

## Romans 5:5-8 The Gospel Of Love

What comes to mind when you hear the word “LOVE”?

Usually, when I ask that question the answer takes the form of acts of love: he takes the bins out, she forgives me. Or feelings of love; passion, unconditional acceptance.

And we think of love in different ways. In romantic terms: a Royal wedding of a Prince and a pauper who fall in love or a Shakespearian sonnet:

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

We think of love in ethical terms: 1 Corinthians 13:

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

Sometimes we think of love in terms of an attitude of mind: the Beatles told us that “All you need is love, love is all you need”.

Or we illustrate love by looking at relationship within families, a mother for her son.

But when we come to think about Divine Love, the love of God, it is important that we open our eyes and ears to understand love in a deeper, bigger way. When we read about God's love, in Romans 5 it is about a passionate posture toward us with which our version of love does not bear comparison.

**Romans 5:1-11**

*1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 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.*

*3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

***5 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.***

***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.*

Paul spends the first 4 long chapters in Romans setting out the architecture of the Gospel. But in all his many words, one word has been totally absent: LOVE. Why? Is it because the notion of love is absent from God's workings in the Gospel? Of course not.

In his excellent book on Romans, "God is for us", Simon Ponsonby writes, *Paul has not mentioned the word love yet, because he knows we will say "ah yes, yes, I know about that". And then we project onto the gospel our own, apriori, preconceived, notions of love.*

We set God's love in a misty, picture frame of romantic feelings and ethical behaviours and completely miss out other aspects of God's love such as his holiness, his justice, his judgment, his wrath and his unconditional love.

Our version of love, even when good, doesn't even scratch the surface of divine love.

How are we to grasp the astonishing magnitude of this love? In "The Message of Romans" John Stott says we must measure the cost to the giver and the worthiness to the recipient. The scale of love.

The **cost of divine love** is pre-eminently counted in the visceral, vicarious death of Jesus, for us, on the cross. The cost is measured in the sacrifice of life.

God's love is gauged by a bloody instrument of torture as Jesus offers his own life up as the price to be paid. Not just any life but the life of the Son of God, the one who is above all others, the one who has the universe in His hand, the one on whom sits no obligation to make any sacrifice. Yet He gives up everything, and he does it unconditionally – for you and for me. It doesn't get more costly than that.

The **unworthiness** of the recipient is seen in the four words Paul uses to describe us:

- Powerless (v6) – we have no ability or strength to save ourselves. When left to us it just gets worse not better.
- Ungodly (v6) – we have rebelled against God and placed ourselves at the centre of our worship.
- Sinners (v8) – by “nature we're fallen” and we reject his ways as naturally as a driver creeps over the speed limit.
- Enemies (v10) – we make God our enemy not our friend, fighting against his will and his grace.

God does not love us because we are loveable, he loves us despite our ugliness.

The price is high, the worthiness is low – the extent of divine love is unfathomable.

Because Divine Love is so much more than our own paltry understanding, 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians used the word Agape when they talked about love. It was pretty much a new (or at least little used) word which they selected to try and describe this new form of extreme love.

Let's explore Agape in two ways:

1. Love as an Objective Historical Event (v8), and
2. Love as Subjective Existential Experience (v5).

### **Love as an Objective Historical Event – God sends His Son**

Although no serious historian or theologian doubts the existence of Jesus as a real human being whose feet kicked up the dust in Palestine 2000 years ago, a recent poll showed that around 40% of English people don't think that Jesus was a real person. That means that roughly half your friends don't know that Jesus is and was real. They need to be informed!

*v8 'God demonstrates his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'.*

Ponsonby says,

*A real event at a real time in a real place with a real person.*

*We see that there is a heart at the heart of the universe.*

*Divine love is not some intangible, ethereal, sentimental notion.*

*Divine love is visceral, tangible, historical – it is a Brute Fact and a Brutal fact.*

*Divine love is not the preserve of Poets but Historians.*

*Divine love demonstrates itself in time and space.*

*Divine love expresses itself through a man, in a life laid down 2000 years ago on a hill outside Jerusalem.*

*God does not shout that he loves us, he shows us.*

The cross is like Shakespeare's love – an ever-fixed mark - that neither bends nor removes.

