Looking at the Face of Jesus, Part 5
2 Corinthians 4:5-6
47-26

Again this morning we return to the study of the precious treasure of Scripture. We find ourselves concluding a series we've been doing in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. So I would encourage you to turn in your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 4 as we look together to this text which has become a treasure to us in the last number of months.

The title of this five-part series has been, "Looking at the Face of Jesus." And basically what I've been saying to you as far as practical application goes is that the Christian life comes down to being fixed on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. A Christian life comes down to a Christ-focus, looking always at the face of Jesus Christ in every situation and finding there revealed the glory of God.

Now you remember that this, of course, is in the context of Paul's ministry in Corinth. He was in the midst of dire problems at this particular time, not only severe physical problems coming against him as noted in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 23 and following, but some very, very tragic issues that were going on in Corinth in regard to his reputation, character assassination, assaulting his integrity, his credibility, trying to undermine his church, tear the flock, as it were, to shreds. And so he was suffering on almost every front. He woke up every day and said it was as if it might be his last day. There were so many plots to take his life, so many of those who wanted to kill him and others who were destroying his reputation on every front.

But what we find here in this marvelous passage in this section about the new covenant is that he found the solution for his trouble and his trial and his anxiety and his depression by looking at the face of Jesus. And as long as he beholding as in a mirror as verse 18 of chapter 3 says the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ, as long as he did that, he found strength and comfort, encouragement and even joy in the midst of his trials.

So we've been suggesting to you that looking into the face of Jesus is the way to live your Christian life. And that is an objective thing, not a subjective one. We're not asking you to find some mystical image of Jesus in space somewhere and fix yourself on it, but rather to look at the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed on the pages of Scripture and finding there the real Christ, learn to trust in Him.

Now I want to sort of approach the same program...same issue this morning, the same pattern of vision, looking at the person of Christ, but from a bit of a different angle. Rather than just talking about looking at the face of Jesus, I want to take a step beyond that and I want to define that look as love, if I may. And say to you that the reality of the Christian life as I have been saying is looking at the face of Jesus and the reality of that is simply loving the Lord Jesus Christ. That's really what that is. That is synonymous with loving the Lord Jesus Christ. The reality of loving the Lord Jesus Christ is at the heart and soul and core of the Christian life. Love for the Savior is present in every true

Christian. I'll say it again. Love for the Savior is present in every true Christian. In fact, we could be defined as those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. Most frequently we say, "Well I accepted Christ," or "I trusted Christ," or "I confessed Christ, or "I put my faith in Christ." And perhaps what would be more true would be to say, "I love the Lord Jesus Christ. And in so saying you are saying He is the object of my highest affection. He is my highest joy. He is the one to whom I am supremely devoted. He is the object of my desires and my interests and my love. My whole life is centered on Christ...to use the words of Paul, "For to me to live is Christ," is another way of saying, "I love Christ with all my heart, soul, mind and strength." And Paul certainly exhibits that kind of devotion.

So as we talk about looking into the face of Jesus, let's talk about it this morning as love for Christ. In Matthew chapter 10, for example, in verses 37 and 38, we read this, "He who loves father or mother," these are the words of Jesus, "more than Me is not worthy of Me and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

So, what is Jesus saying? A Christian is one who loves Me more than father, more than mother, more than son, more than daughter. A Christian is one who loves Me more than life itself. That's what it means to take up your cross, to be willing to die. And if you don't love Him more than life and you don't love Him more than family and anything else, you're not worthy of Him. So we could say that being a Christian is coming to the place where Jesus Christ is the supreme affection in your life.

In John 8:42 Jesus said this, "If God were your Father, you would love Me." If God were your Father, you would love Me. In John 14:21 Jesus said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father and I will love him and reveal Myself to him."

This matter of being a Christian then is a matter of loving the Lord Jesus Christ and being loved by Christ, by God the Father and demonstrating that love in sacrifice, a willingness to alienate yourself, if need be, from family, willing to give your life, a willingness to give up your life and certainly a willingness to obey.

