

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS

For seven consecutive Sundays, we've been looking at the "Importance of Love in the Life of the Believer." We noted first God's love **to us**, then how God's love **can transform us** like it did the Apostle John. We then spent three Sundays looking at what **our response should be** to God's love—to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind and to keep His commandments. With next Sunday being Resurrection Sunday, my intent for this week was to look at the crucifixion. Can you talk about the cross without talking about the love of God? I suppose you could if you focused on the emotional, physical, and spiritual suffering Jesus endured without mentioning **why** He did it. Pretty difficult, though—if not impossible—to consider the cross and not mention the love of God. Stanza 3 of "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" is a wonderful case in point:

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

When considering the crucifixion, we often go to the narrative accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John and I fully anticipated doing that for this week. The Lord led in a different direction, however, to a passage that I believe is without equal when it comes to tying the love of God to the cross. In fact, some call it the "John 3:16" of Romans. Please turn to Romans 5 and follow along as I read verses 6-11.

1. The Predicament of Man that Brought God's Love

We have here in the verses I just read a "less-than-flattering" view of man. In fact, that is a strong argument for the Bible being inspired by God instead of a product of man. Man's opinion of themselves is much higher than what we have here before us. What man thinks of himself is not all that important—what matters is what **God says** about man. What does God say of those that are without Christ? First, they are....

A. Without strength; helpless: "For when we were yet without strength" (v 6a)

"Without strength" is a translation of the Greek word *asthenon* and according to Barnes "is usually applied to those who are sick and feeble, deprived of strength by disease."

In Acts 3, God used Peter and John to heal a lame man. In Acts 4, they are called before some religious leaders and were asked "By what power, or by what name, have you done this?" (Acts 4:8) Their response?

Acts 4:9 "If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole..." "Impotent" in this verse is from the Greek word *asthenon*. The lame man was **helpless**; he could not physically walk and consequently was a beggar at the gate of the temple.

This word is not always used to talk about **physical** weakness associated with disease, however. We know from the context here it is used in a moral sense and carries the idea of "inability and feebleness." "Inability and feebleness" to do what? The inability to get ourselves out of our sinful condition and into favor with God!

Does mankind think of themselves as **helpless** to save themselves? Sadly, not enough of them do! Far too many think that they can DO some great thing to rid themselves of their sin and guilt. The reality is that they can't! **Isaiah 64:6** reminds us "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags..." All our good works; all our efforts to "clean ourselves up" are empty, and feeble, and worthless.

To recognize we are without strength—that we are helpless and hopeless—is a good thing when it comes to being forgiven and saved. Why? Because if we still have **some hope** in ourselves, we will keep trying to save

ourselves! But once we are convinced that we **cannot** save ourselves, then—and only then—will we come to Christ in child-like faith with the attitude that “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling!”

Not only is unsaved man helpless, they are also...

B. Ungodly: “...in due time Christ died for the **ungodly**” (v 6b)

Some commentators suggest that “ungodly” in the last part of the verse is no different than “without strength” in the first part of the verse—and no different than “sinners” in verse 8. Others suggest—and this is how I lean—that there is a downward progression of sinfulness in the words God inspired Paul to write.

“Ungodly” then could refer to what unsaved man is by **nature**. They are sinful—they have a sin nature—and are characterized by an **indifference** to spiritual things. **Psalm 10:4** “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.”

We often think of “wicked” people as those who do horrible things to others. We see here, though, that a wicked person could also be what we consider just a “normal” person that lives their life **independent** of God. They are not on the “most-wanted” lists; they do not make the evening news; and they are not feared or shunned by their neighbors. In fact, they may be a great neighbor—except for the fact that they have no time for God!

Just like the helpless are often oblivious to the fact that they are helpless, many of the ungodly are the same way. In fact, many of them would argue that they are NOT ungodly because they pay their bills—and taxes—and work hard and go to church and are nice to people. But a life-time of neglect of God in this life does not lead to spending eternity with Him in the **next!**

C. Sinners: “...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (v 8)

What is a sinner? Paul gives us a pretty detailed list in Romans 3:9-18. Notice the last part of verse 9 “for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all **under sin...**” Paul then lists what those that are under sin are characterized by:

- Unrighteous (v 10)
- Don't seek God (v 11)
- Don't do good (v 12)
- They lie (v 13)
- They curse (v 14)
- Their feet are **swift** to shed blood (v 15)
- Arrogant; no fear of God before their eyes (v 18)

What is man's state without Christ? Helpless, ungodly, sinful, and lastly...

