

All You Need is Love – Part 10

by Rev. Robert Griffith

Last week we began looking at this amazing progression in Paul's references to love in his letter to the Ephesians. In chapter one we see that God sovereignly chooses us. God created us *in* love - *for* love. Our primary purpose in life is to have a loving relationship with God and then, in turn, with those around us. Then in chapter two of Ephesians, we see that God's sovereign love is not just His choosing of us; it's not just His affection for us; it is also His power within us. His love impacts us and does something to us, in us and through us. It affects our being. **You cannot be truly impacted by the love of God and remain the same.** I had the following statement on my desk for many years to remind me of this truth:

God sees all that you *should* be ...
God sees all that you *could* be ...
But God loves you, *just as you are*.

Religion is very concerned about what you should be and many churches are passionate to tell you what you could be, but God simply comes to you in love, just as you are. However, when that amazing truth, God's amazing grace, really sinks in and God's unconditional love impacts you deep down in your soul, then a transformation will begin and it continues and intensifies day by day. The more you drink in the unconditional love and grace of God – the more you embrace the empowering presence of God, then the more you become all that you could be and all that you should be! This is the gospel! This is the good news in Jesus Christ. This is why we are still here!

Ok. So we move on now in this natural progression of love which Paul gives us in Ephesians, as we enter chapter three. Now that we have been chosen and loved by God and this love has affected us in life-changing ways, *this* is where we are to stay at all times - rooted and established or grounded in that love. We don't move on from that reality. We don't grow out of our need for God's love. We don't 'mature' into some place in our relationship with God where we don't need His empowering presence and love. We need to be rooted and grounded in what God has done for us every day and it's out of *that* reality that we then minister and do things for God and with God in the world around us. Let's read from verse 16 of chapter 3:

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:16-19)

When I first embraced my salvation personally and started living for God, I read a lot of books and heard a lot of teaching about what I needed to now do as a new believer and what I needed to be grounded in so I could be strong and effective for God. I had quite a list! Now these were very helpful things. I was told to read the Bible and pray and commit to a church family and give my money, time and gifts and share my faith with others and support overseas missionaries ... to name just a few!

All these things were important and all the advice I was given came with love and the best of intentions. However, someone forgot to tell me the most important thing. Something vitally important and foundational was missing, or so well-disguised that I have no recollection of it. None of those books said that before you do anything else by way of Christian activity or service or spiritual discipline – first and foremost, you must be rooted and grounded in God's love. *That* is the foundation. *There* is where you need to drop anchor FIRST. You need to grow deep roots into God's love before you do anything else. Everything must flow out of that reservoir of God's love in your life.

You see friends, I was one of millions of disciples who were not really told the most important truth of all, which is that all of those wonderful acts of worship, all of those precious spiritual disciplines and Christian activity and service are actually meant to be the *fruit* of something else far more foundational, far more important. None of those things are worth anything unless they are the fruit of God's empowering presence, God's amazing grace, God's overwhelming, lavish love in our lives. Our life must be FIRST established in God and His finished work in Christ, before we can participate in life with our worship, good works or service.

I've noticed in Sydney over recent years, as available land for building is swallowed up, that they are using a lot of swamp land to build on. Now this can be done - if it's done correctly. They build it all up to get it out of the swamp, but first, they must drill down through the mud and shifting sand until they hit rock and then they put multiple steel cylinders down and fill them with concrete, just like they are doing right now in the middle of the Clarence river for the new Harwood Bridge. The house or school or commercial building can then be built on that bedrock foundation.

Now, you can imagine them drilling, can't you? 'Have we hit rock yet?'... 'Have we hit rock yet?' 'Yes? Good, now we can build.' But until they hit that bedrock, any construction would be futile, or worse than that, the building may go ahead and look great for a while until one day the pressure on that structure is just too great and the lack of foundation will result in a disaster.

In Jesus' name, hear God's Word to us again today friends: God's love is that bedrock in our lives, our ministries, our congregations and the entire Church across the world. We should always be asking as we build our lives and help Jesus build His church: 'Have we hit rock yet? Have we hit God's love yet? Do we understand God's love yet? Have we been affected by God's love yet? Have we felt God's love yet? Do we really know the magnitude of God's love yet? Do those around us and in our families and those we really care about know God's love yet?'

Until we are overwhelmed by, saturated in, and firmly rooted in and grounded upon the love of God, we actually haven't hit rock yet and any building we do without that foundation will be careless and doomed to topple eventually. It may topple when we are young as the pressures of our peer group lead us astray. It may topple in middle age when the pressures of family and work reach their peak. It may topple in our twilight years when death approaches and we are finally forced to examine the foundation of our faith and the reality of our personal relationship with God. God's love for us in Christ is the bedrock of our lives and everything else is built upon and flows from that love.

