

### 3. Hope Grounded in the Love of God (5:6-11)

In verses 5:3-5 Paul showed how the Christian's exultation in hope implies his exultation in tribulation. The reason for this necessary connection is the crucial role tribulations play in the nurture and strengthening of the believer's hope. Difficulties do not act to diminish or decimate hope; they only press it forward. Yet the reason hope prevails and grows strong through tribulation is the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The fact that the Christian is a "*dwelling of God in the Spirit*" testifies to God's overflowing, triumphant love; the love that has effected both the satisfaction of sin and the restoration of communion (8:9-11; cf. also 1 Corinthians 3:1-17, 6:12-20; Ephesians 2:11-22).

As Paul introduced hope in terms of its essential relation to faith, so he introduced God's love in terms of its essential relation to the believer's hope. *It is ultimately God's love - as the eternal motive behind His redemption in Christ - that is the basis and security of Christian hope* (cf. Ephesians 1:1-12, 2:1-7). For this reason, in an extended context focused upon hope as a core Christian virtue, it is entirely appropriate that he would unfold the ineffable grandeur and effectual, inexhaustible power of the love of God.

In doing so Paul approached the topic from the two perspectives that pertain to it: God's love as it has reference to *Himself*, and as it has reference to *men*.

a. Foundationally, Paul's consideration of the love of God from the divine perspective is centered in *Jesus Christ* (5:6-8). In that regard he considered it in terms of both its *essence* (5:6) and its *unique greatness* (5:7-8).

1) With respect to the former, God's love in Christ is seen to be a matter of *infinite condescension*. Paul's summary statement indicates that the divine love finds its preeminent expression in Christ's substitutionary death for the *weak* and *ungodly*: "*while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*" A more succinct articulation of the essence of the gospel cannot be imagined. Three things about Paul's statement must be noted, two of which focus upon the *beneficiaries* of Christ's death and the third upon the *benefactor*.

The first two address the predicament of men as the object of God's redeeming love, namely that in themselves they are both *ungodly* and *helpless*. The former adjective speaks to the human state of alienation and enmity, and the latter to its immutability. Fallen human beings are not only hostile in their estrangement from God, in their weakness and infirmity they are incapable of remedying their hopeless plight. It is these pathetic creatures that are the objects of God's love. And yet not simply a love of sorrow or pity, but a love of *remediation*. It is a love that rescues men from their calamity. In this is seen the merciful and gracious nature of the divine love: *it is merciful because it is directed toward the relief of the infirmed and impotent; gracious because it is has its object in the ungodly and undeserving.*

The third thing to note pertains to the subject of this love, namely God Himself. Specifically, it concerns His eternal intention and determination: God's intervention for the helpless and ungodly came *at the right time*. The implication of this prepositional phrase is that His redemption of sinners was deliberate and timely; it was neither impetuous nor capricious, but was precisely according to plan. Paul's phrase leaves no doubt concerning the determined nature of God's redemption, but it could be just as easily inferred from the principle of love that motivated it. As this grace of salvation "*was granted to us from all eternity,*" so also it stood upon an eternal determination of love (Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Timothy 1:8-10).

As a final consideration of 5:6, it is important to observe the centrality of Jesus Christ to the gospel of God's love. For Paul, it is precisely the death of Christ - which itself presupposes God's gift of Christ in the *Incarnation* - that best manifested and made effectual the love of God for men. God's loving rescue of the helpless and ungodly came through Christ's death on their behalf. Christ is God's love for the world. So the apostle John:

*"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 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."* (1 John 4:9-10)

- 2) The second thing that Paul revealed about the divine love as he considered it from God's vantage point is its **unique greatness** (5:7-8). In order to prove this contention he contrasted the divine love with its human approximation. Essentially, his argument can be phrased as follows: *if a person would know the unique and unspeakable greatness of God's love, simply consider the matter of one man giving his life for another.*

In the realm of human experience it is extremely rare for a person to willingly give his life for someone else. Even soldiers who die in combat rarely do so as a result of intentionally placing themselves in harm's way when they were not already in danger. And in the uncommon instances where a person *would* voluntarily die for the sake of another, there is no doubt but that his positive perception of the other person drives his decision: "*perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.*" A person may conceivably lay down his life for a *stranger*, but he will not die for an *enemy* bent on doing him evil.

