

Romans 5:6-11 The demonstration of His love

Introduction

What is love? Is it adequately defined by a gushing overflow of sentimental speech? Is it the boringly predictable stereotyping of superficial relationships seen in so many Hollywood films or television soaps? Or is it something modelled in a lifestyle that may include words, but demonstrates in a powerfully practical way an attitude and conviction that is to a limited degree a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ? I want to suggest today that this love is seen in the practical care I have seen time and again in homes where individuals and sometimes families cared for their loved ones performing without complaining tasks they never envisaged when promises were made before God in a marriage ceremony. I have seen it in the faithful dedicated service in pastoral work of men and women who love the Lord Jesus so much that they, behind the scenes, offer to support others who need a helping hand. There are the people who make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in modelling something of God's love to others. One example of this was Maximilian Kolbe who was a Polish priest who died as prisoner 16770 in Auschwitz on August 14, 1941. When a prisoner escaped from the camp, the Nazis selected 10 others to be killed by starvation in reprisal for the escape. One of the 10 selected to die, Franciszek Gajowniczek, began to cry: *My wife! My children! I will never see them again!* At this Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward and asked to die in his place. His request was granted. Observers believed in horror that the commandant would be angered and would refuse the request, or would order the death of both men. The commandant remained silent for a moment. What his thoughts were on being confronted by this brave priest we have no idea. Amazingly, however, he acceded to the request. Apparently the Nazis had more use for a young worker than for an old one, and were happy to make the exchange. Franciszek Gajowniczek was returned to the ranks, and the priest took his place. Gajowniczek later recalled: I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on. **The immensity of it; I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me – a stranger. Is this some sort of dream?** I was put back in my place without having any time to say anything to Maximilian Kolbe. I was saved. And I owe to him the fact that I could tell you all this. The news spread quickly all around the camp. It was the first and the last time that such an incident happened in the whole history of Auschwitz. For a long time I felt remorse when I thought of Maximilian. By allowing myself to be saved, I had signed his death warrant. But now, on reflection, I understand that a man like him could not have done otherwise. Perhaps he thought that as a priest his place was besides the condemned men to help them keep hope. In fact he was with them to the last. [www.auschwitz.dk/Kolbe.htm]. The apostle Paul wrote these words in Romans 5:6-11 that explain the incredible depth of the love of God in Christ for His people, past, present and future, who would be saved through His sacrifice on the cross. *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! ¹⁰For if, while 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! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation* (Romans 5:6-11). This is the demonstration of His love. This is the greatest possible demonstration of His love and justice combined to demonstrate both His integrity and righteous requirements, together with His incredible desire to bridge the gulf between sinful humanity and Himself. Let's look more closely at the key points Paul raises here.

1. How does Paul describe the people for whom God demonstrates love? (Romans 5:6-8, 10a)

Looking back a couple of millennia later it is difficult to comprehend how things might have worked out without God's intervention in history in the person of Jesus Christ. In particular, Paul would want to explain to us the depth of our plight without Jesus, which is often understated today. This predicament is increasingly highlighted through his use of four words to show that self-conversionism or any other method of attempting to bridge the gap between humanity and a holy God would be totally impossible. The apostle invites his reader to look in the mirror of our hearts and to reflect on the image that is visible before us. To be outside of Christ is a serious plight we need to do something about. How does Paul describe humanity outside of a living relationship with God?

(a) **Powerless** (Romans 5:6a) *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless...* The strength of this word must not be minimised. It means exactly what it says. It hurts human pride to admit there are things over which we do not have ultimate control. I remember more than a decade ago a story on the news of a businessman from Norfolk who wouldn't take flights because that obviously means delegating control to the pilot and co-pilot! Very few people take it that far, but our sinful human nature screams for control in our lives and struggles to accept limitations upon it. We feel sympathy for a baby that cannot change its nappy, though that is natural, but are even more sympathetic to an older person who through reasons of a health condition or sheer old age that needs assistance to get dressed or washed or taken to the bathroom, as none of us would wish that situation upon our loved ones and friends, or indeed ourselves. Yet spiritually that is our state before God. Without the intervention of the Holy Spirit of God our hope of salvation would be zero. In I Corinthians 2:14 the apostle Paul wrote: *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.* This is in line with Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3:3-5: *'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'*⁴ *'How can someone be born when they are old?'* Nicodemus asked. *'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'*⁵ Jesus answered, *'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.* The most graphic statement of our powerlessness comes in Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus: *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world... But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions* (Ephesians 2:1-2a, 4-5a).

