

HOW TO HANDLE REGRET

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Do you struggle with regret? Do you find yourself longing for freedom and forgiveness for the injury and pain you may have caused to others? Is it even possible for you to know freedom from your past and the mistakes you keep committing in the present? Do you ever wonder if God can truly forgive you? Today we will explore an over-arching theme in God's Word, namely, redemption. As a result of what we learn, today could be a day of liberation for you.

I. INTRODUCTION:

One of my all-time favorite Christian thinkers, Blaise Pascal, once wrote: *"All of man's miseries comes from one thing, which is not knowing how to sit quietly in a room."*

A. Pascal contends that one of the primary reasons why we keep ourselves so terribly busy or diverted in the way we conduct our lives is because we do not want to face the larger challenges, problems, and questions of life. Thus, we distract ourselves with activity after activity, keeping ourselves preoccupied with trivialities, pursuits, work, pleasures, and just *"down right"* busyness with perhaps lots and lots of good and noble things. But sometimes our greatest enemy is not what is evil, but what is good. For what is good can keep us from what is best.

B. But those challenges, problems, and questions we attempt to ignore or suppress can be *"weighty."* For example, no matter how hard we have

tried, we have certain dreams that we know will never materialize. We can't seem to find lasting fulfillment no matter the hobby, job, location, relationship, or charitable activity. We are disappointed with our lives in ways we never anticipated. Our spouse did not bring the happiness we were looking for; our children have terribly hurt us with each costly mistake. Happiness seems to elude us no matter how many successes we have gained under our belt.

The Problem of Regret:

C. But one particular problem or better yet, a haunting, that definitely pushes us to keep ourselves busy is that of regret. In those quiet moments, perhaps when we are tired, thus not able to keep those fortifications up, our mind becomes preoccupied with past memories. Our thoughts draw up past scenes or event involving certain conversations, images, and emotions...people we have loved and people who have loved us. Family members, old friends, colleagues, and folks who we used to laugh with, share life with, care for, and love, have been hurt because of what we have done. As we see their faces and hear their voices in our minds and think about the destructive role we have played in whatever the situation was, the feelings of regret return and the blows of anxiety or shame hit us hard and repeatedly like waves on the sea wall.

D. Maybe our regret involves our parents, our siblings, our marriages, best friends, or even our children. Words that should have never been said or heard have come out of our lips. We said things without thinking them out. We did not consider how our words, tone, and attitude affect the lives of others. We allowed our emotions to fly out of control and it generated some really painful, powerful scenes.

E. Perhaps they are even unethical agreements, under-table deals, or partnerships that should have never been forged. We have hurt people, fractured them, and in some cases, we may have even ruined them in ways that for them, in view of their perspective, recovery seems impossible. And from all these feelings, reactions, and pain we have made our homes, our jobs, our neighborhoods, and even places where we worship and serve look more like a war zone than a haven for those searching for healing and hope in a world that is already filled with horrific loss, turmoil, and tragedy. People are looking for someone or something to believe in and they are not consistently seeing it in us!

F. So, we sit there in that quiet room or lay there in our beds, with tears coming down our faces, shaking our heads from side to side so wishing we could go back in the change the past. But what is done is done! We can't change the past. Even if we were to attempt to face those people we have wronged, it once again brings up certain "baggage" we don't really want to face. Consequently, we talk ourselves out of pursuing reconciliation, rationalizing to ourselves with comments like, "*there is too much water is under the bridge*" or "*Things can never be where they once were -so why try!*"

G. But instead of grabbing that TV remote to divert our attention, searching for our I-phone to text a friend who will make us laugh, surf the latest instagrams, or check out the new releases on Netflix, consider this... Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the one who entered into time and space, offers another solution to our regrets, to the sadness we repress inside, the disappointments we try to keep hidden, and the losses we have caused. He offers redemption!

