

God's Contagious Love Romans 5:6-8

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Romans 5:6-8** where we read the definitive statement of God's love displayed in a single act in time.

Please stand as we read this passage.

I am a visual learner. I can hear something or even read something and it takes me a fair amount of mental gymnastics before I can get my mind around it to understand it. At times I feel quite confused. On the other hand, if you show me something I catch on a bit faster. Once I get it in my head how something is supposed to be done, then I can relax a bit and enjoy the learning process.

In the past I have done some PowerPoint presentations and have been able to do the basics. Today I wanted to add something that I hope will turn out, something new that I have learned. I went to a web page that gave directions on how to add it in the presentation, but just the printed word didn't make a lot of sense. I'd follow the steps but it didn't turn out. I was eventually able to figure out what I wanted to do, but the scrolling feature only went through half of the song. So I did some more digging and found a webpage with a video clip of the step to step actions necessary to get the effect I wanted.

The video was very helpful even though the demonstration was using a previous version of PowerPoint, I could work through the screens to get the desired look.

Reading instructions makes me go through mental gymnastics, but eventually my thick skull will catch on. Seeing something and then repeating it is much easier for me.

Maybe you're like me and it takes what Dezzie Arnez would say to Lucy after some antics landed

her in hot water "you got some 'splainin to do" to help fully understand a topic. But once it's been thoroughly or properly explained, the proverbial light bulb comes on and an expression of joy comes over your face as you exclaim that you now get it! It's the Ah ha moment.

It can be that way with the gospel as well. Maybe early on when you first heard the gospel you thought it was some strange idea, another language or something equivalent to quantum physics or some other obscure science. Eventually it became clear to you and you understood it.

What we are going to discuss today may be of review for many. That's okay. Review is good. It helps reinforce what you already know and believe.

For others, it may be just the thing to help clear the fog away. Maybe there is still a little confusion about some of this. A little clarification is just what the doctor ordered to help the haze dissipate so that the core or central idea of Christianity become clearer and better defined.

Still, for someone today it will be like getting hit with a 2X4 or struck by lightning. You have heard Christianity boiled down to its core and now you get it. It makes sense. What you now know and understand will have a transforming impact both now and for eternity. Those who hear for the first time with understanding the core truths of Christianity how God has an amazing love for you will want to embrace what it has to offer.

Our passage boiled down is simply this: God loves you. Some people will argue that it isn't so, they think they have proof based on their own experience where they believe God abandoned them or rejected them in some way or they cite the many atrocities around the world. Others make it into something more complex than it is, believing there must be contingencies and strings attached: God only loves me if I am a good person or go to church or give to

help the needy. Still others think it only happens to certain people who deserve it. Many ignore it and reject it. None of that erases the truth that God really does love you.

Francis Chan in his book titled *Crazy Love* writes “It’s crazy, if you think about it. The God of the universe – the Creator of nitrogen and pine needles, galaxies and E-minor – loves us with a radical, unconditional, self-sacrificing love...God is calling you to a passionate love relationship with Himself...and once you encounter His love, you will never be the same.”

But before we get to that we need to understand a problem. The problem is defined for us in verse 8. We are all sinners. Throughout Scripture that concept has been made abundantly clear to us. We mess up – a lot. Sometimes they’re really big things like murder or stealing a car. However, many times we don’t consider them so big – insignificant like cheating on a test or our taxes; telling Mom a little lie to get away with breaking the window or why we didn’t clean our room or telling the boss why we didn’t get a project done by the deadline. We think the situation and our actions are justified. The bottom line is, we want to save our skin. So we sin just a little. And what’s the big deal if no one gets hurt?

The problem of sin as the Bible sees it is this: it doesn’t matter whether they are big or small, what matters is that we are all guilty. We are all sinners and sin requires justice.

The name Richard Speck doesn’t mean much to me. After all I was only 8 when he was in the news in 1966. He was considered one of the first mass murderers when in that year he assaulted and murdered eight young nurses in Chicago. His actions traumatized the nation for months. Every day the cry went up for him to pay for his crimes.

