

Love Ain't Easy

(29 Aug 15)

“...Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures,” 2 Peter 3:15-16.

Love. Though we're not accustomed to it I submit to you that the love of God is surely one of “these things” that Peter is referring to here.

Why do we assume today that everyone can understand the love of God? So much modern “evangelism” hastens to throw out phrases like, “God loves you,” or “God loves you unconditionally.” There's nothing more that a believer should strive to know than love, but I hope I can convince you in this letter how important it is to handle this topic carefully in our lives. We should be careful not to treat love as a simple thing, or as something to be taken lightly. We should not presume everyone understands God's love. It is a precious thing, the love of God. It is not promiscuous, but it is most precious indeed. Billboards to total strangers going 70 MPH on the freeway read: “I love you exactly as you are. – God.” Or, “I am not angry with you. – God.” Or my personal favorite, “Accept Jesus. He accepts you.” While I do not wish to in any way overly complicate the subject of the love of God in this letter, I would not define it loosely as is so often done today. I don't want to see its definition set up as a fill in the blank especially for the sake of anyone who may be outside it. I don't want to help people twist the love of God in idolatry. I may work to define it simply to a toddler, but not necessarily to the world, and certainly not to the church. I want to know what love is in its biblical context. I want to be able to articulate it and not talk about it like some kind of sentimental fantasy. And no I don't feel that this in any way compromises the childlike faith we're invited to by Jesus. I cannot throw out love as a bottom shelf concept. I no longer expect sinners to understand God's love even if they think they can. Who loves on a cross? No one. The love of God is very different than any other love. I don't tell non-believers that God loves them when I'm talking about the cross. I will tell them that God loves sinners when I speak of the cross, but I can't put love down lightly for them to tread upon. Love is a pearl and I do not want it trampled. I feel it's a service to people to not give them the opportunity to blaspheme whenever possible. I don't want them

inadvertently shaming love by mistake by being put in a position where they can insert their own definitions of love on top of a faulty understanding of God's and then reject what they think is God's definition of love while they're in fact only rejecting their own erroneous proclivities of what God's love actually looks like. I don't want to help them do this. "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet..." Matthew 7:6. What can be more applicable to this teaching of Jesus than love? The gospel is a message of love, but oh how we twist it. I don't want to give occasion for men to blaspheme the Son and his amazing love. More have been swayed to sleep the sleep of death by demons today through a soft gospel message of the love of God that demands nothing than all the sermons on hell in the past two thousand years. This is what Peter means when he says that the unlearned and unstable twist Paul's (and all Bible) teachings to their destruction. The air is sweet in the American church and the eyes of many have grown dim under a false pretense of God's love. I don't want non-believers to be misled about God's love through mistaken sentiments or misperception. There are ways we can either help or hinder them in this. It starts with taking the subject of love itself seriously.

God is love, 1 John 4:8. Jonathan Edwards wrote the following in part one of his book the Religious Affections: "The Scriptures do represent true religion, as being summarily comprehended in love, the chief of the affections, and fountain of all other affections." Amen to that. There is no doubt that love is what the mature believer longs to understand more. There is also ultimately nothing more that we want anyone to understand than love. It is the love of God that motivates those who are best motivated in the faith. Without love we are nothing, 1 Corinthians 13. Christians grow slowly in their understanding of love through a great many teachings and trials; we do not just "arrive" and grasp it because we're saved. We often come to understand the love of God best through our manifold failures and sins. He is so merciful through all of our weakness that it melts and molds us to better appreciate love. No believer will tell you that he did not come to understand the love of God better only after repetitive sin. We cannot understand that our standing before God is in Christ alone and not in our performance easily. As we sin and see that our performances could never be good enough we come to understand the depth of forgiveness in Christ more and more. This is understanding love more and more. It is not overnight. We mature into love with God, and learn to take it less and less for granted each year. We can come to know it well. Nevertheless, I believe that God's love is wholly beyond us all. I believe that he loves in a way

