

## **Union With Christ** *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*

### **Our Redemption by the Son** *Ephesians 1:6 – 8*

#### **Introduction: The Cross and the Confession**

The morning was already warm and hazy. Four soldiers stripped him down to his underwear. Someone handed him a drink. His lips touched it--wine laced with a narcotic called myrrh. He closed his eyes and refused to drink. But that didn't stop the other two guys. They drained their cups dry. Their eyes darted around while Jesus' remained still. All three were forced to lie down against different wooden poles. The rough splinters lanced into Jesus' already shredded back. Someone yanked his arms left and right as far as they could go, palms upward. Jesus tried to swallow, but he couldn't. His tongue was too thick, his throat too dry. He wished he could swallow. Then something cold touched his wrist: a fly biting him. He wanted to reach over and slap the fly away but his other arm was already tied. Then that fly bit deeper. It became a burrowing metal nail. It pushed his bones apart and sank its nose into the wood.

Marcus Gallius squatted and licked the sweat off his upper lip with his tongue. He waited for the prisoner to stop his spasms before he started to pound in the other nail. "Jewish fools," he thought. "Just like all the rest." He had seen people die like this before. But it never made him choke on his own stomach until now. This one seemed different. "He doesn't seem like a criminal, but he's been whipped and beaten beforehand worse than any prisoner I've ever seen." What was that above his head? Marcus couldn't read that well, but he figured that it was the same phrase in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Marcus held his breath and got back to work. As he put the nail against the prisoner's wrist, he heard the word, "Father." Marcus glanced at the man. The man was looking right at him. "Hmph. He thinks I'm his father," muttered Marcus. But he didn't feel comfortable. Another pound on the nail, and Marcus heard, "Forgive them..." Now Marcus was surprised. And though each hammer blow rang in his ears, this man's whispering words between the hammer blows rang in even louder.

"...For they..." THUD.

"...Do not know..." THUD.

"...What they..." THUD.

"...Are doing..." THUD.

Then the cross went up. Jesus felt all his weight hang momentarily from his two wrists as his crossbeam was lifted from the ground. The soldiers lifted the beam up the *patibulum*, the main pole, and formed the dreadful cross. Then they climbed down and put one more nail through his feet. The sky was darkening and it was becoming a bit colder. His calf muscles and thigh muscles trembled under his weight. He began to shiver. Exhausted, he lost control of his bodily functions. He could hear people crying out around him, jeering, swearing, just above the roar in his own ears. His heart was racing to keep him alive.

Marcus Gallius' mind was racing, too. The minutes seemed to drag on with the day getting warmer, the people mocking, the other soldiers laughing about the clothes they had scavenged. Marcus' could hardly keep his patience. "Will he say something more?" Many fanatical Jews had prayed, but they were bitter curses of vengeance. But this man had prayed that his God would forgive the soldiers, even Marcus. Many others called down insults, but Jesus had called down forgiveness to the sorry scoundrel crucified next to him. *Who is this man?* And many victims cried as they were crucified. But Jesus' tears weren't for himself. He cried for his mother who stood next to him, and the others who stood with her. *Who is he?* Marcus wore a stern face, warning the crowds away. But inside, he was wondering, wanting to come close.

After six hours, Jesus cried out with surprising strength, "It is finished! Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." Marcus whipped his head around just in time to see Jesus look at him briefly, then close his eyes. He let out his last breath, and a tremor went through the ground like a last breath coming out of the earth. Marcus stepped towards the cross in surprise, inspecting Jesus. He glanced up into the sky. Maybe he could see this "Father" Jesus spoke of. Marcus wanted to know. Sons took after their fathers. So could this man's God be a Father as forgiving as His Son had been? Spontaneously, involuntarily, he blurted out,

“Certainly this man was innocent.” Though the other Roman centurions whipped their heads around and fixed their narrowed, surprised eyes on him, Marcus felt like he was being drawn...somewhere else. To become...someone else. Something inside him wanted to believe in this God of forgiveness. He said, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

