

Romans 5:1-6

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[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, turn to Romans chapter 5. Romans chapter 5 is on page 942.! And for the last few weeks we've been kind of going through questions that people ask.

And we're going to finish off next week with why does God allow suffering? But tonight we're going to look at can you give me one good reason why I should believe in a God of love?

Can you give me one good reason why I should believe in a God of love? There's lots of reasons that you should believe in a God of love.

The food that you're eating today, the kind of semi-beautiful sunny day that you've had, the clothes on your back, the shelter that you'll have tonight.

The fact that we are essentially a people at peace. But sometimes I want to look at the greatest expression of God's love. The problem is when we hear the word love, it's in our culture, when they hear the word love it's the most inane word in the world.

[1 : 11] It's been butchered in so many ways by so many people, including myself. It falls off the lips of young men like saliva, doesn't it, love? It's led to, I don't know how many teenage pregnancies.

I love you, baby. It's alright. It can describe anything, can't it? From dog food to sex. It's been used as the title word for more songs probably than any other word.

She loves you. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's crying out, isn't it, for a bit of definition. John McLean, you know that funny song, American Pie? I won't sing it, but it goes like this.

The ocean parts when I walk through, and the clouds dissolve and the sky turns blue. I'm held in very great value by everyone I meet but you. Because I've used my talents as I could.

I've done some bad, I've done some good. I did a whole lot better than they thought I would. So come on and treat me like you should. Because everybody loves me, baby. What's the matter with you? Tell me, what did I do to offend you?

[2 : 17] Well, yeah. Everyone loves me, baby. What's the matter with you? Tell me, what did I do to offend you? Well, the song, nobody really knows what the song is, but it could be about American foreign policy, doesn't it?

Might be, isn't it? But it speaks, doesn't it, of the self-confidence in one's own loveliness.

Everybody loves me, baby. What's the matter with you? It spoke of one's own loveliness.

That if you didn't love me, the problem is with you. Because everybody loves me, baby. What's the matter with you? And while the song sang of such self-confidence about one's loveliness, I knew, well, we all know, it's far from the truth, that when push comes to shove, and you overstep the line in a relationship, often that friendship comes to an end, doesn't it?

A best friend can become an enemy in a matter of seconds. And go on in the verses that we read out to us earlier, in Romans chapter 5, verses 6 to 11.

God is saying, you've tried the best. Now, let me take you to the very best. Let me read you verse 8. But God shows his love for us. In a while we were still sinners.

[3 : 40] Christ died for us. If you really want me to show you how much I love you, God is saying, let me grab you by the skull, and turn you in the direction of an event that happened 2,000 years ago, because this is the best I can give you.

The love of God is not simply a line in a song. It's a love that is planted in time and place. But if you want to understand the whole notion of why Christians go on and on and on about the death of Jesus, and I will go on for the next 20 minutes, to understand the good news of the love of God, you have to understand the bad news.

It's a bit like, isn't it, if you want to see the brilliance of the stars, we know that there's no point going out now. And there's too much daylight, you can't see them. But against the blackness of the night,

I'm assuming there's no clouds and there's no haze, the glory of those stars will scream out at you, won't they?

Particularly in the country. And if you want to grasp the brilliance of Christ's love for you tonight, you will only ever understand why Christians go on and on and on about the love of Christ, when we understand what we're like.

And I'm not speaking for just one generation, I'm speaking of humanity in general. So the question is, what were we like when Christ died for us? And there's four words that describe our state before Christ.

[5 : 11] In verse 6, it's this. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Now I know it's not going to be pretty for a little while, but it's good medicine, so stick with me. Christ died for the ungodly. That is, we bore no resemblance to the God who made us.

We were ungodly. So when God looks at us, He says, you're nothing like me. What went wrong?

We were made, weren't we, Bible teaches, in the image of God. That is what is so special about human beings. Every single human being, every single one of us tonight, every single one of us in this great city, was made in the image of God.

But when God looks at us, He says, you're nothing like me. What went wrong? I'm not identifying with what I'm looking at. You are ungodly.

[6 : 10] Christ died for us when we were ungodly. We were unlike Him. The second statement describes us as powerless. It is powerless. Doesn't it? It is powerless.

For while we were still weak, that's the word there, we were weak, we were powerless. At just the right time. Powerless in two senses. If you read the whole book of Romans, you'll see that we were weak, we were powerless, in the sense that we couldn't wrestle ourselves from the judgment that is to come.

