

## Loving God – 2a The Means of Loving God

**2 Corinthians 4:4-6** *whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.* <sup>5</sup> *For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.* <sup>6</sup> *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Have you ever used something for a purpose for which it was not designed? Ever used a butter knife as a screwdriver? Or a heavy piece of glass as a hammer? Sometimes some things can function outside of the purpose for which they were designed. But very often, they fail.

What happens to human beings if they use themselves for purposes outside of their intended design? They destroy themselves.

Loving God is your ultimate obligation. You were made in God's image and were made to love Him and reflect Him and find ultimate satisfaction in doing so.

This is what we have studied so far. The greatest commandment of all is to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. It is our created purpose; it is our ultimate obligation. We saw that this great command is actually based upon an even greater statement. "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one" or "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is God, Yahweh alone". From that statement we saw the whole basis for loving God, the motive we should have for loving God, contained in a negative side and a positive side.

The negative side is that all other gods are false gods. Anything besides Jehovah that we worship, that we treat as an end in itself, that we live for, is a god and it is a false god. Ultimately, because of this fact of reality that only Jehovah is the true god, anything else we put in His place will ultimately betray us, torture us with its jealous demands and ultimately destroy us. That is why the greatest commandment in Scripture seen from the point of view of a prohibition is the first of the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me".

The positive side is that Yahweh alone deserves to be loved entirely for Himself. He deserves, He is worthy of being loved for Himself. Loving God is not a means to anything else. Loving God is the end, the goal. The reason for this is that God is incomparably lovely, beautiful, admirable, glorious. Nothing in the universe is like God, because it is necessarily inferior to its Creator.

Positively, then the command is love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your might. Negatively speaking, nothing else deserves your worship, positively speaking, God does.

But I want to address the next logical question about loving God, which is simply this: If God is so lovely, and if idols don't satisfy, why do so few people love God? If God is so manifestly superior to all other things, why isn't it more obvious to all people, including ourselves?

It is the equivalent of having a roaring Victoria Falls in full view of everyone, but people are squeezing drops of water out of roots, and chewing on leaves to get some moisture out of them. One writer called it moral insanity. If in fact, God is so lovely, and if in fact the things we worship are so vain and empty and like broken cisterns, then something is seriously wrong with the human race. Seeing insane people bothers us because they are out of touch with reality. They greet invisible people and have conversation with them. But from heaven's perspective, the whole human race is acting like things are God, acting like we are God; acting like the creature is the Creator, while

turning our backs on the most fascinating, inexpressibly beautiful, infinitely satisfying God.

Either the whole theory is wrong – and God is not God and His gifts have usurped His place, or else something is very, very wrong with humanity. The Bible makes it clear what the problem is. In fact, it makes it clear that man has more than one problem when it comes to loving God.

Our text in 2 Corinthians implies what the problem is and it tells us how God corrects the problem. In this passage Paul is explaining what a powerful and supernatural thing that God does at conversion. He is explaining why this New Testament ministry is so vastly superior to the Old, and why we press on. In these few verses in chapter 4 he unveils a sparkling gem that helps us to understand the problem with loving God and the solution.

Verse 4 and verse 6 are basically parallel.

*V4 - lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,*

*V6 - light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Notice three things – the light, the Gospel and the glory. The light of the Gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Let's start with the first one: the glory of God. In both verses we read about the glory of God. It is that glory which is what we love when we see it. It is exactly this glory that people should love, treasure, admire, cherish and value. This glory of God is seen in the Son. God the Son reveals the glory of God. We know that from many Scriptures – John 1:18, Heb 1:3, John 14; Matthew 11.

Here comes problem number 1. Man is alienated from the glory of God. His sin has cut him off from fellowship.

**Romans 3:23** *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

**Isaiah 59:2** *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*

It has defiled him. It denies him access to God. It taints all his actions making them unacceptable to God.

**Isaiah 64:6** *But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.*

**John 3:36** *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

The consequences of man's sin means that he will never enjoy the glory of God, not in this life, and definitely not in the next.

**Hebrews 12:14** *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:*

**2 Thessalonians 1:8-9** *in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,*

Problem number 1: man's state is one of alienation from God's glory. So what word in 2 Cor 4:6 is the answer to man's alienation from God's glory?

