “All” is best understood as “all kinds of men”—i.e., not limited to a certain kind of group (“Jews”).
- **Revelation 5:9-10** – “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and

people and nation. You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” Not “you purchased every tribe and tongue and people and nation” but “you purchased from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

“If we concentrate on the thought of redemption, we shall be able perhaps to sense more readily the impossibility of universalizing the atonement. What does redemption mean? It does not mean *redeemability*, that we are placed in a *redeemable position*. It means that Christ purchased and procured redemption. . . . It is to beggar the concept of redemption as an effective securing of release by price and by power to construe it as anything less than the effectual accomplishment which secures the salvation of those who are its objects. Christ did not come to put men in a redeemable position but to redeem to himself a people. We have the same result when we properly analyze the meaning of expiation, propitiation, and reconciliation.” —Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 61

D. Practical Implications

- 1. You are no longer a slave to sin.** Romans 6:17-18. You cannot say “I cannot stop sinning” unless you are woefully mistaken about the implications of Christ’s redemption and need to improve your understanding, or you have truly not been redeemed by Jesus Christ. Redemption cancels the power of sin for the believer.
- 2. A great price was paid for your freedom.** 1 Peter 1:18-10. Your redemption was not accomplished cheaply. This should lead to the deepest gratitude and praise. Your life should be the continual refrain, “I will glory in my Redeemer, whose priceless blood has ransomed me!”
- 3. You now belong to a new Master.** 1 Corinthians 6:16-19. Believers are not bought by Christ into a liberty of selfish ease. Rather, since they have been bought by God at terrible cost, they have become God’s slaves, to do His will” (Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 54). Every part of you belongs not to you, but to God.
- 4. Take this message to the world.** Revelation 5:9-10. Our passion and practice must align with the plan of God to bring men from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation to sing this new song of *redemption*. “May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering!”

For Further Reflection

Scripture Memory: Mark 10:45

Recommended Reading:

- John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, pages 533-35, 554-565.
- John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pages 39-48.
- Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pages 11-64. Advanced.

Homework:

- Why is it an oversimplification to define “redemption” as “deliverance”? Or asked a different way, what makes the term “redemption” more precise than “deliverance”?
- How would you respond to the professing Christian who contends that salvation grants him the liberty to live without any restrictions (“bondage”)? Provide several biblical texts to support your answer.
- How should “freedom” be best understood, according to the doctrine of redemption? Freedom from what?
- How would you respond to the professing Christian who says that he cannot stop sinning?
- Are there areas in your life where habitual sin contradicts the reality of your emancipation from sin? What are you doing about it? What do these habits say about you as one who has been freed from sin’s bondage?
- Review the hymns selected for this study (listed below). Trace how these hymns articulate the definition of “redemption.” What are the common themes?
- If someone asked you why you “glory in your Redeemer,” how would you respond?

Hymns: “I Will Glory in My Redeemer” (*Hymns of Grace* #196); “There Is a Fountain” (*Hymns of Grace* #301)

This Week’s Audio: gracechurch.org/motw

Next Meeting: November 6 – “Calling”