He was tried, convicted and locked up in Stateville Prison in Joliet, IL with eight consecutive life sentences. For a time people were at ease believing that justice had won out. 25 years later he died in prison and an ugly chapter in U.S. criminal history was over, or so they thought.

Several years after his death, a videotape surfaced showing how he spent the final years of his life living like a king in prison. He had free access to drugs and alcohol whenever he wanted. He had numerous lovers who would come in and out of his cell at will. There in the middle of the prison he had a little country club life.

A news reporter got his hands on the video and went public with it and people were outraged all over again. It was clear to everyone that he had not made appropriate payment for his crimes. Our minds demand justice, that’s why events like 9/11 or Benghazi or Boston have such a strong public outcry. We aren’t satisfied until an appropriate payment has been made in full.

On one hand we demand justice for infractions of the law. On the other hand if it’s us, we want leniency. It doesn’t matter how many times Lindsay Lohan has broken probation, she wants out of rehab. It doesn’t matter that O.J. Simpson was caught breaking into a hotel room to steal his own sports memorabilia, he thinks he should be released from prison.

And when it comes to committing sin against a holy and just God we want Him to go easy on us, look the other way. We might even tell Him that if He doesn’t punish our sin, we’ll never do it again. When the law has been broken there must be punishment, some payment made for restitution.

But just what is appropriate payment? To put it into a theological term we call it **atonement**. It’s essentially the same idea. *Atonement is satisfying the demands of justice when a crime has been*

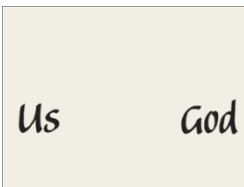
committed. Because we demand justice when some crime has been made we carry an understanding of this concept in our heads. Whatever infraction of the law has been committed we want justice. That's atonement – satisfying the demands of justice when a crime has been committed.

A core understanding of Christianity is that we are all sinners before God, we have broken His law and we deserve His justice.

Here is a second core principle in Christianity. It's a word you are familiar with – **substitution**. We know it pretty well. It's when the teacher is sick and someone else comes in to take her place or when someone goes in to pinch hit or pinch run for another player. It is simply *taking the place of another*.

Combining the two terms we come up with **substitutionary atonement**. That means *somebody taking the place of someone else and satisfying the demands of justice for a crime that has been committed*.

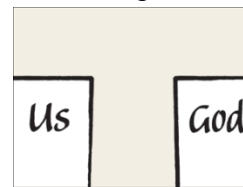
When God created Adam and Eve He told them that He had breathed life into them and told them to make all kinds of decisions. The greatest thing He told them wasn't to stay away from the tree in the center of the garden, it was that He loved them and wanted to have an ongoing relationship with them. We see this in a simple illustration. First there was God who then created us. There was a perfect relationship in the beginning.



Now as God and man conversed God told them that He was holy and just and if they ever decided to violate his laws this wonderful gift of Life that He breathed into them was going to end. He told them

that if they ever disobeyed Him they would die, both physically and spiritually. Up to that point nothing had ever died, but He made it very clear to them. Death would be the penalty.

One day Adam and Eve were confronted by Satan who convinced them that God didn't really love them as much as He said He did and persuaded them to disobey God. This brought an immediate separation between them and God. They knew it and God knew it. This separation caused by sin created a great chasm between God and us.



(Include sin in diagram)

They were guilty after only committing one sin. God didn't give them a second chance because maybe they didn't fully understand the consequences or because that vile creature had deluded them. It wasn't the fruit that made them sinners now separated from God, it was their disobedience.

I remember grocery shopping with my Mom when I was pretty young. We were at the A&P store in Pontiac. Going down the produce aisle I was enticed by the display of red, juicy grape. So I snatched one and popped it in my mouth. At that moment I felt horrible inside. Guilty.

