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Bridgeway Church

Romans #22

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The “Much More” Love of God

Romans 5:1-11 (3)

Have you ever read a passage of Scripture and immediately recognized yourself in the text? I do, every time I read Romans 5:6-11. You may wonder how that could be, given the fact that the personal name of “Sam Storms” does not appear in it. Oh, but I’m there. I’m there, writ large. I am the one who is “weak.” I am the one who is “ungodly.” I am the “sinner.” I am God’s “enemy.”

Perhaps my use of the present tense “I *am*” is misleading. More accurately, “I *was*” weak, ungodly, sinful, and an enemy of God. Because of what Jesus did for me on the cross, I am *now* strong in his strength. I am now godly insofar as I have been declared righteous with the righteousness of Jesus, through faith alone. Although I am still a sinner, that is not my fundamental identity. I now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, don’t have to sin. And I am no longer God’s enemy, but his friend, his child forever and ever.

All that is why, if you cannot see yourself in these descriptive terms, you will never understand Christianity. You will never know God. You will never feel the thrill of being made a recipient of God’s amazing, reconciling, forgiving grace.

When God contemplated me, he saw someone who was profoundly weak and ungodly and sinful and an enemy. But his love for me was so great and beyond imagination that at just the right time he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for weak, ungodly, sinful, enemies like me. In doing so God was free to justify me, to declare me righteous through faith in the death of Christ Jesus. I am now reconciled to him, one with him, found in him, never to endure another second of alienation and hatred.

That is the fundamental message of these wonderfully, Spirit-inspired, Christ-exalting words in vv. 6-11. Today I have the privilege of digging deeply into them and you have the privilege of being able to lay

your hand on your heart and say: “Although I was once weak, ungodly, sinful, and an enemy of God, I have been reconciled to him by the blood of his Son!”

If You Wake up Tomorrow, Will You Still be a Christian?

I hope nothing ominous happens to you today, but it may. You may die in your sleep. I pray that will not happen. But it may. You may wake up tomorrow and discover that you have cancer. You may wake up tomorrow and be told by your child that he/she experiences same-sex attraction, and they don't know what to do about it, and neither do you. You may wake up tomorrow and be told by your spouse that he/she has decided to leave you and to start a new life with someone else.

Those would be horrible ways to start a day. But my question for you now is simply this: When you wake up tomorrow morning, no matter what else may have happened during the night, and no matter what else anyone else may have decided to do, ***will you still be a Christian?*** Will you still be considered righteous in the sight of God? Will you still be his child, destined for an eternity with him in the new heaven and new earth? Paul has declared that we have peace with God and therefore have hope that on the final day we will experience God's glory (vv. 1-2). But how can I be sure that I'll make it that far? How can I know that I'll persevere from now until then? How can I know that the faith I now have I'll have on that final day?

Many of you right now are saying to yourselves: “Sam, what a dumb question to ask! Of course I'll wake up a Christian. If I went to sleep as one, I'll wake up as one. I'm confident and secure in my relationship with God. I will most assuredly persevere in my relationship with Jesus until the end.”

Others of you might be saying to yourself: “I certainly hope so. But I can't be sure. Who knows if my sin may have pushed God beyond the breaking point and he has decided during the night or on the previous day to cut ties with me and to sever my relationship with Jesus? Who knows if I may wake up and discover that I've lost faith in Jesus and no longer consider him Lord of my life?”

I'm here to tell you today that if you and I wake up tomorrow and discover that we are still saved, justified, born-again believers in Jesus, ***and we will***, it is only because God made a commitment to us that he would finish the job that he began when we first trusted in Jesus. “And I am sure of this,” said Paul in his letter to the Philippians, “that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

I could stop right there and declare this theological debate to be over. God's elect, born-again children will never wake up and discover that they are no longer Christians. This issue, of course, has been debated and discussed for centuries. Entire denominations have been built by identifying with one or the other view. Southern Baptists, Presbyterians, as well as people in most independent Bible churches affirm that our salvation is secure in God's love. The Assemblies of God, Methodists, Nazarenes, and the Churches of Christ, among others, believe that it is possible for a Christian to lose or forfeit his/her salvation. The former believe that once you are truly saved, you are always saved. The latter do not.

