

February 12, 2012
 Psalm 32:1-5 / Colossians 2:13-15 / Ephesians 1:7-8
 Redemption and the Forgiveness of All our Sins

About a year ago, my daughter Elisabeth was speaking with me about various churches she'd attended and how different pastors focus on different things in their sermons, and then she said: *"But with you dad, no matter what passage you start with, you always end up at grace."*

And most of the time that's probably true. I do. After all, if the central theme of the Bible is the saving grace of God that comes through Christ, how could one NOT end up there on most occasions?

And I tell you all that, *because I want you to know from the start*, that as we go through Ephesians, that's going to happen a lot. In fact, in this book it will probably happen 100% of the time! Because as we saw last week, Paul's whole purpose in writing this epistle is to underscore and emphasize, **"the riches of God's grace"** (v. 7) / and **"the incomparable wealth of His grace"** (2:7) / and in particular, **"the praise of His glorious grace"** (v. 6).

And since that is the case, as we make our way through this epistle (week by week) what should take place in every heart, is a greater understanding and greater appreciation of God's grace as each Sunday passes.

Last week we looked at the **"glorious riches of God's grace"** bestowed upon us through the **"spiritual blessings"** of election unto holiness (v. 4) / and predestination unto adoption as sons (v. 5).

They were the first and foremost of the "spiritual blessings" that came to Paul's mind when he started listing how God had richly **"blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus"** -- before the foundation of the world.

And this week, what Paul does is move on in time, from the time before creation, to the time of the crucifixion, where through Christ or **"in Christ"** those people He had chosen and predestined to adoption as sons, receive **"redemption through His blood; the forgiveness of sins."**

A gift which He ***"lavished upon us in accordance with the riches (or wealth) of His grace and with all wisdom and understanding."***

So, open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:7 as we consider even more of the spiritual blessings which God has so abundantly blessed us with. Blessings which give us even more reasons to praise Him for the abundance of the wealth of His grace which He has given to us who believe. And let's do so by taking this one sentence (though 2 verses) in its *THREE* distinct parts.

Beginning with the **FIRST** part in v. 7, where Paul starts with the words: ***"In Him...."*** ***"IN HIM we have redemption through His blood..."*** And though it's an easy phrase to overlook, it's of supreme importance to understanding this text. A phrase he uses in v. 1 / v. 3 / here again in v. 7 / another time in v. 9 / again in v. 12 / and then twice in v. 13! In fact, in the first 12 verses, he uses the phrase "in Christ" (or one of its derivatives) 12 times!

And the fact that Paul uses it so often should make it obvious to even the casual reader, that for Paul, this is something quite significant. So significant in fact, that we'd be missing out on the most characteristic phrase of Paul's "salvation terminology" if we ignored it.

Commonly repeated phrases are usually of great importance / and in this first chapter no phrase is used more frequently / or carries with it as much importance as the phrase, ***"in Him," "in Christ,"*** or ***"in Christ Jesus."***

Paul uses those phrases NO LESS than 164 times in his letters (assuring us that at least for him, this concept of being "in Christ" is key to our understanding of salvation and any attempt at living the Christian life.

It was a phrase that so caught the attention of James Stewart that he wrote a book (in my opinion, his best) to counter the fact that so many had missed or overlooked this vital element in Paul's teaching. A book about the life and teachings of the apostle Paul which he aptly entitled: **"A Man IN CHRIST."**

So what does that phrase mean? And the answer? It means being joined to Jesus Christ, not just through a faith relationship, but also through the spiritual union of our spirit with His.

And it's a reality so vitally important to one's salvation, that the apostle Paul could say in Rom. 8:9: ***"If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ (that is, living in them) he does not belong to Christ."*** Or as we would say, he or she is not yet saved.

Which means that that salvation is NOT simply a matter of believing in a Jesus who lived long ago / or even died on a cross / NOR is it simply believing in Him as Someone external to us, or in the heavens above.

Rather, its believing in Him as One whose Spirit has come to live within us / and been joined to ours through spiritual union / and taken up residence within our hearts and souls / in order to fill our lives with the aroma of His presence / and our character with a resemblance to His.

So let me quote James Stewart where he says of being "in Christ": ***"If one seeks for the most characteristic sentences the apostle ever wrote, they will be found, not where he is refuting the legalists, or vindicating his apostleship, or meditating on eschatological hopes, or giving practical and ethical guidance to the Church, but where his intense intimacy with Christ comes to expression... in such great words as... 'in Christ Jesus.'"***

"In Christianity the final stress must ever fall on one thing and one thing only -- our union with Christ, or life in fellowship with Christ... Until we realize the central place this always held in Paul's thought and experience, many of the richest treasures of His Gospel must remain forever sealed from our sight."

