

The Triune God is Holy and Glorious

True Church Conference 2023

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Romans 6:6 through 10, as I hope to lay a foundation for these other brothers who will preach behind me in the conference. Paul writes verse 6, Romans 5,

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Why did Adam and Eve run from God after they sinned there in the garden of Eden? Because God is holy. Why did God hide Moses in the cleft of the rock as he passed by? Because God is holy. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush why did he say, "Moses, take off your sandals, you're standing on holy ground"? Because God is holy. When God descended on Mount Sinai with the thunder and the dark clouds and the lightning and the people were terrified, why were they terrified? Because God is holy. When Isaiah saw the Lord and he trembled and he said, "I'm a I'm a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips," why would he say that? Because God is holy. When Peter and James and John were on the Mount of Transfiguration and God's presence is seen in a brilliant whiteness and they are terrified, the Scripture says, why were they terrified? Because God is holy. When Jesus ascended back into heaven and heaven received him, why did that happen? Because he was holy and he needed to be in the holy place. The Bible says that when Jesus returns, men will cry out and even cry for the mountains to cover them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. Why? Because God is holy.

When you come to texts like Romans 5, I believe to properly grasp what God wants us to see you need to maybe have a little primer on who God is. Just who is this God under which we live and before whom we must stand and give an account? Well, he must be awesome in all respects because in this text Paul gives four powerful descriptive terms that speak to who we are, who man is in our natural unredeemed state. In verse 6 he uses

two of the terms, he says we're helpless and we're ungodly. In verse 8, he uses the term sinners. In verse 10, he uses the term enemies. Helpless, ungodly, sinners and enemies. Why are we in such a dire condition? Because God is holy.

Let's do a brief review on the holiness of God and then unpack some of what's here. There's so much we can't cover, but some of it. First of all, when we're thinking about the holiness of God, I try to tell my people that in all the ways God made us like himself, he is yet infinitely superior to us, the communicable attributes of God. The Bible speaks to those and includes those that we're like God in several ways. For example, we we, God is a giving God and we know something of giving. God is a caring God and we as human beings made in his image know something of caring. God is patient and we know something of being patient. God is wise, we have some grasp of wisdom. God is just and man knows something of justice. God is loving and man knows something of loving. God is forgiving and we know something about being forgiving. And we could go on and on but in all of these ways we fall terribly short compared to God, so short that you can hardly even compare them together, that in all the ways God made us like himself, and we are made in the image of God, yet in all of those ways God transcends. He's infinitely greater than us.

You see, God is giving but it's holy giving, and God is caring but it's holy caring. God is patient, but it is a holy patience. God is wisdom, and it is a holy wisdom. God is justice, but it's a holy justice. God is love, and it is a holy love. And God's forgiveness, but it is a holy forgiveness. He transcends us greatly in all the ways he made us like himself, but secondly, he's at the same time radically unique, unique, rather, and separate from us in so many ways and in ways we can't comprehend. For example, he's eternal. We can't grasp that. God is spirit, just radically different than us. If I could just pause here and elaborate maybe, God help us in our pulpits to preach a God that man can relate to. He's not like us. There's a mystery to him. You should leave your people sometimes scratching their head like, "Wow, what kind of God is that?" He's omnipresent. He's omnipotent. He's omniscient. Radically unique. Not like us. He's self-existing, and he's immutable, changes not. He's Creator. Can't relate to that. Isaiah 40:28 says he's the God that does not become weary or tired and his understanding is inscrutable. How can there be a being that don't become weary and tired?

He is set apart from us and the most obvious way, perhaps, that he's unique and set apart is that he is pure and he is sinless. He's not like us. He's not like us. Isaiah 60, 46:5, "To whom would you liken Me And make Me equal and compare Me, That we would be alike?" It picks somebody out, picks something out. "Is there anything that's like Me at all," God says? We must preach and we must hold to the only-ness of God. You see, there's nothing in the created realm that you can point to and say God is like fill in the blank. Now, I know there's anthropomorphic phrases about God that help us understand. I get that but I mean, in the true sense, there's nothing that you can say, well, God is like blank because he's holy. He's holy.

