

Garry Williams Love of God 1

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[0 : 00] The rest of the weekend that we have together and our theme is a great theme, the love of God. God is love, 1 John 4, 1st.

It's probably one of the most famous statements in the Bible, can be a few more famous. A statement which is simple enough for a small child to grasp. A statement that when our eyes were opened to it, when we were converted, we grasped immediately, we were captivated by it. It is the simple good news of the Gospel, that God is love. But it is a statement, God is love, that can be abused and is open to misuse.

And it seems to me that it's misused when rather than taking it in its biblical context and asking what it means in the context of Scripture, we take it out of that context and refashion the love of God in our own image.

So rather than remembering that it is God who is love, we too easily think of our own human love and project that onto God.

[1 : 08] We readily presume that for him to be loved must be the same as for you or me, to be loving towards somebody. And I guess normally when we do that we're thinking of romantic love or marital love, which we often take as a model for the love of God.

And indeed we have biblical backing, good biblical backing, for doing that, for thinking that way about it. Think of Ephesians 5 for example. The Apostle Paul compares the love of Christ for the church, the love of a husband for his wife, or perhaps better the other way around.

The Song of Songs, rightly understood I think is about Christ and the church. Hosea, the prophet's marriage, an illustration of the relationship between God and his people.

So the Bible itself points us to marriage as an analogy for the love of God for the church, a picture of it, a comparison for it.

But when we look more closely we see that the questions still remain. And that in fact the biblical picture of God's love for us as the love of a husband for his wife for example, raises lots of questions as well as answering lots of questions.

[2 : 21] For example, human love can be fickle love as we know, perhaps some of us know to our cost. Human love can be broken love.

And so we may say, if the love of God is compared to a human love, does that mean it is perhaps fickle? Might God stop being love if he is love?

Does his love come and go as human love can come and go? You may be aware that even within a stable and happy human marriage, I can say this because Joan is not here this evening, the feeling of love can fluctuate, being stronger one way than the next.

We can feel full of love brimming with it. Or we can feel really frankly quite cold toward one another. And it's God like that. We know, don't we, I think that human love is sometimes really an act of resolve and determination on our part.

That we have to commit ourselves to it. We perhaps, if we're married, have to remember our marriage vows. Or if we're children, we have to remember our responsibilities to our parents.

[3 : 31] In a bit of a sort of gritch your teeth kind of way. We don't feel love, but we decide to love. We determine to love. Whereas at other times, love just bubbles up within us for someone.

Well, what's love like for God? Is it a decision, an act of his will, and nothing more? Or is it in some way a feeling that he has?

Does God have feelings as we have feelings? Is he emotional? Is God emotional? Think about that question for a moment. You might want him to be emotional.

You might want God to feel for you. Particularly in your plight in some difficult situation. But perhaps when you think a bit more, you don't want God to be emotional. Because emotional can have quite

negative connotations, can't it?

Imagine we're talking about a mutual friend. And some situation that he faced. And I say, oh yes, he got very emotional about it. It's clear that that's not a compliment, is it?

[4 : 33] Or you talk about a friend, he says, oh yes, she's always very emotional. Being emotional can be a criticism, can't it? You know, you find yourself one day being grumpy and impatient with people.

You wake up and you're just like that that day. And you have absolutely no idea why you are behaving like that. In fact, maybe this is just me. You're looking blank, but no, no, okay.

For some inexplicable reason one day, you feel low. Everything seems fine. Yesterday you were full of beans. Nothing's happened to you to change that.

But you now feel hollow inside. Is God emotional? Does he have an emotional life like that? Is his love an emotional love? And if it's not, then, well, what is it?

What is a non-emotional love? Do you see the kinds of questions that can arise in our minds as we stop and think about God being love? And his relationship to us being like that of a husband to a wife.

[5 : 39] Now, what I want to do with you in the first three sessions, so today and the two tomorrow, is to look more closely at God's love as it is revealed in the Bible, from a range of passages, so that we can understand the love of God within the wider context of the ways that he describes himself to us.

Now, let me say at the outset, this is not going to be comprehensive at all. The love of God is obviously a vast subject. It is interestingly a subject on which not many people have written books. I wonder if you've ever read a book on the love of God. Don Carson?

Yeah? Anyone else? Any other books? It's interesting, isn't it? John MacArthur wrote a book on the love of God. Surprisingly, not many people have written about it.

