

Romans 5:8 Christ Died for the Ungodly

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Sacrifice for others is the greatest demonstration of love that we can make. A husband is willing to sacrifice his life for his wife and children. A patriot is willing to sacrifice his life for his fellow citizens in a military conflict. An athlete sacrifices for the benefit of his team.

But the greatest demonstration of love that ever happened was when Jesus laid down his life for the ungodly.

Tonight I want to focus on Romans 5:6-8.

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 his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Today is Good Friday, an occasion especially devoted to remembering Christ's death for us.

Rom 5:6-8 tells us some important things about Christ's death for the ungodly.

I. Chris's death was for ungodly sinners. .6

Paul uses three words here to describe those for whom Jesus died.

A. .6a He died for the *weak*. "when we were yet without strength"

1. The word here for "without strength" is literally "weak" (ἀσθενῶν) – helpless, sick.

It's the word "strengthen" (σθενόω) with a "not" or "un" in front of it. To be "weak" is to be literally "un-strengthened." To be not strong is to be weak, without strength.

2. The weakness in view here is spiritual weakness, not physical weakness. Our problem is not physical; it's spiritual.
3. As the old song says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it...." We easily and often fall into sin because of our moral weakness.
4. James 3:2—we all stumble in many ways.

5. We are all well aware of our own moral weaknesses and how often we fall into temptation.

So we are morally weak and prone to sin, but that's not all....

- B. .6c He died for the *ungodly*. “for the ungodly” (ἀσεβής) – impious, profane, godless, wicked, irreverent, unholy.

1. It's the word for “reverence” (σεβω) with “not” or “un” on the front—i.e., not reverent, not holy, impious.
2. Most of us would readily admit that we are not holy; we fall short of the glory of God. We are far less than perfect.

So we have these two words—not strong, not godly. We lack moral strength and we lack godly reverence. But that's not all; it gets worse.

- C. He died for *sinner*s. “while we were yet sinners” (.8)

1. The word “sinners” here (ἁματωλός) is the most basic word for those who sin.
2. The verb form means “to miss the mark, to be mistaken, to wander from the path, to violate God's law.”

1Jo 3:4 ... *sin* (ἁμαρτία) is the transgression of the law.

3. If you've ever failed to do what you should have done, you are a sinner. If you've ever broken the law, you are a sinner.
4. The problem is that “all have sinned” (Rom 3:23).

- D. In the original language, each of these three words—without strength, ungodly, sinners—begins with the prefix “not” – we are *not* strong, *not* godly, and *not* on target.

- E. This is our most basic problem: we are ungodly, weak, law breakers. We all fall far short of what God expects of us.

- F. People often lack a realistic, biblical view of sin.

1. Some believe in the basic goodness of humanity. They would claim that, way down inside, underneath everything else, man is basically good.
2. Others would say that man is neutral; he can be either good or bad. He is not naturally inclined either way. He has an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other.

3. Others would suggest that mankind has natural moral weakness, but still able to contribute something. He's mostly good but with some bad spots.
4. Some would go even further than that and admit that man is mostly bad but still has some good qualities.
5. Others would claim that man is 99.99% bad, but still retains a little spark of life. He retains some ability within himself to do good and please God.
6. What does the Bible say?

Ephesians 2:1 *you ... were dead in trespasses and sins*

Mankind, before salvation, is spiritually dead. He's not good; he's not neutral; he's not just weak or ill; he's not .01% spiritually alive; he's spiritually dead.

7. The Bible firmly and repeatedly asserts that mankind is deeply, profoundly, desperately wicked from the inside out. We are far worse sinners than most people recognize.

Jer 17:9

Rom 3:10-18

Ephesians 2:12 *... you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Ephesians 4:18–19 *having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

Titus 3:3 *For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.*

These verses describe our true spiritual condition before salvation. Mankind is utterly, hopelessly depraved. Sinfulness has penetrated to every part of the human condition. Every single part of our human nature is corrupted by sin. Our sin is far worse than we know.

