

"Is Christianity a Crutch?"

"Christianity is a crutch for the weak and helpless." How many of us have heard that charge? How do we respond to it? We'll find our answer by studying the biblical concept of redemption. Throughout the Bible, God is called our Redeemer. But what does that mean and why does it matter? What does Christianity, and redemption in particular have to offer to those who don't feel weak and helpless?

Is Christianity a Crutch?

- Has anyone ever said to you "Christianity is a crutch for the weak?"
- How do you respond?

- Answer that question from Isaiah
 - o something different – just 1 word
 - o Read Isa 44:6 from last week
 - o word: Redeemer – used as a title for God **13 times** in Isaiah
 - o Redeem – verb form used **12 times** in Isaiah
 - o Redeem, Redeemer, Redemption – encounter throughout Bible – central to our understanding of who God is – **He is our Redeemer**
- **But what does that actually mean?**

- **Start with OT - Redeem**
 - o Two primary Heb words: *ga'al* and *padah* – overlap in meaning
 - o Fairly common terms in Jewish society, especially in the context of families.
Redemption was what you did for the poor and destitute in your family:
 - if a poor relative sells his house to pay his debt: to redeem means...
 - if a poor relative becomes a debt slave... to redeem means...
 - if your close relative died & left behind a childless widow...
 - story of Ruth – poor & vulnerable – Boaz: kinsmen redeemer
 - o Helps us get a sense of basic idea: "**to deliver or liberate someone from a desperate situation.**"
 - May involve payment of a price; may not
 - Either way, comes from a 3rd party who graciously steps forward
 - o **Throughout OT, primary one doing the redeeming is God**
 - o And the **most common desperate situations** He redeems from:
 - **slavery** – primary example: Egypt
 - **Dt 7:8** – redeemed Israel by His mighty hand – thru 10 plagues
 - **enemies – Psalm 106:10**
 - **threat of death – Job 5:20**
 - **exile**
 - primary situation addresses in ch40-55 of Isa
 - To Babylonian exiles, God promises... **Isa 48:20**

- Redemption: a common activity of God throughout OT

- called "Redeemer" because in the business of redeeming those in need
- **Notice from definition – redemption explicitly for those in "desperate situations"**
 - in Bible, only needed by those who are weak, poor, desperate
- Back to charge against Christianity – it is a crutch for the weak?
 - sounds like it from "redemption"
- So what about those like my dad years ago – not weak, not desperate
 - not slaves, not poor, not exiles, not about to die
 - Do they have any use for Christianity? Any need for redemption?
 - To answer that, turn to NT – goes deeper into our need for redemption

According to the NT, what does God offer to redeem us from?

1) God offers to redeem us from the penalty of sin (turn to Rom 3)

- *while turning:* back to Isaiah – gives us a hint of this redemption
- **Isa 44:22** – redemption from sin
 - they had committed serious sin = idolatry
 - God promises to redeem them from the guilt of that sin
 - that was the primary issue for the Israelites – led to the exile in first place
 - exiles because of their sin, not because of Babylon's power
 - ultimate problem that had to be fixed for them to experience freedom
- A problem we all share: Read **Rom 3:23**
 - fall short – disobey the standard of God's glorious righteousness
 - No surprise when you study biblical concept of sin
 - sin is... that includes...
 - By that definition, everyone has sinned
 - from my experience, most Americans would agree
 - probably define it differently – just stealing, lying, etc
 - but agree that all have done bad things, sinned
 - But to most people, that doesn't seem like such a big deal
 - We're not murderers, drug dealers
 - So what if we sin here & there?
- To answer that: Read **Rom 1:18**
 - penalty for any & all sin = the wrath of God
 - review – wrath = God's righteous anger poured out upon sin
 - wrath = God's justice in action
 - He is the perfectly just judge – He must render justice
 - and that wrath will not be mild or temporary – Read **Rev 21:8**
 - lake of fire = place where God's wrath poured out for eternity
 - This is a reality none of us want to think about
 - too painful – turns our stomachs
 - But the inescapable teaching of the Word – all who continue to reject God will spend an eternity under His wrath in lake of fire
 - Not what God wants for anyone!! 1 Tim 2
 - No one goes there because God lacked love or compassion for them
 - But He must be just & justice demands wrath upon sin
- So my dad...
 - did not need redemption from exile, impending death, slavery to a person
 - needed redemption from something far more serious – the wrath of God!
 - all human beings are in desperate need of that redemption
- Thank God, my dad found that redemption more than 30 yrs ago thru faith in Jesus

