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His Great Love pt 2

We're going to continue our study in the book of Ephesians today. I was out of town last week, but the previous week we were looking in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 4 dealing specifically with this phrase "His great love". Why don't we just read the first four verses of Ephesians 2 to refresh our memory and we'll take it from there.

Eph 2:1 And you, 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,

Verse four ends right in the middle of a sentence, but we're going to stop reading there for now. This "great love" is what I want to look at again today. The great love with which He loved us. The following few verses go on to describe the nature and experience of His great love. But we'll get more into that soon.

If you'll recall from a couple weeks ago, I closed by saying that our comprehension of His great love corresponds to our Spirit-given view of our great need. In other words, your understanding of His love is directly proportional to your understanding of your need. If you understand yourself to be a person who struggles with sin, then the love of God for you in Christ will have to do with 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.

So 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.

This is 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 come to share 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.

So the love of God is the great Solution to the condition that Paul describes in verses 1 – 3 of Ephesians chapter 2. And that solution is a Person. And that Person is given to you as Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn't give you a solution. Jesus Christ IS the Solution that is given to you. In other words, Jesus is the life, the righteousness, the spirit, the new mind, the new nature, etc., that you required. He Himself is our peace with God. More than that He is the death that ends what you could never end, and then the life that grants what you could never find. Christ is the love of God.

It might be helpful if I just back up a bit and talk a little about the word love. As always, this spiritual word has its understanding bound up with the Person who is the sum of all things Spiritual. Christ is the Father's understanding of all spiritual things, and therefore to understanding anything spiritual, we must understand it in the person or "face" of Jesus Christ.

But by way of contrast, let's look at love as it is understood by the natural mind. Love to the natural mind is primarily an emotion of the soul that has to do with a fondness or desire or longing or attachment or affection for something. We love things that we think are good or are gain to us in one way or another. Even though that may take some of the "magic" out of love, it really is pretty much that simple in the heart of the adamic man. The reason we love things, according to our most familiar definitions, is because of what we gain by them or the pleasure that we take in them. And then love becomes an action, a verb, whenever we act on those emotions.

Now I don't suppose I have to prove this, but just think of something in the natural realm. Something other than your kids. It seems to me that perhaps, in the case of children, natural love can be elevated to something slightly more than desire for self gain, although not always. There can be, it seems to me, something in a parent's love for their child that is a better reflection of the nature of God's love. Not a good picture, but a better one. But think of something else. Ice-cream, football, sunshine, chicken-noodle soup, a house, a car, a friend, walks on the beach...whatever. Why do you love them? We feel certain ways about them because of what they offer us. And then action flows out of the emotion. We prove we love ice-cream by how much we eat. We prove we love this friend by how much we call them. We prove we love our car by how much we clean it. Whatever.

And I'm not trying to say that all of that is worthless. It has its place in the realm in which it belongs. But I will say that it is not really what the term "love" has to do with in the Bible. And it is not really the nature or reality of God's love for us. Once again, because this is how we love, we project OUR understanding of love onto God, rather than let Him show us the reality of His great love. In other words, we think that God's love for us is like our love – a fondness, an attraction, a longing for the purpose of self-gain. And that is why that understanding often leads to condemnation on the one hand and complacency or pride on the other. Condemnation to those who are certain that they do not deserve the fondness, attraction and affection of God. Complacency and pride to those who are quite convinced that they do.

I want to challenge our understanding of love again this morning. I taught on this quite a while back, but I am able to see it even more clearly now. What I'm sharing may not be new words, but the reality has sharpened in focus and I want to try to describe what I've come to see about the love of God. And, like I always say, you

must be willing to let go of some of your thoughts about spiritual things before God has room in your heart to show you His.

Biblically speaking, love is not just a fondness and attachment to people or things unto personal gain. Nor is it the nice things done for those purposes, or nice things said because of that fondness. That is not the nature of God's love for us. And it is not the nature of our love for God. Let me say it as plainly as I can. Feeling, doing, and saying nice things because of an emotional desire for something is not God's understanding of love.

That is how the natural mind defines love. And that is why the natural mind is so offended when we read in the Bible God doing things that seem to contradict our notion of love. We define love according to our own hearts, then we read the Bible and have to write books and commentaries that explain these "difficult passages" and how they still line up with what we know love to be.

Now, before I go any further, let me reassure you that I know the love of God to be real and powerful and beyond comprehension. It is greater, not lesser, than the natural mind's concept. So you can let your guard down. I'm not leading you to a place where I'm going to conclude by saying – therefore God doesn't love you. No. I'm leading to a place where we will trade in the imagination for the Truth – a far better love.