D. Enemies: “For if, when we were enemies” (v 10)

What does it mean to be an enemy of God? One way to better understand it might be to consider opposing sides on a battle field. There is a hatred, I suppose, but even that is often curtailed by a common decency. When deployed for ODS, I worked in a 400-bed evacuation hospital in the middle of the Saudi Arabian desert.

Right next to us was another hospital and they were tasked with the medical treatment of enemy prisoners of war. On more than one occasion, they had more patients than we did so we would go help them. Interesting concept—one part of our military is “shooting” them; another part of our military is “patching them up.” Is that the kind of picture Paul is painting here when he talks about us being an enemy of God?

Being an enemy of God is much more intense than just being on opposing sides on a battle field. Probably the best way to understand it is to think of what characterizes God's number 1 enemy—Satan himself!

--God loves life, but Satan **hates** life—Jesus calls him a murderer from the beginning in John 8:44—and is without question the driving force behind abortions and mass shootings and random acts of violence.

Titus 3:3 “For **we ourselves** also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, **hateful, and hating one another.**”

--Satan is a rebel that resists God and hates God and wants to replace God. Is mankind like that? Yes they are! **Romans 1:25** “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and **worshipped and served the creature** more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.” Satan wants to be worshipped instead of God and mankind worships and serves himself more than his Creator!

C.S. Lewis: “Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.” Not a pretty picture, is it? The predicament of man without Christ is pitiful at best. There is nothing good in us, there is no seeking of God by us, our actions and attitudes are an offense to God, and we are in utter rebellion against Him. What is **God’s response** to our predicament? Verse 8 “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

2. The Proof of God’s Love (Some of the following outline is from John Phillips Commentary)

A. Christ’s death was intentional

Although Jesus was **killed** by wicked men—He did not drive the nails into His own hands and feet—He came to earth for the **purpose** of dying. In verse 6 and 8 we see the phrase “Christ died”—not that He was killed.

--Jesus knew He would die

Mark 10:33-34 “Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles: ³⁴And they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall kill Him: and the third day He shall rise again.”

--Jesus knew **why** He would die

Mark 10:45 “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to **give His life a ransom for many.**”

John 10:11, 17-18 “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life **for the sheep.** ¹⁷Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. ¹⁸No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again...”

B. Christ’s death was unconditional (v 6, 8)

In **John 15:13** Jesus tells His disciples: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus died for more than just His **friends**, though, didn’t He? He died for even His enemies!

What is unconditional love? It is loving someone just the way they are! We see that here in this passage, don’t we? First, we see it in **who** Christ loved. Christ didn’t die for “the good”—He died for the ungodly, and sinful, and rebellious.

Second, we see it in **when** He loved us. Verse 6 says “For when **we were yet without** strength...”; verse 8—“while **we were yet sinners**, Christ died for us.” Some people have the impression that we need to “clean up” our lives first, and **then** God will love us. The truth is that we can’t clean up our lives apart from being changed by God. Christ’s love is unconditional—there was no requirement of us to change in order for Him to go to the cross. In fact, He went to the cross so that we **could** be changed!

C. Christ’s death is incomparable (v 7-8)

Notice v 7 “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.” Have men died for other men?

A week before Christmas in 2015, Zaeveion Dobson—a 15 year old African-American boy from Knoxville, TN—used his body to protect 3 girls from a spray of bullets during a gang-related drive-by shooting. The result—the 3 girls lived, but he died. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

While on vacation in Florida, a man by the name of Gareth Griffith decided to try sky diving. He was jumping in tandem with Michael Costello, an experienced instructor. Disaster struck, however, when the main chute failed to open. No big deal, they had a back up chute. But—you guessed it—the backup failed too. The two men went into a violent spin as they plummeted to their destiny. The instructor corrected the spin and regained control of the fall. Griffith was on bottom and the instructor was on top. As they neared the ground, the instructor **intentionally** folded his arms and legs, causing the pair to rotate. The result? The instructor hit the ground first, cushioning his student's blow. Griffith survived; the instructor, however, died. He sacrificed his life **not** for a friend, but basically for someone he had just met. (Reuters News Service, 6-24-1997 Illustration by Jim L. Wilson)

Imagine what it would be like to be a Secret Service agent for the President. I've never personally talked to one so I can't say this for certain, but I imagine every work-day begins with the thought 'I may have to take a bullet for the President today!'

