

LOVE IS.... 4/11/2010

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Shawna has said many times, "Scandalous love is here." And it's raised a few eyebrows. We're talking about the scandalous love of God, and we're beginning a series now on the scandalous love of God.

My name is Greg Boyd, if you're visiting here. I suppose it's Greg Boyd even for those who aren't visiting here, but I'm the senior pastor here and the main teacher.

We've taken a break from the book of Luke to do this series. It is as important and foundational a series as we could possibly be involved in. I want to entitle this message "Love is..." because I'm going to be laying the foundation for what's going to be following here.

I want to read from First John, the Epistle of John, Chapter 4. A classic verse. The most profound verse in the Bible, I suspect. He says, "Whoever does not love does not know God." Whoever does not love does not know God. Why? "Because God is love." God is Love.

Pray with me here for a moment.

Father, I thank you for every precious soul that is in this auditorium right now hearing this message, for every precious person who's listening through podcast, watching through television, or some other means. I thank you, God, for them that their life trajectory has brought them to this point.

I pray, Lord God, that this message would be—in fact this whole series—would just be revolutionary, revelatory, transforming. Invade us with your love, God, right now, invade us with your love, saturate us with your love, baptize us in your love, fill us with your love.

Use this message, Lord God, to tear down strongholds that keep us insulated from your love, lies that keep us viewing you as less than you truly are. Holy Spirit, infuse this word with your authority.

We pray in Jesus' name.

And all of God's people said amen, amen, amen.

I suspect that there are at least some in this auditorium and some who are listening through podcast or some other means who, when I read that passage, "God is love", some part of their brain does something like this: "Blah blah blah, wuh wuh wuh wuh wah. I've heard that 1,000 times. I've heard 1,000 sermons on it. Got that in Sunday school. Been there. Done that. Let's move on to something a little more profound. This is so elementary. It's boring."

Or maybe some have something even more sinister. They'll say, "God is love," and they'll hear that voice from the preacher on *The Princess Bride* going, "Twue wuv bwings ush togewer to-day." And they sort of satirize it in their brain. And maybe they're hearing the part of their brain that's saying, "Oh, here we go, that lovey-dovey, nicety-nice, fluffy-fluff-fluff-fluff God who is just always so, you know, loving," and that liberal view of God and things of that sort.

We think we understand this verse, "God is love." The first word I'm going to say in the series—maybe the most important word—is this: If you think that you understand the verse, "God is love," let me assure you that you don't have a clue. Don't have a clue. Especially if you think you understand it. God's love is scandalous precisely because we don't have a clue. None of us do, really. In fact, we can't have a clue. And if you don't see that, well, then you really don't have a clue.

God's love, if you begin to understand what it's all about, the first thing to understand—and you never lose this understanding—is that you can't even begin to get your mind around it. When it comes to God's love, I don't think any of us are even out of kindergarten. When it comes to understanding God's love, I don't think any of us, however profound your experience has been of God's love—and maybe it's really profound—but I don't think any of us have had more than the most momentary glimmer of the full radiance of his magnificent, beautiful love.

When it comes to understanding God's love, I think we're all pretty much in the position of a five-year-old. Kind of like this: a five-year-old who just learned that one plus one equals two. And our relationship with love is sort of like this five-year-old's relationship with nonlinear equations and how they map out the superpositions of subatomic particles. Doesn't have much of a clue about that stuff. That's where we are with regard to God's love.

We experience God's love the way an ant at the foot of Mount Everest might experience the grandeur of Mount Everest and the height of Mount Everest. The ant really doesn't have a clue. And that's kind of where we are at with God's love. We touch the foot of the mountain, but we don't at all grasp the height and the grandeur and the majesty of that mountain.

Our understanding of God's love is a bit like the understanding of a microorganism sort of floating out there in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. And how much does that organism understand about the width and the depth and the grandeur of the ocean? Not much.

And that's pretty much where we're at when it comes to understanding God's love. We don't have a clue. If we have any clue at all, then we grasp that we don't have a clue. And, if you're not there yet, then you really don't have a clue.

Over the years, I've become convinced that God loves me. I don't think there's much of my brain that resists that anymore. There used to be, but not anymore. I believe God loves me. And I've had times where I've really experienced, profoundly, the love of God. The most recent time being this Good Friday service that we had. It was just beautiful. God's love just saturated that

place and I just felt overwhelmed by the love of God. It was profound. But the more profound your experience of God's love is, the more you realize that you're just scratching the surface.