So let me ask you now, have you drilled down past your own efforts, past your successes and failures, to reach the bedrock of God's love? Have you drilled down past your own commitments, past your own holiness, your own righteousness and, for that matter, your own sin and found the rock of God's love and grace yet? So many Christians were never told just how important this is. So many have built their lives on faulty foundations and now we have all kinds of bad attitudes and practices and wonky theology across the church and an image of a Christian which the world does not find attractive at all ... because too many people never drilled far enough to hit that bedrock of gospel truth.

My passion, my calling, my life's work, my deepest desire is that we do this right for the next generation of believers and the only way that will happen is for the gospel of God's amazing grace and love to be preached like the Apostle Paul preached it, over and over and over and over again.

Still today, millions of new believers are given a list of behaviours and disciplines which they need to embrace before they are treated like loved and accepted members of the Church. That's not the Christian faith - that's religion and God hates religion with a passion! What God wants is a free relationship of love and trust and the more we drink in God's unconditional love, the more empowered we will be to live the life God is calling us to live. A free relationship of love - not one we buy with our obedience, or our confession, or our repentance, or our diligent service - but a radically free relationship. How free? Let me tell you how radically free God's love is to you today.

I want you to picture Jesus hanging on the cross, near death, writhing in agony, spiritually crushed by the weight of the sin of the world ... and then the most extraordinary thing happens. With His dying breath, Jesus has a conversation with the thief on the next cross.

This brief snapshot at the end of Jesus' earthly life showcases the radical gospel of God's grace and love in just one paragraph – one picture – one brief encounter with one broken human being. Did this thief tick any of the boxes which religion requires? Did he repent? Did he confess his sins? Was he baptised? Did he study his Bible? Did he pray, visit the sick, give a tenth of his income or serve in a ministry? Did he show any fruit in his life which would honour God or deem him worthy of the name disciple of Christ? No! He spent his life stealing from people and didn't give God or anyone anything but contempt.

But then, in his last minutes of life, he simply encounters the love of God in a guy on the next cross and asks the most arrogant, infuriating question a religious person would ever want to hear leave the mouth of this scumbag ... he turned to Jesus and said, "*Will you remember me?*" And then from the next cross comes the essence of our whole faith, the gospel, the bedrock of the Church, the simplicity of the good news: *Love* then turns His bloodied, tortured face towards this criminal who deserves everything he's getting and says, "*Today, you will be with me in paradise.*"

Brothers and sisters, that encounter between Jesus and the thief on the cross was recorded and preserved by the Holy Spirit so that in every generation since that day, enlightened children of God could be given the most powerful religion-busting tool in our possession and the most simple and life-changing story to tell when people ask us what the Church is all about.

That is what the church which *Jesus* is building is all about. Unbridled grace and love! Tragically, that's not what many man-made institutions called 'church' are about and that's why so many people have not yet been introduced to the Jesus whom that thief encountered on his deathbed. They have been introduced to a counterfeit Jesus or no Jesus at all. How do I know that? It's simple really. Look at the shrinking church across our nation!

Now I can provide you with a truck-load of research, studies, surveys and analysis from the experts as to why this is the case, particularly in the western world. I can give you another two truck-loads of books on evangelism and church growth and every formula under the sun to grow the church. I am embarrassed to admit that I have actually wasted a lot of time wading through the contents of those books many years ago. But then the scales fell from my eyes as I began to see what God sees.

The mission of Christ, in and through the Church, is so very, very simple and the only reason we have complicated it and have truck-loads of solutions which don't work is because we refuse to accept just how simple it is.

The Church needs to meet and fall in love with the *real* Jesus again. The Church needs to encounter the same Jesus that thief encountered on the cross. At that point, we will once again have the attention of the world in the most positive, life-changing way, because we will once again be rooted and established in love, not law; relationship, not religion; Jesus Christ, not a facsimile of Him which repels people, but the *real* Jesus Who always draws people to Himself and it is that Jesus Who promised to build His Church, and that's exactly what He's doing.

As that happens, the world will no longer be talking about Royal Commissions, child abuse in the Church, or the irrelevance of the Christian faith to our post-modern, post-Christian, 'enlightened' society. The world will once again be talking about these Christians who are known by their love, their acceptance, their grace and the power and presence of God in their lives. Christ crucified, will be Christ glorified and then the promise of Christ to build a Church against which even the gates of hell itself cannot prevail, will become a reality.

You and I get to be part of that revolution as we, and those to whom we minister, teach and encourage, become rooted and grounded in the life-changing, nation-transforming love of God.

Lets pray.

Holy Spirit of God I ask again that You would show us our hearts. Reveal our foundation and show us if we have built our lives, our faith, our theology or our Church and its ministries on anything other than the bedrock of Your amazing grace and love in Christ.

Show us if we have built our life on somebody else's good ideas. We may have built our life on the foundation of a parent's expectations. We may have built our life on the expectations of society or the Church or friends, rather than on the bedrock of Your love and grace.

Lord show us our hearts today and into this coming week and give us the courage to let You re-establish us, renew our foundations, so that our house, our life and then by extension, the life of the Church, is built upon the rock of Your love and the simplicity and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in Whose name we pray and for Whose glory we live, Amen.