In case you hadn't picked up on it by now, I identify with those who believe that a true born-again, justified-by-faith-in-Jesus-believer, is eternally secure in the salvation that God has granted by his grace. This is an issue that arises several times in Romans, as it does here in Romans 5:6-11. We will look at this paragraph to learn two things: (1) The *Character* of God's Love for us (vv. 6-8); (2) The *Consequences* of God's Love for us (vv. 9-11).

The Character of God's Love for Us (vv. 6-8)

It's important that you see the connection between vv. 6-11 and what has preceded in v. 5. Paul states in v. 5 that our hope in God will never, ever prove futile. It will never let us down or disappoint us. We know this because God loves us, a love that he has poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Our hope is as secure as God's love is immutable.

There is more. Paul appears to be saying that since God has demonstrated his love for us by sending Jesus to die for our sins, it follows that he will do everything necessary to make certain that we are safely and securely preserved all the way to the end. But how do we know God loves us in this way? What is the historical, empirical, objective foundation of our confidence in that love? Paul's answer comes in vv. 6-11. Here in vv. 6-8 Paul proceeds to answer two questions. First, when did Christ die? Second, and more important still, for what kind of people did Christ die?

I'll be brief in my answer to the first question. Paul says in v. 6 that it was "at the right time" that Christ died for us. Simply put, the death of Jesus was no accident, no quirk of fate. In Galatians 4:4 Paul says it was "when the fullness of time had come" that God sent forth his Son to die. Both of these phrases mean it was in God's time, when the Father determined for him to die. The death of Jesus didn't slip up on God and catch him by surprise, perhaps when the Father was looking the other way, dealing with more important issues on the other side of globe. But knowing when Christ died is of secondary importance to understanding the nature of those for whom he gave his life.

This second question is one that I've already answered briefly. Paul gives us a four-fold description of the kind of people for whom Jesus died.

(1) They were **"weak"** people (v. 6a). The NIV translates this as "powerless" while the KJV renders it, "without strength". He means spiritually and morally impotent people, unable to prepare themselves, unable to prove themselves worthy of Christ's sacrifice; helpless to do or say anything that might attract God's love. You may remember the famous saying from Poor Richard's Almanac that "God helps those who help themselves." When it comes to salvation, Paul disagrees: God helps those who are utterly and absolutely helpless!

(2) They are **"ungodly"** people (v. 6b). We saw this same thing back in Romans 4:5 where Paul said that God "justifies the ungodly." Jesus didn't die for Bible readers or truth-tellers or tithers or people who regularly pray. He didn't die for nor does he justify Baptists, Presbyterians, charismatics, Methodists, Jews or Gentiles. The only people for whom Jesus died and the only people who God justifies are "ungodly" people! He didn't die for only Republicans or only Democrats or only those who choose to identify with neither political party. He didn't die only for those who at one time would have at least \$500,000 in their 401(k) or who have at least a graduate degree from an accredited university. The only people he died for were "ungodly" people.

To be "ungodly" surely means we are unlike God. God is infinitely pure and holy and righteous and we are not. But to be "ungodly" means more than that we differ from God. It also means we stand opposed to God. As Paul will say in v. 10, we are his "enemies". When you say that a person is "un-American" you mean more than that they live in Russia or Iran or North Korea. You mean they embrace an ideology that is antithetical to American principles. To be "ungodly" means we dislike God. Indeed, we hate God. When he says Yes, we say No. When he says No, we say Yes. These are the kind of people for whom Jesus died!

(3) They are **"sinners"** (v. 8). There are not two classes of people in the world: those who sin and those who don't. All are ungodly, spiritually impotent, defiant sinners. And it is for those kinds of people that Jesus died and whom God justifies by faith.

(4) Finally, they are **"enemies"** (v. 10). Don't water down that term. It means everything you think it means: rebellious, insolent, haughty, arrogant, self-righteous, repulsive, disobedient, and defiant to God and all that he represents and says. And it is not simply that we are enemies of God, but also the case that before we are forgiven and justified, God is an enemy to us. We are not simply opposed to God. He is opposed to us.

