

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

YOUR GREATEST NEED

Ephesians 1:7-8a

By

Steven J. Cole

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Ephesians Lesson 5

Your Greatest Need Ephesians 1:7-8a

What is your greatest need? If you're sick, you may think, "My greatest need is to be healed of this illness." If you're unemployed, you may think, "My greatest need is to get a good job to provide for my needs." If you're single, you may think, "My greatest need is for a mate." If you're in a difficult marriage, you may think, "My greatest need is for harmony in my marriage." If you have a child who has become ensnared by drug abuse, you may think that your greatest need is for your child to be free from this addiction.

While all of these are important needs, none of them are your greatest need. The greatest need of every person, whether he recognizes it or not, is to have God forgive his sins before he dies and faces God's eternal punishment. Health, adequate money, and a happy family are wonderful blessings, but if you die without God's forgiveness, these blessings will be useless. Your greatest need is to know that God has forgiven your sins and that you are reconciled to the holy Judge of the universe.

The subject of knowing and experiencing God's forgiveness of our sins is so important that the enemy of our souls has worked overtime to sow seeds of confusion and error. Our modern pagan society often deals with the problem of guilt by telling us that we don't need to worry about it. This is crassly summed up in a bumper sticker that advises: "Screw guilt!" In other words, since guilt doesn't make me feel good about myself (which is my aim in life), when my conscience condemns me, tell it to take a hike. Rather than being ashamed about our sins, we now celebrate them under the guise of being "true" to ourselves.

Another ploy of the devil is to get us to invent a god who is not perfectly holy and to view ourselves as basically good people. This god is tolerant and loving. He couldn't possibly condemn a nice person like me! Of course, I'm not perfect, but compared to terrorists who blow up innocent women and children and perverts who abuse little children, I'm not so bad. So I can excuse my relatively "minor faults" and dismiss my need for God's forgiveness.

Satan also sows confusion about God's forgiveness under the guise of religion. All of the world's non-Christian religions, some branches of Christianity, and all of the cults that claim to be Christian teach that we must *do something*—fasting, prayer, penance, self-denial, good works—to help pay for our sins and to earn God's favor. Often religious people base their hope of forgiveness on the fact that they have faithfully performed certain religious rituals—going to mass, praying the rosary, observing Lent—for many years.

Several years ago, I went into the Orthodox Church in the main square of Timisoara, Romania. I noticed a woman on her knees, weeping and praying to an icon (a picture of a "saint"). She was dressed very immodestly and may have been a prostitute. Others nearby were lighting candles and going through other religious rituals. Meanwhile, a priest in his long robe strolled around, quietly observing these people who desperately needed to know what the Bible says about obtaining God's forgiveness. I wanted to grab him by his robe and scream, "Tell them how they can be forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ!"

As we have seen, the apostle Paul begins this powerful letter to the Ephesians with a long sentence (in Greek) that runs from verse 3 through verse 14, in which he blesses God for all of the spiritual blessings that He has freely given to us in Christ. In 1:3-6, he blesses God for the work of the Father; in 1:7-12, he unfolds the work of the Son; and, in 1:13-14, he shows the work of the Holy Spirit in our salvation. So, in verse 7, we begin a new section of this extended exclamation of praise. Paul is saying,

In Christ, we have redemption through His blood,
the abundant forgiveness of all our sins.

Before we consider the meaning of Paul's words here, I cannot over-emphasize the importance of these truths for your life. If you try to seek God's forgiveness in any way other than what Paul here states, you will waste your time and endanger your soul. If your hope of heaven rests on anything that you must do to earn it, you will hear, "I never knew you; depart from Me" on that great day. If, as a Christian, you do not understand and live daily in light of the truths that Paul here sets forth, you will not grow in godliness. You will be defeated by sin and guilt. So these truths are vital for a healthy Christian walk.

1. In Christ we have redemption.

“In Him” is literally, “in whom,” and refers back to Christ, whom Paul calls “the Beloved” in verse 6. Jesus Christ is God’s beloved Son, in whom He is well-pleased (Matt. 3:17). His perfect life and His substitutionary death on the cross obtained redemption for all whom God has predestined to adoption as sons (Eph. 1:5).

A. All of God’s blessings come to us in Jesus Christ.

As Paul puts it (2 Cor. 1:20), “For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; ...” Spurgeon succinctly put it (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pilgrim Publications], 37:310), “We have nothing apart from Jesus.... Our wealth of mercy is all in Christ.” Whatever spiritual blessing you need, God has given it to you “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

So, if you lack redemption or forgiveness of your sins, you will not find it anywhere except in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Trust in Him and you get it all! As Jesus proclaimed (John 7:37-38), “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” All you need is in Jesus Christ!

B. Redemption means that Christ paid the price to free us from the penalty and power of sin.

Leon Morris points out (*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* [Eerdmans], p. 11) that we use words such as “redeemer” or “redemption” as religious terms. “But when the man of the first century heard them he immediately thought in non-religious terms.” It brought to mind the common picture of a slave being purchased and then set free. Redemption meant *release from bondage by the payment of a price*. Every Gentile in the Roman world would have thought of this when he heard the word, “redemption.”

