

# GOD IS LOVE\*

D. A. Carson

**T**wice John writes in his first letter, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). The biblical writers treat the love of God as a wonderful thing, wholly admirable and praiseworthy, even surprising when the objects of His love are rebellious human beings. But what does the predication, “God is love,” actually mean?

An older generation than ours might have attempted to answer the question primarily through word studies. Especially prominent was the attempt to invest the *ἀγαπάω* word-group with theological weight.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW NOT TO PROCEED

Many have tried to assign the love of God, and derivatively Christian love, to one particular word-group. The classic treatment is that of Anders Nygren.<sup>2</sup> The noun *ἔρως* (not found in the New Testament) refers to sexual erotic love; the *φιλέω* word-group refers to emotional love, the love of friendship and feeling. By contrast, the *ἀγαπάω* word-group refers to willed love, an act of willed self-sacrifice for the good of another. It has no essential emotional component, however generous it may be. Moreover, it was argued, the reason the *ἀγαπάω* word-group became extremely popular in the Septuagint and subsequently in the New Testament, is that writers in the biblical tradition realized they needed some word other than those currently available to convey the glorious substance of the love of the God of Judeo-Christian revelation, so they deployed this extremely rare word-group and filled it

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed more fully in D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2d ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996)

<sup>2</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969)

with the content just described, until it triumphed in frequency as well as in substance.

Whether this is a fair description of divine love will be discussed later. What is now clear to almost everyone who works in the field of linguistics and semantics is that for several reasons such an understanding of love cannot be tied in any univocal way to the *ἀγαπάω* word-group.

First, careful diachronic work has been done on Greek words for love.<sup>3</sup> In the preclassical tradition, there was a homonymic clash between two verbs, *κυνέω*, “to kiss,” and *κύνω*, “to impregnate.” Certain forms of the two verbs are identical (e.g., the aorist *ἔκυσα*). Inevitably this gave rise to many salacious puns, which forced *κυνέω* into obsolescence, replaced by *φιλέω* (which is used, for instance, to say that Judas kissed Jesus, Luke 22:47). This meant, of course, that *φιλέω* could be taken to mean “to kiss” or “to love,” which in the Attic period encouraged the rise of other words for “to love.” By the end of that period and the beginning of the Hellenistic era, the verb *ἀγαπάω* was one of those verbs, though there is not yet any evidence of the cognate noun *ἀγάπη*. In other words there are excellent diachronic reasons in Greek philology to explain the rise of the *ἀγαπάω* word-group, so one should not rush too quickly toward theological explanations.

Second, even in the Septuagint it is far from clear that the *ἀγαπάω* word-group always refers to the “higher” or more noble or less emotional forms of love. For example 2 Samuel 13 says that Amnon incestuously raped his half-sister Tamar: he “loved” her—a vicious act, transparently sexual, emotional, and violent—and both *ἀγαπάω* and *φιλέω* are used.

Third, John twice states that the Father “loves” the Son (John 3:35; 5:20), and in the first occurrence the verb is *ἀγαπάω* while in the second it is *φιλέω*. It is impossible to detect any difference in meaning. Surely it is not that God is more emotional in the second instance than in the first. When Paul writes that Demas has deserted him because he “loved” this present evil world (2 Tim. 4:10), the verb the apostle chose is *ἀγαπάω*, an incongruous choice if it refers to willed self-denial for the sake of the other.

Fourth, occasionally someone argues that a distinction must be maintained between the two verbs because, however synonymous they may be in many occurrences, inevitably there is a little semantic overhang, that is, one will be used on occasions where the other could not be. As already noted, *φιλέω* can mean “to

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<sup>3</sup> By far the most important, though not the only contribution, is Robert Joly, *Le vocabulaire chrétien de l'amour est-il original? φιλεῖν et Ἀγαπᾶν dans le grec antique* (Brussels: Presses Universitaires, 1968).

kiss,” but *ἀγαπάω* never has this meaning. Kissing is part of the semantic overhang of *φιλέω*. This means that in any context a subtle distinction can always be made between the two verbs, since the semantic ranges of the two are not the same. But although this is a valid argument for the lexical meaning of the two verbs, it has no bearing on any concrete passage. To assume that it does is to fall into the trap that linguists call “illegitimate total-ity transfer”—the illegitimate importing of the entire semantic range of a word into that word in a particular context.