He's right. The glorious truths of redemption ARE found in phrases such as this: ***"It is because of God that you are IN CHRIST JESUS..."*** / ***"We are dead to sin, but alive to God IN CHRIST JESUS."*** / ***"There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are IN CHRIST JESUS."*** / ***"God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms IN CHRIST JESUS."*** / Or again, ***"If anyone be IN CHRIST he has become a new creation."***

In other words, all the redemptive blessings of God come to us, if and only if, we are ***"IN CHRIST JESUS."*** / HIM living "in US" and US living "in HIM."

What does that mean? It means that for the person who is **"IN CHRIST,"** life is primarily about Christ. You love Him / you have a relationship with Him / your faith is in Him / you worship Him / you serve Him / your constant desire is to know Him better / your yearning is to honor Him in all you do / and to depend on Him throughout each day.

In fact, in what surely constitutes the most elevated expression of what it means to live one's life "in Christ," Paul says from his prison cell in Rome:

"But whatever was to my gain I now count as loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I count all things loss for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish (the Greek word literally means "dung" or "excrement") that I may gain Christ and be found IN HIM..."

And then, after speaking of, ***"pressing on to take hold of that for which Christ had taken hold of him,"*** he says: ***"One thing I do; forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward toward what is ahead, I press on to attain the goal of the prize of being all God wants me to be IN CHRIST JESUS."***

And what does God want us to be "in Christ"? What does that consist of? Being "in Christ" is to have Christ as the focus of your life. / It's to live your life ever conscious of the fact that you belong to Him and not yourself. / It is to have Him as your Lord, Master, Savior and King / your wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption / your power, strength, sufficiency and joy.

It's to look to Him as: The Vine that gives you life / the Bread from heaven that nourishes your soul / the Rivers of living water that quench your thirst and refresh your life / the Rock upon which you can securely build your house / the Anchor which holds you steady in the storms of life / the High Tower into which you run for safety and protection from the enemy / and your Advocate, Mediator and Sacrifice and High Priest who intercedes before the Father and rescues and saves you from the wrath of God against all your sins.

So I ask you: Are you "in Christ"? / Have you been "joined, by faith, to Jesus"? / Is He "in you"? / Does His Spirit reside in your heart and soul?

If NOT, you are still in your sins, and subject to the wrath of God for them. But if SO, then you have been blessed with, "**redemption, through His blood and the forgiveness of those sins.**" Because the blessing of redemption and the forgiveness of sins is only for those who are "*in Christ Jesus.*" "**IN HIM we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.**"

Which brings us to the **SECOND** part of this verse, which provides us with the next blessing of grace which God gives to ALL who are "*in Christ Jesus.*" And after election and predestination, the first one we come to is "**redemption through Christ's blood.**" And what is redemption? Leon Morris tells us: "**Redemption**" is "**the payment of a ransom price to secure a desired release.**"

In order for any human being to be "released" or "freed" from the due penalty for their sins before a just and holy God / Someone who was both Just and Holy had to pay that "ransom price" or "release price" for them, to secure their rescue, freedom or emancipation from the liability they had accrued before God because of their sins or innumerable willful transgressions of His Law.

And what is the redemption price? Christ's blood. He redeemed us "**through His blood.**" Yet it doesn't simply mean, "His blood," as if it would have been sufficient to simply cut Him and take a pint of His blood (like we do at our blood drives) and consider THAT sufficient to atone for sin.

Not at all! When it says "**through His blood**" it means "**through His blood shed unto the point of death**" -- always! The blood of Christ is a synonym for the death of Christ.

"The wages of sin is death," and therefore the payment paid to avert that penalty must be the death of an innocent victim. Nothing but the death of the Son of God Himself, would suffice, when it came to paying the "ransom price" needed to redeem sinners from the penalty for their sin.

Christ, therefore, is our "Redeemer" in the sense that He graciously came to pay the severe and exorbitant price that secured our release from the punishment we so rightly deserve for all our sins.

Salvation, in that sense, may be free for us, my friends, but that's ONLY because Christ paid such a supremely great price to secure it for us.

Rev. 5:9 speaks of this truth of "redemption" when it says of Jesus: ***"With your blood, you purchased men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation..."***

And notice, they were "purchased for God" with Jesus blood, the day He died on the cross! That's when my salvation was secured for me -- 2000 years ago! / Not just the possibility of it. / Not just the potential for it! / No maybe's or question marks or what if's whatsoever. / It was done then!

