

God Helps Those Who Cannot Help Themselves

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Romans 5. Why do you have a brain? What's the best use of your brain? I'm going to tell you what it is: to think on the deep things of God. Yes, indeed, you have to use your brain to just get by in this world and make out a budget for the groceries and 1,001 other things, I do understand that but as one Bible teacher said one day: "Think. There's so little competition." This is a thinking sermon, a sermon to challenge you to use some diligence sobriety of the brain organ to think on God. I have pulled this text out and this particular message out 12 times in the last two years because I just felt it needs to be stated again and I put it back up but this week it's back out and I had actually begun working on my Luke message and thought, "No, I want to go here."

I want to talk about the holiness of God for just a moment and I'll say the same things I basically say about God's holiness because I'm not concerned about you thinking I'm repeating: I want to repeat on purpose because I want you to remember it. Some things are true and they need to be repeated. When you think about the holiness of God, you should think about three basic things, two categories and one summary statement, if you will. First of all: the holiness of God means that in every way that God is like us, he is immeasurably superior to us. That's the first thing. We call those communicable attributes: for example, God is giving, we know something of giving; God is loving, we know something of loving; God is good, we know something of goodness. And we could go on and on but when you find those communicable attributes, those that we share with God, when you look at what we think about a certain attribute, let's say love, and what God thinks, you look at how we extend love and how God extends love, he's immeasurably superior to us. He's greater. Think about the most loving person you know, think about the most giving person you know, think about the most caring, whatever the virtuous attribute you might think of and God is infinitely greater at that than they are. He's holy.

But not only is he infinitely greater in any attribute he may share with us, secondly: he is transcendent to us, that is he transcends. He is radically contrary to us. He is radically different. He is otherworldly, that is there are things about God that we can't even relate to they're so magnanimous and unique from us. God is spirit, we can't grasp that. God is eternal. God is omnipotent. God is omniscient. God is omnipresent. And on and on we could go with the incommunicable attributes of God, that is he doesn't share them with his creatures. He is uniquely that and no one else is like him and that is why I abhor this

great and giant movement to make the church relevant, to make the church service an extension of the kind of joys and pleasures you had in the world this week and they may not have been wrong, but church pleasures are to be different because God is different than the world. Our joys are different than worldly joys because our God is infinitely different than this fallen world. Amen? We can't make this like the world just another type of fun thing we do in the week. No, there must be something different because our God is different. He transcends all that we know or understand.

He so infinitely exceeds everything and there is nothing you can even compare him with. In other words, you can't complete this sentence, you can't say: God is like _____ because he's really not like anything you can think of. He's holy, separate, distinct and unique. The Psalmist rebuked the carnal Israelis or Jews by saying, he's quoting for God now, "You thought I was just like you. You thought I was like you, just a little bigger and stronger. I'm not like you." That's why sometimes we might pray a prayer, "Oh God, heal this one!" God, in his infinite wisdom says, "Healing is not right right now," because he's greater and bigger than us. "God, fix this issue in my life!" It's okay to ask but God may say, "No, fixing it will not achieve perfect and wise ends that only I understand." That's why we trust him. When we can't trace his hand, we do trust his heart. Amen? He transcends.

So, you must humble yourselves before Scripture and receive by faith the truth he reveals of himself therein and then understand as the Scriptures reveal the truths of God and you receive those, even though in our minds we can't logically wrap all the way around them, we still receive them as truth. But at the end of that, we only know God partially though we do know him truly. What we do know of God from the Scriptures and, by the way, that's the only place you understand God is the Scriptures. Some guru or some deep mystic or some thinker or some guy that's seen a vision just get over that. God has revealed all he's going to reveal of himself right here until Jesus comes again. It's done. It's finished. It's settled in the sacred doctrine of the word of God.