we are commanded to, but just can't. We fall short of the love of God. His is a perfect love. That alone shows us how his love is ultimately *completely* different than our own. Even my love for my kids isn't perfect. His is a love that is perfectly motivated, perfectly based, perfectly fixed and perfectly pure. Jesus' analogy of a parent's love for his child helps us understand God's love in many ways, Matthew 7:11, but even our understanding of this does not give a full orb understanding of the love of God. No parent loves their child with a cross. *Thank God and his blessed love that we don't need to.* Doctrinally, we ought to approach love like Moses came to the flaming bush with our faces down and our sandals off, yet there's something else about this subject today that causes us to be flippant and whimsical instead. We throw love around like cheap paint. We should approach God and love with reverence. It will make us dance at times and sing with joy in our hearts, but it's still something holy and precious. How many of us classify love anywhere close to reverence? Let us never forget that we were all orphans at one time in this world and were brought near by the love of God, Ephesians 2:13. We were once outsiders to love ourselves, and now we're insiders sent as ambassadors to outsiders, 2 Corinthians 5:20. They don't know what love is. Much like every aspect of God but only much more so, there is something to the love of God that can only be shown in what he has done for us, and it's because of that fact that I don't like the billboard statements about love thrown out to just anyone in a lot of modern "evangelism." Thank God that he uses such things in our lives, but I'm talking about what we as a church should teach, not what may be used by God despite our carelessness. God often comes to people on beds of suicide. That does not mean that we as a church should hand out rope. What if someone is abused and their idea of love contains abuse? What if this is all they know? Can a billboard style mention of "love" accurately convey the love of God to them? Instead of just saying the word love to people like a dictionary term with a blank space behind it for them to fill in a definition, we need to anchor the term to the works of God as best we can at all times. The Bible is replete with statements like: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins," 1 John 4:10. Or, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." John 3:16a. Or, "The *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," Galatians 2:20. God gave. The common denominator of this absolutely uncommon love is the cross. God's love is perceptible through the cross of Jesus. Love acted in the redemption of the elect throughout history in every work God did. Love is not a mere sentiment

to God. The very works of God are the only reason that the word “love” should be sweet on our lips.

God “showed” his love to his people through all of his works in history. The Exodus was the major event of the Old Testament. It was an act of love. Though we don’t exactly find the word love in the Song of Moses (Exodus 15) after the Exodus we know that God is eternally motivated by several good things, one of which is certainly love. His love is demonstrable, and it culminated in its display outside the City of Jerusalem on a cross around A.D. 28. This is a love that is most specific. It is nailed to a cross! It is not flippant. You cannot attach this love to Buddhism or Islam or any ungodly amalgamation of world religions. This is a Christ-centered love. It is exclusive to the cross. This love is found nowhere else. A dumb man can point to this love. Deaf men can hear and blind men can see it.

Jesus did not die for all men. In fact, with all respect to those who believe that he did I cannot shrink from the assertion that such a sentiment is silly. Who could believe that an omniscient God did not know, by name, exactly those that he came to redeem. No, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,” Ephesians 1:4. Of course, if he chose “us” he knows “us.” What shepherd does not know the precise number of his sheep? Saying he died for all is like saying a good husband went to a jewelry store and bought a diamond for a woman, but wasn’t sure which. No, it was intentional. Jesus bought something. The husband has someone in mind. So did God. Just as the high priests interceded yearly for a specific group of people, so Jesus intercedes forever for a specific people. To say, “God died for you” to just anyone is to make this most excellent and eternal love of God something to be trampled upon. We shouldn’t do it. He may not have died for them. Wise ambassadors do not overstep their bounds in negotiations. They don’t make concessions they’re not sure they can meet. We can accomplish the same thing we mean to say to a stranger by saying something like, “Christ died for sinners,” or, “Christ died for all those who would repent and put their trust in him,” or “Christ died for people like us,” etc., but we can say these things without cheapening the love of God. God’s love toward believers is special and is not like the love he has toward all men in the general sense. Scripture says, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...” Romans 8:29. This word “foreknew” here, by the good and necessary consequences of interpretation, actually means “fore-loved.” It comes from the Greek “ginosko” and is the same word used by Mary when she responded to the angel, “...How can this be, since I do not know [ginosko] a