None of us can undo the damage that we've done. And the consequences that flow from it. But powerless in another sense, even when we want to do the right thing, we find ourselves doing the wrong thing.

Have you noticed that about human nature? Whether you're a Christian or not, you know that's your experience. You try to do the right thing, but you find yourself doing the wrong thing. What is going on? And you never see that more clearly than in reverse psychology.

You want to get a child to do something, and you tell them to do the opposite. And they're pretty much guaranteed to do it. You see a sign that says, wet paint, do not touch. There's a story, isn't there, that the bishop in Sydney, who was travelling on the train, he sees a sign, no spitting on the train.

[7 : 30] He's never even thought of spitting on the train before that moment. But at that point, saliva begins to build in his mouth. We've thought about it, isn't it?

It's an instinctive thing to oppose a command. Our life is one big quicksand. The more we thrash about, the more we sink. Christ died for us while we were still powerless.

Thirdly in verse 8, Christ died for us while we were still sinners. The word sin is really simple Bible word. It's a word taken, kind of, you think about archery, and it really means to miss the mark.

If the mark is bullseye, and we just never make it, we never hit that bullseye, and we fall short, that is sin. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and yet we never quite do it.

We are to love our neighbours ourselves, and we keep falling short on that. And there is no point tonight in taking pride in the fact that others might be worse sinners than you are.

[8 : 30] I'm sure they are. It doesn't matter where you are in humanity. You miss a bus by three minutes, or you miss a bus by three days.

Guess what? You missed the bus, didn't you? And you may think that some people deserve a hotter corner of hell than you, sure. But the point is, you miss a bus by three seconds, or you miss a bus by three months.

It doesn't matter, you missed the bus. You've missed the bus. And this very letter, in Paul's letter to the Romans, it says, all have sinned, every single one of us, and fallen short of the glory of God.

Christ died for us while we were still sinners, and that's all of us. And fourthly, if the word sinner doesn't ring any bells, or for you, I bet the word enemy does. Look at verse 10. For while we were enemies, Christ died for us while we were his enemies.

Every single one of us, no matter what culture we're from, knows what this word means. You might not have known what the word sinner is, but I bet you know what the word enemy means.

[9 : 44] Have you ever been so badly hurt by another human being that you wish they were dead? I have. Though the thought of them being removed from the face of this earth, it's actually quite a pleasant thought.

Well, the pain generated by another human was so great that not having them around was delightful. That was what an enemy is. And by the life that we've lived, we have turned the one person who was keeping us alive into an opponent.

And that is not only wrong, that is downright done. And that is what we've all done. That while we were all enemies, Christ died for us.

It's one thing, it's not having a human enemy. But it's quite another thing being God's enemy. Part of life is learning to live with people who are upset with us, isn't it?

That's a good part of life. Learning to live with people who are upset. If you want to try and go through life with nobody upset with you, well, good luck to you, but it won't happen. We have to learn to live with that.

[11 : 01] But we can't live with a God who is rightfully angry with us because of our behaviour. And He is right to be angry tonight. Because we have become an enemy to Him.

By simply ignoring His claim on our life, that is the background to Christ's death for us. We have all shut the door in Christ's face. And I tell you, it wasn't just for five minutes, it's lifelong.

And it wasn't an accident. It's intentional. And in spite of the hurt and the grief and the pain we have generated in the heart of God, if I can say that, in spite of the fact that we treated the most living and the most loving God worse than some mangy dog, in spite of that, Christ, the Son of God, willingly, deliberately, climbs upon that cross to die in our place for our sins.

As one Christian woman said, reflecting on when she became a Christian, she said this, you know what blew me away when I became a Christian?

It wasn't that I could be Jesus' friend, but that He was prepared to be my friend. And as I heard those words, I thought, that is right, isn't it? That is not low self-esteem, that is an honest assessment of the fact that there is nothing inherent within her that would attract God's love.

[12 : 27] It was in spite of what she was like, but more than that, Jesus wasn't prepared to stand with her as a friend, He was prepared to die for her. And that is a love that breaks all the rules.

And so when I'm at my worst, God gives me His best. And when you are at your worst, God gives you His best. And as I'm telling you that this week, I've tried to think of a story about it.

But there is no story I can tell you. There is no illustration. I've got no story. Because there's no corner of this earth, and there's no point in human history where people love their enemy in this way.