My actual salvation and all that it includes, was secured for me in full the moment Jesus poured out His life-blood to death to "redeem" or "pay the ransom price" for my sins! The transaction took place then and thus both secured and ensured what happened in 1980 when I placed my faith in Christ!

"All that the Father gives to Me, will come to Me," says Jesus in John 6:37. And they will come to Him, because their salvation was purchased in its entirety and secured for them in full on the cross. / And as the author of Hebrews tells us, it was a price He paid out of the "joy" of purchasing and redeeming a people for Himself.

And then **THIRD**, what did that redemption purchase? Not just deliverance from the wrath of God against those sins for all who are "in Christ," but in a very personal and practical sense, ***"the forgiveness of sins"*** -- all their sins! As Paul says to believers in Col. 2:13 (a book that mimics many of the themes in Ephesians): ***"He forgave us ALL our sins."***

Whose sins? The sins of all who would ever believe. The sins of all those who would ever be "in Christ." For only "in Christ" is there redemption and forgiveness of sins. Christ died to purchase "forgiveness of sins" for every person, from every place, and every tribe, and every age, who would EVER place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ to save them. And He died for **ALL THEIR SINS** -- past, present and future.

My friends, there are few blessings that are as precious as the forgiveness of sins. David stresses that point when he says in Psalm 32: ***"Blessed is the person whose sins are forgiven, whose sins are covered."*** And you know what the closest English translation for the word blessed is? ***"Happy!"***

"Happy is the person whose sins are forgiven, whose sins are covered."

At least that's what they're supposed to be! Forgiven people are supposed to be happy people.

Why? Because they have been "redeemed" or "freed" or "released" or "emancipated" from the tremendous burden of guilt that piles up to crush the conscience of the person who sins.

You see, God has written on the hearts of all people, "the requirements of His law," by virtue of their being made in the image of God (Rom. 2:15). And He has also made the human conscience in such a way that when we sin, it "bears witness" by "accusing us" (or condemning us) by pointing our thoughts to our actual guilt. Not just our feelings of guilt, but our actual guilt. Our conscience makes us feel guilty, because we are guilty!

And what Christ did when He "died on the cross" was to pay the penalty for our actual guilt -- our actual sins and transgressions of God's law -- whether it's the law written on our hearts or written in His Word. And what that should do -- since it frees us from the guilt of sin -- is enable us to experience the joy of a clear conscience! The joy of a person who knows they will not be held accountable for their sins.

The joy of person who is free of condemnation and because their sins are forgiven and covered and separated from them "as far as the east is from the west." How could one hear that and believe that in faith and know that deep down in their soul and NOT rejoice?

Yet you know what? Although David says, **"Happy is the person whose sins are forgiven,"** I see a lot of gloomy looking believers. I do! People who still carry the weight of guilt for past sins in their conscience.

Guilt that often rises up in the quiet hours of the night to "accuse them" and "condemn them" and "make them feel the sting of guilt for them all over again -- time and time and time again. And all that, despite the fact that the Gospel tells them that "in Christ" they have (as an unquestioned benefit of redemption) ***the forgiveness of ALL their SINS.***"

Not just the lesser ones / not just the ones that didn't hurt anyone else / not just the sins which the people they have hurt have forgiven them for / but all their sins, all inclusive!

Why? Because they deserve to be forgiven? No! Never! But because Christ the Lord, shed His blood, to pay the "ransom price" for every one of them / and thus redeem us from the guilt and condemnation and penalty for them!

Yet you know what I've found? Many people think it's wrong to experience joy long after they've sinned. I'm not talking right after they do it, I'm talking about years down the road. They are still beating themselves up emotionally even for things they did 10, 20 or 30 years ago... a lifetime ago!

They feel it's necessary to punish themselves and wallow in remorse and inflict their conscience with even more guilt, when the truth of forgiveness begins to do what it's supposed to do and free them from it! They won't allow the Gospel do what it's supposed to do in their lives.

Yet, you know what? To do so is an offense to God! Christ died to free us from the guilt of our sins! That's why Paul can say, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Thus I ask you, are you "in Christ Jesus"? Have you trusted in Him for salvation? And are your sins therefore atoned for and forgiven and covered by the blood of Christ? Then you must stop punishing yourself, condemning yourself, and holding on to the guilt of sins that Christ died to free you from!

