

Get Off the Fence and Into Christ

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[0:00] And please turn in your copy of God's Word to Romans 5. Romans 5, and we'll read verses 1 to 11 this morning.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance, character, and character, hope.

And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man. Though for a good man, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him?

[1:34] For if, when 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?

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

Some of you need to get off the fence. You've been sitting up there holding God off. For a hundred different reasons, you are still up there.

And today I want you to get off the fence. It's time to stop messing around. And it is time to actually do something about your soul.

Some of you aren't on the fence. You're not even there yet. You have some vague ideas about God and about Jesus. It's just vague, though. And if that's you, I'm glad that you're here.

[2:37] I'm glad that you've come because God has something to say to you. And it's something good. It's very good. What He has to say to you, you can find in the passage that I had read for you, Romans 5.

And we're going to look at verses 6, 7, and 8. So in that passage, God says three things. He says, this is you. He says, this is me.

And He says, this is what you need to do. So follow along as I read those three verses over again. Romans 5, 6, 7, and 8.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man.

Though for a good man, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[3:46] And so the first thing God says to you, to us, is let's talk about you. Let's talk about you.

So how do you see yourself? If you had a piece of paper with four or five lines, and I asked you to write down some words that describe you, what would you put down?

You don't have to worry because no one's going to see it. And you won't have to explain it to anyone. And you don't have to be embarrassed. You can just be honest with yourself.

And so what would you put down? To describe you. To get at the heart of you. Hurt. Misunderstood. Cheated. Ashamed. In over your head. Or maybe talented. Unique.

[4:47] Special. Religious. A guy, a girl, trying to do his or her best, but sometimes failing. But on the whole, doing okay. On the whole, doing the best I can.

It's amazing how many people say they're doing the best that they can. Well, those are our thoughts about ourselves. But how does God find us? What does God say about us?

And that is the far more important question than what we say about ourselves. God uses three words in this passage to describe us. And I'm going to give you fair warning. He's being honest with

us. He's being honest with us.

And it might hurt. But it's true. Because he doesn't lie. He has no reason to lie. It says, while we were still sinners. That's where we begin.

Sinners. And I wonder, on your piece of paper, did you put that word down? To describe you. That you're a sinner. And maybe some of you say, no, that can't be.

[5:48] That can't be. That's not really at the heart of me. But that's really to misunderstand yourself. It's to misunderstand your situation. We are so used to running from God that we think this is normal to live a life without God.

To live a life where we don't care about him. Or where we do whatever we want. We think this is life. But God comes to us and he says, now this is something that you need to understand.

That there is something very wrong. There is something very wrong about your whole life. And it's right here. We're sinners.

We're sinners. He's not saying we are as bad as we could be. He's not saying we couldn't be worse. He's not saying even that we are out and out terrible, wicked people.

What it means here is that we are born enemies of God. Enemies of God. We were born going our own way.

[6:51] And that's who we are. We are set on our own way. The disposition of our heart. The direction of our heart is going on the things that God hates. And that's why we find it so easy to sin.

And yet so very difficult to do what is right. And so it comes naturally for us to do what God doesn't want us to do. So do you ever teach your child to hit back?

To get revenge? Do you ever teach your child to complain? Do you ever teach your child to complain? Has that ever been on the lesson plan? Parents, where you say, now, this is what I want you to do.

I want you to be ungrateful. And when you don't get everything you want, I want you to moan and groan and complain about it. Oh, you're not doing it right. You need to moan more when you're doing it. You need to complain more when you're doing it.

You don't say that. Or when you're getting in trouble for something that you have done, just say you didn't do it.

[7:56] Just say you didn't do it. And then strain together a story that has really no resemblance to what actually happened. That's what you need to do if you're going to live this life.

No, you'll never understand yourself and you'll never be saved until you can say, until you can really come to terms with this, that there is something very and really and desperately wrong at the very bottom of you.

I told you God is being honest. He's not interested in your good opinion of what he has to say. He says, we, you and me, were born going the wrong way, facing the wrong way.

With hearts that oppose the truth, that oppose God, that oppose what is right. Not always, because sometimes the right agrees with what we want to do, doesn't it?

Sometimes the right thing to do is something that I want to do, and so we don't obey God, but we do agree with him. Do you have a pet like that, that never obeys, but sometimes he agrees? Please, that's how we are sometimes.

[9:05] And so as long as it's good for us, or as long as we think it's good for us, then the choice is very easy. We will do the right thing, but our hearts are revealed. Your heart is revealed. It is shown for what it is by when what God wants crosses what you want.

