

Love Beyond Question

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[0 : 0 0] I want to encourage you now to turn back to Romans chapter 5, and we're going to be focusing in on verses 6 through 11.

Last Friday was a celebration in Christian history. It was a celebration of Warner Salmon's birthday. Now he's long since departed, and you've not heard of Warner Salmon, but you might be familiar with his work.

He was what is known as a Christian illustrator. He drew pictures of Jesus. He was an immigrant to America, and he became known as the 20th century's greatest Christian artist.

He became a Christian through one of the evangelistic crusades associated with D.L. Moody in Chicago. And he said about his experience that he had long known the doctrines of God, even the words and teachings of the Bible.

But he had no experience. He had no feeling, no sense, or assurance of God's love.

[1 : 2 4] He had no experience that would result in a day-to-day, moment-by-moment assurance of Christ's redeeming grace.

At this evangelistic crusade, he said, at that time, I had that experience. And it captured me and gave me assurance that no matter what happened, that I was the Lord's and the Lord was mine.

He was an illustrator for a Christian magazine called The Covenant Companion. And he was asked to draw a profile ahead of Jesus Christ.

That is where you might know him. I know he's quite famous in America at one time, a generation ago. You could go into just about any Christian home in the southeast, and in the main room would be the head of Christ portrayed.

Bronze skin, red girl, wavy hair. He's a little too pretty, but he is very masculine, and he's looking upwards. The director of the Moody Bible College, when he found out Warner's task, said, when you portray Christ, don't make him effeminate.

[2 : 5 2] Make him masculine. As one who spent many a night out in the open with his disciples. As one who would go in and turn over the tables of the money changers.

But one whose face was set on triumphing at the cross. Not reluctant, not fearful, but looking forward to what he would do on our behalf.

And so Warner, inspired by that, did the sketch. And it was published. But he would go on to draw that face of Christ over 500 times.

Because he began to invite people to come to a talk, which was a way of saying a presentation of the grace and the forgiveness of Jesus Christ by his work on the cross.

And as he began to share his testimony of coming to faith with a white easel, he would begin to draw that face.

[4 : 0 2] And he said, look to the face of Christ. Look to him. Let the eyes of your heart see him.

Let your mind dwell on him and his finished work on your behalf. That you too might experience that assurance in him.

Now, this is all captured in verse 8. And it's particularly captured in the word show. Paul writes, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The word for show there means to demonstrate or illustrate or narrate something to the point that it becomes beyond doubt, beyond question.

Imagine a courtroom where evidence is brought out and presented and we now, as we would say, we now reach a conclusion beyond a shadow of doubt.

[5 : 18] That's the word for show. And what is it that if we see it, if we consider it, if we gaze upon it and look at it, that it will move us beyond a shadow of a doubt.

He says, it's the love of God beyond a shadow of a doubt that will be shown to us when we look to the cross of Christ.

God shows his love beyond a shadow of a doubt in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I can put it forward to you where we're going this morning, the time that remains in a simple outline. First of all, I want you to see that there's a lurking question about God's love.

There's a lurking question. There's a question. There's vague doubt, even unbelief lurking in our mind and in our heart about God's love for me, about God's love for you.

[6 : 32] Secondly, I want you to look at the answer that God gives us. Look at the answer that he gives us. And it's found in the person and the work of Christ, the work of his death on our behalf and in our place.

That that seals it. That answers beyond doubt that we are truly, truly loved. And then lastly, I want you to see the loving response to the answer.

If our question that lurks is answered in Christ, what is our response to be? And that's verse 11. The measure of our assurance, the measure that we are experiencing God's love without doubt, moment by moment, that we're truly not simply knowledgeable of God's love, but experiencing God's love is joyfulness.

It's the spirit and the attitude of joy. So without further ado, let's look at this because indeed there's a lurking question.

I just finished reading again Jane Eyre. And Jane Eyre to me is, it's the greatest, it's certainly the greatest gothic novel ever.

