

The Power of Love

Romans 13:8-10

Introduction

One writer describes the classic movie – ‘The Blob’ – as a picture of sin

In ‘The Blob’ – a meteor comes hurtling to earth from outer space and crashes in a wooded field. As it lay glowing there – a man came up to it and poked it with a stick - - - suddenly the cosmic slime moved up the stick and onto the man’s arm. The man sensing something is very wrong and begins running and screaming – trying to get this blob off his skin - - - but the harder he worked – the more the blob began to consume him – eventually he was gone and the blob was left by itself a little bigger than before

Pretty soon – the blob made its way into town and was eating some of the citizens! – showing up at movie theaters / grocery stores / etc.

The blob started out small – the first man to poke it with a stick did not feel threatened by it at all – he was just curious about it. Temptation and sin often starts in a similar manner – just one little area. We might draw right up next to it - - - We reach out to poke it – and pretty soon it is on us and won’t go away

The townspeople tried everything to get rid of the blob and destroy it - - - they bombed it / shot it / tried to destroy it with fire / electricity – but it survived everything except CO2 from fire extinguishers - - - when they sprayed it down – it became inert - - - they then safely moved it to the arctic – where it could stay frozen forever

Sin is here – and it shares traits with the blob

It looks harmless at first

But when a person is consumed by sin – all sorts of evil result

Anger / lust / greed / hatred / pride / pornography / drunkenness / / bitterness / murder / strife - - - all of these things are the evidence and manifestation of sin in our world

The Great Physician of our souls is Jesus – who came to destroy the works of the devil

I John 3:8 - ‘The Son of God appeared for this purpose that He might destroy the works of the devil.’

One of the ways He does that is by making us new creatures in Christ – being remade into His image

II Corinthians 5:17 - ‘Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.’

As Christians - - - now - instead of walking in the ways of the flesh and of the world

We see the wisdom of God's ways and seek to follow His paths

As we have been studying the book of Romans – man has a great problem – he lacks righteousness / He stands under the condemnation of God

The gospel changes both of those realities

Romans 5:1 - 'Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

We have been declared righteous thru faith in Jesus / we have peace with God / fellowship

Redemption is to lead us to walk in newness of life - - - what should that life look like?

In Romans 13:8-10 – Paul paints a portrait of what this newness of life looks like

I. Loving One's Neighbor - v. 8

Here Paul reminds us of an enduring command / a calling we have to one another in this world – that is to love one another / to love our neighbor as ourselves

I Thess. 4:9, 10 - "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you brethren to excel still more."

Taught of God - θεωδιδασκτοι - lit. God taught

This is something God teaches us to do

Andrew Young: 'Sinful human nature cannot love, or be patient, self-controlled, forgiving, or generous to those in need. God has to teach us to do these things through His Spirit.'

In our world – we have all kinds of teachers / instructors

A teacher might teach you math / literature / history

A music instructor might teach you how to sing on key / or how to play a musical instrument

When I was a teenager – one of the first songs every guitar player would learn how to play was – 'Smoke on the Water' - [kind of like Hot Cross Buns for the Recorder!]

If you met a guitar player and you said – can you play, ‘Smoke on the Water’? - - - and if he couldn’t do it

You would be like – ‘You don’t know anything about playing guitar - - - Who taught you?’

If we have been to God’s school - - - What does God teach us?

He teaches us how to love – it’s our first lesson

I John 4:7, 8 - ‘Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.’

Now that have been purchased by Jesus Christ – cleansed by His blood – what should we see? [answer: love]

Love is the sum total of the Law

When the two Russians climbed to the top of the Empire State Building – they hung a flag that said – **‘When the power of love beats the love of power - the world knows peace.’**

Love is a force in our world - - - but true love is something generated by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God’s children – and is defined for us by God’s Word /

If I were to ask you – ‘what is your favorite parable of Jesus?’
Most people would say – ‘The Good Samaritan or The Prodigal Son’

The Good Samaritan - Luke 10:25-37

This parable is found only in Luke - one of the most beloved parables of Jesus

The parable is sparked by a question given to Jesus from a lawyer

Luke 10:25-29

This man asks the question: ‘What should I do to inherit eternal life?’

Jesus points the man to the two great commandments that summarize the Law - - - love God / love neighbor

If we could do that – we’d be ok – but since the Fall – no one has ever perfectly kept the commandments [except Jesus]

R.C. Sproul: 'Jesus knew the man had not kept the Great Commandment since he got out of his bed that morning . . . because none of us have kept the Great Commandment fully from the day we were born.'