**Context:**

That brief story about Jesus and the centurion at the Cross leads us to our question: What did Jesus do for us on the Cross? Our text today gives us some insight into that. We are at the center of Paul’s first poem in Ephesians. Here at the center stands the Cross of Jesus Christ. In an ancient Hebrew poem like the one we’re studying, the center is always the emphasis and main point. Last time, we studied God’s choice to adopt us, which was an impulse that began in the Fatherly heart of God the Father. Never have we known such a Father. But now, we discover God’s payment to adopt us, which was a payment joyfully paid by the Son of God. Jesus paid our adoption price on that Cross. The Father could not adopt us if the Son had not paid the price, just like there is an adoption price for adopting children even today. And what we’re going to see here is the meaning of that event.

**Love Freely Bestowed and Lavishly Given: v.6,8**

The outermost poetic lines both begin with the phrase, “His grace.” God’s grace is His unmerited favor towards us. It is His demonstration of love that is totally spontaneous, unpredicted, and undeserved by even the best of us. It’s like that one occasion when my mom gave me dessert even though I didn’t finish my dinner. Though it happened only once in my memory, that is unmerited love.

Also on both lines is another pattern. Paul says, “His grace, which He...” and then Paul goes on to use two very similar phrases. At the beginning, he says, “which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” And at the end, he says, “which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight.” Those two phrases complement each other and build on each other. God’s love is “freely bestowed” and is “lavished upon us.” We are showered and soaking in God’s love. So why is the Cross of Jesus a portrait of God’s grace? Because it is two things: redemption and forgiveness.

**Redemption: v.7a**

Let’s take the first of those two things. In v.7, Paul says, “In him we have redemption by his blood.” In the Greco-Roman world, ‘redemption’ (apolutrosis) was a word used in the slave market, when a slave was purchased by someone out of slavery. It comes from the verb “lutoun,” which means “to ransom.” Some scholars estimate that there were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire, about two thirds of the entire Empire, so they would definitely have related to what Paul is saying here. People in Rome sometimes became slaves by being sold into slavery in an auction. To help us appreciate what this word means, imagine yourself on the block in an open-air Roman slave market. The rich, fat merchant who yanks your chain is Sin, and he doesn’t give a lick about you. He’s auctioning you off to filthy buyers because he enjoys seeing you squirm and suffer. Their grubby hands are about to grab you. Your price starts at a hundred. Because you’re pretty fit and good looking, your price goes up to five hundred. But suddenly, a man with scarred hands and feet raises his hand and bids a hundred million of his hard earned money for you. It’s everything he has. The crowd gasps. No one has ever paid that much for a slave. Sin scowls in frustration. “Sold!” says the auctioneer. “For a hundred million!!” And that man with scarred hands and feet smiles, and gently puts his robe on you. He treats you like a person. And you know you’ve been redeemed, going to a better place.

But ‘redemption’ is fundamentally a Jewish concept. In fact, when the Jews spoke of redemption, they primarily thought of the Exodus, when they were delivered by the blood of the Passover lamb. Hence, redemption fundamentally means ‘deliverance’ and ‘transfer.’ Dreamworks, in the movie *The Prince of Egypt*, suggests accurately that they cried out in a pleading song, where the Israelites begged, “Deliver us! There’s a land You promised us! Deliver us, to the promised land!” They wanted to be transferred from one place to the other, from a place of slavery and death to a place of freedom and life. So God smote Egypt with plagues, and when Egypt did not let the Israelites go, God took the lives of every firstborn child from every house that didn’t have the blood of the Passover lamb smeared on the doorposts. So God delivered Israel from one place to another, from being in Egypt, to being in the promised land, by the blood

of the Passover lamb. Redemption is being moving from one place to another. Every Passover celebration and sacrifice since then reminded them that redemption occurred by the shedding of blood.