Fifth, the best English example is simply the verb “to love.” One may use it for sexual intercourse, platonic love, emotional love, the love of God, and more. The context defines and delimits the word in everyday use precisely as the context defines and delimits the verbs meaning “to love” in holy Scripture.

Sixth, so far as Christian love is concerned, in 1 Corinthians 13 *ἀγάπη* cannot be reduced to willed altruism. Even believers who give their bodies to be burned, or who give all they have to feed the poor—both willed acts of self-denial for the sake of others—may do so without love, and according to the apostle it profits them nothing. The least one must conclude from this is that Christian love is not equivalent to willed altruism.

Seventh, although I have never traced it out in detail, I suspect that the understanding of *ἀγαπάω* as willed love independent of emotion and with commitment to the other’s good has been influenced by the schoolmen and other philosophical theologians of a bygone era who denied there was feeling in God. To have feeling, they argued, would imply passivity, that is, a susceptibility to impression from people or events outside Himself, and this is surely incompatible with the very nature of God. Thus God’s love must be fundamentally different from that of humankind. The only point of similarity between God’s love and human love, they argued, is self-communication; it is not emotion or feeling. Counter evidence found in the Bible (and there is a lot of it!) must then be marginalized by dismissing it as anthropopathism (the emotional counterpoint to anthropomorphism). More than a century ago Charles Hodge responded:

Here again we have to choose between a mere philosophical speculation and the clear testimony of the Bible, and of our own moral and religious nature. Love of necessity involves feeling, and if there be no feeling in God, there can be no love. . . . The philosophical objection against ascribing feeling to God bears . . . with equal force against the ascription to Him of knowledge or will. If that objection be valid, He becomes to us simply an unknown cause, what men of science call force; that to which all phenomena are to be referred, but of which we know nothing. We must adhere to the truth in its Scriptural form, or we lose it altogether. We must believe that God is love in the sense in which

that word comes home to every human heart. The Scriptures do not mock us when they say, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps. ciii.13.)<sup>4</sup>

We may perhaps quibble with the antique phrasing of Hodge's words, but his point is well taken. How all this applies to the doctrine of impassibility will be discussed in the next lecture in this series. The point here is that to begin to fathom the nature of the love of God requires something more penetrating than methodologically flawed word studies.

### HOW TO PROCEED: TEXT IN CONTEXT

Passages in the Bible must be studied with great respect for their contexts, and themes in the Bible must be studied with great attention to their place in the unfolding drama of redemption. The trouble in this case, of course, is that there are so many of both kinds, passages and themes, that bear on the love of God, that a brief treatment can barely scratch the surface. But a scratched surface is at least a start, so I make one scratch and probe one passage that gives a glimpse into the intra-Trinitarian love of God and provides an opportunity to offer some rudimentary reflections on the contribution of this passage to the difficult doctrine of the love of God, the central theme of these lectures.

Following the flow of thought of John 5:16–30 uncovers extraordinary insight on the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. It is one of two passages in this Gospel where the apostle declares that the Father loves the Son (3:35; 5:20).

Jesus has just healed the paralytic at the pool. He then instructs him to pick up his mat and walk (5:8). The healed man does so, and runs afoul of the authorities, who charge him with breaching the Sabbath regulations. Trying to provide clarity to the Mosaic prohibition of work on the Sabbath, Jewish scholars had developed various *halakoth* (rules of conduct), including the prohibition against carrying any burden outside one's domicile, and carrying any burden higher than one's shoulder, even at home. Such rules became what it means not to work on the Sabbath. When the man diverts attention from himself by blaming Jesus (5:11), official disapproval turns against Jesus because He "was doing these things on the Sabbath" (5:16). Whether "these things" refers specifically to the healing, or to the advice that had encouraged another man to engage in a prohibited category of work, or more likely, both, matters little.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint, New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1972), 1:428–29.

Jesus might have replied by engaging in a theological dispute over the *halakoth*. He might have pointed out that the Mosaic Law was not so specific; that He Himself was scarcely a medical doctor trying to earn a little overtime on the Sabbath by performing medical procedures that could have waited until the next day; that the healed man was not a worker picking up extra pocket money by carrying a mat on the Sabbath. Any such rejoinder would have met with heavy-duty debate, but not with a charge of blasphemy. Instead, Jesus here avoids all such arguments, and authorizes His own Sabbath activity by saying, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (5:17).<sup>5</sup>

Two background features must be understood in order to grasp the implications of this claim.