[7 : 55] But I believe it's the greatest work of British literature. But Jane Eyre, you might remember the story and time doesn't permit me to give you all the storyline and the plot, but she's in love with Mr. Rothschild.

And this scene that I want to set up is Mr. Rothschild and her are talking. He's a bit older than she is. And he had been talking about just a counter even the day before with a woman who is insane or as Jane Eyre would say, quite mad.

And he talks about this woman and her violence toward him as something that is a very unloving object. Jane Eyre says, would you talk that same way about me knowing that Mr. Rothschild loves her?

She says, would you talk about me that way as being a hideous thing, a crazed demoniac if I were mad?

And this is his response. You're mistaken. You know nothing about me and nothing about the sort of love of which I am capable.

[9 : 12] Every atom of your flesh is as dear to me as my own. In pain and in sickness, it would still be dear. Your mind is my treasure, and if it were broken, it would be my treasure still.

If you raved, my arms should confine you, and not a straitjacket. Your grasp, even if it were in fury, would have a charm for me.

If you flew at me as wildly as that woman did this morning, I should receive you in an embrace, at least as fond as it would be restrictive. I should not shrink from you with disgust as I did from her.

In your quiet moments, you should have no watcher and no nurse but me, and I could hang over you with untiring tenderness, though you gave me no smile in return, and never weary of gazing into your eyes, though they had no longer a ray of recognition for me.

That's human love. Rostal is saying, not even in your rejection of me would I stop loving you. But we know that that's not so.

[10 : 27] Our love humanly has a capacity. It has an expiration date. It has limitations. But the lurking question that arises in my mind, that arises in your mind on occasion is, does God still love me like He did when I first came to know Him?

I'm not experiencing His love. Maybe I'm experiencing circumstances that I question, is this the way you treat your child? Is this love?

Perhaps I've done something wrong. I've upset you. Perhaps it arises with our sin. We don't seem to be getting any better.

We don't seem to be changing. And we think, it's because I'm such a mess. Oh yes, God still loves me.

But it's a flustered love. Oh yes, He loves me, but He's disappointed. We would answer the question, if you were to die today, and stand before God, would He let you into His heaven and His kingdom?

[11 : 47] And if you respond, I hope so, then you're grasping at the nettle there. You're beginning to get what Paul is up against.

Because Paul would have us not say, I hope so, but I know so. Blessed assurance. Happy assurance. Jesus is mine.

And that we would have a taste of heaven even now, as we have that assurance, that experience of God's unending, unexhaustible, steadfast love for us, never wavering.

Before I leave this lurking question, let me put it in terms of theological terms. What is happening here is that Paul, in the first paragraph of Romans 5, has set forward justification by faith that we've put in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

Justification is a legal declaration. It's a forensic term saying, because you have looked to Jesus Christ, you bring your sin and your life before Him, and I give you Jesus' life and His death on your behalf.

[13 : 14] Your sin is forgiven, you are covered, and you are now saved. It's declared. And it all happens in one moment.

Now in this paragraph, verses 6 through 11, Paul is turning to sanctification. That's the ongoing work of God to change us and transform us and give us power over sin such that we can become true sons and daughters in imitation of Jesus Christ.

And the question that arises, and it's captured in verse 5 that we didn't read, but it's captured, hope does not put us to shame.

There's a tension, it seems, in this church in Rome. And Paul wants to bring out this evidence and show us to answer this lurking question.

He wants us to look and see the answer to the problem. And the problem is this. They're looking at their justification with all faith, but they're letting it rest on their sanctification.

[14 : 27] They're saying, God certainly loved me. He loved me when I was in the dark. But now I'm His own dear child.

And it's what the Puritans would say. I'm sinning in the light. I'm knowingly sinning. I know the good I should do, but I don't. I know I'm flustered.

It's a flustered love that He must have to me. I know that He must be disappointed because I know, and yet I sin anyway.

And Paul is saying, the same love that He demonstrated when you were operating in the dark is the same love. Does not waver. It does not lessen that He's showing to you now.

And you can expect that same love when you stand before Him in glory. He puts it this way in verses 9 and 10. He says, since we have now been justified, that's my conversion.

