

## We Rejoice in God

Romans 5:6–11

This morning we are looking at Romans. 5. As we enter into the Christmas season, I wanted to preach on something that focused our attention on Christ and what He accomplished in His first coming. It is appropriate, especially at this time of the year, that we remember Christ's first Advent. He's coming again to reign as we've been studying in Revelation. But He came the first time to die, as our passage will teach this morning.

This section of Romans 5 has been a very meaningful passage for me over the course of my life. But in the last few years with the birth of my two daughters, I gained a new appreciation for the amazing love God has shown us in Christ. For the first time in my life, I was faced with the reality of loving *unilaterally*. In those early days, infants don't give you a whole lot of loving feedback. And they definitely don't say "thank you." Having my own kids gave me a whole new appreciation for my own parents because I finally realized all they had to do as a parent, and all the sleep they didn't get. It also taught me to appreciate what my heavenly Father has done for me.

I thought I was a patient person. I thought I was a fairly loving person. But having two children showed me how really bad I am at loving. And while I was up in the middle of the night, again, I was constantly reminded of the love spoken of in this passage. A unilateral love to the most unlikely people.

Because this passage shows us that God's divine initiative to love was not just toward those who couldn't love Him back—it was in the face of sinful opposition. Those early days of parenting taught me a new appreciation of God's divine acts on our behalf when we absolutely didn't deserve it.

### **In Romans 5:6–11, we see 3 divine acts that should cause us to rejoice in God.**

As we look at these three divine acts, they shine all the brighter when we see them against the backdrop of our human condition.

Divine initiative is set against human inability.

Divine love is set against human sinfulness.

Divine reconciliation is set against human enmity.

So as we look at these verses, we rejoice in God because of what *He has done*. We rejoice because of *His divine action*. First, we will see our human inability and God's divine initiative.

## I. Human Inability and Divine Initiative

Read with me 6–7, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.” The first reason we should rejoice in God is because of His divine initiative. And this divine initiative is in contrast to our human inability. We could even think of it as God's *ability* contrasted with our *inability*. His *power* against our *powerlessness*. His *strength* against our *weakness*. We see this in the word *helpless*.

This word can refer to a debilitating illness, or it can refer to *experiencing some incapacity or limitation*, which is how it is being used here. This word means we are *incapable*, or *powerless*. In what way are we powerless?

The emphasis here is on our moral inability, our spiritual depravity. Notice how this verse equates helplessness with ungodliness. “For while we were still *helpless*, at the right time Christ died for the *ungodly*. In response to the Pharisees asking why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus responded in Luke 5:31–32, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Why do you go to the doctor? Because you need help, and you can't fix your own problem! But in our case, we don't even have the strength to go to the physician. We are powerless. The good news is, this is who Jesus came to save.

This is not the first time Paul has spoken of our powerless nature in the book of Romans. In 3:10–18, summarizing the state of everyone outside of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, Paul said no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God, and no one fears God. This is why we need the Great Physician!

But do you know what is even more amazing about this physician? He came to us when we *would* not come to Him! He came to us when we were not righteous, when we did not understand, when we did not seek, and when we did not fear Him. Or as verse 8 so clearly puts it—while we were still *sinners* Christ died for us. Paul describes us before salvation as dead in Ephesians 2:1. We were *dead* in our trespasses and sins.

Some refer to this idea of total inability as “total depravity.” This does not mean that all human beings are as wicked as they can possibly be. It does mean that the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, and thus the fall of humanity into sin, was so serious that it affects our whole person. It means that the totality of our being is polluted by sin. We are totally unable in our own strength to have a relationship with God.

So here’s the picture. We were ungodly. We were morally incapable of pleasing God. We were completely unable, due to our sinful state, to commend ourselves to God. *And that’s when Christ died for us!* That’s what this time of year is all about isn’t it? That Christ came at the *right* time. Or as [Galatians 4:4–5](#) says, “[But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.](#)” Christ came in the fullness of time, exactly when God had promised He would come through the prophets, born of a virgin, to redeem us from our sins.

