

# Sovereign Redemption Applied

Ephesians 2  
January 7, 2018

Tonight we continue with our study of Ephesians, and I take aim at chapter two. Paul finished chapter 1 with a glorious prayer that his Ephesian readers would be able to comprehend the dimensions of Christ's Lordship and its benefit for us.

Of course there were no chapter breaks in the original letter, so the transition from the end of chapter 1 to the start of chapter 2 is smooth if we would but read it that way.

So when chapter 2 begins, Paul is already in motion, talking about the work of Jesus and its implications for believers. But here the focus of Christ's redemptive work is regeneration: the granting of spiritual life to the spiritually dead.

This is one of the clearest passages in all of Scripture regarding the means and the implications of salvation, namely, Who does the work of salvation and what happens *when* He does that work.

As with a number of other Pauline letters, Ephesians is divided rather neatly into two parts: chapters 1-3 are largely doctrinal, while chapters 4-6 deal with the application of the doctrine. This chapter lands squarely in the doctrine section with application to follow.

Nevertheless, I've entitled this message "Sovereign Redemption *Applied*" because we're going to be examining the application of Christ's redemptive work to sinners on both a small and on a big scale.

The chapter is neatly divided into two long paragraphs, which fit with our two main headings tonight.

In verses 1-10, we see "Redemption Applied to Sinners," or what I'm calling *Micro-redemption*.

In verses 11-22, we see "Redemption Applied to the Nations," or what I'm calling *Macro-redemption*.

To begin, I'm going to read Ephesians 2:1-10 before we examine Micro-redemption.

## MICRO-REDEMPTION

<READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10>

Now in this paragraph, I want us to consider...

### **The Objects of Redemption (2:1-3)**

*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body[a] and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

Paul is writing his letter to Christians; they are themselves redeemed, and for sake of their own faith and Christ's glory, he reminds them of their situation prior to their salvation.

Quite simply, they were *absolutely dead* to spiritual things, being dead in their sins. I'm not really sure that Paul could have used clearer or stronger language to express that they had absolutely no hand in their salvation whatsoever, but many evangelicals today may suppose that Paul is overstating the case a bit here. The trendy notion among many Christians today is that salvation is cooperative; God does his 99% of the job, we do the rest in showing up and receiving His gift. There's a difference between sickness and death.

In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the very first thing the narrator establishes is that Scrooge's business partner, Jacob Marley, was dead. The narrator says, "There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate."

Likewise, if we fail to see the spiritual deadness of natural men, we fail to marvel rightly at what God has accomplished in giving us spiritual life, and we ultimately fail to honor Him as we ought. If man can share any of God's credit for his salvation, then basically our salvation is not such a big deal, and men have cause to boast.

We, the redeemed were all once spiritually dead, haters of God, followers of the devil. Those outside of Christ are not only disinterested in righteousness, they're under the influence of the devil, as they follow the "prince of the power of the air."

And lest there be any confusion, Paul's indictment of mankind extends beyond the Gentiles of Asia Minor to include all of humanity: "...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh..." (v. 3) So we are included in this indictment.

### **The Fact of Redemption (2:4-6)**

*4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

Here then is the *statement* of what God has done. And we see much here about the character of God.

We see that God is rich in mercy.

We see that God loves us even when we sin.

We see that God is no tightwad when it comes to blessing His people.

While dead in our trespasses, God gave to his sheep new life. These are all ways to say the same thing.

Verse 6 is a bit tricky, and we won't take time to go into it right now, but it does have to do with our positional situation in Christ. What God has done for the Son He has done for us, as well, and we are now situationally above the spiritual powers he speaks of in verse 2.

Speaking plainly then, verses 4-6 tell us that God saved wicked sinners. In the verses that follow, we find out *why*, in The Purpose of Redemption. Look at verse 7.

### **The Purpose of Redemption (2:7-10)**

*7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

God saved us to show off “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” This is a comprehensive statement; what God purposed in our salvation is summed up here. He desired to show off for the cosmos and for the spiritual powers His gracious nature. This does not explain how God gets glory in the damnation of the wicked, but it does talk about the purpose behind salvation, which is Paul’s aim in these verses.

Paul wants his readers to fathom what God has done on their behalf. And He has gone to great length to showcase His grace in Christ.

Salvation is monergistic; there is one agent: God. He initiates and He gives us the ability and the interest to respond, and then to live differently in the world, showcasing the work of God in us. In verses 8-9, Paul plays out how that happens:

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

This represents what God has done in order to show “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

God gives us saving faith; it’s not a reward, it’s a gift. In His sovereign grace, God has actually prepared beforehand the good works in which we are enabled to walk.

But remember again the stated purpose in verse 7: “to show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

God saves us for Himself and for the expression of His glorious grace.

Now there will no doubt be some who suppose that this colors God as egomaniacal, or that it cheapens the value of man. Perhaps even you are thinking, “I’ve always been told that God saved me because He was crazy about me, and wanted a relationship with me so much that he gave His Son to make it happen.” Well, God saving us for His own glory’s sake does not take away from His love for us. Paul even speaks of God’s love in verse 4. But the greatest expression of that love *was* the bringing about of our salvation and the expression of His grace.