First, "Sonship" is very often a functional category in the Bible. Because the overwhelming majority of sons ended up vocationally doing what their fathers did, "like father, like son" was the cultural assumption. Jesus assumes as much in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). The idea is that God is the supreme Peacemaker, and so every peacemaker is in that respect like God, and to that extent God's "son." That is also the thinking that stands behind such monikers as "son of Belial [worthlessness]" and "son of encouragement": the unarticulated cultural assumption is that the man in question is either so worthless, or so encouraging, that his father must have been, respectively, characterized by worthlessness or encouragement. So when Jesus claims that His "Father" is "always at his work to this very day," He is implicitly claiming to be God's Son, with the right to follow the pattern of work that God Himself sets in this regard.

Second, first-century Jewish authorities entered into sustained theological disputes over whether God kept the Sabbath. One side said He did; the other denied it, arguing that if God ceased from all His works on the Sabbath, His works of providence would stop and the universe would collapse. But the first side seems to have been dominant. They argued in return that since the entire universe is God's domicile, and since He is bigger than anything in the universe so that it can never be said of Him that He raises anything above His own shoulders, He therefore never performs any work on the Sabbath that breaches *halakoth*, and so He keeps the Sabbath. This means, of course, that God "works" even on the Sabbath (and so His providential order is maintained), but that He does not "work" in such a way as to

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<sup>5</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, unless noted otherwise.

break the Sabbath. In the nature of the case, of course, this sort of loophole could apply only to God.

Yet here is Jesus, claiming the right to work on the Sabbath because God is His Father, and implicitly He is the Son who follows in His Father's footsteps in this regard. The point is that while one may be called a son of God for being a peacemaker, ordinary mortals cannot rightly be called sons of God in every respect, since they do not imitate God in every respect. I for one have not created a universe recently; certainly I am not a son of God with respect to *creatio ex nihilo*. The Jews recognized that the loophole that applied to God's working on the Sabbath was related to God's transcendence and suited Him alone. For Jesus to justify His own Sabbath-working by appealing to God as His Father was to make a stupendous claim. Now He was not only breaking the Sabbath, the Jews reasoned, "but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

They were right, of course, but also slightly mistaken. Almost certainly they thought of Jesus setting Himself up in parallel with God, another "God-center." Implicitly the charge was blasphemy, and the construction was ditheism. In His reply in the following verses Jesus provides the raw materials that preserve His equality with God while never sanctioning ditheism. In short, He provides the raw stuff of *Christian* monotheism. Along the way, He says some extraordinarily important things about the love of God. While time does not allow following His argument in great detail, we can trace the following points.

First, Jesus denies that He is setting Himself over against God as an alternative to God. Far from it: He is entirely dependent on the Father and subordinate to Him—yet it turns out to be an astonishing subordination. On the one hand He says, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing" (5:19a). Thus He never threatens the Father with competition as a divine alternative. On the other hand He can do *only* what He sees His Father doing, "because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (5:19b). Here is a claim to deity slipped through the back door. It is one thing to claim to be like God in a role as peacemaker; it is another to claim to do *whatever the Father does*. Indeed, Jesus grounds His functional subordination in His claim to coextensive action with His Father: He can do only what He sees the Father doing (subordination) because (*γάρ*) He does whatever the Father does (coextensive action). That makes His Sonship unique.

Second, the next verse (5:20) tells *why* the Son does everything the Father does: because (*γάρ*) the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does. Here the preindustrial model of the agrarian

village or the craftsman's shop is preserved, with a father carefully showing his son all he does so that the family tradition is preserved. Stradivarius Senior shows Stradivarius Junior all there is to know about making violins: selecting the wood, the exact proportions, the cuts, the glue, how to add precisely the right amount of arsenic to the varnish, and so forth. Stradivarius Senior does this because he loves Stradivarius Junior. So also here: Jesus is so unqualifiedly the Son of God that the Father shows Him all He does, *out of sheer love for Him*, and the Son, however dependent on His Father, does *everything* the Father does.