[15 : 28] That's when I first say, I take Jesus to be my rescuer and my savior. And then, now that we've been justified, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.

That's the future. That's when we stand before God, the great judge. He says, rest assured that just as He loved you when you were a sinner at the beginning, He is loving you all the way to glory.

And then in verse 10, we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. That's my salvation, the moment of my salvation. Much more.

In addition, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. There's a story told of a bishop who ran into a street evangelist on his walk through the town.

And the street evangelist looked at him and said, Brother, are you saved? And he said, Yes, I have been saved.

[16 : 37] I am being saved. And I will be saved. Paul uses the terms here over and over again to make his point.

He says, You were weak. You were sinners. sinners. And you were enemies. That was your condition.

That was my condition. But you have been justified, pronounced, forgiven. My guilt is gone. You have been sanctified and are being sanctified.

The same love, the same work of Christ is in effect right now. Are you experiencing that? Or do you have this fearfulness?

Paul says, Look. Look. In verse 8, look and see. God is still showing His love with every remembrance, every meditation on the very work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

[17 : 51] Are you looking? Are you seeing? One of my, one of the men, theologians and Christian philosopher that influenced me was Francis Schaeffer.

Francis Schaeffer came to a crisis of faith. Francis Schaeffer looked at his Presbyterian denomination of which the denomination I'm a part of, the PCA, was based on.

And he said, We have doctrine, but there is, and we've got sound doctrine. We're an evangelical, fundamental, conservative denomination.

Fundamental in a good sense. And we have strong doctrine, but we've got lifelessness. We've got, we're strong on truth, but we're, we're not demonstrating that we're very loving people.

And then he looked in the mirror and he said, that's what I've become. And so, at this time, he was in France serving there as an evangelist.

[19 : 04] And as he was there, he would frequently, particularly in Champré, when he was located there, he would take long mountain walks. And it came to him, he said, you know, I've been trained in these great doctrines, but I've had little encouragement to focus on Christ's finished work for me.

And he said, I think that that is the secret. If I will focus on Christ's finished work for me, then I can rest.

I don't feel like I have to perform or add anything to it. I don't have to add anything to the gospel. It can be complete good news. Your own Robert Murray McShane, he said, spend less time studying your own heart and more time studying the heart of Christ toward you.

For every one look you take at yourself, take ten looks at Jesus Christ. Looking at Christ and his finished work is the answer to the question.

Does God's love to me, is it wavering now because of my own waywardness? Not at all. His heart toward us is good and loving and has not changed because of my sin.

[20 : 34] Not even my sin can change God's love toward me. We know this, for that was how we began with him. Are we going to continue with him in a different vein and on my own energy?

Paul asked in Galatians. Did you begin with the spirit? Now you're going to continue in the flesh? As if you need to by your obedience strengthen the love of God?

Now don't get me wrong. We do seek to walk in holiness, purity, and obedience, but we do so from God's love, not for God's love, or not in fear that he loves us less.

In fact, knowing that there's nothing that I can do to cause him to love me any more than he loves me right now, and knowing that there's nothing I can do to cause him to love me any less than he does right now, it frees me.

It frees me to serve, and it frees me to obey. Everything I do pleases him, and everything that I want to do, I'm motivated to please him.

[21 : 44] Grace and mercy all. Look, look at Christ and his finished work for you. That's the answer. I think that Robert Murray McShane, though, is on to something.

I think we still have that dilemma. It's a problem that Paul was wanting to tackle, and I'm wanting to tackle this morning. I think we take ten looks at ourselves, and maybe we'll take one look at Christ.

And the result is a weakened prayer life. We're sensitive to criticism. We're defensive.

We're anxious. We're restless inside, unsettled about God's love and the measure of his love. Oh, that we would look again, even ask the question today, what is the extent of God's love to you now?

right now? If you were to imagine God's face right now, if you were to see Warner sketch out the face of Christ, and he were to actually look at you from that portrayal, what would the expression of his face be when asked, here is Phil.