Transition:

H. Therefore, let us take to time to explore what the Bible says about one of the most beautiful and over-arching truths or doctrines in all of Scripture, namely, *redemption*. At the end we will discover three related truths about redemption that should impact our attitudes, our every-day decision-making, and even those quiet moments when the hauntings of our past seek to be painfully entertained.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF REDEMPTION:

A. What does redemption actually mean? Whether one examines the biblical Hebrew or Greek, you come to discover that the word “redemption” essentially carries the same meaning. In his phenomenal work, *Sin, Savior, and Salvation*, Dr. Robert Lightner, defines redemption as “*freedom by the payment of a price.*”¹ Dr. Donald K. Campbell puts it this way, “*The concept of deliverance from some type of bondage on the basis of the payment of a ransom is called redemption.*”²

B. Ah! But what significance would the word “*redemption*” have from Jewish context during the time period of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ? Well, I suspect a certain historical Mosaic richness would immediately emerge. For example, consider Exodus 13 where we have Jews mandated to obey the “the law of the firstborn.” Therefore, let’s take our Bibles and turn to **Exodus 13:1-2; 11-16.**

C. According to Hebrew Bible, both property and life could be redeemed by a certain payment. In other words, once the Israelites entered into the Promised Land, every firstborn son and male animal were to be dedicated to the Lord. Interestingly, even donkeys were to be redeemed. Why? Donkeys were considered to be ceremonially unclean animals (Lev. 11:2-4).

¹ Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, Savior, and Salvation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 117.

² *The Theological Wordbook: The 200 Most Important Theological Terms and their Relevance for Today*, eds. Don Campbell, Wendell Johnston, John Walvoord, & John Witmer (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 290.

Thus, they could not be sacrificed, but they could be redeemed, that is, bought with a price. So, lambs were sacrificed even in the place of donkeys! Now, I've met a few lambs in my life. But I've also met some donkeys. Even the donkeys, like me, have worth! Since human sacrifice is totally unacceptable, the firstborn were also to be redeemed.

C. Why the need for this law of redemption for the firstborn male and animal? It was to serve as a powerful reminder, a teaching lesson, how God historically and dramatically redeemed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. But in particular the law of the firstborn highlights the events surrounding the 10th plague here in the struggle between Moses and the Egyptian Pharaoh.

D. Let's step into Jewish and Egyptian history and recount this historical act of redemption. Moses, a Jew, but Egyptian born, is commissioned by God to demand that the Israelites be released from Egyptian bondage so that His people may be free to worship the one True God. They would be emancipated! Experience equality! Be free to worship Him! The Israelites have been slaves for 400 years in Egypt. But the Pharaoh resisted Moses, and ultimately God, at every turn. Thus, God sent a total of 10 plagues. Remember the first 9 plagues?

1. Turned the Nile River into blood;
2. Filled the Egyptian lands with frogs;
3. God Sent gnats;
4. Flies swarmed all over everyone;
5. Disease appeared on the farm animals;
6. People broke out in boils;
7. Egypt faced its worst storm ever in Egypt;
8. Hoards of locusts descended on them; the sky looked black;

9. Egypt was enveloped in darkness for 3 days.

But even after the first nine plagues, the Pharaoh refused to let God's people go. Isn't that amazing! No matter how strong the evidence and the resultant consequences of seeing God's power at work all around them, they can still refuse to listen, trust, and obey God. Are we so different from Ramses? I try to pray everyday that He would open my eyes to see what I too often fail to see; to give an unquenchable passion for God and a grievous burden for those who do not know Jesus; to be abandoned unto God.

E. As a result of the Pharaoh's refusal to listen, trust, and obey, God sends the 10th plague.

Listen to these words from Exodus 11:1: ***The Lord had spoken to Moses. He had said, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you and your people go. When he does, he will drive you completely away.***

F. But before Moses departed Pharaoh, Moses gave him a final warning in Exodus 11:4-8: *Moses said, "The Lord says, 'About midnight I will go through every part of Egypt. **Every oldest son in Egypt will die.** The oldest son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, will die. The oldest son of the female slave, who works at her hand mill, will die. **All of the male animals that were born first to their mothers among the cattle will also die.** There will be loud crying all over Egypt. It will be worse than it's ever been before. And nothing like it will ever be heard again. But among the people of Israel not even one dog will bark at any man or animal.' Then you will know that the Lord treats Egypt differently from us. All of your officials will come and bow down to Me. They will say, 'Go, you and all of the people who follow you!' After that, I will leave."*

G. Every firstborn son and every firstborn male animal would die because the Pharaoh and his followers refused to listen to God.

