

# The Love of God

 Romans 5:6-8

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 November 2, 2014

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Let's turn to Romans 5:1-11, the results of justification once more. I hope you are taking some time to ponder and marvel at some of what we presently possess as a result of our justification. These are great positional truths to meditate on, they give you the spiritual strength you need when the world is sucking the life out of you; you're able to go back and recall all that you have by virtue of being declared righteous through faith. What are some things that we have? First, in 5:1 we have "peace with God." You know what you can do with that? No matter who your enemy is you have peace with God. Go back to that, who cares about Joe Blow down the street who's angry at you for no real reason. You have peace with God. Second, in 5:2 we have "access to grace." Think about having access. You can go right into the throne room of God and make petitions for whatever you need. There's no one at the door saying, do you have an appointment? The door says "walk-in's welcome." You can walk right into His throne room and make your requests before the God of the universe. Third, in 5:2 we have "a standing in grace." Think about that. You have a standing in grace and you always have that standing. You don't have to worry that you're going to lose that standing. You are eternally secure. You can rest; you can relax. You're standing isn't based on your performance. It's based on Jesus Christ's performance. And therefore you always have a standing in grace. Fourth, in 5:2 we "exult in the hope of the glory of God." In other words, we eagerly look forward to the future millennial reign of Christ. What does this mean? This means history is going somewhere. There is a goal to history. It's not just random. There is a goal, an end point and that end point is the millennial reign of Christ with the glory of God filling the earth. And guess what? That's where we're going. We're going to be in that kingdom. So what does that mean? It means that what's happening now in the world, what's happening now in our nation, what's happening now in your life, has a purpose. Life is not a box of marbles or a box of chocolates. Life is defined by God's purpose for history and your place in it. Fifth, in 5:3, we also "exult in our tribulations." How can we do this? Because we know where history is going. We know that we must go through many tribulations to enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22). It's part of the training that is necessary to develop perseverance and perseverance to produce proven character and proven character that produces hope, hope for the future reign of Christ in the millennial kingdom! You're a part of God's training program to

get in shape now for reigning in His kingdom then. So we don't moan and groan in hard times, we leap for joy because He's got us on a training program designed to make us into something that we could never dream of becoming left to ourselves. It's something like an athlete in training. He might not like lifting weights, it may be hard, but what's the slogan? No pain, no gain. So ultimately, if he can change his attitude by keeping focused on the fact that in the end he's going to be one of the greatest pass receivers or running backs ever in history, then he rejoices in the road to getting there. It's not all drudgery because there's a terminus, a goal, a point to it all. Take that idea over to our tribulations. They're getting us ready to be people we could never imagine being. And throughout the process God is flooding our hearts with His love through the Holy Spirit whom He has given to indwell us. This is the sixth result; we have the indwelling Holy Spirit. He's been given to us as a down payment of more to come and He constantly assures us through our afflictions, encourages us, reminds us through what we have come to know that our future in the kingdom is certain and He is at work in our lives preparing us for the coming kingdom reign.

Today in Romans 5:6-8 we come to one of the most important passages on the love of God in the NT. Having said that you can imagine that one of the observations we're going to make is that Romans 5:8 is the John 3:16 of Romans, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son of God that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life." Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The only element lacking is belief or faith but Paul has previously taught that truth many times in Romans 3:21-4:25. So Romans 5:8 is the John 3:16 of Romans and many of you will recall that as such it is used in the Roman Road way of salvation. People have historically used five basic references to lead someone to Christ from the Book of Romans; 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9-10 and 8:38-39. They use the verses in this out of order sequence and the reference in 6:23 is used wrongly because 6:23 is in the context of sanctification, not justification, so they misuse that one. And they also misuse the 10:9-10 one in that they often say you have to confess your sins to be justified and they interpret this as walking an aisle and confessing before men. But they do use Romans 5:8 correctly to show that Christ's death on the cross was a substitutionary death for us. In any case it's the John 3:16 of the Book of Romans. Second, Romans 5:6-10 uses four words to describe us when we were unbelievers and each word gets worse than the former. For example, in verse 6 it says we were **helpless** and then later in the verse we're not just helpless but **ungodly** and then in verse 8 he takes it one step further and says we were **sinners** and finally in verse 10 he goes so far as to say we were **enemies** of God. So we are in these verses described in progressively worse terms but all of them contrast our condition apart from the love of God. Third, Romans 5:6-8 teaches that the love of God is most clearly defined by His giving us Christ. The essence of His love is giving something to us that we did not deserve. Fourth, Romans 5:6-8 shows that Christ did not die for us because of any admirable quality in us or for any foreseen admirable quality in us. In other

