

Good Friday—2019

“Because of Love”

(4/19/19)

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Those verses succinctly and poignantly sum up the message of Good Friday and the cross—what theologians refer to as ‘penal substitution’. (Explain)

According to Heb. 9:22, we know that without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sin.

And since sinners can’t die for sinners—it would take the innocent dying for the guilty to make atonement for our sins.

And yet, everyone born into this world is a descendant of Adam and therefore born with sin on their soul resulting in physical and spiritual death (*“in Adam all die”*—1Cor.15:22).

For someone to die for sinners they would have to be a member of the human race (‘goel’) but sinless and therefore virgin born. (Explain)

Now, that explains the theology behind why Jesus came to redeem us—but was that all that moved God to do what He did for us?

What really motivated the Father to send His Son to die for us—and why did Jesus willingly submit to dying in our place?

The answer is—“**Because of Love**” (which is also the title I’ve chosen to call this Good Friday message by).

And of course, the love I’m talking about is God’s love—which is vastly different from our human love.

The Love of God Defined

First of all, let me say that in the Greek language (the language of the N.T.) there are four words for *love*—although only two of them actually appear in the New Testament.

1. There is the word **eros** from which we get our English words—*erotic* and *erogenous*.

This is a word that better represents the idea of *lust* and is really more about the biological act of *sex* than love—this word does not occur in the New Testament at all.

2. The second Greek word for love is the word **storge** which speaks of *family* love—this word also doesn’t appear in the N.T.

3. Then there is the word **phileo** which means “*affection*”, “*friendship*” or “*brotherly*” (reciprocal) love.

4. And finally, there is the word **agape**.

This is a Greek word that represents a powerful, all-consuming kind of love.

Now, we must be careful here because, I've heard pastors say that this Greek word was invented and used exclusively in the N.T. for God's love.

And yet Jesus, in Luke 11:43 said, —"*Woe to you Pharisees! For you love (agapao) the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.*"

The Pharisees were *consumed* by a 'love' of prestige and the praise and recognition of men—and so in that regard they *agaped* the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

However, it is true that, by far, the most common use of the word 'agape' in the New Testament *is* in connection with *God's* love—an all-consuming love characterized by selflessness and sacrifice—

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved (agape) the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

God's love is an all-encompassing and unconditional love that loves freely regardless of how that love is returned—if returned at all!

Which is different from human love which is *reciprocal* ("I love you *because* you love me.") and *conditional* ("but I only love you *when* you treat me right.").

God's love is not like human love.

God's love is unconditional, universal and indiscriminating—as the Scriptures say, "*God so loves the world...and is no respecter of persons.*"

Human love is limited and can diminish over time—Jesus said that during the Tribulation Period, "*...the love of many will grow cold.*" (Matt.24:12)

But God's love never diminishes because God is the source of love and God never diminishes—
"*He is the same yesterday, today and forever.*" (Heb.13:8)

Human love, loves its own (those closest to it)—God's love, loves even His enemies:

Matthew 5:44-45 (NLT2)

⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies...⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

And so, Jesus commands His followers to love even our enemies with the love of God—but there's the problem with that.

God's love is a supernatural love that is not inherent to our human nature—in other words, it is not of this earth!

And as such, it can't be manufactured through the energy of our flesh (hard-work and self-effort).

This love is only found in God Himself Whom the Bible says doesn't just contain a great amount of love—but that He Himself *is* love! (1John 4:8)

And so, the only way for agape love to fill our hearts is for *God* to fill our hearts (to live inside of us through His Holy Spirit)—and that only happens when we are born of the Spirit (saved)—

Romans 5:5 (NKJV)

⁵ ...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

In Galatians 5:22 Paul said that once God's love has been *planted* in our hearts at salvation—it then becomes a *fruit* of the Holy Spirit.

But for the fruit of love to really grow in our lives we need to abide in Christ on a daily basis—

John 15:1, 4-5, 9-10 (NKJV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing...⁹ "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

In these verses Jesus tells us that God's love is a fruit that grows in our lives as a by-product of our union with Him.

As we just said, agape love comes from God (and only from God).

It is planted in our hearts at the moment of salvation and becomes a supernatural testimony to the presence of God within us as His children.

The more we remain connected to Jesus in daily fellowship (abiding in Him)—the more God's love grows in our lives in a supernaturally, natural way.

But understand, the whole purpose of God filling us with His love is so that it would be manifested in our lives—to benefit others.

The Love of God Demonstrated

The whole purpose of a fruit tree is to bear fruit for others to benefit from.

John 13:34 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love [agape] one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

The new commandment that Jesus gave to His disciples in the new covenant wasn't simply to love people—there was nothing new about that!

The Old Testament is filled with commandments and exhortations to love others—Leviticus 19:18, “...*you shall love your neighbor as yourself*”.

What makes this command *new* is that Jesus commanded us to love one another—“**as I have loved you.**”

How did Jesus love them? How does Jesus love us?—He loved us by going to the cross and dying for us!

That's how He wants us to love one another—by going to the cross and dying (not literally but figuratively) for one another—that's what's new about His command to love!

And that's how unbelievers will know we are children of God—

John 13:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Loving people *as* you love yourself (Old Testament love) implies placing them on an *equal* footing with yourself.

But loving them as Jesus means to place them *above* yourself by dying to *your* needs and making *their* needs supreme.

This is the greatest kind of love—the love of God (sacrificial love) manifested in the lives of His people—

John 15:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

We must understand that God's love is not a feeling—it is selfless action toward others in need. (John 3:16)

And that's why nothing is more powerful, nothing is a greater witness to the world than God's love flowing through the lives of His people.

That is what Paul the apostle said to end 1Corinthians 12 and open chapter 13—he called God's love "*the more excellent way!*"

He said that in the context of spiritual gifts—that (agape) love is better than speaking in tongues.

