

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Questions 15 Does God Ever Laugh?

Psalm 2:1-5

April 23, 2017

HOLY HUMOR SUNDAY

Communion: Archie Miller

Care Calling: The Decker's

Host: Elizabeth Thornton-White

Saturday 4/22 Clean Up: Archie Miller

- 1 ♪ **How Majestic [DH 2238]**
- 2 ♪ He's got the whole world in his hands [ALL] 586
- 3 ♪ Sunshine in my soul [ALL] 747
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Psalm 2:1-5 (TLB)

1 What fools the nations are to rage against the Lord! How strange that men should try to outwit God! **2** For a summit conference of the nations has been called to plot against the Lord and his Messiah, Christ the King. **3** "Come, let us break his chains," they say, "and free ourselves from all this slavery to God." **4** But God in heaven merely laughs! He is amused by all their puny plans. **5** And then in fierce fury he rebukes them and fills them with fear.

Question: How many spiders does the average person swallow a year, while sleeping?

I'll come back to that later.

"Holy humor, like love, crosses denominational lines, and is an important healing, bridge-building, and peace-making tool. The editors also discovered that holy humor is the one thing that all of the great religions agree on and value unanimously."

-- Patch Adams, M.D.

Early church fathers such as Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa and John of Chrysostom wrote that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the grave.

They even gave the joke the theological name of "risus paschalis" -- the Easter laugh.

German Protestant theologian Jurgen Moltmann, who wrote the book **The Theology of Joy**, says,

"The Easter laughter is rooted in the wholly unexpected and totally surprising 'reversal of all things.' God had brought this reversal about by raising Christ.... The expectation was for cosmic death, but what comes is eternal life."

Over the past quarter of a century, churches among both Roman Catholic and Protestant have started having the Sunday after Easter as a day to celebrate God's great joke He pulled on Satan.

Think about it:

Death is conquered.

Evil is vanquished.

Jesus, Son of God and Man, lives –and through Him,

Humankind is saved.

I. Does God Have a Sense Of Humor

Let's take a poll.

How many of you believe God disapproves of laughter?

How many of you believe God has a sense of humor?

A. No! There is no place for laughter in a Christian's life.

Dr. Alfred North Whitehead, professor at Harvard University in the 1920's and 30's was a mathematician and philosopher who developed one of the major liberal points of view known as "Process Theology."

Claremont School of Theology in Southern California is today the center of Process Theology.

Dr. Whitehead was of the opinion that there is no humor in the scriptures.

He said that "the total absence of humour from the Bible is one of the most singular things in all of literature."

He apparently attributed the humorlessness of the Bible to the fact that the ancient Jews and early Christians were a "depressed people."

The Jews because of their frequency of being over run by powerfully controlling nations, and the early Christians because of their continual persecution.

But, Whitehead is not alone.

All you have to do is consult your memory, and you can recall incidents that left the impression that humor is out of place in a Christian's life.

Remember that I just mentioned that early church fathers such as Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa and John of Chrysostom wrote that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the grave.

Now here is something ironic, and remember, irony is a form of humor:

In the year 390 the theologian John of Chrysostom preached a sermon against laughter and playfulness that articulated the argument against humor in church and religion:

"This world," he said, "is not a theatre, in which we can laugh... and we are not assembled together in order to burst into peals of laughter, but to weep for our sins...It is not God who gives us the chance to play, but the devil."

The Second Council of Constance in 1418 declared any minister

or monk who spoke "**jocular words such as provoke laughter,**" be cursed, or in their words "Let him be anathema," which means to be formally set apart, banished, exiled, excommunicated, denounced, or accursed.

A recent Seventh Day Adventist publication, says "I question the assumption that Jesus laughed. Certainly, Jesus often exaggerated to emphasize a point, but I would not call this humor."

Gary Dyer, pastor of First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas, says "Christians have been stereotyped as anti-fun, anti-laughter types who think it's spiritual to look like you've been sucking a dill pickle all day, and we probably brought it on ourselves. Laugh and the world laughs with you. Scowl and someone will ask, 'Are you a Baptist?'"

B. Yes! God Does Have a Sense Of Humor.

Someone said that God has a sense of humor is seen by looking at a camel, or an ostrich, or any of the weird animals found in Australia.

But I think the best indication that God indeed does have a sense of humor is that He created man in His image.