(b) **Ungodly** (Romans 5:6b) ... *Christ died for the ungodly.* Paul has already drawn attention to this facet of the human predicament in Romans 1:18 ***The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness...*** There are many ways in which we are not like God that are perfectly acceptable. The fact was we are human and not divine is the most obvious thing, but it is not a neutral or obvious point Paul is making here. The apostle is highlighting that aspect of fallen human nature that knows the truth of who God is and what He is like and what He expects from us, but consciously chooses to act in opposition to God. What is more in Romans 5:6 the description is not aimed only at the 'really wicked people' locked up in prison for many years for their misdeeds, rather it is a wilful behavioural choice of attitude of humanity outside of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is ultimately a failure to give God His due place in our lives. In many aspects of their lives some people who reject a need to trust the Lord are decent honourable citizens and may be contributing far more to society than others who make some kind of profession of faith, but don't follow it through as they should. To be 'ungodly' is to fail to honour God as He is entitled to expect from His creatures. There

is though a nagging challenge to us who profess faith in Christ –do my attitudes in my family, my workplace, in my social settings or in my local church reflect godliness or Christ-likeness? Or do I need to ask God to help me work through an issue or issues. This is a life-long challenge not just an issue that is resolved completely at conversion. Christian perfectionism (or ‘entire sanctification’ as it is sometimes called) in this life is a goal, but will only be a reality beyond this life.

(c) **Sinners** (Romans 5:8) *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* Those who miss the mark. Like an inadequate archer whose arrows set off in hope but keep missing the target zone, our efforts to be good enough, to save ourselves by good works, is insufficient to be acceptable to God. Paul has already highlighted this point in Romans 3:10-11 where he states that in our natural human state without the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit: *‘There is no one righteous, not even one;¹¹ there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God... Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, **through the law we become conscious of our sin.*** (Romans 3:20); his concluding point in that section was this: *There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,²³ for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God... (Romans 3:22b-23). This is a comprehensive statement of our plight outside of Christ. Not only are we unable to save ourselves even if we wished to – that is powerless; then the natural inclination of the heart of fallen humanity is against honouring God as God in His world –that is ungodly. As a result we have fallen short of what is required to earn our salvation- therefore someone has to come into our human predicament to prevent us from being eternally separated from God. However, does sinful humanity on the whole long for such a saviour? The sad reality is the exact opposite is the case, as Romans 5:10a reminds us.*

(d) **Enemies** (Romans 5:10a) *For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him...* This was not a slip of the quill pen by Paul’s scribe. In Romans 8:7 the apostle Paul uses similar language: *The mind governed by the flesh is **hostile to God**; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.* This verse shows a conscious deepening of the predicament. It is not simply we didn’t know about it or could do anything about it; nor is it something we know about but simply have other priorities; nor is there a choosing of alternative values together with a total indifference to God, this verse indicates something far worse, an active hostility to God and all that He stands for. Such a person, if they could, would remove God from the throne of His creation and desire most earnestly to make up their own morals and values and in Sinatra’s famous words ‘I did it my way’. It is a conscious rebellion against God and everything He stands for. In Romans 11: 28 Paul refers to some of his fellow Jews in this way with respect to God: *As far as the gospel is concerned, **they are enemies** for your sake;* On a pastoral level the apostle struggled with this issue. In Philippians 3:18 *For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as **enemies of the cross of Christ**...* Yet it must be plain that the apostle does not have in mind the equivalents of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens of his day, as is clear from his words in Colossians 1:21-22: ***Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.**²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...* It is humanity in general the apostle infers through these quotations. James in his short letter puts it very bluntly that: *... don’t you know that friendship with the world means **enmity against God**?* (James 4:4). The apostle wanted to take the time to underline the unpromising predicament of humanity to whom God would demonstrate His wonderful love. We had not deserved it, earned it or even desired it in advance of His initiative in salvation. God loves us in spite of our unworthiness of it. This fact ensures that Christians have never had any grounds to think of themselves as any better than anyone else – all of us as sinful humanity are in the same predicament, in need of a Saviour.

2. How do we grasp the depth of God's love? (Romans 5:8a)

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us

The first point has already been addressed by Paul in his analysis of our plight. God could have chosen to leave us, helpless, to our own devices. However, he took the initiative and demonstrated the extent of His love towards us by asking His Son to give His life as the Saviour for the world on the cross. He proved the full extent of His love by doing what none of us could reasonably have asked Him to do on our behalf. To reflect on this amazing truth is incredible. We know as parents or grandparents that we would like to think we would put our lives on the line for our children or grandchildren –but honestly we would struggle to add too many more people to the list, for the very best of reasons! This is why the gospel is so glorious as Paul testified in Galatians 2:20: *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave Himself for me.*** The tension over the risks of giving lives for another person and the responsibilities for the one so rescued were memorably played out in the film *Saving Private Ryan*. However, fiction only takes us so far, the lifelong gratitude of Franciszek Gajowniczek to Maximilian Kolbe proves how life changing it is to recognise that someone has actually, voluntarily died so you could live. Paul in Romans 5:7-8 captures the astonishing love of God in doing what so few human beings would willingly have done for others. *Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.*⁸ *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** Has that ever truly sunk in with you? Maybe even as a Christian you have never really allowed time to stop and marvel at the magnitude of this sacrifice in your place and mine? Or are you here as someone who has never placed your faith and trust in Jesus and accepted your need to acknowledge Jesus' death in your place on the cross?