One other thing I want to say: not only is God infinitely superior to us in every way he might be like us and not only is he radically separate and distinct and unique from us, holiness means when you put the composite of all of that together, you have what the Psalmist calls the perfection of beauty. When you put all of his communicable and incommunicable attributes together the way he's assembled them, he didn't assemble them because he never was assembled but the way they exist in him, it is a beauty and it's so far beyond us. Friends, that's what heaven is going to be: in heaven you'll finally have a perfected mind and perfected emotions and a perfected understanding where you can begin an eternal process of receiving, grasping and understanding the perfection of beauty which is God. And it's going to be radically unique and greater than any pleasure, as a matter of fact, all the pleasures of this world all put together. That's what eternity is going to be. He's holy.

Being holy and being true means that God does not conform to some law or to some standard outside himself. In other words, God doesn't say, "Well, here is right and wrong. Here is righteousness and don't I fit that?" No, he's God, he is the righteous standard. He's

God, he is the truth and law. There is nothing outside of him that proves he is good or moral or ethical or upright. His perfections are perfect, if you will, they're eternal and they're unchangeable and they are his very nature.

Now to our text in Romans 5 and I entitled this "God Helps Those Who Cannot Help Themselves." God helps those who cannot help themselves. In this text, the apostle gives four modifiers, four descriptive terms for what man is, what we were before God saves us. By the way Paul words it here, you could almost feel like he could go on and on and on but he just gives four in this section so let me point those out to you. Romans 5, beginning in verse 6,

"6 For while we were still helpless," that's one of the them, "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly," that's number two. "7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners," that's the third term, "Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies," that's the fourth term, "we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

This is a passage that wonderfully shows the great salvation God has provided through his Son Jesus Christ but that's not the primary aim here: the primary aim here is that we might see something of God in this comparison. God through the Apostle Paul, lays out a description of man that we might grasp more deeply the person of God because he wants us to see the contrast between what man is so we might better understand who God is.

So, how does he describe man? He uses four descriptives and the first one in verse 6b is the word "ungodly." "At the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Just to kick off here and I don't want to do this in a way because I don't want to bring anything trivial or trite into this, but Seven-Up had a commercial for years and they called their product the "Uncola." What they wanted you to do is see, "You know what a cola is, well, our product is everything opposite of that." That's what God is saying about mankind, "I am God and mankind is everything opposite of me. Mankind is the ungodly." We are contrary to God. We don't fit with him. We contradict God and in the right sense of the word, it's a slang word today almost, but we are queer to God. We're abnormal, not natural to him. We don't fit. Therefore, being ungodly, we are guilty sinful creatures that deserve to perish before him. You see, in God you have everything that's beautiful and perfect and right so if you're the ungodly, you're everything that is not beautiful, that is not perfect, that is not right. You're the ungodly.

To God, we are totally repulsive. To God we are deeply offensive. I don't know why but in my mind I think about the text that talks about all of our righteousness is as filthy rags and for some reason I think about a hot August day when it's in the upper 90s and has been for weeks and at the edge of a black asphalt road, the road must reach 120-30-40

degrees, who knows, very, very hot, there's a banana that's been laying there for three weeks. It's shriveled up; it's completely black; there is some runny ooze coming out of one end of it. Nothing, absolutely nothing about that banana is appealing to us. Nothing. It's totally repulsive. That's where the writer is trying to get you. He's trying to say, "God is holy and when he looks at mankind, he only sees something that is totally," listen to me, not mostly, not primarily, "totally repulsive to him." Just as you would view that rotten banana on the side of the road in August that's been laying there for three weeks.

You say, "Well Pastor, what about the good things that people do?" Let me ask you this: who told you people do good things? What standard of good are you using? God's standard is the only one that matters. Now, I understand we can, in a figure of speech, it's not wrong to use that on a horizontal human plane but in the truest sense, who told you anybody was good? The Bible said, "There is no one good. No, not one." Isaiah 64:6, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." He said, "Take your righteous deeds, your good things you do," he says, "in the eyes of God, they're but a filthy garment." And do you know what that word "filthy garment" means? It's the menstrual cloth. "Pastor, you're being gross." God's being gross, that's what he used. He wants you to get it. He wants you to grasp how repulsive even the good things people do are in his eyes. Folks, that's why we here at Grace Life Church love the doctrines of grace because there's no law or no work a total repulsive being can do to cause God to want to like them or to receive them or to save them.

Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" What do they say? "Well, I don't feel that I'm ungodly." Well, you're deceived by your desperately sick and deceitful heart. You are functioning from a limited and perverted view of God and that's idolatry. What we've done is we've taken God, we've dumbed God down to be a lot like us but maybe a little bit stronger or bigger or more powerful but like us and we feel like we're not doing too bad. That's why there needs to be great preaching on who God is. Men can't get saved unless they know who God is so that they'll know what they are before him. If he's just a little bigger than us, then it's probably not that big a deal, then you don't have to be all that grateful for him saving you because he didn't have to reach all that far. But he's infinite. If he's the perfection of beauty and holy, then you understand the great gulf that was connected to reach to you.

But we have these low views of God, these idolatrous views of God that appease our conscience a little while but that's a fatal error and just the fact that we try to bring God down and make us feel like we're not so ungodly, so contrary to him, that very notion, that idolatry is another thing that makes us loathsome in his eyes. That's taking the name of the Lord your God in vain. Taking the name of the Lord your God in vain is not just using a dirty word before we say the word "God," it means you have a concept of him, you have an understanding of him, your definition of him or your understanding is less than biblical. That's taking the name of the Lord God in vain. And that's everywhere in evangelical churches today: they've dumbed God down to make people happy and comfortable to God. I don't want you comfortable with God unless you're regenerated of

the Holy Spirit. I want you troubled. I want you perplexed. I want you terrorized if you're not converted because that's the way it truly is because you're the ungodly.

I remember the story of the little girls in the Superdome. Was it Hurricane Katrina that hit the Gulf coast and those people fled to the Superdome and the power went out and there were some savage monsters. Those little children terrified and scared to death went to the restroom and in that darkness, men were taking them and raping them. In my mind, that's just about as low as it could get, take innocent little girls who are already terrified and scared to death and doing something like that to them. Now, when you think about that kind of person, you know what you think? That person is repulsive to me. God said, "Infinitely more so are you repulsive to me. You're the ungodly." Every one of you, including me.

Paul gives us another term, the second term is the term sinners. Not only ungodly but in verse 8 he says, "in that while we were yet sinners," criminal lawbreakers whose destruction would abound to the glory of God. You know the word "sinners" is the idea of "missing the mark, failing to reach the ordained standard or purpose God made us for." God made man to be the highest of his creation. He made us in his own image. He stamped his own image on us that we might represent him to the universe. He said, "That's the purpose I made you for and you've fallen way short of that standard."

I told you this before but when I was a little boy, maybe 6-7 years of age, I loved to fly kites. I was just fascinated by it and I would buy spool after spool after spool of string and my string would go out for a long way before it went up to the kite. One day there were 6-8 boys in my front yard flying kites over the big field in front of my house and our kites were all red, blue or yellow because that's the color they made them in the store. I think we paid a quarter apiece for them. We're standing there flying our kites and I looked up kind of straight over my head and there's this larger gray kite. It kind of shook kind of funny in the air and I was just intrigued by that kite. I thought, "That's not one of our kites. Where did that come from?" I looked at the string and the string ran back about 2-3 blocks behind my house and you'd have to have known me as a kid, I had to find out what kind of kite is this, who is it connected to and what's going on here.

I followed the string and I ran back through the neighborhood and I get about probably 20-30 yards from the guy holding the string and I recognize, I didn't know him well but I knew he was an old person, he was 13-14. He's flying this gray kite different than our kites and I was just fascinated so I had to go over and ask some questions. "This is very unique. What kind of kite is this?" He said, "I made this kite." Blew my mind. I was so impressed. Blown away impressed. "What do you mean you made it? How do you make it?" I didn't know human beings could make kites, you bought them at the store and put them together and flew them was all I knew. He said, "No, I took an old yardstick," remember the old wooden yardsticks? "I split it in two and I made the horizontal beam, the vertical beam, I got newspaper," that's why it was gray, "and I taped around the edges and I bowed it just right, I put a tail on it and fly it in the sky." I was blown away impressed. That's the most impressive thing I can remember almost from my childhood. You say, "You had a bad childhood." Well, maybe so, but I was impressed.