Experiencing God's love, if it's a genuine authentic experience, it's a little bit like looking at a star-filled sky some night when the moon isn't out and you're away from the city and you're out in the country and you see all those stars there. If you'll let it, that experience can be overwhelming because of the infinitude of the experience.

As you look at the stars, you realize that you're seeing just a small, small, small, small fraction of all the stars. It's almost like -- it's almost like a teaser there. It points beyond itself. And the enormity of this incredible creation can just overwhelm you. What you see points beyond itself, and that's the most important aspect about what you see. That's how experiencing what God's love is. If it's an authentic experience, then it never gets to the point where you say, "Been there, done that" or "Got that now." No. It always points beyond itself. However much you experience, you realize that there's an infinite more that you've not experienced. And that is, really, the most important dimension to God's love.

On Friday night when I had this experience, a verse came to me on our Good Friday service. I shared a little bit of it at the end of the service. The verse is Ephesians, Chapter 3. Paul says this—and this is so profound, so profound—he says:

"I pray that you [believers], being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."

And look at this:

"And to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

To know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge. Think about that.

A couple things to note about this passage. First of all, he prays that we would have power, a supernatural power, that God would empower us to get some grasp of the love of God. It takes spiritual power to do this. It takes a supernatural anointing to even begin to understand the height and the depth and the width and the length of the love of Christ. Left to our own natural thought, our own fallen minds, we can't believe this. We can't begin to grasp it. It takes supernatural power because to our natural reasoning it is strictly unbelievable.

Our natural fallen mind will always hear this message—if we're hearing it accurately—our natural fallen mind will say, "No way. That's too good to be true. Surely, the preacher is giving us one side of the story. Surely, he's giving us an over-optimistic spin on this. It's impossible that the truth would be that beautiful. Maybe this is true for others, but it's not true for me." Our

natural mind, our fallen mind will always do that to insulate us from the beauty, the infinite beauty, of this reality, the reality of God's love.

And so, against that weakness—that's how we're weak, we're so weak we can't begin to understand the depth of his love—against that, Paul prays that we'd have power, a supernatural power, to begin to know how wide and long and high and deep is this love of Christ and that we be established in that. And he prays that we would have the power, the supernatural power, to know that which is beyond knowledge, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

How do you know something that is unknowable? The answer is: You know that which is unknowable when you bump up against its unknowability. When you realize that you can't know it, now you're beginning to know it. When you realize you don't have a clue, now you're starting to get a clue. That's what God's love is like.

You begin to know the width of Christ's love when you begin to realize that it goes an infinity to the east and an infinity to the west. So that if you were to travel a trillion miles in that direction or a trillion miles in that direction, you haven't even really gone one inch in terms of comprehending the love of Christ. When you understand that the love of Christ is wider than you can possibly imagine, and you can't ever begin to get your mind around it, well, now you're beginning to understand the width of the love of Christ.

You begin to understand how long the length of Christ's love when you begin to understand that it goes an infinity in front of you and it's an infinity in back of you, and so that if you were to go 100 trillion years traveling in one direction or the other, you haven't even begun to cross a centimeter of the distance that would comprehend the love of Christ. When you get that and realize it's beyond your wildest dreams, how long and how wide is the love of Christ, well, now you're beginning to get a clue.

And you begin to understand what the height of Christ's love is—remember Paul says, “I want you to understand the width and the length and the height and the depth”—you begin to understand the height of Christ's love when you begin to understand that it goes up forever for ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever. So, if you were to take a rocketship and go a trillion, trillion, trillion to the trillionth power light years up, you haven't even left the ground in terms of traversing the height of Christ's love. It's beyond anything you could possibly think or imagine. It's better than you could possibly dream.

And you begin to understand the depth of Christ's love when you begin to see that however far down you go—go down a trillion, trillion, trillion to the trillionth light-years, go down that far, and you haven't even covered one inch. If you were to fall into a bottomless pit and fall for a trillion trillion to the trillionth power light years of free fall, just falling down that abyss, after all that time, you haven't even gone one inch in terms of understanding of God's love.