In this way Paul demonstrated the *uniqueness* of God's love. It is a love that is alien to men in their natural relations, for it takes no consideration of perceived worth; it proceeds out of God's own nature without reference to the worthiness of its objects. In this is seen also the *greatness* of God's love: it does not look for suitable, worthy objects; it looks to *make* suitable objects. ***It looks to transform enemies into devoted, beloved children.***

This insight into the distinction between divine and human love helps to explain one reason people are so resistant to and even suspicious of God's loving overtures. Because every expression of human existence is defined by man's overarching self-idolatry, human love always comes with strings attached. Jesus captured this well: *"If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"*

The mark of men is that they love those who love them; their love for other people is ultimately only an expression of their love for themselves. Indeed, everything outside of themselves - whether people, things, circumstances, etc. - is evaluated and interacted with on the basis of its perceived benefit. Although the definition of *benefit* is subject to every person's individual assessment in accordance with a given issue and particular set of circumstances, *it is always true that the consideration of personal benefit lies at the heart of all human behavior.*

And because all people innately know that there is no such thing as a purely altruistic expression of love, like all human interaction love is approached with a degree of reserve, uncertainty, and suspicion. Only the naïve and inexperienced are willing to give themselves to the love of another person with complete openness and vulnerability; those who are "seasoned" know all too well that to do so invites certain disappointment, disillusionment, and deep anguish of heart. Since all human beings have only known this sort of "love," they naturally respond to God's love with the same suspicion, doubt and reserve they bring to other relationships. This is exactly the reason for God's insistence in Isaiah 55:

*"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David..."*

*"Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. For you will go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands...And it will be a memorial to the Lord, for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off.'"*

God's love does not come with strings attached. His relationship with men is entirely **unilateral**: He *gives* freely and fully and they *receive*. The obvious reason this is so is that God "owns the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:1-15; Isaiah 66:1-2); since all things are His no one can give Him anything. But more importantly, when men strive to give something to Him - or even believe that they *have* something to give - they assign value to something outside of God and so rob Him of His glory; "*from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.*" Therefore, "*to Him be the glory forever*" (11:35-36).

b. The second section of this context has Paul addressing the love of God more from the human perspective (5:9-11). Yet, as with his previous consideration, this latter perspective is also centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. From the divine side, Christ is the focal point of God's love most simply because *God is love* and in Jesus Christ "*all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form*" (Colossians 2:9). For the very same reason He is the focal point of God's love from the human side as well. To see Him is to see the Father; Christ is the embodiment of the God who is love. Yet, Christ is not only the *visible* expression of God's love; He is the *evidential* expression of it. That is, Christ's coming into the world to bear in Himself the guilt of its estrangement is the singular proof of God's love. Lest men doubt God's love for His creation, and particularly for His image-bearers, they need only consider Calvary. This is why Jesus' atoning death has center stage in Paul's theology of divine love (8:12-39; 2 Corinthians 5:1-21; Ephesians 1:3-14, 2:1-7).

1) As seen, God's love in Christ is fundamentally a posture of infinite condescension to the need of men for the sake of their good, and that to the praise of the glory of His grace. Nowhere is this theme more powerfully expressed than in Hosea's portrait of Yahweh as the tirelessly loving Husband who relentlessly pursues the wanton harlot that is His wife until He finally and forever captivates her by His goodness. And having finally prevailed, He is overjoyed to shower her with all of the blessings of His love (Hosea 1:1-3:5; cf. also Isaiah 50:1-54:17).

Similarly, in the present context Paul expresses the magnitude of God's love by showing its *efficacy*:

*"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* (5:9-10)

The love of God that sent His Son into the world as the Sin-Bearer is a love of *accomplishment*: it has effected justification by His shed blood. Paul has already made this point (3:21-25, 4:25, 5:1), and his reason for mentioning it again here was not simply reiteration. For he understood Christ's justifying work to be the foundational reality upon which the believer's faith stands. This being so, it is also the foundation of his confident hope in future glory.

But Paul's consideration did not stop with this. For he has shown that the Christian's hope finds its ultimate basis in God's love, even as it is divine love that stands behind the justifying death of Christ (5:5-8). Specifically, Paul's point here is that Jesus' death at Calvary represents the *singularly great expression of the efficacy of God's love*, so that the cross proves his contention that the Christian's hope does not disappoint.

The way he shows this is through a common form of argumentation that occurs frequently in his writing. It is an argument "from the greater to the lesser," and is founded upon a common-sense principle of logic by which certain truths are recognized as being necessary inferences or "subsets" of other truths. Thus it begins by establishing the truth of a particular premise. From there it argues for a "lesser" inference that necessarily follows from that premise.

