

WHO ARE YOU?

A Sermon on Romans 5:6-11

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the Reformed tradition, two of our most popular catechisms approach theology quite differently from one another. The Westminster Shorter Catechism represents what we might call a “top-down” approach, seeking to adopt the divine perspective in its summary of biblical teaching. This can be seen quite easily in the answer to its third question: “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”

The Heidelberg Catechism, however, represents what is better called a “bottom-up” approach, building theology from a human perspective. For example, its second question asks how many things are necessary to be known in order for us to live and die in the comfort of Christ. It answers, “Three things: first, the greatness of my sin and misery. Second, how I am redeemed from all my sins and misery. Third,

how I am to be thankful to God for such redemption.”

It is this second approach, and indeed the very sentiment of this catechetical answer, that Paul takes in Romans 5:6-11. Considering our fallenness and salvation from a very human perspective, he tells us that we need to know who we are, and to live accordingly.

II. WHO WE WERE BEFORE WE WERE CHRISTIANS.

As Paul says in verse 10, before we were Christians we were enemies of God. Stop for a moment and think about what it means to be an “enemy.” Every American adult over twenty-five years of age has lived at a time when our nation has had legal enemies. As children, some of us had Germans as enemies. During the cold war some of us had Russians as enemies. We may have had the North Koreans as enemies or North Vietnamese. But everyone outside of Christ has God almighty as his or her enemy. God almighty! We were *εχθροί*, objects of God’s displeasure. We needed to be reconciled to God—he did not

have to be reconciled to us.¹

Moreover, we were objects of his wrath. What is this wrath of God against us? It is nothing less than the cup of suffering that is poured out in the book of Revelation; the pit of hell that burns with sulfur where there is incessant crying and agony. It is the wrath that will be dispensed to the ungodly at the day of judgment, the eschatological wrath.

Even as Christians, that is who we were.

III. WHO WE ARE NOW

But that is no longer who we are in Christ. Now, we are objects of God's Love. God has demonstrated his own love for us in Christ, and we are justified and assured.

Paul tells us several things about God's love for us in Christ, beginning in verse 6 with the fact that God's love came at the perfect

¹ Berkhof, 375. This activity is performed through the "death of His Son," a title used in the introduction to Romans [] and not since. The emphasis is that reconciliation is on the Father (thus the meaning of God in *verse 8*), while the categories "blood of Christ" and "death of Christ" are synonymous.

time: “In due time,² he died.” “Christ came at the time appointed by the Father” (Gal. 4:4). In verse 8 he adds that the love by which God acted was literally “of himself”³ — God is love.

God also manifested his love for us in Christ’s death. This relationship is implied in verse 6, but is explicit in verse 8. Verses 6 and 8 are parallel: “while we were yet weak” and “while we were yet sinners.” The death of Christ was the manifestation and expression of the love of God⁴ — and it still is.⁵ God loved us first. But we couldn’t come to Him because of our sin.

Earlier in Romans Paul told us that Christ died on our behalf: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”

2 “In due time” should be connected with the following verb, he died.” The phrase should not be connected with the preceding participial so as to render “we being weak according to the time,” as per Calvin and Luther

3 *eautou agaphn*: “In such passages as this, *υπερ* involves in it the meaning of *αντι*.” Compare verse 7 where the difference between the words righteous and good is made between just and kind.

4 Christ’s death does not *elicit* the love of God, but God’s love was so vast that the only provision for this love can be seen in Christ’s death.

(3:23-24); “Him who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification” (4:25). In chapter 5 he declares that it was on behalf of the ungodly (vs.6), or on our behalf (vs. 8), and then presents the death of Christ in an even more advanced way. In verse 9 he equates the blood of Christ with *forensic justification*, that is, with “being declared righteous” in the sight of God — just as Abraham was!

The “blood of Christ” mentioned here could refer to the obedience and righteousness of Christ which is the ground of actual justification through faith; or it could identify our actual justification through the blood of Christ.⁶ Either way, Christ’s blood lays the ground for or constitutes our *forensic justification*.⁷ Paul means by “justification”

5 Mounce, 137. συνιστησιν “demonstrates” is present tense, emphasizing that although the cross took place in the past, it continues to show forth the amazing love of God [in the present].

6 Murray, 170. The blood of Christ “could be construed as having in itself, objectively, a justifying effect; and the justification in view would consist in the obedience and righteousness of Christ which is the ground of actual justification through faith,” or it could mean “our actual justification viewed as taking place through the blood of Christ.”

7 Hodge: “Salvation, in a general sense, includes justification; but when distinguished from it, as in this case, it means the consummation of that work of

more than the state of being pardoned; he includes restoration to the favor of God and participation in the consequent blessings of God.⁸

IV. PAUL’S SERMON TO US.

Verses 9 and 10 present a beautifully structured logical argument.⁹ They are parallel in construction and state the same important truths, but they do so differently. It appears to me that Paul argues from the lesser to the greater, or from the minor to the major. This style was widely used by rabbis who called it “light and heavy.”¹⁰

In this “light and heavy” way, Paul pointed out that justification is also by Christ’s life. Yes, we are saved by his blood — but all the more so are we “saved by his life.” “Life” here does *not* mean just the work of

which justification is the commencement.” It is not our works, nor our faith, nor our new obedience, nor the work of Christ in us, but what he has done for us; Rom. 3:25; Eph. 2:13; Heb 9:12.

