

Romans (5:6-11)

Grasping God's Love

Part 17 - November 7, 2004

A STRATEGIC SACRIFICE

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul wanted us to grasp the fact that we all deserve God's righteous wrath. Now he wants us to grasp God's love, in the counteracting fact that it is God Himself who works to save us from that wrath.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. - Romans 5:6-11 NIV

In verse six, when Paul says:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. - Romans 5:6 NIV

Paul's point is that it wasn't *circumstances* or *chance* that led Christ to the cross ... it was a divine strategic plan devised for recipients who are both "powerless" and "ungodly"

Imagine you're holed-up in Fallujah with your combat team, the war raging around you all, when a live grenade rolls into the small room you're occupying ... no time to re-throw or run. All of you are helpless and hopeless against its power.

- But, *at just the right time* you throw yourself onto it.

Now imagine you've been captured, beaten, and tortured by Iraqi insurgents, and the grenade rolls in ... and you *could* run away.

Q: Would you throw yourself onto it for the *un-American*?

- This is what Christ did when He died to reconcile His *enemies*.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:7-8 NIV

- Christ's sacrifice is the perfect proof of God's love

I want to show you something cool. Read these three passages with me and emphasize the words: loved and gave.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son ... – John 3:16 NAS

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... – Ephesians 5:25 NIV

[Christ] loved me and gave himself for me. – Galatians 2:20 NIV

Whether we're talking about God's love for the world, the church, or just me, the strategic sacrificial gift of His Son's broken body is His ultimate demonstration of love.

HEAD & HEART

And God expects us to respond to His love in two ways:

Q: Remember last week (in verse five) when Paul said:

... God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit ... – Romans 5:5 NIV

This speaks of an intangible *experience* (through a supernatural act of God's Spirit) to be felt as the heart feels love.

1. (Therefore) We should respond emotionally.

Q: What feelings would you express for a comrade who threw himself onto a grenade to save *your* life?

A: Perhaps an emotional mix of humility and gratitude.

Now, in verse eight Paul says:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8 NIV

This speaks of a tangible *exhibition* (through the historical facts of God's plan) to be comprehended with the mind.

2. (Therefore) We should respond intelligently.

Q: Wouldn't you want to learn as much as you could about that soldier: Who he was; why he'd do such a thing for you?

- But, some folks' religion contains nothing more than *facts*.
- And some folks' spirituality contains nothing but *feelings*.

If you have a comprehensive theology but have never opened your heart to feeling His affection, you'll be prone to: Spiritual emptiness, impotence, and intellectualism.

If you possess spiritual emotion without an understanding of the basis upon which your faith stands, you'll be prone to: Cultism, emotionalism, and fanaticism.

This is why our Membership Manual states as a Core Value that: A balance should be struck between head and heart. We are called to think clearly and feel deeply. Well-balanced faith will put an equal emphasis on formulating faith thoughtfully, and feeling faith passionately.

There is truth *and* Spirit, therefore:

- I must grasp the love of God with my mind *and* my heart

HOW MUCH MORE!

As I read, you shout out the three word phrase: "how much more"

Since we have now been justified by his blood, **how much more** shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, **how much more**, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! – Romans 5:9-10 NIV

You see, all of mankind were God's enemies: we toward Him in our rebellion, and He toward us in righteous wrath. But, here's how Paul is using this phrase: *how much more*.

Suppose the soldier who saved your life was an insurgent who *you* had captured. And suppose he lived in spite of his wounds. You become friends while he lies in an army hospital. And he invites you to visit his family after the war.

Q: When that day comes, would it be rational for you to fear that he might not welcome you into his home?

A: Of course not!

If he was willing to die for you while an enemy, *how much more* would he be willing to now celebrate with you as a friend?

Paul wants us to have confidence and assurance in Christ. When we receive reconciliation it's not from enemies to a *truce*, it's enemies to *friends* (even *adopted children*).

REJOICE AND RECEIVE

Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. – Romans 5:11 NIV

Verses 6-11 say that Christ died for us, and through His death: God demonstrates his love, justifies His followers, saves us from His own wrath, and reconciles us to Himself.

Q: So what's the catch ... what's expected of us in return?

A: Verse 11 gives us the only two active verbs in these verses:

- "Rejoice" and "Receive"

We didn't earn it, we don't deserve it, and we can't afford it.

- We must receive it and live a life of joyful appreciation

Q: And we're called to rejoice in what?

A: "In God."

Q: And we receive reconciliation with whom?

A: With God.

- You see, *salvation* is a gift of God "doing something for us": rescuing us from sin and guilt and hell.
- And, *justification* is a gift of God "doing something for us": cleansing us from sin and counting us righteous.

But reconciliation *isn't* a gift of God "doing something for us".

It's the gift of God Himself, restored to us in relationship, so that we can rejoice with Him – in head and heart – for eternity.