words, His love is not conditioned on anything within us, but is unconditional, meaning the reason for His love for us rests wholly within Himself and has nothing to do with us. And if God's love was conditioned on something in us it wouldn't be anything more than human love. But it's not and so there is something unique about God's love. Fifth, Romans 5:6-8 uses the Greek preposition **for** three times to signify that the nature of His death was substitutionary. In verse 6, **Christ died for the ungodly**, in verse 7, **one will hardly die for a righteous man** and in verse 8 **Christ died for us**. Christ's death was for us. The Greek preposition is *υπερ* meaning "instead of, in the place of. And so three times Paul indicates that the death of Christ at its core is a substitution. He died for us. It's not like the liberals say that Jesus was a good moral example for us and shows us how to be sincere enough about our beliefs to die for our beliefs. No, Christ died for us. He took the penalty due us upon Himself and paid it in full. So the nature of Christ's death is primarily substitutionary. Sixth, if Christ died for us then Christ was not dying for His own sins. This will be elaborated on more fully in Romans 5:12-21, but it's important to point out now that Jesus Christ was sinless and as such was not under the penalty of sin and therefore had no cause of death residing within Him. He said, "No one can take my life from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord." No one could take His life because He was sinless and therefore not subject to death. If Jesus Christ had not laid down his life for us he would still be living and breathing and walking around, and yes, He'd be about 2000 years old. So He was sinless.

Having made those six observations let's look at the details starting in verse 6. Verse 6 is answering to the mention of "the love of God" mentioned in verse 5 which was poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." The pouring out is a perfect tense meaning it was poured out entirely all at one moment in time, when we had faith in Christ, and abides with us continually. Another way of saying that is to say that when the Holy Spirit came to indwell us at a moment in time shedding the love of God abroad in our hearts and He abides with us forever continuing to do the same. We have the love of God permeating our being through His indwelling presence.

Verse 6 is there to explain how this was and is accomplished and the central focus is the death of Christ. Paul says, **For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly**. Note the first term Paul used to describe us, **while we were helpless**. The Greek word for **helpless** is *ασθενης* and means "sickly, weak." As unbelievers we were "spiritual weaklings, sickly creatures." We weren't attractive to Christ. We were in really bad shape and in no condition to make ourselves well. We weren't even interested in being made well. We didn't realize how sickly we were. We didn't think we were in need of help. We thought we were fine, but we were helpless, sickly, weak spiritual beings. But at that time **Christ died for** us to make us well.

That is one of the strangest ideas in all of Scripture. Why would He - who knew no sin and we would say was spiritually strong - come to be weak for us? Why would He come to die for us? It's an idea that

doesn't make any sense if evolutionary thought is true. In evolutionary thought the core is survival of the fittest. Jesus Christ violates that concept. He is the fittest and yet He died voluntarily for the helpless, the weak. Tell me how that fits the evolutionary paradigm. The evolutionary paradigm is the opposite of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ shatters that paradigm.

Now the expression **at the right time Christ died for us** refers to "the appropriate time." Wuest says, it was "a strategic time, a time determined by a set of circumstances which make that particular point of time part of the efficient working of an action or set of actions." We would say there was something about that time that made the death of Christ on the cross the strategically appropriate time. In other words, 500 years before was not the right time and 500 years after was not the right time. Any other time would have been the wrong time. So what made that **the right time**? What were the set of circumstances that made this particular time right for **Christ to die**? First, the prophecy of Dan 2 and 7 which prophesied that Messiah would come during the fourth kingdom of Daniel. The four kingdoms prophesied by Daniel were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Rome was the kingdom at the time Christ died. It was therefore **the right time** according to the prophecy of Dan 2 and 7. Second, the prophecy of Dan 9 where the angel Gabriel revealed to Daniel that from the decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem there would be 483 years and then Messiah would be crucified. Since that decree went out in 444BC then the 483 years expired in AD33, the very year Christ died. So again, because of the prophecy of Dan 9 and the 483 years it was **the right time**. Those are the two chief things that made it the right time. There are a number of additional developments that contribute to making it **the right time**. First, the system of Judaism was bankrupt. It had no answers for life. The Jewish people were looking for something more than the religion of the scribes and Pharisees. They saw that system as hypocritical. They were looking for a Messiah and this is evidenced by a high Messianism in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century. Thus with the system of Judaism being bankrupt it was the right time to give the answer. Second, the system of Greek philosophy was also bankrupt. Plato and Aristotle had exhausted all attempts to find an answer from human reason. Everything that came after them was just a modification. Gentiles were still searching for an answer. They were seeking it in the mystery religions that were cropping up all over the Roman Empire. It was at that time that God sent the answer. Third, the elaborate system of Roman roads paved the way for easy travel and rapid propagation of the gospel. This too contributed to making it the right time. Finally, the widespread use of the Greek language throughout Rome to a multilingual culture made gospel communication possible across a wide spectrum of languages and cultures. For these six reasons it was **the right time** for Christ to die. All of these prophetic and additional factors made this the appropriate time according to divine strategy for His Son to die.