He is the standard of all that is righteous and all that is good. You see, there's nothing outside of God whereby you can check God out to see if God measures up. God is the

measure. God is the standard. The law comes from his very essence, his very being. Through his word, we can know him truly but yet we will never know him fully. He's a mystery. When we get to heaven in the eternal state, we will have perfect minds but we will not have infinite minds. So for all eternity we'll have the deep, abounding pleasures of learning more about God, and when we get up the next morning, if you do such a thing in heaven, there'll be more to learn because we know him truly but he's infinite. We'll never know him fully.

Well, a third thought about God and particularly the holiness of God, holiness is the composite of all of his attributes. You see, holiness holiness is not just one of his attributes, though each attribute is marked with holiness. To be truly holy, one must have all the attributes of the one true. Holiness is the sum of all excellence. The combination of all of his attributes consist in the perfection of character. All of his attributes are holy and all of them coming together in him signifies what one theologian calls the godliness of God. Say, "Pastor. I don't know if I can grasp this." Good. I'm not trying to be deep but we should wrestle with the thin brains we have to receive what God says about himself in the Scripture. This movement, it's always been around but, boy, it's taken steam in the last few decades of viewing God as kind of a little higher, better version of us. No, he's radically unique, transcending us in every way that's good and righteous.

The first three commandments tell us something interesting. Oh, let me go to the number four thing about his holiness before I give you that. His holiness means he is devoted to his own worship and honor. Did you hear that? Holiness means he is devoted to his own worship and honor. I love that God loves being worshiped because if God didn't love being worshiped, he couldn't be a holy God, but if you're perfect and holy, then you are rightfully the object of worship. As I've said to my church many times, God is the only being that could look in the mirror and go, "Perfect." He is holy, so he is committed to his own worship and glory. I mean, the 10 Commandments point this out so clearly. Commandment #1, "Have no other gods before Me." I'm first, i.e. I'm to be worshiped. "Do not make for yourself a graven image," commandment 2. In other words, there's nothing you can make that in any way is a good example or expression of my transcendent holy nature so don't even try it. Well, how can I love a God that I can't even grasp what he looks like? He reveals himself through his word and through his Spirit. He's self-authenticating through his word. The third commandment, "Do not take My name in vain." Don't put a descriptive or an understanding of me in any way, shape or fashion beneath what I have said about myself. That's why in the Asbury Revival or wherever it is, we need the book to be preached so men will know the God they claim they love and worship.

God continually commanded Israel to worship him and him alone. In Psalm 29:2, "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in holy array." Jeremiah 25:6, "and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm." And Jesus in the wilderness temptations to Satan, "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." And because of his holiness, his his intrinsic worth, we will one day require all humans who have ever lived to bow the knee and worship. In the future,

there's coming an eternal state where for all eternity the unredeemed in torment will worship him under justice and all the redeemed in glory will worship him under grace. But all will worship. Why? Because he's holy.

Now we come to Romans 5:6 through 10 and you say, "Pastor, I didn't see anything in here about the holiness of God." Oh, there's a lot here about the holiness of God because when you see these descriptives, the only way these descriptives have any meaning is if God is truly holy. Matter of fact, can I say this, that, um, no matter where you are in a text, if you'll view that text through the lens that God is holy, you'll always interpret it correctly, at least from that perspective. That's never an improper lens to look through when looking at a biblical text. And I'm afraid in our churches that, um, we don't preach enough and expound enough and declare enough about who God has revealed himself to be. No wonder our people don't take sin very seriously because they've got nothing to contrast it with.

Each term here that God gives describing us in our natural state, let's say them again: helpless, ungodly, sinners and enemies. Each of these screams of our woeful fallenness, but they even more, in my opinion, scream of God's holiness. When we come to the doctrine of man's fallenness or man's depravity, we must always view this from the perspective of the holiness of our Triune God. When the Scripture speaks of our sinfulness, it more-so speaks of God's holiness. Infuse our preaching with the doctrine of the holiness of God, our people need it. You see, if we fail to preach the holiness of God, sin loses its sting and salvation loses its treasured nature, and hell loses its terror and heaven loses its sweetness.

