

“What Love is This”?

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 Date: December 17, 2006
 Title: “The Love of God as a Demonstration”
 Text: Romans 5:5-11
 Theme: God demonstrated His own love toward us by the cross.

INTRODUCTION:

“The second part of Advent begins on this Third Sunday of Advent. Faith and generosity overcome impossibility. Poverty and persecution reveal glory.”

Why is this study significant?

Love unseen or unspoken is unreal and unavailable. For love to be real, it must be seen and said. How many times is love between spouses assumed without ever being seen or said?

God’s love for His people is both seen and said at the cross. The expression of this love is a non-negotiable and irrefutable objective fact. The cross event declares openly that God loves those for whom He came (Col. 2:15). To deny God’s love for those He came to save is to reject the cross (2 Pet. 2:1).

Is this a truth that comforts the dying?

In the midst of our confusion and hurt this is the truth that sustains and comforts. God loves you, and the evidence of this love is the death of His only begotten Son.

When one considers the cross, they cannot help being overwhelmed by the selfless nature of the act. An innocent man dies for the guilty. The death is criminal in its execution. Why did this man die? What motivated him to offer up his life in behalf of others? For those who viewed the event, a man died the death of the cross. There was nothing intrinsically objective in its theology. Graves opened, dead were raised, the sun darkened, the earth shook, and mental confusion reigned. Apart from these “signs” there was nothing that spoke of a vicarious sacrifice or penal satisfaction. The normal onlooker could not see the debt of sin being cancelled, or the wrath of God being assuaged, or the insurmountable gap being closed, or the burden of guilt being forgiven, or even the unrighteous being declared righteous. There was no “theology” being taught. It was a simple and brutal end to a flawless and innocent life. For us to understand the “theology” of the cross it is necessary for us to note Romans 5:6-11. Herein lays a demonstration of God’s love for His people.

The demonstration of God’s selfless love for His people is set against the backdrop of man’s selfish love for himself. The contrast is intentional. In Romans 5 there are four declarations or demonstrations communicated by this singular expression of God’s love as exhibited at the cross.

It is the love of God that enables us to have hope (v. 5). It is this love, infused into our souls by the Holy Spirit that makes possible confidence.

The word “demonstrate” in verse 8 speaks of a display, to show forth, or to bring out. The idea is that of setting out front, of bringing to the forefront.

ILLUSTRATION:

The imagery is like a line-up of various people with only one person stepping off the line. The love of God stepped off the line when He sent His Son to die on the cross for rebellious sinners (and there is only one kind of sinner).

ILLUSTRATION:

Some small children were asked, “What is true love?” Without hesitation this little blond haired cutie spoke up, “*Love* is when your mommie reads you a bedtime story. *True love* is when she doesn’t skip any pages.” My friend, God has not skipped any pages in expressing his love for us and outlining the kind of relationship into which he has called us.

Romans 5:6-11 does not skip any of the pages in helping us to see how deep the Father’s love is for His people. Our present passage highlights four aspects of this demonstration.

I. God’s love demonstrated is unconditional (vv. 6, 8, 10).

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

The demonstration of God’s love at the cross is unconditional (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). Often we are overwhelmed by and consumed with our own righteous self-deception. We honestly believe we deserve better than we have it. We think that just because we exist, God is obligated to save us or at least give us a legitimate opportunity to believe. With such arrogance we have come to believe our own destiny lies in our ability to choose Him versus Him choosing us. There is only one reason God set His love on those in Adam and it is because of who He is, not because of who we are or have done. God’s love for us is unconditional. There is nothing in us that prompted Him to act in the manner in which He did.

Paul uses three words in parallel to describe our condition apart from Christ and in Adam. We are helpless, ungodly, sinners, and His enemies. There was nothing inside of us that moved Him to die in our behalf.

- As helpless individuals we are incapable of saving ourselves.
- As ungodly individuals there is nothing within us that is commendable.
- As sinful individuals we are incapable of conforming to His standard.
- As antagonistic individuals we do not even want to come to God.

“And this their character of ungodly shows, **that not goodness in man, but love in God, was the moving cause of Christ's dying for them.**” (John Gill on Romans 5:6)

“God’s love went to the center of man’s corruption to purify, to redeem, and to give assurance of a glorified life.” (J.P. McBeth, Exegetical and Practical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [New York: Revell, 1937, 151].

The love of God is not contingent on anything outside of itself. There is nothing that has to happen for His love to step off the line. His motive for expressing His love lies solely in Himself.