Here's what I thought, "This guy, he's the smartest, wisest, most brilliant guy I've met in a long time." Flying his kite was an expression in my mind of his wisdom and his ability. See, that's what God made you for: you're God's kite. God said, "I'm going to fly you before the universe and I want you to show off my wisdom, my beauty and my power. I want you to be a reflection of me. But, see, you're sinners." What he means is: your kite has crashed to the ground. "You're not doing what I made you to do. You're not showing me off to the world. You've completely failed." And if you make a kite and it won't even hardly get off the ground and it crashes to the ground and breaks, you're just going to discard it and that's exactly what God should do with us. He should say, "Everything I made you for, you've fallen so radically short. You've missed the mark. You're supposed to shine my glory to the universe and you don't. You fail completely." God says tell the truth, we all lie. God says don't steal or respect property rights and we've all stolen in one form or fashion. God says honor your parents and we haven't, not perfectly at least. God says honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy and we recklessly miss church when we don't have to. God says don't commit adultery and we're all adulterers, at least in action or in our hearts we've committed adultery. Over and over God says, "You've fallen so short. I made you to reflect me. You've fallen so short." We offend God.

Paul says: you need to understand something, you're the ungodly, totally and completely repulsive to God in every way; you are sinners, you have fallen short of everything God made you to be and perform and do; thirdly, you're enemies. Look at what he says in verse 10, "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." Enemies. Now, we want to get to the last part of that verse, I understand that, and talk about how God saves but Paul I think wants you to get this, that's why he's using all these different modifiers, he wants you to get the depth of this: an enemy means you're in hostile activity against God, actively hostile against God. There is just no neutral ground and I know people love to play this card, "Well, I'm not really a follower of Jesus Christ but I'm not gonna run with the devil. I'm not doing that either." No, you are running with the devil. There is no neutral ground here. Jesus said, "Whoever is not for me is against me." The word "enemies" here is plural, it means we're all actively working against God. We're all actively working to advancing of the kingdom, not God's kingdom.

We all were active traitors and rebels against God. Let me give you three things: first of all, we've been active rebel traitors against God in our minds. Think about how we do this, listen, are you listening? Every time you minimize the vile wickedness of any sin, you're in active hostility against God. And unredeemed people, that's basically all they do is try to redefine God's standard so they feel more comfortable. "Ooooooh, homosexuality is wonderful! Let's celebrate it!" Why? "Because we all want to be comfortable in our sexual immoralities." We redefine what God says is right or wrong, that's an active attack against God and we're all like that in our minds. Soften the edges on the truth of God so that we all can feel more comfortable about it. Then we actively in our minds reject him. We actively in our minds ignore him. We actively in our minds pervert him. We'll listen to some so-called Bible preacher/teacher who redefines God and we're all more happy with that, we're more comfortable with that image. Who wants a God like the one I'm

preaching? It's kind of terrorizing. It's kind of uncomfortable. That's the way we all are before God changes us.

In our minds, also in our hearts. How many of us came forth from the womb and as we begin to understand the constant attitude of our heart was: my joy and my pleasure is in God? No, we found joy and pleasure in everything but God. It's just the way we were. We came forth from the womb speaking lies. We came forth with a depraved heart that loved this world and loved ourselves and didn't love him. When the Bible says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength," that's normal. That's not exceptional. That's just normal. We're just so abnormal. We love and take pleasure in everything but God. That's the way unsaved men are and that means we are actively a traitor against God in our minds and in our hearts.

Of course, also in our actions. Every sinful deed, little or small, is an attack against God. It's the strike of a hostile enemy. It's the actions of a traitor or a rebel. If God had not changed our hearts, if we could, we would have ascended to heaven and dragged God off of his throne and thrown him into hell and enthroned ourselves there instead. That's what we are. It's what you are.