Solution: The **Gospel** of the glory of God. In fact, it is the Gospel of the glory of God. It is the good news of the glory of God. What is the good news about the glory of God? The good news is that God's glory includes mercy, grace and love. God was not passive regarding our self-destruction. God desires man's worship, while simultaneously desiring man's good, and the two are not opposites, they are complements. So to secure His own glory and our good, He undertakes a plan. God the Son becomes a man. He comes to die as a substitute. On the cross, He takes care of two things: the penalty of sin; and our lack of righteousness. He bears our sin, our defilement. Our sin is imputed to Him. Positively, his righteousness is imputed to us.

God is satisfied with Jesus' righteousness. When we receive Christ as our Saviour, the defilement which tainted our actions is gone, we are found in Christ.

**2 Corinthians 5:21** *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Part of, or perhaps the summation of Christ's righteousness, is that He loves God perfectly, and we are in Him positionally. The access denied is now opened up, we can approach Him. Fellowship is restored. The alienation is done away with, reconciliation is affected. We can once again, approach God and know Him and love Him. This is what the Gospel does. This is why the Gospel takes care of the first problem – our alienated state.

Here is the second problem, and it is a bigger problem than the first problem:

Man hates the Gospel. Man does not want the Gospel. The natural man has no desire for the real Gospel. If the Gospel is repackaged and edited to show only its benefits to the natural man, he may like it. But he hasn't understood the Gospel itself.

He may want to get out of hell, that's a very natural thing. He may want to go to heaven and see departed relatives, and experience endless eternal retirement and rest, that's a very natural thing. He may want relief from guilt, that's a very natural thing. He may want freedom from certain habits, that's a very natural thing.

But what is not natural to man is that he wants the Gospel because, through the Gospel, he gets to see and know and love the glory of Christ. The Gospel is the Gospel of the glory of Christ. When the Gospel is made plain – God is the only true God who deserves your worship. You have spent your life pursuing things other than Him, snubbing Him, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, storing up His wrath and judgement. But Jesus came to die in your place, take away your defilement, grant you His righteousness and restore you to a place where God can once again be your first love, where you can take your place under Him as a worshipper – *that* Gospel is not very popular. If the Gospel is about getting God Himself, the natural man does not want it.

**Romans 1:18-25** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. <sup>24</sup> ¶ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,*

<sup>25</sup> who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

v18 'revealed'

v19 'may/can be known'; 'manifest'=plain; 'God has showed it to them'

v20 'clearly seen'; 'understood/clearly perceived'

v21 – 'they knew God'

v28 – 'they know the righteous judgement of God and that they who do such things are worthy of death'

So what does the Bible then say the problem was?

V18 = 'suppress'

V21= 'they did not glorify God, nor were thankful'

V23, 25 = 'they exchanged' i.e. they had it and the swapped it. – glory for images, truth for a lie

V28 – they did not want to retain God in their knowledge "acknowledge"

– John 3, Romans 1

V32 – not only did them, but delighted in those who did them.

**John 3:17-21** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. <sup>18</sup> "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. <sup>19</sup> "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. <sup>20</sup> "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

You see, the problem is not merely that people haven't seen the glory of Jesus. The problem is that even what they have seen of it in creation and conscience they despise. In other words, God needs to do something more than give more light. He needs to change the eyeballs. He needs to do more than give you more honey – He needs to change your taste buds.

Walk through the Scriptures and see what God must do to the human heart for it to be in a place to receive the Gospel and begin to love God.

**Deuteronomy 29:4** Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.

**Deuteronomy 30:6** And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

**2 Chronicles 30:12** Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the LORD.

**1 Chronicles 29:18** "O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward You.

**Jeremiah 31:33-34** "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

**Jeremiah 32:39** 'then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them.

**Ezekiel 36:26** "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

**Ezekiel 11:19-20** Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup> "that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

Now what does our passage in 2 Corinthians says happens?

Look closely:

... whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. <sup>5</sup> For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We have, in this passage, the glory of God – that which we must love. We have the Gospel of the glory of God – that which reveals the glory of God. But what reveals the Gospel to hearts that don't want it? The light.

