



## Introduction

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:8 ESV)

- This course is focused on God's love for us, not our love for God.

## Who is God?

### RCF Statement of Faith

There is one living and true God who is most holy, self-existent, self-sufficient, unchangeable, all knowing (omniscient), all powerful (omnipotent), sovereign, has no beginning and no end (eternal), and is present everywhere (omnipresent).

### 1689 London Baptist Confession

The Lord our God is but one only living and true God. He is self-existent and infinite in being and perfection. His essence cannot be understood by anyone but Him. He is a perfectly pure spirit. He is invisible and has no body, parts, or changeable emotions. He alone has immortality, dwelling in light that no one can approach. He is unchangeable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, in every way infinite, absolutely holy, perfectly wise, wholly free, completely absolute. He works all things according to the counsel of His own unchangeable and completely righteous will for His own glory. He is most loving, gracious, merciful, and patient. He overflows with goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. He rewards those who seek Him diligently. At the same time, He is perfectly just and terrifying in His judgments. He hates all sin and will certainly not clear the guilty.

God has all life, glory, goodness, and blessedness in and of Himself; He alone is all-sufficient in Himself. He does not need any creature He has made nor does He derive any glory from them. Instead, He demonstrates His own glory in them, by them, to them and upon them. He alone is the source of all being, and everything is from Him, through Him and to Him. He has absolute sovereign rule over all creatures, to act through them, for them, or upon them as He pleases. In His sight everything is open and visible. His knowledge is infinite and infallible. It does not depend upon any creature, so for Him nothing is contingent or uncertain. He is absolutely holy in all His plans, in all His works, and in all His commands. Angels and humans being owe to Him all the worship, service, obedience that creatures owe to the Creator and whatever else He is pleased to require of them.



## What is Love?

- The first several definitions of the noun love given by the Merriam Webster dictionary all relate to affection or feeling.
  - Strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties such as maternal love for a child.
  - Attraction based on sexual desire such as affection and tenderness felt by lovers.
  - Affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests such as love for his old schoolmates.
  - An assurance of affection such as give her my love.
  - Warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion such as love of the sea.
  - The object of attachment, devotion, or admiration such as baseball was his first love.<sup>1</sup>

## Love is Active

- Love involves, at a minimum, truth, commitment, and action.

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18 ESV)

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 ESV)

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9–10 ESV)

## Love is Truthful

- 1 John 3:18
- 2 John 1
- 3 John 1
- Ephesians 4:15
- Ephesians 4:25

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart. (1 Peter 1:22 ESV)

## Love is Steadfast

The LORD passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” (Exodus 34:6–7a ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Definition of love, Merriam Webster, accessed May 25, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love>.



## God is Love

- John tells us God *is* love, not God *has* love.

### God's Simplicity

- God is a simple being, that is, he does not have parts.
- The cross is the clearest testimony to God's simplicity – that is, his undivided and indivisible character.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21–26 ESV)

### False Views of God's Love

- Interpreting “God is love” to mean “God is only love” has led to many false doctrines.

### Process Theology

- Process theology is a form of panentheism, which says that God is in all things, but God is bigger than the things we see.
- God's love is not controlling but responsive, that is, he can only persuade.
- God acts in love but doesn't know what the end result will be. He is an adventurer who risks failure. God is involved in the process but does not control the process.

### Open Theism

- Open theism combined ideas from process theology, Socinianism, and evangelical Arminianism.
- Socinianism denied the Trinity and denied that God could know the future.
- Evangelical Arminianism rejected the reformed understanding of salvation with its denial of total depravity, unconditional election, particular redemption, effectual calling, and perseverance of the saints.
- Open theism teaches that God's knowledge of the future is limited because of the absolute priority of love.

### Love Is Not God

- *God* is the subject, and *love* is the predicate. We cannot reverse these and say, “Love is God.”
- The fact that we do love is an indication that we are made in the image of God, but it does not indicate that we are God.



### Sentimental Love

- A shallow view of God's love cannot reconcile the evil in the world with God's sovereignty over all things.

### God's Essential Love

- Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley give these implications on the doctrine of God from the truth that "God is love."
  - In the simplicity of God's being, "without body, parts, or passions," God's love is not a part of him but all of him. The love of God is simply God loving.
  - Love permeates God's attributes and harmonizes with them all. His holiness is a loving holiness, and his love is a holy love.
  - God is pure love. Just as "God is light" implies that "in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5), so "God is love" implies that no malice lurks in his being.
  - God's love is of himself. God's love does not arise from something outside of him, but is God's very life: he *is* love.
  - God's love is as infinite as his being. A fish could sooner drink the Mississippi River dry than we could empty the fountain of his love (Ps. 36:5, 8-9).
  - Since God's love was essential to him prior to his creation of the world, the great object of his love is his own glory....<sup>2</sup>

### Trinitarian Love

- God's love was real and active even before creation or the fall into sin. This is demonstrated in the Trinity.

### The Father Loves the Son

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16–17 ESV)

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. (Colossians 1:13 ESV)

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24 ESV)

<sup>2</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Revelation and God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 792.



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## The Son Loves the Father

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. (John 14:30–31a ESV)

I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 5:30 ESV)

And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39 ESV)

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8 ESV)

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. (John 10:17 ESV)

## The Holy Spirit’s Love

- The Bible does not explicitly speak of the Holy Spirit’s love for the Father or the Son.
- Matthew 3:16-17

## Trinitarian Love Application

- One of the philosophical arguments against the Reformed understanding of salvation is the argument that we must be able to reject God’s offer of salvation in order for our love for God to be real.
- We can only will what our natures produce and since our natures are dead in sin, we cannot will to be saved. The Father cannot not love the Son, and the Son cannot not love the Father.
- The love of the persons of the Trinity is real love, and our love for God and each other is true love when God is the source of our love.
- There is no forced love among the persons of the Trinity, but sheer delight and devotion within the Trinity.

## Conclusion

- God is the source of our love for God and each other.

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32 ESV)



They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. (John 8:39–44a ESV)

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. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15–17 ESV)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7–12 ESV)

Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5 ESV)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35 ESV)

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12–13 ESV)

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