

Proof Positive  
Romans 5: 1-11

*But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

Though the apostle Paul does not explicitly mention it, context would have us consider that this 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans is meant to address a common problem among God's people. This problem is nothing new, as its roots can be traced back thousands of years in time to a place called the Garden of Eden. Yes, it affected Adam and Eve, but it goes back even further to a previous resident of paradise- an angel named Lucifer.

Isaiah refers to its deadly effects in 14:12 "Oh how you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning. How you are cut down to the ground". Ezekiel describes it in 28:11-19 and Jesus mentions it again in Luke 10:18- "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven".

The big problem Paul is addressing in these verses in Romans began with the fall of Satan and its effects can be seen throughout the history of humanity. It is described for us in Genesis when Adam and Eve were banished from the garden and again when Cain killed Abel. It is revealed again in Exodus, where we learn that it took Gods people 40 years to make an 11 day journey to the Promised Land, all the while complaining "what shall we drink and what shall we eat?"

We see it again in Judges, where the prophet concludes by writing these telling words- in those days there was no king in Israel: everyone did what was right in their own eyes. It was like a deadly disease, affecting men and women alike. Adam, Moses, Saul, David, Solomon and Eve, Sarah, Miriam, and Jezebel and too many others to count. If you have concluded that the problem is sin, you are partially correct.

There is no doubt that sin was wreaking havoc and causing chaos in those situations, but that is too generic of a statement. There was a specific sin at the root of each of those tragic situations the Scripture describes for us.

It is not just an Old Testament phenomenon, as it equally affects those who lived before Jesus came to earth as well as those who lived during and after. The problem is easily stated but not easily resolved. To put it in personal terms, the problem is that you and I believe that God exists, but we are not at peace with Him. We are fighting the lie of Satan that would have us believe God does not love us or does not love us enough. Most often, the battle lines are drawn when we face trial or tribulation.

Though pride is often blamed for Satan's fall it came down to the fact that he did not believe God loved him enough. Like a person drunk with power, he wanted more even though he had more than enough. Banished from paradise, Satan continues to use that same deceptive lie to separate people from God. His first victim was a woman named Eve who was now living in his old home. You know what he told her. If God genuinely loved you, He would not have said you cannot eat from that tree over there. He whispered something similar into Cain's ear. God loves Abel more than he loves you. Cain killed his brother Abel in a jealous rage because he believed it.

It did not stop there. Remember Moses? There is no doubt he knew God existed as he experienced His presence firsthand several times. But when he was trying to lead the people out of Egypt, the evil one was planting seeds of doubt in his mind. If God really loved you guys, you would be in the Promised Land by now. Next thing you know Moses is thinking to himself here I am, trying to be obedient and all I get is grief. Every time I think the Promised Land is just past the next oasis all I see is more sand and all I hear is more complaining. Why can't we get to where we need to go? Don't you love us?

And what about King David? David knew God and knew God well. The Scripture says he was a man after God's own heart. But even though he knew in his heart that God was real, ultimately he did not believe that God loved him. He sought it elsewhere, and adultery and murder were the result.

And then consider the apostle Judas. He certainly knew that God was real. He heard the convicting teaching with his own ears and saw the many miracles with his own eyes that could only lead to one conclusion. Jesus was God. But he was not at peace with Him.

He did not believe that Jesus loved him. In his mind, a God that loved His people would set them free from Roman oppression and allow God's kingdom to rule.

Do you get the picture? Perhaps you are even experiencing a bit of guilt and shame for having had similar thoughts and emotions on occasion. If not, just be patient, as more than likely you will. What then? What do we do when we believe that there is a God, but have real doubts about the depth of His love?

For some, the answer is to deny the obvious and say God does not exist. We know that is foolish, for all of creation and the miracle of life allow us to know with certainty that there must be a divine power behind it. For others, the answer is to conclude that there is a God who created the world and set it into motion but is powerless to intervene in the things that result. Again, we know that is foolish for throughout the Scriptures we learn and hear from a God who both intervenes and intercedes for His people. Both of those explanations do little to bring us comfort when we are hurting.

The real answer- the truth- may be found in Romans 5:8. How do we know God loves us? But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. The proof is in and on the cross. Jesus is proof positive that God loves us. Even when we are thinking that God must not love us God says I love them even though they are thinking those things.

How do we know that is true? Follow Paul's logic in verse 7. Allow me to restate what he is saying in another context. Who do you know that would willingly die for someone that hates them? Would a Jew say go ahead, take my life, cut out my heart out and give it to that Muslim who needs a heart transplant to live? What Muslim would say go ahead and give both of my kidneys to that Christian over there that will soon die without them? What person would say to their captor go ahead and kill me but just let my kids who have disowned me go free? I know someone who would and did, and His name is Jesus.

One of the most powerful things about the Gospel is that it is so believable because it so unbelievable. If mere humans wrote it the story would have been much different. It would have been like a John Wayne or a Clint Eastwood movie- the bad guys die, and the good guys win. But the gospel tells a different story- the good guy dies so the bad guys can live. Who would or could conceive such a thing other than God?

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The next time you are tempted to doubt Gods love, just look at the cross and you will discover proof that you are mistaken. The cross is proof positive- just like the plus sign- that God loves us and has a plan to reconcile us to Him and save us from our sins, even the sin of unbelief. If that is not enough, look at verses 10-11. It is true! Even while we were His enemies, God loved us enough to save us.

We rejoice knowing that we will share in God's glory. Our problem is that joyful hope is not something we can buy at Walmart or Amazon. It comes from a much different source. We find out where in verses 2-4. The Apostle Paul is teaching us that there is a three- step process in which hope, the joyful hope that says I can hardly wait to see and share in God's glory, comes to us. Our hope comes from character, our character comes from perseverance and our perseverance comes from tribulations. For most of us there will not be any shortcuts.

When we willingly and gladly suffer abuse and ridicule for our faith people may not understand it but they must acknowledge that there is something different about us. Our fruit, our works, and our suffering are not the end but the beginning of the process of showing the world God's glory. When we allow God to press us and transform those things into something useful, something edifying, something that builds up His church, we grow, and others grow with us.

I am not suggesting for moment that the process is pleasant, any more than we can make the pain and suffering that Christ endured on the cross pleasant. It does seem that there are some similarities in both. He endured the pain, knowing that glory was at the end. I pray we may do the same. Amen.