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Ephesians 2:4  
His Great Love

We're going to continue with our study of the book of Ephesians today. We have made it to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 4. You can flip there as we review a bit of what we talked about last week.

Last week we looked at the first three verses of chapter 2 where Paul describes the condition of the Adamic man. The natural man. Here is where Paul gives us the bad news about where we started in the sight of God by nature. But, as we said, he describes the deplorable state of the Adamic man ONLY so that He can then go on to describe the "great love with which He loved us". That's in our verse for today. And I'm going to spend more than one week doing my best to describe this great love.

But again, you will never comprehend the greatness of this love unless you first comprehend the greatness of the otherness of Christ. In other words, you will never know the reality of God's love until you first have a confrontation with the Spirit of Truth regarding the reality that you and I were first, **by nature**, children of wrath.

As we mentioned last week, the first three Scriptures don't say that you were headed towards death. It says you **were** dead – spiritually dead. It doesn't say that you had some struggles with trespass and sin. It calls you dead in trespass and sin. It doesn't say you had some worldliness issues. It says you walked entirely according to the course of the world, the age of the old creation. It doesn't say that you were tempted by Satan, but that he was your prince, and in fact, you gave him expression in the earth. It doesn't say that you had some hang-ups with lust, it says you "conducted yourself in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind. It doesn't say that you did some things deserving of wrath, it said that you were **by nature** a child of wrath.

So here we have Paul taking great care to describe the dead and depraved condition of the Adamic man. And we need to see that first. We need to understand that we don't bring our best to God and ask him to use it. We bring ourselves as a living sacrifice, that we can bear His death and walk in His life.

Listen, this goes right back to the tabernacle. You can't know the good news of what is beyond the veil unless you first face the brazen altar. There is an order to knowing the salvation of our God. God made them take specific animals of specific ages with specific perfections to the altar. A male lamb, for instance, one year old, without spot or blemish. But were any of them good enough to live? No, they were all only good enough to die.

Everything that was brought to that altar yes, it represented Christ, but it represented what was being put to death through the death of Christ. It represented us in our trespass and sin. He didn't need to die apart from taking us upon Himself. So you can't just look at the lambs and bulls and pigeons that died there and just say "oh well, those were all just representative of Jesus". No, those were the

animals that the people of Israel laid their hands upon that died representing them in all of their trespass and sin, in all of their fallenness and deadness. This was God putting death to death. These were the animals that brought them into a type and shadow of God's righteous judgment, so that they could be accepted in the Person of the High Priest.

Did any of those animals make it past the brazen altar? How many lambs did you find walking around by the incense altar? Did you ever hear of a bull knocking over the showbread? Why not? Because all flesh died at that altar, only the blood went in. Maybe you can't see how significant that is this morning. But please see at least this: that unless we realize that the death that we are must face death in the Lamb, then we will never truly comprehend how God has loved us in His Son.

Unless we understand that we have nothing to offer Him except the sweet aroma of our nothingness, so that it can be Christ all and in all, then we will never know His great love. Because His great love NEVER ONE TIME let one of those animals live. And that is the kind of love that the adamic man wants. We want God to look down on that fuzzy little lamb on the altar and say "wow, isn't he cute. Look at that little button nose and those puppy dog eyes....tell ya what, lets let this one live". No friends, that is not the love of God. Do you see?

The love of God has to do with putting away, destroying, removing what is contrary to Him, so that He could fill you with something, really someONE, that is acceptable to Him. Not the destruction of your soul, but the destruction of the nature that fills your soul. The natural man. And then the filling of that soul with the very Person of His Son. His love is far greater than giving you some THING or status that makes you acceptable. No, His love is giving you the very Son of His love as your life. "Accepted IN the Beloved".

**Eph 1:6** He made us accepted in the Beloved.

**Col 1:13** He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

Do you realize what this means? Can you see that this is the greatest possible way that God could ever love a human being. Some people hear what I preach and at first think "man, he's saying that God wants me to die. I thought God loved me". Well, its BECAUSE God wants to love you that he wants you to be crucified with Christ. Its because God wants to lavish His love in the Person of Jesus Christ on you that you must be baptized into His death. Because unless you are baptized into His death then you can never walk in the newness of His life. Can you hear that?