The word also has roots in the Old Testament, which refers to a “kinsman-redeemer.” For example, in the Book of Ruth, Naomi’s family property, due to debt, had fallen into other hands. Because she had lost her husband, she could not afford to recover it. Boaz was a near relative who had the right to redeem the property by paying the price, which he did.

In other Old Testament contexts, God is seen as the one who redeemed Israel from bondage in Egypt (Exod. 6:6). As you know, the Jews had to put the blood of the Passover lamb on the lintel and doorposts of their homes. It was a picture of our redemption through the blood of Christ.

A third Old Testament example of redemption was that God commanded the Jews to redeem the firstborn of their sons and of their farm animals (Exod. 13:12-13; Num. 18:15-17). In the case of sons and of some animals, it meant paying a price. In the case of other animals, it meant offering the firstborn on the altar. It was a picture of God's redeeming Israel from Egypt (Exod. 13:14-15). The main idea was the payment of a price to effect release from bondage or captivity.

Paul uses the word in a spiritual sense to refer to Christ's paying the price of our sin by His sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf. We were helplessly, hopelessly enslaved to sin and under God's just condemnation. But with His own blood Christ paid the penalty to release us from bondage. We now belong to Him.

And, while I cannot (for lack of time) develop the thought, the Bible is clear that we are now released not only from sin's penalty, but also from its power (Romans 6). For a believer to live in sin is to contradict the redemption that Christ secured for us.

Implicit in the biblical doctrine of redemption is that God did something for us that we could not do for ourselves. We were enslaved to sin and had no power or means to free ourselves. God did not need our help in paying the price. In fact, it is an insult to Christ if we think that we can add anything of our own to the great price that He paid. If someone offered you a gift that was worth thousands of dollars and you reached in your pocket to give him a penny to pay for it, you would insult him. Jesus graciously paid it all. We can do nothing except to receive His gift and then live every day in light of what He so graciously and generously did for us. Peter exhorts us to conduct ourselves in the fear of God and then adds (1 Pet. 1:18-19), "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 the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

Thus all of God's blessings come to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Redemption means that He paid the price to free us from the penalty and power of sin. Also,

C. We can know and enjoy our redemption right now.

Paul does not say, "In Him, someday we hope to be redeemed." Nor does he say, "We're working at obtaining redemption, but we don't know yet if we'll get it until we see whether our good works tip the scale." Rather, he says, "In Him, *we have* redemption." It is our current possession and experience. True, we await the future redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). The finalization of our redemption will not occur until Jesus returns (Luke 21:28). But, even so, right now "we have redemption" in Christ.

Knowing that should fill us with joy and gratitude and love for Christ. It should remove any fear of judgment and fill us with hope beyond the grave. It should motivate us to be holy. If you have trusted in Jesus Christ as the payment for your sins, God wants you to know and enjoy the fact that He has redeemed you from bondage to sin.

2. The redemption that we have in Christ is through His blood.

Jesus shed His blood to redeem us from our sins. Many are offended by the teaching that Jesus had to shed His blood to secure our redemption. But, you cannot get rid of the necessity of the blood of Christ and claim to believe in the Bible. Why does the New Testament insist on the necessity of Jesus' shed blood?

Romans 6:23 makes it clear, "The wages of sin is death...." If God declared that the wages of sin is death, but then eliminated the penalty, He would compromise His perfect justice. He would be like a judge who told a murderer, "You're forgiven; try not to do it again." We would be rightly outraged at such a miscarriage of justice. Justice demands the appropriate payment for the crimes committed. Hebrews 9:22 states plainly, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." This takes us back to Leviticus 17:11, where God explains, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement."

So Paul here uses the word blood to point us back to the Old Testament sacrificial system, all of which Jesus fulfilled when He offered Himself on the cross (see Heb. 10:1-18). Those animal sacrifices pointed ahead to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who by His death redeemed all whom the Father gave Him. Thus, God can be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).

So the issue is, either you trust in what Jesus Christ did on the cross as the full payment for your sins, or when you stand before God at the judgment, you must pay for your sins through eternal separation from God in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15). There will be no second chance (Heb. 9:27). That is why making sure that you have redemption through the blood of Jesus is your greatest need! Paul goes on to elaborate on what such redemption means:

3. Redemption through Christ's blood means that all of our trespasses are forgiven.

Redemption encompasses more than forgiveness, but Paul mentions forgiveness because it is the first and foundational thing to know and experience when you are redeemed. *Forgiveness* means loosing or letting someone go from what binds him. *Trespasses* is synonymous with “sins,” but the nuance indicates individual acts of sin, not sin in general. Paul wants us to know that our specific, shameful, embarrassing sins that loom up in our memories to condemn us are all forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ.