When Jesus was restoring Peter in John 21, He came to Peter, you remember that day on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and He said to him, "Peter," Peter had been disobedient to the Lord and the Lord wanted to reaffirm Peter's ministry and usefulness, and three times the Lord spoke to him. And He didn't ask him, "Do you believe in Me? Do you believe in Me? Do you trust Me? Do you trust Me? Have you accepted Me? Have you accepted Me?" He said...what? "Do you love Me?" Nothing more defines what Christianity is than loving the Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ is a supreme object of your affection, the supreme desire of your life, the one who is the focus of everything.

In fact, in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 24 there's a quite remarkable statement at the very end of the book of Ephesians often overlooked. Here Paul says, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible." Grace, saving grace, belongs to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love, that's an undying love. You can't love the Lord Jesus Christ and then not love the Lord Jesus Christ because it's an incorruptible love. It never gets corrupted. It never goes out of existence. You can't love the Lord Jesus Christ for a while and stop loving the Lord Jesus Christ because it is an incorruptible love. It is an eternal love. It is an undying love.

And again then, Paul is simply saying grace to believers. And who are believers? Those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love. It is a permanent love, a permanent affection.

In James chapter 1 and verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trials, for once he has been approved he will receive the crown which is eternal life and eternal life the Lord has promised to those who love Him." I wished we talked about it more that way. I wish instead of saying I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I've accepted Christ, I've confessed Christ, I've acknowledged Christ, I've trusted Christ, we would begin to say, "I love Christ," and to express the significance of that faith and that trust which is an undying affection.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 14 Paul says, "For the love of Christ controls us." What he means by that is, "I am literally controlled by my devotion to Jesus Christ." Now that's just another way of saying I am fixed on Christ. If you love someone supremely, passionately and if there is no other thing or person that takes your affections, it could easily be understood that you have fixed your gaze on the object of that love. And that's the point.

In fact, non-Christians are defined as those who don't love Christ. First Corinthians 16:22 says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be damned." The damned are those who don't love Christ. The saved are those who do love Christ. It is characteristic then of every believer that he has or she has an incorruptible, undying love for the Lord Jesus Christ which means it is the most normal thing to fix your gaze on Him, to gaze into the face of Jesus and there to see the glory of God is really what it is to be a Christian.

But, having said that, we take our eyes off Christ, don't we? We...we fluctuate in the intensity of our love. We fluctuate, we wax and wane in the regularity of our devotion to Christ. Why? Because we become enamored with other attractions, other things vie for our affections, things in the world, material things, other people, other goals and dreams and ambitions and desires. They compete and so the love that we have for the Lord Jesus Christ while always there because it is an incorruptible love fluctuates in its intensity and we fluctuate in our devotion. When we take our eyes off Jesus Christ we become weak and sinful.

And so we could just as easily have said, as we started this series, that it's a series about loving the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, as it is a series about looking into the face of Jesus because it's the one you love to whom you look. And it's hard to look if your affection is diverted. I mean, that's true in the human life. You can and should be fixed and devoted to the object of your love, your marriage partner, an undiminished, incorruptible and singular devotion but there are other things very, very often that get in the way and once other things or other people begin to distract our attention, no matter to what level of involvement we might come or not come, it begins to take away the singular devotion of attention should be given to our own partner. The same thing is true in the spiritual dimension. So Satan just parades a string of other things in front of us to divert us. And when we take our eyes off Jesus Christ and our love for Him diminishes, we become weak and sinful.

Perhaps as graphic an illustration of that as is in the Scripture we would find in Revelation chapter 2. Let's look at it because it will set in motion what I want to say to you and will come a full circle by the time we're finished, come back to this concept. But you remember the letter of the Lord to the church

at Ephesus, a very, very well-known letter. And the Lord writes to them and in verses 2, 3 and 6 of Revelation 2 He commends them. In verse 2 of Revelation 2, "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance." In other words, I know that you serve, I know that you work hard, you labor, you toil to the point of exhaustion. "I know your perseverance," that is your steadfastness, you stay at it, you stay at it. "I also know you can't endure evil men, you don't tolerate wickedness. I also know that you put to the test those who call themselves apostles." In other words, you measure them by the Scripture. And if they are not, you will find them to be false. Verse 3, "You have perseverance and you have endured for My namesake and you have not grown weary." And then in verse 6, "Yet this you do have that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate." They were a group of people involved in sinful indulgence, uncleanness and immorality. He commends them for their purity, their discernment, their hatred of sin, their doctrinal soundness, their endurance, their service, their hard work. So much to be commended.