But it is a huge subject, and it's a sublime and an unfathomable subject. So we're going to just scratch the surface, really, this weekend. And we're going to look at some important aspects, but there would no doubt be many other vital things that we could and should say about the love of God, which we will leave untouched.

So don't think this is comprehensive. Now, in this session, what I want to do is to establish, from Scripture, two general principles about how God speaks to us.

[6 : 51] When God speaks to us, two principles about the way that he does that, the way he makes himself known to us. Now, this is going to feel like a bit of a detour. You're going to be thinking into this session, I thought this was a weekend on the love of God.

And he's not talking about it. That's what we're going to do in the two sessions tomorrow. We will then bring these two principles from this evening to bear upon the topic of the love of God.

So tonight is general about how God speaks to us and makes himself known to us. Tomorrow we'll turn that and use that to understand the love of God. And then on Sunday morning in the service, we will think about our love for God.

Because the first three sessions are about his love for us. And then we'll think about our love for God from Paul's letter to Philemon. And then I'll preach on something else in the evening, relating to the theme.

Okay, so that's where we're going. Now, let's just think about this biblical claim that God makes himself known to us. It is a miracle, really, that God speaks to us and makes himself known to us.

[7 : 56] We can get so used to it. You read your Bible every day and, of course, God speaks to us. We carry it around. We have easy access to it in this country. But it is, let's remember, a miracle that God speaks to us.

And that we can therefore speak about God. Because he's spoken to us first. Humanly speaking, the odds are heavily stacked against this being possible. If you think about it.

First of all, we are very, very small creatures. Okay? Think about the difference between humanity and God. We are small, finite creatures.

Even measured against the rest of the universe, we are unimaginably tiny, aren't we? Apparently, astronomers estimate that our sun is one of between 200 and 400 billion stars in our galaxy alone.

We're tiny compared to the rest of the physical creation. How could we, small, small, small creatures, come to know the creator God?

[8 : 57] How could we speak truthfully about him, given that he is infinite and unmeasurable? He is eternal. We are embodied creatures. And God is spirit, as John 4 tells us.

The Bible testifies on page after page to the vast difference between man and God. But we're going to go to Isaiah 40, just to highlight some of these contrasts between us and God.

So Isaiah 40. Is that on 724 in your Bible? 724.

Now Isaiah, writing in the 8th century, is prophesying the return of his people from exile later on.

Exile in Babylon. And he speaks about the power of God in bringing them back.

He's trying to reassure them in advance that God is powerful to bring them back and rescue them.

And he emphasizes how much greater than men and the nations God is.

[10 : 03] How tiny the nations are. Nations which seem powerful and oppressive are nothing to God. The obstacles in the way of this work are nothing to him.

And we'll just read verses 15 to 31 where this point comes out quite clearly. Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket.

They're regarded as dust on the scales. He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor is animals enough for burnt offerings.

Before him all the nations are as nothing. They're regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom then will you compare God?

What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot.

[11 : 08] He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. Do not know. Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth. And its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither and the world then sweeps them away like chaff.

To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? Or says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them each by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel? My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God.

[12 : 17] Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.

They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. So it's a fantastic passage, isn't it? Describing how God is mighty to save.

How he's powerful to lift up his people, to bring them back, to triumph over the nations and the princes and the rulers. But see how it draws out how different he is.

That's how it encourages us, isn't it? To think he can do this is by showing the contrast between God and the creature. He cannot be compared to the nations. He can't actually, verse 18, be compared to anybody.

[13 : 16] To whom then will you compare God? Answer implied, no one, nothing. Least of all an idol. He is above the creation, stretching it out, verse 22.

So he is outside of the created order. He is the uncreated creator of the universe. He is not a creature. Isaiah draws a sharp line between the uncreated God and all created things.

And marks the difference between them. And so we're bound to be left thinking, aren't we? By the time we've read a passage like that, well, how can we know him? How could we speak about this extraordinary transcendent God who is so different from us?

And we've not even mentioned sin in the world yet. And the fall of man in Eden. Because not only are we so much smaller than God as creatures, but as sinful creatures we have darkened minds.

Now Isaiah knew this as well. Do you remember back in chapter 6? Click back to chapter 6. What his reaction is when he sees God. Chapter 6, page 691.

[14 : 42] Here's this glorious vision of God described in the first four verses. And then Isaiah's reaction in verse 5. Woe to me, I cried. I am ruined.

For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty. And it's a reaction that's fairly common in scripture, isn't it? When somebody encounters God.

Think of Peter at the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5 verse 8. What does he say? Not how amazing, but go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man.