My point is this—it is **not** unprecedented that some people have given their life to save the life of someone else. But to die for His **enemies**?

--Who but Jesus would die for those who blind-folded Him, then struck Him in the face and sarcastically ask Him "Prophecy, who is he that smote thee?" (Lk 22:64)

--Who but Jesus would die for those who spit in His face and stripped Him naked and whipped His back to a pulp? (Mt 26:67, 68; 27:26, 28)

--Who but Jesus would die for those who in mockery put a purple robe on Him and a crown of thorns on His head, then beat the crown into place with a reed? (Mt 27:29)

--And who but Jesus would willingly leave the beauty and praise and splendor of heaven to have the wrath of God poured out on Him. "My God, my God, why hath thou forsaken me" was not because of the **physical** pain He endured—it was for separation He felt from the Father when He was **made** sin for us! (Mt 27:46)

A song we sang earlier captures this thought well:

"In Christ alone, who took on flesh, Fullness of God in helpless Babe!

This gift of love and righteousness, **Scorned** by the ones **He came to save**—

Till on the cross as Jesus died, **The wrath of God** was satisfied.

For ev'ry sin on Him was laid; Here in the death of Christ I live."

The predicament of man that brought God's love? We are sinful

The proof of God's love? Christ's death was intentional, unconditional, and incomparable. Notice lastly....

3. The Provision of God's Love

What did God's love provide? Where do we begin?! On one hand, you can say God's love provided:

--Justification and salvation (v 9)

--Reconciliation and intercession (v 10)

--Joy and the atonement (v 11)

If we are technical, though, we shouldn't say God's love **provided** those things? Why? Because not **everyone** is a recipient of those things!

--Not everyone is justified...or saved...or reconciled to God—and not everyone has received the atonement and has Christ interceding for them. Again, being technical, it is probably best to call these things what John Phillips calls them in his commentary—**products** of God's love.

So what did God's love **provide**? Not a trick question, but is one of those things that is so simple it's hard! Notice again verse 8—a verse that many of us know quite well and may have even memorized. How did God "commend"—meaning demonstrate—His love to us? Did He demonstrate His love by making a beautiful world? Not according to verse 8! According to verse 8, God demonstrated His love by the **death of His Son!**

A. Christ's death for us

Four times in these six verses we see a reference to Christ's death.

--End of v 6—"Christ died"

--End of v 8—"Christ died"

--Middle of v 9—"justified by His blood"

--Middle of v 10—"reconciled to God by the death of His Son"

The provision of God's love—the gift that God's love provided—is the death of His Son! That's not all, however. Easy to overlook in this passage is the fact that God's love also provided...

B. Christ's life for us

God provided a Savior that died for us—but He also provided one that is now **alive** for us! Notice again verse 10: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be **saved by His life.**"

--We serve a risen Savior—not a dead one! Is that significant? Yes—and here are 3 reasons why:

1) Because Jesus is alive, He can be—and is touched—by the feeling of our infirmities.

Hebrews 4:14-15 "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. ¹⁵ For we have not an high priest which cannot be **touched with the feeling of our infirmities**; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

2) Because Jesus is alive, He is able to intercede on our behalf.

Hebrews 7:25 "Wherefore He is able also to save them **to the uttermost** that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to **make intercession for them.**"

3) Because Jesus is alive, we know that God was satisfied with the work He did on the cross.

"It is finished" was Jesus' victory cry; the resurrection was God's "Amen!"

One question before I close in prayer. God was satisfied with what Jesus did on the cross. Are you?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Are you satisfied with what Jesus did on the cross? Here's how you can tell.

1. First, if you are counting on **you** and **your efforts** to get you to heaven, you are in essence saying that Jesus' death was an **unsatisfactory** payment for your sins. It was satisfactory to God—but you are saying it is not satisfactory **to you**. Is that a good position to take? I don't think so—and neither do you!

2. Second, if you are counting on **you** to keep yourself saved, you aren't satisfied with Christ's **life**. You don't believe He can save to the uttermost—completely and forever—those that come to God by Him. Again, is that a good position to take? Rest in what He has **done**—not on what you **do**!