

SERIES ON THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

Sermon #4

Ephesians 2:1-10

12, 1984

February

GOD'S AMAZING LOVE

L. Dwight Custis

In our Sunday services, we are currently considering the doctrines of grace. That is simply another title for the doctrine of salvation. And I have been seeking to emphasize with you from the Word of God that it is really not possible for us to understand the doctrine of salvation, the doctrines of grace, unless we know something about God. That is the reason I am spending time teaching some of the attributes of God.

For the past two Sundays we have looked at what the Scriptures have to say about the sovereignty of God, and about the righteousness of God. In looking at God's sovereignty, we saw that He exercises absolute authority over creation, and that His sovereignty also extends to every aspect of salvation. So often we are quick to recognize that God is sovereign in creation, that God is sovereign in the events of our lives, that God sovereignly guides us and protects us and uses us, but, somehow, we have gotten to the place where we exclude God from all, or at least part, of the work of salvation. But the Word of God makes it clear that our God is sovereign in everything that has to do with salvation. It was within the sovereign rights of God to determine whether or not there would even be any salvation for sinners. It was also within His rights to determine who would be saved. All of this, and a great deal more, is included in our Bibles concerning the sovereignty of God.

Now when we think of the righteousness of God, this means that, as we come to an understanding of the doctrine of salvation and possibly run

into some things that are different from the way we would have worked out the great plan of redemption, yet God, because He is righteous, is never sinful. He is never unjust in what He does. And so He is perfectly righteous in everything that has to do with salvation, including the facts that there is salvation, how we are to be saved, and who is to be saved.

I think it was last week we had occasion just to refer to those great verses in Romans 1:16 and 17 where Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed . . ." You see, if there had been any way in which the righteousness of God had been violated by the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, then Paul could not have said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." He was unashamed of the Gospel of Christ

Doctrines of Grace -- #4
Page 2

because in the Gospel the righteousness of God has been revealed. So it was right for God to choose certain people to be saved. It was right that human works should not be a condition for salvation. It was right that salvation should not be by man's will, but by the drawing and constraining grace and love of God.

Now there is another aspect of the nature of God that we need to consider if we are to understand the doctrines of grace. Not only is God sovereignly omnipotent, and not only is He righteous in all that He does, but we need to know about His love. And this is the characteristic of God I want to direct your attention to today. When you consider who God is--that He is absolutely righteous, and that He is absolutely sovereign--and then you consider the sinful condition in the heart of man, you must recognize that there is only one reason that God could possibly provide salvation for sinful men. That is because of His love. God was not moved to salvation because of anything meritorious in the hearts of men, but His own heart was moved with love toward sinners.

Some who have written on the attributes of God refer to the benevolent characteristics of God. By this they would include God's grace, His mercy, His lovingkindness, His goodness, His longsuffering, His patience--all of these which are a manifestation of the grace of God. These are the characteristics of God which cause Him to seek the blessing and the happiness of His creatures. And God's love is perfectly consistent with His sovereignty and His righteousness. You

see, one attribute of God never works against another attribute of God. The sovereignty and righteousness of God could very well strike, could I say, terror into the hearts of men if we did not also know that God is a God of love. If He simply acted toward us in righteousness, giving us what we deserve, then there would be no hope for any person on the face of the earth. And because He is sovereign, then, of course, He could execute judgment in the way that He sees fit. But love is such a major part of God's nature that the Apostle John twice said, in First John, chapter 4, verses 8 and 16, that "God is love." If there is one attribute that really characterizes God it is His love. The words to that Gospel song which we sometimes sing are certainly true, "Love found a way to redeem my soul, O praise His holy name!"

Now there are many passages of Scripture that I could have taken for my text today, but I felt directed by the Spirit of God to speak to you from Ephesians chapter 2. There are five things that Paul said in this passage about the love of God which I want you to see. And these are the five things: First of all, the fact of His love. Secondly, the depth of His love. Third, the work of His love. Fourth, the extent of His love. And, finally, the sufficiency of His love.

I. THE FACT OF HIS LOVE

First of all, the fact of His love.

Now suppose that you were reading the Bible for the first time and you were trying to learn about God (which, of course, is the most important thing that anybody can do when they come to the Word of God). You would find, and it is emphasized here in this passage of Scripture, that it is true that God loves men. And the glory of this truth is that it is this righteous, sovereign God Who has expressed His love to sinners. Now if you have your Bible open to Ephesians 2, I want you to look at the contrast that is introduced at the beginning of the fourth

Doctrines of Grace -- #4

Page 3

verse. The Apostle Paul in verses one, two, and three, has given us a true picture of the hearts of men--of your heart, and my heart, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. And he has shown in that passage our hopeless condition, that we not only walk according to the course of this age in which we live, but we are by nature the children of wrath and under the dominion of Satan. Paul has given us in these three verses just about as complete a picture as you can find any place in the Word of God of the desperate need and the sinful condition and the hopeless nature of man. And then he came to that glorious contrast in

verse four when he said, "But God . . ."

