



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Incomparable Love of God

### God's Transcendence

When I was in my first year of Seminary, I was introduced to the word, *Transcendence*. “Transcendence is an attribute of God that refers to God's otherness; the fact that He is different from us. One man put it this way:

“The word *transcendence* means literally 'to climb across.' It is defined as 'exceeding usual limits.' To transcend is to rise above something, to go above and beyond a certain limit. When we speak of the transcendence of God we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us... It points to the infinite distance that separates Him from every creature. He is an infinite cut above everything else.”<sup>1</sup>

God is different from us. Though we have knowledge, God's is omniscient. Though we exist, God is self-existent! Though we possess the ability to do things, God is omnipotent! And though we are confined to time and space, God is omnipresent! This is why when Isaiah beheld the glory of God, he could do nothing else but fall to the ground and confess his sin.<sup>2</sup> It is why when Daniel was confronted by the divine, he immediately fell to the ground as a dead man.<sup>3</sup> It is why when the Disciples came face to

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. R. C. Sproul, [The Holiness of God](#), Tyndale House Publishers, 1997, page 55 ISBN 0842339655

<sup>2</sup> Compare Isaiah 6

<sup>3</sup> Compare Daniel 10:8-9

face with the transcendency of Christ, they worshiped Him.<sup>4</sup>

Though there are some areas of similarity between us and God, due to the fact that we are created in the image of God, God is nevertheless transcendent, and thus everything about Him in reference to creation is ultimately Incomparable!

And that is the case when it comes to God's love. Though

- The citizen loves his nation.
- The worker loves his job.
- The husband loves his wife.
- The mother loves her child.

none of this can compare to the love that God has for us as His people!

Paul makes this point in our text. In Romans 5:1-11 he tells us about the saving benefits of the cross of Christ. And yet in verse 5 the apostle mentioned the love of God and how it had been “poured out” within the believers heart. In other words, God's love is not a trickle, administered drop by drop, it is a torrent!

In light of this, Paul takes the opportunity here to diverge from the point he is making in chapter five to discuss the beauty and magnificence of God's love.

Romans 5:6-11, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth [demonstrates] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.”

I hope you see it! God's love is incomparable. There is nothing in this world is like it. And yet, in light of his word choice, Paul clearly here is being dramatic. Accordingly, let's consider the incomparable love of God with the following

- The Cast, vv. 6-8.
- The Scene, v. 7.
- The Drama, v. 8.

## The Cast

There are five people in the cast. First, notice the helpless.

Romans 5:6, “**For when we were yet without strength**<sup>5</sup>, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Matthew 14:33

<sup>5</sup> ἀσθενής asthenes

In this context, this refers to moral frailty rather than to physical weakness. When it refers to the physically weak, it is usually that of a severe kind. In Acts 5 the term is used of the sick.

Acts 5:15, “**Insomuch that they brought forth the sick**<sup>6</sup> into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.”

The “helpless one” is the one who has no physical strength, who has to be carried on a stretcher in order to go from one place to another. Now in reference to moral “helplessness,” this carries much of the same nuance. When Christ found the disciples sleeping instead of praying He said:

Matthew 26:41, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”<sup>7</sup>

See, to be “helpless” is to be unable to perform moral good. And thus, to say that before Christ saved us we were “helpless, weak, or without strength” is to say that we were powerless to escape from

- The dominion of sin.
- The misery of this world.
- The wages of our sin, which is death.
- The reign and rule of Satan.

Now, the second cast member is the ungodly.

Romans 5:6, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time **Christ died for the ungodly.**”

The ungodly one is the one who has a lack of reverence for, devotion to, and worship of the true God. In essence, the ungodly man is the one who has forsaken God for the sake of their own wants and desires. God characterized the world at the time of the Noah as ungodly.

2 Peter 2:5, “And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.”

And what was it that made them ungodly?

Genesis 6:5, “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

See, the “ungodly” man is the one who has turned aside from following and reverencing God unto a path of self-centered living in which the intent of the heart is evil. Notice, it isn't that the ungodly aren't religious. Rather, it is that their religion is that of self! And thus, the ungodly man is the man who stands at enmity with God.