And then, well, you don't really love what is right. You really love yourself, and so you do what you want. And then we become the greatest, the boldest, the most clever defense attorneys ever.

We are able to come up with the greatest excuses and the greatest reasons as we defend ourselves. As we defend ourselves from God, as we defend ourselves from coming to terms with really who we are, what's really going on, and so we shade events.

We slip in excuses. We put the blame on someone else. We blame the judge. We complain about other people. We say everyone else is doing it. And around and around we go.

Around and around we go, running away from this truth. But God cares enough to tell us the truth. He cares enough about you to tell you the truth. He says, this is what you are.

[10:12] You are a sinner. And he doesn't say those things to be mean. And neither do I. And he doesn't say those things to insult you.

Neither do I. So you're sitting in the doctor's office, and he says, I have bad news. You have cancer. You have emphysema.

You have AIDS. Do you rail at the doctor when he tells you something like that? Do you yell at the doctor?

And you say, how dare you say something like that to me? A perfect specimen of health. How could you possibly say that? And I don't like what you're telling me. I don't like your insults.

I think you're a jerk for what you have to say. Well, we don't do that. It's not what we want to hear, is it? But we don't want him to lie to us either. We want the bad news, and we want it straight up.

[11 : 13] And so God is sitting you down. He's sitting us down. And he's taking your hands in his. And he's looking you in the eye with pain in his heart.

And he's saying, there is something really wrong. You are a sinner. I've told you what is right. I have loved you, and I have blessed you. I've written the law on your heart, and yet here you are.

You're my enemy. You're acting as my enemy. You are my enemy. You are a sinner. But then he goes on, and he makes it even worse.

If we thought that was bad, he has something even worse to say. He says we're not only sinful and enemies. We are also powerless. We're powerless.

He says you see at just the right time when we were still powerless. See, it's worse than what we thought. Because if that was the situation, but we had power to do something about it, well, then that would be one thing.

[12 : 17] But it is worse than that. We are powerless. Now, he's not saying that we have no power whatsoever. What he is saying is, as in, we have power to take care of our children.

We have power to love our wives. You have power to go to work. You have power to earn a living. But that isn't what the Bible is talking about. What he's saying is, is you were powerless to save yourself.

You could do nothing to fix the situation. And so you're powerless in your relationship with God. And you're powerless against the power, the oppression, the might of your sin.

You're broke. And you can't fix yourself. The Bible's picture of powerlessness, of being powerless, is Israel and Egypt.

As slaves in Egypt. And so here they are, the whole people of Israel, down in Egypt. It was called the land of slavery, the land of oppression. And they can't do anything to get out.

[13 : 22] They can't do anything to get out of Egypt. They have no money. They have no weapons. They're not able to get together. They have no resources. All they can do is moan.

That is the great extent of their power. They can moan. Have you ever been there? Where you've come to the place where you have felt your powerlessness.

That you are facing a situation and there is nothing you can do to make it better. There is nothing you can do to fix it. And so you do moan. You hurt.

You ache. North Korea is a terrible place. Terrible place. The nation is basically the personal property of Kim Jong-un.

And it's terrible. Poverty. Incredible oppression is everywhere. And you would think that at some point, have you ever asked that question?

[14 : 17] Like, why don't they ever rise up and throw these people off? Why don't they ever rebel? I mean, we rebelled when they taxed our tea. No offense.

They taxed our tea. But in North Korea, it's not that way. It's not that way. I just read a story that, this was surprising to me, said there is basically no dissent whatsoever in North Korea.

There's no dissent. There's no organized pushing back in the whole country. It said, if Kim Jong-un died suddenly, the country wouldn't revolt.

It wouldn't do anything. It would sit and wait for the next person to take over. Every step out of line is crushed. Crushed completely.

Crushed to the third generation. Crushed to your cousin's cousin. Crushed. They are powerless. That was Israel and Egypt.

[15 : 24] And that is what God says about you. Jesus said, we're like prisoners in Satan's stronghold. And his house.

And he guards us. And what he's saying is, no one comes out. No one is escaping. It's worse than Alcatraz.

No one is getting out. The only hope is that someone goes in and ties up the strong man. And then robs his house. And Jesus says, I am that strong man.

They're powerless. But I am full of power. And I am here to save. And so God says, put aside the idea of saving yourself. You can't do it. You can't think of salvation as just being a whim of your will. Where you just will do it. You'll flip the switch. You'll do whatever you can. It's just a trigger that you can pull any time. And if that's what you think about it, go ahead. Try it.

[16 : 25] And you will see that the power of sin is greater than anything you could ever imagine. So try to break free from that heart that chooses you instead of God.

