

## Who Would You Die For?

### Romans 5:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. <sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> 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! <sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Here's a weighty topic to consider on a Sunday morning: what would you die for? I think we could come up with some noble causes, some freedoms worth protecting with our lives, rights that we enjoy and want others to enjoy as well. Isn't that why so many of you serve or have served in our armed forces?

A closely connected question is: who would you die for? A soldier jumps on to a grenade to save his squadmates, his brothers in arms, because if he doesn't, more than just one person will die. A coach, Aaron Feis, laid down his life shielding students from bullets during school shooting in Parkland, Florida. A mother chooses to give birth knowing that it will very likely cost her her life.

Paul says in our Bible reading from Romans chapter 5 that "very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die." (verse 7) We can think up scenarios where we would possibly dare to die for someone. Albeit at the same time we pray that we are never put in those scenarios. Paul gives us four types of people to consider dying for. So, let's ask the question again.

Would you die for the powerless? We like standing up for the little guy, for the ones who can't defend themselves: children, babies, unborn children, those with mental and/or physical disabilities, the aged, the marginalized, the abused, etc. It's a righteous cause to stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. We care about human life. If we have to, we might possibly dare to die to protect these people. We may rally to their cause, but we still shy away from immediately jumping to saying, "I will give my life for this person." I'll help them. I'll support them. I'll work for them, but I'm not sure about dying for them.

Would you die for a sinner, a law-breaker, a criminal? There's an instant aversion on that one, right? But then you think about it a little bit more, and you want to know, "Well, what crime did they commit?" "Was it done out of evil intent or out of desperation for something greater than themselves like the thief who steals bread to feed his starving children?" "Were they just in the wrong place at the wrong time?" "Have they been oppressed, put down by the Man?" Maybe, just maybe, if they were a good person, a reformed person, and they had suffered injustice, I might possibly dare to die for them.

Would you die for an ungodly person? Now, they don't necessarily have to be hostile to Christianity, but they are not a person of God. They may have chosen to be atheist and are still amicable, likeable, smart, funny, etc. This may be someone who practices an Eastern faith like Buddhism or Hinduism, who seek peace within themselves and with others. But this also includes people of other faiths, people who don't believe in the God of the Bible, in the one true God. Would you die for a Muslim? How about a Satanist? Can you even bring yourself to a point where you would say, "Maybe I would dare to die for them"?

Would you die for an enemy, for someone who hates you, who constantly undermines you, who tries to bring you down every chance they get, who make your life miserable? I might possibly dare to die with the other cases, but for my enemy, for the one who hates me, for the one who wants to destroy me? Why would I ever even consider dying for my enemy?

Yes, there are some people that we might possibly dare to die for, but there's a whole lot of people in this world that we wouldn't dare to die for. We can't do it. They don't deserve it. I will not give up this precious and fragile commodity of my life for someone who is so undeserving of it. I like living, and I don't want to be dead. I don't want to choose to die.

Enter our Lord Jesus Christ. “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. (verse 6) God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (verse 8) While we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.” (verse 10) Jesus didn’t sift through the powerless, the sinners, the ungodly, his enemies, in order to decide who he would die for. He decided to die for them all, without any hesitation, without any background checks, without any sympathy votes.

God saw a need. He saw a world full of powerless, sinful, ungodly enemies. He knew that no one on this earth could ever fix this problem and be reconciled with God, to have peace with him. There was no hope of salvation, not even a chance of it. He decided that this was a cause worth dying for, the cause of saving the entire world. Christ certainly did not choose to die because people deserved it or because our suffering tugged on his heartstrings and he felt bad for us. No, he demonstrated what his love, true love, for people actually is. Jesus gave his life for those who disobeyed him, those who opposed him, those who hated him, those who could never help him – the sinners, the ungodly, his enemies, the powerless.

This is us. We are the powerless, sinful, ungodly, enemies of God. When we came into this world, we were ungodly, without faith in the true God. We don’t come into the world as friendly, innocent, believers, but as ones who are hostile to God, ones who hate him, oppose him, resist him even as a child willfully does what it wrong. “Don’t touch that,” you say. Then they look at you and do it anyway. We’re sinners. We’ve broken God’s law. We’ve chosen to go contrary to him. We don’t get a do over. I’m imperfect. I’m a law-breaker. I’m a sinner. I’m powerless to save myself. I don’t deserve nor should I expect that anyone would die for me.

Yet God demonstrated his love for us by dying for us while we were still powerless, sinful, ungodly enemies. That fact changes everything for us. Paul builds on what it means that Christ died for us.

Since Christ died for us, we have been justified through faith. This means that God has wiped away our criminal record, thrown it out. He has dropped all charges against us and forgotten all our crimes against him. The sentence for our crimes as his enemies, as sinners, as the ungodly has changed from an eternal death sentence to pardon that gives us life eternal with him.

Because we have been justified, declared not guilty, through faith, we have peace with God. All that hostility over the things we have done against him are forgotten. He does not hold a grudge. He does not bring up our past sins and rub them in our faces. He has us stand with him as one who is accepted. We are saved from God’s wrath because Christ died to satisfy it. We are reconciled with God.

Because we have been justified through faith, believing that Christ died for us, we know that when we suffer here on earth, that does not mean that God is punishing us or that he hates us or that he doesn’t care about us. Instead, “we glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” (verses 3-5) God uses the suffering we experience on earth to benefit us. He uses it to build our endurance, and then our character. He uses it to draw us back to him which, in turn, increases our hope in God, not some wishy-washy hope that maybe someday God might take me to heaven, but a hope that is a certain expectation of what is to come: to live forever with God in his glory, that glory he has given us by the Holy Spirit because Christ died for us.

Knowing all that, I ask one more time, what would you die for? In a few moments, two young people will be asked, “Do you intend to continue steadfast in God’s Word and his teachings and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from them?” It’s a question asked of every person who is confirmed as a communicant member here at Light of the Valley. It is a question of considerable weight.

As you reflect on your confirmation vows and ponder this question for yourself today, consider this: death cannot take from you the fact that at just the right time, when we were still powerless, sinful, ungodly enemies of God, Christ died for us. Death cannot take from you the declaration that God has made of you, that he has thrown out all the charges against you and declared you “not guilty.” Death cannot take from you the fact that you are saved from God’s wrath. Death cannot take away the reconciliation you have with God, the peace you have with God. Death most certainly cannot take away your hope in the glory of God. Death cannot take from you any of these most awesome blessings that you have because Christ died for us.

Because of all of these blessings, we ask God to make our confession bold that, if it comes to it (although we pray it doesn’t), may we answer, “Yes, I will die for you because you died for me.” If that day comes, God will be there with you and will deliver you from this vale of tears. He will comfort you with the fact that death can’t take away from you what he has done for you. God be praised forever because while we were still sinners, he died for us. Amen.