If that doesn’t make you rejoice in God, I don’t know what will! Do you see God’s divine initiative in the face of human inability? It was God’s initiative that sent Christ to die for us. We didn’t ask God to come down. He planned from the foundation of the world to send Christ.

I like to use this illustration to demonstrate God’s initiative in the face of our human inability. Imagine that the whole human race has suffered a shipwreck. The boat has gone down, and we are all in the water. And then...salvation comes. Christ comes on and He throws you a life ring. The good news of the gospel has come to you! Grab the ring! Be saved!

But there is a bigger problem. Because everyone is already dead. They are totally unable to grab the ring. They are *helpless* as verse 6 says. This passage is about God’s divine initiative, *which is absolutely necessary in light of our total inability*. Do you see that?

Some people would use this illustration and say, “Good news! You can grab on to the ring! Christ has done His work, now you must do your part!” But the picture the Bible presents is that you need something much greater than just the *offer* of salvation. You need someone to get out of the boat, pull you out of the water and raise you from the dead! When you look at verse 6 that is what it means that we were helpless. We are totally unable to do anything to restore our broken relationship to God apart from the Divine initiative of God.

Paul has already talked about this in chapter 4. Using God's promise to Abraham that he would have a child as a picture of salvation he says in 4:17, "as it is written, 'A father of many nations have I made you' in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, *who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.*" What is he talking about here? What is this life he gave to the dead? What is God calling into existence that which does not exist? Paul is talking about the birth of Isaac. In the same way that God called the life of Isaac into being even though Sarah was barren (which means her womb was *dead*), and Abraham who was beyond the age of having children (as good as dead as 4:19), so your salvation is God giving life to the dead. Your salvation is God calling into existence that which did not exist.

What didn't exist? Spiritual life. Any affinity for God! We were ungodly! We had no desire for God or His salvation. Romans 1:30 calls sinful humanity, "Haters of God." But now, God calls into existence faith and love for Him. And as verse 1 of this chapter says we are then justified by faith.

Christ did all this at the perfect time. Christ came and died for His people when they could do nothing to fix their sinful standing before God. Christ did what us what we could not. Divine initiative took action when human inability could do nothing.

God's sovereignty in salvation often rubs people the wrong way. I don't know where you stand in relation to this biblical doctrine or how familiar you are with it, but the question we have to ask ourselves is what is this passage teaching? I understand this is a difficult topic because God's sovereignty destroys man's pride. In fact, that's the point. The point of this passage is that we would rejoice in *God* for our salvation, not in *ourselves*. Paul says 1 Corinthians 1:29–31 that God is sovereign in salvation, "so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus [who's doing? God's doing!], who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" The goal is that God gets the glory for our salvation, and we get the joy. He is glorified, and we rejoice! I love God's divine initiative! Without it, I would be dead in my trespasses and sins. My hope is that you would see this as a glorious truth!

Sometimes, those who reject God's sovereignty in salvation will paint a picture of God stiff-arming someone who truly desires to be saved. A person wants to come to God, but God says, "No." The problem with this idea is that it presents false reality. There is no one like this in the world. The only kind of people in this world are powerless sinners who are enemies of God.

There's no one "trying" to love and obey God whom God is not allowing to come to Him. There is no one who is righteous, there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks, there is no one who fears.

God receives *everyone* who comes to him through faith in Jesus Christ. As John 1:12 says, "To all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." But if God was not sovereign over salvation, no one would come to Him! Remember, as Ephesians 2 says, we are all dead. And people don't do anything!

Notice that it says Christ *died*. This is past tense. This is an objective reality that happened in history at the perfect time. But it is not just an objective reality, but a subjective experience the Holy Spirit pours into your heart. If you are a Christian, you don't just say that Christ objectively died for the ungodly. You can say, "Christ died for *me*!" Can you say that? If as Romans 10:9 says, you, "*confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*" Can you say, Christ died for *me*?

