



Salvation for Enemies

Romans 5:6-11

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I'm glad to be back in the book of Romans. We'll be looking this morning at Romans, chapter 5, verses 6-11. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 5, beginning at verse 6:

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would open up your Word to us. Open it up by the power and work of your Holy Spirit. Illuminate our minds. Make our hearts good soil for the truth of your Word. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

We're here this morning in the fifth chapter of Romans, the book that is Paul's presentation of the great gospel. We've been going through the book of Romans now for some time, and we've seen that Paul began by telling us about the problem of sin, that sin is condemning, that sin is debilitating, and that sin is what separates us from God.

Paul further went on to tell us that sin is a problem for *all* of us. It is not just a problem for some people out there; it is a problem for each and every one of us. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, so this problem is something we all need to have resolved. In chapter 3, Paul began to tell us how we can be free from sin's power and free from sin's condemnation because of what Jesus has done. We can be justified by faith and receive the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Then in chapter 4, Paul began to show us how this doctrine is a biblical doctrine. He showed us from the Old Testament what it looks like to be justified by faith, specifically in the persons of Abraham and David. Now, starting in chapter 5, Paul is going to begin speaking about the consequences of this justification. So the answer we need to seek is... *Why would God justify us today?* Paul tells us it's because of his love, even when we do not deserve it.

This morning, I'd like us to see three things about God's love. First, we see that *God's love is praised*, that God's love is worthy of all of our praise. Secondly, we see that *God's love is great*. God's great love comes before us, and we see the magnitude of the love of God. Thirdly, we see *our response to such love*, this love that God sheds abroad. We see it, we experience it, and this is our response to it. God's love praised, God's great love, and our response to such love.

God's Love Praised

Remember the immediate context of our passage this morning. As we begin to look at God's love that is worthy of being praised, the first thing we see is that his love is undeserved. It is unearned, unmerited. The immediate context describes this for us. The Lord has given great blessings to people, and he gives it to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and who are justified by faith. This is what Paul says in chapter 5, verse 1. Because of it, we have the experience of being at peace with God. This peace is objective. It is real. It is not a subjective feeling.

Secondly, we now have access to God. We can approach the Lord without fear. Thirdly, we have hope, rooted in who God is...not only what he has done but who he is. Then there are also things that the Lord has done in our lives, changing us by the work of Christ. We can now rejoice in our sufferings. You remember that the reason we can rejoice in our sufferings is because we know they are not meaningless, that they are, rather, a part of the purpose of God. Even when we can't see it, our sufferings are a part of God's purposes.

Also, we are being made more and more like Jesus Christ. God produces a godly character in us as he makes us more and more like Jesus. Finally, we saw at the end of this initial passage in chapter 5, verse 5, that the love of God is made more real and understandable to us as the Holy Spirit pours it out into our hearts. It is at this point now that Paul begins to expound upon the love of God. As we've seen in the past, Paul anticipates the questions we have. He makes an argument, and just when we are ready or someone is ready to say, "Oh, but, Paul, I have a question..."

Perhaps we might think Paul doesn't have the answer. Paul is very ready. He anticipates it, and he says, "I'm glad you've asked that. Let me see if I can explain this a bit more." We need saving, and the Father has sent the Son to save us. We need to do nothing except believe. So the question we ask Paul is, "Why? Why would God bother to save me? What can I bring to God that he would do this?" Paul's answer is the same that it has always been. It's just expanded here: Nothing. You could do nothing. You could bring nothing. You deserve nothing.

God does this because of his love for you. That's why the Father sent the Son. That's why we could be justified by faith. It is because of the love of God for his people. Now let's stop for a moment and think about this. What is love? Our society has, I daresay, an obsession with love. Love is kind of the decisive turn in any argument. If there's any disagreement and you need to get a one-up on someone else, you simply declare that you have to do this for love or that love requires this.

It's kind of a trump card you lay down. It ends the discussion. You don't need any more reason, any more rationality. Love is what matters more than anything else. Yet at the exact same time in our society love has become increasingly transactional. Let me give you one example. Marriage began as a covenantal, committed relationship with another person, and now it has devolved into an exchange of meeting each other's needs.