How could such sinful creatures know God and speak truthfully about him? And the answer is, left to ourselves? We couldn't.

It would be impossible. We cannot, by nature, speak rightly about God. Since Adam fell, we all turn from God. We all hide from God like Adam did.

[15 : 38] We put him, as another verse in the Old Testament says, behind our backs. We don't want to know him. It's not only that we can't, it's that we're actually hostile to the idea of God.

We're blind and dead in sin, and we are, by nature, haters of God. The clearest image of God among the things that he made was, of course, man himself.

Genesis 1.26 tells us, let us make man in our image, in our likeness. But actually, even that's been ruined by the fall into sin. We've been changed so that the image of God in us is spoiled, is ruined. We no longer rule over the creation in God's image as we should have done. We no longer exercise the capacities he gave us, as we should do. So that the image of God is a ruined image, and God has become all the more unknowable to us, even if we look in the place where we would have been most able to see him.

So we have a two-fold problem, which really gives us our first principle. Our first principle is that we are very, very different from God, and he is very, very different from us, as our creator and as holy, given that we are small and given that we are sinful.

[16 : 52] That's our first principle. We call it the principle of difference, if you like. Or very, very different. And that principle of difference takes two forms, really. It's a two-fold problem that we have.

We're blind to see the revelation of God and the things he's made. And even if we could see the revelation of God and the things he's made, it's marred by sin.

Do you see that? So we've got a problem in seeing, and even if we could see, what we would see is a ruined image. And that means, really, that we need two things.

We need our eyes to be opened, and we need what is out there to be restored, so that when our eyes are opened, we can see a restored image of God. Okay, let me explain that again.

We've got what you might call a, there's an objective problem with knowing God, that what's out there around us in the world isn't reflecting improperly anymore, because of the entrance of sin into the world.

[17 : 54] So we're no longer the image of God as we should have been. We can no longer look at one another and see God in the way that we would have been able to do. That's the objective problem. That's the problem out there with what's out there.

And then there's a problem with what's in here and with our sight. But because we are sin-darkened creatures, we can't even see what is out there. And so what we need is a two-fold solution to this two-fold problem.

We need what is out there to be restored. We need a new image of God out there. And we need, then, our sight to be restored, to see it properly.

Okay, we need what's out there put right, and we need our own capacity to see it put right. Does that make sense? Does that make sense? Okay. Now, how is that going to happen? How has God done that?

Because, of course, we can speak about God. Yes, this is the problem. And this great difference, because we're creatures and because we're sinful, leaves us thinking, well, the odds are stacked against it. But we know that we can speak about God, because he's spoken about himself.

[18 : 58] And how, then, has he solved this problem? How has he overcome this difference? And how has he dealt with this two-fold problem of what's out there being no good, and of our sight being no good?

Well, how has he done that? He's done it in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. So, Lord Jesus, then, is out there now as the revelation of God.

Martin Luther called him the proper man. You're in A Mighty Fortress, that wonderful hymn. He calls him the proper man. So, he is the new Adam, the last Adam, and Paul describes him, if you turn to Colossians 1, as the image of God.

That's 15, page 1182. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. So, where can we look to see the revelation of God?

Well, to Christ. He is the image of God. In Jesus, we have the perfect likeness of God. And actually, God doesn't, when God restores things, he doesn't just put back what was there in the first place.

[20 : 19] This is interesting. He's observed this in all sorts of different ways. It's not just a case of giving us Adam back again. He actually gives us something better than we had originally. So that Adam imaged God, yes.

But he wasn't God. And in the last Adam, that God gives us in Christ, he doesn't just give a replacement who images God, he actually gives us the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God.

So he's an even fuller revelation of God than Adam would have been. As Paul goes on in verse 19, for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

Well, that wasn't the case with Adam. Adam was like God. Jesus is God. So that he can say in John 14, verse 9, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

And this should really astound us, the way that God is rebuilding our knowledge of him, making it possible for us to know him and speak about him. Because what does God do when we wreck creation with our sin?

[21 : 26] First of all, he doesn't come and simply condemn us for eternity, which he could do in justice. But secondly, he doesn't just restore it to what it was, put things back the way they were.

That's not his way. His way is actually to bring a super abundance of good out of the evil that we have done. And to make things even better than they were before.

So he takes the evil of the fall and he turns it to good. And we know this is what he does all through the Bible, isn't it? Think of the story of Joseph. If you know it, at the end of Genesis, Joseph's brothers had evil intentions against him.