Romans 1:18, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”

Notice a third cast member: the sinners.

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<sup>6</sup> ἀσθενής asthenes;

<sup>7</sup> ἀσθενής asthenes

Romans 5:8, “But God commendeth his love toward us, **in that, while we were yet sinners,** Christ died for us.”

In Paul's day, *sinner* was a derogatory word used to describe a class of people without the law. Thus, if you were a Jew, by definition you could not be a *sinner* for you were one who possessed the law.

Now, Paul took this word and used it with a significant twist. The sinner referenced by Paul was any one living in conscious opposition to God's will as found in the law; i.e. one who transgresses God's law. As the man who “feared God” in the Psalms was the one who walked in God's word so also, the man who rejected God in Paul's day was the man who transgressed God's word.

Thus, whether you possessed the law or not was quite irrelevant. What mattered was whether or not you lived according to it. To fail here was to testify to a wicked and perverse character identified in Scripture by the title of *sinner*. **AND YET THERE ARE TWO MORE CAST-MEMBERS MENTIONED HERE.**

The fourth cast member is the righteous man.

Romans 5:7, “**For scarcely for a righteous man** will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.”

The word *righteous* references someone who was “in accordance with what is right.” Accordingly as we have seen, this term has somewhat of a relative element to it, or the “right” in question will determine what we mean by a righteous man. For example, though George may be in prison on account of robbery, nevertheless while there he observes the rules and treats the guards with respect in the context of the prison, he might therefore be called a model prisoner, or a righteous man he clearly conformed himself to the standards of what constitutes a good prisoner.

In light of this, and in light of Paul's usage here, the focus of the term, “righteous man,” is not someone who had never sinned, but rather a model citizen. And so the fourth cast member is the righteous man.

Finally, notice the fifth cast member.

Romans 5:7, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: **yet peradventure for a good man** some would even dare to die.”

The *good man* refers not only to a righteous man, good citizen, but also the one who is morally good. See, a good citizen might uphold the laws of the land, but be an altogether unpleasant individual. The “good man” in contrast would refer not only to a model citizen, but someone who genuinely cared about other people. The good man was generous, honest, and typically put others before him.

This is the cast of the drama which Paul is placing before our eyes.

## The Scene

Romans 5:7, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.”

Based on Paul's reference to people “dying” for others, we conclude that each of our cast members have

their hands bound are themselves bound to a tree awaiting execution. Now it goes without saying that no one is going to come forward to try to save the helpless, ungodly, sinner.

Yet what about the other two men?

The focus of the phrase, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die” is not to the difficulty of dying for a righteous man, the model citizen, but to the difficulty of finding someone who has actually done this. Paul was no stranger to martyrdom. He lived in a time when martyrdom was common. And thus, when he reflected upon all the deaths he had witnessed or heard about, a common theme emerged:

- No one was willing to die for a law-abiding, picture-perfect citizen.
- At the executions of relatively good citizens and countrymen, Paul had never known of a stranger from the crowd of onlookers coming forward saying, “I have not been as good a citizen as has this man; let me die in his place.”

And this observation on the part of Paul still holds true today. Can you think of one example in history where a person was willing to sacrifice his life to save NOT... a weak, ungodly, sinner or a model citizen?

You need not search long; the answer to this is a resounding, “NO!” NOT because we don't value model citizens BUT because we value our life too much to give it up simply for a model citizen who may be corrupt in other parts of his life.

Now, whether we like it or not, this produces a statement regarding the standard of our love which we will summarize in a moment. For now let's look at Paul's second point in this verse, “yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.” Here the language shifts: Impossibility is replaced with improbability.

If Paul was pressed, he might be able to cite an example of someone dying for a good man, a man who not only was a model citizen, but was genuinely good; i.e. noble and virtuous. But finding this would be difficult, and the reason being is that dying for a “good man took much courage.” Notice Paul says, “Dare.”