Gen. 1:27 (NIV)

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And it is certain that people all over the earth are able to perceive and express humor.

It makes sense, then, that God Himself would also have laughter, and mirth, and fun as a part of His personality.

With the exception, possibly, of my Marine Corps Drill Instructors, God has given us the gift of a sense of humor and expects us to use it!

I was fortunate enough to meet, several years ago, a Franciscan brother at the Mission up in San Miguel, who was a living example

of this. It was pouring down raining, and I didn't want to come over the grade until it had slowed down. So I toured the mission, and was walking around when I met the Brother. He had a great sense of humor, and we walked together through the rain as he pointed out the improvements he had made over the years just to preserve this piece of history. He was constantly smiling, and joked with all who he met. He was a true embodiment of God's joy!

And that is where God's humor enters our lives. God has plans for us, and those plans are not always what we expect. But God doesn't derive any joy out of surprising us with things and making us uncomfortable. Instead He looks forward to the moment when we realize His greatness, and the height, breadth and length and height and depth with which He loves us, so He can rejoice and laugh with us as we celebrate His goodness! (Eph. 3:18)

When asked if God had a sense of humor, Sister Diane Walsh answered,
“Does a bear poop in the woods?”

I don't know who said it, but it is true that:
Laughter is the hand of God on the shoulders of a weary world.

C. What is Humor?

Humor is the ability to see that something is funny, or the enjoyment of things that are funny. And, there are many ways of helping us to see that life is to be taken less heavily and more lightly. There are many different types of humor. These include: puns, wordplays, riddles, jokes, satires, lampoons, sarcasm, irony, wit, gallows humor, comedy, slapstick, farce, burlesques, caricatures, parody, and travesty.

And, to our enjoyment, all these forms of humor are found in Holy Scriptures.

Truly, this is a case of “those who have eyes to see, see.”

II. The Witness of Scripture

A. OT Examples of Humor

The idea that God laughs is mentioned several times in Psalms.

The Psalmist says In

Ps. 2:4 (NASBU)

He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, 6 "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain."

The Psalmist says in

Ps. 37:12 (NASBU)

The wicked plots against the righteous And gnashes at him with his teeth. 13 The Lord laughs at him, For He sees his day is coming.

And, the Psalmist says in

Ps. 59:7 (NASBU)

Behold, they belch forth with their mouth; Swords are in their lips, For, they say, "Who hears?" 8 But You, O LORD, laugh at them; You scoff at all the nations.

These verses all indicate that one day the Lord will laugh at evildoers.

Of course, the type of laughter described here is not a happy, funloving laugh, but a sarcastic, derisive one.

The Psalmist is describing a contemptuous, sardonic laugh aimed at the wicked who do not realize the futility of their plots if God does not approve.

Puns may be the lowest form of humor, but the pages of God's written portrait, the Bible, are full of them.

A **pun** is an expression which deliberately creates confusion by using similar words or expressions.

One example in the Old Testament is seen in the story of Adam and Eve.

In Genesis, there is a play on the words between "man" (*ish*) and "woman" (*ishsha*) comes through loud and clear even in English.

And then there is fabulous story of Abraham and Sarah.

After telling the aged Abraham and Sarah they will give birth to a son in the geriatric ward, God adds a little twist to the story.

When God told the 100 year old man and a 90 year old woman they would have a son, they just laughed.

Gen. 17:17 (NASBU)

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed.

Genesis 18:11-15 (NASB)

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. **12** Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" **13** And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear *a child*, when I am so old?' **14** "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." **15** Sarah denied *it* however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

So God does a twist, and says:

Gen. 17:19 (NASBU)

You shall call his name Isaac.

That little surprise package, at whom Abraham and Sarah snickered in disbelief, will be named -- in Hebrew, "laughter."

B. NT Examples of Humor

Jesus obviously had a marvelously well developed sense of humor because he demonstrated it frequently in his teaching.

Jesus used "the weapon of wit and the saber of satire" in his running verbal battles with the religious power structure.

Humor was often the "Mother of all bombs" that Jesus used to blast the veneer of piety surrounding "Fortress Pharisee."