And God took them and he brought out of it good. The good of Joseph being in place in Egypt and feeding all his own family and the Egyptians, the nations, bringing blessing on the nations, fulfilling that prophecy or that promise that was given to Abraham, his ancestor.

So God takes bad that's done to Joseph and brings good out of it. And of course he does that supremely in the cross, doesn't he? Because if you think about the cross, it is the greatest evil ever committed.

[22 : 36] Murdering the Son of God. But God takes the greatest evil and brings out of it the greatest good. Salvation and glory. Even more good than there was there before the evil.

So God doesn't just give us Adam the mark too. He achieves a new height of revelation by sending his Son as a man, the God-man. And God brings out of darkness, the darkness of sin, a new and more perfect revelation of himself than we would have had before.

And this is what's known in the history of Reformed Churches as the prophetic office of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now what does a prophet do? Well he reveals the will of God. So the prophetic office of Jesus is his revealing office.

He's given the job of being the revealer of God. Probably his most neglected office if you think about it. The three offices as they're normally understood prophet, priest and king. The Lord Jesus is our prophet, our priest and our king.

Our priest, we talk about that a lot don't we? because he makes sacrifice for our sins. Our king, we talk about that a lot as well because he's our lord and our ruler. But we don't often think about him being our prophet, the revealer of God.

[23 : 49] Anyone who has seen me, he says, has seen the father. So, that's the first part of the problem. That's how the father deals with the first part of the problem. The revelation out there is restored in Christ who comes as the image of God, as God himself.

Then what about our subjective problem? The fact that we can't see it. You see, the incarnation, great and amazing as it is, wouldn't actually have done anything to show us God if God hadn't done something else so that we could see Christ.

We couldn't see even what is there in Christ. We'd have an objective revelation of God out there, but we wouldn't have the subject of capacity to see it. We're blind by nature.

Do you recall the parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16? The rich man in hell pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back from death to warn his brothers. And Jesus says, Luke 16, verse 31, one of the most extraordinary verses, really, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.

by nature, we are all so blinded by sin that we could stand at the tomb of Jesus Christ, he could rise from the dead, and he could come and stand nose to nose with us, and we would not believe, we wouldn't see the glory of the risen Christ.

[25 : 23] And so God gives us his spirit to give us new eyes to see Jesus.

This is very clear in that wonderful verse of the beginning of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians chapter 2, if you want to turn to 1145.

5. 5. 5. 6. 7. which is read from Huffington, verse 10.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

We have not received the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God this is a beautiful bit, isn't it? That we may understand what God has freely given us.

[26 : 27] It's a wonderful statement of God's grace, isn't it? That's the work of the Spirit, so that we can understand what God has freely given us. So the Father in His infinite grace and mercy has given us His Son as an objective revelation of God.

And He's given us His Spirit who opens our eyes to see that revelation of God in Christ, to understand what we've been freely given in Christ.

And so He addresses that two-fold problem of the revelation out there being spoiled and of our sight being ruined by sin.

Now, having done all of that, how does God then tell us about it? He tells us about all of this in the pages of the Bible so that the object of revelation of God in Christ is now in place.

And God, in writing the Bible, takes up created things and uses them to describe Himself. Okay, so remember our fundamental question, how could we possibly know God?

[27 : 38] We've seen our first principle, the principle of difference, the distance between us and God. We've seen what He's done to bridge that distance. And now to bring that revelation to us, which He does through the Scriptures, He talks about Himself and His revelation in the language of created things.

He speaks the language creaturely, you might say. He talks about stuff that we're familiar with. And He takes that stuff and uses it to describe Himself.

The very language of His creation. Think of some of the examples of creaturely language used to describe God in the Bible. Isaiah 31, verse 4. God is a lion. Deuteronomy 32, verse 11.

God is an eagle. Isaiah 53, verse 7. A lamb. Matthew 23, verse 37. A hen. Psalm 84, verse 11. The sun.

Hebrews 12, verse 29. Fire. Psalm 36, verse 9. A fountain. Perhaps most surprisingly, Isaiah 5, verse 12. A moth.

[28 : 43] And what? God is what? Hosea 5, verse 12 tells us. The language of creation, of surprising things, familiar things, is applied to God on every page of the Bible to describe to us His revelation of Himself.

And even more than that, the Bible can speak in creaturely language because God has become a... a creature. A man. So now that the divine person, the eternal Son, has a human nature and has become a man in the incarnation, He has soul and flesh and blood, He has hunger and tears and He has death, the Bible can supremely speak in creaturely terms when it speaks of the Son of God. This is why the Lord Jesus Himself is described in creaturely terms. So all of these things come together in talking about Him in the Bible, don't they? He's the Lion of Judah.