man?” Luke 1:24. It’s a special address in Romans 8:29 showing an intimate acquaintance of those in view. He does not merely know something about those he foreloves; *he knows them*. Beliefs or actions are not thus called, justified and glorified; believers are. This word “ginosko” can even mean a sexual knowing such as its use in Matthew 1:25 where it says that Joseph, “...did not know [ginosko] her [Mary] till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.” What this is saying is that Joseph and Mary didn’t have sex until after she had given birth to Jesus. Did Joseph not know who Mary was before Jesus was born? Yes, of course he did. He knew her, but he didn’t “know” her in the sexual sense that the word here connotes. We must learn to rightly divide Scripture. It helps and it’s actually fun. In Romans 8:29, we know that of course God “foreknew” everyone in the sense that he is omniscient, but not everyone was “foreloved” in this intimate sense of the word AND thus predestined, thus called, thus justified, thus glorified, Romans 8:29-30. Those God foreloved *in this way* he predestinated, etc. God “knew” those he chose and he knew them very specifically and personally, cf. Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:13, 16; Job 14:5. This is an eternal and commanded love that we understand in the church as tough as it sometimes is to see. Jesus made a grand canyon of distinction between his sheep and the world in John 17:9. He said, “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.” Only those who are given to the Son by the Father are loved in this way by either the Father or the Son. No, God does not love all men the same.

God shows his lovingkindness even to a world that hates him with food and their enjoyment of the pleasures of this life for a season. “...for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust,” Matthew 5:45. This love is not a redemptive love, however. Men are not saved by this love. I like what The Baptist Faith and Message says in section II.A on this: “God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.” There is a difference between the love God has for the saints as a Father, and the love God has for the world that is fatherly.

For God so loved the world does not mean all people in the redemptive sense of the word love at all. There is another verse to compare here that shows us that just like with “know” (ginosko) that the word “world” (kosmos)

must also be properly compartmentalized. 1 John 2:15 says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” The same word kosmos is translated “world” all three times here. Obviously the Father does not so love the “world” in this sense. He loves his own *in the world*, and because of this we are not now *of the world*. When God gave his Son to the world it was for the redemption of all of the elect from throughout the entire world, 2 Peter 3:9. Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come,” Matthew 24:14. God’s purposes are invincible and so the Bible also says things toward the end like: “You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,” Revelation 5:9. Everyone who is ever saved anywhere in the world is saved because God the Son was given. God loves his own that much.

We must handle words and concepts like “love” carefully. Any concept is to be treated carefully, really, but I don’t see too many evangelicals mishandling the concept of hell these days. I doubt anyone would disagree with me that we need to be careful when we speak on hell. We need to be careful when we address the sin of homosexuality. I doubt anyone would disagree with me on this. Again, I’m not trying to complicate the subject of love. Making something precise so that it does not denigrate truth is not the same as complicating it. In light of the way we use the word “love” today, I think that such teaching is very helpful for us. Could anyone really deny that our use of the word love has cheapened the Bible’s concept of it? We say, “I love that movie,” “I love chocolate,” “...the lost,” “...Celtic freeform jazz,” “...puppies,” “...God.” We are so capricious with the term, and it’s also just our language. The Greeks had at least four different words for love in their language. We have only one. They were therefore inherently more precise with the term through the term and context. We should not be careless today with our one word “love” as Christians. If we are careless with the context then we’re careless with the terms that should define or describe it too. Love means different things to different people. We as a church should be helping people see the cross. It will make all the difference.

I sat with a fellow in the Phoenix airport yesterday. I had just finished writing the majority of this letter in the days prior. He said he knew nothing of the Christian faith. He said he was an agnostic. I asked him to help me prove my premise here, and he was most gracious to do so. My premise is that people don’t just get the love of God. I formed the following question for him. I

said, “Imagine we’re at a cross two thousand years ago together. You’re a passerby Roman citizen and I’m a Jew. I’m in overwhelming tears over Jesus on the cross, and you try, seeing that you’ve seen maybe a hundred crucifixions in your time, to offer me some sort of council or comfort. You eventually ask, ‘Why are you so upset about this guy?’ And I say to you in all earnestness, ‘that’s the King of the world, the Creator who’s up there.’ You then ask, ‘Why’s he up there if he’s the King?!’ To which I reply, ‘Because he loves you.’” You should’ve seen the look on his face. It was one of utter confusion. It made no sense to him. The greatest act of love in all of history made no connection to his life in that Schlotzky’s, man. And I don’t blame him! He said something to the effect of, “Well, that’s weird...he loves me so he’s on a cross?” He agreed that if he was the Roman guy that day he’d probably be like, “Uh...ok? Have a nice day.” I then explained his sin in light of the law and was able to come back to that same cross scene and show it as a ransom, a rescue mission for all those who would repent and come to Jesus. “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,” Matthew 20:28. He then understood it. It made sense to him. Love made sense. We should not just assume that people get it when we say, “God loves you.”