It is a memorial to God loving the ugly, rebellious and unloveable.

He loved us when we despised & dismissed him.

He loved us when we were still far off – he saw us from afar and he loved us.

He doesn't love us because he saw us at our best, he loved when seeing us at our worst.

His love is not a response to our love. It is love unconditional – not conditional on anything else except the fact that He loves you, and me.

Our thoughts, words, actions of love are only responses to God loving us first.

Without his love there is none in us.

1 John 4:18, *"We love because He first loved us"*.

Someone described love in the marriage vows: "when he says I do, he does". At the cross God says I do and then he does.

And it is for today. *"God demonstrates his love for us"* is written in the present tense – it's an historical event that is effective today and every day.

What does this crucified love mean for us today?

- His love justifies us (v1,9);
- His love gives us access into His presence (v2);
- His love gives us hope (v3)
- His love confronts suffering (v3-5);
- His love brings peace and reconciliation (v1, 10,11);
- His love saves us (v9).

Before the cross we are powerless, ungodly, sinners and enemies. At the Cross God's love becomes an Objective Historical Fact and we are saved from his wrath, justified, made righteous and reconciled to him.

## Love as a subjective existential experience – God sends His Spirit

The crucifixion is a fixed marker, a monument in time and space of God's love. Most of you know this. But many of you don't feel it.

*v5 God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

We are meant to know and believe that act of love and then also to experience it. God doesn't just say "I love you, look at the cross" – he says "I love you, look at the cross and here I am".

The cool, clinical fact of love 2000 years ago in Palestine is more: it becomes the warm, living presence of his Spirit in our hearts today.

He gives us Himself, He pours Himself into our hearts by His Spirit. You may have understood that God loves you when you look at the cross (the objective fact) but you may never have experienced God's love (the subjective encounter).

God longs to pour His Spirit out on you – so that you may know His love in your heart.

**Love Poured** - the image of pouring conveys a lavish, abundant, extravagant grace of the Spirit given to us. This pouring is not a dribble it's a deluge, a flood.

**God's Spirit** - God gives us the free gift of Himself: His Son, whose blood poured out in sacrifice and He gives us His Spirit, His love poured out. Not token Christmas presents, nicely wrapped. No, He pours Himself into our hearts. God Himself gives Himself freely. He comes to abide with us. The Gift is the Giver.

**Into our hearts** - In Hebrew thought the heart was the centre of one's being, one's core (in the Greek world the centre of being is the mind or bowels). The heart is the place of the affections, emotions and feelings that drive actions.

God gives himself to us in love at our very core – it is love experienced, love FELT.

When you believe in Jesus, and receive the Holy Spirit you'll be able to tell the difference! Love is an event (the cross) and an experience (the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in our hearts).

On 24 May 1738 John Wesley, unsure of his faith and conversion, sat reluctantly in a meeting as a preacher expounded Romans. He described the event in his journal:

*"In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, **I felt my***

***heart strangely warmed.*** *I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."*

Have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit? God's love poured out in your heart? When was your heart last strangely warmed?

## **CONCLUSION**

Our faith in God is based on an historical fact and an existential experience.

Jesus did live and did die - for us - and in so doing revealed God's love for us. A profound love which cost everything and of which we are totally unworthy.

But His love is not just demonstrated. God's love for us is also poured out into our hearts by the coming of His Holy Spirit, yesterday evening, today and tomorrow morning.

You may know the fact, but have you experienced the love of God in your heart? Is His presence a present reality for you? The love of God in history must be brought into the present as He pours out His love into your heart.

Take the opportunity to receive His love right now.

Believe. Ask. Receive.

As the saying goes, *"Don't just do something, sit there."* You need not do anything. Just invite Him to pour His love into your heart as He loves to do.

David Flowers

8 November 2015

*Much of this material is taken from:*

*Simon Ponsonby's God is For us, chapter 21.*

*Also recommended:*

*John Stott, The Message of Romans.*

*Tom Wright, Paul for Everyone, Romans Part 1*