- G. If we were honest, we would have to admit that we are often impious, profane, irreverent, and unholy. We are morally weak law-breakers. That's who we are; that's how the Bible describes us; that's our main problem.
- H. The first step toward salvation is acknowledging that you are a weak, ungodly, law-breaking sinner. Christ came to seek and save that which was lost—you have to recognize that you are lost. You need to acknowledge your disease before you are ready to seek treatment from the doctor.

Mr 2:17 Jesus ... saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

- I. If you want to benefit from Jesus' death, you have to be a sinner; you have to admit that you are weak and ungodly. Those are the only people Jesus died for. If you don't admit that, you cannot be saved.

Lu 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

- J. Many people refuse to be saved because they will not admit that they are sinners. They deny the problem, and thus they deny the solution.

Trans: What solution has God provided for this problem?

II. Christ's death is the solution for sin. .6end

- A. His death was substitutionary.

.6end "Christ died for the ungodly." This little word "for" (ὐπὲρ) is very important. It means "in place of, on behalf of."

We find many other passages in the Bible telling us that Jesus died for sinners (cf. 1 Cor 15:3; Gal 3:13; Eph 5:2, 25; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:24).

Isaiah 53:5–6 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

2 Corinthians 5:15 He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them ...

1 Thessalonians 5:10 [He] died for us, ...

1 John 2:2 *And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*

All of this language speaks of a substitutionary/vicarious atonement; one person dying on behalf of/for the benefit of another. Christ died for us. He took our place; he got what we deserved; he was our substitute.

B. .6 His death was remarkable.

An interesting detail here is that the oldest MSS of this passage repeat the word “yet” (ἔτι) twice in vs. 6.

A very literal rendering of the text (.6) would be “for yet Christ, we yet being weak, according to time, for the ungodly, died.”

By using the word “yet/still” twice, Paul seems to be emphasizing that Christ died for us *in spite of* our weakness and depravity. Jesus was well aware that he was dying for weak, ungodly, law breaking people. But he still laid down his life for them.

Ps 103:14 *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*

III. Christ’s death happened “in due time.” .6

A. Literally “according to time” (κατὰ καιρὸν).

Galatians 4:4–5 *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

B. How did that redemption happen? Through Jesus’ death. Redemption is the payment of a price to grant freedom to one in bondage. The payment price was Jesus’ life. His death was a payment.

C. That payment happened, literally, “according to time.”

Christ died at the right moment in history (cf. Mark 1:15, Gal 4:4, 1 Tim 2:6, and Titus 1:3). God’s eternal purpose and plan culminated in Jesus’ death at just the right moment. His death was part of God’s eternal plan. It was no mistake; it was voluntary and intentional.

IV. Christ’s death stands in contrast to human activity/nature. .7

A. .7 Someone might claim that Jesus’ death was not unusual. After all, some people are willing to die for others. Sacrificing your life for a loved one is relatively rare, but it does happen.

- B. Paul admits that someone might be willing to die for a righteous man or a good man. We could imagine circumstances under which someone would be willing to sacrifice himself for someone better than himself.

Illus.: In Charles Dickens' famous novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, one of the characters willingly sacrifices himself for someone else. In the book, the character willing to die for another utters these famous lines, "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."

The character (Sydney Carton) had lived a sinful life, but he willingly substitutes himself for a better man. He realized that the sacrifice of himself would bring happiness to others. He was an evil man who was willing to die for a good man. Sometimes that happens in novels and even in real life.

- C. That's *not* what Jesus did. Jesus' death was *not* for good people; it was for sinners, for ungodly people, for law breakers. That's unnatural; no one willingly dies for bad people. But that's what Jesus did.
- D. .8a Note the contrasting word here, "But." Jesus' death for the ungodly was not like anyone else's death for anyone else. Jesus' death for us was unique, one of a kind, never again repeated. It stands in contrast to all other forms of sacrifice.