Who couldn't help but laugh when Jesus exposed the arrogance of blindness of the religious leaders when He said to them:

Matthew 7:3-4 (GW)

So why do you see the piece of sawdust in another believer's eye and not notice the wooden beam in your own eye? [4] How can you say to another believer, 'Let me take the piece of sawdust out of your eye,' when you have a beam in your own eye?

And...

Mt. 23:24 (NASBu)

You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

By the way, there is a myth that the average person, while sleeping, swallows an average of four spiders a year.

This myth appears frequently in email.

But, take comfort, for there is absolutely no basis in fact for this wide spread myth.

Who would miss the obvious humor when Jesus says:

Mt. 23:25 (Msg)

Frauds! You burnish the surface of your cups and bowls so they sparkle in the sun, while the insides are maggoty And, I love the one where Jesus says to the Scribes and Pharisees:

Mt. 23:27 (NASBU)

You are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Garrison Keillor of "Prairie Home Companion" fame insists, "Christ gives his followers a satiric sense of the world." Keillor says the proof is "The upended values of the parables -- with the last becoming first."

Humor is disarming,
It makes us deal with issues we wouldn't face otherwise.
Humor is more than a joke at the end of a sermon.
It does not even necessarily produce laughter and it might even produce tears.
A lot of the Bible is narrative, and lots of the narrative is funny.
It makes both God and man stand out as real.

III. Humor Brings Out Forth An Ode to Joy

There's going to come a time for Israel when
Jer.30:19 (GW)

The people who live there will sing songs of praise, and the sound of laughter will be heard from there. I'll make them numerous, and their number won't decrease. I'll bring them honor, and they won't be considered unimportant.

Circle songs of praise
Circle the sound of laughter

From the negative reaction to laughter and a sense of humor we have seen exists, it would seem that the church's "need to be taken seriously" often prevents believers from taking seriously the Apostle Paul's request that we keep things in perspective:

1 Cor. 3: 18 (Msg)

Don't fool yourself. Don't think that you can be wise merely by

being up-to-date with the times. 19 Be God's fool-that's the path to true wisdom. What the world calls smart, God calls stupid. It's written in Scripture, He exposes the chicanery of the chic.

1 Cor. 4: 10 (NASBu)

We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

Circle fools for Christ's sake

Living out the call to be fools for Christ's sake involves much more than exercising one's "dormant foolish faculties."

Being fools for Christ's means giving up arrogance, self-pity, fear, despair, envy and vindictiveness.

It means being able to laugh at our own foibles, longings and pretensions, transforming the pain involved in ordinary life into a more joyous state.

Being fools for Christ's means leaving a lot behind, but replacing it with something more enduring.

St. Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying: "Leave sadness to the devil. The devil has reason to be sad."

And, apparently Martin Luther agreed with St. Francis, for Luther left that as a recommendation to his followers.

So, let me ask you,

Where will you find the sounds of Joyful laughter?

A. Will you find true joy among non-Christians?

People avoid making a commitment to Jesus because they think He is a kill joy.

Will you find joy among those addicted to drugs?

Look at the track marks down their arms and legs and you've answered your question.

Look at how they support their habits by stealing and robbing?

Doesn't look like real fun does it?

B. You will find joy among those in pain

I used to run several groups for folk who had some life threatening illness. They made jokes about their illness.

One doctor said "those who can laugh at cancer have the best chance of getting well."

Go to a meeting of the **Disabled American Veteran's** and watch them make jokes about their wheel chairs, their prosthetics, their hearing aids, their scars. They are a cheery lot of men and women.

C. You will find joy among survivors

Dr. **Claude Farris** was one of my Clinical Supervisors. Claude was a Ph.D. Psychologist, and a Baptist Minister with a Th.D. During WWII, he piloted a B-25 bombing Germany. His plane was shot down, and the entire crew was captured and imprisoned.

Claude says one of the most funny things he ever witnessed happened in that prison camp when everyone had dysentery, and the outhouses were being occupied day and night.

A lot of methane gas built up in the latrine, and one night when the German soldier flipped his cigarette into the latrine, it literally exploded, coating everything and everyone near by with you know what.

Comedienne **Chonda Pierce**, author of *It's Always Darkest Before the Fun Comes*, lost two sisters in childhood -- one to cancer and another in a car wreck. Other tragedies followed in her life. Yet her favorite theme is "casting all your cares on Christ."

Barbara Johnson, author of *So Stick a Geranium in Your Hat and Be Happy*, lost one son in Vietnam and another in a traffic accident.