Because of Adam and Eve's one sin all creation shares that separation from God. But here's the thing. Remember moments ago I said that God is love and He loves you unconditionally? Because of His love, He did not strike Adam and Eve dead on the spot. But neither does He just walk away from our sin either. He doesn't shake His finger at us and scold us and tell us to do better the next time or else. He not only loves, He is also just and holy and sin must be paid for. We must pay for our rebellion and resistance to Him. God takes sin seriously. He

judged them as guilty and condemned them for their rebellion.

From our perspective God has a dilemma. On the one hand He is absolutely holy and just. On the other hand he is a loving God whose heart is filled with compassion for this man and woman and indeed for all who would follow them. The thought of them trying to atone for their own sin the rest of their lives and then for all eternity in hell must have broken the heart of God. Even with our absolute best efforts we can never live up to His perfect standard or work our way back to Him.

Here's a sobering thought. We try desperately to get back to God on our own. Everything falls short.



Being good

Going to church faithfully

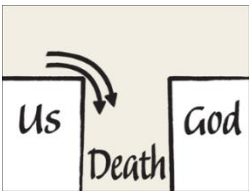
Giving to charity

Helping others

These are all noble and good things.

You name it, we try every way possible to eradicate this guilty feeling, but it all falls short.

To make matters worse, God's nature demands that He punish us for our disobedience. That punishment is death – separation from God for all eternity.



This picture is hopeless. We are helpless in ourselves to do anything about our sin condition so that we can get to God. But the good news is that the situation moved God to provide an alternate way so that sin could be legitimately paid for without the sinner having to spend eternity in hell for his or her

sin **AND** without God's holiness being compromised.

God does something very unusual even unexpected right in front of Adam and Eve. **Genesis 3:21** explains that God made garments of skin to cover their shame and nakedness. Now where did he get those skins? God took an animal and killed it in front of them. Up to that point there had never been any death of any kind. This animal sacrifice is a big deal. It is our first glimpse at the arrangement God was making to provide sinners with an alternative to have their sin atoned. Through this act of sacrifice it's as if God were saying to them "In order for your sinfulness to be covered, in order for your wrongdoings to be atoned for, an innocent party is going to have to bear the penalty that was rightfully yours." Now that doesn't mean that we can just go sin as we please because someone else will bear our penalty. And I can just see PETA out there picketing God that it's not fair to kill an innocent animal.

What God did is a sneak preview of this idea of substitutionary atonement arranged by Him for an innocent party to stand in the place of the sinner and absorb the penalty due to the sinner, thereby satisfying the demands of justice and the guilty party is set free and at the same time exercising His love for the sinner.

This same picture is seen later on in Exodus when God told the Israelites that in order to be spared from the angel of death they had to slaughter the blood of a perfect, innocent lamb and put the blood on the door post of their home. God had to punish sin, but He gave an escape plan through the blood.

How many firstborn are here today? Imagine if you were living in Egypt at the time as an Israelite and you as the first born watched your Dad go out to the sheep pen and pick out the prize lamb, bring it up to the house where the sheep were butchered. Just as your Dad is about to thrust the knife into the lamb

you ask why he's going to kill the best lamb of the flock. Imagine if your Dad says "well son, it's the lamb or you. Sin is going to be paid for tonight and if we don't sacrifice the lamb to take our place God will take you instead." I think you would probably help. "Smear a little more there." That night the lambs died and the sons went free.

God is telling us that sin is serious and when it's atonement time sin gets paid for one way or another. Substitutionary atonement is seen here when an innocent lamb takes the place of man's wrongdoing so that the guilty parties go free.

Later on God would give the Israelites a sacrificial system with the same principle. When you sinned an animal was sacrificed for that sin.

The prophet Isaiah then spoke about the substitutionary atonement of the Messiah in **Isaiah 53**. **"But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was buried for our iniquities. And the Lord will lay upon Him the iniquity of us all."** This is saying that someday, somewhere God would send a human sacrifice to make an ultimate atonement for the sins of the world.