Our problem is that we fail to love God with all our heart / we fail to love our neighbor as ourselves

A proper response would be - - - Jesus – I can't do it - - - I fall short of the Law - - - what can be done for me?

But – that's not how he responds

We are told that this man wants to justify himself – v. 29

And so he asks another question: 'Who is my neighbor?'

Jesus says – 'Let me tell you a little story – a parable'

Stories played an important role in 1st century Israel - - - because they were easily remembered – and could be passed on to others

Luke 10:30-37

Jesus tells a short story

A man travelling on the road to Jericho

He's been beaten / robbed / and left half dead

Then we look at those who pass by this scene – the passersby

The first two were Jewish religious men – a priest and a Levite

We aren't specifically told why the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side

Jesus could have given us their motives [it was his story!]

Some speculate this or that – [a priest would be defiled if he touched a dead person / etc.]

The important point is – they ignored the wounded man

They don't even bother to check for a pulse

We might think of Iryna Zarutka – sitting on the metro train in Charlotte NC – [stabbed by a crazy person] surrounded by 4 different passengers who did nothing to help her – after the attack

Nobody lifted a finger on her behalf

Why didn't you call for help? / why not talk to the poor girl and tell her you're there to help?

In the Veggie Tales version of this story - - - the people passing by – they see a cucumber stuck upside down in a hole - they sing a little song to explain why they can't help – 'I'm busy – busy – shockingly busy – you've no idea how much I have to do - - - I'm much too busy for you.'

One of the things we have to realize is that - - - opportunities to love others / serve others - - - don't always show up at convenient hours of the day – or night

Paul refers in II Timothy to two different individuals that made a difference – in his latter days - - - one for good / one for ill

II Timothy was the last letter he wrote that we have in our possession [65-67 AD]

He was imprisoned at this time in Rome – shortly before his death

The first person Paul mentioned:

II Timothy 1:16-18 - 'The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me, and found me - the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day - and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.'

Onesiphorus – heard that Paul was in Rome – imprisoned - - - went looking for him – refreshed him - - - w/ food or other items

II Timothy 4:14 - 'Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.'

Our world is filled with both kinds of people

Some help / some hurt / most just pass on by

One of the remarkable things about C. S. Lewis - - - At the height of his fame - he received between 200 and 250 letters a week.

Despite this volume, he was dedicated to answering most of them personally.

One lady in America – kept up a lengthy correspondence with him - - - over 100 letters between 1950 thru his death in 1963 - - she donated them to the C.S. Lewis collection at Wheaton College – they were later published as ‘Letters to an American Lady’

Lewis could have found any number of reasons to toss these letters in the trash – without response – but he sought to encourage people in the faith

Jesus chooses a surprising character to be the hero in his story– a Samaritan

Samaritans were despised by the Jews – if you traveled thru Samaria – you would shake the dust off your feet!

When the Jews wanted to criticize Jesus

John 8:48 - "Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

The actions of this Samaritan were compassionate / selfless / and costly

He did what was needed

Jesus closes by changing the question from: ‘Who is my neighbor?’ – to rather, ‘Which one proved to be a neighbor?’

‘Go and do the same’ - - - that’s the essence of loving one’s neighbor

Ultimately – that is what God did for us at the cross

Psalm 103:13 - 'As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.'

We were in need / under condemnation of the Law / left wounded and bruised by Satan

God comes along and provides for our redemption

I John 4:10 - 'In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

II. Love and Law - vv. 9, 10

Paul says – love does not commit adultery / murder / stealing / coveting

How do you define love?

Is it some vague, sentimental, fluffy feeling that can be twisted to mean whatever you want – or – are there objective standards of love?

Is love the equivalent of being **nice**? [I Cor. 13 – ‘Love is patient, love is kind . . .]

Usually what people want you and I to believe about love – is that love means we accept all behaviors regardless

The alcoholic says, ‘If you love me – you’ll quit bugging me about my drink!’

The immoral person says – ‘If you love me – you won’t bug me about my relationship.’

But the love of the Bible has specific boundary markers or guard rails surrounding it / defining it / clarifying it

Robert Louis Cole once went out for coffee with a pastor who was experiencing a bit of a trial in his church. The minister of music had been involved in several homosexual relationships and members of the choir had taken a position that nobody would say a word to the pastor about it! They were all hoping that the situation would rectify itself.