Jesus initiated a new redemption through a new exodus. After he taught in the Temple for the last time, Jesus went with his disciples into an Upper Room to eat a Passover meal. There, he spoke of something that would happen the next morning. He broke bread and said, "This is my body, broken for you." And then he took a cup of deep red wine and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." Then, Jesus went out the Eastern Gate of Jerusalem, silently crossed the Kidron Valley, and prayed in a grove of olive trees called the Garden of Gethsemane. Finally, Jesus was apprehended, tried, falsely convicted, and sentenced. At the same time as Passover lambs were being prepared and sacrificed in each Jewish household, Jesus was being prepared and sacrificed. Then the Romans nailed his wrists and feet to the Cross, and he died there. That was the doorway for our redemption: the lifeblood of the Son of God.

Illus: I just have to share how much this symbolism moves me. In 1998, Passover fell in April. That week, I decided to make something of a Passover for the Aquino family, my next door neighbors. So I made a passover lamb. Actually, I cooked the lamb in a Mexican style called Cordero Al Pastor, and it was lamb baked with a delicious green sauce with mint, oregano, and chilis. Along with that, I made harosheth (the apple with cinnamon mix), boiled eggs, and romaine lettuce with horseradish. We had matzah bread and deep reddish purple grape juice, too. So in reality it was kind of a Jewish celebration with a Mexican dish substitute all made by a Japanese American; surely one of the most unusual meals ever eaten! Over the light of some candles, we talked about the redemption of the Jewish people out of Egypt. But as we drank our grape juice, we thought about the miracle of our greater redemption out of sin.

Thus, in both the Gentile and Jewish circles of Paul's day, the word "redemption" would have triggered the idea of an intervention to deliver and transfer. The word doesn't always seem to need a price to be paid. For instance, in the New Testament, Paul talks about our bodies being redeemed later (Rom.8:23, Eph.1:13) without a payment. They will be delivered from mortality to immortality.

That is great news for us, because we feel worthless sometimes. Sometimes we get that twinge deep in our hearts where we feel worthless. Maybe you just got fired from your job. Maybe you feel like the people around you belittle you. Maybe you feel like you're not valued by your friends or even your spouse. Let me remind you how much you are worth to God. Could God have paid a higher price to bring you into His family? No. There's a song by Michael Card that says, "He cannot love more, and will not love less. "

The poetry of the Cross is amazing, when you think about it. Especially in the context of this picture of adoption that Paul talked about in v.3-6. Adoption always requires an adoption price. Back then, a Roman father would have to pay to adopt an adult son to be an heir to his house. Even today, adopting parents need to shell out thousands of dollars to adopt a child into their home. The same goes for God. God paid the ultimate price. He gave His Son to make us His children.

### **Forgiveness of Sin: v.7b**

But there is a deeper reason Jesus needed to pay the adoption price with his life. God had to work out a way to forgive us. This is exactly what Paul highlights next in the second half of v.7. "We have...the forgiveness of our trespasses." Each of us needs to be forgiven. We were not just third party helpless children who were part of a different family. We were part of another family that was against God. We were part of the enemy family.

The word "trespasses" means "to misstep, to violate" where you violate the domain and prerogatives of another. Today, we use this word for pretty light crimes; trespassing onto someone's property, for example. But in Paul's day, it wasn't a light thing. A trespass is a deep intrusive insult that results in a serious betrayal of relationship. In this case, it's a betrayal of relationship with God. Simply put, it's sin.

What might have been in Paul's mind as he recited this? As he thought of how Christ died for all, maybe he thought of the deep racist resentment he used to feel against anyone who wasn't Jewish. As he thought of how Christ calmly forgave those who pounded the nails through his body, maybe Paul also thought of

the furious hatred he would have also leveled against Jesus; Paul just transferred that anger onto an early Christian named Stephen. Paul had participated in a mob that brought about Stephen's death. Paul must have breathed a sigh of gratitude, because God had forgiven him.

Or what might have been in the minds of the Ephesians when they received this letter? Maybe they thought of the way they used to worship the Greek goddess Artemis, who represented the moon and the hunt. The Greek mythology had been fused with a fertility goddess of Asia Minor, and resulted in an Artemis with many breasts, which was a perversion of femininity that resulted in a cult of prostitution. Something occult was going on too, because we know from Acts 19 that people in Ephesus were demonized. The Ephesians had much to be forgiven of. So these Ephesian Christians must have relished hearing about forgiveness, because God had forgiven them much!

