

A Demonstration of Love
Romans 5:1-11
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Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, how do we *demonstrate* our love for someone? What do we have to do to prove to someone that our love is real, genuine and sincere?

In the wedding ceremony this past Friday night Steve and Susan gave each other a ring. As the form for the solemnization of marriage states, those rings serve as a symbol of their constant faithfulness and abiding love.

But as I instructed them in the message for the ceremony, the real demonstration of their love will be witnessed in their everyday lives and activities – in the way they treat each other as husband and wife.

And in that sense, beloved, we know that there are countless ways in which we are called to demonstrate our love for the people around us. No, we're not talking about buying gifts (*buying someone's love*) as they say; that's the easy way out and not always a true demonstration of love.

We're talking about the everyday gestures of kindness and thoughtfulness; we're talking about the words we speak, the deeds we do, the sacrifices that we make on behalf of another. Sometimes that demonstration of love is witnessed in the most mundane areas/duties of life.

A small toddler brings his breakfast bowl to the sink because he wants to help mommy clean the kitchen; that's a demonstration of love. A teenage son cleans his room or takes out the garbage or washes the car without being asked. That's a demonstration of love.

But by far and away the greatest demonstration of love was identified by Jesus himself. In John 15: 13 Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends". So Jesus says *self-sacrifice* is the greatest demonstration of love. And that's simply undeniable.

And in the passage we read today, the Apostle remarks that it is not unheard of or uncommon for someone to die for a good man. We've heard people say that about the king they serve or the leader they follow into battle – I would give my life for that man (or parents for their children)!

But the real shocker in what our passage says next. It talks about a sacrifice that defies imagination; that makes no sense. For while it is *not unheard of* for someone to give his life for a good man (a friend), it is rare, even more, it is completely unheard of for someone to sacrifice his life for a man who is completely unrighteous and wholly unworthy of being saved.

Yet, as Romans 5: 8 points out, this is exactly what God has done for us, through Christ Jesus our Lord. ***God demonstrates His great love for undeserving sinners.*** This demonstration of God's love is the most gracious, the most merciful, the most undeserving act of love every witnessed. As we meditate on this passage today, notice that,

- 1) **The Demonstration of God's Love is Astonishing;**
- 2) **The Demonstration of God's Love is Ongoing;**
- 3) **The Demonstration of God's Love is Reassuring**

1) The Demonstration of God's Love is Astonishing

In order to better grasp the astonishing nature of God's love, we can do a quick comparison and contrast between God's divine and supernatural love over against the kind of love we know and experience everyday: human love.

Human love has many traits and characteristics, but not all of them are good or positive. Human love, for instance, can be *impulsive* by nature. We've all heard of *love at first sight*. It is when our attraction to someone is instantaneous; the moment we lay eyes on them we fall in love.

Human love is also subject to change and shifting from person to person, from year to year. Very often it happens that the person whom someone loved at first sight is not the person he or she winds up marrying. In that way our impulsive feelings of love are not always a good barometer or indicator of a steadfast love (if that love is going to fade or remain).

Human love, as we know, is also deeply emotional. We sense that deep emotion in the poems that are written about love, in ballads that are sung about love. You don't read poems which speak of how our love is driven by our intellect or reason. No, they write about the fact that our love is driven by our heart, by our (unbridled) passion, by our deep affection.

Also we know that to a great extent, human love is founded upon the attractiveness, on the beauty of the other person (outward beauty or inward beauty, or both). We are drawn and attracted to a person by their inner and outer qualities and characteristics.

And finally, human/natural love tends to be reciprocal in nature. We tend to love those who love us back. We also have a natural inclination to love those who are easiest to love, to love our friends, our family, all those who hold near and dear unto us.

But now, let's consider God's divine love in light of what we have just discussed. What do we discover in our passage? As we pointed out already, verse 6 and 8 reveal to us something that is truly stunning. It says that *God loved us while we were yet ungodly*, that *Christ died for us while we were yet sinners!*

Those verses provide us with some amazing insights into the love of God. First of all, it tells us that God's love for us is not impulsive. God's love was not the product of a sudden rush of emotion or a sudden feeling of affection for us.

No, God's love for His people is an *objective* love; it is not based on the emotions. His love is based upon the covenant promises which he made in His Word. Also, God's love is an eternal, unchanging love. In Ephesians 1 it says, *For he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.*

Because God's love is eternal, predating creation itself, we know that His love for us does not shift or change. The list of names found written in the Lamb's Book of Life is not subject to editing or erasure on a daily basis. God's love remains as steadfast as His being—He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

What's more, God's love is not based upon, or in the least bit influenced by any loveliness or beauty, or attractiveness of His people. In fact, the Apostle Paul makes it very clear that there is no basis, no reason, no inherent worth within us that would ever justify or explain God's love.