But the horror of being God's enemy is not that we are active in hostility against him, it's that he is active in hostility against you. Not only are you God's enemy, listen to me, God is your enemy. That's what Paul is talking about here, how wonderful conversion is because God was in active hostility to destroy you as his enemy. Scripture makes this very, very clear that God, before a person is converted, now listen to me, is actively storing up wrath to bring against that person when in his perfect providence it's time to extend that wrath. You might say, "Well, God is just not active right now and people are doing wicked thing and ungodly things." No, he's very active. Everything is being recorded, everything is being chronicled and the right amount of divine wrath and retribution is being set aside for that person every day and it's building and building and building and building. Listen to Romans 2:5, "Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself." Notice that: storing up wrath for yourself, "in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." In the future, the wrath of God is going to be released upon you based on all that you did and are doing against him as an active traitor against him. We are his enemies and he is our enemy.

Paul says: you're the ungodly; you're radically the opposite of everything God is which is the only thing that is perfect and right and good and attractive, you're totally repulsive to God; you're a sinner, you fall completely short of the purpose he made you for, to shine his glory and his perfection to the universe; you're an enemy, you're an active traitor against him in your mind, your heart and in your will, your actions and God is actively against you. One more word Paul uses here: he uses the word "helpless." "For while we were still helpless." That's the idea of weak or sick or without strength. It means we are altogether unable to help us out of our condition.

Now think about it: God is the King, the Creator of all things and so he rightfully expects us to love him, to honor him, to obey him and to glorify him. The question is: why wouldn't men honor him and love him and obey him and find pleasure in him? Because he is the perfection of beauty, why is that not just normal and natural? Well, it's because we are helplessly blinded and in the bonds of wickedness. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." What it means is: we all sin and fall short because we are helpless to change. Nobody wants the wrath of God; nobody really would like to be the enemy of God. We're just radically unable to help ourselves. We can't fix ourselves. We're helpless to resist sin and we are helpless to do good. Did you hear that? We are helpless to resist sin and we are helpless to do good. If you're out there thinking that you're going to start being good so God will like you – listen to me – you are helpless to stop sinning and helpless to ever do any good. That is no way to find God or find salvation. Helpless. Unable to lift ourselves out of our dilemma. Romans 8:31 says, "If God is for us, who can be against us," but the reverse is also true, "If God is against us, who could be for us?" We're helpless.

Another word that the Bible uses that has the idea of helplessness is the word "lost." We're lost. We don't have a compass, we don't have a map, we don't have a guide. Furthermore, if we had all that, we'd have no strength to travel home and someone to show us the way. I think I was actually in Orlando, Florida doing something when I thought about this but I was meditating on this and I thought about your quadriplegic, you have no strength in your legs, you have no strength in your arms. Somebody puts you in the back of a pick-up truck, they prop you up in the back corner and they start taking you out into the middle of a vast wilderness. You're trying to memorize where you're being taken so that you might somehow get out. After hours of driving back through this wilderness, they take you out and they set you on the ground and they prop you up against a tree and they leave you there, telling you before they leave that this forest is about to be burned to the ground and then bulldozed over. And you're in the middle of it. There you are a quadriplegic. Nobody can hear your voice. If you knew the way out, your legs could not carry you out. If you knew the way out, you couldn't even try to drag yourself with your arms. You have no strength in your arms or your legs. If a guide came by and said, "Follow me," you'd have no strength to follow the guide. Nothing you can do. You're helpless and that's the way mankind is. He is helpless. He has no strength to find his way out or carry himself out.

Man tries to do this but to no avail. That's why Proverbs 16:25 says, "There is a way which seems right to a man," notice it seems right. That's where religion comes in. "Give me some religion. I'll join the church and I'll partake of the ordinance of baptism and I'll clean up the bad things in my life and I'll add on some good stuff." It seems right but it's no good. "Its end is the way of death." You're still ungodly at the end of doing a few better things. You're still an enemy of God at the end of doing a few better things. You're still a sinner before God at the end of doing a few better things. You're still helpless to fix or remedy your problem. At the end of it all, you're more deep in the muck and mire of sin and helplessness than you were before. The Bible says when a man does self-cleansing, that is he finds some religious thing to do to feel like, "I've cleaned myself up

some,” the Bible says seven demons come out of that demon that he cleansed himself of and the last state is worse than the first.