If this is true, then what can you do to stop Him from loving you? God’s opinion of you does not vacillate. I realize that some of us struggle with this idea of unconditional love. Do not be deceived, there is nothing you can do to make God love you more or any less. All of your righteous acts after salvation are fruits of the Holy Spirit and all of your righteous acts before salvation are nothing but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).

“A love that is beyond anything human is exhibited in Christ’s dying for corrupt humanity. Those for whom Christ died, and whom God loves are both ungodly in practice and corrupt in nature.” (J.P. McBeth, Exegetical and Practical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [New York: Revell, 1937, 152].

Yet into a scene of helplessness like this, God sends His Son,—for what? To die for the “ungodly.” **No return or response is demanded: it is absolute grace—for the *ungodly*.** (William H. Newell on Romans Verse-by-Verse, 5:6)

God’s unconditional love is an expression of unmerited grace. God stooped before the creature so that the created might stand before their creator.

This brings us to our second point inside of our paragraph.

II. God’s love demonstrated is vicarious (vv. 6-8).

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

⁷ For one will hardly die *for* a righteous man; though perhaps *for* the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died *for* us” (Rom. 5:6-8).

Vicarious means “performed or suffered by one person as a substitute for another or to the benefit or advantage of another.” <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/vicarious>

He took our place. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. The Father sent His only begotten Son in order that He might die in the place of His people. The word “vicarious” means “in place of.” Jesus Christ is our substitute. It was while we were sinners that His Son died in our place.

He died for us. We were supposed to die and He took our place. God become man in the incarnation in order that He might satisfy the wrath of God against sinners and represent man before the Father. The death Christ died is described as a vicarious sacrifice or a substitutionary death. Both ideas communicate the same thought.

“Having a substitute, the believer is out of the picture, and can never be touched in that he has a substitute.” (J.P. McBeth, Exegetical and Practical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [New York: Revell, 1937, 200].)

The Greek preposition *huper* speaks of “in behalf of, for the sake of.” I do not know if language or even imagination can grasp the enormity of this thought.

ILLUSTRATION:

I ask for leniency in order that I might paint for us a repugnant picture so that we might catch a glimpse of God’s activity in our behalf.

Let us imagine going into a den of pedophiles that are openly engaging in their devilish behavior. Let us now imagine that in order for them to be forgiven of their crimes against individuals, you must die in their place. These individuals show no remorse, no repentance, and no shame. Let us also imagine that they hate you and are openly antagonistic toward you. Would you die for them? The only hope they have of living is for you dying. Would you accept the sentence against them in order that they might live? Would you take their place?

Jesus Christ took our place. “The death of Jesus is the proof that God is for us.” (J.P. McBeth, Exegetical and Practical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [New York: Revell, 1937, 200].)

While we were going about avoiding and hating God, that same God was having His Son, Christ, meet all the Divine claims against us by His death on Calvary! (William H. Newell on Romans Verse-by-Verse, 5:10)

Because Jesus Christ is our substitute we are safe.

“The design of this [v. 7], and the following verse, is to show that Christ's dying for ungodly persons is **an instance of kindness that is matchless and unparalleled.**” (John Gill on Romans 5:7)

He died for us. We were supposed to die and He took our place. God become man in the incarnation in order that He might satisfy the wrath of God against sinners and represent man before the Father. There are very few people for whom you would voluntarily die in the place of. The potentiality of you or I dying in the place of another is thin; the thought that the person for whom we might die is an open antagonist is even thinner. Yet, this is exactly what Jesus Christ did for His people.

This brings us to our third point inside of our paragraph.

III. God’s love demonstrated is wrath satisfying (vv. 9, 10).

⁹ “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, **we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.** 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” (Rom. 5:9, 10).

The demonstration of God's love at the cross is wrath satisfying (Rom. 5:9, 10). Our verses use such powerful words as "justified," "saved from the wrath of God," and "reconciliation." All of these consequences are secured because of the death Christ died. It is through His blood that sinners can stand before the eternal creator God as justified, fully and completely acquitted. It is because of His death and His life that the lost are found, the drowning saved, and the alienated reconciled.

In verses ten and eleven the word reconciliation is used. Because the wrath of God has been placated by the blood of Jesus Christ and because we are declared right because of His death in our behalf, the gap existing between God and man has been closed so that we are now reconciled to God.

It is the vicarious death and resurrected life of our Lord Jesus Christ that gives us life.