I want you to think for just a moment about those words, "But God." It is God he was talking about. It is God Who is rich in mercy. It is God Who has exercised His great love. It is God Who has done something about the sinful condition of men. This is the great truth of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Man in himself is hopeless. Man is unable and unwilling to turn to God. But God has done something! And God has done it because of "His great love wherewith He loved us."

Now let me remind you of some other passages of Scripture where you see this same thing. Think, for example, of a verse that all of us know: John 3:16. Let me read it to you, thinking of this same emphasis: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . ." You see, when you are thinking of who God is, and that it is God Who has taken action about sin, and has provided salvation, then this throws the whole picture of salvation into perspective so that you can see it as it actually is. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

Romans chapter 5 and verse 8 says, "But God commendeth his love toward us . . ." Think of it! Perhaps you are like I am: I never did sit down to memorize John 3:16 and Romans 5:8; I just heard these verses over and over again until I have memorized them by hearing them. Possibly that is true with you. But sometimes the verses that we know the best are the verses that we have never really been impressed with the way we should. It is God Who has given proof of His love in that He has given us His Son.

Second Thessalonians 2:16 says, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us." Every one of us needs to take these verses and to think about them until we are overwhelmed with the fact that God would love us. And, of course, the longer we are saved and the more we understand about our hearts, the greater will be our amazement that God would express His love for us, and, in His wonderful grace, send the Lord Jesus Christ to die for us.

In that same book of 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3 and verse 5, Paul put this in the form of a prayer: "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." He was praying this for believers. We have experienced the love of God, but we do not understand the love of God the way we need to understand it. So here he was praying that the Lord would make the love of God mean more to them than it had ever meant before: "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ." The only thing, apparently, according to these words of Paul, that can really give us patience in waiting for the Lord

Jesus Christ in going through all the trials and testings that we may experience here on earth, is in knowing that God loves us.

Doctrines of Grace -- #4

Page 4

First John, chapter 3, verse 1, is a verse that I am sure most of you know as well: "Behold," the aged Apostle John said, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Does it cause you to marvel and to praise and to worship God that you are His child? Or has this become such a commonplace truth that your heart is not really moved by it anymore? Here is John--and we know that John wrote his epistles late in life when he was very likely the only surviving apostle--and what do you find? Well, we find him reveling in the love of God, amazed at this late period in his life, that God would ever condescend to love a sinner like he was. And not only to love him, a sinner, but to bring him into His family. There really is nothing that is quite as amazing as the love of God.

II. THE DEPTH OF HIS LOVE

All right, secondly, let us look at what the Apostle Paul had to say here about the depth of the love of God.

In the prayer that comes at the end of chapter three in Ephesians where Paul was speaking of the love of Christ, he said, beginning with the last part of verse 17, "that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Now when you talk about the love of Christ, or the love of God, you, of course, are talking about the same love. We are rooted and grounded in love--and the Apostle Paul was telling the Ephesians that he was praying that they would know the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, of that love. Let us think for just a moment about the depth of the love of God. You will see it in Ephesians 2:4, 5a. What does it say? "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins. . . ." The depth of the love of God is indicated by the fact that He loved us when we were dead in sins. He did not just love us after we were saved, but while we were still in our sins. And this is something that should cause us to marvel even more at the love of God: the depth of His love.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah, chapter 31 and verse 3, Jeremiah touched upon this. He said, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with

loving-kindness have I drawn thee." So not only has the Lord's love been upon His people from the time of birth, in spite of their depraved condition, but from all eternity the Lord has set His love upon those whom He has chosen for salvation. And He said, "With lovingkindness have I drawn thee." The hymn writer expressed it this way:

He saw me ruined in the fall,
Yet loved me notwithstanding all,
And saved me from my lost estate,
His lovingkindness is so great.

Turn back to Romans chapter 5 and you will see three verses in that passage which again are expressive of the amazing depth of the love of God. In verse 6, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." In verse 8, "But God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In verse 10, "For if, when we were enemies, we were

Doctrines of Grace -- #4

Page 5

reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." So, when we were without strength, while we were yet sinners, when we were enemies, we were the recipients of this amazing love of God. This is why the Apostle Paul said that it was because of "His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins."

III. THE WORK OF HIS LOVE

Now let us consider the work of His love. The truths related to the love of God, as seen in our text, should make us marvel more and more at all that we have in Christ. And I hope that they really move your own heart as you think of what God has done for us because of His great love for us "when we were dead in sins."