Now you take a look at our society today, and it is rare, to say the least, to find someone who even would sacrifice for a good man, much less die for them. I challenge you go to a hotel and ask for a room. At the outset inform them that you have no money, but you are a good and generous person. Even if they believed you, do you think you would receive a room?

Maybe, but it would be rare! Now, imagine if the stakes were not the money for a hotel room, but a life for a life. How many takers would you find? Not many!

From this verse I hope you see the standard of man's love, is conditional and capricious based on the attractiveness of the object of love, and its relationship to our wants and desires. While no one would die for a helpless, ungodly, sinner and it would be hard to find someone who might give their life for a model citizen. The morally upright man fares little better.

If it were left up to us, ALL the members of the Cast would be executed. Now against this backdrop; i.e. our weak, ungodly, sinful state, and our standard of love we see the incomparable nature of God's Love...

## The Drama

Romans 5:8, “But God commendeth<sup>8</sup> his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:6, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

The word commendeth, literally means to place alongside or demonstrate. The image is a person placing another one at their side in the position of honor and appreciation. And yet here, the word is used somewhat uniquely. Accordingly to Kittel, the word here carries the idea of showing publicly or demonstrating.<sup>9</sup>

What a dramatic demonstration of the character of God's Love. Against the backdrop of man's wretched state and standard of love- upon a stage on which five individuals are going to be executed with no one coming forth to deliver not even the best of the lot- we catch a glimpse into the incomparable love of God. Christ entered upon the stage of life and amazingly walked past the model citizen and the good man- the ones we might die for. Indeed! He kept on going to the helpless, ungodly sinner and said, “Excuse me! But this is My tree!”

Do you see it! Jesus did not forfeit His life for a righteous or a good people. He died for helpless, ungodly, rebellious sinners like you and me! And yet, this is but half of it. For, it wasn't that we were ready to mend our ways if God would just save us. We were willing to change if only He died for us. In spite of our sin, we nevertheless had some virtue in us- some hope.

Rather, it was that while we were in a state of rebellion against God (verse 6, still sinners; verse 8, yet sinners) Christ came for us. While we hated God and everything associated with Him; Christ died for us! While we justly deserved the wrath and curse of God, God loved us!

Our world knows nothing of this love, it is incomparable! And yet, it doesn't stop here; notice Paul said that it was at the right time (verse 6). Christ's death on our behalf was not an afterthought, nor was it “Plan B.” Rather, it was according to the predetermined counsel of God which was/is infallible in its execution.

Galatians 4:4, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.”

See, the cross of Christ and the redemption it brings was/is administered at the perfect time in our life. Right before the death blow is given, Christ steps forward!

I love how one man put it:

“Picture yourself tied to a tree, condemned for the sins of eternity. Then picture a spear parting the air, seeking your heart to end your despair. Suddenly- a Knight, in armor of white, stands in

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<sup>8</sup> συνιστημι sunistemi

<sup>9</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, by Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (10 Volumes, Hardcover – April 1977)

the gap betwixt you and its flight, And shedding His [glory and honor] for you- bears the lance that runs Him through. His heart has been pierced that yours may beat, and the blood of His corpse washes your feet. Picture yourself in raiment white, cleansed by the blood of the lifeless Knight. Never to mourn the prince who was downed, for He is not lost! It is you who are found.”

For us we see the incomparable love of God! It is unconditional, directed toward the utterly unworthy, and exercised according to the perfect timing of God- God makes no mistakes. This is the love that God demonstrated at the cross of Christ. This is the incomparable love of God.

And it is this love of which we must become convinced. In light of this, I want to exhort you along four lines.

First we must be done with all pride in our life! As amazing as this sounds, there are many who on account of grace look down on other people. Yet listen, through the love of God we have been transferred into a realm in which we are no longer weak, ungodly, and identified as the sinner.

And thus, we are able to function according to a different standard of love- God's Standard!

1 John 4:19, “We love him, because he first loved us.”

Thus, to look down upon another person on account of a perceived superiority, is to testify to worldliness on our part as God's people.

