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Our Unique Faith: Reconciliation

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Romans 5:6-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Let me ask you a question: Have you ever wondered, “How do I know that Christianity is the right religion?” There are thousands of religions out there, right? How much have you studied them? How well do you know them? Has the doubt ever crept into your mind: “Maybe one of them is right, and we are wrong! What if my God isn’t the true God? What if my faith isn’t the true faith? What if I’m on the wrong path?”

I’ll be honest: there’s nothing I can say that will totally eliminate that question. The Holy Spirit will eventually answer that question for you in your heart. But what I can do, is highlight for you the ways that the Christian faith is absolutely unique. The essentials to the Christian faith are not to be found in any other religion in the world. The Christian faith is utterly unique at the most fundamental level. So I would propose to you that there are thousands of religions that have at their root a very similar teaching. But Christianity at its root is unique.

The book of Romans more than any other highlights our unique faith. It clearly shows how the Christian faith is different than any other.

I haven’t really mentioned this or stressed this at all, but in our messages this summer, we are working our way through portions of the book of Romans. Today will be the third message in this series, and if you missed the previous two, I strongly recommend you download them from our website. The first message was called, “Getting Right with God.” What more fundamental question could you seek to answer? How do I get right with God? We discovered that we don’t get right with God through morality... by being better people. And we don’t get right with God by doing more religious things. No, we get right with God through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we focused on this unique aspect of the Christian faith: the word “atonement.” Only Christianity teaches that God atones for all our sins through his Son. That is, full satisfaction and reparation for our injuries to God (caused by sin) is made through his Son Jesus Christ. In every other religion of the world, to some degree or another, man must make full or partial reparation for his sin. Our faith is unique!

Last week, the message was called: “Extreme Promises Given and Kept.” We saw that our religion is unique in that a right relationship with God comes *by faith*. Realizing our own inability and trusting fully on God’s promises, we are declared by God to be righteous. Not by works, but by trust... we are saved. This concept is unique to Christianity. There is no other religion in the world that teaches this.

Today, we continue to make our way through Romans, and we highlight another word, another concept, that is unique to the Christian faith. Today’s word is: reconciliation. World English Dictionary says “to reconcile” means:

to become friendly with (someone) after estrangement or to re-establish friendly relations between (two or more people)

to settle (a quarrel or difference)

Where is there an estrangement, a quarrel, a hostile relationship that needs mending? Who needs to reconcile with whom? The Bible tells us that we need to be reconciled to God, because our natural, sinful nature and our natural sinful acts have alienated us from him. We, by nature, are enemies of God.

Let that concept sink in, because it's no one that we easily admit. We can understand how our relationship with God is strained at times. We'll readily admit that we're not perfect, and we can see how God might be frowning on occasion because of that. But does that make us his *enemy*? The Bible says yes!

Do you remember the parable of the prodigal son (or the "lost" son?) Maybe that will help us grasp this concept. The son despised his father, and so asked his father for his share of the inheritance. The father gave it, and the son packed up and moved away. FAR away. To a foreign country. There, free from his father's rules, free from living in his father's house, he did what he wanted, when he wanted. He squandered everything in wild living. Simple question: What was his relationship with the father during that time? He was estranged, wasn't he? He was separated, right? There was a difference that caused a huge separation between the two... a complete break.

That son is you and I by nature. When a person lives in sin, he is declaring his independence from God, he is rebelling under his roof and moving out. He is calling the shots, and not allowing the Father to call the shots anymore. The person who lives disobediently to God is saying, "I'll take your gifts, God... my abilities, my time, my resources... and I'll use them how I want, not how you want."

This is our natural sinful condition. "Enemies of God" is not an overstatement. We'd like to hear that we are "sick" in sin, not "dead" in sin. But the Bible uses the word "**Dead.**" We would like to think we have poor spiritual eyesight in spiritual matters, but the Bible says we're **blind!** We would like to think we're weak... sometimes. But the Bible says we are **powerless...** all the time when it comes to making things right with God. We would like to hear that we have differences of opinion with God, and that maybe sometimes the relationship is strained. But God says our natural condition makes us his **enemies...** and the relationship is **broken**, not strained.