A third son was estranged from his parents for 10 years while he pursued a homosexual lifestyle. Her husband nearly died in another car accident and spent years paralyzed.

Anyone who walks by Johnson's sales table at conferences will encounter a 200-pound pile of shimmering, blue glass stones, gifts to anyone who walks by as a reminder to look for joyful moments in life.

Right now you may be locked in a bitter struggle, financial, family, profession, physical, and wonder if you'll be a survivor.

To survive you need to keep focused on the help and hope of our Lord Jesus Christ who says to you:

John 15:10-11 (GW)

If you obey my commandments, you will live in my love. I have obeyed my Father's commandments, and in that way I live in his love. [11] I have told you this so that you will be as joyful as I am, and your joy will be complete.

Prayer and Invitation

April 23 Lesson 8 Reconciling Love

Devotional Reading: [Romans 1:1-15](#)

Background Scripture: [Romans 5:1-11](#); [8:31-39](#)

ROMANS 5:6-11

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. **7** Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. **8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! **10** For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! **11** Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

ROMANS 8:31-39

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? **33** Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. **34** Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? **36** As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” **37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39** neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

KEY VERSES

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
—[Romans 8:38, 39](#)

Introduction

A. Assuring Victory

We've just passed the time of year known in the sports world as March Madness. Media was saturated with coverage of this, the highlight of the year in college basketball. That coverage is certain to include analysis of the preparations that coaches and players undertake to assure victory. Such preparations cover a wide spectrum, from the eminently practical to the hilariously superstitious. But history tells us that there is no 100 percent assurance of victory, no matter what preparations are made. Upsets happen!

By contrast, the two text segments of today's lesson speak of that which is assured absolutely. God has done all the work through Christ to bring about this blessed assurance.

B. Lesson Background

Paul's letter to the church in Rome sets forth the grand scope of what he calls "my gospel" ([Romans 2:16](#); [16:25](#)). This scope includes how it addresses the deepest need of rebellious humanity, how it fulfills the foundational promises that God made to his people in history, and how it transforms death to life and slavery to freedom. The result is nothing less than fallen humanity's reconciliation with their Creator.

In laying out these truths, Paul was urging the Christians in Rome to renew their commitment not just to God but also to one another. Apparently the church had experienced a certain division between Christians of Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds. Each group seemed to have been asserting a greater claim to God's forgiveness (compare [Romans 2:17-29](#); [11:13-24](#)). This tawdry game of one-upmanship was intolerable, so Paul demonstrated that no group can

claim a privileged position; all people are rebels against God ([3:9-18](#), [23](#)).

But through Christ all can be reconciled to God ([Romans 3:21-26](#)). To be a Christian is to be one “whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered” by the blood of Christ ([4:7](#)). This state of blessedness is available to both Jew and Gentile, without prejudice ([4:9](#)). These facts are preparatory for Paul’s unfolding argument.

I. Enemies Become Children

([Romans 5:6-11](#))

The “therefore” of [Romans 5:1](#) introduces the theme of assurance in terms of the peace the Christian has now and the hope he or she has for the future. When we reach [verse 6](#), the apostle allows us to consider even greater proof of the assured peace and hope that Christians have as God’s reconciled people.

A. Love and Death ([vv. 6-8](#))

6. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Regardless of who we are or what we have done, we are helpless to overcome the result of our rebellion against God. We can resolve to do better, and we may do so. But we can never go back and change what we have done. Paul has shown at this point in his letter that all are guilty of sin and without means of removing their own guilt.

But it is at this very point of weakness—our inability to reverse the guilt and power of our own sin—that Christ’s saving work comes to bear. Christ came for those who are unable to help themselves, which is everyone. We are all members of *the ungodly* (compare [Romans 4:5](#)) before he rescues us. The ungodly have not shown God the honor that is his right and due.

Further yet, Christ did not simply come for the ungodly, as if merely to teach us how to live better. He *died* for us willingly. In his strength he gave himself over to utter weakness for the sake of the weak. In his goodness he gave his innocent life in place of our guilty lives. On his gracious love, demonstrated at the cross, stands the believer’s confident assurance.

What Do You Think?

