

A Relationship of Love

Week 8: A Relationship of Love

Description: To be in Christ is to be infinitely loved by an infinite God. In Christ we find a Savior who loves us perfectly, a God who exerts his omnipotence for our good, a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, and a husband who gave his own life for us.

Chapter 5 (Romans 5:7-8).

- Name the two ways God shows us His Love through the cross?
- Why did God not die for frogs (29) – Ephesians 1:7?

Chapter 6

- Did Jesus die for you (31) - John 17:24? Yes, he died for the church and for each of us individually.

Chapter 27 (Hebrews 4:15-16).

- Since Jesus never sinned, did he experience the full force of the temptations that we face (72)? Why or why not?
- Even when we feel unworthy of God, should we take our struggles to God (73)? Yes we should take our struggles to God. He understands our pain and sorrows.

Chapter 35 (Ephesians 5:25).

- What does Christ death teach us about marriage and a husband's love for his life (89)?

FIFTY REASONS WHY
JESUS CAME TO DIE

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TO SHOW THE WEALTH OF
GOD'S LOVE AND
GRACE FOR SINNERS



*One will scarcely die for a righteous person—
though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—
but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:7-8

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

John 3:16

*In him we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his grace.*

Ephesians 1:7

The measure of God's love for us is shown by two things. One is the degree of his sacrifice in saving us from the penalty of our sin. The other is the degree of unworthiness that we had when he saved us.

We can hear the measure of his sacrifice in the words, "He gave his only son" (John 3:16). We also hear it in the word *Christ*. This is a name based on the Greek title *Christos*, or "Anointed One," or "Messiah." It is a term of great dignity. The Messiah was to be the King of Israel. He would conquer

the Romans and bring peace and security to Israel. Thus the person whom God sent to save sinners was his own divine Son, his *only* Son, and the Anointed King of Israel—indeed the king of the world (Isaiah 9:6-7).

When we add to this consideration the horrific death by crucifixion that Christ endured, it becomes clear that the sacrifice the Father and the Son made was indescribably great—even infinite, when you consider the distance between the divine and the human. But God chose to make this sacrifice to save us.

The measure of his love for us increases still more when we consider our unworthiness. “Perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7-8). We deserved divine punishment, not divine sacrifice.

I have heard it said, “God didn’t die for frogs. So he was responding to our value as humans.” This turns grace on its head. We are *worse* off than frogs. They have not sinned. They have not rebelled and treated God with the contempt of being inconsequential in their lives. God did not have to die for frogs. They aren’t bad enough. We are. Our debt is so great, only a divine sacrifice could pay it.

There is only one explanation for God’s sacrifice for us. It is not us. It is “the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). It is all free. It is not a response to our worth. It is the overflow of his infinite worth. In fact, that is what divine love is in the end: a passion to enthrall undeserving sinners, at great cost, with what will make us supremely happy forever, namely, his infinite beauty.

TO SHOW HIS OWN LOVE FOR US



*Christ loved us and gave himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Ephesians 5:2

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Ephesians 5:25

[He] loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

The death of Christ is not only the demonstration of *God's* love (John 3:16), it is also the supreme expression of *Christ's own* love for all who receive it as their treasure. The early witnesses who suffered most for being Christians were captured by this fact: Christ “loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). They took the self-giving act of Christ’s sacrifice very personally. They said, “He loved *me*. He gave himself for *me*.”

Surely this is the way we should understand the sufferings and death of Christ. They have to do with me. They are about Christ’s love for me personally. It is *my* sin that cuts me off from God, not sin in general. It is *my* hard-heartedness and spiritual numbness that demean the worth of Christ. I am lost and perishing. When it comes to salvation, I have forfeited all claim on justice. All I can do is plead for mercy.

Then I see Christ suffering and dying. For whom? It says,

“Christ loved the *church* and gave himself up for *her*” (Ephesians 5:25). “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for *his friends*” (John 15:13). “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for *many*” (Matthew 20:28).

And I ask, Am I among the “many”? Can I be one of his “friends”? May I belong to the “church”? And I hear the answer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13). “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43). “To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). “Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

My heart is swayed, and I embrace the beauty and bounty of Christ as my treasure. And there flows into my heart this great reality—the love of Christ for me. So I say with those early witnesses, “He loved me and gave himself for me.”