[23 : 12] What do you think about Phil's life? What do you think about Phil's love toward you? would he be disappointed? Would he frown?

Would he be embarrassed? Paul would say, his love for us is beyond measure. In Ephesians chapter 3, and he gets caught up in this description.

I mean, it just, it literally blows his mind. He says, may we have, it's his prayer for the church. May we have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and the length, and the height, and the depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

The love of Christ surpasses your knowledge. It surpasses my knowledge. My encouragement to you is to take more time meditating on the love of Christ for you as demonstrated in his finished work.

He dies and he says, it's finished. You're mine forever. I sentence you, as my mentor Jack Miller used to say, I sentence you to joy.

[24 : 36] You are now imprisoned in Jesus' love. You're his now forever. forever. And Paul is saying, oh, that we would take more time to comprehend and I dare say this, I would encourage you, now Colin's going to get me for this, so don't tell him.

Stop Bible study for a week. Stop your personal Bible reading and just take time to focus. You can have some select verses if you like, but just focus and meditate, be it on a walk, or be it on a private place in your home, or in the workplace, or the school room.

Find a place that you can regularly, systematically replace your Bible study and reading with meditating on the finished work of Christ for you.

And you may say, well, I can do both. So frequently, we do Bible study, we do our devotions very regularly, but then we never meditate on His love.

And Paul is saying here, comprehend. It takes strength, but discipline yourself, include it in your devotions to discipline yourself and take strength to begin to gauge the depths.

[26 : 03] It's bottomless. It's even shoreless. It's vast. It's bigger than we know. And God wants us to experience the depths of His love.

Well, the last thing that I want to say is verse 11. And I've already had a couple of remarks to say about this. but the measure that you are being once again captured not simply with knowledge but with an experience of God's love for you personally is the fruit of joy.

That will be your loving response and you can't help but be joyful. Your prayer life will change. If you struggle with prayer, if you feel like you've got a really weak prayer life right now, part of that is perhaps how you see God in your approach to Him.

Perhaps part of that is that you've languished in your relationship with Him. But when you become overwhelmed, it's like a lover being overwhelmed and enraptured by the other lover's love for them, you'll find that you have more praise in your prayer life than you do petition.

Francis Schaeffer, Edith tells the story that Francis Schaeffer took these long walks in the mountain and they were staying at a chalet in the hills there of France.

[27 : 41] Later, Labrie, his ministry, the Labrie Fellowship, would be birthed there. Edith, his wife, was very worried because in the upper level of that chalet where his study was, she would hear him for hours on end pacing, pacing, pacing, and she knew that he was troubled.

He said, I once had an experience of God's love and I certainly know it.

Oh, that I would again for in that is life. And she knew that the sun had come out when a song came along.

she knew that he had solved the crisis of belief when she heard him singing. She said, I heard this song and in tears, Jesus loves me, this I know.

I pray today, I pray today for myself and for you that we will recapture that joy that we are so dearly loved and that love is unending and unwavering, not a wit toward me.

[29 : 21] And may God capture you by that love even as you are captured once again by looking to your Savior, die for you and that not with reluctance but because he has put his love upon you and that love doesn't change now or forever.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you. Mother, I thank you for this love that you've put upon us. We thank you that you are that shepherd and that you are not reluctant but you take delight in looking for the sheep.

Father, we ask that you would find us today. You would find us wherever we are. You would find us in our weakness. You would find us where we stray. You would find us distant or estranged in our relationship with you.

You would find us in our obedience. You would find us trying hard to earn your pleasure. But Father, when you find us, find us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And Christ, would you through the Holy Spirit once again speak to us that our forgiveness is assured now and forever. That your work on our behalf is finished.

[30 : 47] And now we have the freedom to sing again and live as your sons and daughters to a watching world, to a generation that needs to understand that we're not good because we're good people.

But Father, all of our life is a demonstration and reflection of you and your love placed upon us.

It's a response. So, Father, we ask your blessings. We ask, Father, that you would accomplish these things even to the strengthening of our body and our church as we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.