Try to break free from that heart that says at the end of the day, really what is important is me. What I want and what I need. Instead of who God is and what God wants. You're powerless.

You're an enemy of God. And really the whole thing boils down to the last word. And he says you're ungodly. Ungodly.

Because God says we are ungodly. Christ died for the ungodly. And again, that doesn't mean you're outwardly, out and out wicked. Don't misunderstand.

When he says we are ungodly, the picture is not someone who is incredibly wicked that everyone here in the whole room can point to that person and say, wow, they're bad. No, that's not what ungodly means.

[17 : 26] It just means that we don't have any room for God in our hearts. There's no room for him in any of our thoughts. That he weighs nothing. He is like a helium balloon.

In our hearts. He makes no difference to us. And if we want him out of our lives, we just swat him out of our lives. We don't want anything to do with him. The further away, the better.

And that is what we say. I'm better off without him. He adds nothing to this situation. He adds nothing to these circumstances. What is going on here has nothing to do with him.

That's what an ungodly person says. He's not saying. Think of that person down the street and they're really bad.

And they're strung out on meth. And their kids are running wild. Those are ungodly. Well, no doubt they are. But he's talking about people who live a normal life. Who just don't think about God.

[18 : 22] And that's why they're powerless. Because they don't care to revolt. They're happy there. They're happy being slaves.

Because that is what they like. They're happy being enemies. Because that is who they are. And so God says, let's talk about you. If you're going to be saved, then you need to realize that you're an enemy.

You're powerless. And you are ungodly. But now here is the second thing that God says to you. That is you. But this is me.

And I love sinners. I love those people. I love those ungodly, powerless enemies of mine.

I love them. I love sinners. God loves sinners. And that's what these verses are mostly about.

Because you see, it's when we are powerless.

[19 : 21] And enemies. And ungodly. It's those people that God demonstrates his own love. It's on those kinds of people. And so the thing is, is we have to put aside all hope of saving ourselves.

But that doesn't mean the situation is hopeless for you. That there's no hope that it's past winning. No. Here's the hope. It comes in at the end that God loves these kinds of people.

So we don't love our enemies. We hate our enemies, don't we? We see them fall and we are like, yes. Yes, finally.

But God isn't like us. God isn't like us. God loves sinners. So most of the world here, most of the world thinks if there is a God, he doesn't care about me.

He's a million miles away. What does he care? He's so big. You've heard that. He doesn't care about us. And the other half thinks that God loves his friends and hates his enemies. So he either has nothing to do with me or he's just like me.

[20 : 27] That he loves those who love him. And he loves the righteous and he hates the wicked. And that's it. That is the bottom line. That's the big black line that there's nothing underneath. But that's not what we find here.

That's not the story of the Bible. The story of the Bible is God loves sinners. He doesn't begin to love us when we save ourselves.

He doesn't begin to love us when we save ourselves. He loves us when we are still powerless. Did you see all the time references in those verses? While? When?

When we were powerless? While we were still sinners? He doesn't begin to love us when we save ourselves. He loves us in order to save us. He loves us and saves us. And that's just unheard of. That kind of love for your enemy is unheard of. And it's not just love and word.

[21 : 26] Christ died for the ungodly. God's love wasn't just something he spoke. It is something that he did. That he showed. That you can't deny because it's happened.

Christ died for us while we were still sinners. So God's love isn't just a feeling. It's an action. He did something to show it. You could point to a time and a place and say, That is God loving sinners. A real time. A real place. And you could point to it and say, That's God loving sinners. And anyone here can say that. This is God's love for me. This is God's love for me.

That God's love for sinners. That God loves those who couldn't care less about him. And so we were all running headlong into hell. We couldn't get there fast enough when we were saying, God, get out of my life.

And to those people, God sends a savior. That's God's love. And it's not human love. It's not human love.

[22 : 28] And that's the big distinction in this passage. What's human love at its greatest? And then it's totally on another scale. This is God's love. Sometimes a man loves enough to die for his friends.

For his family. For his buddies. It's rare, but it's not unheard of. You can find lots of stories. Just Google them.

Of people dying for other people. December 4th, 2006. An Iraqi insurgent throws a grenade into a Humvee where Private Ross McGinnis is manning the machine gun on the top.

And he has time. He has time to jump from the turret and save himself. To jump off the thing. To get away from the grenade. But he didn't. He yells into his mic, grenade.

Then he throws himself down on the grenade. Smothers it with his back. And dies. And his four buddies go free.

[23 : 34] No greater love than this, than a man laid down his life for his friends. Very rarely will someone die for a good man. But it happens.

And when it happens, you receive a medal of honor. But God's love is different. This is not some story that you could Google.