How many people have you heard in your life that have read the Bible, or looked at world circumstances and tragedies, and used their natural mind to form a conclusion about the love of God? It doesn't take very long in reading the Bible before you see God doing things and speaking in ways that, in some way or another, go against our concept of what love is. Adam kicked out of the garden and cursed for one screw-up. Cain rejected, Ham rejected, Ishmael rejected, Esau rejected. Then you see nations rejected, cut off, cast out, and killed. You see the entire world flooded and destroyed – all but one man and His boat. You see Abraham's seed conquering nations, burning cities, killing all that have breath. And its not long before the "love = niceness" definition doesn't quite fit. "I thought God was a God of love."

And then you turn to New Testament, and you find Jesus calling Pharisees hypocrites, broods of vipers, white washed tombs. You see him turning over tables, whipping cattle, and telling a Gentile woman that it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to dogs. At one point he says "do not throw your pearls to swine, they will only trample them under foot and then turn on you". In another place he says of the Pharisees "leave them alone, they are the blind leading the blind". As I heard one pastor say one time – "that's not even Christian!"

And this is why I said a few weeks ago that love can never be defined by works. But works can be the outworking of love. In other words, you can't look at a work and say "there is some love". You must first know the reality of love, and then you might see and comprehend some works of love.

We must first know what love is, WHO love is, and how it works. Then we can understand the things that flow out from love. Love can never be defined by what we think is nice. You can't look at a work and say – "wow, that was really love". How could you possibly know that? Do you realize how many so-called "loving things" are done by dead religions and spiritually dead humans all day long who busy themselves with things done in the name of love. Do you know how many so-called

loving things are done by Christians far more out of insecurity, a need for self-affirmation, a sense of spiritual maturity, then out of the love of God working in their soul. We have to stop judging love by works, and start judging works by love.

What is love? Love, in its essence, is not taking things unto ourselves because of fondness, attraction, affection, or beauty. Love is really the giving, sharing, outpouring of life. And specifically, biblically speaking, the nature and reality of God's love is the giving/sharing/outpouring of His very Life in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the sharing of His life with those who would receive it, live by it, and thus cease to live by their own. Love on God's part is offering us the great exchange of His Life for our living death. Love on our part to God is accepting that offer – losing our life to find His.

And as I said last time, I don't simply mean that God's emotions compelled him to share His life. **I mean that the sharing of His Life in Christ Jesus is precisely what His love is.** In other words, its not as much that God felt certain feelings for you, therefore He gave you Jesus. Its that the love of God given to you IS Christ Jesus.

And that is what we looked at last time in John 3:16 which reads, quite literally, "for God **in this manner** loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.

1Jo 3:16 In this we have known the love *of God*, because He laid down His life for us

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

And here is where we need to step back and let the Lord show us a greater view of His love. We need to step back from how we have defined love and therefore, unknowingly, defined God. Love is far more than just an emotion with God. Not just an emotion that motivates Him. Try to set that aside for a bit. Love is really what God is and what He does. That is why Scripture says "God is love". God is, by nature, one that seeks to lavish Himself, pour out Himself, share Himself, give Himself, to those who will receive Him. And yet, you cannot receive this love without first walking through the door that has blood on it. This love, which is the granting of His life, requires the loss of your own. It cannot be otherwise. Jesus says it over and over again.

God's love for us is an invitation into a full participation of His life through His death. It is granting us the newness of life through baptism into death. It is offering us Himself as our resurrection, when we come unto His crucifixion. God's love is the outpouring, giving, sharing of His Son with us, but the price on that gift is the loss of all that stands opposed to it.

Love, from God's perspective, is the full and unhindered giving of Himself, the giving of His life, and nature and glory in and through the cross – and therefore the necessary rejection and destruction of everything else. It is both an offer and a rejection. It is a destruction and a new creation. It is a death and a resurrection. A judgment and complete liberation.

I one time said it like this. How did God love you? He killed you and gave you the life of His Son. He loved you by offering you a death you couldn't die. He loved you

by crucifying you with His Son and causing that Son to be your life. And the natural mind says "WAIT!!...I thought you said He loved me. He wouldn't reject me and kill me if He loved me!" But see, that is where we go so wrong. He **couldn't** truly love you without crucifying you with Christ. **RIGHT THERE is the love of God made manifest. He takes away what you were so that He can bring you into the experience of all that He is.**

I know that may be hard to hear. I know that may sound funny, but its better than the alternative. And the reason that we reject it is because, at a heart level, we disagree with Paul's assessment of the natural man in Ephesians 2:1-3. This is what I've been trying to get at for several weeks. We don't see our need like Paul saw it. We don't see ourselves as dead, enemies, vessels of the enemy, children of wrath by nature. This is why I said that our view of His love corresponds to our view of our need. We read right over these first three verses as though they are talking about somebody else. But it is talking about you and I by nature. Not something we did, but something we are. Not a struggle with naughtiness, but something that God could not look upon.