He now passes over to the other part of justification, which consists in the free imputation of the obedience of Christ: so that to the remission of sins, there is added moreover and besides, the gift of Christ's righteousness imputed or put upon us by faith, which swallows up that unrighteousness which flowed from Adam into us, and all the fruits of it: so that in Christ we do not only cease to be unjust, but we begin also to be just. (Geneva Study Bible on Romans 5:11)

If Jesus Christ did not take on Himself human nature and if He did not die the death of the cross and if He did not take our place in the wrath absorbing vicarious act, then we would still be and eternal exist in a state of complete alienation from all that is God.

Hallelujah, What a Savior!

P.P. Bliss

Man of Sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God, Who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
"Full atonement!" can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;
 “It is finished!” was His cry;
 Now in Heav’n exalted high.
 Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,
 All His ransomed home to bring,
 Then anew His song we’ll sing:
 Hallelujah! What a Savior!

“How can it be then that Christ, being now alive, should not save them from destruction whom by his death he justifies and reconciles?” (Geneva Study Bible on Romans 5:7)

“The streams are very sweet, but, if you run them up to the spring-head, you will find it to be Christ's dying for us; it is in the precious stream of Christ's blood that all these privileges come flowing to us” (Matthew Henry's Commentary on Romans 5:6ff).

ILLUSTRATION:

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
 I'd rather one should walk with me than merely show the way.
 The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear;
 Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear.
 And the best of all preachers are the men who live their creeds,
 For to see the good in action is what everyone needs.

I can soon learn how to do it if you'll let me see it done;
 I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.
 And the lectures you deliver may be very wise and true;
 But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.
 For I may misunderstand you and the high advice you give,
 But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.
 (The Lookout) http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=854

In this passage we see fully a simple but unthinkable demonstration of God's love.

This brings us to our fourth point inside of our paragraph.

IV. God's love demonstrated is glorious (v. 11).

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

The demonstration of God's love at the cross is glorious (Rom. 5:11). The death Christ died causes us to boast and glory in nothing else but Him in His redemptive work and unconditional intercession. There is nothing so glorious and majestic that

would prompt us to boast or glory in anything else. To make our boast in anything other than the cross is an insult and injurious to the true depth of His life and death.

The word “exult” means “to boast or to glory.” It is the shout of triumph that comes from comprehending the love of God for lost sinners. It is the love of God that moves us to worship Him. His love is an expression of a lavish grace. **He did for us what we could never do for ourselves in order that we might gain what we could never earn.**

The death of Christ is proof positive that He will never forsake us. “He rescued us when we were enemies by a supreme act of love. Now that we are His, He will take us all the way through to the end.” (Alva J. McClain, *Romans*, BMH, 1973, 129)

If our worship of God would appear flat, then perhaps it is because we are not thinking enough on the love of God as demonstrated in the cross of Jesus Christ?

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here? What is the NEXT STEP?)

If this is true, then how should we now live?

First, just as God loves us unconditionally, so also should we love others unconditionally.

No matter how disappointing our children or parents or spouses or employees might have turned out to be, there is still no reason as to why our love for them should be anything less than unconditional. If God loves us unconditionally, then we too should love unconditionally.

Second, there are times when we will have to do something for someone in whom there is neither gratitude nor virtue.

It is when this happens that we are most like God in our love. Such moments are undefined and unplanned, they simply happen, but when they do, may God work in us and through us His love to them.

Third, when we find ourselves in wrath-filled situations, it is only love that will cover a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8).

“The hard truth of our call to reconciliation is that reconciliation happens in the context of wounds and division. As Christians, our icon of the ministry of reconciliation is the Cross. But our willingness to be present with the world's wounds, to return blessings for accusation, to love without regard for who is appreciative or deserving, will be a means through which the whole world — friends and persecutors, and even ourselves — will experience the Good News of healing, reconciliation, and abundant life in Christ, the boundless harvest of which Jesus' resurrection was just the first fruits.”

http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2005/06/proper_6_year_a.html

Let the love of God be a wrath-satisfying expression of biblical Christianity in you and through you to those who least deserve it.

Finally, when all is said and done, the last virtue remaining will be love (1 Cor. 13:13).

Love is glorious. Love outshines everything else. Pray that God will work in you and through His love to those around you. May you and I be instruments/channels through which the love of God is poured. When God pours in us and through us His love, it will be glorious in His church. May this be what moves us to live as people of love.