How do we get this light?

Answer: God has shone in our hearts. How does that happen?

What is the shining in our heart compared to?

The Genesis account. God sovereignly declared, "Let there be light". It is like the fallen human heart is a place of utter death and darkness.

Which member of the Godhead comes to the heart and turns on the light that we might see God's glory in the face of Jesus? The Spirit. The Son reveals the Father. The Spirit reveals the Son.

So God the Spirit comes to a heart, and says, "See". Be renewed. And when that light dawns on a heart, the moral insanity is removed, and we see that Christ is glorious. The result is that we see the Gospel is obvious, true, necessary and desirable. We repent of our sin, and we embrace Jesus Christ as Lord. When the heart sees the glory of God, the response it has of desiring Him and seeing Him as one to trust and obey and serve is simply called *faith*.

**John 3:3-8** Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Now does He do this apart from using means? Do people just wake up one day with a new heart? No, He has appointed means that He uses.

**Romans 10:14-17** How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" <sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" <sup>17</sup> So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

The Spirit uses the Word of God as a means. He uses prayer as a means. He uses the preaching of the Gospel. But Jesus makes it very clear that unless the Spirit of God comes and does this to the heart, we will not see Jesus as lovely or desirable or one to trust.

**John 6:44** *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

**John 6:64-65** *"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. <sup>65</sup> And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."*

Firstly, we should be before God in total humility and absolute gratitude, if you have come to know and taste and see that the Lord is good. These truths ought to just smash our pride into the dust. We don't come to God because we are more reasonable than the next man, more moral. We don't love God because we were always leaning that way our whole lives. If you say, I loved God from my earliest memories, I will tell you that you loved something you thought was God, but the Bible says, 'there is none that seeks after God, no not one.' This just demolishes any way that the human heart can say, "In the end, it was me. I chose to love God once I was fully persuaded." The Bible says, nothing would have persuaded you except the Spirit had said in your heart, let there be light.

**Romans 9:16** *So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.*

Once I give up trying to take credit, I pour gratitude and praise on the mercy of God for shining in my heart. Whether it is your own salvation, or someone else who has come to faith through your witness, the Bible tells us

**"1 Corinthians 1:31** *that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."*

You know what else it does? It gives us hope for the worst sinner on earth. No matter how stubborn, how opposed, how proud, how wicked, God can graciously say to any heart - live. That means that we take the means God has give us – the Word of God, the Gospel, and we proclaim it. We make no discrimination based upon apparent receptiveness, age, income group, and cultural background, Jew or Gentile. We go up to people and we proclaim the gospel of the glory of Christ knowing that God may say to one of those hearts, "See".

What that also means is when we are dealing with people, it is right to pray that God would grant them repentance and faith. It is right to pray, "God, command the light to shine in that person's heart, as the Gospel is declared." For that matter, if you don't love Christ, the starting point might be to say, "God give me a heart to see and believe these things".

It also means we are going to go full steam ahead in telling people the Gospel. I am not responsible for causing light to shine. It is as if I have in my hand a lamp with a very long wire. That lamp is the Gospel message. Individual people are like light bulbs. I can't see the switch, and I can't see if it is on or off. My job is to find light bulbs and plug them in. If they go on, then I know the Master switched it on. If not, I know He didn't. I am not responsible for that. I am responsible to keep plugging in as many light bulbs as I can, leaving the decision up to God.

Unbelievers do not love God. Unbelievers cannot love God. It takes a miracle. So when you are thinking about someone whom you wish was saved, realise God does not expect you to work a miracle. Like the men who filled the water pots with water – He simply expects you to be obedient and do your part. He'll do the miracle.

Fundamental to loving God is the Gospel. First comes the work of enlightenment and regeneration, and then the work of justification. God grants us a new heart that loves the glory of God, and He grants us forgiveness and imputed righteousness so that we can have fellowship with Him.

Fundamental to the Gospel is loving God. The main aim of the Gospel is to restore rebels into worshippers.

How does a human ever come to love God? Regeneration by the Spirit, justification, and then the thing we will examine next, sanctification.