In verse 7 Paul takes the time to point out how amazing this act of Christ really is. He says, "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die." Dying for someone is not an everyday occurrence. And even in the rare cases where one can think of that happening, it certainly doesn't happen for wicked people. You can think of stories of a soldier jumping on a grenade and sacrificing his life for his fellow soldiers, but can you think of a story of a soldier jumping on a grenade for the enemy? Of course not! Perhaps for a good person one would dare to die, but that is not what Christ did.

Christ died for the *ungodly*. Not for the righteous. Not for good people. He died for His enemies. And we rejoice in God because of this! We were weak, powerless, ungodly, unrighteous, and evil. And yet...Christ died for all those who put their faith in Christ. Do you have this joy in God? Can you rejoice because of these great truths? Have you been united to God through faith in Jesus Christ? If you haven't, God wants you to repent of your sin and put your faith in Christ. If you have, then do you know what God wants from us? He wants us to rejoice in Him! Join now the songs we have been seeing in the book of Revelation, like Revelation 5:12–14. "12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all

things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.” Amen! We could end right there, but we’re not done yet! We have seen human inability and divine initiative.

## II. Human Sin and Divine Love

The next aspect of divine accomplishment we see in this passage is divine love, and it is set against the backdrop of human sin. Look at [verse 8](#), “[But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.](#)” Contrary to a person who might dare even to die for good person, Christ died for the *worst* of people. He died for sinners.

When we talk about the love of God it is easy to get into very nebulous territory. Most people think that God’s love is essentially God giving me what I want. But verse 8 is very clear. Do you want to know how God loves you? *This* is how God loves you. God *demonstrates* His love, He *shows* His love, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. *That is amazing love!*

If you have walked with Jesus for a long time, we can become complacent with this great demonstration of love. I think the more we hear the story of Christianity, the more we begin to think this was the only logical thing God could have done. But I want to remind you that this is the most *unlikely* thing that could have ever happened!! God did the most unexpected thing imaginable. He decided in eternity past to send His Son to die for sinners. Not for righteous people. Not for good people, but for the powerless—for sinners. That is love!

I mentioned earlier that those early days of having children teach you to love unilaterally. But as the days go on, you begin to see their sinfulness. Then you are faced with loving them in the midst of their sin. All parents have experienced trying to love their child and do what is best for them, only to get a sinful response. *That is you and me before God.* He demonstrated His love to us while we were still sinners.

Why? Why would God do this? Well one thing is very clear from these verses. Did God love us because we were worth loving? No! We were the very opposite of lovable. We were powerless sinners!

So why does God love us? *God does this because God is love.* God loves because it is part of His essential character. He has always existed as love. God did not suddenly become loving after He created us. He did not create us and say to Himself, “Finally! I now have a creature I can love!” Love has existed in the Trinity for all eternity. Jesus said that He was loved by the Father before the foundation of the world. God loves because it is His very nature to do so.

Another reason God loves is because He *chooses* to love. While love is essential to His character, God is not constrained by some outside force to show love to sinners. He chooses to show love to sinners. [Ephesians 1:4–6](#), “Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

In love, God predestined us for adoption *according to the purpose of His will*. This was all for the *praise of His glorious grace*. God loves sinners because He chooses to love sinners. And choosing to love sinners abounds to the praise of His glorious grace. Sounds a lot like Romans 5:6–11 doesn’t it? What is the point of this section? To rejoice in God. To glory in God. To praise God for what He has done. How can we do anything else? We were sinners. And still, Christ died for us.

I was listening to a sermon on Hosea this week and was reminded of the amazing picture of God’s love from that book. It is such a vivid display of God’s love for the unlovable. God has Hosea take a wife of harlotry as a picture of His relationship with Israel. If you remember anything about Israel’s history, you know how underserving of God’s love they were. But that was never why God loved them to begin with was it? [Deuteronomy 7:6–7](#), “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.”