Do you understand that there is no possible way for God to love you more than to give you – not a justified status – but the very Life of the justified Son. "The One who knew no sin but became sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." This is so important. Listen, God didn't just give you righteousness, He gave you His Son as your righteousness. I'd call that love. God didn't just give you some eternal Life. He gave you His Son as your eternal Life. I'd call that love. God did not just give you a relationship with Him. He gave you Christ's relationship with His Father. "I am in Father, you are in Me, and I am in you." UNREAL!! I'd call that love.

Listen to me. The Love of God is not something God gives you because of Christ. The love of God IS Christ. And so Paul takes great care in describing our adamic condition because we must come to know that it needed to be destroyed and not refined. It didn't need a nature enhancement. Spiritual botox. It needed a nature replacement.

So lets read our verse for today, but lets back up and start from the beginning of the chapter.

**Eph 2:1** And you ~~He made alive~~, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

It is my opinion that there is an incredible amount of confusion regarding the love of God in the body of Christ. When most people think of the love of God, they naturally conjure up in their mind what they know or want to know love to be. Once again, apart from the Spirit revealing Truth to us, we create God in our own image. Love is generally understood to be an emotional fondness or passion that he has for people. It is a feeling. It is way that God feels.

And then if you ask a person, how do you know that God loves you, most will point to something in the natural creation as the proof of God's love. Somebody will point to the sunshine and say – that is how I know God loves me. He gave us the beautiful sun. Or another will say "because he provides food on my table every night". Another will say "because I'm 68 and still healthy as a horse". Ok...that's fine. I'm not going to argue that those are good things, and that each of them ultimately have their source in God and His good creation.

But let me ask you a question. What about the person born blind from his mother's womb that has never seen the sun? Does God not love him? Worse than that, what about the person who's been in some dungeon somewhere for the last 40 years for a crime he didn't commit and never will see the sun. Does God not love him? How about the starving North Korean who doesn't have food on his plate every night, or even every week? Is that the measure of God's love for that unlucky soul. What about the person who never sees 68, but dies slowly of cancer at the age of 28 and leaves four kids. Where's the love of God in that?

Now I'm not trying to be melodramatic or confusing. Nor am I denying that there is something of God's kindness and provision and care seen in every ray of sun and bite of food for our bodies. I am just trying to define His great love in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Scripture speaks of the love of God IN CHRIST. I am just hoping to expand our view of His love beyond what we may have seen. The love of God is not conditional, and it is not really proven in the natural realm. The love of God is eternal and unconditional, and is proven in and as the cross of Jesus Christ. And I will go on to describe exactly what I mean by that.

But before I do, I am going to say to you something that I have said over a hundred times. Unless we are willing before the Lord to trade in our imagination, we will never share His view of Truth. We have all imagined the love of God. We have all

conjured up thoughts and ideas as to its nature and character and reality. That is not bad, its just not the mind of Christ. **And wherever we hold on to our thoughts, that is where He is not free to show us His.** I'd like to talk to you plainly about the love of God. But I'd also like us to put our guard down from around our pet doctrines so that the Spirit has room in our hearts to show us the Person who is the love of God. His view is always far greater than our own, if we will only trust Him to bring us to that view.

The love of God has to do with putting death to death, and giving us the Person of Life to fill our soul.

I was meeting with somebody this week and while we were drinking some coffee he was telling me that as he listened to what I was saying last week about the condition of the Adamic man, and the need to put death to death, it dawned on him that right there is the love of God. I wanted to do a back-flip. Yes, that is exactly right. The love of God is not some nebulous feeling of goodwill. It is not just an ill-defined emotion or passionate sentiment. **It is Person who is given to you as death, and who, in His resurrection, becomes your Life, and righteousness, and freedom, and truth, and wisdom, and redemption, and unity, and peace, and forgiveness, and reconciliation, and joy, etc. These are not things that he gives you because he loves you. These are things that He is given to you in the Person of love.**

When are we going to realize that the love of God is not anything other than the Person of Jesus Christ given to the soul of man. How could God possibly love you any more than to give you Christ. I'm not just saying that God loved you and therefore He gave you Christ. I'm saying that the love of God IS CHRIST. There is a distinction. And it is a distinction that the New Testament bears out repeatedly – starting with everyone's favorite verse, John 3:16.