Thank God! For here at the Cross of Jesus we have forgiveness for all those things we've done, all the things we've kept hidden or not wanted to talk about. And in being forgiven, we are set free from two of the greatest forces known to humanity: guilt and shame.

Those two things go deep, don't they? Guilt is everywhere around us and in us. Listen to it. It is one of those hidden forces that is at work within us and between us. We get so used to hearing, "You should work harder! You should be less selfish! You should get up earlier! You should speak up more!" and things like that from everyone around us, that we get used to feeling guilty. So we either shut down, tune out, passively rebel, actively rebel, try harder, get more frustrated, or get upset. Sometimes we get so used to hearing guilt that we pass it along, too. We say, "You should be more understanding! You should listen more!" Should, should, should. Naturally, we think that guilt ultimately comes from God, who is in the perfect position to wag His finger at us and say, "You should." Guilt goes deep.

Shame is different from guilt. Shame is feeling bad about who we are. We might feel guilty about the things we do. But shame goes deeper, because often we internalize negative feelings so deeply that we feel bad not just about our actions, but about ourselves fundamentally. We feel like we're a constant disappointment, that our parents are embarrassed about us, that our friends can't get too close to us. We keep listening to the voices that say, "I'm ashamed of you. You are a burden to me. You are embarrassing to be around." Those voices may be voices from the past that we replay like a bad record over and over in our mind. Or those voices may be voices in our present, like a condescending spouse who makes you feel like a failure, parents who criticize you all the time, or even your own voice, which keeps saying in a constant sigh, "If only..." If only I didn't feel so sexually perverted. I'm so ashamed. If only I were more responsible. "If only..." Shame is a quiet disease. Once it gets into our system, it's hard to get it out. We may appear normal on the outside, but inside, we're being eaten up slowly. And again, we think that God is ashamed of us, and that we're shameful before God.

But you are released by God's forgiveness in Jesus! God doesn't traffic in guilt or shame. Do guilt and shame drive you into relationship? No! They drive you away. They make you feel like hiding, like Adam and Eve behind the tree when they disobeyed God. But God offers us forgiveness because He wants deep, meaningful, sweet relationship with us. Did you know that? He wants *you* to be in His family. True, He sometimes stops us and asks us the penetrating question that we need to be asked. But it's meant to lead us to His mercy immediately. He doesn't want us to wallow in the mud, with guilt and shame following us around. The Cross signals the end of our guilt and shame. In Christ and before God, we are free from it!

Illus: I feel like I'm starting to understand how deep this forgiveness goes. On Sunday, January 10, 1999, our group of friends in East Palo Alto got together for our usual Sunday night dinner. Visiting us from Fresno was Matt's dad, Milo Martin. He is a big strong man with huge hands. His 69<sup>th</sup> birthday was that weekend, so he had come up to visit his son and the rest of us. Now Mr. Martin has been involved with Prison Fellowship in the California State Prison in Fresno. And one of the men in that prison, a guy named Joe, had recently been released because he had served his time. Joe is an even bigger, buff guy with a shaggy beard. The really intimidating kind. Well five days after being released, Joe came back to the prison. Mr. Martin and a friend asked him why he was back. Joe said that he really liked the Bible class called *The Life Changing Class* that was being taught; he had been told that if he wanted to, he could always come back even after he was released. So Joe did, and when he was asked whether he wanted to

receive forgiveness from God through faith in Jesus Christ, Joe nodded. So Mr. Martin put his hand on Joe's big shoulder, and Joe prayed the sinner's prayer. Mr. Martin couldn't resist peeking, and he saw tears squeezing through Joe's closed eyes and streaming down his cheeks. Joe was receiving forgiveness.