What convinces you most that you need daily what God offers in Christ?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding physical challenges

Regarding spiritual challenges

Regarding relationship challenges

Other

7. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

A person dying for another is most exceptional. Paul reminds us of this point to emphasize how extraordinary Christ's death is and how far beyond ordinary human experience God's love is.

Let us imagine, says Paul, *a righteous person*, someone who has been obedient to the laws and standards of society. Only in the rarest of cases can we imagine someone volunteering to die in the place of even such an honorable person. Then let us imagine *a good person*, one who "brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart" ([Luke 6:45](#)). Certainly someone might voluntarily *dare to die* on his behalf, but even that would be rare.

8. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ did not die for righteous or good people. No, *Christ died* for *sinners*, for people who had rebelled against his authority as the divine king, "the ungodly" of [verse 6](#). This is well beyond even the outer bounds of human heroism!

The cross of Christ sets before the world the full demonstration of God's love. God loves not as humans do. We focus our love on those closest to us, but God's love is for everyone. It is boundless and utterly self-sacrificial. His love is for his enemies—and our sin makes us all his enemies at one time or another. The extent of God's love is seen in what he gives for the benefit of his enemies: the life of his Son.

Let there be no mistake here. God the Son, sinless himself ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)) and sent by God the Father ([John 3:16](#)),

physically died on a wooden cross to pay the penalty of the guilty ([Romans 3:23-26](#)). We will not be able to imagine a firmer foundation for confidence in our relationship with God than the cross of Christ. The death of the Son assures our peace and hope.

B. Justification and Reconciliation ([vv. 9-11](#))

9. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

The New Testament uses the language of salvation in different senses. Concerning time-based senses, which are seen here, we can think of salvation both in terms of what we possess right now and also as something that awaits realization in the future ([Colossians 3:3, 4](#); [1 John 3:2](#)).

By Christ's death (*his blood*) repentant sinners can be counted as righteous in the present (*have now been justified*; compare [Romans 3:21-26](#)). The fundamental truth is this: Christians stand justified before God—meaning treated as if not guilty of our sin—because of the righteousness imputed to us by Christ's work alone; being justified does not result from anything meritorious we have done. A marvelous result is that we enjoy God's blessings daily ([Romans 4:6-8](#); etc.).

Regarding the future, we have no fear of Judgment Day. Being justified means to be *saved from God's wrath*. That future outpouring of anger will be his righteous, holy response to evil ([Romans 2:5](#); [Revelation 6:15-17](#); [11:18](#); etc.). Since God counts us as his people in the here and now, then certainly he will also save us from the wrath of judgment! His reconciling love assures our eternal future as long as we remain faithful ([Romans 11:17-22](#); [1 Corinthians 15:1, 2](#); [Colossians 1:21-23](#); [Galatians 5:4](#)).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to express the confident assurance that Christ's death gives us?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In relationships

In priorities
In stewardship
In worship
Other

10. For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

This verse reveals parallels with [verse 9](#) as Paul expands on his point about our present status in relation to our assured future. One parallel consists of the words “justified” ([v. 9](#)) and “reconciled” (here in [v. 10](#)). The former is from the language of the courtroom; the latter is from the language of relationships. Their use in parallel here may give Paul’s readers an understanding that they might not otherwise have thought about. The parallel phrases “by his blood” ([v. 9](#)) and “through the death of his Son” (here in [v. 10](#)) help ensure that the readers don’t miss this connection.

Looking back, we see that at one time *we were God’s enemies*—the king’s subjects who had mounted a rebellion against him. Not only were we hostile to him, he was hostile to us ([Romans 1:18-32](#)). God overcame that state of hostility, but it cost him dearly as the Father gave the Son over to death. Our penalty has been taken by another—the Son of God himself. Since God has paid such a high price to make possible the transforming of his enemies into his children ([Romans 8:14-17](#)), we can have utter confidence about the future (compare [2 Timothy 4:8](#)).

CORRECT SEQUENCE

In August 2014, a white policeman fatally shot a black man in Ferguson, Missouri, after a complicated chain of events. The result was a two-week wave of unrest. More unrest resulted in November when a grand jury declined to indict the officer.

Whether or not the grand jury’s decision was proper in this particular incident, the U.S. Department of Justice subsequently determined that the practices of the Ferguson police department “violate the law and undermine community trust, especially among African Americans.” This incident and its aftermath served to

focus public attention yet again on issues of justice and reconciliation.