Third, within the cadre of Johannine theology there are two enormously important entailments. First, the Son by His obedience to His Father—doing only what God gives Him to do and saying only what God gives Him to say, yet doing such things in function of His ability to do whatever the Father does—acts in such a way as to reveal God perfectly. In other words, if the Son acted in line with the Father sometimes and did His own thing on other occasions, we would not be able to tell which of Jesus' actions and words disclose God. But it is precisely His unqualified obedience to and His dependence on His Father that ensure that His revelation to us is perfect. Far from threatening the Son's perfections or jeopardizing His revelation of God, Jesus' functional subordination ensures His perfections and establishes His revelation. Second, this marvelous self-disclosure of the Father in the Son turns ultimately not on God's love for human beings, but on the Father's love for His unique Son. It is because the Father loves the Son that this pattern of divine self-disclosure pertains.

We all too quickly think of salvation almost exclusively with respect to its bearing on us. Certainly there is endless ground for wonder in the Father's love for us. But undergirding this love is the Father's love for the Son. Because of the love of the Father for the Son, the Father has determined that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Indeed, this love of the Father for the Son is what makes sense of John 3:16. True, "God so loved the world that he gave his . . . Son." There the object of God's love is the world. But the standard that tells just how great that love is has already been set. What is its measure? God so loved *that He gave His Son*. Paul's reasoning is similar: If God "did not spare his own Son . . . how shall he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). The argument is cogent only because the relationship between the Father and the Son is the standard of all other love relationships.

Fourth, before pressing on with the flow of the argument in John 5:16–30, this is the place to reflect as well on the Son's love for His Father. This theme does not overtly surface here, but it

does elsewhere in John's Gospel. Because the Son always does the things that please Him, the Father has not left the Son alone (8:29). Indeed, the perfection of the Son's obedience (He always does what the Father has commanded Him, 14:31) is grounded in His love for the Father (14:31).

Fifth, Jesus says that the Father loves the Son, a love manifest in the Father's showing the Son all He does (5:20a). Indeed, the Father will show the Son "even greater things than these [these' referring, presumably, to the things Jesus has already done]. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (5:20b–21). It is the prerogative of God alone to kill and make alive. In the past, God occasionally used human agents (e.g., Elijah) in resuscitating someone. Jesus is different: because the Father has "shown" Him this, Jesus raises the dead as He pleases, just as the Father does.

### SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

It has sometimes been argued that the label "the Son" is rightly attached only to the incarnate Word, not to the Word in His preincarnate glory.<sup>6</sup> This view has sometimes sought support from this passage; some suggest that there was progress in time as the Father "showed" things to "the Son," showing Him resurrection later than other things—and this surely means that all this "showing" to the Son is tied up with the incarnational state of the Son. Nevertheless several points need to be noted: (a) The same passage argues that the Son does whatever the Father does. If this "whatever" is comprehensive, it must include creation, which identifies the Son with the Word, who is God's agent in creation (John 1:2–3). If that is the case, then in addition to the Father "showing" the Son things in eternity past (hence the Son's agency in creation), the Father also "showed" Him things step by step in His incarnate state, which served as the precise trigger for what Jesus in the days of His flesh actually did, and when.

(b) The obvious reading of verses like John 3:17 ("For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him") is that the person sent was in fact the Son at the time when the Father sent him. True, such language could plausibly be anachronistic. If I say, "My wife was born in England several decades ago," I do not imply that she was my wife when she was born. I have heard of robbing the cradle, but

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<sup>6</sup> This view must not be confused with the claim that the Son had no preexistence. The false view described above acknowledges the preexistence of the Son, but urges that "the Son" as a title attaches only to His incarnational existence.



this is ridiculous. Such exceptions, however, are normally clear from the context. In a book that has already introduced the preexistence of the Word (1:1, 14), the natural reading of 3:17 is that “the Son” is an alternative appellation for that Word, not that this is a tag only for His incarnational existence.