Illus: Occasionally, I see myself as being covered with filthy stuff. It's just this picture of myself that would enter into my mind on certain occasions. It's graphic and disgusting, kind of like the slimy ooze in *Ghostbusters*. Kind of a gross picture, but that was the image that flashed through my head every now and then! I knew that what it symbolized was this sense of inward shame at all the struggles I had: with lying, with lust, and with anger. I recall in September of 1998, I was working as a project analyst for a computer chip design project that was scheduled to finish in late January. It was my job to produce charts and graphs that predicted the completion date of the 666 Mhz Pentium II. I was presenting two different graphs, and the managers I was working for noticed that they didn't agree. So suddenly I was embarrassed. What had happened was I made a simple adding mistake on an Excel spreadsheet that hadn't shown up until September. And when I went back and discovered that, I was tempted to lie about it, to blame Microsoft, to blame someone else in my group, and to do something, anything! to hide my mistake. For about 15 minutes I tried to cover it up. Finally I called my boss to tell him I had made a mistake, but then I felt so ashamed that I would stoop so low as to think those things and not own up to my mistake. And that image of myself flashed through my mind. Yuck! And for that reason, I saw myself as unapproachable. I mean, who'd want to touch someone dripping with slime on the inside? But as I remembered the Cross, and of myself standing before it, I got the picture of myself standing dripping with the pure water of God's love, totally clean. I was forgiven, and my shame was gone.

Why? Why does the Cross of Christ have that effect? How could guilt linger when Christ knew all our actions, took all our guilt, and paid all our debts on the Cross? Guilt can't linger there! It's not possible! God's forgives us even of those mistakes we'll make in the future. The Cross was a one time payment, and therefore it was sufficient for all our guilty feelings. And how could shame haunt us when God publicly humiliated Himself at the Cross for us? It is His public commitment to us. And it is a public declaration of His love to us where he died a shameful death to bring us honor. What more powerful public declaration could we want?

My friend Albert recently apologized to a friend of his. He said, "I need to ask for your forgiveness." This friend was a bit surprised that Albert said this. He said, "Sure." And then he started thinking. His eyes opened wide and he said, "What if I went around to every person I've done something wrong to, and asked for their forgiveness for everything that I've done? Do you know how good that would feel?" How good would that feel for you?

Furthermore, to answer guilt and shame at its deepest festering level in us, God changes our identity. He places us "in Christ." Remember that Paul said, "In the Beloved" and "in him" in v.6 and 7? This identification with Jesus Christ is our bottom-line identity. Just as there is absolutely nothing that comes in between Jesus and God the Father. Does God see sin in Jesus? NO! So if we are in Christ, does our Heavenly Father hold our sins against *Christ*? NO. That's how our new identity in Jesus so revolutionizes our relationship with God.

This fits in beautifully with the adoption metaphor that we studied last time. When God paid the adoption price to bring us into His family, all our old debts accumulated in our old family were cancelled out. Imagine your credit card bills, school loans, and home mortgage being cancelled out because you are in a new family with a new name and a new address. Your new name is "in Christ." Your new address is "in Christ." A lot of you open bills and letters that are addressed to the old you: "You should feel ashamed because of what you did with that pregnancy. " "Remember how you lied? You are a liar at heart." "You will never get over your bitterness." Those bills addressed to your old you are no longer for YOU!! You're brand new, so DON'T EVEN OPEN THEM!!

### **In All Wisdom and Insight: v.8**

The Cross answers our deepest needs. I believe that is why Paul adds the phrase, "in all wisdom and insight" at the end of v.8. I know most of your Bibles put a period right in the middle of v.8, in between "which He lavished upon us" and "in all wisdom and insight." But in reality, all of v.3-14 has no

punctuation. It's one long run-on sentence if we think of it as prose. But if we think of it as poetry, then it makes absolute sense, and we can see a nice parallel. Read v.8 as one sentence!

He lavished His love on us at the Cross in all His wisdom and all His insight. This is another way of saying that God knew exactly what He was doing. Don't you mistake it! He knew exactly what the Cross would mean for us. If you're anything like me, you've been searching for most of your life for a demonstration of love that is so powerful and so moving, that it would be etched forever on the inside of your heart.