Eventually word did get out to the pastor. He met with the minister of music who admitted the accusations. The pastor said he needed to either repent or resign. The minister of music decided he would do neither

Eventually a group from the choir approached the pastor and said: ‘You don’t understand –If we just surround him with love and understanding that will help him, and he will get rid of his problem.’

The pastor responded: ‘if you simply surround him with love and understanding and he doesn’t have to repent of his sin – he will never be able to get rid of it.’

The church went thru a rocky period – but eventually the music minister left with some of his sympathizers – and the church grew as God purified the body

The reality is that when love is violated - - - somebody gets damaged / someone is harmed

Love does not steal / kill / commit adultery / lie / etc.

Someone is being violated in those instances / someone is being cheated / abused / misused

When we are not following love as defined by Scripture – somebody gets harmed

Louise Perry has written an interesting book titled: ‘The Case Against the Sexual Revolution.’

Basically – she argues that the sexual revolution of the 60’s forward has been one big con job foisted upon women – in particular and that it’s lies are easily exposed

She is not a Christian / she is a British feminist - - - but she has stumbled across the truths of Scripture – without realizing it / or acknowledging it

One of the Lies of our world: Sex is no big deal / sex need not be restricted to marriage / we can do whatever we want – homosexuality / porn / immorality – there are many healthy ways to express your sexuality / etc.

In fact – Religion writer [NYT] Ross Douthat argues – that Christian morals in the sexual relationship - - - is a huge barrier to belief for people in today's culture

Ross Douthat: 'Since the upheaval of the 1960s, it's increasingly taken for granted by the average American or Westerner that a modern and enlightened person must reject the constraining sexual ethics of traditional religion, the prohibitions of premarital sex, divorce, homosexual relations / etc.'

The kool-aid has been passed around / the indoctrination is nearly complete

Louise Perry: 'When we attempt to disenchant sex, and so pretend that this act is neither uniquely wonderful nor uniquely violating, then there is another kind of cost. That cost falls disproportionately on women.'

i.e. – if liberty and freedom are all that we want in the sexual realm – then inevitably sex is cheapened as 'no big deal' – but that doesn't work in the real world

Louise Perry: 'Following hook-ups, women are more likely than men to experience regret, low self-esteem and mental distress.'

Louise Perry: 'We need to re-erect the social guard rails that have been torn down . . . we have to start by stating the obvious. Sex must be taken seriously. Men and women are different. Some desires are bad. Consent is not enough . . . loveless sex is not empowering. People are not products. Marriage is good.'

What are the social guard rails that have been torn down – who tore them down?
They are the principles of Scripture:

'Flee immorality / do not commit adultery' – let marriage be held in honor among all and the marriage bed undefiled

Louise Perry: 'Above all, listen to your mother . . . Until we do, each individual woman will have to learn on her own the lie of the promise of sexual liberation - the lie that tells us, that sex is freedom / liberation. It was a lie all along. It's time at last to say so.' [p. 190]

The damage and harm that sexual license has inflicted upon our culture [women and men] is real – and it was a lie all along

The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy

Jesus came to give us joy

John 15:11 - 'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.'

Love causes human beings to flourish

Love does no wrong to one's neighbor

Love reflects the holy Law of God

Robert Haldane: 'Love is here beautifully represented as a debt that is never paid. It is a debt that ever remains due.'

I John 4:11 - 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.'

Conclusion

In 1952 – a woman named Florence Chadwick waded into the water off the coast of Catalina Island. She intended to swim the distance of the channel from the island to the coast of California [about 20 miles]. Long distance swimming was not something new to her – she was the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions.

The water was pretty cold that day – the fog was so thick she could barely see the boats in her party. Several times sharks had to be driven away with a rifle. She swam more than fifteen hours before she asked to be taken out of the water. Her trainer tried to encourage her since they were so close to land – but when she looked out – all she could see was fog. So – she quit – just a half mile away from her goal.

Sometimes we experience a spiritual fog in this world – we forget why we do what we do

We encounter discouraging events – there are sharks in the water! / we get weary!

But God remains at our side, 'Keep going - - - Keep on loving your neighbor /love God / do the things I taught you to do.' - - - 'Great is your reward in heaven'