But the fatal flaw comes down there in verse 4 where He says, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love." Sadly, the honeymoon had ended. Love was cold. No longer were they fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. It's reminiscent of Jeremiah's prophecy back in chapter 2 of Jeremiah. The Lord comes and says, "I remember the devotion of your youth and the love of your betrothals." I remember how it was when we first got engaged. I remember how it was when the first step of marriage took place. But oh how you have changed. Oh how love has grown cold. Oh how the honeymoon has ended. It happens in human relationships. It doesn't have to happen, but it does. It happens in the spiritual dimension. It happened in the church at Ephesus. It happens to us. Our love ebbs and flows and fluctuates.

And so then we have an essential word here for us as to the church at Ephesus. Verse 5, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen." Get back to that first affection, that first love, repent and do the deeds which you did at first. If you don't, I'll remove your lampstand. When you first came to Christ there was that exhilarating joy, that desire to know Him, to fellowship with Him, to find in Him the satisfaction for every need. You saw in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You saw everything your heart could ever desire in Christ. And it begins to fade and wane and ebb and flow and fluctuate. And frankly, there's no way to live a triumphant life without devotion to Christ, without love for Christ, without looking into the face of Jesus and seeing the glory of God revealed. And as I sad again last week, I'm talking about an objective experience of spending time and effort in the Word of God so that you know the Christ who is the true Christ revealed in Scripture. When you look into the face of Jesus Christ and see the glory of God, you're going to love what you see. And it's going to have the dominating influence on your life.

And so Paul here as he writes, back to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, is in the middle of severe trials, severe problems, heart-breaking issues in the church. Physical things pale beside the immense emotional trauma that he was feeling as everything was up for grabs and his whole ministry was being assaulted as to its integrity. And in the midst of that he finds his equilibrium and he finds his strength and he finds his victory and he finds his peace and he finds even joy, not by changing circumstances but by looking at the face of Jesus and seeing the glory of God revealed.

And so we have said that as he talks about the new covenant here and the great privileges of being a new covenant preacher, he's not just talking about something for which others are privileged but he himself because his own joy is found in looking into the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the new covenant. And so in verse 18 he says, "Looking at the face of Jesus and seeing the glory of God is a clarifying look." In verse 18 he says it's a transforming look. Then in chapter 4 verse 1, it is a

strengthening look. At the end of the verse, "We do not lose heart." Looking into the face of Jesus in verse 2 is a purifying look. It causes us to renounce the things that are hidden because of shame and not walk in deception. It is a truth-loving look, it causes us never to adulterate the Word of God but always by the manifestation of the truth commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. So it's a truth-loving look.

So Paul has found that no matter what the trial, things become clear. He becomes transformed, strengthened, purified and begins to love the truth as he gazes at the face of Jesus Christ in any situation. And then sixthly in our outline last time, we said it was a limited look. Maybe a better way to say that would be a privileged look because it is limited to those who can see the truth. He says the gospel is veiled to those who are perishing, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel to the glory of Christ who is the image of God. He realizes that this look is a privileged look. And how can one become discouraged and despondent and despairing? And how can one take his eyes off Jesus Christ when the privilege is so immense? When there are so many people who don't have that privilege and he does, how can he take his eyes off Jesus Christ? When he has been delivered from the domain of darkness, when in him the true light is shining, when the light of the world is shined on him and he no longer walks in darkness, but has the light of life, when he has been so privileged as over against the mass of multitudes in the world who have not been privileged, how can he take his eyes off Christ? How can his love grow cold? It is a limited look, but it is a privileged one.