I couldn't find any stories that showed a man dying for his enemies. I found a story of a World War II German ace. He was out on a mission. He was out on a mission in 1943.

And he found a lone B-17 bomber. It was flying relatively slowly and low. It only has one engine left. It's completely shot up.

It's limping home. And Hans Stigler, the German ace, he shot down 25 other people already. He knows how to do this. And he came up on that wounded plane.

[24 : 37] And no one shot back. Because the tail gunner's already dead. Out of the ten people on there, three are left. And all he has to do is fire.

And those three men are dead. And their 25 children and grandchildren will never exist. And so he holds their lives in his hands.

And he says, I saw the horror on their face. And I waved and flew off. And they made it home. Well, that's love for your enemies.

That's love for those who would kill you. But there's no story. And there's no illustration. And there's no parable. There's nothing you can Google. There's no fact or fiction story.

Nothing that I can say, this is what God's love is like. Because no one has ever laid down the life of his son for his enemies. And that's what we're dealing with.

[25 : 38] It's love that's not even on our scale. A love that will lay down the life of his own son. No one has ever been so full of love that he would sacrifice not himself but his child for his enemies.

And you know that your child's life is a thousand times more valuable than yours in your own sight, isn't it? If your child has leukemia and goes into the hospital and loses all her hair, you know, in a heartbeat, a thousand times over, you would take her place.

You would take her place even to the point of death if you could spare her. And, you know, why do you do that? Because you hold their life more valuable than your own.

But God loves sinners so much that when the cost was his own son, he did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all.

And so God was filled with love, so filled with love, his heart overflowed with love, and his hands opened up and his son came forth to die, to go to the cross.

[26:57] And so if you're sitting on the fence, how can you stay there? How can you stay there?

Are you an unfeeling piece of iron that will look at God's love and say, what's that to me? And will you add to all your other sins the worst sin of all?

Of scorning the blood of the Son of God? But look at his love for sinners.

Look at his love for sinners. He wants you to be saved. It's with a profound sense of knowing that God wants me here, that I'm preaching this message, and God wanting you to hear this.

And so for centuries, the Son of God was holding out his hands to Israel, to those who rejected him all day long. But he was holding out his hands, and he was longing all day long that they would be saved.

[28:05] And so he sends prophets to come and say, be reconciled to God, and they don't come. And so he sends more, and they kill them, and he sends more. And finally, God says, I'll send my son.

All day long, I stretched out my hands. And that's God's heart towards you now, stretching out his hands, saying, get off the fence. Well, maybe some of you don't understand.

You say, I see that that is loving. I see that that is the big demonstration, a grand gesture of love, that that kind of sacrifice is loving. But what did it do?

See, this world is big on gestures, isn't it? How many times do we see movies of, oh, this wonderful proposal video, right? And they have a hot air balloon and a million roses, and it makes people like me feel like a chump.

But they have these great gestures, and you wonder, I wonder if that's real. Or is it just the gesture? Will it come down to really loving them 20 years later?

[29:15] When it means sacrifice and pain and growing old, will that kind of love reach then? What will this love do? And God's, this love is not a parade. It's not a gesture, a big sign.

It is those things. It was so loving because God was actually doing something for us. For sinners. He was meeting our greatest need of all.

To be reconciled to God. To have that enmity, that fighting done away with. To make enemies friends and to wash sinners clean.

And so Christ came and he died paying the price for sin. It is the irreversible law of heaven.

That the soul that sins shall die. That the wages of sin is death. It's not a rule that God changes. It's not a policy that he looks and reevaluates every 100 years.

[30:23] The soul that sins shall die. The ungodliness, the sin, the rebellion. It must be paid for. Or there is no justice in heaven.

There is no justice on earth. Or God doesn't love righteousness and hate wickedness. But he does love justice. He does love righteousness. And his glory must be vindicated.

All that scorn and stealing and thieving that we have done against his glory. It must all be paid back.

There is no easy way out. There is no pass. There is no pass because God is who God is.

But God loves sinners. But God loves sinners. He loves those who owe him so much. And so he sends his son to die in their place.

And that's the cross. That's the cross. That's Jesus on the cross paying the price for sin. So God himself was meeting your greatest need out of his own pocket.

[31:30] And he reached down to the very bottom. Reached down to the very last cent that he had. The very last thing he could offer. And he sent his son to pay for our sins.

So instead of enemies, you can be a friend. You can actually be a friend of God. Where you can say, I know God and he knows me and we are friends. That's what the gospel offers.

That's what Jesus Christ came to do. So do you want it? Do you want to quit running? Do you want to be saved? Do you want to end the war against God? So third, what do you do?