And you must do it, so you can experience the blessedness, or happiness, or joy of being forgiven! Because few things do more to turn people away from the faith than Christians who walk around still shouldering the guilt of things they've were forgiven for long ago! Sins Christ endured the cross to free you from! So please, if that's you, allow yourself feel the joy of being forgiven. That's what He wants!

He came, says Is. 61, "**to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners!**" So don't keep yourself caged up in the

prison of guilt for things He came to free you from! When He swings wide the prison doors, to allow you to go free, don't sit in the prison cell and refuse to come out!

I know you're not supposed to quote yourself, but just this past week, I wrote to a missionary friend in Honduras about this very thing.

And I said to her: ***"The Gospel promises forgiveness for every sin. Since Christ died to pay the penalty for every single one, every single one is forgiven. Yet for that forgiveness to have its divinely intended and healing effect upon us, the promise must be believed, accepted and internalized... even for the sins we think are "unforgiveable."***

The ones where we hurt, injured, maimed or irreversibly damaged someone -- as is the case with man-slaughter / murder / women who have had abortions / or cases where we betrayed or hurt someone terribly, and they died before we had a chance to say we were sorry, reconcile with them or ask them to forgive us.

And what makes such sins seem "unforgiveable" is that while we hate ourselves so much for doing them, we can't go back and rewrite that part of our lives. And that makes it nearly impossible for us to forgive ourselves, even though we say (or give lip service to the fact) that God has forgiven us.

The conscience has the hardest time believing in forgiveness when we've done something we consider to be really, really bad. For in those cases, some people will actually refuse to accept the healing of forgiveness, feeling it would be WRONG NOT TO CONTINUE TO FEEL GUILTY FOR IT - - sometimes, for the rest of their lives. They intentionally refuse to allow themselves to feel the JOY of being forgiven.

In fact, some people who were raised in guilt or shame-based homes, actually find a kind of sadistic relief in punishing themselves or continuing to bat themselves up for their sins."

So what's the solution? ***"One must not only believe that Christ's death purchased their forgiveness in full, they must also refuse to withhold from themselves the joy and happiness of a forgiven conscience.***

If they are believers, God has already forgiven them. So the only real block to the joy of forgiveness is their stubborn refusal to forgive themselves -- which in a subliminal way, is really a refusal to accept the forgiveness Christ purchased for them when He paid in full the penalty for every one of their sins on the cross.

Such self-punishment is not an act of humility, it's actually the deception of an inverted pride suggesting that what they are doing to themselves is of greater atoning value in the sight of God than the death of His own Son! And that is not only offensive to God, it is to disbelieve the Gospel."

LISTEN: The surest way to know if you have believed, accepted, embraced and internalized the forgiveness Christ purchased for you on the cross, is by measuring the presence or absence of JOY or HAPPINESS in your life.

"Blessed," says David, "happy is the person whose sins are forgiven."

The person who truly believes (deep down in their soul) that Christ's death atoned for every single one of their sins, will experience (or should experience) -- not just once, but in an ongoing way -- the happiness and sheer joy that can't help but well up in the soul that's been emancipated from guilt!

Is that you? Has the joy of a cross-purchased forgiveness had its liberating effects upon your soul and freed you from those self-accusing and self-condemning thoughts?

Have you LET IT? Have you asked God's forgiveness for repressing it by actually holding on to the guilt that Jesus died to free you from? / Will you let yourself experience the joy Jesus died to purchase for you?

Prayer

"Lord, Your grace is truly amazing. We sing that all the time. It goes beyond the ability of human words or the finite nature of our language to express how unspeakably precious and invigorating and valuable and life-giving it is.

And yet, so often, when we think or speak of it, it fails to move and mesmerize and enrapture our souls as it should. So forgive us Lord, if we haven't, or if we don't... if we fail to prize it or value it as we should -- above all the kingdoms, comforts, pleasures or riches known to man.

Teach us, deep down in our souls, that no other gift can compare to it. It is, as Paul tells us, of "incomparable wealth" -- an undeserved, unearned, pure gift You were in no way obligated to give anyone. Yet You DID -- unbelievably You DID -- freely, kindly, and mercifully out of nothing but your great love for unworthy, offending sinners, like us -- who mess up so often.

Lord, from this day forward, may we see with the eyes of faith the incomparable wealth and the wondrous beauty of Your grace, which human language struggles so hard to express, and our human affections struggle even harder to adequately appreciate, in an ongoing way, deep down in the core of our being.

As each day passes, reveal to each of us, with greater and greater clarity, the truly amazing nature of Your grace. For I pray it in Jesus name. Amen."