And so the Apostle Paul in the midst of his deepest pain and greatest agony and severest struggle looks at the face of Jesus and things become clear and he becomes transformed and he is made strong in the midst of weakness and his heart is purified and the truth takes the high priority and he sees himself as immensely privileged. And so it must be in life that if we're going to triumphant over the difficulties of life, we've got to keep our gaze toward Jesus Christ, keep loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and we too will experience the clarifying, the transforming, the strengthening, the purifying, the truth-loving and the privileged results.

Now that takes us to the last two points. Number seven, it is a humbling look...it is a humbling look. You might think at this point because the privilege is so immense, because there are few who find this glorious privilege, because the elect seem to be a small group, because those who believe are not many, that the Apostle Paul would boast and be proud about having achieved this, but it's not the case. Such a look is a humbling look and we see that humility in verse 5. He says, "For we do not preach ourselves...we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake."

There's no question in my mind but that these false Apostles who had gone to Corinth and started all this trouble had accused Paul of preaching himself. Oh they had accused him of having a life of secret shame. They had accused him of walking in craftiness and adulterating the Word of God. And in verse 2 he said that's not true, he renounced all that. And they had also accused him of preaching himself, seeking self-exaltation, self-promotion, self-aggrandizement, having a desire to establish personal power, personal authority, gain personal prestige and prominence. He says not true. We do not preach ourselves and in so saying he really indicts the false apostles who did in fact preach themselves.

In fact, later on he says that about them in chapter 10 verse 12. "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves." Those false apostles

commended themselves, preached themselves. Paul did not do that. So this in chapter 4 verse 5 is both a denial and an indictment of his critics who themselves did preach themselves. But Paul was humble, humbled by the very vision of Jesus Christ whose glory dominated his life. In 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 3, "i was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." In 2 Corinthians chapter 12 he reminds them of the very same thing. Verse 5, "I will boast, I will boast, however, in my weakness." And then in verse 9, "Most gladly therefore I will rather boast about my weakness that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

Whenever Paul talked about himself, he talked about his weakness. Whenever he referred to himself he referred to himself in terms of his inabilities. The Apostle Paul never promoted himself. He never preached himself. His vision of Christ caused the glory of Christ to dominate his life. His love for Christ caused him to be completely consumed by Jesus Christ and Christ was the focus of everything. He would boast in glory, he would glory in the Lord. And if there was anything to boast about in him, it was his weakness. So in his weakness he could be made strong. He never promoted himself.

He goes further in verse 5, "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord." I think we could safely conclude from that that Paul was a lordship preacher. I think that's a safe assumption. He preached Christ Jesus as Lord.

Back in 1 Corinthians 2:2 he said, "For I determine to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He preached Christ as Savior and he preached Christ as Lord. And those are the two obvious components. You preach Christ crucified as Savior, the one who delivers us from sin. You preach Christ as Lord, the sovereign who rules our lives. Whoever rejects the preaching of Paul then is not rejecting Paul but rejecting the lordship of Jesus Christ. Paul was a lordship preacher. He told the Romans in Romans 10:9, "If we shall confess with our mouth and believe in our heart...confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead, we'll be saved." Philippians 2:11, every knee is to bow and confess Jesus as Lord. And so he preached Jesus as a crucified Savior but also as sovereign Lord. Jesus as crucified Savior provides forgiveness, mercy and grace for sin...as sovereign Lord, calls for allegiance, obedience and submission.

Paul's preaching again was so simple. Preaching, friends, his information...it's information. And admittingly in our culture it's harder to do preaching because you're used to receiving information and much more entertaining ways. I'm just standing here talking. There's nothing going on around me to excite your senses. You're used to digesting your information in extremely palatable doses. And by means of those things which entertain you at the same time. The challenge for the preacher is to get the information through to your mind without dancing horses and other kinds of things to entertain you in the process. Preaching is information...that's what it is, it's information. It's information about Jesus Christ. Faith comes by hearing a message about Christ. That's what Romans says, chapter 10. Faith comes by hearing a message about Christ. That's what it is. And the message is He is Savior. And you talk about the cross and all that it means. He is Lord and you talk about His sovereignty and all that it means. Paul's goal was to cause people to understand who Jesus was and why He came, what He did and why He did it.