Note, secondly, in verse 6, that we were not only **helpless** when **Christ died for us** but we were also **ungodly**, not only sickly and uninterested in the Great Physician but also irreverent towards Him. The

Greek word **ungodly** *ασεβης* means "irreverent". It's the same word used in 1:18 and 4:5. In 1:18 Paul used the word to characterize the unbelieving world and state that they are the specific objects of "the (present) wrath of God" because of their "ungodliness." This present wrath turns them over to their own devices, to do that which they should not. In 4:5 Paul said that God "justifies the ungodly" to show that justification is by faith alone apart from any works. God justifies us not when we are godly but when we are ungodly. If that is so then justification is a legal declaration. Finally, here the word is used in 5:6 to refer to the kind of people for whom Christ died. The word basically means "irreverent." Moulton and Milligan say that it refers to those who arouse resistance to God as authority. In other words, they encourage people to resist God's authority. Peter used this word ungodly to characterize the world at the time of the Flood (2 Pet 2:5) and also to characterize the coming world at the time of the Tribulation (2 Pet 3:7). Christ died for us in this condition.

So verse 6 is again very strange. Christ didn't die for strong, moral people; He died for sick, ungodly people. What kind of a God is this? And what kind of Christ? What kind of love?

Also the end of verse 6 says Christ died **for** using the Greek preposition *υπερ* which means "instead of, in place of" and points up the substitutionary nature of Christ's death. Christ died instead of us, in our place. He had no reason to die residing within Himself. He was sinless. So He took our sin upon Himself.

Now verse 7 is a set up for verse 8. Verse 7 is the love of man, verse 8 is the love of God. And while both love they are of a distinct kind. Verse 7 is the love of man. **For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.** The word translated **though** in the NASB about mid-verse is an interpretation and not a translation. The word is *γαρ*, the same word used at the beginning of the sentence and translated **for**. There are not two men in view, one righteous and one good, but one man in view who is both **righteous and good**. "The thought of the verse is that "among men it is *scarcely* true that one will die even for a righteous and good man..." It's but an illustration but it shows that the nature of the death in view is a substitutionary death. The BKC says, "A person willing to **die for a righteous man** or **for a good man** obviously is offering himself as a substitute so that the righteous or good man can continue to live." The fact that the illustration is a substitutionary death definitely shows that Christ's death was in essence a substitution and not merely a good example or a good man dying for sincerely held beliefs. The reason He died was to take our place so that we could live. Also note the scarcity of this kind of love expressed among men. It is very rare for a man to die for a righteous and good man. Usually men don't do that. Usually men are devoted to self-preservation. But it does happen on occasion and when it does we see the greatest love that one man can have for another. Jesus said it this way, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." So what's the greatest love a man can have? Dying for a friend. Do men die for godless, wicked people? No. They might die for a friend, but a godless, wicked person they will not die

for? And yet that is what verse 8 is saying that Jesus Christ did for us! Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends; but Jesus Christ has a greater love than this, in that He laid down his life for his enemies. This is a different kind of love here entirely. Jesus Christ didn't come to die for His friends. Jesus Christ didn't have any friends to die for. We were His enemies and while His enemies He died for us.