To be sure that I can have your love, I need to be lovely, or even more than that, I need to do things to earn your love. I need to make myself worthy of your love, and if I'm no longer worthy of your love, then our commitment means nothing and we can mutually decide to call it a day and to separate. That's what happens in our society today, but this is not the love of God in the Bible. It is important for us to see what motivates God's love, because if we think we deserve God's love, we will never be secure.

If we're honest, we'll always be thinking that we're going to mess it up, that we're going to do something and God is going to come to his senses and realize we're not as lovely as he thinks we are, and he's going to leave us behind. The problem is if we think that, we don't understand who God is, and we don't understand who *we* are. Paul is here this morning to set us straight.

In verse 8, he summarizes God's love for us. He says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Paul is very clear here. There is nothing in us that prompts God to love us. To be very plain, God gets nothing out of loving us. He gets no benefit. At first glance, this sounds cold or cruel. God doesn't need us. What kind of a relationship would that be? But the truth is actually glorious. God loves us in spite of who we are, and nothing can take that away.

So what are we like when God loves us? How do we know it is all of God and not of us? Paul describes what we are like. He does so using four words. The first word he uses in verse 6 is the word *weak*. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." We are weak. We are helpless. We are unable to please God in any way if left to ourselves.

You have to understand what this word means is not just that we're in a tight spot because of circumstances. It's not as if the clock is running out at the football game and we're about to lose, but if somehow someone gave us three extra time-outs we could pull it out. No. There is no circumstance that could be changed that would make us able. That's what this word means. We are weak in and of ourselves.

Paul has described this previously to us. He says, "No one seeks after God. No one does good. No one understands." He's including everyone in that. Think for a moment. He's including *himself* in that. No one seeks after God. This is who we were: weak. The second word Paul uses to describe us is in the same verse. It is the word *ungodly*. We shouldn't get the impression that it's just that we're unable or just that we're ignorant. It's actually much worse than that.

Paul reminds us that we were ungodly, and this means we were irreverent. We were sacrilegious. We were against God. What we have to think about is we hated God for who he was and is. Because he's sovereign, we hate his rule. Because he's holy, we hate holiness and we seek wickedness. To be ungodly is to be against God, to delight in the things that God hates.

The third word Paul uses to describe us in verse 8 is that we were *sinner*s. What this means is this weakness, this rebellion, this ungodliness in us works itself out in our lives. We are opposed to God, so because of that, we break his law. What being a sinner means in its most basic form is to refuse to conform to God's will and God's standards. We want our own way. We want to go our own path. We don't want to be tied down by God. We want to transgress, is another way of saying this. We're weak, we're ungodly, and we're sinners.

Finally, in verse 10, Paul comes to the climax of who we are apart from Christ. He says we were *enemies* of God. I think often we have this view that before we came to know the Lord Jesus Christ we were kind of neutral about God. People even claim that. People will often refuse to say they're an atheist. They'll just say they're agnostic. They don't know enough about God. If maybe God gives them enough evidence, maybe that will convince them, but right now they're kind of on the fence.

What Paul says is you were not on the fence; you were on the other side, and you had a weapon in your hand and were going after God. If you could have destroyed him, you would have. Lest we think that's a bit fanciful or harsh, all we have to do is look and see what sinners did when God came in human flesh. They destroyed him, or so they thought. It wasn't even enough to kill him. They had to punish him as much as they could. They wanted him banished from their sight. They thought they had won the victory.

That's what it means to be outside of Christ, to be an enemy of God. Now we are enemies of God, and God is opposed to us. Think about that. Paul is describing the love of God to us, his enemies. This is encouraging. You are not as bad as you think you are. Cheer up. You're worse. That's actually good news, because God has loved you in spite of that.

We think we put on our best clothes and our best airs and our best speech, and we have other people fooled so they will love us. Sometimes, in the pit of our stomach, we're afraid that somehow our true personality will get out. This happens often for parents of young children. They have crafted an image of themselves with others, and then all of a sudden, a young child comes up and blurts out something they say at home. You are horrified, because now the jig is up and people know what you're really like, and how will they react to you?