However low you go, he's lower. However high you go, he's higher. However wide you go, he's wider. However long you go, he's longer. Not just that, but he's an infinity longer and an infinity

higher and an infinity wider and an infinity deeper; and, when you grasp that, now you're beginning to get a clue about the enormity and the beauty and the intensity of God's love. When you know that it surpasses all knowledge, now you're beginning to know it. When you really believe that God's love is like that—without any ifs, any buts, any qualifications—when you believe that, you begin to manifest the power to understand what goes beyond understanding as the love of Christ.

God's love—when you begin to see that you can't possibly outrun it, you can't out-jump it, you can't out-fall it, you can't outlast it, and you certainly can't out-sin it—now you're getting a clue. That's why it's scandalous love. When you begin to see that you can't comprehend it, you can't grasp it, you can't limit it, you can't qualify it, you can't condition it, you can't temper it, you can't moderate it—it's scandalous love—now you're beginning to get a clue.

God's love, you can't restrict it, you can't confine it, you can't define it, you can't refine it—it's scandalous love. It's beautiful. It's beyond anything you can possibly imagine. And when we bump up against its unknowability, now we're beginning to know it. When it seems too good to be true, now you're finally starting to get a clue. In fact, that should be a little rhyme we say all the time, "If it seems too good to be true, then you're having a clue!" Because it means that you're heading in the right direction, and you're bumping up against some of the lies in your head that are blocking you from fully entering into this.

To our fallen mind, it's always going to seem too good to be true. But to suppose that, in fact, there's any limit to it is to limit God and to take away some of the beauty of the love that, in fact, he is.

So, it seems to me it's good to start at the very beginning of the series—since this is the main thing we're up against—we think we know, we think we got it, we think this is old news. It can never be old. It can never be old. We can never say, "Good enough." And so here at the beginning of the series it seems like would be good to break that stronghold. We want to break that stronghold. I want to break that stronghold. Do you want to break that stronghold? Let's do it right now.

There's power in our words, so I want you to repeat after me. If this is in your heart, repeat after me. If it's not in your heart, don't, because I don't like to manipulate anybody. But, if this is in your heart, repeat after me.

*We don't have a clue.
We don't get it.
We are microorganisms
And God's love is an infinite ocean.
Father, empower us
To know the height
And the depth
And the width
And the length
Of the love of Christ
That passes all knowledge.
In Jesus name,
Amen.*

Stronghold be broken! Amen! Amen!

Some of you, I know, have got “buts” in your head. But but but but but but but but! Okay. We'll deal with the “buts” later. Right now, just cancel the “buts.” Kick that “but” out of your head. Time to kick “but.” The “buts” in your head, kick them out! You don't have to understand it, but just know that this is what Christ reveals and Christ is the revelation of God.

Paul says we are to be established and rooted in this. I pray that you be established and rooted, founded solid in that love of Christ that passes all knowledge. In other words, this will be the foundation for our life. Nothing else.

The source of our security, well-being, happiness, contentment should be this and nothing else. To the degree that God's love—that infinite love, that unknowable love—is the foundation of my existence, I will have a sense of well-being, contentment regardless of what happens in my life. I'm always surrounded by the love of Jesus Christ.

To the extent that we're not rooted and grounded in Christ's love, we're going to be rooted and grounded in something else like the stock market or our house or our good looks or our reputation. And that is so shallow and temporary and iffy. No. Put all your eggs in this basket. Be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.

The whole point of this series is to wake up, wake up anew, as for the first time, to the beauty and the grandeur of this incredible love and to be transformed by the beauty and grandeur of this love. To do that, we've got to confront all the obstacles in our head that insulate us from entering into that love.

One of the major obstacles we have in our head that keep us from really being transformed by this love and believing this love is that we're messed up on what it is to love. As I said last week—did I say it last week or the week before—we're all screwed up. We're all messed up. And we're really messed up when it comes to love. We've got messed up ideas on love—some

more, some less—but, to some degree, we're all screwed up and polluted by the world when it comes to understanding what love is.

It can happen a million different ways, but here's one of the ways it can happen. Dad says he loves you. Over and over again he says, "I love you." But he's never around, and there's never any kind of bonding there. There's, actually, detachment. Or the parents say, "I love you," but around third grade it became very clear that that love seems to go up or down based on how you did in gymnastics or on your test score or on your musical instrument or in some other sport. The love is conditional.