**Joh 3:16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God "so" loved the word. The Greek word "so" here is not a word that measure's quantity, but rather quality. In other words. Its not "God so much loved the world", but "God, in this manner, loved the world". Look it up. The word "so" there is the Greek word "houto" (long o) and means "in this manner, thusly, in this way, of this fashion". What's my point? My point is that the love of God wasn't just the emotion that led God to give His Son. The love of God WAS the giving of His Son. The giving of a Son by whom we could die, and in Whom we could live.

**1Jo 4:9** In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

Just like my friend said in the coffee shop – God loved the world by offering us a baptism into the death of His Son, a burial with Him, that we might then have Him as our resurrection and our life. We could walk in the newness of life. The love of God is a Person poured out into the hearts of man unto the displacement of what was already there.

Now I know that this confuses before it brings light. Truth is always that way. God never shows up to add on to what you already know. He shows up to replace what you think you know with the true knowledge of Himself as it is given by the Spirit.

Sometimes I say it like this – God never appears without his flint knife, ready to circumcise more of the strongholds of our mind, the lofty thoughts that has raised up against the true knowledge of Him.

So this confuses before it calms. It disrupts before it settles. It is not uncommon, it may even be necessary, for people to go through a season where they question what they have thought about the love of God. I have had to walk through that myself. I remember when the Lord began to deal with my heart about how He desires an increase of Christ in my soul. Not a quantitative increase, but an increased expression or manifestation. I remember when He started showing me that “in my flesh dwells no good thing”. I remember when I faced the reality for the first time that “I had been crucified with Christ”, and that it was “no longer I that lived, but Christ that lived in me”. That I had been baptized into His death”. And it raised all sorts of questions in my heart.

I remember it raising the question – “God, do you really love me? Or do you just love Jesus? Am I just a means to an end for you? Am I just a way for you to get an increased expression of your son? Do you even love me? I thought you loved me just the way I was? I thought created me just the way you wanted me?”.

Now please listen to me very carefully right now. God does love you – exceedingly and abundantly beyond what you could ask or think. There is, as our verse says a “Great love with which He loved us”. Its far greater than the human mind can even conjure up. In fact, the love of God for you in Christ must be revealed by the Spirit or it will never be touched by the carnal mind. And yet...first there must be a willingness of the heart to exchange the natural minded, man-made image of His love for the truth of this love as it is in Christ.

As strange as this might sound, I believe it is a healthy sign of the Spirit working in a heart when a person asks some of these questions. Those questions would not even come up in your heart if you hadn't allowed the Spirit of God some room to question and confront some of our carnal presuppositions and definitions. So, as painful as it may be to walk through the questions and confusion about the love of God, it is a sign of growth. Do you know what is NOT a sign of growth? Do you know what is a sign of spiritual complacency? When a person is content to “believe” and insist upon his or her own version of spiritual reality without ever falling to their face and saying “God, do I even understand anything of this at all”.

So questions arise. Not just about the love of God, but about everything. Most often, first we build our theologies and doctrines and dogmas, then the Lord comes to replace them with Himself. God shows up with His sword. Not necessarily because they were wrong, just simply because they were not Him. Do you want a doctrine of love? Or do you want to be rooted and grounded in the Person of love. Do you want to know **that** perfect love casts out fear? Or do you want the Person of perfect love to become the end of your fear.

Friends, do you know that so many of our questions and confusion will never be answered by God because they don't even make sense. Can you hear what I'm saying? Our questions are so often born of darkness, and they're not answered in the light, they simply disappear in the light. If your question itself is darkness, it doesn't warrant an answer. It just fails to exist in the light of His face, the light of His truth.