God loved Israel because He chose to love Israel, just like Ephesians 1 says He chose to love us. If you want to reflect on God’s amazing love this week, read the book of Hosea.

God's determination to love for His own purposes and glory has amazing implications for our security. If God loved you while you were a sinner...If Christ died for you while you were helpless...what could possibly separate you from His love? This is an argument from the greater to the lessor. If Christ loved you when you were a sinner, how much more will He love you now that you are His child? This love is based on divine initiative, not on human behavior. That's the whole point! If it wasn't based on human behavior to begin with, it is not based on human behavior to keep it. God's determination to save you and love you is His accomplishment from start to finish.

Just a few chapters later in [Romans 8:83–39](#), Paul says, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” You are secure because God's love and Christ's death are based on God and not on you. And there is nothing more secure than God!

Again, I ask, do you know this love? Can you say, “I know God loved me because Christ died for me?” If you can't, cry out to God and put your faith in Jesus Christ! Ask Him to save you! If you do know the love of God demonstrated in Christ, rejoice in God! And tell others about this amazing love! This is what Advent is about. This is the message the world needs to hear. God demonstrated His love. Jesus came. Jesus died. Jesus rose again. Jesus came to save sinners. What does God want from us in response to His divine love? He wants us to rejoice in Him. But there is still one more divine act we need to look at.

### **III. Human Enmity and Divine Reconciliation**

In the face of human inability, God took the initiative. While we were still sinners, God demonstrated His love for us by sending Christ to die. Now we see that while we were enemies, God reconciled us to Himself. Look at [verses 9–10](#) say, “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 we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

The third act of God on our behalf is reconciliation. What is reconciliation?

*Reconciliation is the exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship.* We use this term to describe a father and a son who have been angry at each other for years and years. Then finally, when the relationship is restored, they are *reconciled*. This term is also used in relationship to money. For example, we speak of reconciling your bank account.

Because we are God's enemies, we need to be reconciled, or brought from a state of hostility to one of friendship. Or if we think about it in terms of our account with God, prior to Christ, our account with Him is completely *unbalance*. We had a debt we could never repay, and we needed to be reconciled with God. Paul, in [2 Corinthians 5:18–19](#) defines the gospel as “the message of reconciliation.” “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” The gospel is the good news of God's divine initiative to reconcile us through the blood of His Son Jesus.

Who took the steps to reconciliation? Did we? Were we even interested in reconciliation? Absolutely not! As [Psalm 14:1](#) says, while we were foolish in our hearts saying, “[There is no God,](#)” the wisdom of God came down in His Son. While we were pursuing our own way and our own kingdom, Christ came to make us children of His kingdom. While we hated God, God demonstrated His love for us. While we were plotting against our enemy, God was pursuing His enemy. When we should have died, Jesus died on our behalf.

This was accomplished by the death of Christ *while we were enemies*. This is similar to what we talked about in verse 7. You can imagine a country coming to the aid of one of their allies under attack. But can you imagine them coming to the aid of a country they are at war with? You can relate to reconciling with a wife or a family member. You have invested in the relationship and so have they. But can you imagine seeking out reconciliation with your enemy? With the person who is utterly opposed to you? With the person who is constantly out to destroy you? These examples still pale in comparison to our enmity with God before we were in Christ.

And still, God took the initiative and provided reconciliation for the very people who were His enemies. While you were opposed to God, He was providing the means of reconciliation.