H. But interestingly, while God was about to judge the Egyptians who refused to listen, trust, and obey, He does something very different for the Israelites. In order to be protected from this 10th plague, Moses reports in Exodus 12:21-24:

Then Moses sent for all of the elders of Israel. He said to them, “Go at once. Choose the animals for your families. Each family must kill a Passover lamb. Get a branch of a hyssop plant. Dip it into the blood in the bowl. Put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you can go out the door of your house until morning. The Lord will go through the land to strike the Egyptians down. He’ll see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe. He will pass over that house. He won’t let the destroying angel enter your homes to kill you. Obey all of these directions.” - Exodus 12:21-24a:

1. Take a lamb (Exodus 12:1,3);
2. A male, without any flaws (Exodus 12:5);
3. Kill the lamb on the 14th day (Exodus 12:6);
4. Put the blood on the door of the house where you eat the lamb. (Exodus 12:7);
5. Eat the lamb. The animal was to be roasted whole with bitter herbs over an open fire, not boiled and not eaten raw. Extra food should not be kept as leftovers but should be burned. (Exodus 12:8-10);
6. Stay inside your house until morning (Exodus 12:22);
7. Do not break any bones of the lamb (Exodus 12:46);
8. I will pass over (Exodus 12:12,13).

Consider this: When God carried out this judgment of death to kill the first born, every house where the blood was applied, God passed over. One scholar put it this way,

“God had been gracious with Pharaoh. He had given him many opportunities to let the Israelites go, but Pharaoh refused every time. God said that He would judge the Egyptians, and He did just that.... On the other hand, the Israelites experienced the Lord’s kindness because they believed in Him. When He came in judgment, wherever He saw the blood applied, He passed over. The firstborn lived - but only because the lamb died. The Passover lamb died in the place of the firstborn.”³

I. But keep two things in mind. First, this is not the first time Egyptians saw death of children. It was the Egyptians who murdered Israelite baby boys by throwing them into the Nile River. And second, Israelites were not the only ones who left. The Bible makes it clear that “other people” went with them, namely, Egyptians, and perhaps other ethnic groups.

J. Egypt’s firstborn sons were slain in judgment with the 10th plague. But the Israelite’s firstborn were spared because they were redeemed by payment with a Passover Lamb. Therefore, this act of redeeming one’s firstborn in Exodus 13 served as a teaching lesson for every generation of a historical event whereby God redeemed His people and formed them into a nation unto His glorious self.

³ John Cross *Stranger on the Road to Emmaus* p. 123.

III. SIMEON'S MOMENT WITH HIS REDEEMER:

A. But the historical richness of “redemption,” does not end with a Mosaic Law. For a Jew who lived in Jerusalem during the early portion of Jesus Christ’s life, the word “redemption” could have conjured up a particular prophecy, an event, a certain news people have been waiting and longing to hear that was beginning to be proclaimed from the Temple.

B. It was a typical day at the Temple. People were bringing their firstborn males in fulfillment of Exodus 13. This event is significant for each family and to God, but not unique to see at the Temple. But on one particular day, one family of three had journeyed from Bethlehem to Jerusalem; it was about a 5 miles in distance...going up! There they were, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, Jesus’ legal father, and 40 day old Jesus. But this day took an unexpected turn. **Luke 2:22-35** explains what happened!

Luke 2:22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Luke 2:25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 29 “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word;

30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation

31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.”

Luke 2:33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

C. Just try to capture the moment! Simeon is holding his own Savior! His redeemer! His God! His King! Even Anna, a widow who served God with fastings and prayers night and day, when she saw what was taking place between Simeon, Jesus, Joseph, and Mary, she gave thanks to God and spoke of Jesus Christ to all those who were looking for the redemption of Israel (Luke 2:38).

D. Sure enough, some time around 30 AD, Jesus Christ fulfilled what Simeon and Anna predicted, when His own people, His fellow Jews, demanded that they crucify Him...when the Romans, who new He was innocent, nailed Him to the Cross. These people nailed the One who Knew No Sin to a Cross!

E. But this payment had to be done. In fact, this is the only way freedom could come for any of us predicted in Isaiah 53:6b **“And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”** The One who knew no sin became sin for us; **“He was led as a lamb to the slaughter”** (Isaiah 53:7c). Thus, this consecrated firstborn, this unblemished Lamb of God, the God-Man, and our Immanuel, died on the cross to pay the price required to ransom anyone who is willing to believe. This is why God the Father sent His beloved Son! He loves us so much that He sent his only begotten Son so

that we would not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Thus, Isaiah 53:10 records, ***“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He has put Him to grief.”*** The Jews killed Christ! The Romans killed Christ! We killed Christ (because of our sinfulness)! God the Father killed Christ! He sent His Son to substitute Him in place of us!