But what was accomplished for us by the death of Christ?

Notice what is stated in Ephesians 2, verses 5 and 6: He, that is God, "hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

You see, we were dead in trespasses and sins--and there is not a single thing that a dead person can do to help himself. And a person who is spiritually dead cannot do anything about his salvation. He cannot contribute to it in any way. But God, in His wonderful grace, and because of His great love, has quickened us, has made us alive. He has

raised us up together with Christ, and He has made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ. And therefore, this means, as difficult as it may be for us to understand that when the Lord Jesus Christ died and was raised from the dead, we died and were raised with Him. When He ascended, we ascended with Him. And when He was seated at the Father's right hand, so were we! So we see the work of His love in these amazing words. He has done for us what we could never have done for ourselves, and He has done a work for us that you and I would never have thought to ask Him to do. We do not believe them because we can understand what all of this means, but we believe them because they are in Scripture. This is what God has done because of His love for us. The love of God is a distinguishing love. He uses this word over and over again. Paul did not say that God did this in Christ for all man, but that He did it for us, the people of God. This is a work which God has done in our behalf. It is not a work that we could ever have done for ourselves--quicken, raised, and seated with Christ. This is what God has done for us because of His great love for us. This is His work: He has quickened us, He has saved us, He has redeemed us. And all because of His love.

IV. THE EXTENT OF HIS LOVE

But fourthly, let us look at the extent of His love. This is in the seventh verse.

This verse always makes me think of Dr. Chafer and the days when I was in seminary. He loved this verse. And you could be sure that if, in any class, you got to Ephesians 2:7, you would be stuck there for the rest of the hour. Once he was there it seemed that he just could not get beyond this. And he would emphasize with us that, when we think of what the Lord has already done for us, we need to realize that this is only the beginning! He has done all that He has done for us

Doctrines of Grace -- #4

Page 6

in order that "in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

One reason that we need to know and to love the word "grace" in this life is because we are going to continue to experience the riches of God's grace throughout all eternity. So many times people will say in conversation, "You know, I wonder what we are going to do when we get to heaven." We have some answers to that question in different parts of the Bible. We are going to see some answers to that in our Tuesday class in the book of The Revelation. You can be sure that we are not

going to be just idly sitting around, strumming on harps, and wishing that we had a little bit more to do. But let me suggest something to you: What we need to be asking is not what we are going to do when we get to heaven, but what is the Lord going to do when we get to heaven. You see, that is the glory of this verse. Paul has been telling us not what we did to contribute to our salvation, but what God has done. And now he is telling us that through eternity, just as God has been doing things for us here, He is going to continue to do things for us. And just as we've been the recipients of His love and His grace here, that is never going to come to an end: "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Oh, the Father has been infinitely kind to us, has He not, in not dealing with us after our sin, not rewarding us according to our iniquities, in removing them as far as the east is from the west. God has been infinitely patient with us! How many times we stumble and fall and grieve Him and disobey Him. At times we do not behave at all like the children of God. And yet God in His mercy and His grace continues to minister to us. But when we get to heaven, we are going to see that the riches of His grace will never be exhausted. Throughout all the ages to come He is going to continue to manifest the wonderful riches of His grace in His kindness toward us. And it is always going to come through Christ Jesus our wonderful Lord. No wonder Dr. Chafer got stuck on that verse. It is a good place to stay.

But I want you to see the point of this. You see, if the Lord has loved us, and He has drawn us to Himself, has given us life, has enabled us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, has brought us into His family, and has seated us together in heavenly places in the Lord Jesus Christ, so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace and His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus, then I want you to see that the Apostle Paul was indicating here that, from the time of your quickening until those ages to come actually arrive, there is not anything that can happen to you or to me to interrupt that work of God. This is a wonderful passage to show the absolute security of every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has quickened us, He has raised us, He has seated us at His own right hand, and He will keep us so that throughout all eternity He can continue to love us and to manifest His kindness to us through Christ. So the people who are worried about losing their salvation, and who feel that it might be possible that tomorrow or the next day they might do something that would cause God to cast them aside, have never really come to understand that the roots of their salvation are not in their behavior, but in the love of God--a love that never changes. "I have loved you with an everlasting love," He told Jeremiah. And He would tell us the very same thing. The

eternal character of salvation is based upon the eternal love of God. To be sure, His power is involved, and His wisdom is involved. All of His attributes are involved. But He has set His love upon us, and He is not going to