Oh, *that's* what love means.

Or it could be worse than that. Somebody in your life is saying "I love you" all the time and then they beat the crap out of you because you did something wrong. Or maybe they sexually abused you, all the while telling you they love you.

And so we then grow up thinking that love looks like that. Love gets associated with detachment. Love gets associated with performance. Or love gets associated with abuse. And then you're told God is love. Well, that's not necessarily good news if your view of love is all screwed up. And then we impose our polluted views of love onto God, and it's jaded.

There's a lady I knew a number of years ago at the first church I was the associate pastor at. She came to church, gave her life to the Lord. It was beautiful. She had a beautiful one-year-old daughter with her, and it was just good. But then we noticed that she always had these kind of bruises and bumps and stuff on her. We would ask what happened, and she would always have some awkward excuse: "Oh I fell down" or "I bumped my head." I thought she was the most clumsy person on the planet.

But, over time, you begin to suspect that something else is going on. And one day she shows up with some teeth missing, and I'm not buying the story that she tripped. She finally confesses that she's living with this guy who, whenever he drinks or goes into a rage, beats her up.

We do an intervention and get her involved in a woman's shelter. She gets out. It looks like things are going to be fine now, but she goes back to this guy. And that happened several times. I remember talking to her one time saying, "Why do you go back to this guy, allowing him to do this to you? And then, on top of that, your daughter's getting old enough to notice this stuff, and that's putting stuff in her head. Why do you do that?" And her answer was, "Well, because he loves me. He tells me he loves me. He's always sorry."

So, in her twisted, sick world, love did not rule out vicious abuse. I don't know what her background was—she ended up leaving the church as we'd get more aggressive on insisting that something be done about this, and she finally chose him. But, I can promise you, guarantee, that some kind of abuse happened in her background. She learned that somewhere. And now

her daughter's learning it as well. It's tragic. If that's your view of love, then to hear "God is love," well, that would not rule out God abusing us.

In fact, I'm convinced that a lot of traditional theology is a result—it's a working out of people who have got jaded views of love and they impose that on God. And so, when they say "God is love," well, it doesn't rule out a whole lot of terrible stuff. So you've got a lot of twisted theology in the church tradition, and all of it's supposed to be part of God's love.

For example, here's a quote from Darin Hufford. He's a father, he's a pastor, he's the author of this book called The Misunderstood God. Scott Boren quotes him in a devotional he wrote for this week. I encourage you to get on Woodland Hills Bridge where Scott will have devotionals every week, and he'll go a little deeper than I can go in the message. And he has this quote. This man says:

"Could you imagine me holding my nine-month-old son, Jude, in my arms and telling him that under no circumstances would I share my glory with him? It's mine. What if I lovingly told him that if he disobeyed me again and again I would pour gasoline on him and light him on fire? What kind of father would I be if I explained to him that he needed to give me ten percent of everything he had or I would withdraw my hand of protection from his life and allow the fires of hell to swallow him? What if I told one of my daughters that she was put here on earth to be my servant or slave? Could you picture me telling my children that I've written everything about me down in a book and unless they read it every day of their lives they're never going to know me? What parent would purposely inject their child with a terrible disease as punishment for disobedience? What father would turn his head away from his son or daughter the moment the child made a mistake?"

Any parent who acted like this, we would think is a poor parent, in fact, a criminal parent, a de-ranked parent. And yet, you find just this sort of thing being ascribed to the God of love throughout the church tradition. God is love, but he also does this kind of stuff. In fact, in some theologies, it's even worse than this. In some theologies, God not only pours gasoline on you and sets you on fire, but he'll keep you in flames eternally.

And in some theologies, it's even worse than that because in these theologies God predestined that that would happen to you. He created you for the purpose of setting you on fire eternally and watching you scream in the flames. Why? Because it gives Him glory. What kind of glory is that? What kind of parent would ever do that? And yet, we're taught that that's the God of love. That's a beautiful God, a God of love, a God of grace, a God of beauty. You're supposed to worship that God and be excited about spending eternity with that God who lights people eternally on fire and created them for that very purpose.

People will, out of fear, do that. No one wants to be set on fire for eternity. So, if he's holding the match and he's got the gas, I'll bow down. And I'm supposed to say, "You're beautiful, you're lovely, you're gracious, you're glorious, you could not possibly be more loving than you

are.” But to the extent that I’m at all healthy, I can't really believe that. I'll say it, but I can't really believe that, except that I’m not healthy at all.