And when you preach the information about Jesus as Savior and Lord, and it is combined with sovereign grace in the hearts of men, people will be saved. Paul says, "I don't...I don't preach Paul, I'm not under some illusion that my cleverness, my ingenuity, my skill is going to get people saved. I

preach Christ. I talk about Christ. Every time I open my mouth I talk about Christ. He's the object of my love, my affection, my devotion. He's the desire of my heart. And He's the only means of redemption." And he says, "If I do refer to myself," in verse 5, "we preach ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake." We preach ourselves as your slave. I'm a slave of God, a messenger of Jesus Christ in order that I might serve you. He served the Lord as a servant. He says that in Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, 1 Corinthians 4:1 and 2, 1 Corinthians 9:19. He often referred to himself as a servant of God, a slave of God. But here he says we're your slaves for the sake of Jesus to bring you Christ, to bring you His truth because of our love for Him, we're your slaves.

Let me tell you something. A true look into the face of Jesus results in humility. It results in humility. I mean, this is very, very basic. Anyone looking at the face of Jesus is turned into a humble self-effacing person. It's true. And conversely, anyone who is not humble is not looking into the face of Jesus. Anyone who is in love with Christ and deeply profoundly devoted to Christ, anyone who has established the Lord Jesus Christ as the object of his affections, the singular object of his love is going to manifest humility. He's going to be a servant of the one he loves and a servant of those whom the one he loves loves. He's going to be a servant of God's people.

Where there is a real look at Jesus, where there is a real love for the Lord Jesus Christ, you will see humility. And where there is no humility, there is no real vision of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and there is a kind of love that we could say is less than first love.

In fact, where you see pride, there is another person vying for that love and it's self, right? That's why when I look at someone who names the name of Jesus Christ, particularly someone who claims to be a preacher and represent the Lord Jesus Christ and proclaim His truth, the first thing I look for is...what?...humility because I'm going to know the level of love for the Lord Jesus Christ in that person's life by the demonstration of humility. And if there's not humility there, then self is the main object of affection and they're not looking into the face of Jesus and seeing the glory of God. And consequently things may not be clear to them, they're not being transformed as they ought to be. They don't have that total devotion to truth and life may not be pure because any true vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, anyone who really loves Christ is going to be humble and his message in his life is going to be Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ and he will be to everyone else but a slave.

Now number eight and the last in our list, looking into the face of Jesus...looking into the face of Jesus is a cause for thanksgiving. You could say it's a thanks-eliciting look if you want. You know, here's Paul and he's in the midst of trouble, but no matter what you did to him he was always overwhelmed with gratitude. Why? Verse 6, "For God who said light shall shine out of darkness is the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Somebody is going to say to Paul, "Hey, the ministry is tough, Paul. I mean, you're getting hammered. Physically you're beaten with rods, you're whipped, you're stoned, left for dead in a heap, shipwrecked, been in every imaginable peril. Then you have to deal with the concern for the church as people assassinating your character saying you're in the ministry to make money, you're in it to gain sexual favors from women, you're a liar, you're a charlatan, you're a fraud, you're a deceiver. They're saying down underneath your life is a hidden life of shame. They're assaulting and assassinating your character on every level. They're demeaning you, they're doing all they can to destroy you and they're doing this to your own people. They're in that Corinthian church and they're

lying about you all over that church as much as they possibly can to try to destroy your credibility, your integrity. Doesn't that tear you up? Doesn't that cause you to be depressed? Paul, aren't you suffering burn out?"

"No, I just look at the face of Jesus and I look at Him because I love Him. And in looking at His face I'm made thankful because of the very fact that I can do that because it's simply and only due to the sovereign power of God." That's what verse 6 is saying. This verse is so filled with richness. Paul is saying, "For God who said light shall shine out of darkness is the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." I mean, do you understand that no matter what goes on in my life there is this overriding reality that the light is on and I can see the face of Christ and in His face the glory of God? I am the beneficiary due to nothing of my own of the goodness of God. We preach Christ Jesus and that's all we preach...crucified, risen, we preach Him also as Lord. And we're simply slaves for Jesus' sake because God is the one who has to turn the light on. There's no sense in preaching oneself. There's no sense in exalting human wisdom, ingenuity, technique or ability. There's no sense in begin enamored with my own cleverness, no sense in seeing myself as the source of people's response to the truth. It's ludicrous for me to think that anybody and everybody would respond to this if the preacher were clever enough.