We live in fear of someone finding out who we are. You don't need to fear God finding out who you are. He already knows you better than you know yourself. The things you have done that you would wake up in a cold sweat if your spouse found out about it, God already knows. The things you have done that you fear your parents would hear about it, God already knows. He knows you at your worst. How encouraging is this, that the love of God comes to us though we don't deserve it.

The next thing Paul reminds us of is the cost of this love. Love is a costly thing. By definition, love is self-sacrifice. Think about your family, for example. You sacrifice all the time for your family. You sacrifice your immediate desires. You sacrifice your preferences. You sacrifice your efforts. You put in work that you don't want to put in. Why? For something greater than that: for love. It's no different for God's love. It comes at a cost. In fact, Paul tells us how great the cost was.

The cost of God's love can be seen in his purpose and his plan to send his Son. Paul alludes to this when he says in verse 6 "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." This reminds us of Galatians 4:4 where we are told, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman." What this means is God's love is not accidental. It's not halfhearted. It's not half-efforted. It's not as if, well, you know, Jesus happened to be in the neighborhood, and we happened to need some help, so I guess I've got some time to kill. We could save some people.

God's love is purposeful. It is planned from all eternity. When the perfectly right time had come, the Father sent the Son. The Father sent the Son not just to show us the way to God. Jesus was not just an example to us to follow. Paul tells us the true cost of God's love was the death of Jesus Christ. While we were weak and ungodly, totally undeserving, at just the right time, the Father sent the Son for us. He sent him to die for the ungodly.

Think about that for a moment. Who is Christ? Christ is God himself. He is perfect in all his ways. He is righteous and he is good. Who are we? We are sinners. We are weak and helpless, wicked and rebellious. This is so counterintuitive to us. Why would God make such a sacrifice for us? Paul gives us an illustration of this in verse 7. He says, "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die..."

What Paul is saying here is not some kind of contrast between a righteous man and a good man and your odds of someone dying for you based on what kind of man you are. What he's saying is it's rare. It's exceptional. With difficulty someone might die for someone else who's righteous or good. We see this throughout history. We see it when someone in the army dies for his buddies in a war. We see it when someone lays down their life for their family in an attack.

But this is not what Paul is talking about. Can you imagine a father dying on behalf of the murderer of his children? Could you imagine a soldier dying for the enemy who's attacking him? It makes no sense. This shows us how great God's love is. No cost is too great for him. Christ died for the ungodly, those who are opposed to God. Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

Beloved, God does not wait for you to come around. He doesn't only love those who love him. He's not responding to our seeking him. He is the one initiating. God's love initiates with us when we are not worthy. Could there be any greater security for us? Could you be any more assured of God's love? You can't worry

about God falling out of love with you, because you weren't worthy of his love to start with. He has already seen you at your worst. How secure are we in the love of God.

God's Great Love

Paul now moves on to a series of arguments to show the greatness of God's love. First, that we are saved from wrath, and second, that we are reconciled to God. Technically, these are called *a fortiori* arguments, for those of you who know logic. Put very simply, you argue from the greater to the lesser. What this means is that God gives us assurances of his love and what he *will* do based on what he has already done, which is great and powerful.

We might think of it *this* way. It's as if someone came up to you and asked, "Do you really think you can make that hour-and-a-half drive?" and you say, "Listen. I just took the vehicle 12 hours on vacation. An hour and a half is a piece of cake. It's nothing." You're arguing from the stronger to the lesser. Or as if someone says, "Can you help me with my arithmetic quiz? I need help with $3 + 3$ and $4 + 5$," and you say, "Listen. I just completed college algebra. Of course I can do simple math." You argue from the stronger point to the lesser point.

The first argument Paul makes here is about our security in escaping the wrath of God. Do you understand what the Bible means when it says we are saved? There are actually three dimensions to this: a past, a present, and a future. There's a past dimension to this in that we say, "God *has* saved me from my sins when Jesus Christ died on the cross and I believed." There's a past tense there. I live as a result of this salvation.