If some of you can think of a more twisted view of God, I’d like to hear it because I can't think of one. And yet that’s supposed to be the God of love. And, given pictures like that about God’s love, there are times where I have nothing but compassion towards the atheists. If that's the view of God that they’re rejecting, I almost want to applaud them for their integrity.

We've got messed up ideas of what love is, and we impose those on God. And even apart from our jaded experiences that screw us up about what love is, even apart from that, we get messed up because the word love is so ambiguous. We use it to cover everything. Think about it. You say, “Oh, I just love the garden I planted. I just love my plants. I love my flowers.” And then you say, “I love my house. Oh, I just love your hair! I love that car! I love the way you sing!” We use love to cover that.

Then I say I love my wife and I love you different than I love the plants. Then I say I love my buddies. We play in a band together and love these guys. I say I love you, but I also say but I don't love you like I love my wife. All right. So just get that clear. I love my wife differently but I use the same word.

I love my kids, but I love my kids different than I love the guys in the band. I love the guys in the band differently than I love my wife, and I love my wife differently than I love my plants. I love my dog, but that's different than my wife or buddies or kids or plants. But it’s the same word we use for everything.

And then, nine out of ten times the word love is used in songs today, and it doesn't mean any of those things. It’s about having sex. “I want to make love! Uh, what was your name again?” Or something like that. And you're making something, but it’s not love.

And then we’re taught to love our enemies. How are we supposed to love our enemies because maybe we don't have the affection toward enemies that we have for a plant. Maybe there's nothing we like about them, but we’re taught to love our enemies. So it just gets screwed up. It gets screwed up. And then we’re taught God is love.

What does that mean, God is love? Does God love us the way that we love our plants? Does God love us the way we love our kids or the way we love our spouse or the way we love our friends? Or maybe the way we love our enemies? What does it mean to say God is love?

Now, here is where knowing a little bit of the Greek helps. A lot of times I think scholars who know the original language make it a little too much of that. “Well, if you knew the original language, you’d know that I’m right.” It’s kind of a card you could play whenever you're in a corner. And so I think a lot of times they exaggerate the importance of knowing the original language. But, once in a while, just once in a while, it really is important and this is one of those things.

Because we've got one word, love, that covers everything. There are four different words in Greek that can be translated love. First of all, there's *storge*. *Storge* simply means affection. I love your car. You know, I'm not in love with your car but I just like your car. I like your hair. I like my plant. I love my dog. It's affection. Or approval. It can mean approval.

Philos is a different word, and it means friendship, the kind of love that you have when you have something in common. I play with my guys in the band and we have this in common. We make music together, beautiful musical together, we're friends. It's different than *storge*.

Then there's *eros*. We get the word erotic from it. It means romantic love, and it can mean sexual passion, passionate burning love. It's the kind of love I have with my wife and only my wife. By God's design, we're only supposed to have that with one other person.

These kinds of loves are, obviously, not mutually exclusive. You can *storge* something about a person that, otherwise, you really despise. "Oh, I just love Osama bin Laden's beard." You can *storge* his beard, but you don't approve of anything else about him. So *storge* can stand by itself. You can *storge* stuff about strangers and even enemies.

Then there's *philos*, friendship. And, usually, when you have friendship, there are things you *storge* about people, you like about people, but it goes beyond that because you have a shared experience, you've shared something in common. That doesn't mean you *storge* everything about the person. My friend Dave, he's the lead singer in the band that I play in, *Not Dead Yet*, I *storge* a lot of things about him. I love sharing this experience with him, but, you know, sometimes his breath I don't *storge*. Forget about it. By the way, insulting is our love language, so I'm just getting even. I owe him a bunch of stuff.

A good marriage should include all of these. In a good marriage, hopefully, you *storge* some things about the person. You have affection. You like some things about them. And you should have a friendship with them, a deep friendship. But, on top of that, the icing on the cake is *eros*, romantic passion.

Then there's the fourth word, and it's the word *agape*. It is the most important kind of love. Paul Eddy, that great scholar who is also on staff here and at Bethel University, he defines *agape* this way: It's other-oriented, self-sacrificial, choice-based love. Oh, that's good. Other-oriented, self-sacrificial, choice-based love. The only thing I'd like to add is this: *Agape* love ascribes worth to another at cost to oneself, if necessary. That's *agape* love.