While some are quick to call for racial reconciliation, others say that justice must come first. How those two concepts interrelate can be complicated when they concern human-to-human relations! Part of the problem involves defining the terms *justice* and *reconciliation* to the satisfaction of all concerned.

But regarding our relationship with God, everything is quite straightforward: justice has already been served in the fact that the penalty for sin has been paid by Christ on the cross. This is the basis for our reconciliation with the one we once treated as an enemy—God.—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

How should Christ's death for us as his enemies affect the way we respond to our own enemies?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of our thoughts and memories

In terms of our words

In terms of our actions

11. Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

As our reconciliation in the present assures us of salvation in the future, so our future salvation transforms our present. Because we are justified, because we are reconciled, because we are saved—all *through our Lord Jesus Christ*—we have a triumphant declaration to make continually. *We also boast*, that is, we are victoriously joyful, about what God has accomplished in Christ. Love like this cannot be kept a secret.

II. Children Become Conquerors

[\(Romans 8:31-39\)](#)

Between the two segments of today's text, Paul further contrasts the readers' new status in Christ with their status before coming to him ([Romans 5:12-7:6](#)). This leads into thoughts on the purpose of the law in relation to sin ([7:7-25](#)) and implications of life in the

Spirit ([8:1-30](#)). With those tasks completed, he is ready to summarize the “assurance section” of Romans, which extends from [5:1 through 8:39](#).

A. Invincible Advocate ([vv. 31-34](#))

31. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

In this section, Paul uses a series of questions to summarize the believer’s status in God’s love. The first question concerns the proper perspective to have in light of all that God has done. That question is answered with another, the answer to which is obvious. God is the greatest being, and what he has done to reconcile us is the greatest act of love we can imagine. So since God is our advocate—proven by what Jesus accomplished on the cross—then no opponent can prevail against us. Whatever hardships life brings, the cross speaks God’s assurance to us.

32. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

As he has done before, Paul reasons from God’s past actions to his future actions. To reconcile us, God gave *his own Son* to suffer a tortuous, shameful death in our place. Christ put God’s plan into action with great pain but greater determination ([Luke 22:39-44](#)).

In light of the cross, what will God do in the future? Surely he will affirm his Son’s sacrifice by making him the world’s king! But just as surely, he will affirm that sacrifice by making us to share in the Son’s rule of the world (compare [1 Corinthians 15:25-28](#)). Like a victorious army under an invincible general, God’s people in Christ share with Christ the celebration of his victory.

33. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

No charge of guilt can be valid against those to whom Christ’s blood has been applied—those whom God has made his *chosen* because of their faith in his Son. Such people are in right standing

with God, who has paid the penalty for their sin. No one can allege guilt where God pronounces innocence. “The accuser of our brothers and sisters ... has been hurled down” ([Revelation 12:10](#)).

34. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Should Jesus’ followers worry that a charge of guilt will somehow slip through the forgiveness that God has provided? The answer is found in what Christ has accomplished. Christ’s death was sufficient to pay the penalty of the sin of all humanity. His resurrection demonstrated his victory over the death that would have been our just punishment.

Jesus now rules in the position of supreme authority in Heaven. There he *is also interceding for us* in the heavenly court of justice, an advocate who asserts authoritatively that our penalty is paid in full. There is no voice that speaks more authoritatively than his, nor any charge that is greater than the sacrificial price that he paid. As victor over death, Christ is the unanswerable advocate.

What Do You Think?

In what specific ways can our church express in action that Christ was victorious in death?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding outreach (evangelism, benevolence, etc.)

Regarding upreach (worship, prayer, etc.)

Regarding inreach (fellowship, nurture, etc.)

B. Insufficient Opponents ([vv. 35-39](#))

35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Having assessed our divine advocate, Paul now discusses various things that may threaten to *separate us from the love of Christ*. All are formidable. All are painful. But none measures up to God the Father or Christ the Son.

The listing is of the range of experiences that cause people to suffer. *Trouble* is pressure or problems of any kind. *Hardship* is similar: a term for pressured, painful trouble. *Persecution* is the distress wrought by people who deliberately oppose us.