He is the Good Shepherd. Everyday stuff. He's the door. Everyday stuff. He's the vine. Everyday stuff. The bread of life. We eat it everyday. But even in Acts 20, 28, God has brought the church with His own.

[30 : 07] Blood. Which He's now taken to Himself. Do you see what God is doing here in the pages of Scripture? He is taking created things and using them to describe Himself.

And this is not just a happy coincidence. You might think it's a happy coincidence. You know, God created the world. Plan A. Sin came into the world. Oh dear. Plan B. I'm going to work out a way to save people.

And, okay, I've done that now. Now how am I going to describe it? Hmm. Oh look. There's a lion. How handy. I could use that, couldn't I? No. That would be wholly wrong.

God designed the creation before He made it to be used in this way to reveal Himself to us. Let me put it like this.

When you next go to the zoo and you see a lion at the zoo ask yourself what is it for? Why the lion? [31 : 10] Why did God make the lion? And surely the most important answer to that question must be this. God created His world as He did in order to make Himself known to mankind within it.

And therefore the chief reason that He made the lion was so that in due course He could use the lion to describe Himself to us.

Now, lions have other purposes they have to admit, don't they? You know, the lion is to roar in the jungle. Good. Excellent. The lion is to hunt and eat antelope.

Good. Splendid. Great, great. That's great. But surely the greatest office of the lion is to be used to describe the Son of God Himself the Lord Jesus Christ.

You can do great things with children in zoos, therefore. Going to the zoo is an opportunity to talk about God. Going through a door is an opportunity to talk about God. Drinking wine is an opportunity to talk about God.

[32 : 21] Etc, etc. The Spirit takes all of these this bizarre range of created things and uses them to speak to us about God in Scripture.

Now, notice what I'm not saying in case any of you know, some of you have got those kind of antennae that some people have on their heads. You can't actually see them but they're kind of they're sort of heresy detectors.

And if any of you have got those and they're twitching at this point I'm not suggesting that we could work out the revelation of God by going to the zoo and staring at the lion. This isn't natural theology which we do by ourselves.

We work out God by looking at the creation. No, no, no, no, no. Because these things only work like this in the pages of Scripture. Yes? It's God who shows us this about Himself in Scripture.

that when He does that He takes the stuff in the world to describe Himself to us. So there's a triangle really, a triangular relationship. God uses the creation to describe His revelation to man.

[33 : 25] So there's God taking all the created stuff and using it to speak to us to speak of Christ. So man is the pinnacle of the creation the highest creature that God makes and all of the other created things are there to serve as the medium of God's communication with man.

And that is an extraordinary thought isn't it? The whole world around us is designed to be a field of communication between God and man when it is used in Scripture.

And the entire universe this is true. Think about the enormity of the universe. Why the stars? Many reasons for the stars but surely the supreme reason for the stars is that God can point to them can show Abraham the stars and show them his innumerable descendants which is a picture of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ filling the earth.

Everything functions like this. They're put there to illustrate that in Genesis 15 verse 5. There is nothing plan B about this as I said. It's not that God thought oh no how can I describe myself and then chanced upon some greater things that could be useful.

This is plan A for divine revelation. Before the forwards was purposed. This is how God designed things to be. Okay so what have we got to? Well so far we've actually got two principles in place now.

[34 : 53] First of all that principle of difference. God is different from us. He's infinitely above us. He's deeply, deeply unlike us and everything else in the world. All the more unlike us because of our sin.

But secondly by his grace we have now in place the principle of revelation. So God has restored his image in the Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's designed the things of the world to be used to speak to us about the Son by the Spirit in the pages of the book he wrote the Bible. And now he opens our eyes by that same Spirit who wrote the Bible to understand the Bible to see the Son and the likeness of God.

So two principles then. First of all the principle of difference and then secondly the principle of revelation that God has made himself known in this way by giving us Christ by giving us the Spirit and by using the created stuff to speak about himself.

Difference and revelation. Colossians. Now you can actually see that interestingly in two of the passages we've already looked at.

[36 : 05] Have a look would you back at Isaiah 40 but keep Colossians we'll find Colossians as well we need Isaiah 40 and Colossians because you can see this quite strikingly page 724 for Isaiah 40 and 1182 for Colossians.