Doctrines of Grace -- #4
Page 7

let us go. Nobody is ever going to be able to pluck us out of His hand. We cannot get away from the Lord. We may displease Him and disobey Him, but the Lord is going to work to bring us back because He has His heart set on the fact that throughout all eternity He is going to "shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Those of us who are parents can certainly understand a verse like this because it does not make any difference how old your children may get, how far away they may get, how independent they may be from the standpoint of being able to support themselves and to take care of their own families, a Father never gets to the place where he does not delight in being able to manifest kindness and goodness to His children. Our heavenly Father is like that. Never think that your Heavenly Father turns against you. His love is ever the same. You can grieve Him, you can sin, as we all do, and displease Him. We so quickly step out of His way. But you can never do anything that would cause God to stop loving you. Paul said in Romans 8, verses 38 and 39 that he was "persuaded," a word that means that nothing could shake him from this conviction, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

So here we have the extent of His love. And we see how marvelous this is: The Lord has loved us from eternity past; the Lord will love us throughout all of the ages to come; and so let us rejoice that He will never stop loving us now. He is never going to tire of manifesting His love to you and to me.

V. THE SUFFICIENCY OF HIS LOVE

Now that is closely tied in with my last point: the sufficiency of His love.

By nature we are rendered incapable of doing anything to contribute to our salvation. God has made it clear in His Word that salvation is not by works. But there is no need for our works because the Scriptures

here and there, wherever it touches upon salvation, show us that the work of God is sufficient. Not am I unable to contribute to my salvation, but it is unnecessary that I contribute to my salvation. Those who feel that they are saved by works--by baptism, or because they join a church, or give their money--have never come to the realization of the sufficiency of the love of God. You see, when He provided salvation for us, He did not do just a part of the job. He did not do a work that needed to be completed by something that you and I do. God, in His wonderful grace, by sending the Lord Jesus Christ, did everything, everything that is necessary for our salvation--from start to finish. And that means to bring us into a right relationship to God, to see that we are sanctified by the Spirit, and to see that some day we will be presented faultless before His presence with exceeding joy. And so the Apostle Paul said here (speaking of our salvation) in these two very, very familiar verses, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

I think it was Dr. Sutcliffe who used to say that a text without a context is a pretext. We all know Ephesians 2:8 and 9, but did you ever notice that verse 8 is a reason for the truth in verse 7? Verse 7 says, "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through

Doctrines of Grace -- #4
Page 8

Christ Jesus." But I might say, "Lord, how do I know that I am ever going to make it. I fail You so often and grieve You. How do I know that I am going to experience this in the ages to come?" And the Spirit of God responds by saying, "It is because by grace that you have been saved through faith, and it is not of yourself." Do you see that? The reason I know that I am going to be experiencing the kindness and goodness of God throughout all eternity is because it is not of myself. If it were in the least dependent upon me, I would never make it. You would not either, if it were dependent upon you. But, you see, it is dependent upon the grace of God, the love of God, the kindness of God. And we know that we are going to be there because God has done a fully sufficient work. We are saved "by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." When Paul said, "not of yourselves," he meant that there is nothing of personal goodness or merit in us that contributes to our salvation. It is not of works; it is not anything that we could do. And yet it is amazing, is it not, that, when you have these simple statements of Scripture, we still have that desire in our heart to contribute somehow to our salvation, either by what we are or by

something that we can do. We try to see some things in us to show why God would save us. But it is grace. Christ made a sufficient sacrifice. 2 Timothy 1:9 says that God has "saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." John 1:12, and verse 13 with it, says, "But as many as received him (Christ), to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Christ is the One Who is completely sufficient for all that pertains to our salvation. What a wonderful love God has manifested toward us! His salvation is not a partial work, but a complete work.

Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that bro't it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary!

If it were not for the mercy and grace and love of God there would be no salvation.

How helpless and hopeless we sinners had been,
If He never had loved us till cleansed from our sin:
Unto Him Who hath loved us and washed us from sin,
Unto Him be the glory for ever. Amen.

The words of Isaiah are still true, the words by which Charles Haddon Spurgeon was called to salvation: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22). The Apostle Peter agreed with these words when he said, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). When the Apostle Paul was asked by the Philippian Jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" He said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" Acts 16:30, 31).

I trust that those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ will find that the Spirit of God has kindled within our hearts a fresh note of thanksgiving and praise to God for this wonderful love that is the root and the foundation of our salvation--the salvation that we enjoy now, and will enjoy throughout all eternity. But if you

Doctrines of Grace -- #4

Page 9

should be here without the Lord Jesus Christ, I trust that you will see that He is the only provision that God has made for sinful man. God gave expression of His love in sending the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the

only Saviour. If you believe in Him, you will be saved. If you do not believe in Him, you will be lost for all eternity. I trust that God has spoken to your heart as I have been reading these various passages of Scripture and in His wonderful grace will draw you to Himself, granting you the joy that most of us here this morning have found in trusting the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.