If you quickly slide past this four-fold description of the human race you will just as readily slide past the glorious nature of God's love. God's love will never be seen for the stupendous, incomprehensibly glorious thing that it is until you come to grips with your own fallen nature apart from his grace. Sadly, people today think of themselves not as weak, but as strong and competent; not as ungodly, but godlike; not as sinners, but as righteous; not as enemies, but friends. That being said, let's go even deeper into Paul's argument as it unfolds in vv. 7-8.

Who is this so-called "righteous" person for whom one will scarcely die? Keep in mind that by "righteous" and "good" he is speaking in purely human terms. He has already told us that no one is righteous or good in God's sight. He is describing people as *we* see them, not as *he* sees them. The "righteous" person is the civil, law-abiding person who fulfills his/her duty. This person meets their obligations and fulfills their promises. This is the kind of person who evokes your respect, but not necessarily your affection. This person is lawful but not gentle; firm, but not friendly. It is unlikely that you would give your life for that individual. Your admiration does not go so far that you would be willing to sacrifice your life for him/her.

The "good" person, "perhaps" for whom you might die, is the righteous person who is also kind, loving, and altruistic. This person evokes your admiration and your affection; both your respect and your love. For such a person, *perhaps*, you might be willing to die. You are slightly more inclined to sacrifice your life for *that* kind of individual than you would for those who, in the eyes of men, are merely righteous.

But God! There it is again, those glorious words of contrast: But God! God shows or demonstrates and puts on public display his love for us in sending his beloved Son to die, not for righteous people, not for good people, not for intelligent, hard-working, church-attending people, but for sinful enemies! What you and I would only reluctantly do for a good person, God joyfully and spontaneously and abundantly and freely does for evil people. The love of God thus runs counter to every known or implied rule of human behavior.

Mothers: would you gladly die for the sake of your child? Yes! But would you die for the person who kidnapped and murdered your child? No. Fathers: would you willingly give your life for the sake of your child? Yes! But would you die for the sake of the one who brutally abused him/her? No.

But that is what God did! He didn't send his Son to die for those who loved him or sought him or served him. He sent his Son to die for the very people who murdered him, for those who spat in his face and despised him. That is the character of God's love for us!

Imagine a Christian in conversation with a non-believer. When the non-believer hears this, he says: “That’s no big deal. I have a son who is in North Korea, serving the poor. He has been thrown into a prison and given a life sentence. I would gladly give my life for him so that he might return home.” The Christian responds, “Yes, but would you do the same for the North Koreans who arrested and tortured and imprisoned him?” But that is what God did for us!

What was it about us that attracted our Lord Jesus Christ? What was it about us that moved the heart of our Heavenly Father to send the Son to die? Was it in response to our plea for help? Our good looks? Our potential for virtuous, self-sacrificial deeds? To salvage what little divine spark still flickered in our souls? No. Nothing in us or about us or done by us could serve to move God’s heart. The only explanation why God sent his Son to die for us is because he wanted to! He loved us because he loved us.

Let’s linger for a moment on that word in v. 8 translated by the ESV as “shows,” perhaps better rendered “demonstrates.” ***The cross of Christ is the demonstration of God’s love, not its procuring cause.*** Christ’s death on the cross isn’t what moved God’s heart to love you. It was God’s heart of love for you that led and stirred him to send his Son to die. Jesus doesn’t stand before the Father pleading: “Oh, Father, I died for them; will you not therefore now love them?” No! He declares, as does Paul, “You loved them, therefore I died for them.”

This runs directly counter to everything our western worldview has told us. Perhaps this is nowhere better seen than in the words of Maria from the film, *The Sound of Music*. I can’t believe I’m actually using *The Sound of Music* as a sermon illustration, but here goes. When she first discovers how much the Captain, played by Christopher Plummer, loves her, she breaks out singing:

“There you are, standing there loving me, whether or not you should.

Some place in my youth or childhood,

I must have done something good.

Nothing ever comes from nothing; nothing ever could.

Some place in my youth or childhood,

I must have done something good.”

A sweet song, a pleasant thought, in a rather sugar-coated movie, but hardly a way to account for why God sent his Son to die for us.

