

In Our Place (5:6-8)

^{5:6}For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Helpless

- The adjective “*helpless*” refers to our ability to save ourselves. We could not. Paul also uses the metaphor of “*dead in your trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1).

The Foundation of Our Experience of Love

- The “*for*” of 5:6 connect these verses with what came before: “...*the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who was given to us*” (5:5). This is how we experience the love of God subjectively, the Person of the Holy Spirit, the Person Who is God’s love, is “*poured out within our hearts.*” There is an objective ground to God’s love, too, external to us and unaffected by any action of ours. Paul now turns his attention to this objective foundation to our subjective experience of God’s love.
- “The experiential character of God’s love does not float free from any anchor in history; it is rooted in the objective work of Christ on the cross.”¹ There is a very practical and pastoral application to this truth. Our experience of God’s love is not rooted in emotional encounters or events. It is not based upon how good we are. Our spiritual experience of God’s love is based on the cross. This is why the central symbol of Christianity is the cross. This is why the “central act of worship, and the only act for which we have explicit biblical instruction,” the Lord’s Supper, is a congregational proclamation of “*the Lord’s death*”

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 259

(1 Corinthians 11:26).² It is the first words of the Gospel as Paul presents it (1 Corinthians 15:3), and was the predominant theme of his preaching (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Jesus is manifested in the center of heaven’s attention as “*a Lamb standing, as if slain*” (Revelation 5:6), and His death is the theme of heaven’s song (Revelation 5:9,12), and the criterion for salvation is whether or not your name is written in a heavenly book entitled, “*The Book of Life of the Lamb Who Has Been Slain*” (Revelation 13:8).

- In other words, all of Christian worship and doctrine is cross-centered, so that your participation in the congregational life of Christianity keeps you firmly cross-centered.

God’s Timing

- “...*at the right time...*” Christ died in the plan of God at the exact right moment in human history (Romans 3:26; 8:18; 13:11; Galatians 4:4). Ecclesiastes 3, which contains the famous “*a time for*” poem (vss. 2-8). This poem is framed by reminders that God does everything at just the right time (3:1,11). If God gave His Son for our salvation at the perfect time in human history, we can rest in the fact that everything else that happens is part of His perfect timing.
- The faithful had been waiting since the day God spoke the promise of the serpent-Crusher in Genesis 3:15. God satisfied that waiting at just the right moment. He still does.

Substitute

- Christ died in the place of “*the ungodly.*” His death isn’t effective for the good person, nice person, moral person, etc. His death only saves only the one who

² John S. Hammett, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” in *Baptist Faith & Message 2000: Critical Issues in America’s Largest Protestant Denomination*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 75-76.

makes no claims to salvation from self-merit, but relies completely and only on the substitutionary death of Jesus for salvation.³

- Christ as a substitute will continue as a theme throughout today’s text.
- Why was His death in our place necessary? The Bible says that “*the wages of sin is death*” (6:23), and that “*all have sinned*” (3:23). To experience real, full, and eternal life before God, that demand of death-for-sin had to be satisfied. Christ our Substitute satisfied that demand completely. In the sinner condemned to eternal spiritual death finds true life in Him.⁴

From Human Examples

5:7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.

- While the specifics of this verse aren’t exactly clear to us, the basic idea is: while human beings might die for someone perceived as worthy, God sent His Son to die for those who were absolutely unworthy.

This Is Love

5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

- The apostle John says this, too (1 John 4:9,10).

No Instrument of Self-Esteem

- The cross of Christ is not a reflection of how worthy, beautiful, or valuable we are.⁵ Paul, in the span of our text for today, says that we “*were still helpless*” (5:6a), “*the ungodly*” (5:6b), “*we were yet sinners*” (5:8), and “*we were enemies*” (5:10). **If your understanding of the cross builds your self-esteem, you don’t understand the Gospel.**

³ Remember the astounding title Paul has already given God: “*...Him Who justifies the ungodly*” (4:5).

⁴ READ John 11:25.

⁵ READ Deuteronomy 7:6-8. God’s love is the result of His gracious promise, not our performance.

- **The cross doesn’t magnify our worth, but our absolute unworthiness in the light of God’s amazing grace toward His “*helpless...enemies,*” “*ungodly,*” and “*sinners.*”**

Saved, Saved (5:9,10)

Saved from God

5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

- The mention of “*His blood*” takes us back to 3:24-26, where Christ’s death is put in the context of the Old Testament sacrifices. Sin (rebellion against God’s Law) demands death, and “*the life of the flesh is in the blood*” (Leviticus 17:11).
- There is no conflict between God’s love (5:8) and His wrath (5:9).⁶ Both are seen in the cross, where Christ received the wrath we deserved as a display of God’s love.

Reconciled

5:10 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.

- READ 8:33,34. His life at the resurrection and continued life interceding for us in heaven saves us.

Our Response (5:11)

5:11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have now received the reconciliation.

- This verb, “*exult,*” was previously used in 5:2,3.
- This exulting is boasting, as in 1 Corinthians 1:30,31.
- The Christian life is an exultant life. If it isn’t, Christian, cling to David’s prayer (Psalm 51:12)!

⁶ See also 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9.