Agape love is based on choice. It's not based on something you find in the other person. It's based on a decision you make. You don't have to *storge* anything about a person in order to have *agape* love towards them. You may not like anything about them, but you can still ascribe worth to them. And you reflect that worth by how you think about them, how you speak about them, how you speak to them, how you treat them, and things of that sort.

You can *agape* love somebody, and you don't have a *philos* relationship with them. They're not friends. In fact, maybe they're even enemies. That's why Jesus tells us to *agape* love our enemies. We don't *philos* them. They're not friends. But we can still have an other-oriented, choice-based, self-sacrificial stance towards them.

You certainly don't—shouldn't—*eros* everybody. But we are commanded to *agape* everybody.

Agape is the only kind of love that isn't based on something you find in another person, and it's not based on any kind of a feeling. Yet the people who practice *agape*, other-oriented, self-sacrificial love—if you practice it consistently—it's not based on a feeling, but you will find that there is a joy, a depth of joy that rises in your heart, and a warmth of feeling towards others that goes beyond anything that *storge* can give you and anything that *philos* can give you. And it's very different from what *eros* can give you. But it's not based on any kind of feeling.

The most basic command of a Kingdom person, of a Jesus disciple, is to love everybody like that, *agape* love; all people, all times, all situations, no exceptions, no ifs, ands, or buts—to have this other-oriented stance towards them. And the reason we are to love like that is because God is like that. That's what it means to be godly. We love like God loves. God loves in an *agape* kind of way.

Which brings us back to the verse we started with in I John 4:8, “God is love.” God is *agape*. Notice it doesn't say that God just loves—verb. It says, “God *is* love”—noun. God's essence is love. It's who he is in the core of his being. God from eternity, past to eternity, future is this unsurpassable joy, that's rooted in this unsurpassable expression of other-oriented love. As Father, Son and Holy Spirit—even apart from the world—God is, in his innermost essence, this love.

God's love isn't just something he does. It's who he is. For God, love is not first and foremost a verb. It's a noun. God verbs love because God is the noun love. And if you get that point, then you'll get this revelation, and this is the foundation for everything. This will confront every lie in our head if we will simply let it.

If you get that God is love, then you'll realize why it is impossible, impossible, metaphysically impossible, for God to stop loving you on the basis of something you did or the basis of something you're doing or the basis of that deep, dark vile secret that you've got that no one knows about. God loves you because he *is* love. It doesn't go up and down or improve a little bit or retract a little bit based on what you're doing. No. It's not a *storge* kind of love. It's not a *philos* kind of love. It's not an *eros* kind of love. God is *agape* love. It's impossible for God to turn the off button on that because, to do so, would mean he's no longer God.

The devil will try to drive a wedge between you and that kind of love of God because that's how he keeps you in bondage. Because all freedom, ultimately, is a matter of letting the love of God in. But that's the devil doing it. That's not God. God's love is *agape*. It's not *storge*. He may *storge* things about you—he may like things about you—but there may be a lot of things about you he doesn't like. In fact, there may be things he loathes, he despises, precisely because he's

got *agape* love towards you, and he sees that these things are destroying you. He may not *storge* a lot about you, but that doesn't keep Him from loving you.

You may not have a *philos* relationship with God. You may not be a friend of God—he wants to be your friend—but you may, in fact, be an enemy of God right now. You may be declaring war on God. So he doesn't *philos* you, but he does *agape* you. He has that other-oriented love for you. He's still for you, not against you.

God may not *eros* a lot about you. He does want a sort of *eros* relationship with us. The Bible describes it as a kind of husband/wife kind of romance. There's a romance dimension to this. There certainly is passion involved in this. He wants a passionate relationship with us. You may not have that now. In fact, you might be passionately against God. But he's still passionately for you because his love is *agape*.

You may right now be doing everything that God hates. You may be a mean, nasty, vile person. Maybe you gossip. Maybe you judge others. Maybe you're debaucherous, and you're immoral, and you're greedy. Maybe you're violent, and you're murderous, and you're full of hate. And God hates all of that. But, if he hates all of that—and he does—it's because he loves you. No ifs, ands, or buts. There's nothing you could possibly do that would get God to love you less than he loves you right now. Right now God is God. That's all I'm saying. God is God, and God is love. Which means, right now at this moment, you are the object of a love that is wider and higher and deeper and longer than you could possibly ever fathom.