The Consequences of God's Love for Us (vv. 9-10)

When we looked at Romans 5:5 I pointed out that Paul was not speaking in strictly logical terms, as if he wanted to prove a point. He described there an experience. It wasn't an argument he was attempting to prove but a feeling that the Holy Spirit awakens in us of the reality of God's love. But in vv. 9-10 Paul most assuredly does make a logical argument, and it is irrefutable and airtight.

He begins in v. 9 with a proposition. He reasons or argues or makes his case on the basis of God's greatest expression of love for us. God justified us on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus. Of course, Paul has said clearly on multiple occasions before that it is only if we believe and have faith in the blood of Jesus shed for us that God declares us to be righteous in his sight.

On the basis of this truth, Paul can assure us that when the day of final judgment comes, we will still be "saved from the wrath of God" (v. 9b). God the Father himself has worked *in the past* decisively through the death of Christ and will therefore work *in the future* infallibly through the life of Christ to rescue us from his wrath (v. 10). In fact, it is "much more" certain that we will be saved and delivered from God's wrath on that day. How can Paul say that? What is the basis or ground for this assertion?

There are two sorts of logical reasoning in Scripture: reasoning from the lesser to the greater, and reasoning from the greater to the lesser. One example of arguing *from the lesser to the greater* is in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:9-11).

An example of reasoning *from the greater to the lesser* is found in Romans 8:32.

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

If the greatest and most costly and most sacrificial thing God could do for us was to send his Son to suffer and die on a cross, does it not stand to reason that he would then do those things to keep us saved that, by comparison, are far easier and far less sacrificial and far less demanding? Yes!

But there is more to the argument than that. It isn't just for good and loving and holy people for whom he does this. It is for weak and ungodly and sinful enemies that he does this. If the greater task was for God to send his Son to die for us while we were his hate-filled enemies, how much easier and more readily would he save us from the coming wrath now that we are his friends, indeed, his sons and daughters? If Christ died for his enemies, he will surely save his friends.

If Christ loved us as much as he did while we were helpless, weak, ungodly, sinful enemies, how much more shall he love us now that by his grace we are justified, righteous in Christ, adopted as children, and reconciled to his heart! Will the God who loved us and saved us when we hated him turn his back and desert us now that we love him? If he saved us while we hated him, how much more certain is it that he will keep us secure now that we love him and trust him?

Getting the consent of his holy and righteous nature to send the Son to die for you while you were ungodly was the greatest and most costly and most demanding thing God could ever do. By comparison, keeping you saved is a breeze! How can we possibly suggest that God was willing to do the greatest thing for us but is now unwilling to do that which is far less?

If ever there were a time for God not to love you and me, a time to forsake and desert us and cast us aside, it would have been when we were aliens, opposed to him at war with him, unreconciled to him. But now you and I are no longer unreconciled, but a child! No longer are you at enmity with God but in love with him. ***It is logically, theologically, and biblically impossible that God would love you less now, now that you are his child, than he loved you then, when you were his enemy.***

So what does Paul mean when he says we will be saved "by his life," that is, the life of Jesus? He's already said in v. 10a that we were reconciled to God by the death of Jesus. Now he says that it is even "much more" certain and sure that we "shall be saved by his life." This would most likely be a reference both to the resurrection of Jesus as well as his heavenly intercession on our behalf. Recall Hebrews 7:25,

"Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always *lives* to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

Correcting a Misunderstanding

I've often heard people emphasize our value as treasures and pearls in God's sight, as if that is what moved his heart to send Jesus to die for us. But if that is the case, what becomes of grace? The cross is an expression of grace because those for whom Christ died merited only wrath and hell. If those for whom he died were contemplated as "treasures" whom God valued, do we not diminish the nature of grace? Do we not, to that degree, "merit" his atoning sacrifice? If God saw something in us that stirred him to send Jesus for us, the gift of his Son ceases to be grace and becomes a matter of debt.

When we ask God, "Who were we that led you to do this for us?" the only answer is: "You were hell-deserving rebels who had no claim on anything in me other than to be the recipients and objects of eternal wrath. I did this for you not because you were a treasure or because of anything in you; indeed, it was in spite of what was in you. I did this for you solely because of what was in *me*, namely, sovereign and free and gracious love for those who deserved only to be hated."