There is no story. There is no illustration. Earlier in verse 7, the Apostle Paul makes the point, very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, and for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. It's rare, isn't it? People give up their lives for other people that they respect and honour. I'd like to think if it came to it, I'd die for my wife.

[13 : 40] And I'd die for my children. Would I die for you, you love? Some of you, we don't know. I'd like to think I would.

I'd like to think that if it came down to me or you, I'd take the bullet. I'd like to think that. I'm not saying I'd do it. But would I do that for an enemy?

Let me tell you about a man called George. George is alive because his mother saved him. He's about 12 years old. He was going to the shops to buy a leather jacket for his family. Goodness, there was about 12 years for buying leather jackets for.

His two sisters were in front of him and his mother was behind him. She had just stepped off the curb. He was somewhere in the middle of the road and his mum caught out of the corner of her eye a car driving too fast that wasn't a stop.

As it turned out, it was a drunk driver and she knew that if the car kept going, her son would die. So instinctively, this mum, she leans forward, she pushes George out of the way and in the process, she gets hit by the car and she dies pretty much within an hour.

[14 : 49] That's what mothers do for their sons, isn't it? That's the depth of love that a mother has for their sons. It is within the realm of possibility that one will die for another.

You'll die for a friend or a sister or for a son. A soldier in battle throws himself on the grenade to cushion the impact and save his platoon. He'll take a bullet for his mates but the soldier would never take a bullet for his enemy.

Have you ever heard that story? I've never heard that story. You'd take the bullet for your mates but you'd never take a bullet for the enemy. You'd shoot the bullet but you don't take the bullet.

And the pattern gets broken here though. What is the worst thing that you can have in life? The worst thing that you can have in life is an enemy.

It'll keep you up all night stressing about it. What is the best thing that you can give to your life? And the two never come together apart from in one place the cross.

[16:04] While we were enemies Christ died for us. The kind of Goldberg Chopper do you remember him? Born Russian he had a kind of red birthmark on the top of his head.

He led to need the reforms in the Soviet Union. the mid to late 80s. When he did that the KGB the spy outfit that's led to lots of good spy movies trying to organise a coup to get rid of him some of you will remember it.

It was all over within a weekend. The three men who tried to kill Mikhail Gorbachev were found they were placed in front of him. I don't understand Russian but he said to them as he stared at the men who tried to kill him there will be no forgiveness.

There will be no forgiveness. And by the end of the day all three were executed. That's so different isn't it from the Lord Jesus.

When they organise a coup to overthrow him and in the midst of the nailing nails into his wrist he cries out Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And there is the difference.

[17:16] When people have been angry with me I've only ever learned to expect two kinds of responses either to be hit or in some way to be ignored. And even though God has been rightfully angry with us and well within his rights he never lashes out nor does he withdraw.

but he steps forward with the body of his son. Do you remember Billy Joel? It's best of CD it's best of Billy Joel it's always on offer at service stations all around the country isn't it?

We've all bought him for £3.99 I quite like him actually. One of his most famous songs is I Love You Just The Way You Are Do you know that? It's a great song.

You'll all go home and put it on this night won't you? It's very popular. It's a great line in that song.

And it says this I could not love you any better. I could not love you any better.

God has been singing that song from the cross for the last two thousand years. God says to you tonight I could not love you any better. I have nothing more to give you.

[18:30] Nothing nothing more precious than my son. I could not love you any more. I have nothing more left to hand over. But God's love is much bigger than that isn't it?

Bigger than just Jesus dying for sinners. It's really in the type of death that makes it so extraordinary. While we were sinners Christ died for us. I don't know if you've seen the film there's a film called The Doctors for Oldeners.

It's about a skilled surgeon. It's about a surgeon who is not really compassionate to his patients. Imagine that. A skilled surgeon who's not really compassionate to his patients but he's very good with the knife.

He discovers he's got nodules in his throat and that they are life threatening. He's now lying in a hospital bed on the other end of the scalpel. He's about to go into surgery and he's very fearful that he may not come out alive.

And one of his fellow doctors comes along and says to him he's completely just hand on his shoulder and says Bill do you want me to go with you? And quick as a flash this doctor says I don't want you to go with me.

[19:37] I want you to go instead of me. And that is exactly right. That is a smart man. I love the thought don't you? I really love it.

That God has become flesh. And he has shared my world. And he is stacked into my footsteps.

And he knows tonight. The God man in heaven knows tonight what it is to be rejected. And the God man in heaven knows what it is to be wounded and what it is to be hurt.