There's also a present tense. Right now, God *is* saving me. He is making me more and more like Jesus Christ. He is saving me from the power of sin daily. Then there's also a future tense, that God *will* save me. On that great day of judgment when everyone comes before the throne of God, when Jesus returns, I *will* be saved. I *have* been saved, I *am being* saved, I *will* be saved.

So how do these three aspects relate? I think sometimes we are tempted to doubt what Jesus has done for us. We try to separate out these aspects. It's not just bad theologians who think you're saved in different ways; it's bound up in our hearts. We can doubt what Jesus has done because it hasn't been completely and finally fulfilled. There remains a day of judgment that will occur.

It is true that we are not yet fully saved, because the day of judgment hasn't come yet, so it is possible for us to fear that God might change his mind or that we might do something to mess it up. What Paul assures us with is that our future standing before God is grounded and certain in the work of Jesus Christ, that Jesus has already accomplished our justification. That's what he says in verse 9. "We have now been justified by his blood." It is something Jesus has done at great cost, the cost of his blood.

This provides us with confidence for the coming judgment. "Since we have been justified by his blood..." Look at what Paul says. "...much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God." Paul puts it *this* way. If you have believed on Jesus Christ and he has justified you with his death on the cross, there is no wrath that remains for you. How could God pour out his wrath upon Jesus and then reserve wrath for you on judgment day? It has already all been poured upon Jesus. What does the old hymn say?

Jesus paid it all
All to him I owe
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed it white as snow.

There is no sin remaining in us deserving of the wrath of God, because Jesus has borne it all. So we have no fear of the day of judgment, even though we read in the Scriptures that we will be judged with a perfect standard according to the perfect law of God. If we were relying upon our own works, our knees would knock in fear, but we do not need to fear, because Jesus has fulfilled the law for us. Jesus has borne our penalty for us.

We have great confidence in our judgment before God, not because of who *we* are or because of what *we* have done, because after all, we are not perfect, but because of what Jesus has already accomplished. "Look," Paul says. "If Jesus made you right with God when you were his enemy, how much more will he preserve you from the wrath to come now?" Look at what Jesus has done, and have confidence for what he *will* do.

The second argument Paul makes is about our life *in* Christ. He makes explicit in verse 10 what he has described in verses 6 and 8. He says, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." He has described who we were: weak, ungodly, sinners. That means we were enemies of God. We opposed God. We opposed his Word. We did not want a relationship with God. We wanted to rid ourselves of God so we could continue in our sin.

Paul is now going to show us the power of God's reconciliation. What does it mean that we were enemies of God? I think oftentimes when we hear a phrase like this we tend to focus upon ourselves and our own internal feelings and motivations. We tend to focus on *our* side of the equation, *our* hostility, *our* opposition to God. That is a true reality, but it's the wrong focus for what Paul is talking about.

Paul is not talking about a subjective transformation that takes place in us to change our attitude toward God. What he is talking about is the removal of our alienation from God, the removal of our separation from God. It is the removal of God's opposition to us based on our breaking of his law. This is a much greater thing. It is one thing for us to consider having our lives turned around, as hard as it would be.

You may have had this experience. Have you ever been convicted by the words of Scripture that you're supposed to love others? There's that person you know who you really can't stand. Whenever they talk it's like fingernails on a chalkboard. They never have anything good to say about you. You try, if you see them walking down the hall, to take a different route to be away from them. You screw up your courage and say, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to follow God's Word, and when I go to speak to them I'm only going to be positive and encouraging and loving."

Even though that's hard and even though that person might make it difficult, you can do it, can't you? You can't keep it up forever, but you can do it. That is not what Paul is talking about here. It's another thing to say that God has made peace with us and he's no longer opposed to us, because God has every right to be our enemy. We are the ones who have mocked him. We are the ones who have deserted him. We are the ones who have denied him.

Now why is this all so important? Because of the second half of Paul's argument. "...much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." If God has done so great and unbelievable a thing as reconciling us to himself when we were his enemies, what does that mean for our future life with him? Can we trust God? Do we have a future with God? Paul's answer is an emphatic "Yes."