The well-known American pastor and Bible convention speaker of the last century Donald Barnhouse illustrated a message on this subject with these illustrations. He told first of two men trapped in a mine after a rock fall. Poisonous gas was leaking into the cavity where they were located. One of the two men had a wife and three children but his mask had been torn off in the explosion and could not be reached. His life expectancy was extremely limited until the unexpected action of his colleague. The other man firmly insisted that the family man take his mask knowing full well that in minutes he would probably perish. 'You have Mary and the children. They need you. I am alone.' How do you define or quantify love?

The second illustration, again from early in the previous century, came from a family with two children one a boy was quite a few years older than his sister. The girl had some kind of serious accident and was crippled but needed an operation which was quickly organised. There was a problem though in that she would need a blood transfusion after the operation and the hospital was short of supplies of that blood group. The elder brother matched her group and he was asked to give blood. He was taken tight-lipped to her bedside and the needle inserted into his vein and the blood transferred to his little sister. When the transfusion was over the doctor commended the boy on his bravery of enduring the procedure in silence. The youngster knew nothing about blood transfusions nor the doctor about the bravery of the boy –until the boy looked up at him and quietly said: 'Doc, how long before I croak?' He had mistakenly thought the doctor had removed all his blood and that therefore his gift of blood would result in the loss of his life –which he had agreed to, albeit with a little apprehension [Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Exposition of Bible Doctrine*, Vol.4, pp. 161-162]. Jesus willingly laid down His life for you –what is your response to Him?

An anonymous person, years ago, explained this truth using John 3:16 to make the point: *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

GOD	the greatest Lover
SO LOVED	the greatest degree
THE WORLD	the greatest number
THAT HE GAVE	the greatest act
HIS ONE AND ONLY SON	the greatest Gift
THAT WHOEVER	the greatest invitation
BELIEVES	the greatest simplicity
IN HIM	the greatest Person
SHOULD NOT PERISH	the greatest deliverance
BUT	the greatest difference
HAVE	the greatest certainty
ETERNAL LIFE	the greatest possession [www.Crossway.org/tracts/the-greatest-gift]

Could you describe it any better than this? I doubt it! The question is have you experienced this love? Have you trusted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour –if not please do so today!

3. The assurance of God’s amazing love (Romans 5:9-11)

(a) **We are saved through Christ** (Romans 5:9-10) *Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through Him! ¹⁰ For if, while 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!* (i) **Saved from His wrath** (5:9) Is Paul here simply reinforcing the point by repetition of what he has said previously by declaring the truth of the effectiveness of Christ’s death on the cross for us? No! He has spoken in detail about how in the past objectively in the perfect finished work of Jesus on the cross we have been saved, that is put into a place of right standing with God. The child of God can say truthfully: ‘I have been saved’ by the Lord Jesus who died for me. We can also say equally that the gift of salvation is our ongoing experience. Paul, in I Corinthians 1:18 wrote: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but **to us who are being saved** it is the power of God.* A past event and present experience are equally true. You might state: ‘I was employed by ‘x’ company on a certain date some years ago’, but unless you said otherwise I should expect that you are still employed by that company. Or a fourteen-year old person declaring that they started ‘x’ High School on a certain date –we would expect if the school was in the city where they lived that they were still attending that institution. Our experience of Christ should be a present one –not just a testimony of something in the past. Yet Paul is writing here neither about the past nor the present but his thoughts have turned to the end of life on earth for his hearers and readers. Paul had already, in Romans 2:5, warned people who rejected God’s gift of salvation in Jesus of the dangers of living life without God in this way: *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed.* Should the child of God who has put their faith and trust in Jesus be at risk of this judgement? *Since we have now been justified by His blood, **how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath** through Him* (Romans 5:9). The apostle is speaking of the future day of judgement. It is not something for us to fear. Our Lord Himself expressed it this way in John 5:24: *Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent Me **has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.*** Do you need to receive this assurance from Jesus? The genuine child of God need have no fear of losing their salvation because God has taken care of it. (ii) **Saved through His life** (5:10) *For if, while 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!** I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead*

(Philippians 3:10-11). This is an extraordinary blessing that becomes much more precious when we have first grasped the cost of identification with His sacrifice in death –which for some Christians will result in martyrdom, even though they never sought it. The enabling power of the Holy Spirit to equip us to be victorious Christians can be our experience too. The apostle is not talking about an extraordinary blessing for a few extraordinary Christians, rather the gift of God to all His children in their ordinary everyday lives. Jesus said: *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full* (John 10:10). The argument here is progressive –if God has gone to this extent –in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to save you- then following the resurrection of Jesus He will surely do what it takes to complete the work He has begun! Paul made this point in Philippians 1:6: *being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*. Praise the Lord for this wonderful assurance. Therefore, in the light of such blessings, Paul declares:

(b) **We also rejoice in God** (Romans 5:11) ¹¹ *Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation*. In Romans 2:17b Paul was critical of some of his Jewish brothers and sisters who *brag about your relationship to God*. He was critical of them for having a superior attitude to people whom they rightly or wrongly perceived didn't have a relationship with God. The difference here is that the follower of Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, boasts not in what they have done to earn God's favour – because we have no grounds for making such a claim; instead we rejoice in His amazing love to the undeserving. What a wonderful Saviour we have to celebrate. Make sure this week you take time to magnify His glorious name, Amen.