Even Jesus clearly knew what his mission was when he said in the Gospel of Mark 10:45: ***“For even the Son of Man did not come be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*** For God the Father, it cost Him His Son on our behalf. For the Son, it cost Him everything on our behalf. For you, it cost you nothing. You are simply called to believe!

E. The Apostle Paul also puts it very plainly in Romans 3:23-25:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Rom. 3:24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

F. I am always reminded of Malcolm Muggeridge’s statement when I read vs. 23. *“The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact.”* If you look closely at verse 24 you see the word, “redemption.” This particular Greek word for redemption, *“apolutruseos,”* refers to the act of buying back by paying a ransom price. Now, this word in the Greek is in the genitive case, meaning it is possessive. In other words, redemption can only come from Christ for Christ is the only one who can offer it; redemption properly belongs to Him. I love how St. Augustine put it in his *Confessions*, *“You are my Lord, because You have no need of my goodness.”*

G. No other can freely, freely offer such a gift! Christ paid the ransom price with his own blood, freeing us from the demands of the law and its

curse on sin to become the children of God (3:13, 4:5). By paying the penalty of all of our sins, past, present, and future, through His death, Jesus frees us from our sin and transfers His righteousness to those who believe in Him.

h. Just a little earlier in vs. 22 of the same chapter, that is, chapter 3, Paul writes that we are declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ to all (Jew and Gentile) and on all who believe. Why? Because we all sinful. In fact, in Titus 2:14 Paul writes, ***“Christ redeemed us from all wickedness.”*** Galatians 3:13 states that Christ ***“redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”*** Ephesians 1:7 states, ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins”*** In Romans 8:23, ***“We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”*** (Romans 8:23; cf. Eph. 4:30). Interestingly, our redemption also includes a future blessing, namely, the deliverance of the body from its present frailties.

III. THREE RELATED TRUTHS ABOUT REDEMPTION:

A. So, in sum, if we take all of these insights from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament together (along with other insights as seen in Boaz being the kinsman-redeemer on behalf of Ruth in the Book of Ruth), we discover three related truths about redemption:

1. When you are redeemed, you are unshackled from your past. Just like the Jews who were released from Egyptian bondage, you are free! Jesus Christ, the Son of God liberated you! Can't ask for a better liberator than God Himself!
2. When you are redeemed, you are released from your mistakes. God knows everything about you! All your secrets, your imaginations, your words and actions both in public and private. Jesus takes it all! Jesus says, ***“It is finished.”***

3. When you are redeemed, you are unconditionally secured in God's love forevermore! He purchased you! You are not for resale even if you think you are a piece of junk. Why? You now belong to Him!

IV. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

- A. When you are facing those quiet moments and the hauntings of regret begin to emerge, instead of diverting yourself into trivialities or busyness, behold your Savior! Your past is redeemed; your presence makes sense, and your future secure!
- B. While your past can't be changed God has changed you and is changing you and will continue to change you! You are now free! Free to love Him! Free to Serve Him! Free to reflect His beauty in the choices you make, the values you embrace, and the pleasures you pursue.
- C. But if you do not know Jesus Christ, know this. Because of what Jesus has done for you, it is no longer a sin question, but a Son question. Will you not receive Jesus Christ as your Savior? All you have to do is receive Jesus Christ as your Savior in the open arms of faith; He is the Son of God who died on the cross for your sins and who rose bodily from the dead. And if you will do that, right now, I suspect afterwards you will begin to sing from out of your heart, soul, mind, and strength something like this:
- D. *Amazing love! How can it be! That thou, my God, wouldst die for me? Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night; Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee. My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and*

*followed Thee. Amazing love! How can it be! That thou, my God, wouldst die for me?*⁴

V: CONCLUDING CHARGE:

Since you have been redeemed, that is, purchased by Jesus Christ from the judgment of sin and eternal death by His substitutionary atonement on the cross, seize Christ because He has seized you. Seize Him in the daily grind of your life! Seize Him in the choices you make, the values you embrace, and the pleasures you pursue!

⁴ Lyrics by Charles Wesley, *Amazing Love: How Can It Be*, 1738.