Further, if we are instruments used by God to showcase His grace, we can only say that diminishes the value of our salvation if we believe that showcasing God's glory is not a big deal.

In truth, God is great, and His glory must be expressed. Our glory is not as great as we think, and we would do well to gain some humility.

But the God of Scripture saved the Ephesian sinners, all by Himself, giving them (and us!) love and grace instead of what they deserve. Let's now take the helicopter up to 30,000 feet and look at Redemption Applied to the Nations, or *Macro-redemption*.

## **MACRO-REDEMPTION**

<READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22>

Now in this paragraph as well, I want us to consider the same three headings:

1. The Objects of Redemption (2:11-12)
2. The Fact of Redemption (2:13-15a)
3. The Purpose of Redemption (2:15b-22)

I think it's pretty easy to over analyze this paragraph and to get too far down into the weeds, supposing that it's an eschatological silver bullet for Covenantalists and Dispensationalists in their theological sparring matches. I think that's missing the point Paul's making. In fact, I think a child can understand what Paul's getting at: In Christ, salvation has been extended to the nations. The people of God comprise Jews and Gentiles alike. Where Gentiles were once strangers, they're now brothers. Where Israel was once a solitary voice to the nations, she is now joined by millions of adopted brothers, and Christ is the cornerstone of this building.

That's it. The people of God now include Jews and Gentiles, which has been God's plan all along, and it is for God's good and our glory. Let's watch Paul unpack this.

### **The Objects of Redemption (2:11-12)**

*11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated*

*from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

It's no secret that apart from Christ, the Gentiles were "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." They had no hope for salvation, and they hated God. And salvation has come to the Gentiles through the Jews.

Granted, Gentiles have always been a part of God's plan, and He's always aimed to extend salvation to the Gentiles. (We'll get to that in chapter 3.) And from Melchizedek to Rahab to the Ninevites, there are lots of Gentiles in the Old Testament who wind up on God's good side. It's no piece of news that Gentiles can be saved.

And now after the Cross and with the arrival of the Church age, the plan of God to extend salvation to the nations is really taking off. Paul is himself an apostle to the Gentiles, though he continues to have particular affection for his Jewish brothers.

Of course Paul's Ephesian readers were Gentiles living in Asia Minor, and they were now gloriously numbered with the redeemed Jews, to whom salvation came first.

### **The Fact of Redemption (2:13-15a)**

*13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances...*

This paragraph is seasoned with the gospel spices of *peace* and *reconciliation*. In Christ we are reconciled to God, and he has destroyed the hostility that once existed between Jews and Gentiles.

Now where men reject Christ today, this dividing wall of hostility remains. But by the blood of Christ, Paul's Ephesian readers (just like us!) have been "brought near." But this is different from the grafting into Christ that Paul speaks of elsewhere; this is more than simply the Gentiles being brought into the same spiritual building as the Jews; this is an entirely new structure!

We'll see that now in the following verses, and "The Purpose of Redemption."

### **The Purpose of Redemption (2:15b-22)**

*that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.*

God has done this to create one people of God, comprising Jews and Gentiles.

There is no room for hostility within the same body. And now, in Christ, there is one figurative body in place of the two Jewish and Gentile bodies.

And the Cross is the instrument of our reconciliation. Jewish and Gentile Christians both come near to God only by their having been redeemed. At the Cross Christ bought us and paid for our sins. It's the same for all believers.

*18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

When believers are united to God and empowered by the same Spirit, then there will necessarily be no division among them. The Spirit of God is never divided against Himself.

And this new building is not just a remodeling of the old one.

*19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

This is a new foundation and a common cornerstone. A cornerstone is laid in such a way as to give strength to the two connected walls. The cornerstone is Christ, and the two connected walls are Jews and Gentiles. They remain distinct parts of the same structure.

The deeper we drill, the more this illustration makes sense.

The macro effect then, is that the nation of Israel and the Gentiles are brought together in Christ, and the Gentiles enjoy blessings they never could have known before.

It must be said that God creating one new body does not mean He has forgotten or changed His mind about His distinct promises to the Jews under the New Covenant. He has created one new body without destroying either of the old ones; it's one new united structure with walls that retain their uniqueness. But like the adoptive children that we are, our identity is determined not by how we were born, but rather by who owns us. Like the Ephesian Christians Paul was addressing, we belong to God because of the redemptive work of Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thoughts have consequences and theology has implications. There's no doubt that Paul was trying to shepherd these Christians from afar, giving them lots of theology because they were still learning. And it seems to me that these thoughts would be particularly orienting.

And just how is it orienting? I think in at least three ways:

### **The doctrine of redemption humbles us.**

Lest we be inclined to believe that we have done anything meriting salvation, Paul lays us in the dust with the teaching that we are spiritually dead apart from Christ, completely incapable of any righteousness. We owe our salvation wholly to God. This too should make us grateful.

### **The doctrine of redemption energizes our evangelism.**

If God saves, then our job is to be faithful and get the gospel out there. The outcome is His.

### **The doctrine of redemption helps us understand God's purposes.**

There is a purpose to everything that God does, and our redemption is no exception. God has a purpose to showcase His glory in our salvation.