It's better than healing the sick.

God's love is better than raising the dead—because those things are only beneficial for this life.

And while the exercise of these gifts can be exciting and emotionally moving (for the moment)—God's love can soften the hardest heart and change a person for eternity!

(Talk about the woman who wrote to the man in prison who had killed her whole family telling him she forgave him and sharing Jesus with him).

When Jesus commanded us to *love our enemies*—many people can't comprehend doing that because our concept of love is rooted in human love which is often based *on* feelings.

And so, when people hear that Jesus said we are to love our enemies, they immediately respond—*"how can I love (have feelings for) my enemies!"*

Well, you probably can't—but God's love isn't about feelings.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul went on to give us the best description of God's love in all the New Testament—using all verbs, because God's love is not feelings, it's actions!

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. ⁸ But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. But love [God's love] will last forever!

There are those who like to point out that human love can be very selfless and powerful—as when a soldier dives onto a live grenade to save his fellow soldiers. (John 15:13)

It is a powerful thing when a person lays down their life for family or a friend—very commendable, no doubt about it.

But God loves His enemies and Jesus died for them—

Romans 5:6-8 (NLT2)

⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners [i.e.—His enemies].

➔ Talk about Vince the 'gang-banger' at a New Year's Eve Christian skate night

Human love often needs to be *earned*—as it’s often based on performance (as when a parent’s love is based on their child’s obedience).

The problem is that—many Christians bring that concept of love into their relationship with God and begin to think that God’s love needs to be earned as well.

This causes many to think that God doesn’t love them because they have failed so badly in life and therefore haven’t *earned* His love—so how could He ever love them?!

How can He love you?—because it’s His nature to love—and to love unconditionally, regardless of how much we fail and blow it and don’t deserve it!

That is the whole message of Good Friday and the cross—that God so loved a world of sinners, failures, losers and reprobates that He sent His only begotten Son to die for them—**all because of love!**

If God commands us to love even our enemies—how much more should His love be applied to our marriages and in our relationships with our earthly families and our church families?

“I don’t know if even God’s love is enough for that!!”

One of the greatest hymns ever written on the subject of God’s love was written by Frederick M. Lehman in 1917—it’s called *“The Love of God.”*

*“The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell,
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win:
His erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin.
When years of time shall pass away and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men, who here refuse to pray, on rocks and hills and mountains call,*

*God's love so sure shall still endure, all measureless and strong:
Redeeming grace to Adam's race—the saints' and angels' song."*

The final stanza was added to it later—after it had been found scratched on the wall of a cell in an asylum by a man said to have been insane.

*"Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky."*

The man who wrote that sounds pretty sane to me!

Maybe he was considered 'crazy' for simply being a follower of Christ?!

Don't worry what the world thinks of you when you demonstrate God's love—they may call you crazy (for loving your enemies) but God calls you sons and daughters!

I really don't know who has hurt you in life—but I do know that forgiveness is necessary.

"How can I? Why should I?!"—Because of love!

God's love for you that forgave you—and now commands you to forgive those who have hurt you!

I'll close with an article that I think illustrates my point.

*"In her Holocaust memoir *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom tells how she and her family resisted the Nazis by hiding Jews in their home. They were ultimately discovered and sent to a*

concentration camp. Corrie barely survived until the end of the war; her family members died in captivity.

Seared by this terrible trial by fire, Corrie's faith in God also survived, and she spent much of her time in the post-war years traveling in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, sharing her faith in Christ.

On one occasion in 1947, while speaking in a church in Munich, she noticed a balding man in a gray overcoat near the rear of the basement room. She had been speaking on the subject of God's forgiveness, but her heart froze within her when she recognized the man. She could picture him as she had seen him so many times before, in his blue Nazi uniform with the visored cap — the cruelest of the guards at the Ravensbruck camp where Corrie had suffered the most horrible indignities, and where her own sister had died. Yet here he was, at the end of her talk, coming up the aisle toward her with his hand thrust out.

"Thank you for your fine message," he said. "How wonderful it is to know that all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

Yes, Corrie had said that. She had spoken so easily of God's forgiveness, but here was a man whom she despised and condemned with every fiber of her being. She couldn't take his hand! She couldn't extend forgiveness to this Nazi oppressor! She realized that this man didn't remember her — how could he remember one prisoner among thousands?

'You mentioned Ravensbruck,' the man continued, his hand still extended. 'I was a guard there. I'm ashamed to admit it, but it's true. But since then, I've come to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior. It has been hard for me to forgive myself for all the cruel things I did — but I know that God has forgiven me. And please, if you would, I would like to hear from your lips too that God has forgiven me.' And Corrie recorded her response in her book:

'I stood there — I whose sins had again and again been forgiven — and could not forgive. It could not have been many seconds that he stood there — hand held out — but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it. I knew that. It was as simple and as horrible as that. And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. And so, woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, and sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. 'I forgive you, brother,' I cried. 'With all my heart!'

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then”’.

Did Corrie *feel* like forgiving this man?

No, but she did it out of obedience to God—and then the feelings came!

If you wait to you *feel* like obeying God before you do it, you probably won't obey Him very often.

Understand, in the Kingdom of God (to which you belong if you're a child of God)—obedience always *precedes* feelings.

You will never know the fullness of God in your life as a Christian until you forgive those who have wronged you.

That's the message of Good Friday. That's the message of the cross. And that's the message you must take with you from tonight.

That thru the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross—God forgave you your sins against Him, and now He commands you to forgive those who have sinned against you—why?

“Because of love!”

May God give us grace to be channels of His love to the lost and broken people we come in contact with every day.

They may not want it. They probably don't deserve it, but we are commanded by Him to love them anyway—**because of love.**