As Moses said in Duet. 7: 7 *The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples...it was because the oath he swore to their forefathers!* God love is the result of his steadfast faith.)

And let's not forget what Paul wrote in Romans chapter 3. He quotes the Psalmist saying, *there is no one righteous, no not one, there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.* Paul is speaking there about the unattractiveness, the ugliness of all sinners -- Jews and Gentile alike.

We are altogether dead in our trespasses and sins, not deserving in the least of God's love or mercy. If you turn back to that passage (vv. 10ff), you'll see that Paul goes into great detail to describe the ugliness of fallen humanity, of all sinners.

In fact, what he describes ties in very well with what goes on in our communities at this time of the season. People put on costumes for Halloween that resemble the dead. That's the way Paul describes sinful humanity in chapter 3.

Fallen humanity resembles the living dead. From the lips, to the mouths, to the throat, to the heart, hands, and feet, lost sinners are dead. There is nothing in them that is lovely or attractive or appealing. So you see, when God's Word says that Christ died for us while we were yet *sinners*, that God loved us while we were *ungodly*, it's means that God loved us in spite of the fact that we were completely undeserving of his love and affection (in fact, even stronger than that – his love defies explanation for he loved those who, by nature, hated him!).

Beloved, if we can't understand *that*, then we will never be able to understand and appreciate God's grace. If we can't understand this, then there's no way we will even begin to comprehend God's amazing love.

I think one of the biggest errors we make is that we like to project (or impose) upon God, our standards of love. We like to think that **God loves**, the way **we love**. We tend to think that the reason God loves us, is because of who we are *right now*.

We're prone to think that God loves us because we are basically good people who love him back and try to do what pleases Him. We so easily forget that God's saving love for us is not based upon anything we have done, it's not based upon who we are now, or based upon our Dutch heritage or our Christian heritage, or our family name.

Now it's true, God does love us when we obey and when we are faithful, but the basis of God's saving love which he demonstrates through the death of His Son, is solely founded upon His sovereign will and good pleasure (nothing to do with anything we've done or haven't done).

That truth is foundational to the very nature of God's grace; it lies at the very foundation of the teachings of the Reformation. God's saving love is completely unconditional, completely unmerited and unearned! It is completely undeserving.

That's what makes God's love so unlike our love, so completely foreign and unnatural love. There's no logical basis for it, no reasonable explanation. God would have been just and right to leave us all in our sin and condemnation, but in His grace and mercy, He chose instead to pour out His love upon us sinners, and send His Son to die in our place to secure our salvation.

2) **The Demonstration of God's Love is Ongoing**

So that's why we say that the demonstration of God's Love is Astonishing. But secondly, we see that the demonstration of God's love is Ongoing. Now, if you look at verse 8, you'll notice that the main verb '*demonstrates*' or '*shows*' is in the present tense—*But God demonstrates His own love for us...* That's a curious way to phrase that sentence.

Paul *could have* written that phrase in the past tense. After all, Christ's death occurred many years before the writing of Romans. So it seems that Paul could have said: *God demonstrated His love for us in this: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners.*

Yet, he writes this phrase in the present tense. This suggests that this demonstration (which took place in the past) is an ongoing reality. For the Apostle Paul, for the saints in Rome in that day, and for you and me here today, the death of Christ was a historical event past but *its significance remains an ever present and glorious reality for the church today and for every generation.*

In other words, this demonstration of God's love is an ongoing, continual display for all the world to hear and see. Every time the gospel is preached, every time a sinner hears the Good News of salvation and responds in faith and repentance, it means that he has come face to face with the demonstration of the Father's love on his behalf.

They see for themselves how **real**, how **true**, how **genuine** and **sincere** God's love is for them. And the same is true for us on a different level. Every Sunday when the Word is preached, or when the sacraments are administered (every time we see covenant children baptized like this morning), God holds that ongoing truth before our eyes – He demonstrates (again and again) his wonderful and amazing love for us: while we were yet sinners Christ died for us!

This demonstration stands before us as an ongoing reminder of God's forgiving grace, of His loving kindness, of His tender mercy on our behalf. Just as importantly, the demonstration of His love stands as the model, the example, the standard by which *we also love others.*

Just as the Father loves us – with an unconditional love, we are to love one another. Just as God loved us, as Christ loved us with a sacrificial love, with a forgiving love (bearing and forbearing with us) so we are to love our neighbor.