Well, let's look at them one at a time. It's as if Paul can't help himself. He's just wrestling with the Greek language to bring out all he can to give you the contrast of what we are naturally and what a holy God is or what we are in contrast to that holy God. Helpless, verse 6, look at it there again, "For while we were still helpless," being in the state of helpless. It means we were without strength. It means we were altogether unable to help ourselves out of this condition. Now God is the holy Creator, he is King of all, and he rightfully expects and demands all to love, honor, and obey him. Mark 12:30, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." It should be normal to love God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your strength. That should be normal but it's not. Why wouldn't man fully honor and obey this Triune Holy God who is infinite in power and in beauty and in wisdom? It's just the opposite, isn't it? From Adam and Eve sinning in the garden of Eden and all the way down to today. Name one person that the first thought of every morning is, "I love You and I want to serve You all day long." It's not there. We are helpless in our condition. As one scholar said helpless either to resist sin or to do good and utterly unable to help ourselves out of this problem, and yet God is holy and just, and will condemn and punish all sinners, and Paul says, "I want you to know you're helpless before this holy God."

John 8:31 reminds us that if God is for us who can be against us, but doesn't that lead to another thought, but if God's against us, it doesn't matter who's for us. The word helpless

here is similar to the Bible word lost, same connotation when it says we're lost. We're like a lost soul. The idea here under the word when the word lost is used is usually that you're lost in a condition where the only outcome is you're perishing. It's like a quadriplegic. He has no strength in his arms. He has no strength in his legs and he's been left in the middle of a vast wilderness. When a quadriplegic is left in the middle of a vast wilderness, you can give him a compass, but it doesn't matter. You can give him a map, but it doesn't matter. You can walk up as a guide and say, "I'll lead you out," but he can't follow you. He is helpless.

Man in his foolishness and helpless condition tries to help himself. Proverbs 16:25 reminds us that there's a way which seems right to a man but its end is the way of death. Man tries to look at philosophies and science, or he tries to dull his mind through alcohol or drugs or dull his mind through religion, but the Bible says when you do a self-cleaning with religion, that demon leaves and he gets seven more and you're worse on the back end than you were on the front. At the end of the day, you're only deeper in the muck and the mire of helplessness. You may be sitting here this evening and you don't know Christ and you're not God's and you're not forgiven and you're naturally thinking, "What can I do?" I want to tell you what you can do: nothing because you're helpless.

The second word. Paul wants to drive this home. You say, "Brother Jeff, man, that's heavy for the first session." Shouldn't be heavy. Don't you get this every week? Shouldn't be heavy. Verse 6, "at the right time Christ died," here it is, "for the ungodly." Ungodly is the idea of irreverence. It means a destitution of reverence toward God. There there's not an element, there's not even the germ of a genuine seed of reverence from your heart to a holy God. It's actually the idea of being the opposite of God in in great contrast to God. At risk of being a little trivial, years ago the 7UP company had a commercial where they said, "We're the uncola. There's the Coca-Cola, and everything. it's not, we are. We're opposite of it." Well, that's what basically Paul's saying. Take everything that God is and we are contrast to that. We are the antithesis of that. We're the ungodly.

It's funny how you see things and they always stay with you. I remember as a boy walking down the edge of the asphalt on a county highway. It must have been late July or August and somebody had threw a banana out and it had been there for several days in the hot Tennessee summer sun, and it had shriveled up and it was completely black. It had been run over by some cars and there were some maggots working on it and some ooze coming out of it. And every part of that was repulsive to me. And as the ungodly, every part of us is repulsive to the holy God.

Y'all remember Hurricane Katrina that hit New Orleans so devastatingly years ago? I'll never forget the report that as they put those people in the Superdome, the power's out, the people were terrified, and they're in this Superdome and there's almost no lighting in there, and they found out there was a band of cruel monsters, men who would lurk in the corners and get those little girls and rape them in the darkness. There they were already terrified about all that was happening and then have that to happen to you. You say, "Those guys are monsters! That's repulsive!" You know anything about the holiness of

God, you know that we naturally are more repulsive than that to God. We are the ungodly.