There are certain topics in the Bible that are beyond the scope of the comprehension of the non-believer. I would put love at the top of that list like I said at the outset. There is likely no concept more twisted to the destruction of the unstable today than that of love itself. Love, true love for God, is a fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. It only really comes to us with him! Reader, perhaps the most defining characteristic separating the saved from the unsaved is the pronoun phrase- “those who love God.” The true church is made up of those who love God. This is a very precise statement. God has made us to differ from the outside. The world does *not* love God. This defines them. This is ultimately their undoing. We are different from the world because God loved us and saved us. It is only by his Spirit that we can even actually say that Jesus is Lord, 1 Corinthians 12:3. It is the Spirit alone who enables us to love God in the first place and not all men have the Spirit. Not all can love God. Not all can grasp the love of God. The Bible says that it’s the Holy Spirit who gives us our love for God. “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us,” Romans 5:5. If he has not been given to someone then that someone cannot, in one sense of the term, really know the love of God at all. All things being equal then, why would we take the concept of love and expect it to be such a simple or pure

motivation for people to follow Jesus when they can't even rightly apprehend it? Beloved, the judgment of God and the wrath of God are easier concepts for the lost than love. The unsaved man cannot perceive love by the conscience, but he can perceive sin by it, Romans 2:15. I'm not saying it isn't wise to talk about love. Some people need to hear about it more than anything else and we should be mindful of that as we go, but do we not just assume that everyone gets the love of God today? This is dangerous and leads to a "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" kind of foolishness. Anyone who begins an "evangelistic encounter" with a stranger with that kind of line is either a careless Christian or a wolf in sheep's clothing. Paul says, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Corinthians 2:14. Is not love the highest of spiritual truths? Then why do we think unspiritual people will do anything other than twist it in confusion? Is there any concept the devil would rather distort in the minds of men than the love of God? Is our culture not "in love" with a hundred evils that cannot ever possibly produce any true love at all? Friend, we are best brought to understand love at the cross of Jesus Christ. We should bring men to Mt. Sinai and to Mt. Calvary to really ground love rightly. Spiritual truth, in the sense of anyone eternally profiting from a knowledge of it, is forever outside the capacity of the unsaved. You can know all about Jesus and not be saved. I discoursed with a Buddhist this week who once taught in a church I was in. He never knew God. Facts and doctrines do not save any more than miracles can. True Christians do not have facts and doctrines alone. We have facts and doctrines *and Jesus*- the one who backs them up. Love, like any concept, must be handled with care. Reader, when I say God loves sinners I can directly tie that to every page of the Bible. There is a whole lot to love. It is an ocean. It is not an unanchored idea. It is an idea as richly rooted in history and theology as the Seed of the woman himself. It is both sublime and simple. Adults should define it as their children dance in it so that one day their children can define it while the adults dance into it eternally. I would not stand on a street corner and open up the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in election on a college campus. I would not address a group of unwitting strangers about the intricate differences between Rome's understanding of justification and the church's. I would not expect a non-believer to be able to understand the doctrine of hell. That person would have no ability to ground his understanding of its reasonability in the infinite righteousness of a perfectly holy and infinite God whose anger against sin is only properly seen in light of an eternal hell. Why is it that so many of us would assume that the average non-believer would

struggle with the idea of hell, but not with the idea of love? Perhaps it's because we relate God to a loving dad too quickly. There is some merit to this, of course, as mentioned before. God is indeed a good father to his own. He is fatherly to all others. God is Father to the saved; he will consign all those over whom he is merely fatherly to hell. I want to be to my kids what God has been to me. But what if someone had an abusive father, or an absentee father who didn't care about them at all? Could they not then understand love? No, they can. They could through the cross. Our false ideas of love are just other sins that must be repented of as we come to Christ. Our false ideas of love must be nailed to the cross. God is different than just a loving dad. God is a Father, but not to all, Ephesians 2:3. Jesus identified that there are such things as children of the devil, or children of hell, John 8:44; Matthew 23:15. God is not the Father of all. He is the Creator of all, and so all retain that dignity inherently, but he is the Father of the born again believer *only*. God is Spirit, and we must be born again. Born once, die twice; born twice, die once, Revelation 2:11.

