

Demonstrated Love

Romans 5:6-11

Paul Tripp was a pastor for many years in Pennsylvania. In his book *Dangerous Calling* he confesses that for much of his ministry there was a great discrepancy between his public persona and his private life - especially his marriage. In public he was patient and kind and spiritual-minded; but at home he was an angry man. When his wife confronted him about his anger he argued with her and tried to convince her that he was really a great husband. In the heat of one such argument he actually said, "Ninety-five percent of the women in our church would love to be married to a man like me!" That's when his wife informed him that she was "in the other five percent."

God has his way of humbling us and exposing our pride and inconsistencies. God humbled Paul Tripp and allowed him to deal with his anger. But his story illustrates what can be true of all believers. There can be a great discrepancy between what we know to be true and what we actually experience. This is especially an issue in a church like this one in which we hold to the authority of the Scriptures and in which we study/teach/discuss passages from the Bible. It is possible to know so much and experience so little. We can have big heads and small hearts (for Lord of the Rings fans, this is the classic description of an Orc).

One area of doctrine/truth in which this is often the case is "the love of God." We can know so much **about** God's love and yet experience so little of it. I would have to admit that this has often been true of me. I can give you definitions of the various Greek words for love; I can articulate how God loved Israel in unique ways in the old covenant and how God loves us in Christ in the new covenant; I can teach 1 Corinthians 13 with great conviction. But do I live as a man who has been ravished by the love of God? Does my life scream, "That is a man who **knows** that the love of God has been lavished upon him!"?

In today's passage (Romans 5:6–11) Paul explains the incomparable love of God. I pray that as we go through this passage we will understand and **experience** the love of God in new and fresh ways.

The Love of God in the Death of Christ. (Romans 5:6-8)

In verse 5 Paul made the statement that "hope does not disappoint [put us to shame], because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." In the following verses Paul explains just how radical the love of God really is. As we go through this passage, we'll notice that Paul describes humanity using terms that emphasize just how unlovely we are.

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

"At the right time" - or as Galatians 4:4 says, "in the fullness of time" - Christ died for us. In the sovereignty of God, Jesus became one of us and died for us at the most appropriate time in all of history. He died for us "while we were still helpless." The term

helpless means that we were weak and sick and unable to help ourselves. Jesus' sacrifice was an act of pure mercy.

Paul writes that at the perfect time "Christ died for the ungodly" - for those who were unlike God. Back in chapter 1 Paul gave a devastating description of the sinfulness of humanity apart from God. There he wrote that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all **ungodliness** and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth. . . ." Here we learn that Christ died for these very people, the ungodly - people who deserve His wrath. We'll talk about this more later, but it's worth noting that a core characteristic of God's love is that it is extended to people who are **unlike** Him.

In verse 7 Paul points out how rare it is for one person to die for another.

7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.

Paul's logic has always been a bit confusing to me because in my thinking a "righteous" person ranks higher than a "good" person; therefore I would think it more likely that someone would die for a righteous person than a good person. But Paul is obviously using those two terms differently. Some have suggested that "the good man" is a reference to God or Jesus. You may remember that Jesus said in Mark 10:18 that "God alone is good." Whatever the case, Paul's point is clear: it is extremely rare for someone to die for another, even if that person has the highest moral character.

This observation makes the death of Christ (and therefore the love of God) all the more radical.

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Genuine love is always demonstrated. If somebody loves you, it is demonstrated by their actions. Did you notice that the demonstration of **God's** love toward us is the death of **Christ**? This reflects the incredible unity and humility that exists within the Godhead - here between the Father and the Son. God sent His one and only Son; the Son willingly went to the cross.

God's love wasn't directed toward people who were even remotely deserving: "we were yet sinners" when Christ died for us. Paul never got over the fact that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," adding "among whom I am foremost of all" (1 Timothy 1:15). The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were scandalized by the way Jesus made a bee line for sinful, shameful people. He talked with them, ate with them, touched them, invited them to be His disciples, and died for their sins. Jesus was not naive; Jesus wasn't blind to our condition. As Steve Garber points out, "God knew the worst about us and loved us anyway" (*Visions*, p. 187). He saw our selfishness, our addictions, our hatreds, and our idolatries, and He loved us anyway.

Why does it even matter whether or not we think about and experience the love of God? Why isn't it enough to file "the love of God" away somewhere and get on with our lives? Well, in other passages Paul and other NT authors give all sorts of reasons for experiencing the love of God in deep, profound ways. 1 John 4:10-11 is representative:

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

The love of God obligates us. We have a responsibility to treat each other the way God in Christ has treated us. John will say that "we love because [God] first loved us (1 John 4:19). In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul will say something very similar: "The love of Christ controls us. . .[since] He died for us. . . we live for Him" (vv. 14-15). There are very tangible, practical applications for our lives that flow from understanding of the love of God.

Here in Romans 5 Paul doesn't really urge us to *do* anything in response to the love of God. He mainly wants us to convince us that God's love is as deep and substantive as He says it is. Believing and experiencing the love of God doesn't make a person selfish and complacent; accepting the love of God in the death of Christ humbles us and motivates us to love others.