Isaiah 40 verse 18 remember we mentioned this earlier to whom then will you compare God what image will you compare him to? Now remember the force of that passage the answer is nothing you can't God is beyond comparison okay there is no image of God Isaiah is saying then come to Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 he is the image of the invisible God the first born over all creation you see what's going on there one passage is telling us be hugely hugely careful don't think you can liken God to anything and the other passage in the light of Christ says you really really can you can know him in Christ so you see there nicely

I think those two principles as Isaiah 40 the principle of difference God is very very different from us but Colossians 1 15 the possibility of knowing him and him being likened and his knowability therefore the principle of revelation a second principle now let me give you some applications of this which we're then going to work through with reference to the love of God tomorrow first of all the principle of difference shows us the impossibility of knowing God's love by ourselves God is infinitely above us his image is marred we are naturally blind to him and we cannot we must not therefore engage in natural theology we cannot fashion God in our own likeness using our own powers that is what liberal theology does at the end of the day actually I don't know if you do you ever use the cheese box the brie box brie anyone ever come across brie b-r-i-e you draw a square split the box into four you put b-r-i-e b for bible r for reason i for institution e for experience and that's all of theology evangelical theology bible theology r reason liberal theology i institution Roman Catholic theology e experience charismatic theology b-r-i-e don't do it get rid of the cheese it doesn't work because you can't concede to liberal theology that it's about reason liberal theology isn't about reason liberal theology is actually cultural protestantism as it's been explained liberal theology is the spirit of the age theologized turned into a theology why is it that liberal theology reflects all of the causes that surround us in our culture because that's what it's doing it's just mirroring the culture it's not about reason so in liberal theology God's love becomes the love of a socialist or the love of a feminist or the love of a homosexual rights campaigner or whatever there's that old illustration about the liberal quest for the historical Jesus the liberals who are constantly trying to piece together the real Jesus and somebody once said that they stared down the well of history and what did they see reflected back at the bottom their own faces and he's a good of his liberal attempts to reconstruct the historical Jesus he ends up looking just like the liberal theology he was writing about okay we can't do that we cannot project onto

God so a big fireback once commented quite famously that you know religion is essentially us creating God but that's actually right for a lot of religion isn't it that is what's going on it is us projecting and because of the principle of difference we must not and we cannot do that we must expect in fact to find so God's love is actually unlike our love in a number of significant ways because of that principle of difference we cannot simply take the statement God is love and say therefore dot dot dot how often have you heard that done yes even non-Christians can do that can't they God is love therefore I'll be okay with him it'll be fine he'll forgive me that is natural theology that is just working out what we think God being love means and we'll get it wrong because God is different we need to assure our own ideas and inferences about the love of

[41 : 11] God secondly we should rejoice in the principle of revelation because despite our sin and our smallness God's love can be known and that should surprise us and I think what I want to leave you with this evening if you ask what do you take away apart from the theology what do you take away from the evening is a sense of being surprised that we can know God because as I said in the beginning it's so familiar to us especially when we've been Christians for a long time that we can know God but actually maybe we're used to thinking of our salvation as being unmerited we didn't deserve it it's amazing that we're saved we should remember that revelation is unmerited as well that we can even open our mouths and speak truths about God should astonish us it's a wonderful mercy to have Jesus as our sacrificing priest indeed and it is also a wonderful mercy to have him as

our revealing prophet so I think we should consciously recall and give thanks for the Lord Jesus as our prophet more than we do and marvel at the fact that

God is known to us I wonder when you last did that and then thirdly we should rely on the revelation of God in the Lord Jesus Christ for our understanding of God's love now I don't just mean the gospels because the whole bible is about Jesus as he explained on the road to Emmaus so our account of God's love must therefore grow out of the revelation of God in the whole of the scriptures it must be built from the scriptures so what we're going to need to do in effect what we'll be doing is taking the statement God is love and setting it alongside the other things the bible says about God presuming that the bible is coherent it doesn't contradict itself if you think it does then come and talk to me afterwards we can pursue that later but we'll be presuming that it coheres and so what we will do is we will take the statement God is love and other things that we know about God from the bible and allow those statements to inform one another yes it's that fundamental principle of protestant theology that the bible interprets itself the pope is not the interpreter of the bible nor the church nor even are the elders authoritative interpreters of the bible in that sense the bible is its own authoritative interpreter ok and so we will set those biblical teachings alongside one another and they will then regulate each other so that we will then see the love of God as God gives it to us not as we imagine it to be in the context of his revelation of himself and that's what we will do tomorrow shall I pray