That's the bad news. Now listen to the good news of how we are reconciled to God:

**Romans 5:6-11** <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.

While we were powerless... while we were still sinners... when we could do nothing... God did something... something powerful, something amazing, something radical, something drastic, something costly. Christ died for the ungodly. Christ died for us.

This is something called amazing grace. Stunning, jaw-dropping undeserved kindness of God for us. This kind of love is really hard for us to wrap our heads around. We very rarely see it in our daily lives. Even in the fiction world of books, movies and TV you almost never see it: where someone gives of himself for his enemy. Do you see good people doing good things for other good people? Sure! That's not all that rare. Do you see good people doing good things for strangers? That's not quite as common... in fact, it's definitely newsworthy, isn't it? You'll hear stories like that on the evening news because they're quite uncommon. People don't help strangers very often... but it does happen. But how often do you see on the evening news that a person helped their enemy? Now imagine that the help comes at tremendous personal cost, and

the person they help has done the most horrible things imaginable! How many stories have you heard like that? I'm guessing not many.

Yet, that's God's story. We were enemies of God because of our selfish living in which we have declared our independence from God and his control. We were living estranged from God and separate from him... by our choice! And that's when God showed his love for us in doing the unimaginable. God gave his one and only Son to die for us ungodly people. God gave his son to die for us sinful, rebellious people.

We have been **justified by his blood**. So it wasn't just a neat and easy declaration from heaven that our sins are now considered okay. For us to be declared not guilty by God required a tremendous payment... a tremendous sacrifice... the shedding of the blood of God's own Son.

Have you ever stopped to think about what a bloody religion Christianity is? Does it really have to be this messy? Do we really have to bring up this bloody mess all the time? Listen to what the Bible says:

- **“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”** Hebrews 9:22. There is no forgiveness without blood. Opposing almighty God demands the death sentence. Blood must be shed.
- Exodus 12:13: **“...when I see the blood, I will pass over you.”** This was God's direction to Israel when the 10<sup>th</sup> plague was going to come over Egypt. Kill the one year old lamb and paint the blood on the door post. The angel of death would pass over the house that had the blood. The shedding of blood spared their lives.
- In the same way, the blood of Jesus redeems the believer. It is the payment price for our sin. 1 Peter 1:18-19: **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”**
- The blood cleanses us from sin. 1 John 1:7: **“...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”**

The shed blood of Jesus is the payment price for the offense and debt of all your sin. You are declared by God “not guilty” because Jesus shed his blood for you.

Now, listen to the final verses.

**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 [rejoice] in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

Paul uses a contrast here to fill our hearts with joy, hope and encouragement. Here's his point: When we were enemies of God, what did God do for us? He sent his Son to die for us and shed his blood so he could declare us “not guilty.” Amazing love! But what now? Well, now we have been reconciled to God. Now are no longer enemies of God, but in Christ we are friends of God. Now Jesus is no longer dead, but he rose again and he is alive even today. Wouldn't logic dictate that God would do far more for us, given our current standing?! If he gave his Son for us when we were his enemies, what will he do for us now that we're his friends through faith in his Son?

The story is told of Martin Luther and his wife, Katie. Luther was in a foul mood. Plans had gone awry and he had been unbearable to live with. So one day Katie came in dressed in black. “Why are you dressed for mourning, wife?” he said. “Haven’t you heard? God has died,” she answered. Luther exploded, “God has died? What do you mean by such blasphemous talk? Of course He hasn’t died!” “Oh,” she said. “I’m sorry. I thought by your manner these last few days that surely He had.” Her husband got the point. So should we. We can entrust ourselves to God’s care in all things.

Is that how we live our lives? If God did what was hardest at the most impossible time, won’t he now finish what he started? Won’t he now carry through and give us our eternal reward?

Friends, remember this word all week long: reconciliation. It is a word that is unique to our Christian faith. There’s no other concept like it in any other religion. By our sins we were estranged from God with a broken relationship and separate, living as his enemies. But he reconciled us to himself through the shed blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. And since he did that, you better believe that no matter what we face in this world, God is in control. God loves us. God will work it out for good, and God will make sure that he delivers us from this world of sorrows by giving us his great reward: Life. Forever. With Him. In paradise.

Friends, rejoice and go in peace. You have been reconciled to God! Amen.