What do you do? Well, all over this passage, it talks about faith. Justified through faith. So what do you do?

Well, what does all that mean? Well, you have to begin where God begins. You want to know what it takes to be saved? You have to start at the starting point where God starts.

[32:35] He has to start with who you are. And you have to start agreeing wholeheartedly with what God says about you. You begin by owning up to what you are.

Jesus said, I have not come to save the righteous. Not come to save those who think they're righteous. If you're here and you think I don't need salvation, then you're not going to get it. Because Jesus only came to save sinners. He saves sinners. So do you want to be saved? Then you have to take God's side, even against yourself.

Even against yourself. So let's picture this. You're going to do a courtroom. You're going into a courtroom. And you are on trial. Now, salvation begins when you see yourself on trial.

And instead of defending yourself, you take God's side against yourself. You take God's side and you point to yourself and you say, that person is guilty.

[33 : 42] That person is sinful and evil and wicked and ungodly. See, it's tempting to see yourself. And this will kill you and this will keep you ever from being saved.

It's so tempting to see yourself on trial and say, wait a minute. You don't understand. It's not all that bad. You don't understand my history. You don't know my past. You don't know what I've been through. You don't know my parents.

You don't know the things that I've done. You don't know the things that. You don't know my side of the story. Well. Salvation begins when you take God's side.

God knows your story. He knows your story. He knows it better than you. And he says it's not enough. It won't work.

God sees right through it. And so your only hope is to lay down your arms and plead for mercy. And then by faith, you take God's gift.

[34 : 45] You receive it. You receive it as it's handed to you. You don't work for it. You take it. You don't try to accomplish it. You just accept it. His gift of righteousness.

His gift of forgiveness. His gift of his own son. It's Jesus Christ. And so here is God with his arms open wide saying, take this. This can be your righteousness.

This can be your salvation. It's all in Jesus Christ. Lay down your life and take my son. And so take it. Take it. And you will be saved.

So what do you do? You believe it. You believe this message. You take God at his word. You throw yourself on his promise. That Jesus' cross was enough.

That he paid for all the sins of all my sins. That you accept that. You take it. You accept the forgiveness. You lay down your life. You throw yourself on the promise.

[35 : 40] And so instead of trusting yourself and your arguments and your excuses and your defense and your hopes and your plans, you put them all aside and you say, Christ is all I need. That's what so many people here have done.

They put everything aside. All the excuses. All their plans. All their hopes. And Christ is all I need.

Christ is all I need for this life. Christ is all I need for the next life. Christ is all I need for salvation.

Christ is all I need for anything. And I think his death is enough. And God's love is enough. And I can't make it right. But he did something to make me right. And so I'm going to lean on that.

I'm going to put myself, Jesus, I put myself into your hands. Save me. Now what happens if you do? What happens if you say to Jesus, I'm done with my sin.

I'm done running. I'm done fighting. I'm done trying to do good enough. What happens if you say to Jesus with all your heart, without holding anything back, please save me? There's no doubt what will happen.

[36 : 48] Let me say that again. There is no doubt what will happen. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It's God's solemn oath. His promise that he's sworn upon himself because he can swear on nothing higher.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So call on Jesus right now to save you. Call on him even as we sing our closing hymn. In our hymn that we're going to close with, God's people take up this call to say, repent and believe.

So I'm done saying my peace. Now all of God's people are going to call on you to believe. And I want you to do it. Hymn 393.

We'll sing just the first three verses. Let's stand as we do. Hymn 393. Just the first three verses. Let's pray.

[38 : 02] God, thank you that it was for real sinners. Real sinners like me that you came or that you sent your son to die for.

With real sin. And real guilt. And real shame. And real weariness. Hatred. And everything else that we had in our hearts for you.

Thank you that it was for people like us that you came to save. So I pray. Lord Jesus.
Go into the strong man's house today. Pull out. People. Save sinners today.
Will you put the devil to shame. Will you glorify yourself. Glorify the love of the Father.
[39:08] By bursting the bonds of sin. And guilt. And bringing forth the dead. To newness of life.
Lord Jesus.

Every touch of yours is life. So please. Touch the dead. And the guilty. And the sinful. And save them today. Don't let anyone walk away from here.

Missing this appointment. This day when they could be saved. I pray for those who are. Already. In your kingdom.

Thank you for this reminder. That it was when we were sinners. While we were. Powerless and ungodly. That you loved us. May that kind of love. Not only mark us.

But stir us up. To worship. To service. To joy. To love for one another. And especially. And most of all. Love for you. Do your work today. I pray.

[40:03] In Jesus name. Amen.