Its like a person going into a perfectly dark and perfectly empty room and demanding to know the color of the couch. "God, tell me what color my couch is!". "God, I'm going to pray and fast and seek you until you tell me what color my couch is!" "God I'm not giving up until you show me the couch and I can see its color". And then finally the light goes on in the room and reveals that there is no couch there at all. Light didn't answer his question, it just showed his question to be born out of darkness. Light showed that his question didn't even make sense. It had no answer. There was no way to answer it, it had to be destroyed by the light.

So much of our questions and confusion is like that. We are demanding that God answer our questions and confusion about things that don't even exist in His view. We have our doctrines and dogmas that we are certain God wants to defend, and we are praying that he would teach us more about them and show them to our neighbors. And all God is really trying to do is shine the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And sometimes that will answer your question, and sometimes that will dissolve your question. And more often, I have found that my questions dissolve in His appearing because they were born out of darkness.

Now listen to me. I can tell you something very real and very personal. All of my questions about the love of God for me, for the world, for the sinner and the saved, all of those questions and confusion were like a man demanding to know the color of a couch that doesn't exist. Its not that God doesn't love. Oh His love is so far greater than my imagination could ever envision. Its just that his love was not there for me to define by what I thought I knew and wanted and had read. His love was predestined, pre-packaged, and given in and as the Person of Jesus Christ. And my measure of truly knowing the love of God corresponds directly to the measure that the Person of Jesus Christ has been revealed by His Spirit to my soul.

I hope you can hear what I'm saying. I'm not saying that the love of God isn't real. I couldn't be saying anything further from that. I'm simply saying that if I demand it to be a couch in an empty room because that's what I want, that's what I heard, that is my felt need, then I will never let Him show me what it really is, Who it really is, and how it is infinitely more real and more satisfying than my carnal dream.

I mentioned this once before. We are all familiar with the verse "God is love". Its a verse that even non-Christians like to quote for various reasons. But the problem with that verse is that we all approach that verse thinking that we know what love is and then we define God according to our definition of love. We say, "well, I know what love is, and so if God is love, then God must be like this, and do that, and feel this". And so **rather than allowing Him to be the definition of love, we have defined Him by our definition of love.**

Its kindof like the example of faulty thinking that is often used in logic classes. Perhaps you've heard this: "If God is love, and love is blind, and Ray Charles is blind, then Ray Charles must be God.". Its not quite that bad, but its along those same lines.

And so, getting back into our verses for today, the reason that Paul deals with "His great love" right here in verse four is because **our understanding of His love is directly proportional to our understand of our need.** I'll try to explain what I mean, and then we'll end with this for this week and get more into it next time.

Your understanding of His love is directly proportional to your understanding of your need. You see, if you understand yourself to be a person who struggles with sin, then the love of God for you in Christ will only be the forgiveness of some sins. But if you understand yourself to be what he describes in verses 1-3 then love will take on an entirely different reality.

In other words, if you know yourself to be dead in trespass and sin, living in a dead realm, under the power of the enemy, giving his kingdom expression, conducting yourself according to the lusts of the flesh, and in all things seeking to fulfill the lusts of the flesh and the carnal mind, and even by nature a child of wrath...well then, the love of God has to be God's grand solution to **all of that**. It has to be both the destruction and removal of all of that, and the replacement of it with something that is life rather than death, righteousness rather than sin, the power of an indestructible life rather than the prince of the power of the air, the fruit of the Spirit rather than the lusts of the flesh, and partaking of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3) rather than by nature children of wrath.

Do you see what I mean when I say that your comprehension of His great love begins with a greater comprehension of your natural condition. You cannot comprehend the solution until you have had His view of the problem. You cannot see the reconciliation until you have started with His view of the enmity. You will never understand the nature of His love until you see the nature that first had to be put away.

And that is exactly why Paul introduces God's great love by first describing the condition of the Adamic man. Love then becomes not just something God feels, but something God gives as the only remedy to this dreadful and hostile situation. And the love then that He gives cannot be a what, it has to be a Who. If it were a what, it would be some THING that could fix you. No, that's impossible. But if God's love is a Who, then it is some ONE that can live in you. "Not I, but Christ who lives in me".