It is crucial for your Christian life that you understand and experience on a daily basis this liberating truth that God forgives all of your sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. In 2 Peter 1:5-8, Peter lists a number of virtues that you are to add to your faith so that you will be useful and fruitful in your walk with Christ. Then he adds (2 Pet. 1:9), “For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.” The devil knows this, which is why he is the accuser of the brethren. The saints overcame his accusations because of the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:10-11).

Here's how this works practically. You are a believer in Jesus Christ, but you have just sinned. You disobeyed a clear command in God's Word. Maybe it was anger or lust or foul language or stealing or whatever. The Holy Spirit convicts your conscience

through your knowledge of the Word that what you did was sin. So, you repent and confess your sin to God and appropriate His cleansing (1 John 1:9). So far so good!

But, then the enemy comes and whispers, "A fine Christian you are! Do you really think your sins are forgiven? Ha! You're not even saved! You're guilty and you know it. Forget all of this nonsense of being saved by grace!"

How do you answer him? It would seem that he is right. You claim to be a Christian and yet you deliberately, knowingly sinned against God. There is only one way to answer the devil when he accuses you: "You're right, Satan, I did sin. But my salvation does not rest on my sinless performance, but rather on the blood of Jesus that paid the price for my sin. I'm trusting in His shed blood and if His blood isn't adequate to acquit me, I am doomed. So the Lord rebuke you, Satan!" (Zech. 3:1-5.)

But, perhaps you're thinking, "This is fine for everyday, minor sins. But, my sins are too terrible and too repeated for God to forgive. Surely, I must do something to make up for or pay for the awful things I've done." "Not so!" says Paul.

4. Redemption through Christ's blood is according to the riches of God's grace, which He lavished on us.

Paul adds, "according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us," to show that there are no sins too great for God to forgive through the blood of Christ. This has always been God's appeal to repentant sinners. In Isaiah 55:6-7, the prophet calls, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Abundant pardon! Rich grace lavished on us!

The measure of God's forgiveness is not according to how much we flagellate ourselves or mourn over our sin, although we should mourn when we realize how we have spurned God's great love (Matt. 5:4). Rather, the measure of God's forgiveness is according to the riches of His grace, lavished on us (on God's riches, see Eph. 1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 16). Paul does not say, "*out of* the riches of His grace," but "*according to* the riches of His grace." If you go to

a multi-millionaire and ask for a contribution for a worthy cause and he gives you \$100, he has given *out of* his riches. But if he hands you a blank check and says, "Fill in what you need," he has given *according to* his riches.

The word "lavished" may be illustrated by ocean waves. They just keep coming and coming and coming. They never stop. God's forgiveness is like that for those who are redeemed through the blood of Jesus. If you have trusted Christ as your sin-bearer, Paul wants you to experience the extravagant, lavish undeserved favor of God in forgiving all of your sins. Do you experience this?

You may be thinking, "Steve, you're going too far! If you preach like this, people will go out and sin, knowing that they will be forgiven." If you thought that, I'm glad, because when Paul taught this same truth in Romans, he anticipated that response: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2). When you know that the Beloved Redeemer shed His own blood to secure your forgiveness, it binds your heart in love to Him. It makes you hate your sin and strive against it all the more.

Conclusion

Do you believe this: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us"? "Yes," you say, "I'm a Christian. I believe this." But, do you *experience* it personally? And, do you extend God's lavish grace and forgiveness to others?

One night in a church service God opened the heart of a young woman to respond to His call and believe on Christ as her Lord and Savior. She had a very rough past, involving alcohol, drugs, and prostitution. But, the change in her was evident as she experienced God's forgiveness. Over time, she became a faithful member of the church, and served by teaching young children.

It was not long until she caught the eye and heart of the pastor's son. The relationship grew and they began making wedding plans. But then the problems began. Many in the church did not think that a woman with a past such as hers was suitable for a pastor's son. The church began to gossip and argue about this matter.

So, they decided to have a meeting. Emotions heated up, tension increased, and the meeting was getting out of hand.

The young woman became very upset about all of the things being brought up about her past. As she began to cry, the pastor's son stood to speak. He said, "My fiancé's past is not what is on trial here. What you are questioning is the ability of the blood of Jesus to wash away sin. Today you have put the blood of Jesus on trial. So, does it wash away sin or not?" The whole church began to weep as they realized that they had been slandering the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (source unknown).

We sometimes sing the old hymn, "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Either that's true or it's not. If the blood of Jesus does not wash away all of our sins completely, then we're all in a lot of trouble, because we all have a lot of sins to deal with. If it only atones for minor sins, what good is that? "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us." Thank God that is true! Cling to it and live it each and every day!

Application Questions

1. Is there a proper place for remorse and mourning over our sins? When does it cross the line by muddying God's grace?
2. Many churches use guilt to control and motivate people. Is this a biblical approach? Why is grace a better motivator?
3. If God forgives all of our sins at the moment we're saved, why do we need to confess them to obtain forgiveness (1 John 1:9)?
4. Why does the true grace of God lead to holiness rather than to licentiousness? Why is it wrong to "tone down" grace for fear that people will shrug off sin?

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