- Here the established premise is the justifying work of Christ, proven by His resurrection from the dead. Christ died to justify the ungodly, and His resurrection is the proof that He accomplished that work. At the same time, His atoning death had its origin in the eternal love of the Father, indicating that the recovery and renewal of the fallen creation is the eternal goal of God's love; *it is the end toward which God's love is working.*
- Because this love is *God's* love, it has been fully effectual in accomplishing redemption through the blood of Christ. And this being so, it necessarily follows that the cosmic recovery accomplished at Calvary will endure and advance to its predetermined goal, namely the summing up of all things in Christ with the renewal of the new heavens and new earth. God has accomplished the *greater* work in the conquest of sin and death at Calvary; therefore, it follows that He will accomplish the *lesser* work that is the fruitfulness of that accomplishment unto its appointed perfection at the last day. Thus Paul: "*Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.*" The whole point of God's justifying work in Christ was the gracious deliverance of men from final judgment; having accomplished that justification at the cross, will they not indeed be delivered from wrath on that last day? ***If God accomplished the greater, will He not accomplish the lesser?***

This same thesis is reinforced in verse 5:10 by considering justification in terms of some of its important particulars. As seen, in verse 9 the greater/lesser structure was localized in the principle of justification and the deliverance from condemnation that it brings. But in verse 10 Paul opened up the specifics of God's justifying work and presented his greater/lesser argumentation in terms of parallel, pointed contrasts.

- His greater argument is God's *accomplished reconciliation of His enemies through the death of His Son*, which work is the very substance of justification.
- By way of parallel contrast, his lesser argument is the *final salvation of reconciled sons through the Son's life*.

Again, Paul's logic is that, if the greater contention is true, then the lesser one, being a subset of the greater, is also true. Here, if God has reconciled enemies through the greater work that is the death of His Son - which reconciliation has its eternal goal in final glory - then it is certain that God will preserve reconciled sons and usher them into the glory for which their reconciliation was accomplished.

It is also noteworthy that this latter argument introduces again the core gospel principles of *life* and *death*. Previously Paul established that gospel faith is summarized in unwavering confidence in the God who gives life to the dead, and so calls into being that which does not now exist (4:16-21). This faith was present in Abraham in relation to the conception of Isaac, and later in his offering of Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Yet these instances of faith in the God who makes alive that which is dead prefigured the great point of fulfillment of this truth, namely faith directed toward the death and resurrection of Christ. *Thus faith in Abraham's God is faith in Christ crucified and resurrected* (4:23-25; cf. also Acts 2:22-36, 7:1-56, 10:34-43, 13:14-41, 17:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 15:1-4).

In this context Paul uses this reality of life out of death specifically to prove out his contention that the believer's hope can never disappoint.

- As his hope is grounded in God's love, so that love has been supremely manifested in the giving of His Son in *death* at Calvary.
- Christ's death had its goal in satisfaction for sin, and the unassailable proof that divine love triumphed in accomplishing this end is Jesus' resurrection to *life*.
- Even more, Christ's death was a substitutionary sacrifice that looked beyond atonement to *reconciliation*; its ultimate end was the reconciliation of God and man. Jesus came as the Second Adam to recover what had been lost by the first Adam (5:12-21).
- Thus, reconciliation came through Christ's cross-work, which is the epitomizing fulfillment of God's promise to overcome death with life. So also the believer's reconciled state is the fulfillment of the promise of life conquering death: *the death that is estrangement is overcome by the life that is restored communion*.

- But the way in which this reconciliation - this life out of death - takes place is through union with the One who was dead and is alive forevermore (Revelation 1:9-18). As the Christian shares in His death, so also he shares in His life. *And it is precisely because he participates in Christ's resurrection life now that his hope of future glory in the resurrection of the last day cannot disappoint.*

Christ's death has conquered and abolished death and brought life and immortality to light (2 Timothy 1:8-10). His death is the death of those who have faith in Him, and His life is their life (6:1-10). But if it is true that Jesus' death brought their reconciliation with God - which reconciliation is entered into by entering into His *life*, and is attested by the indwelling presence of Holy Spirit - how much more will they prevail by the presence and power of His life within them unto their own final perfection in glory? *How much more will they be saved by His life?*

- 2) Because of what God's love in Christ has accomplished and secured, it has a **supreme glory**. Thus the believer "*exults in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation*" (5:11). With this summary proclamation Paul has brought his discourse full-circle. He began by declaring the Christian's exultation to be in the *hope* of future glory. From that Paul extended exultation to the *tribulations* by which the saint's hope is nurtured and strengthened in the promise that it will never disappoint. And now, he has shown that the reason the Christian exults in hope, as well as in the tribulations that lead him toward that hope, is that *his foundational boast is in God Himself*.

And yet he exults in God not simply because He is great and glorious, sovereign and almighty, holy and transcendent. *The Christian exults in God because of His infinite, invincible love and what that love has accomplished in Christ*. His boast is in the God who has kept His promise to give life to that which was dead - the God who, through Jesus Christ, has justified the ungodly, reconciled them to Himself, and given them His Spirit as irrefutable proof both of their present justification and reconciliation and their future inheritance in His glory.

*"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 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...By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world."* (1 John 4:9-17)