

Redemption

Ephesians 1:3-14

As I reread this scripture and had an opportunity to study it I discovered that Paul talked more about our position of adoption than redemption. So let's talk about adoption and my Uncle Sonny. Sonny birth mother was my great aunt. She came to visit my grandparent, had Sonny, and when she returned home, Sonny became one of my grandparent's 14 children. No difference was made between the children, so none of them knew that he was adopted. He had all the rights and privileges of all the children including the rights of inheritance. All the children had heard rumor, but those were easy to dismiss. It was only when Sonny was drafted into the Army to fight in World War II that the truth of his birth was revealed. Naturally this made no difference to his siblings or parents as Sonny was a member of the family. Sonny and the family understood grace.

Our scripture has been a favorite text for those Christians who understand the gospel to be an affirmation of God's grace. From this perspective the gospel is not first about human beings, but about God and what God has done in Jesus Christ "before the foundation of the world." In the introduction to his commentary on this text, John Calvin describes Ephesians' first three chapters as "chiefly occupied in commending the grace of God":

Paul tells us of God's free election, our adoption, and our redemption; so that we may acknowledge that we are now called into the Kingdom of God because we have been appointed to life before we were born.

First, for theologians like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and Barth, Ephesians makes clear that redemption and adoption are statements about the

wonder of God's grace in Jesus Christ. It is above all else an affirmation that the God Christians know in Jesus Christ is gracious beyond the wildest reaches of their imaginations. Redemption, election and adoption are a part of the theological identity of Christians. It says something important about who God is and about we are who have freely and undeservedly received God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Second, redemption, election and adoption are about the sovereignty of God's will. Repeatedly this text affirms that God's redemption, election and adoption are rooted in the good pleasure and mystery of God's counsel and will (vv. 5, 9, 11). Our redemption and adoption are good news because they affirm that we who are in Christ belong to God, not because we are less sinful than other people or because we have done the right things, but for no other reason than God has chosen to be merciful to us. God's grace is not a response on God's part to what human beings have done, but that which precedes faith and is its source.

Third, God's redemption, election and adoption are always "in Christ," and Christ is "the looking glass" in which Christians should contemplate our redemption, election and adoption. What Christians know in Jesus Christ is that God's sovereign will is good. At the birth of Christ the angels announce God's goodwill to the world. The appropriate response to God's redemption and election are gratitude and praise. According to both Calvin and Barth, those who wonder if they are included in God's redemption, election and adoption should look not within themselves, but upon Christ. Those who look first at themselves and what they find in their own hearts and souls cannot help but be discouraged. If, however, they look not at themselves but at Christ, and if they see in Christ the grace and mercy of God, they should find assurance they are included in the promises of God's grace and mercy. If

redemption and election are "in Christ" that means Christ is the only one who is elect and that Christ alone is both the electing God and the elected human. If all are in Adam by virtue of their sin, so too all are in Christ by means of his grace.

Fourth, redemption and election remind Christians that we are adopted children of God. Those chosen by God in Christ belong to God not because of blood or family; rather, God "destined us for adoption" (v. 5). Our inheritance is utterly gratuitous. Our redemption and election are not rights but gifts. All those who have been justified by God's grace, according to the Westminster Confession of Faith, are "partakers of the grace of adoption." As adopted children we belong to God not by virtue of family or law, but merely by God's goodwill.

Fifth, God's redemption and election do not make Christians "special" in relation to other people, but calls us to specific tasks of serving God and neighbor. Because we are redeemed and elect in Christ, we are called not to privilege but to discipleship and to the suffering of the cross. Bonhoeffer got it right. To paraphrase him, when God calls someone, God calls that person to come and die.

Our redemption and election are the good news that God's grace in Jesus Christ precedes us, surrounds us, and sustains us, or, in the words of 1 John 4:19, "We love because [God] first loved us." **George W. Stroup**

Like my uncle, abundant blessings and glorious grace are lavished upon us, for God's own good pleasure. This is no capricious whim of God, but purposefully planned before the foundation of the world. God has adopted us as God's own children, made us to be God's own people, and has given us an inheritance in Christ. God has chosen us to be holy and blameless in love, forgiven and redeemed through Christ.

The focus is on God's actions. This is not our doing; it is all gift. There is nothing for us to do but "live for the praise of his glory" (v. 12). In the words of the Westminster Catechism, our "chief end" is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

Ephesians reminds us of God's love for us, and the flowing words of our passage envelop us with excessive, tender, richly abundant love. We are blessed *in Christ*, we are chosen *in Christ*, we are destined for adoption *through Christ*. *In Christ* we have obtained our inheritance, and our hope is set *on Christ*. This gift is a blessing for the community of Christ.

This passage offers a counter to the world's understanding of "worth." It isn't merely that we are somehow special, but rather that we have been taken up into something extraordinary and offered this gift to receive as our own. Like a pauper invited to take the place of a prince or princess, we have been invited to share in the riches of God's grace. God has accomplished all this on our behalf through Christ, so we might live as God's own children. In the words of the old hymn, "All things are mine since I am his! How can I keep from singing?" **Karen Chakoian**

This scripture is important because we all have situations that we assume to be hopeless and, instead, they are a part of the plan of God revealed in Christ for "all things."

The final two sentences in the passage (vv. 11-14) tell of the kind of life that we are to lead as people who know ourselves to be adopted, graced, and richly blessed with a massive inheritance of love. Paul says that this inheritance is our way of life. He called this way of life living to "the praise of his glory" (vv. 12 and 14). He said it is a journey "toward redemption as God's own people" (v. 14). Paul imagined the Ephesians and us living as a people known not for their praise of human institutions or idols or ideas but

for their joy in what Christ is doing to redeem aching souls and a suffering world. **Edwin Searcy**

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