I know one thing for sure and that is the only one that can turn on the light is God Himself. For God who said light shall shine out of darkness. What's he referring to there? Genesis 1:3, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," says verse 1, "the earth was formless and void and darkness was over he face of the deep and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters, then God said...verse 3...Let there be light and there was light." And he's referring back to that creative moment. "For God who said light shall shine out of darkness, the God of creation," he's saying, "is the one who has shone in our hearts." It's the same God of creation who turned on the light physically who turns on the light spiritually.

That's the point. And 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation." It's a creation. I can't create. No preacher can create. No preacher is clever enough to create. None of us nor all of us together can create. And spiritual life is a creation by the creator. And the same God who said light shall shine out of darkness and created physical light is the God alone who can create spiritual light. Same God who created natural light is the God who must create supernatural light.

And salvation or redemption is as much a divine operation as was creation and it's as much a creative operation. Spiritual darkness covers the minds of men and women until God shines in their hearts. Colossians 1 says, "Giving thanks to the Father," verse 12, "who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light for He delivered us from the domain of darkness." Thanks to Him, He did it. He delivered us. It wasn't our cleverness, ingenuity, insight, ability to comprehend, it wasn't our good sense, common sense and it wasn't the cleverness of a preacher, it was simply the truth presented, God turned on the light. God alone can dispel the darkness. Second Corinthians 5:18 says, "All these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself in Christ."

God alone can dispel the darkness of sin and ignorance in which people are perishing under Satan's deception. Only the creative power of the almighty can transfer men from that kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son. It's right back there in Isaiah 9:2, the people who walk in darkness will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. And Jesus came and said I'm the fulfillment of that. He was the true light that lights every man who comes into the world. Christ bore the light of God. God alone can turn on the light in the heart.

So the point that he's making is creation and redemption are each works of God. God commanded the light to shine out of darkness at the creation. And the light which shined in a creative way has now begun to shine in a redemptive way. The light of creation has become the light of salvation. The light placed in the heavens has now become a light placed in the heart. The light which was material has become immaterial...or moral. The physical light of the sun, s-u-n, has become the spiritual light of the Son, s-o-n. The universal light has become the personal light. A sovereign God shines the gospel light into the human heart when the truth is preached and God designs to save.

And so he says in verse 6, "God is the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light, to make the light known." And what is that light? It is the light that is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. What is the light? It is to know who Christ is, that He is God incarnate, that He is the clearest revelation of God. He is the illumination of the truth about God revealed in Christ. That's it.

Paul is saying whatever might happen to me, I can't despair. Whatever might happen to me, I can't be depressed for very long. What ever may happen to me, I can't be sad and sorrowful. Whatever difficulties of ministry, I can't quit, bail out and fail and give up because I am so immensely...immensely blessed that my heart is overwhelmed with thanksgiving, that in the midst of my darkness a sovereign God chose to turn on the light.

In some little small ways I can identify with this. People attack me, attack my ministry, attack my integrity. They don't usually do it in here, they usually do it in the parking lot, or in the newspapers, or through the mails or whatever way they want to do it. Now if I preached myself, this would be a major issue for me. Right? If somebody's salvation depended upon the credibility of John MacArthur, that might be an issue. If somebody's becoming a believer depended on their ability to trust in me, that might be a problem. But I don't preach myself, I preach Jesus Christ and salvation comes only through hearing a message about Jesus Christ. So whatever they may say about me, in a sense, is immaterial. Because the issue is not John MacArthur, the issue is the gospel and the truth. And if we preach Christ crucified and preach Jesus Christ as Lord and in the midst of that preaching God moves to turn on the light, it doesn't matter what men say about me, does it? Paul says we just keep preaching Christ Jesus as Lord and we're your slaves for Jesus' sake. We preach the truth and when God chooses, He turns on the light. What a privilege.