- Read **Rom 3:23-26**
 - o **v23** – the bad news
 - o v24 – the good news of the gospel – Jesus provided redemption as a free gift
 - redemption brings justification
 - o v25-26 – Jesus secured our redemption through propitiation
 - propitiation = to satisfy the wrath of God – He took our punishment in our place
 - o allows God to righteously declare sinners “righteous” – love & justice win!
 - o we receive this gift of redemption simply by faith (v26)
- Summarize – this is the first and most important “desperate situation” that we need redemption from
- But not the only one – Not only bondage to penalty of sin...

2) God offers to redeem us from the power of sin (turn to John 8)

- About to read Jesus’ teaching concerning sin – flies in the face of our cultural beliefs
- **Read Jn 8:31-33**
 - o Audience believes they have no need of the redemption He’s offering
 - o “We are free; we’re not slaves!!”
- **Jesus’ replay – Read Jn 8:34** – Yes you are a slave! You are not free!
- **Important distinction – “sins” vs “sin”**
 - o “sins” (plural) – disobedient actions, words, thoughts, motives
 - serious, but actually a symptom of something even more serious
 - o “sin” (singular) – sin personified as a master who rules over us
 - Not saying that when you commit sins you become a slave of sin
 - You are and have always been a slave, that’s why you commit sins
- **Paul’s point in Eph 2:1**
 - o all humans born “dead in trespasses” = powerless to resist sin – can’t help but sin – sinners by nature from birth because slaves of sin from birth
- **Inherited that slavery from our earliest ancestor: Adam – Read Rom 5:12**
 - o thru Adam, sin entered the human race – as a result, we commit sins
 - o We as a species are bent towards sin
- **That’s why Paul says: Rom 3:10-12**
 - o all are bent towards sin – sin taints/ruins everything we do, even the outwardly good stuff
- Senior English in HS
 - o “Are human beings basically good or basically bad?”
 - o Self-evident to me – basically bad
 - o Not obvious to everyone else! I was the only one to voice that opinion
 - o Everyone else: of course we’re basically good! Just need a little help; a little education to point us on our way
- Optimistic! But not biblical! Scripture is clear – we are all basically evil
 - o **Depravity** – result of the fall, every area of our lives tainted & bent towards sin – doesn’t mean we’re as bad as we could be
- So as Americans, we’re not slaves of another nation – worse: our master lives within us! A cruel master!
- We are in desperate need of redemption – emancipation
- Freedom is provided by Jesus – Read **Rom 6:6-7**
 - o Sin legally “owns” you till the day you die
 - o But the moment you trust Jesus, you die! Joined to His death
 - o Result: sin loses its hold on you – no longer bound to its power
 - o Still tempted by sin – bent that way

- But no longer have to obey – can say “no” to sin and “yes” to God

3) God offers to redeem us from bondage to Satan

- **2 Cor 4:4**
 - “god of this world” – God allowing him to rule
 - rules by blinding unbelievers
 - doesn’t mean they’re ignorant...
 - but can’t grasp most important truth – gospel
 - He holds them in bondage & directs them towards sin
- We are born into that bondage
- Nothing humans can do about it – he’s far stronger than us – most don’t even realize they’re slaves!
- Only one way of escape – **Col 1:13-14** – “kingdom of darkness” = Satan’s kingdom

4) God offers to redeem us from bondage to death

- **Psalm 49:7-9** – no man can redeem himself from death – inescapable
- **Psalm 49:15** – but God offers to free us
- **Rom 8:23** – our future hope – final stage of redemption = resurrection
- Humans fear death – but we have no need to fear

Back to the question – when someone says, “Christianity is a crutch for the weak” – What do you say in return?

- Yes it is! And thank God it is because I need a crutch & you need a crutch!
- Not “a” crutch; “the” crutch – no other hope for humanity
- Less a crutch, more a **defibrillator!**
 - Not like we’ve sprained our ankle – we’re stone cold dead without God’s help!

So is Christianity only for the weak & helpless? YES – BUT THAT INCLUDES ALL OF US

- slaves to sin and Satan, destined for death, and in danger of the eternal wrath of God