Our lives must be an ongoing demonstration of God's love as well...as we show this love toward those who in the faith, outside the faith, and new to the faith. We are not to be judgmental and vindictive and hateful towards sinners, rather, we are to call to mind the mercy and the kindness and the love which God displayed to sinners *just like us* and let that be the measure by which we treat and judge and love others.

This is exactly what Paul writes to Titus in chapter 3:3 *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy!*

You know, it's considered to be a great attribute, a appealing virtue for a celebrity or for a famous athlete to remember his roots, to be willing to go back and identify himself with the small town from whence he came, to never let his pride or his fame, or his newfound wealth and stature drive a wedge between the person he is, and his past.

So too, it is a great virtue for a Christian (in fact it is one of the marks of a Christian) to never lose sight of our roots, to never forget the spiritual poverty out of which we were saved, to never allow pride to so well up in our hearts that we look with condescension on someone who has fallen into sin, or someone who is enslaved to sin.

This might sound a bit strange to our ears, but Christ's church is to be a place where sinners of all stripes find themselves at home. Christ's church ought to be the place where sinners can find a sympathetic ear, an understanding heart, a forgiving spirit.

It ought to be a place where sinners can find those who *identify* with their struggles, who can help them through their struggles, who can sympathize with their failings and weaknesses. Certainly Christ's church does not approve of sin or condone sin, or encourage a life of sin.

We are to abhor all sin and flee from it; nevertheless, as God's people, as those who are the objects of God's amazing and astonishing love, we Christians ought are to show special care and compassion to those who are still lost, or who are struggling along the way. In that way, we can be a living demonstration of God's love; we can embody God's love and care and compassion.

3) The Demonstration of God's Love is Reassuring

Thirdly, congregation, we see that this demonstration of God's love is reassuring. This is Paul's objective in this portion of chapter 5. He is writing this to reassure the saints of their right standing with God.

He wants to give the saints all the assurance they need to persevere, so that they will be able to hold on to their hope that does not disappoint. This reassurance comes in verses 9 and following. *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!. For, if when 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?*

What God's Word says here is really very simple, yet at the same time it is so very profound and beautiful. This passage says that if God loved us while we were His enemies (even loving us to the point where He sacrificed His own Son on our behalf!), then how much more won't God love us now that we are his own Sons!

This passage also says that if God has saved us by Christ's death (reconciling us to God), then how much more won't God keep us in His grace, by the resurrection and eternal life of His Son. Christ's death saved *us* from death and the penalty of sin, and it brought us into the family of God; now it is the power of Christ's resurrection within us (His Spirit and Word) that gives us power over sin, and keeps us walking in God's ways, that we might be faithful and true.

Do you see what wonderful assurance this is, beloved? The Bible teaches us that our assurance is inextricably bound to the finished work of Jesus Christ! Here to we tend to get this turned around, don't we?

Sometimes we think that our assurance is inextricably bound to our faithfulness, to our own efforts, to our life of godliness. The more holy I become, the more I show my love for God, then quite naturally, the more assurance I will experience.

But that's not the way it works. As Martin Lloyd Jones writes, it is not our love to God that matters most, but God's love to us that is of utmost importance. That doesn't minimize our call

to love God, or the fervency of our love for God, but it just reminds us again that the seal and guarantee of our assurance lies in God's unchanging eternal love.

God demonstrates His love for us in the death of His own beloved Son. *See from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow **and love** flow mingled down?* The precious blood of Jesus Christ is a sure sign and seal and guarantee of God's love. So if we want assurance of God's love, we know where to look: to Calvary's cross. To the sacrifice which was made there on our behalf.

God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life! We can find our assurance right here, in the sign and seal of baptism, in the ordinary water that is sprinkled on the foreheads of these children.

In putting them under the water, these children have been immersed with Christ into His death and burial – Christ in His suffering and death took away their sin and guilt; and in taking these infants out from beneath the water, it shows that they are risen with Christ unto newness of life. The power of sin and the grave has been broken; they are free to live for Christ.

These little children (though conceived and born in sin and subject to condemnation in Adam), are -- in and through Christ Jesus -- promised the full assurance of God's love no less than you and me today. That's how amazing and astonishing God's love is.

God gave His Son even for such as these; even for such as you and me. That's the ultimate demonstration of love. And it is this love that has been shown to us, and it is this love that we are to show and proclaim and demonstrate to others. Amen.