Brothers and sisters, the non-christian world will know we are christians by our love. And that means that as they look at our lives they will see a love that is unconditional, directed toward the utterly unworthy, and without regard to our own interests.

Is this a description of your life?

It better be, for there is no place in the body of Christ for the looking down upon another person because of their sin, and for that matter their race, gender, or creed. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6

1 Corinthians 6:11, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

Be done with what I have coined, “Situation Interpretation.” As we've seen in Genesis and Job, the tendency for the child of God is to derive our theology about God from experience, and NOT His word.

And so the Christian who has undergone difficulty and trial- maybe

- The death of a loved one.
- Physical illness.
- A series of lost jobs.
- The loss of a house.
- Any sort of tragedy.

the tendency will be to conclude that God doesn't love us. If He did, our life would be better! If this is where you are today, and if not just wait, I doubt any Christian will be spared from this temptation, recognize that you doubt God's love because you misunderstand it!

God is in the business of changing lives for eternity, not for this world. The program in which each of us are apart on account of the cross is a program designed to equip us for living not on the present earth, but in **THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH!**

And thus, God's love will necessarily require trials and tribulation for the perfection of our souls, that our souls might be fit for heaven.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Romans 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

And thus, far from doubting the love of God when we go through trial, we are assured of it!

Hebrews 12:8-10, "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

Dr. John Beake put it something like this:

"When we are blessed, it is the whisper of God saying, 'Come to Me.' When we are chastened, it is God calling out to us, 'Come to Me.' And when we suffer, it is the shout of God crying, 'Come to Me!'"<sup>10</sup>

To the one who thinks that because of their circumstances God doesn't love them, think again. It is through the fire that God calls us to Himself.<sup>11</sup>

Thirdly we must deny ourselves and willingly embrace the implied description of the child of God in this text.

Brothers and sisters of the cast in this drama who are you?

Our default programming by which we endeavor still to save ourselves does not want to identify itself with the helpless, ungodly, sinner of this text. Yet would you notice that it is they **AND THEY ALONE** who know the love of God.

Now, this doesn't mean that our identity as children of God is that we are wretched sinners. Indeed! We are children of God! What it does mean is that we begin here in order to know the love of God — Yes in my flesh I am a helpless, ungodly, sinner **BUT** God in His grace and mercy has given me life!

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<sup>10</sup> During sermon preached at Choral's husband's funeral- 1992

<sup>11</sup> Compare 1 Peter 1:7

Finally, my last exhortation is that we must not leave here without knowing the forgiveness, grace, and love of God!

For some of you, I know that this exhortation will seem rather obvious. But to the Christian

- Who has had an abortion.
- Who has committed adultery.
- Who has taken a life.
- Who has committed what they could call a heinous sin.
- Whose life is falling apart because of their sin.

Their candidacy for the Love of God is often times placed in doubt. If there should be one listening who struggles here, I want you to see that believing this is tantamount to “de-throning” God! See the one who says, “God couldn't love me; I've done such and such!” is actually saying that something they have done is able to thwart God's ability to love them! They are saying that God is limited in His ability to love!

See, far from being a statement made from a burdened soul laden with grief over sin these are actually the words of disbelief- doubting the power and ability of God.

If there should be any here recognize that your thoughts dishonor God! It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. It is not the clean who receive the Love of God, but the dregs of the earth, the weak, ungodly sinner! It is not the worthy, the virtuous, the one whose life is together that receive the love of God, but the ruined life!

Thus, the issue is NOT whether God could love you in view of your sin BUT whether you love God or your sin! And if that is the question you are faced with, what you do this day will have great ramifications... Either turn from the sin which until today you have used as an excuse for not pursuing God wholeheartedly or turn from God (and the erroneous thought that He loves you), and pursue your sin. To continue in a state of despair over supposedly unforgiven sin, at the detriment of undistracted devotion to the Lord, is not only to associate God with the world's standard of love but also participate in grievous sin!

## **About Bethel Presbyterian Church**

*The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on January 7, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.