

God's Perfect Love

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God: Love; Forgiveness / Romans 5:6–15

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This week we begin a several month walk through of the Book of Romans. We are going to be looking at God's Greater Story and what a way to start out with this text from Romans 5. It's clear that through the centuries, Paul's letter has lifted up the church in the most difficult of times. This is not a coincidence that Paul's letter to the Church in Rome is now being read in 2020, a year like no other. This is a historic year. It's been a hard year. 6 1/2 months ago the year started with so much promise. Here at Salem we were looking forward to expanding our ministry. We were thinking about what it was to see with a 20/20 vision moving forward. There was excitement brewing in the air. Not that many months into 2020 that all came crashing down. Our lives were upended. What we all thought that this year was going to be, it is not. This year is going to be defined by disappointment and division, by disease and death. It's going to go down with the words and phrases such as "Coronavirus", "social-distancing", and "safer-at-home" in our vocabulary. I remember on March 17 meeting with the Elders and Council and deciding to close our doors to the public. I left that meeting with tears in my eyes. It was hard. 13 weeks of preaching to a camera, including Lenten Services, Holy Week, Easter Sunday, Pentecost. I know the pain. I have been emotionally exhausted every day. I know the disappointment...my plans for the summer of seeing family are gone. I look at this year and I realize how utterly weak I am.

Let's look at some of these words that Paul shares with us today: Weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies. That's who we once were. You and I once were weak and ungodly, sinners and enemies of God. Now as we look at those words that Paul

says that we once were, we also see that these words can also describe us now. Just think...you and I are weak. I am sure that many of you have experience some form of anxiety over the last three months with the CoronaVirus and now perhaps are fearful with the riots, looting, violence, etc. We have really discovered at just how weak we actually are. There are many things that we just can't control. Think of all the worries you have had in the last three months. Think of the fears, the anxieties, the worries, etc. Then we look at the temptations we face...and you and I fall so quickly...we are weak. We are weak people! We aren't just weak, we are ungodly.

We are ungodly. You and I, we are ungodly. Just look at what we do to one another. Do we treat others in godly ways? Heaven's no. We look down on others. We belittle one another. You and I have been involved in that. Just look at this Covid-crisis we find ourselves in. It's been going on for 3 months at least locally. We are divided on our views, some of us including myself have looked at others and thinking... "are you crazy for thinking that way?"

We are weak and ungodly people. Then Paul goes an even step further, he says that we are sinners. Yes, you and I, we are sinners. I look at my life and I says, Yes, Michael, I am sinner. I need to get on my knees and confess my sins. And I look at you, and I see a room full of sinners. I see that there are people logged on to our Facebook services that are sinners. I am sure that those listening on our call-in line are sinners as well. If we honestly look at our lives, look at our hearts and minds, we see that we are poor, miserable sinners. We sin by thought, word, and deed every day. I'm not going to give a laundry list of sins today, that's not what you need today.

Yes, we are weak, ungodly, and sinners. We are also enemies, enemies of God. Because you and I are weak, ungodly, and sinners, we are enemies of God. When we sin, we are enemies. We separate ourselves from God our Father. When we are separate from God the Father we are destined for hell.

Yes we are all of that. We are weak, ungodly, sinners, and enemies. When God looks at us, that's not what He sees. St. Paul gives us such great news today. Listen again to what he tells us today:

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6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us

While we were still weak, at the right time, at the opportune time, Christ died for the ungodly. Christ Jesus came to this earth at the proper time. He died for us, the ungodly, while we were still weak. There was no amount of strength or energy inside of us that could get us to the Father. There was and is nothing that we can do on our own to become strong and godly. It took Jesus and all of his strength to bring us back to His Father. When Christ Jesus died, He took your weakness upon himself. He took your ungodliness upon Himself and He died. You look at the cross, you don't see a strong man...you see someone that is weak and helpless. You see your Savior dying there for you. It's not because he had to, he didn't. He is God. He went to the cross because of his perfect love for you.

That's what St. Paul tells us: "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." That's so true. We were still sinners when Christ died for us. There was nothing that could get us out of our sinful behaviors on our own. What did God do out of love for us? He sent his Son Jesus to die.

St. Paul didn't end with Christ on the Cross.

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9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 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. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

These words of Paul. We are saved by His blood, the blood of the Lamb. We were reconciled back to God by the blood of the lamb when we were still enemies. Think about that...this was not a two-way reconciliation. This was one way...This was God the Father loving you so much to win you back, to bring you back by the death of His Son. While you were yet his enemies....Christ Jesus

reconciled you by His death....now much than that...we have the promise of something far grander than just reconciliation. Through this reconciliation and the death of Jesus, the Father continued to show His love for you when He resurrected His Son and brought life back to you. He did this because He loves you. He did this because of His own perfect love for you.

Because of God's perfect love for you...you can rejoice. You can rejoice in the fact that God loves you. You can rejoice in the fact that Jesus is alive and that you are reconciled to the Father.

What a blessing it is to know that you and I who to one another look like we are weak, ungodly, sinners and enemies of God are not in the eyes of God. When the Father looks at you, He sees His SON!

Yes, even though we still struggle on this earth. Even though we are weak, ungodly, sinners, and enemies, God still loves you and gives you His strength to get through life's troubles. Without Christ in my life, I wouldn't have made it through the last three months, let alone the last 36 plus years. God is your strength. I've proclaimed that to you repeatedly over the last three months. Jesus Christ your Savior is your refuge and fortress. He's your strength and shield. He is the one that keeps you strong, even when you feel oh so weak.

You and I still sin, but Christ Jesus comes to you in the forgiveness of sins. HE says to you, "I forgive you. I love you. You are mine!"

Thank God that He continues to care for us. Thank God that he has perfect love for you.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus your Lord and Savior. Amen.