If God reconciled us to himself when we were enemies, how much more will he keep us in his family now? That's what he's getting at when he says "saved by his life." The *life* here that's being described of Christ is not just the perfect life that Christ lived. It *is* true that we are saved by the obedience of Christ, the active obedience of Jesus, the life he lived in accordance with the law to earn the righteousness of the covenant, but that's not what Paul is talking about.

What Paul is getting at here is the resurrection life of Christ. That's why he puts it in opposition to the death of Christ in the same verse. If we're reconciled by the death of Christ, how much more will we live in his resurrected life, the fact that Jesus Christ lives forever to intercede for us? We're never alone. We never have to face anyone by ourselves.

You might even think of it *this* way: the Father's love is spread upon us, that he sent his Son to die for us that we might be reconciled. With this loving Father, even though our Father is loving, we still don't have to enter his presence alone. We have Jesus with us, pleading his merit for us. Any accusations that come against us are null and void at the word of Jesus. The power of his resurrected life.

We might put it *this* way: if God removed our separation from him at the cost of the death of his Son, how would he, then, not keep us in his love through the continued exalted resurrection life of his Son? What Paul is telling us is if we benefit from the death of Christ with forgiveness and reconciliation, we will surely, much more, benefit from the *life* of Christ, our future relationship with God.

Our Response to Such Love

Finally, how do we respond to such love from God? It is fitting that we talk about our response but that we also acknowledge that the critical work is God's. Without the Lord's love, we would be lost and helpless. God's love changes who we are. It changes us at the very core of our being. We are never the same; therefore, our response arises out of God's work for us.

The first thing we must acknowledge is that it is all of God's grace. It is far too easy for us to focus on ourselves. We think about what we've done or what we have to do, and we think even about our hostility, as we talked about before, how we need to be rid of our hostility to God. But we said earlier that Paul is not talking about our hostility to God; he's talking about God's separation from us.

Verse 11 makes this clear. It is not that we make reconciliation with God. Look at verse 11. "...through whom we have now received reconciliation." It is not that we see God's side of the story and we see that it makes sense and then decide to do what's best. "Now I can see what God is talking about in this Bible thing. That would be good for my life. I might flourish if I did this."

We see this kind of heresy break itself out in an old song you may have heard. Someone will say to you, "Well, God has voted for you. The Devil has voted against you. You need to cast the deciding vote." Paul says, "Not a chance." We don't reconcile with *God*; God reconciles with *us*. We *receive* reconciliation. Do you see the word? It doesn't say *make* reconciliation. It doesn't even say *have* reconciliation. It says we *receive* reconciliation. God comes and brings reconciliation to us. We do nothing.

That makes sense, because we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We are not righteous. We do not seek after God. No one does any good. We are weak and unable, so God does everything and reconciles us to himself. This is a critical truth. It is by God's grace that we receive what we have. God has reached out to undeserving sinners who were weak and unable, wicked and hostile, and he has brought them to himself by the death of Jesus Christ.

Do you deserve the death of the Son of God? Can you lay claim to God himself? You have to realize today that it is all of grace. If you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus and you're wondering what you can do to have all of these blessings, I have a word for you: Stop it! You cannot earn these blessings. There is nothing you can do to be reconciled to God. It is just by receiving what God has done that you can be right with God and know peace with God. You can believe right now and be reconciled with the Father.

Secondly, our response is to rejoice in the Lord our God. When we truly understand who God is and what he has done, we are in awe of him. Paul says, "More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We cannot help but praise him for his wisdom, his power, his provision. This is not just a by-product of our salvation. It's not as if we have a slight feeling of thankfulness that comes over us for all of the good stuff God has given to us.

Paul says it very emphatically: "More than that..." This is a really big deal, Paul says. We rejoice in God because that is the end of our salvation. Do you see how we can do that? It is through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved from the wrath of God, and we live in the resurrection power of Jesus so we can rejoice in God.

God's love is a great love. It is great because it is powerful enough to save. It is great because it overcomes our sin, but it is truly great because it comes from him. Praise him for his love. Praise him for what he has done, but most of all, praise him for who he is.