Isaiah 64:6 says, "all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our 'righteous deeds' are like a filthy garment." You know the word, the menstrual cloth, our garments soaked with the oozing puss of a sore. God said, "Take all your good deeds you might do, and I'm gonna tell you what they are to Me, they are a filthy puss-soaken rag." Guys, why is this important? Because he's holy. He's holy. We're so prone to want to bring God down. That's why he says in Psalm 50:21, "You thought I was just like you. You thought I was kind of like you. No, I'm not." "The heart is more deceitful than all else," Jeremiah 17:9, "and it's desperately sick. Who can understand it?" And that's the way we are, our hearts so deceive us and one of the ways we deceive ourselves is you say, "Well, well, I don't feel that I'm ungodly." Well, you've been deceived by your lying heart. You have this limited and even perverse view of who God is that makes you an idolater. You're worshipping worshipping a God of your understanding, not the true God who's revealed himself in the text. And he's holy. This idolatrous view of God appeases our conscience a little, but it has a fatal ending. Our evil hearts, our corrupt minds, our errant behavior proves us as ungodly and repulsive or loathsome in God's sight.

Now there's a part of me humanly that says, "Okay, Paul, time out. That's good for now." Paul says, "No, we're not done." Look at verse 8, "in that while we were yet," here's the third descriptive term, "sinners." We're all very familiar with Romans 6:23, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." And we're all familiar with some of you know me, I like to bow hunt when I can and the picture there, if you will, is of shooting the arrow and hitting the mark. It's it's it's achieving the purpose for which God made you and created you and God says to all of us, "You're all sinners. I made you for this purpose and you don't we don't reach it. I created you for this purpose and you fall short of it."

When I was a little boy, um, probably 7-8-9 years of age, me and my buddies would go to the dime store and buy kites to fly in the sky. I think they were \$0.25 and they were red and they were blue and they were yellow. And sometimes there'd be eight or ten of us in my front yard flying our kites across this big open field, and I'll never forget one day I looked and kind of straight over my head was this larger kite, and it was gray in color, and it kind of shook in the wind, and I thought, "Now that's different." So I followed the string and I followed it down about a couple of blocks behind my house and you know what? I was blown away. A teenager was flying that kite. I was so impressed. And I begin to ask questions, "That kite is so different, so unique. Where did you buy it?" And this really impressed me, he said, "I didn't buy it. I made it." I just thought, "Wow. That's something. How did you make it?" Well, that's newspaper. And I took yardsticks, remember the old wooden yardsticks, and I split them and I made the cross and I made the vertical beam and I bowed it back and I put the tail on it. And I'm flying it in the sky, I thought, "This is the most brilliant human being on the earth that can do this." I was so impressed because that kite spoke something of his character to me and his ability. God made you to be his kite to fly before all the universe and say, "This is what I'm like. Look at this." But the text says we fall and crush it all to the ground. Once that kite hits the

ground and it breaks the vertical beam or the cross beam, or both, you throw it in the garbage.

That's where we are sinners. We fail to reflect God's glory being made in his own image, and so we are sinners before a holy God. You see, God says to always tell the truth and we've all lied. God says to never steal and we've all stolen something, some of you stole time from your employer this week. God says to honor your parents but we sometimes use them and take advantage of them. God says never commit adultery. All of you have, at least in your heart. We are sinners. God made us to be a reflection of his holy character and we've missed that mark. We've failed our holy Creator's purpose to properly represent him in this world.

