

Romans 5:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Analysis

But God commendeth his love toward us (συνίστησιν δὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός)—the verb συνίστημι (synistēmi) means to demonstrate, prove, establish. God doesn't merely declare His love but demonstrates it historically in Christ's death. This is ἀγάπη (agapē), the distinctive Christian term for self-giving love that seeks the good of the undeserving.

In that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (ἔτι ἁμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν)—the temporal clause stresses simultaneity: not after we improved, not because we showed potential, but while still actively sinning. The term ἁμαρτωλῶν (hamartōlōn, 'sinners') encompasses moral rebellion. This verse has arrested countless hearts: the demonstration of love is not Christ's teaching or example but His substitutionary death for enemies. Here is the gospel in miniature.

Historical Context

This verse became central to Reformation theology's understanding of justification. Luther and Calvin emphasized that God's love is not attracted by human worthiness but demonstrated toward the unworthy—contradicting medieval theology that required grace-enabled merit before full justification. Augustine's conversion was influenced by Romans (especially 13:13-14), and this verse captures the scandal that transformed him: God loves sinners while they are sinners, not after they become saints.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How would your life change if you truly believed that God's love for you is not based on your spiritual performance?
2. What does 'while we were yet sinners' teach about when God began loving you—before conversion or after?
3. How should the demonstration of God's love in Christ's death shape how you demonstrate love to others who wrong you?

Interlinear Text

συνίστησιν	δὲ	τὴν	ἐαυτοῦ	ἀγάπην	εἰς	ἡμᾶς	ὁ	θεὸς
commendeth	But	G3588	his	love	toward	us	G3588	God
G4921	G1161		G1438	G26	G1519	G2248		G2316
ὅτι	ἔτι	ἁμαρτωλῶν	ὄντων	ἡμῶν	Χριστὸς	ὑπὲρ	ἡμῶν	
in that	yet	sinners	were	us	Christ	for	us	
G3754	G2089	G268	G5607	G2257	G5547	G5228	G2257	
ἀπέθανεν								
died								
G599								

Additional Cross-References

John 15:13 (Love): Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

John 3:16 (Love): For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Romans 5:6 (References Christ): For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

1 Peter 3:18 (Sin): For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

1 John 3:16 (Love): Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Isaiah 53:6 (Sin): All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Ephesians 2:7 (References Christ): That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Romans 4:25 (Parallel theme): Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Romans 5:20 (Sin): Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

1 Timothy 1:16 (References Christ): Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.