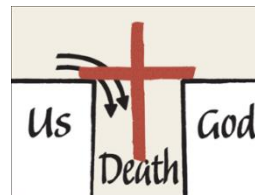
Several hundred years later Jesus was born and we hear the words of John the Baptist exclaim about Jesus **"Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."** In effect John was saying that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. He would be God's ultimate provision for atonement. He's the unblemished lamb that will be offered as the ultimate substitute for sin. All the previous animal sacrifices were just pictures of the one true Lamb of God who would be offered for sin.

When Jesus began to teach He said the same thing about Himself. He came to die for the sins of mankind, not just for the good or popular or religious – for all of them.

If you think that Adam and Eve cringed when they witnessed death on their behalf; if you think there was tremendous grief when families woke up the morning following the visit by the angel of death only to see their first born child cold and lifeless, think what heaven must have felt when the sinless Son of God was slain for our sin. I put Him there. Instead of praise, He was punished. Instead of singing, there was taunting. Instead of bowing before Him in worship, He bowed before their whips. He died in our place so that we could live. When He said "It is finished" His substitutionary atonement was complete.

Romans 5:8 doesn't say that God loved the sinner so an animal died to take our place. It says God loved the sinner and Christ died for us.

Remember, we have made many attempts to reconcile our broken relationship with God through our own feeble efforts. Everything has fallen short and in the end the only reward is death. It's a dismal state to be in, but because Jesus died in our place, taking our sin upon Himself, His cross has now bridged the gap that once was unattainable. *The distance was too great for us, but it was not too great for God.* Nothing is impossible with God. The cross bridged the separation making it now possible for man to once again have a relationship with God.



I think man stumbles over the cross. The price seems too high. Guilty sinners don't deserve a substitute like the one God provided. What did the sinless Jesus do to deserve dying in our place? We ought to pay for our own sins. We deserve it. After all we were the ones who did the sinning. We broke His rules. We lied. We cheated. We murdered.

We hated. We are sinners to the core and deserve to suffer for our own sins. We were the ones who rebelled, not God, but He paid our price. Why would He do such a thing? Why would He bear the brunt of the punishment we deserved? The answer to those questions is simply found in the wonderful words of **John 3:16** **“For God so loved the world.”** They are also the words of our text **“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, through for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

He provided the substitutionary atonement because He loves us, when we were His enemies. That doesn't compute with us very well. It would make more sense and we could understand it if the text said that God's Son died for the good people, the ones who are religious. But that's the point. There isn't a one of us who is good. We are all sinful according to **Romans 3:10 and 23**.

None are righteous.

All have sinned.

That God sent His Son to die for us ought to tell us just how much we matter to Him. It ought to tell us the degree to which He loves us and the extent to which He was willing to go to show us how much He loves us.

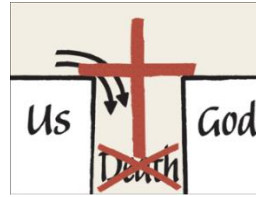
His love for us will never fail.

His love for us will never change.

His love for us will never end.

Even though we ought to pay for our sins, God loved us so much He sent His only Son to take our place, to pay the death penalty we should have paid, making a substitutionary atonement on our behalf.

In effect He wiped out death at the cross.



Stop and chew on that for a moment. That's the core of Christianity – Jesus taking our place, satisfying the demands of justice so guilty parties like you and me can go free. We can be forgiven and stand blameless before God on the merits of the Lamb of God who paid our price for sin.

Every other religious system is built around a core principle that is different from Christianity. They have some kind of performance expectation. We could illustrate it with one simple word – **DO**. People attempt to do enough good things to earn their way back to God - give more, do more, pray harder. The problem is we never know when we have done enough. The Bible makes clear that all our efforts fall short of what God expects if we attempt this method. All those efforts still leave the person wondering if it's been enough, if the good outweighs the bad.

Christianity is the only faith system whose core idea is based on substitutionary atonement where guilty sinners go free on the merits of the provision God made through Jesus who paid the price on our behalf. A simple word describes this faith - **DONE**. God's incredible, unconditional, all inclusive love ought to fire us up. It ought to make the love He has for us contagious. It is the kind of love that many around us are wanting. It is the kind of love that we should be willing to share with them.