You may be at war with God right now, and that's a bad state to be in. Get out of that state. But when you become a friend of God—and I pray you will—it won't make God love you more. It just means that God's love will now have some benefit in your life. His love for you right now is perfect.

That love was so intense, it led him to become a human being, set aside the prerogatives of heaven, become a human being, and dive into hell for you. He takes on himself our hell, our sin. He becomes the opposite of himself. There is infinite distance between God and sin. He becomes that. And the infinite price he paid reflects the infinite intensity of his love for you and for me.

That's why it says this in I John:

"This is how we know what love is."

This is the ultimate definition of *agape* love: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. That's how you know what *agape* love is. You might not have any other clue in your life what *agape* love is, but look to Jesus. "While we were yet enemies," the Bible says, "Christ died for us." While we were yet lost. We didn't want anything to do with God. He crossed this infinite distance and became a human being and, on Calvary, took on our sin, our judgment, our condemnation in order that we could be reconciled with him.

The cross reveals who God is because the infinite price he paid reveals the infinite intensity of his love. And don't worry if you can't understand it, because that's the point. When you realize that you can never get your mind around this, well, now you're starting to get a glimmer of that love.

Calvary is always the ultimate expression of God's character, of God's love, because God is love. God is Calvary to you, to me, to all people who have ever been. That's who God is. There's no off button to that. Nothing you do will ever change that.

I believe the most important act of discipleship is to know this—know this—that which passes knowledge: The most important act of discipleship is to cultivate an awareness of this moment by moment. Don't worry if you can't get it, because it's not gettable. Just rest. The most you can do is rest and yield to its ungetability—there's a word for you—the ungetability of God's love. When you realize it's ungettable, then you're starting to get it. And just to rest in that and walk in that. Don't try to feel it. Don't try to understand it. Certainly don't try to achieve it. But don't suppress it. Just be aware of it and surrender to it and say yes to the love of God.

Right now we are surrounded. We are in the bottom of an ocean with all this ocean pressure and the ocean is God's love. And we're little microbes, as it were. He's pressing in on us with that love. Just know that. Just know that. It's reflected in Calvary. Calvary defines who God is. Calvary defines who you are. I'll say more about that next week.

Say yes to that. All freedom, all transformation, all the ways that God wants to beautify our life are the result of our saying yes to that. Daring to believe that the power of God overcoming the weakness of our flesh to dare to believe that God really is that beautiful and infinitely more than that, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. That's all throughout eternity. That's as good as it's going at it. It's even more than that. It's even more beautiful than that. When you get that, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, now you're beginning to get a clue.

I'm going to close in prayer, and as I do that, I want to say that the altar will be open after the service if you want to come forward and receive prayer or just pray on your own, maybe overcome some of the obstacles in your brain that are right now going, "but... but... but... but... but... but... but..." and you want help kicking the "buts" out of your brain, then come up here and pray with these folks.

I encourage you to stop by and support AWOL Mission Team and support A Freedom in Christ, that beautiful ministry that's there. Also, we have assignment sheets if you want to digest this more throughout the week, stop by at the Hub. All that stuff is there.

Father, I pray in Jesus' name that we'll get that we can't get it, that we'll get a clue that we're clueless, that we'll know that we can't know it.

I pray, God, that we would never, ever, ever for a second get used to this, get bored with this, relax on this, get too comfortable with this. Father, I pray that we would always be struck anew and overwhelmed anew by the infinite power of your love and that we would just be aware that we're squished, squashed, submerged, drowned in your love every second of our life.

You're more beautiful than we could possibly ever speak or think. Help us to always be aware of that and to walk in that moment by moment and to yield to you moment by moment. It changes everything. You change everything. You are God.

God, help us to never put limits on that, to make you after our own image, or the image of our mom or dad, or ex-husband, or abusive boyfriend, or sexually deviant babysitter. Whoever jaded us, God, help us not to impose that on you but to let Calvary define everything about you—everything—and everything about us.

In Jesus' name we pray. And all God's lovers said Amen.

God bless you guys. Go out and be love and love others. Amen.