In Romans 8:35 Paul will ask rhetorically, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" After listing off seven things that might threaten our experience of the love of God (such as persecution and famine), Paul makes this bold pronouncement:

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the identity of the believer. We are people who understand that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Brennan Manning (*Abba's Child*, p. 49) tells the story of a friend, John Eagan, who met with a spiritual director who told him something that changed his life:

"John, the heart of it is this: to make the Lord and his immense love for you constitutive of your personal worth. *Define yourself radically as one beloved by God.* God's love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth. Accept that, and let it become the most important thing in your life."

This is a very challenging idea because we tend to find our worth and identity in our accomplishments and in what we do for God. But as believers we say with Paul, "Our primary claim to fame is that *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" We need to allow this fierce, relentless love of God to captivate our hearts and imaginations.

In verses 9 and 10 this conviction about the love of God informs how we view the future. He moves from what the **death** of Christ accomplished in the past to what the **life** of Christ will accomplish in the future. Even though Paul doesn't use the term "hope," that's what he is describing in verses 9 and 10. Paul wants us to have confidence/hope that because Jesus is alive our salvation will one day be complete. Hope is important because without hope we live our lives with all sorts of unnecessary anxieties.

Our Confidence/Hope in the Life of Christ. (Romans 5:9-10) In these verses Paul argues from "the greater to the lesser." He will argue that since God has already done the greater thing (sending Jesus to die for us), He will surely do lesser things. They're not insignificant things, but in comparison to the death of Christ they are lesser things. Paul uses the expression "much more" to argue from the greater to the lesser.

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

If God did the greater thing of justifying us by Jesus' blood, surely He will do the lesser thing of saving us "from the wrath of God through Him." For Paul salvation has past, present, and future aspects: we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Here he talks about being saved in the future from the wrath of God. On the last day at the judgment, the wrath of God will be poured out on His enemies. But the believer won't experience God's wrath because it was already poured out on Christ on the cross. On that day, instead of wrath, we will experience salvation.

In verse 10 Paul expresses basically the same thought.

10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

The "greater thing" was "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son." Paul has described us as helpless, ungodly, sinners, and (now) enemies. Whereas the term justification comes from the courtroom (being declared righteous), the term reconciliation comes from the realm of relationships. Reconciliation means that a relationship has been mended. Whereas we were formerly God's enemies, we now have peace with God; our relationship with God has been mended and is whole and healthy.

Having been reconciled by His death (the greater thing), "much more . . . we shall be saved by His life." Paul is speaking about the resurrected life of Jesus. Jesus not only **died** for us; He also **lives** for us. Paul doesn't say here exactly *how* "we shall be saved by His life." But in other parts of Romans we are given hints of how this might happen. For example, in chapter 6 Paul will explain that if you are "in Christ," whatever happened to Him happens to you: you have been raised up with Him; His life guarantees that you are alive to God. And in chapter 8 Paul will write that Jesus lives and intercedes (i.e., prays prayers of petition) for us:

34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

The living Christ prays for us. Only God knows the “dangers, toils, and snares” we’ve avoided because of the prayers Jesus has prayed on our behalf. Only God knows the ways our salvation has moved forward because Jesus, our great High Priest who knows exactly what we’re facing in this life, has asked God to supply what we need when we need it. We are (present tense) being saved because Jesus is alive.

Here in verses 9 and 10 Paul looks to the future and says that we will be saved by His life for all eternity. God wouldn’t give His only Son to die for us and then quit refining us and leave our salvation incomplete. At the return of Christ we will be transformed in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye; even our bodies will be transformed (raised immortal - see 1 Corinthians 15). Because of what God has done in the past through the death of Christ, we can be confident that He will save us completely in the future.

Our Response: Celebrating God through Jesus. (Romans 5:11) Paul concludes this paragraph with a doxology - an expression of praise. This strikes me as a fitting transition to our time at the Lord’s table. Notice what Paul writes:

11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

For the third time in this chapter Paul writes that “we exult/celebrate.” In verse 2 Paul wrote that “we exult in hope of the glory of God”; we celebrate ahead of time that the glory we lost at the fall will one day be restored. In verse 3 Paul wrote that “we also exult in our tribulations” because God uses even our suffering to refine us; this is further confirmation that God will finish what He’s begun within us. Here Paul writes that “we also exult/celebrate in God” Himself. Our delight isn’t ultimately in abstract spiritual truth but in God Himself.

Paul is always eager to mention that our experience of God is “through Jesus Christ” - the one mediator between God and humanity. Here he says that “we exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Jesus is the One whose death made it possible for our relationship with God to be restored.

This is what we celebrate at the Lord’s Table. Let this be your response today. I know how easy it is to “check out” during the Lord’s Table and let your mind wander. But why waste this opportunity to exult in God Himself?!? Let the bread remind you that His body was broken for you. Let the cup remind you that His blood was shed for you. Let the love of God wash over you as we celebrate the Lord’s Table.

We invite all who trust in Jesus alone to participate in this celebration today. Please hold the bread until everyone has received; then we will eat together. Please hold the cup as well and we’ll drink together.