⁸ Berkhof, 375. The emphasis is that reconciliation is to the Father (thus the meaning of God in *verse 8*) and that the category “blood of Christ” and “death of Christ” are synonymous. The term “reconciliation” is objective: effected by death of Christ while subjective is work of Spirit

⁹ Hodge 215, and Murray. An *a fortiori* argument, that is, if one thing is true, more so must something else be true.

Christ on earth. Rather, Paul intends for us to envision “the exalted resurrection life of Christ.” In verse 10b he could have said that we are saved by his “resurrection.”¹¹ But he purposely didn’t state that. (It is always good for Christians to examine closely the words of the Bible.) In Jesus Christ’s present life in heaven we see ourselves both in our present and our future justification.

Just what benefit do we derive from justification? Simply put, justification saves us from the future wrath of God (verse 9). Even non-Christians have trouble in this life. But their present troubles do not match their eternal torments. We also experience a host of troubles in our life on earth. Yet our *present* troubles do not compare to our *future* joy (Rom. 8:18). Our freedom from the wrath to come produces a *hope* and an *assurance* of deliverance from the apex of God’s displeasure.

The meaning of the “saved from wrath” in verse 9¹² envisages “saved by

10 Mounce. 137 n.111. Also Kasemann, “*den rabbinisch qal wachomer genannten Schluss a minori ad majus*” 129.

11 Murray, 174.

12 That the verb is future in tense indicates that the wrath in question is eschatological.

his life” in verse 10. That is, the guarantee of our final and consummated salvation is the exalted life of Christ. In a sense this is a summary of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15: 20-24: “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. . . Since death came by Adam, so life came in Christ . . . then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to God the father.” Paul assures us that the guarantee of the our resurrection is the resurrection of Christ.¹³

Justification also has present consequences. Verse 11 states that we have received this reconciliation and presently rejoice in its fulfillment.¹⁴ This verse brings us back to verses 1 and 2: “Having peace with God, we rejoice in hope of his glory and here, being reconciled, we glory [or rejoice] in God.” Salvation is begun on earth. Joy is a fruit of the spirit and should be a part of our normal Christian life.

Reconciliation is a gift that we receive by grace, in the same manner as

¹³ Murray, 175.

¹⁴ Hodge’s translation: Through whom we have received reconciliation, that is, have been reconciled.

justification. It is in his death, his cross (Eph. 2:16). It took place “when we were yet enemies.” It consists above all in the effecting of peace as the fruit of justification (5:1), and thus prepares the way to receiving a share in the new creation, the new things, peace as the all embracing condition of salvation.”¹⁵ Christ’s death on our behalf changed our relationship to God, and it took away his wrath against us, or his justice.¹⁶

V. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR LIVES?

How does it make us *feel* to be the object of human love? In marriage we *respond* to our partner’s love. There is always at least some mutuality in marriage. Parental love is different. A mother does *not* respond to her infant’s love.¹⁷ Her love for her helpless baby is different from her love for her husband. God’s love toward us is like a mother’s

15 Ridderbos, Paul, 185.

16 Not to include conduct or display divine character. Overall sanctification is in view, but here it is to propitiate

17 From Hodge: 220ff. Doctrine: perseverance of the saints attributed to the free and infinite love of God in Christ Jesus. “The praise is therefore no more due to them, than commendation to a helpless infant for its mother’s sleepless care.”

love. Yet this analogy of love is still not close enough. The helpless baby is *her* baby. The baby has not rejected her mother. But we had rejected our Father in heaven!

Rather, we ought to consider, as from the lesser (human love) to the greater, our response to divine love. The blood of Christ has made us right with God and we are the objects of His love, love greater than the love a mother has for her child. We have received a love gift from God. It is the gift of His own son (who did not reject him!), the gift of the love of Christ in dying for us.

As children of God, we need to ask this question of the Scriptures: How shall we live in this new relationship? What will assurance of the love of God produce in our lives? Paul answers this question for us. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 he says that “the love of Christ controls us.”¹⁸ Do we as Christians really want the love of Christ to control us?

The Lord also wants us to respond by being joyful. We want the

¹⁸ “No one can be a true Christian on whom these truths do not exert a governing influence.” It never produces self-complacency or pride; but always humility, self-abasement, wonder, gratitude, and praise.

love of Christ to control us, and in this passage that love is to be manifested in our joy. He wants His *glory* to penetrate our everyday lives. True Christianity is glorious. Remember Paul's difficult life and context — yet he is full of boasting! Did he rejoice when he was being beaten, shipwrecked, flogged, or jailed? He was able to exalt *in Christ* in the situation, but he was no idiot. Still, he used this word “boast” or “glory” or “rejoice” over 35 times! Verse 2: “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God”; and verse 11: “Not only is this so, but we also rejoice [or exalt; *καυχωμεννοι*] in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received [*ελαβομεν*] reconciliation [*καταλλαγην*].” The joy that Paul is talking about is not a mindless joy in the midst of life's troubles, as if they were not troubles. Indeed, there are troubles!

As I consider the Christians I know, I know some who have suffered heart attacks and had their chests opened up with an electric bone saw like the butchers use. Some are selling their home, or working for a new business. I see mortgages and sick children. Is the Lord calling

us to pretend that a feverish baby is fun at 2:00 a.m., that it is a joy to have to go to work when you are bone tired? Of course not.

Nevertheless, Paul calls us to “rejoice in God.”

Who are you? In Jesus Christ you are no longer enemies but beloved.

Who are you? You have been promised eternal joy, and your earthly lives can taste that assurance now.

Who are you? You have received a command from the King of Kings. The command is to exult in Christ.

May the church always be full of people who know who they are and live accordingly!