One day the reality of the judgment is going to hit. From afar we may think we have a shot at making God's favor on our own.

Quite a few years ago I got into a conversation with a friend about sports and we were discussing if we had a chance to go up against some pros which

sport would we choose. He played some football in High school and was pretty fast with good hands and he thought he could hold his own against the pros – maybe if it were the Lions. I chose basketball.

Watching from the stands or even from the couch is one thing, it doesn't look so hard, but up close it's a whole other story. We would quickly realize how deluded we are.

We may think that we can hold our own against God because we've lived a pretty good life, but when we get up close and realize how awesome and absolutely holy He is, any vestige of hope we had in our own righteousness would quickly collapse as we stand there utterly guilty of sin.

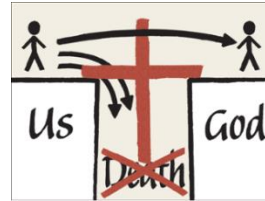
One day the prophet Isaiah was ushered into the presence of God through a vision. Here's a guy who lived for God, spoke for God, and loved God. He quickly realized that next to God's holiness he was absolutely destitute and devoid of any righteousness of his own. Anything we try to do will only fall short of God's standard.

The Bible says that between now and the Judgment Day we have a decision to make. We can either continue down the path of our effort or we can choose God's path. If we choose our own path, we'll wind up finding out that it wasn't ever enough and we'll be forever separated from God for eternity in a real place called hell. It's your choice.

The other option is the path God made available, the one that includes the substitutionary atonement of His Son Jesus on the cross. Jesus took our place and we, the guilty party, can be forgiven and set free, adopted into God's forever family where we will enjoy a renewed relationship with Him. Again it's your choice.

All you have to do is humble yourself, ask forgiveness for the sin you have committed against

Him, a holy God, believe that your sin was paid for on the cross and ask Him to lead your life now and into the future.



In this illustration we see the individual has made a choice to accept God's provision and begin a relationship with Him through His Son and because of His Son.

This is the core of Christianity that separates it from all other religions – this idea of substitutionary atonement. Christ willingly took the weight of our sin on Himself so we could be free. It's not just enough to acknowledge what He did as a good thing and say we understand it. You could write the words **"I UNDERSTAND IT"** above the word US on your diagram. Understanding the core of the message of God's love and grace (grace by the way is God giving us what we don't deserve) is only part of the picture. There is another important part to the equation. We can fully understand the message of salvation but wind up in hell forever. Merely understanding isn't enough. It would be like standing on the left of our diagram and just nodding our head in agreement. Understanding is a good first step, but we're still on the wrong side of the chasm. It doesn't get us over to God's side. It doesn't put us in a relationship with Him.

The Bible says in **John 1:12** **"But as many as received Him (Jesus), to them gave He power (the right) to become the sons of God even to those who believe on His name."**

Believe + Receive = Become

If you have believed and received you have become a child of God, you have crossed over the bridge

provided for by Christ to enjoy a personal relationship with God.

On your diagram you can write the words “**I RECEIVED IT**” above the word God.

If you have done that in the past, you can rejoice in this relationship and thank God daily for the free gift of salvation He has given you. Our joy should spill over into wanting to tell others that they can have the same joy in a newfound relationship with God. Continue to develop a contagious faith, share God’s tremendous gift with others.

If this is something you have never done, today can be the beginning of a brand new relationship with God who is wildly in love with you. The proof of His love is seen in the cross where He gave the very best He had, His Son, to die in your place so that you can have eternal life.

The Bible very simply says that **“if you have the Son, you have life. If you don’t have the Son of God, you don’t have life.”**

John MacArthur has written “The God who hates every sinful thought and every sinful deed nevertheless loves sinners who think and do those things, even while they are still hopelessly enmeshed in their sin...they are still the objects of God’s redeeming love. Because of our faith in Christ we are forever linked to God by His love.”

Even though we may not fully understand His contagious love for us we need to believe and receive it.

The choice is yours. Whatever you choose, understand that it is eternal.

(Keith Green song – *Altar Call*)