So Verse 8, **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** Now here we're talking about the love of God and when we talk about the love of God we draw our Creator-creature distinction and our acronym SRJLOOOIE. The S stands for Sovereign, God is sovereign; the R stands for Righteous, God is Righteous; The J stands for Just, God is just; the L stands for Love, God is love. And each of these qualities is qualitatively different than what we have as creatures. (incomprehensibility) God is Sovereign and man has choice; choice is something similar to sovereignty but it's not identical, it's analogous; same thing with righteousness. God is Righteous and man has a concept of standards, what's right and what's wrong, but it's not identical to God's standards for what is right and wrong, it's a finite reflection of it. And so this goes on for each attribute and when we say God is loving we say that man has love and we just saw that he has love in verse 7, but man's love is qualitatively different. It's not that God's love is just higher on the scale than man's love. God is not greater than us by degree; God is greater than us in kind. So what we are seeing here is the infinite love of God in contrast to the finite love of man.

Now think about this, here we are called the third name, **sinners**, and this word means we don't measure up to His standard of righteousness. There is none righteous, no not one. So we fail to measure up. I fail, you fail, we all fail and we already saw this in 1:18-3:20, we are all under sin. And yet God loved us. So if God loved us while we were yet sinners then the cause of His love could not be anything in us. How could God love us because of anything in us? The only thing in us is sin. God doesn't love sin. So He must love us because of something in Him. And that's the answer; why does God love you; not because of you; but because of Himself.

Now how did He show us that He loved us? By giving His Christ to die for us. Christ is the eternal Son of God. He's forever been with the Father and the Father with the Son. They've always been in perfect harmony and yet God sent forth His Son to die for us. That's how he demonstrated His love. That's the greatest expression of love because it's the love of the Creator toward the creature. There is no greater example of love. There is no purer form of love. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us so that we could be with Him.

So there is where you see that God's love is a distinct kind of love, it's not just greater than man's love, it's different. Man's love only extends to those who are his friends; but God's love extends even to His enemies. He does not love us because we act a certain way. He does not love us because of a certain

quality that He foresees in us. He loves us because of who He is within Himself. This is a very difficult kind of love to grasp because it's not something we naturally have. We love those who love us, that is natural, we love those who give to us, we love those who are kind to us, but that is not what He does. He loves us despite our unlovely condition. What kind of love is this? *Αγαπη*, and that is the word used here. *Αγαπη* love is unconditional love. Its unconditional love, meaning it's not conditioned on anything in you. Everything we love is conditioned on the object. But not God's love. God's love is something wholly other and when we ask why we are left searching and wondering because we don't understand the answer for why God loved us? What is the answer? Because God loved us. That is as far as human comprehension can go. God loves us because He loved us. And the big picture of that is His sending His own Son to **die for us**. Now it's possible for us to exercise *Αγαπη* love since He has first exercised it toward us. WE love because He first loved us. But the only time we love this way is when we depend upon the Holy Spirit and He produces it as His fruit. But you and I, we don't produce this kind of love. It isn't sourced in us. It's sourced in God the Spirit and is channeled through us. So it can come out in this world through us but only when we depend upon Him.

But the greatest demonstration of this is through the most provocative event in all of world history! An event which has drawn more people to salvation than any other idea. The idea that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. That idea is so great. That God the Son, who is very God of very God, would, as the second person of the Trinity incarnate Himself and die for His creatures who rebelled against Him. That's a great idea. But it's not just a great idea. It's also the truth.

Nobody ever came up with an idea that great. That is why this idea has won the hearts and souls of millions of people. That is why this idea will never die. That is why this idea has lived from generation to generation against all those who said it would die. You can't kill this idea because it's a great idea and it commands our worship. When you realize what God's *Αγαπη* love did for you in sending His son and how the Holy Spirit who is given to us at the moment of faith in His Son sheds this love abroad in our hearts. That is a wonderful idea and it is why we worship the one true God in three persons. Because God did not first love when He sent His Son but He loved within His own Godhead from all eternity! That is the kind of God that He is and that is the kind of God that died for us, to show us the greatness of His love toward us, worthless, helpless, rebel creatures.

And if He would do all that when we were rebels, how much more do you think He would do for us now that we are justified, now that we are reconciled. We'll find out next week in verse 9ff, but just as a foretaste, in the future he will save us from the wrath. We're not destined for wrath. There is no wrath for us. Couldn't possibly be and if we understand His love for us while we were yet sinners then we can understand that much more so there could not be any wrath for us when justified in the future. Praise God!