Paul says, "I've got one more I want you to look at." Verse 10. Not only are we in our natural state helpless and ungodly and sinners, lastly, "For if while we were enemies." The enemies of God. The idea is a active hostility against God. The idea is that everything we are, everything we say, and everything we do is actively for God and against God but in our case it's against God this side of regeneration. But the point is it's active. There's no neutral ground and that causes us to be traitors and rebels against God. Think about how we are active against God in our minds. In the natural man and mind, rather, we are in active rebellion against God. For example, how often as the natural man do we see people explaining away sin? "Oh, that's not sin. Oh, that's not really wrong. Oh, God didn't really view it that way." That that's being a traitor to God. We're supposed to honor his truth, not to try to explain it away. Active rebellion in our minds. Though we should love God with all of our minds, with all of our hearts, think of the times we ignore him in our minds, we explain away his precepts and his standards and his holiness in our minds. We reject him out and out in our minds. I don't mean the redeemed children of God outright, but I mean mankind in his unregenerate state.

So when doing these things, we are active enemies, we are traitors and rebels in our minds against God. Then think about our actions. Every unrighteous action is an attack against God. You understand his law is not separate from him. You don't break his law and then he's a third party. You break his law, you sin against him. The law came from his very nature and character. If we could in our fallen unredeemed capacity, our standing, we would have ascended to heaven and dragged God off his throne and placed ourselves there instead. If you don't understand that about your fallenness you don't understand your fallenness. But the horror of being God's enemy, are you ready? He's our enemy. That's what Paul's saying, "while we were yet enemies," while we were still enemies, while we were in that state. It's troubling to think about I'm an active enemy against God, but it's more troubling that God is an active enemy of the sinner.

Romans 2:5 reminds us, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself." In other words, God's actively doing something, "storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." One day God in full holy justice will act out his wrath against his enemies, but right now he's active storing it up. Well, you say, "Well, preacher can I be saved in this helplessness? Can I be saved in this ungodliness? Can I be saved as this sinner that I am?"

Can I be saved when I'm the active enemy of God?" No, unless God does something. Unless God does something you can't. You're doomed forever. What can you do, active enemy of God, to save yourself?

So the question is would God love me and would God have mercy on me, the helpless, ungodly sinner and traitorous enemy against him? Yes, he would. He would. He has done something and he will do something. But let me ask you, why would God do this? Why would God do this? Because of who he is, because he's holy, he's different than you. He's greater than you. He's higher than you. He's more magnanimous than you. He's more wonderful than you. You wouldn't do it if you were God but this God's holy God. Romans 5:8 right in the middle of our text, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners," in the condition of being failures to our God's purpose in making us and we couldn't change that condition, going our way in rebellion and traitorous actions against our God, while we were in that state, "Christ died for us." His, I'm glad the phrase in the New American Standard is "His own love," because the point is this isn't your kind of love. This is not love you human beings know anything about. This is holy love that led him to be the sacrifice and the guilt offering for us dying on the cross.

Notice how his death is central to redeeming us from this great problem. Look at verse 6, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Down to verse 8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then," verse 9, "having now been justified by His blood," that's his death, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." Verse 10, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the," there it is again, "the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." His was a holy love and a holy sacrifice of a holy Savior that wrought for us a holy justification and a holy reconciliation to God. You see, through Christ God loves the helpless and gives them both direction and strength to get home. Through Christ, God loves the ungodly and makes them become attractive and desirable to himself. Through Christ, God loves the sinner and he becomes acceptable as if he hit the mark. And through Christ, God loves his enemy and makes him his cherished friend, even his own beloved child.

No wonder the songwriter wrote,

"If that isn't love
The ocean is dry
There's no star in the sky
And the sparrow can't fly
If that isn't love
Then heaven's a myth
There's no feeling like this
If that isn't love."

Oh dear friend, his love is deeper than the ocean and his love is higher than the heavens. His love is broader than the universe and his love is too glorious for the poet's pen. His love is too marvelous for the singer's song. His love is too amazing for the scientists to observe. His love is more beautiful than the rose. His love is more fragrant than the most costly perfume. His love is more desirable than all the world's gold. His love is more precious than the Hope Diamond. His love is more enduring than the universe. And his love is more pleasure producing than all of earth's delights combined. He is the one true holy God and he loves us who were rightfully the helpless, ungodly, sinners and enemies of God. He, with a holy love, a love manifested by his holy Son and a love applied to us through his Holy Spirit and we become the friends of God.