So we end where we began then with looking into the face of Jesus Christ because God has turned on the light. And in His face we see the glory of God revealed. What is it to be a Christian? It's to see God revealed in Christ and to love Him. It's to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength as He's revealed in Jesus Christ. That's the essence of the believer's life, a clear look at the face of Jesus and in it God is revealed and we love the God we see revealed. That love becomes a consuming passion of life to which we submit all our powers and energies, all our hopes and dreams.

Now as we close, let's go back to where we began. Now follow this thought. I want to talk about that issue of first love before I let you go. How can that love grow cold? Well because there are other distractions and attractions. We never lose that love but it ebbs and flows and waxes and wanes. And just to exhort you with one final exhortation and a perspective that I hope you'll find refreshing, I want you to consider God's love and how wonderful it is to be loved by God to the degree that He has turned the light on in you and given you the privilege of loving the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we talk about the love of God toward us, the Bible says we love Him because He first loved us. Giving love back to God should be a very normal thing and it is for a Christian. As I say, it fluctuates but it's still normal to the Christian life. I think it's helpful for us to understand how God expects us to love and this is a final sort of framing of an exhortation for you.

Let me talk about God's love. We hear, very often people say, "God loves the world, God loves everybody, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." And people like to talk about the love of God and how God loves the whole world and God loves everyone and that's true, in a sense. And I want to kind of help you to understand that. God does love the whole world. It says that in John 3:16, "God so loved the world..."

You say, "You mean God loves unbelievers?" Yes, He loves unbelievers. "Are you sure about that?" Absolutely sure about that. The rich young ruler was lost and damned, you remember. He would not obey the Lord Jesus Christ. He would not acknowledge his sin and he went away without believing. And Mark 10:21 says Jesus felt love for him.

Furthermore, Matthew 5 is unequivocal on this. Matthew 5 verse 44, "I say to you love your enemies in order that you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven." What does that mean? You should love your enemies if you're the children of God because God loves His enemies. Don't ever question whether God loves the world, He does. There are some people who...who think that God hates the world. God loves the world in this sense, His love is general, universal, and indiscriminate. It shows up in a number of ways. Let me give you four of them.

God's general love for the world shows up in common grace. He makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. He loves them enough to make the grass green and the sky blue and the flowers colorful. He loves them enough to enjoy a tender kiss from a little baby, to hear the laughter of a child, to drink a cool drink, to eat a tasty meal. He loves them enough to give them common grace. It's the love of benevolence.

Secondly, there's the love of compassion. This is a love that is expressed, for example, in Luke 19:41 when Jesus saw the city, He wept. It elicited emotion out of Him because He cared deeply. God is not willing that any should perish. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. It is a love, listen to this, very careful, it is a love motivated not by the worth of the object for it's a damnable object, any sinner, but by the lost value of that object. It's not a love elicited by the value of it but the lost value of it. Not the...not the inherent goodness of it, but the fallenness of it. It's the love of a heartbroken sadness, the love of pity, the love of the individual because the image of God is defaced, it's a sympathetic love that makes Jesus weep.

There's a third way in which you see the general love of God and that's by warning. The Scripture is loaded with warning. And what is warning? Warning about hell over and over and over, judgment, hell, destruction, punishment, damnation. Over and over, warnings and warnings and that is love providing warnings which call people to repent. God loves enough to warn. If He didn't love He wouldn't warn. Scripture, Psalm 19:11, it says is to warn us.

And then fourthly, God's indiscriminate general love is expressed not only in benevolence and compassion and warning but in gospel presentation. We see the love of God extended to the world in

the proclamation of the message of salvation. Christ is the light that lights every man that comes into the world. Romans chapter 1, "That which may be known of God is in them." God gives man a conscience, Romans 2:14 and 15, excusing...or excusing them and they have a law of God written in their hearts. There is truth given to man in the fabric of his life, revealed through the creation, through conscience, through the mind, and then in Matthew 28, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." There is the preaching of the gospel of grace. That is on the part of God an expression of love.