You listen to me: every time you self-cleanse through some work, some religion, something you're going to do, you make yourself more evil in the sight of God, you store up more wrath. Now, I'm about to tell you something: if you find a person that gets on the horse of legalism and they just won't get off, they ride that horse and ride that horse and preach that doctrine and teach that doctrine, more than likely you have a person with serious sin issues in their life and their trying to fix it by works and legalism and it never fixes it. Paul writes to, I believe it's the Colossians or the Ephesians, forgive me I don't remember the exact reference but he talks about people that put on these works and these laws and here's what Paul says, “It is no guard against fleshly indulgence.” It doesn't help you live cleaner. It makes you feel better about yourself but it doesn't help you at all. Still totally helpless.

So, man asks the question, you may ask the question, I hope you're asking the question: how can I be saved being the ungodly? How can I be saved being the sinner? How can I be saved being the enemy of God? How can I be saved being totally completely helpless? Can I be saved? No. No. There is nothing you can do to be saved. What might God do? What might the God do who is the perfection of holiness? He's the perfection of beauty who everything about his perfect being looks at you and finds you repulsive, finds you a radical traitor and enemy, finds you as one who has failed him in everything he made you to be and do. What would this God do to you? What would he do for you? I'm going to tell you what he'll do: he'll love you. He'll love you. “How could he love me?” Because he's not like you. God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, that's in this text, Romans 5:8, while we were yet the ungodly, while we were yet enemies, while we were yet helpless, he chose because it's just what he's like, to love the most loathsome, repulsive and unlovely us. Just chose to love us. Listen to me, I could run through that back wall and make a hole and run back through and make another hole over this point: don't you ever allow the notion in your mind that there was something good in you that caused God to want to save you. That is the greatest of wickedness and abomination to the whole sense of doctrine. God loved us the most loathsome and ungodly and sinners and enemies. He just is that kind of God and do you know what we are? We're grateful and we're humbled that he would love us.

Through Christ, God loves the ungodly. Through Christ, God loves the sinner. Through Christ, God loves his enemy. Through Christ, God loves the helpless. In Christ, the ungodly becomes attractive and desirable. In Christ, the sinner reaches the mark. In Christ, the enemy becomes a cherished friend even a precious child of God. In Christ, the helpless are picked up and carried safely home. The songwriter said,

“If that isn't love,
The ocean is dry,
There are no stars in the sky,
And the sparrow can't fly.
If that isn't love,

Then heaven's a myth,
There's no feeling like this,
If that isn't love."

And what a love.

His love is deeper than the oceans.
His love is higher than the heavens.
His love is broader than the universe.
His love is too glorious for the poet's pen.
His love is too marvelous for the singer's song.
His love is too amazing for the scientist to observe.
His love is more beautiful than the rose.
His love is more fragrant than the most costly perfume.
His love is more desirable than all the world's gold.
His love is more enduring than the universe.
And his love is more pleasure-producing than all of earth's delights combined.

God helps those who cannot help themselves but you come as the ungodly, the sinner, the enemy who is helpless. So, "Christ, I believe in you," and he says, "That's all I need because I love you." And child of God, you failed him: you sinned against him; you dishonored him; you've neglected him; in some ways you've even denied him. And do you know what he does? He looks at you before you repent and leans over and looks you right in the eye and says, "I want you to know something. I love you and it's not like the kind of love you have. I love you." And what does that do to a true child of God? It crushes us with repentance and joy. You don't repent because you're threatened by God's chastening; you don't repent because you're threatened that God's going to catch you. You repent because you're overwhelmed that he still loves you. And he does. As a matter of fact, his love is so perfect it can't change. His love is not based on you, it's based on him. What a God we serve. Maybe I'll get to preach in heaven. I won't preach the gospel, I guess, because nobody is lost but I would long to have the vocabulary to better express the greatness of God. That's what I long for. What a love.

Let's stand together.