We like to think of God as being quite fond of us as we are by nature. We like to think of Him forgiving the bad parts, keeping the good and just making it better. We say things like that all the time. "God loves you just the way you are". "God meets you where you are". Well, its true that God meets you where you are, but that is so that He can kill you. I say that jokingly, but its really true. He meets you where you are so that He can take you where He is, but the ladder from one realm to the other is death, burial, and resurrection.

He meets you where you are with His cross, because in order to love you he must remove from you all that is horrible and dead and deceived and harmful and in the way of good. And this IS the manifestation of His great love. **His love could never leave you as you are. His love is far greater than that. Love conforms you to His image by conforming you to His death.**

We misunderstand Him and try to make him like us. We say "God hates the sin but loves the sinner". And though there is some truth in that statement, what we usually fail to see is that the cross puts away "the old man together with his deeds" (Col. 3:9), or "the old man together with his lusts" (Eph. 4:22). In other words, the cross removes both the sins and the sinner and makes us into a new creation where it is now Christ all and in all. This is how we are loved of God.

The measure of God's love is the measure of Christ. He is the width and the breadth, and the height and the depth of God's love. Christ is the One in whom we are accepted of God. "Accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6), "translated into the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13). And it is only in the blindness of the adamic mind that we demand God love us in any other way. We demand God love us just as we are. Friends, he did something so much better than that! He didn't just tolerate or learn to stomach what you are by nature, He gave you the very life, glory, Person, and relationship of His Son. What greater love could there be than that. That's not just a feeling He has. That is a Person He has given. The great love of God is Christ given to the human soul.

The only question, as always, is whether we have come to see as He sees. The fact of the matter is that we, by new birth, have already made this great exchange – death for life. We have already received the love of God as the Person of Jesus

Christ. He is our life. We have died and our life is hidden with Christ in God. And yet, in the darkness of the unrenewed mind we demand he love something that, in reality, no longer exists. We are not even the person that we are demanding Him to love. That person has been crucified with Christ. We are a new creation in Christ. One new man where Christ is all and in all.

Let me try to say it another way. The love of God for you is an incredible, unimaginable offer to lose your life at the cross, and find Christ as your life. It is God's grace...the gracious gift of a death that you could not find. The gift of a death, burial, and resurrection that are all Christ. The death of His Son. The burial of His Son. And the Life of His Son as your resurrection from among the dead.

And so you begin to understand something of the nature of love. This love involves both a rejection and an acceptance. It involves a division. It involves calling one thing dead and calling another thing alive. It involves the putting away of the first and the establishing of the second. This love involves the death of the old and the replacement with the new. And then you can look again at those strange but familiar stories of the Bible and see them again for the first time.

You look at them again and realize that God has always been showing the same love. A love that has to destroy in order to make new. A love that has to judge in order to accept. A love that divides in order to make one. This is a love whereby God has rejected what is dead, and brought us into Him who is alive.

And you see this love being demonstrated and testified to in the stories of Cain and Ishmael and Esau. Not the individuals, God is no respecter of persons, of individual persons here. No. You see a love being demonstrated whereby he rejects one seed and invites us to live by another. He rejects one kingdom, and desires to translate us into another. A love that removes from a land everything that is contrary to His seed, in order that that seed may be all and in all.

You see a love that rejects Saul as king because he refused to agree with God as to what was condemned. Saul tried to keep the best of the first in the place of the second. And not just Saul. Abraham says "oh that Ishmael might live before you. Laban says "oh take my daughter Leah instead of Rachel". Esau cries "but I am the first, and Jacob is the second". Joseph tells Jacob "Father, you crossed your hands and are giving the second born the inheritance".

You see Jesus' harsh words and righteous indignation were spoken against those who called darkness light and evil good. You see that the most loving thing to do was to pronounce condemnation – not because He was condemning them in heart or in word, but because they stood condemned of God, even as He said in John chapter 3

Joh 3:17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is **condemned already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil

And when you begin to see the nature of this love, then you can begin to judge works according to love...and not try to judge love according to works. In other words, understanding something of love, you can see how all that God has ever done

and said and offered and destroyed and cut off has always and forever been a manifestation of the nature of love. A love that rejects what is not Christ, only so that He can lavish Christ upon any that would call on Him.

The love of God is the Person of Christ, the Life of Christ being given to you. And that Person is not a supplement to the natural man. That Person is the loving destruction and end to all that Paul describes in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 – 3. The end of death. The end of trespass and sin. The end of enmity. The end of being vessels of evil, children of wrath by nature. But that is because this great love is a chance to lose your life and find His. This great love is a bloody door, where you walk in, but He walks out. As we will go on to see in the following verses, this love is where you, being baptized into His death, can not be made alive with Him, raised with Him, and seated with Him in the heavens – dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Amen.