And so we see God as kind and God expresses His love in general. But when you compare as wonderful as that is, when you compare that kind of love with the love God has for His children, it pales...it fades. And it could almost be classified as hate compared to the kind of love that we know from Him. God's love to believers is far beyond that kind of love. Because you know something about that love for the world, it's...it's a love with a severe hook in it because the greater your participation in the expressions of those love...of those acts of love, if you're in the general population, the greater your experience of God's love, the greater your eternal punishment. Right? Because you have trodden underfoot the expression of God's love. The more you have benefited from benevolence, the more you have benefited from God's compassion, the more warnings you have heard and the more of the gospel you have proclaimed, the more you are sentenced to a severer punishment.

And so, when we read, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated," in comparison, it's that kind of divergence. But what about God's love to believers? First John 3, this great statement, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God." This is a completely different dimension. This is a particular, peculiar, special, discriminating, unique love given only to believers. The song writer said, "The love of Jesus, what it is, none but His loved ones know." Zephaniah 3:17 calls it a renewing love. Isaiah 49 and Jeremiah 31 call it an eternal love. John 13, a perfect love. John 14, a family love. Romans 9, an electing love. Ephesians 2 and Romans 5, a saving love. Romans 8, an unbreakable love. Ephesians 5, a purifying love. Hebrews 12, a chastening love. And on and on and on and on.

This love is enhanced and defined throughout Scripture in glorious terms. But it's a love that only believers know. The song writer was sensing it when he wrote, "Heaven above is softer blue, earth around is sweeter green, something lives in every hue, Christless eyes have never seen, birds with gladder songs are flow, flowers with deeper beauty shine. Since I know as now I know that I am His and He is mine." This is the bliss of being loved and loving in return.

Now you say, "Well where are you going with all of this?" Just here, get this. God loves all His creation. Everything He created He looked at it and said it's good. And there is a dimension of love in the being of God which is expressed toward His creation. Follow this. But among all of His creatures He loves His rational creatures, man, more. And that shows up in benevolence, compassion, warning and the gospel. But beyond them He loves His special people, His children even more. But most of all, most of all, more than He loves His creation, more than He loves His rational creation, more than He loves His new creation, most of all God loves His Son. Did you get that? He is the supreme object of God's affection. And the whole redemptive plan unfolded because of the Father's love for the Son and His desire to give to His Son a redeemed humanity to praise Him forever and ever. Most of all He loves His Son with a perfect, inexpressible, inconceivable love. We are loved because we are placed in Christ. John 5:20, "For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all things." The Father loves the Son and shows Him all things. This is My...Matthew 17:5 says...beloved Son.

So for us, follow this thought, we are to love as God loves, we are to love as God loves. So what does that mean? That means we love the world that God made and we thank Him for it. And out of that world that He made we love the rational creatures most. We love...we love them more, I should say, we love men. We want to do good unto all, right? And we want to show kindness and mercy and love and compassion and warning and gospel truth to all. More than that, we love believers with a love that is special and unique and transcends even our love for the unbelievers. But most of all, if we're to be like God, we love...whom?...Christ His Son. That's our first love.

We're to love our enemies cause God does. We're to love believers more...more than father, mother, son or daughter. But we're to love Christ most...most. And how can we do less then be consumed with loving the one whom God loves most if we are God's beloved children who are to manifest His nature? So rekindle that first love, remember from where you are fallen. Begin again to focus all your life on knowing Jesus Christ, gazing at Him through the mirror of Scripture that reflects the glory of God in the face of Christ and you'll find in Him all the realities and all the resources for triumph, for peace and for joy. Let's pray.

Father, we are so overwhelmed by all of this. It is not new to us but comes so fresh and so exhilarating. Thank You that we can love You because You first loved us. Thank You that we love the Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love that will never die but forgive us for the fluctuation. Forgive us for being distracted and setting our affections on other things and not on things above. Forgive us for being enamored by the passing things of this world. Forgive us for loving ourselves instead of Christ supremely. Give us back our first love and so loving may we gaze at the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ and find all these great realities become ours, even as they did in the life of Paul who therefore because of what was happening in his own life could preach and proclaim nothing else. We thank You for the new covenant. We thank You for the new covenant in Christ. We thank You that we can gaze fully into Your glory revealed in Him and in the joy of that first love experience all the best that You have for us and give You all the glory, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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