V. Christ's death demonstrates/commends God's love toward us. .8

- A. .8 Jesus' death for us was a demonstration of God's love for us. As Jesus said, "Greater love has no man..." (Jn 15:13). His death demonstrated God's love for us.

Scriptures point to the death of Christ as the supreme (Rom 8:32) demonstration of God's love for man.

John 3:16

Ephesians 5:2 ... *Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*

Ephesians 5:25 ... *Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her*

1 John 3:16 *By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. ...*

1 John 4:9–10 *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

- B. Jesus' death for weak, ungodly, law-breaking sinners had a purpose—to save us from the wrath of God (vs. 9b). We are deserving of God's wrath because we are sinners. But God will forgive us if we repent of our sin and place our faith in Jesus to save us.
- C. What does it mean that God “commendeth/demonstrated” his love for us?

- 1. The word in the original language (συνίστημι) has a wide range of meanings. It literally means, “to stand together with; to put together,” but in this passage has the sense of showing to good effect; to show to advantage; to show with grace. Christ's death on behalf of sinners showed the beauty of God's love for miserable sinners like us.

Quote: [God] was putting his love in a graceful setting, like placing a beautiful diamond on a velvet cushion. He was adorning or gracing his love with added lustre through the greatest demonstration of divine love in all history.¹

- 2. To “commend” something has a richer sense than simply “showing” or “demonstrating.” Perhaps a near equivalent in modern terms would be “to showcase.” When you “showcase” something, you are displaying it in a good light, showing the beauty of it.

Illus.: At a jewelry store, they put the jewelry in a showcase; they want to show off the jewelry to the best possible effect.

Christ's death for us demonstrated God's love in the best possible setting or light. It was the highest demonstration of God's love for us. Jesus' death demonstrates the immense value of God's love for us.

¹ Mark Ward, *Authorized: The Use & Misuse of the King James Bible*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Lynnea Fraser, and Danielle Thevenaz (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 34–35.

It may seem odd that a bloody, painful, inhumane, unjust death was the way that God demonstrated his love for us, but it's true. That kind of death demonstrated the height of God's love for us. Jesus' love for ungodly sinners was so strong that he endured that kind of death so that we might be saved.

Rom 5:9 *Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*

- a) Jesus' death for weak, ungodly, law-breaking sinners had a purpose—to save us from the wrath of God. We are deserving of God's wrath because we are weak, ungodly sinners. But God will justify us if we repent of our sin and place our faith in Jesus to save us.
- b) Justification is God's declaration that the believing sinner is righteous. The believer's faith in Christ grants him a righteous standing in God's sight. Rom 5:1—Justified by faith.

Vs. 6—Christ died for the ungodly; vs. 8 Christ died for us. That's who we are—weak, ungodly, law-breakers for whom Christ died.

Christ's death for sinners was the height of God's demonstration of love for us. Jesus' death showed us how much God loves us. God's love is best seen in Jesus' sacrificial, substitutionary death for sinners.

Is there anyone too ungodly to benefit from that love? No. The love of God as expressed in Christ and his death for us can save the chiefest of sinners. No one is beyond the love of God, no matter what you have done. God knows how sinful we are; he knows that we are weak, irreverent, unholy law-breakers. Jesus came to save people just like that. God delights in showing mercy and grace to those who humbly admit their sin, repent of it, and seek forgiveness through Christ.

The only sin that God refuses to forgive is unbelief. If you reject Jesus, there is no forgiveness of sin. The only way to gain forgiveness of sin is through Jesus' death. If you reject that, there is no salvation from the wrath of God. Acts 4:12

Are all sinners saved automatically? Does Jesus' death for sinners mean that all sinners are forgiven? No, we must respond properly to this love. The proper response to God's love is 1) repentance; 2) faith and 3) commitment to God.

2 Corinthians 5:14–15 *For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them*

The main message of Good Friday is that Christ died for the ungodly; that's us. We are ungodly, weak, wandering sinners. Those are the people whom Jesus came to save. We celebrate the fact that Jesus saves people like us through his death.