In verse 8 Paul argued from the greater to the lessor. If God showed His love for you by sending His Son to die for you while you were a sinner, how much more will He show His love to you when you are righteous by faith in Christ? Paul now argues from the lessor to the greater. Did you notice that phrase “much more” used twice in [verse 9 and 10](#)? Look at them with me again. “[Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood](#) [that is, His death], *much more* [shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.](#) [10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.](#)” If Christ can justify you by His death. If Christ can reconcile you back to God by His death, can you imagine what He can do by His life?! If the death of Christ can reconcile you, then much more the living Christ can save you. This is talking about salvation into the future because this verb for salvation is in the future tense. It’s not just that you have been saved in the past, but that you will be saved forever because of the life of Christ.

[Hebrews 7:25](#) says it like this, “[Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.](#)” Christ always lives to make intercession for us. His death was sufficient to reconcile us to God. His life is *more* ensures we are saved for all eternity.

We must never forget that while we were weak, sinners, and enemies of God, God took the initiative. God loved us by sending Christ to die for us. And God removed His wrath by reconciling us by the death of His Son.

And knowing what we know now, can you imagine any other conclusion than we see in [verse 11](#)? “[And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.](#)” Of course we exult in God through Christ! Of course we rejoice in Him! If it were not for these divine acts of God, we would still be powerless, we would still be sinners, we would still be enemies of God. If you are a Christian, if you have been justified by faith in Christ as [Romans 5:1](#) says, no one needs to tell you to rejoice in God for this.

But again, can you make this personal? Can you say, “*I* rejoice in God through *my* Lord Jesus Christ?” If you don’t have this joy, perhaps it’s because you are still powerless, still a sinner, and still an enemy of God. What should you do? Paul already answered this in chapter 3.

You need to be justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We are justified by faith in Jesus apart from works of the law.

If you have put your faith in Jesus and you know that He died for you and that you are no longer His enemy but at peace with Him, there are still things that can rob you of this rejoicing in God. The most obvious is sin. We need to be actively putting to death the deeds of the flesh, confessing our sin, repenting from it, and turning towards righteousness. Then, like David in Psalm 51:12, we can pray, “[Restore to me the joy of your salvation.](#)”

There are many other things that can distract us from rejoicing in God. There is a lot of noise in our world. There are many distractions. Reflecting on passages of Scripture like our passage will help you rejoice in God. Reflecting on the birth of our Savior during the Christmas season will help you rejoice in God. Reflecting on the glorious picture of Christ as the coming King that we have been studying in Revelation will help you rejoice in God.

Fearing man or the things of this world will steal that joy. Putting your hope in the things that are seen rather than the things that eternal will steal that joy. Trusting in political parties or justice in this world will steal that joy. And just plain old business or laziness will steal that joy. Rejoicing in God is not an idle endeavor. The more we pursue God, the more we will rejoice in Him. The more we know the love of God for us in Christ, the more we will love God. The more we understand the depths of our condition outside of Christ, the more we will praise God for His amazing grace.

God’s love is so far beyond anything we can imagine. It is beyond any human love you have seen or heard of. Nothing compares to God’s love for us. We’re going to sing *How Deep the Father’s Love for Us*. Yes, how deep indeed! “[How vast beyond all measure. That He should give His only son, to make a wretch His treasure.](#)”

He didn’t love us once we were able to fix our moral problem, or even to begin fixing our problem. He loved us when we were *powerless*. He didn’t love us because we were loveable, or even just a little loveable. He loved us when we were *sinner*s. “[It was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished.](#)” He didn’t love us once we had waived the white flag of peace, or even when we had considered a peace treaty. He loved us when we were *enemies*.

“[Why should we gain from His reward? We cannot give an answer.](#)” And I hope you can sing the next line, “[But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom.](#)”

We have really only begun to touch on the magnificence of this passage. I hope that if you don't know this joy, you would turn to Christ in faith. I hope that if you do know this joy, our time has served to increase your joy no matter what happens in this life. I hope that you are emboldened to share that joy with those around you. I hope that we as a people can say, "We rejoice in God!" Join now in what we will be doing for all eternity—rejoicing in God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who have purchased for us our salvation.