The ancient world knows *famine* as a constant threat. The same is true for *nakedness*, when clothing is made by intensive manual labor and therefore very expensive. Paul uses the word *danger* eight times in [2 Corinthians 11:26](#) to refer to numerous perils he had faced to that point in his missionary travels. *Sword* reminds us specifically of human violence.

When faced with the difficulties of life, people ask, “Where is God? Does he no longer care about me?” But that’s not what Paul asks. His preference is to ask whether anything can cancel the love of God that Christ has brought to us by his cross. Christ triumphed after he suffered. And in one way or another, we too will triumph after each and every suffering we endure. “If we endure, we will also reign with him” ([2 Timothy 2:12](#)).

What Do You Think?

What guardrails can you erect to ensure that you do not separate yourself from the love of Christ during times of difficulty?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When unbelievers scorn your faith

When you feel “not good enough”

When negative circumstances pile up

Other

36. As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

The question of why God’s people suffer is as old as humanity. Paul quotes an ancient biblical text to remind us of this, [Psalm 44:22](#). There the faithful call out to God to deliver them as he had done for his people in the past. These words express the experience of God’s people in every age, including those who can look back on the cross and therefore know the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Human experiences are truly painful, as this quotation expresses. But as God's past deeds of deliverance provided assurance, so now Christ's victory provides even greater confidence.

GOD'S LOVE IS GREATER

American Christians have sometimes used the word *persecution* to describe their loss of a dominant role in American culture as values have changed. Often cited as evidence of this phenomenon are limits on Christian prayers at civic gatherings. But what's happening elsewhere in the world makes American "persecution" seem like a minor skin rash.

As Islamic militias expanded their violent control in the Middle East and Africa a few years ago, Christians there began to suffer severely. Many were beheaded publicly for the simple fact that they *were* Christians. Islamic radicals are the primary persecutors of the church in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Indonesia, and other parts of Asia. By one estimate, at least 180 Christians were killed each month for their faith in mid-2015.

It happened in the first century as well. Yet in writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul expressed his strong assurance of hope. Regardless of how much other people might hate them, God's love would be greater. Should martyrdom be their lot, God's love would still surround them (compare [Acts 7:54-60](#)). Do you know a "suffering someone" who needs your prayer that he or she continue to honor Christ?—C. R. B.

37. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

God's people experience a victory so great that Paul uses an intensified Greek word found nowhere else in the New Testament. In English it comes out as *we are more than conquerors*. Paul's confidence is not in his own strength, but in God's love-motivated victory in the work of Christ.

38, 39. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all

creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To bring his point to a climax, Paul lists various threats to anticipate. He begins with *death*—the great fear of all people and the sentence that God pronounces on sin ([Genesis 2:17](#); [6:3](#); [Romans 5:12](#)). Christ has overcome death by his resurrection ([1 Corinthians 15:12-34](#)). *Life* contrasts with death, but here it is named as a threat: anything that might befall as one lives. God's power is more than sufficient to overcome what life throws at us.

Angels and *demons* are terms used in Paul's time for spirit beings. These threaten weak, mortal humans ([Ephesians 6:12](#)), but Christ stands supreme over all of them ([Colossians 2:15](#)). *The present* and *the future* suggest both our immediate circumstances and whatever may come our way. The terms *height* and *depth* encompass all that is above us and all that is below. The final category of *anything else in all creation* is an all-inclusive catch-all to refer to any created thing imaginable.

Our relationship with God is secure because his love cannot be overcome by any external force. *Christ Jesus our Lord*, who reigns supreme, makes the ultimate outcome of God's love utterly certain.

Conclusion

A. The Light of God's Love

Based as they are in the facts of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, today's texts paint a picture of enormous comfort: God's love reconciles us to him with utter certainty. Because our relationship to God is founded on his love in Christ and not on any goodness of ours, we can have complete confidence that we are now, and will always be, his saved and blessed people.

Even so, every believer has times of doubt as the turmoil of life raises questions about ourselves and our relationship to God. What transforms doubt into renewed faith is the good news of the cross and empty tomb. The divine Son of God gave his life for us to pay sin's price when we were his enemies. His resurrection assures our own. Even in our darkest moments, the light of God's love in Christ can shine brightly.

B. Prayer

O God, your love for us in Christ is indescribable! As we ponder how you reconciled us to yourself, may we be examples of people who are also reconciled to one another. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

When in doubt, remember the cross and the empty tomb.

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