Certainly I agree that God saved us in Christ in order that he might make treasures of us, but not because we already were treasures. What I am saying is that when people think about why God smiled on them in the cross of Christ they should say: "It certainly wasn't because of anything in me. In fact, I should have brought only a frown of judgment to his face. That he should have smiled in redemptive love is traceable only to his sovereign and gracious good pleasure. Thanks be to God that he has chosen to make a treasure out of a moral dung heap. But it was not because I was a treasure but in spite of my being a moral dung heap that he was moved to love me in the first place."

One more brief word of clarification is in order. I'm not saying that human beings lack value in the sight of God, or that we are in some sense *worthless*. All men and women are of value and worth simply by virtue of the fact that they are created in God's image. The image of God in mankind has most assuredly not been altogether erased or destroyed by the fall. That the image of God in man has been severely damaged is recognized by all. Paul even speaks of sanctification as, in one sense, the restoration or renewal of the image of God in us (Col. 3:10; cf. Eph. 4:24). God's handiwork always has value, whether that is the natural creation, angelic beings, or humans.

However, it is one thing to say that we have value as image-bearers; it is altogether another thing to suggest that what moved God to love us and send us his Son to die in our stead was our value as image-bearers. What stirred the heart of God to send his Son was the free and sovereign choice of love. I don't believe God said, "Well, [or perhaps even Wow], these fallen humans are of such worth that I now feel love for them and, based on and because of this worth, I will send Jesus to die for them and redeem them." I think God would instead have said, "Well, these fallen humans deserve only my wrath and

eternal damnation. They have squandered all that I gave them. They are helpless to do anything that might merit my favor. They are ungodly, both in the sense that they are morally unlike me and relationally against me. They are sinful in thought, word, and deed. They are my enemies. But I am determined to glorify myself through them. Therefore, in spite of the fact that they don't deserve anything other than hell, in spite of the fact that if I were to immediately consign every one of them to eternal condemnation and be perfectly just and fair and righteous in doing so, I am going to love them. I am going to choose to have compassion on them. I am going to take these immoral wretches and make them treasures and trophies of my grace." That is, in my opinion, what Scripture is saying to us, particularly in Romans 5:6-11.

But if our redemption and salvation required the precious blood of Jesus, doesn't that reflect on the precious nature of those for whom it was shed? No. Nothing less than the precious blood of Christ was required because of the immeasurable heights and holy demands of God's character as just and righteous. It was the value of God's holiness that could be satisfied with nothing less than the life, death, and resurrection of his sinless Son that required that he shed his blood. No other sacrifice would suffice, not because those redeemed are so valuable that an immeasurably high price was required, but because their sin was so evil and the one against whom they sinned was so gloriously good that only the blood of Jesus could appease and make amends and fully satisfy the justice of such a God.

There is one more objection I must address. Someone might say, "But Sam, what if *we* choose to abandon God and defy him and walk away from faith?" My response is that you have failed to understand fully what God's love entails. It not only entails the gift of his Son for us on the cross, but also everything necessary to keep us in our faith in him. God's children can't ultimately walk away from their commitment to Christ not because they are incapable of it, but because God's love is such that he is committed to preserving us and securing us and guarding us and keeping us in our commitment to him (see Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; Heb. 13:20-21). Peter makes it clear: we are "by God's power . . . being guarded through faith" (1 Pet. 1:5). ***Whatever faith and obedience in you and me that is necessary to stay saved, God provides and supplies and works in us by his Spirit.***

Conclusion? Worship! (v. 11)

The same word used in v. 2 to describe our joyful boasting and exultation in the hope of God's glory is the same word used in v. 3 to describe our joyful boasting and exultation in our tribulation. And it is one more time the very same word now used in v. 11 to describe our joy and exultation in God for all he has done for us in Jesus! But note carefully how and on what basis this is done: it is "through our Lord Jesus Christ." There is no such thing as acceptable, God-honoring worship that is not grounded in and focused on and accomplished by means of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

So, I say, let's rejoice! Let's boast in God! Let us now exult in him so that he may be exalted in us.