

The Cross of Christ

Lesson 1: The Heart of God: Why the Cross? -- Romans 5:6–11

Picture a hospital waiting room at two in the morning. The chairs are hard, the coffee is bitter, and a family sits huddled together while someone they love is wheeled into surgery. Now imagine the surgeon stepping out, not to give a report, but to say the only way to save the patient is to take his place on the table, to let his own heart be stopped so that the dying one can live. We would not call that medicine. We would call it love, the kind that empties itself completely. That is the strange and beautiful logic at the center of the cross, and it is where this whole study must begin. Before we examine what the cross accomplished, we have to ask the deeper question: why would God do such a thing at all?

Paul answers that question in Romans 5 with words that should never become ordinary to us. While we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Notice the timing. God did not wait until we had cleaned ourselves up, until we were lovable, until we had earned a second look. He moved toward us at our worst. Paul even pauses to marvel that you might find a person willing to die for a good man, perhaps, on a very good day. But God shows his love in this, that while we were the opposite of good, Christ died in our place.

Maybe you have carried a quiet suspicion that God tolerates you more than he treasures you, that he helps you the way a busy person helps a stranger, out of duty rather than delight. Many of us have a picture of God as someone who had to be talked into loving us, perhaps by Jesus, as if the Father were the reluctant one and the Son the kind one. Romans 5 takes that picture apart. The cross was not something done to change God's mind about us. The cross was God's own heart breaking open in our direction. It is not the cause of his love; it is the proof of it.

So read these verses slowly, and let them work on you. This passage is not first a lecture on theology, though it carries enormous doctrinal weight. It is the unveiling of a heart. Behind the nails and the thorns and the darkness at noon stands a God who looked at people who had turned their backs on him and decided, at infinite cost to himself, to win them back. That is the heart we will be tracing through this entire study. Everything else the cross accomplished flows from this fountain: God so loved.

Group Discussion: When you hear the phrase “the love of God,” what image or feeling first comes to mind? Where do you think most people get their working picture of how God feels about them, and how might that picture be different from the God who “shows his love” by dying for the ungodly?

Personal Reflection: Be honest with yourself for a moment. Deep down, do you tend to think God loves you because of something in you, or in spite of everything in you? How would your prayers, your worship, and your daily peace change if you truly believed that Christ died for you while you were still weak and ungodly?

Read Romans 5:6-11

Study Questions

1. Paul says that “while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (v. 6). What does it tell us about the heart of God that he acted for us before we did anything to deserve it, and why does Paul stress the timing of the cross?
2. Think about the times you most want to hide from God, the moments after you have failed or sinned. How does it change your instinct to run away when you realize that Christ died for you precisely while you were “still a sinner” (v. 8)?
3. In verses 7 and 8 Paul contrasts the rare person who might die for a good man with God, who “shows his love” by Christ dying for sinners. How does the cross reveal a love that goes beyond anything we see in ordinary human sacrifice, and what does the word “shows” tell us about why God did it this way?
4. Where in your life have you been quietly trying to earn God’s love, to make yourself acceptable before you come to him? What would it look like this week to let the cross, rather than your performance, be the proof that God loves you?
5. Paul says we have “now been justified by his blood” and will be “saved by him from the wrath of God” (v. 9). Why does Paul ground both our present standing and our future hope in the blood of Christ rather than in our own goodness?

6. When you imagine standing before God one day, do you expect to meet wrath or welcome? Name the specific fear or guilt you carry, and consider how the promise that we are “saved by him from the wrath of God” speaks to it.
7. In verses 10 and 11 Paul says we were “enemies” who have been “reconciled to God” through the death of his Son. What does it mean that the cross deals not just with our guilt but with our broken relationship with God, turning enemies into friends?
8. Are there relationships in your own life marked by distance, resentment, or a refusal to make the first move? How does the God who reconciled his enemies “while we were enemies” challenge the way you handle being wronged?
9. Paul moves from “justified” to “saved” to “reconciled” and finally says we now “rejoice in God” (v. 11). Trace how this passage roots our salvation entirely in what God has done in Christ, not in human merit, and explain why this leaves no room for boasting in ourselves or for despairing of God’s welcome. How does this guard us against both pride and hopelessness?
10. Look back across Romans 5:6–11 as a whole: weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies, and yet loved, justified, reconciled, rejoicing. Name one specific way the heart of God revealed here is reshaping how you see yourself, and one concrete step you will take this week to live as someone truly loved by God.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 3:16–17, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son; 1 John 4:9–10, this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son; Ephesians 2:4–7, God who is rich in mercy made us alive together with Christ; Romans 8:31–32, he who did not spare his own Son will surely give us all things; Titus 3:4–7, when the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared, he saved us.