Perhaps I can convince you to stop saying "God loves you" to everyone you meet indiscriminately by showing you that what's perhaps most difficult about the concept of love to the world isn't just the idea of love itself, but rather that they can't understand why they wouldn't have it naturally even without Jesus or his cross? The belief that God loves them "just as they are" has become an idol, and we as a church have been all too quick to hand them our earrings and necklaces to fashion it. So many "altar calls" and calls to "accept Jesus into the heart" stem from this long fostered ignorance, and we too allow it right at the feet of Sinai. Many "preachers" ask for prayers to be given, but there's no cost counting. There's no repentance called for. I hate the idea of decisional regeneration. The, "just say this prayer" thing. I hate it. Many say things like, "God loves you unconditionally." It is not true that God loved me as an unredeemed person "just as I was." Unquestionably not in the redemptive, saving sense of the word. He had to make me lovable through the new birth. He crucified that old man with the Son, that's how much he loved him "just as he was," Galatians 2:20. Someone once wisely said that God loves us too much to leave us as he finds us. This is true. In our day this is perhaps more of a pressing need to understand than ever. We are so full of ourselves today as people that we can scarcely comprehend of anyone or any God actually really knowing us inside and out and *not* loving us to death. We feel that heaven would actually be a lesser place without us. This is the default mindset of my people. If God had a wallet our picture would be in it. If he had a refrigerator our picture would be on it. If we were the only one on earth he

would have died just for us. I've heard all this sentimental hogwash from pulpits. And on and on the delusional, albeit perhaps well-meaning silliness, continues to fashion a concept of love actually divorced from love. *Such sentimentality is hardly a cross.* Our culture has developed a conceited view of itself that has skewed the concept of love entirely. We think God loves us because we're so lovable. God then comes along and says that our condemnation literally stems from our innermost being and we naturally have a hard time with it. If you read God's diagnosis of the human heart in Romans 3:9-18 it's impossible to *not* distinguish God's love for his people from the world. The world has a skewed concept of the love of God because they do not start from the biblical standpoint that we as people are wholly unlovable. This again shows us why we must be careful when we just say, "God loves you." No one loves like God, but let's help people understand that by not being too careless with it. We don't deserve God's love. Kindly helping people see this is the job of the evangelist. The great evangelist George Whitefield said, "First, then, before you can speak peace to your hearts, you must be made to see, made to feel, made to weep over, made to bewail, your actual transgressions against the law of God." How many people do you think you'll meet on your average college campus today who are predisposed to view themselves in such a light in any sense whatsoever? Has anything they've been taught helped them see themselves biblically? The following quote is absolutely a descriptor of our time in my opinion. It describes my current cultural milieu exactly: "The moment God's law ceases to be the most powerful factor in influencing the moral sensitivity of any individual or nation, there will be indifference to divine wrath, and when indifference comes in it always brings in its train indifference to salvation." -A.N. Martin. The cross is a sign both of love and of God's extreme wrath against sin. God did that to the Son and Jesus was only dying for the sins of others. What do you think he'll do to you *for your own innumerable sins*? This is us, reader. We are indifferent to God's wrath. Because sinners believe that the love of God is owed to them, or at least that they are qualified for it if there is a God up there, they cannot rightly esteem the cross which is the greatest act of love for sinners. It's our job to be careful with the word love so that they can come to see it rightly. Don't just throw the word out there carelessly. Lift it up by placing it just behind the cross. Let people know, in every way possible, that they must pass by the cross to get it. Be a wise ambassador and steward of it.

We must contextualize the love of God where he would have us to do so. We must determine ourselves to teach good things with wisdom. No one in the

Bible's message was love, love, and love. Paul once said, "For I determined not to know anything among you except love." No, that wasn't it. He said, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified," 1 Corinthians 2:2. You should use the term love, but don't let just anyone give it its context. If you teach about the cross then you teach about love invariably and in turn. If you just talk about love, however, you can do that and not have the cross. A love without a crucified love giver is hatred. Love without the cross and the Christ who rose again after it is the doctrine not merely of the tempter, but of the dragon himself. It kills.