And what do I mean? I mean that he paid the highest price possible to give me the greatest gift possible. And what is that? It is the gift he prayed for at the end of his life: “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory” (John 17:24). In his suffering and death “we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). We have seen enough to capture us for his cause. But the best is yet to come. He died to secure this for us. That is the love of Christ.

TO BECOME A SYMPATHETIC AND HELPFUL PRIEST



For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:15-16

Christ became our Priest by the sacrifice of himself on the cross (Hebrews 9:26). He is our go-between with God. His obedience and suffering were so perfect that God will not turn him away. Therefore, if we go to God through him, God will not turn us away either.

But it gets even better. On the way to the cross for thirty years, Christ was tempted like every human is tempted. True, he never sinned. But wise people have pointed out that this means his temptations were stronger than ours, not weaker. If a person gives in to temptation, it never reaches its fullest and longest assault. We capitulate while the pressure is still building. But Jesus never did. So he endured the full pressure to the end and never caved. He knows what it is to be tempted with fullest force.

A lifetime of temptation climaxing in spectacular abuse and abandonment gave Jesus an unparalleled ability to sympathize with tempted and suffering people. No one has ever suffered

more. No one has ever endured more abuse. And no one ever deserved it less or had a greater right to fight back. But the apostle Peter said, “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:22-23).

Therefore, the Bible says he is able “to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15). This is amazing. The risen Son of God in heaven at God’s right hand with all authority over the universe feels what we feel when we come to him in sorrow or pain—or cornered with the promises of sinful pleasure.

What difference does this make? The Bible answers by making a connection between Jesus’ sympathy and our confidence in prayer. It says that since he is able to “sympathize with our weaknesses . . . [therefore we should] with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Evidently the thought goes like this: We are likely to feel unwelcome in the presence of God if we come with struggles. We feel God’s purity and perfection so keenly that everything about us seems unsuitable in his presence. But then we remember that Jesus is “sympathetic.” He feels *with* us, not *against* us. This awareness of Christ’s sympathy makes us bold to come. He knows our cry. He tasted our struggle. He bids us come with confidence when we feel our need. So let’s remember the old song of John Newton:

*Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and pow’r are such
None can ever ask too much.*⁴

TO GIVE MARRIAGE ITS DEEPEST MEANING



*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church
and gave himself up for her.*

Ephesians 5:25

God's design for marriage in the Bible pictures the husband loving his wife the way Christ loves his people, and the wife responding to her husband the way Christ's people should respond to him. This picture was in God's mind when he sent Christ into the world. Christ came for his bride and died for her to display the way marriage was meant to be.

No, the point of the analogy is not that husbands should suffer at the hands of their wives. It's true, that did happen to Jesus in a sense. He suffered in order to bring a people—a bride—into being, and these very people were among those who caused his suffering. And much of his sorrow was because his disciples abandoned him (Matthew 26:56). But the point of the analogy is how Jesus loved them to the point of death and did not cast them away.

God's idea for marriage preceded the union of Adam and Eve and the coming of Christ. We know this because when Christ's apostle explained the mystery of marriage, he reached back to the beginning of the Bible and quoted Genesis 2:24, "A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two

shall become one flesh.” Then in the next sentence he interpreted what he had just quoted: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31-32).

That means that in God’s mind marriage was designed in the beginning to display Christ’s relationship to his people. The reason marriage is called a “mystery” is that this aim for marriage was not clearly revealed until the coming of Christ. Now we see that marriage is meant to make Christ’s love for his people more visible in the world.

Since this was in God’s mind from the beginning, it was also in Christ’s mind when he faced death. He knew that among the many effects of his suffering was this: making the deepest meaning of marriage plain. All his sufferings were meant to be a message especially to husbands: This is how every husband should love his wife.

Even though God did not aim, in the beginning, for marriages to be miserable, many are. That’s what sin does. It makes us treat each other badly. Christ suffered and died to change that. Wives have their responsibility in this change. But Christ gives a special responsibility to husbands. That’s why the Bible says, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

Husbands are not Christ. But they are called to be like him. And the specific point of likeness is the husband’s readiness to suffer for his wife’s good without threatening or abusing her. This includes suffering to protect her from any outside forces that would harm her, as well as suffering disappointments or abuses even from her. This kind of love is possible because Christ died for both husband and wife. Their sins are forgiven. Neither needs to make the other suffer for sins. Christ has borne that suffering. Now as two sinful and forgiven people we can return good for evil.