This must have been a thrilling, highly charged phrase passing between Paul and the Ephesians, because the surrounding Greek world wanted so much to have wisdom and insight. Wisdom (*sophia*) was defined by Aristotle as the knowledge of the most precious things. Cicero defined it as a knowledge of lofty things both human and divine. Insight (*phronesis*) meant understanding and practical know-how. (Aristotle defined *phronesis* as the knowledge of human affairs and of the things in which planning is necessary. Plutarch defined it as practical knowledge of the things which concern us. Cicero defined it as knowledge of things which are to be sought out and the things which are to be avoided. Plato defined it as a disposition of mind which enables us to judge what things are to be done and what things are not to be done.) We know that the ancient Greeks wanted wisdom and insight. In fact, they prided themselves on it. They defined four personality types, they tried to define love and friendship, they worked with political history and political science and ethics, they worked with theoretical physics and mathematics, they tried to figure out the world around them. But for all their knowledge, their understanding of love was confused. Plato, in *The Republic*, showed that he had no idea how important family love is (he thought the state, not parents, could raise children). A lot of the Greeks' sexual practices were perverted. Ultimately they were restless and dissatisfied. They didn't understand love at all. For all their searching for wisdom and insight, they didn't find it, and they didn't understand their own crying need for love—God's love.

Now before we laugh at the ancient Greek world, let's stop and take a sobering look at our world. How many times do we pass by a book rack and see a book of how to make sex turn into love? Sex techniques that will keep the love of your life together with you? Love techniques? How to feel loved? How to win love? How to keep love going? And yet for all that, would you say that we've wized up??? We are absolutely hungry for a real experience of love even though we claim to be so wise about it.

Illus: Once I heard an old story that reminded me of God's love. Have you heard the story of *The Ten Cow Bride*? It's about a not-so-fair maiden who was the seventh daughter of an ambitious merchant. This young woman was sad because she thought she was unlovable. She thought she'd never get married. The painful thing was: neither did anyone in her family! And that affected how they treated her, too, especially the ambitious merchant father, who wanted to charge a high bride-price for each of his beautiful daughters. So she moped around at home. Then along came a humble farmer, who had heard of the daughters of this merchant. The father of the seven girls was ecstatic. He thought the most beautiful daughter would surely be the first to wed. Maybe that farmer would give 3 cows for that one! For in that day and in that land, bride-prices were paid in cows. But the farmer shook his head. He said he wanted the seventh daughter, the rather humble girl. The old father was disappointed. He thought, "Surely this farmer is poor and cannot afford much. He probably can't even afford to give 1 cow." So the father said, "Well, she's not worth much. How much are you willing to pay?" The farmer smiled generously and said, "Ten cows." The father's hands trembled, and all the sisters gasped. No one had ever heard of even five cows being offered as a bride-price, much less ten! But seeing what he thought was a bargain, the ambitious merchant immediately agreed. In almost no time, the farmer and the seventh daughter were wed. Months later, the merchant father decided to pay a visit to his daughter and son-in-law on their farm. He got there, and saw a beautiful and radiant young woman tending the home. He called the farmer over and asked, "Where's my daughter?" The farmer said, "That is your daughter, sir." The merchant couldn't believe his eyes. His humble daughter had been transformed. She was now known throughout the land as the ten cow bride, and she glowed in knowing that. The farmer had been wise and insightful indeed, because he knew that what she needed to begin a loving relationship was a demonstration of costly love like nothing she had ever known.

That is why God is wise and insightful. We all want to be ten cow brides. We all want God to say, "You are worth all I have." And that is what the Cross of Jesus Christ is. It's His demonstration of love. Who

can love you better? Paul says that God “lavished His love on us,” and rightly so. To lavish is to keep heaping it on, again and again. In Isaiah 25:6, God says that He’s going to prepare a lavish banquet for all people with “finely aged wine” and “choice pieces” of food. And in the New Testament, it occurs only 3 times, and it always speaks of going all out. That’s the kind of God who is our adopted Father. He goes all out for us at the Cross, where He put forward His deepest and most practical solution for our gaping need for love.