And to be that from an innocent point of view. He knows what it is like to be me. And he knows what it is like to be you. That is wonderful but it is the next step.

It is the fact that he dies in my place. That he takes the punishment for my sin. When I am his enemy that is what blows me away. I am sometimes asked what does it mean for Christ to die for

me.

[20 : 36] What does that mean? It is a common phrase that Christians use. It means he took the rap for you. He incurs the penalty in your place.

He is your substitute. And so I want to say to you there is one thing that you can never say from this point on. If you have never heard this before tonight then fine.

But from here on in you do not have the right to say no one loves me. Not after hearing what you have heard tonight. While we were sinners while we were enemies while we were powerless Christ died for us.

Well you don't have to wait for the last day to enjoy the love of God. God not only wants to rescue people he wants them to know that they are loved. So we're told in verse 9 since therefore we have now been justified we have been declared right with God by his blood much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life. There are a bunch of ideas in that verse which are quite hard to grasp but let me say two things.

[21 : 58] Firstly you don't have to wait till the last day when you will meet God to enjoy the love of God. But if you come to Jesus tonight you can know what God is going to say on that last day when you will meet him.

It's like you're invited to fishing you're invited to cast a line into the future and you hook the words that will leave the mouth of the judge and you reel them into the present.

And when you reel them into the present you discover that if your faith is in Jesus Christ and you have a personal relationship with him you are justified. You are declared right with God in heaven. You are treated as if you had never sinned. You are adopted into God's family. The verdict has been changed. The charges have been dropped. And the other thing here that is certain and the point here is that he is saying if I have done the hard thing, God is saying if I have done the hard thing for you, don't you think I will do the easy thing?

That is the point. The hardest thing that God has ever had to do for you, he has already done. It is behind him. The hardest thing was to let his son take the punishment for our sin while he was his enemy.

[23 : 18] But now he has done that and now that he is prepared to come and be your friend, he is saying of course I will save you, of course I will keep you. Now that you are my friend, now that you are my child, of course I will keep you to that day.

How much more will I do that? If I can do the hard thing, of course I will do the easy thing. And God tonight not only wants to save you, but he wants you to know that you are saved.

God will save you. And so I want to say to you, that is really not the kind of gift that you can throw back in the face of God. Not after encountering this type of love, a love that breaks all the rules, you see.

If you think about it, what excuses there's right that you have left, knowing that you've thumbed your nose at him? God gave you his best when you were at your worst. Think about it from God's perspective.

What excuses there's left in saying no? Because if we say no to this love, and we keep saying no, and we find ourselves saying no, no, no, all the way to our death, we will discover on the day of judgment that God is going to pour out his wrath.

[24 : 30] And when I say that, it's not that God will rant and rave, he's just going to say, please leave, you're breaking my heart. I really don't want anything to do with you anymore.

You've ignored my son. After he died for sinners, there is no forgiveness. Leave. Leave my friendship.

Leave my goodness. As I've got to tell you tonight, if you are somebody who is not a Christian, and you stay in that position, and you keep saying no to God, the earth is the best it'll ever get for you. If you're not a Christian, and you stay in that way, keeping saying no to God, the earth, well, this is the best it'll get for you. But if you're a Christian, and you get on board with this, this is the worst it'll ever get for you.

And if we say no to the love of God, and the reality is, you're going to have to say yes to his wrath. It's not like there's a third option. And so I guess tonight I'm really pleading with you.

[25 : 51] I am pleading with you, will you let God love you? It's such a funny way of putting it, isn't it? Will you let God love you?

Will you let him rescue you? Will you let him serve you? Because the funny thing about Christianity is before Jesus is your king, you have to let him be your servant.

You have to let him serve you by taking away your sins. What possible reason could you want to say no to that? Or even to postpone it? The tragic thing about this is when you say no to God, you just get good at it.

That is why very few people say yes to Jesus on their deathbed. Because we just get good at it.

Well, if you're here tonight, I would love you to say yes.

And maybe you realise I've been saying no to the love of God for too long. And I need to take the hand of Jesus and I need to make peace with him and I need to take his death which paid the penalty for my sin.

[27 : 08] And I need to live in a relationship with him on his terms because he is saviour and he is Lord. And if you think that tonight, well today is the day, why don't you cry to him now?

Why don't you cry to him now? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God. And the more that you say no to him, the better you get at it.

And the more dangerous it is. Let's pray.