

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

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List reasons why God's reconciliation in Christ is invincible.
2. Explain the connection between *being justified* and *being reconciled*.
3. Identify and implement one personal life change to make in order better to live out God's reconciling love.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Assuring Victory
- B. Lesson Background

I. Enemies Become Children ([Romans 5:6-11](#))

- A. Love and Death ([vv. 6-8](#))
- B. Justification and Reconciliation ([vv. 9-11](#))

Correct Sequence

II. Children Become Conquerors ([Romans 8:31-39](#))

- A. Invincible Advocate ([vv. 31-34](#))
- B. Insufficient Opponents ([vv. 35-39](#))

God's Love Is Greater

Conclusion

- A. The Light of God's Love
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

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.



Visual for Lesson 8. Discuss this humorous visual as a preliminary to posing the serious question associated with [verse 35](#).

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.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Before class, write this phrase on the board:

You may be an egomaniac if ...

As students arrive, have anyone who is willing to go to the board and complete the sentence. You may wish to help your class along by starting the list with one or more of the following:

- ... you have a special place in your heart for yourself!
- ... you think a thunderclap is God giving you applause!
- ... you believe you are too cool to be conceited!
- ... you expect to get a gift on someone else's birthday!

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Buy the Best!” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in pairs to identify famous ad slogans.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study by saying, “Common wisdom tells us that we should be loved because we have great value. Today we will look at God's uncommon wisdom. The Bible says we have great value because we are loved!”

Into the Word

Divide your class into three groups. Give each group paper and pen, and assign each a section of the lesson text. Each group is to summarize its section with a couplet—two lines of rhyming poetry.

Assignments and sample couplets are as follows:

Group 1—Sure Hope (Romans 5:6-8)

Though I declared war on the Deity,
He willingly gave his Son for me!

Group 2—Divine Pardon (Romans 5:9-11)

Jesus alone paid for my sin.
I don't have to pay it again!

Group 3—Utter Victory (Romans 8:31-39)

When next to God by Christ I stand,
Victory is near at hand!

Allow time for the groups to share their couplet summaries.

Option. Write the Scripture assignments and the sample couplets on the board. Read each section of the text together as a class. Then discuss the content of each section, referring to the couplet and to the commentary.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Saying It Another Way” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in small groups or pairs to complete the activity.



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Into Life

Write these two headings on the board:

Self-Esteem | God's Esteem

Ask, “How does today's lesson contrast these two types of evaluation?” Give one or more of these examples to get your class started:

Self-Esteem—I try to face God on my terms.

God's Esteem—I recognize that I am powerless to face God were it not for his grace.

Self-Esteem—I compare myself to others and conclude that I am better than most.

God's Esteem—I contrast myself to Jesus and see the depth of my sin.

Self-Esteem—I boast of my good work for others.

God's Esteem—I boast only of Christ's good work for me.

Self-Esteem—I am secretly afraid that I am not good enough for God.

God's Esteem—I openly acknowledge I am not good enough for God and accept Jesus' sacrifice as my own.

Self-Esteem—I try to prepare for the worst.

God's Esteem—I know that God is with me whatever comes.

Close with prayer that focuses on learners' embracing God's esteem above all.