In the military when we're going to give a briefing we're taught to, "consider your audience." C.Y.A. I learned this in Iraq as a young Second Lieutenant all too well. If I'm going to brief my subordinates, that briefing's content may look wholly different than if I'm going to brief my superiors, even if both briefings cover the same topic. When you talk about love, do not just think that your listeners understand what the heck you're talking about. They don't! They are neither the Jews of Jesus' day nor the Greeks of Paul's. The Bible says explicitly that they do not have the capability to understand the love of the Holy Spirit, John 14:17. This was always true. The church may understand love, but not the world. Consider your audience like Jesus did. Consider your audience like the Apostles did. Consider your audience. By and large in America, we are surrounded by a wholly secular people. My immediate definition of that here is a people so distracted by stuff that they are not at all concerned with the things of God. 99.9% of the people I share the gospel with have *never* read the Bible, or even just the New Testament, for themselves. They have opinions on it, but they've never actually read it. We are surrounded by people who are smart with technology, but spiritual imbeciles. Seriously. I was once just the same. Some would still say I am. In many ways I am. Your average person in America today's spiritual IQ would match my knowledge of the intricate details of time travel. I say again: consider your audience.

Love is something we only get through the cross, and that still dimly in this life, 1 Corinthians 13:12. There is a veil that lies over the eyes of people that is only removed through Jesus, 2 Corinthians 3:14. I will spiritualize this text a bit to say that there is a veil over the eyes of the world as it pertains to the concept of love, and that veil is only removed through Christ and his cross. We come to see love more and more clearly and still only in part after all of our years of searching the Scriptures, and living our lives in obedience to them. Being led by the Holy Spirit means living by the Bible. We see his love

for us only because the Spirit has revealed Christ to us. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,” Romans 5:8. “He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you,” John 16:14. Do not take this idea for granted enough to assume that when you say, “God loves you” to a stranger that they’ll not destroy what you mean to say. I’m not even saying that they necessarily mean to. It’s just the fallen nature. It would destroy all that you mean to say if a person heard you say it and added a “because I...” statement to the end of it. God loves me “because I...” We know that. They don’t. Be wise. Don’t teach calculus to someone who doesn’t know basic arithmetic. Talk about sin, then talk about the cross so that love doesn’t remain some ethereal concept or romantic sentiment in competition with one’s love for pork rinds. Let love bear its fruit like a tree atop rich gospel soil. In Jesus’ day the people were literally up to their ankles in the blood of animals that continuously reminded the righteous of their sin. A talk on love on top of that would be much more palatable in light of the cross. Paul understood love from the vantage of his previous faith as a Pharisee. This was their audience, not ours. Our culture today has no such reminders. We are post Christian. They had the temple; we have Hollywood. The modern church’s billboard/bumper sticker style approaches to the idea of love are usually accompanied by a Coca-Cola and a concept that inadvertently assures people there’s no hell because there’s too much love out there in God for such a barbaric concept. The love of God has been removed from God in our day. Because of this, you can have “love” in Islam, Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, homosexuality, fornication, transgenderism, etc. You can only have love, true love, the only love that is God’s love, if it is nothing less than eternal. No eternal life exists in any of these things. Christ alone brings eternal life and that through the cross. There is love, world. Take it or leave it. We have de-loved love as a church. This is only possible because the cross (in the context that makes it make sense- sin) is not the paramount message of the church. If the cross was the center of it in any way at all then this would not be happening. See, you can’t understand love, God’s love, without the cross. You can’t understand the cross, God’s cross, without sin. Seeing that we as a people do not understand sin, we cannot understand love because the cross makes no sense. You can’t prevent all misconstruction, but we should try because we love them.

The love of God is more complex than the Levitical Law, but it is completely accessible and simple to even the youngest of children of God. Nothing I’m saying here is to complicate love. I believe that what I’m saying

here should be the basics of love so that no further definitions are needed. In this sense true love never needs definition; I'm offering definition here only because of untrue love so that true love might become lovelier among us. It affects everything we do when we handle love with care through our sight of it on the cross. The world will know us by it (John 13:35) because we know it. Because of the gospel we are brought to understand and love the love of God. Not because of what it "does" for us. Oh, that's a part of it, yes. We come to love it because we're actually given the ability, nay the joy, of loving love. God is love. Don't take this lightly. It cost God a lot to bring life and immortality to light in the gospel, 2 Timothy 1:10. We dare not assume that the love of God can be detached from the cross of God without doing irreparable damage to the gospel of God. If you're sure that your audience understands the message of the cross. If you believe that your audience understands that Calvary was a ransom, a rescue mission from the wrath of a holy God. If sin and self-dependence has at least been broached. If they understand such things in any way then love might just be the only thing needed to connect the dots in their mind. We sow and we water. Talk about love carefully and openly. Christianity is the religion of love. Freely we have received it and freely we can give it, but please, please don't assume that love is common to all, and that all people will understand it rightly.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.