(c) A full discussion of John 5:26 could demonstrate that it most plausibly reads as an *eternal grant* from the Father to the Son, a grant that inherently transcends time and stretches Jesus’ Sonship into eternity past. When Jesus says that the Father has “life in himself,” the most natural meaning is that this refers to God’s self-existence. He is not dependent on anyone or anything. Then Jesus states that God, who has “life in himself,” “has granted the Son to have life in himself.” This is conceptually far more difficult. If Jesus had said that the Father, who has “life in himself,” had granted to the Son to have life, there would be no conceptual difficulty, but of course the Son would then be an entirely secondary and derivative being. What was later called the doctrine of the Trinity would be ruled out. Alternatively, if Jesus had said that the Father has “life in himself” and the Son has “life in himself,” there would be no conceptual difficulty, but it would be much more difficult to rule out ditheism. In fact what Jesus says is that the Father has “life in himself” and He has *granted* to the Son to have “life in himself.” The expression “life in himself” must mean the same thing in both parts of the verse. But how can such “life in himself,” the life of self-existence, be granted by another? The ancient explanation is still the best one: This is an eternal grant. There was therefore never a time when the Son did not have “life in himself.” This eternal grant establishes the nature of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. But if this is correct, since Father and Son have always been in this relationship, the Sonship of Jesus is not restricted to the days of His flesh.

(d) In some passages Jesus addresses God as Father (and thus implicitly thinks of Himself as the Son) in terms of shared experience in eternity past. Most notable is 17:5: “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

It follows that the love of the Father for the Son, and the love of the Son for the Father, cannot be restricted to the peculiar relationship that pertained from the Incarnation on, but is intrinsically intra-Trinitarian.

This, then, is a picture of God whose love, even in eternity past, even before the creation of anything, is other-oriented. This cannot be said, for instance, of Allah. Yet because the God of the Bible is one, this plurality-in-unity does not destroy His entirely

appropriate self-focus as God. As we shall see in the fourth lecture in this series, because He is God He is therefore rightly jealous. To concede He is something other than the center of all, and rightly to be worshiped and adored, would debase His very Godhood. He is the God who does not give His glory to another (Isa. 42:8). If this were all the Bible discloses about God, it would present a holy God of impeccable justice. But what of love? The love of Allah is providential, which is one of the ways the Bible speaks of God. But here there is more. In eternity past, the Father loved the Son, and the Son loved the Father. There has always been an other-orientation to the love of God. All the manifestations of the love of God emerge out of this deeper, more fundamental reality: love is bound up in the very nature of God. God is love.

Second, the *distinction* between the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father should be carefully noted. The Father commands, sends, tells, commissions, and demonstrates His love for the Son by “showing” Him everything, so that the Son does whatever the Father does. The Son obeys, says only what the Father gives Him to say, does only what the Father gives Him to do, comes into the world as the Sent One, and demonstrates His love for the Father precisely by such obedience. Not once is there any hint that the Son commissions the Father, who obeys. Not once is there any hint that the Father submits to the Son, or is dependent on Him for His own words and deeds. Historically, in avoiding the trap of Arianism Christians have insisted that the Son is equal with God in substance or essence, but that there is an economic or functional subordination of the Son to the Father.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Because this matter is related to debates about the roles of men and women, currently such a delicate topic, extraordinary publications have appeared in recent years. Royce Gruenler denies that there is any functional subordination of the Son to the Father, on the ground that each “defers” to the other: the Father “defers” to the Son by granting Him what He asks (*The Trinity in the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986]). But this is a vain attempt to bury under the banner of deference the massive differences in the descriptions of the roles of the Father and the Son as depicted in the Fourth Gospel. Because I “defer” to my son’s request to pick him up at the soccer pitch does not mean he commands me in the way I command him, or that my love for him is displayed in obedience to him. Gilbert Bilezikian argues that his opponents in the debate over women’s roles are flirting with heresy on this issue, since subordination in the Godhead does not reach back into eternity past but is restricted to the Incarnation, which teaches both men and women self-denial for the sake of others (“Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 [1997]: 57–68). It is difficult to find many articles that so richly combine exegetical errors, historical misconceptions, and purple prose in so finely honed a synthesis. But I do utterly agree with Bilezikian’s final appeal not to “mess with the Trinity” in support of a contemporary agenda. Closer to the mark is Paul K. Jewett, who rightly concedes that the historical view is that there is no subordination to the Father by nature, but that there is what many would call economic or functional subordination (*God,*

What is of interest for this study is the way the texts distinguish how the love of the Father for the Son is manifested, and how the love of the Son for the Father is manifested—and then how such love further functions as lines are drawn outward to elements of Christian conduct and experience. These function in various ways. There is space to reflect on only one of them.

In the Upper Room, Jesus tells His disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (15:9). This moves from the intra-Trinitarian love of the Father for the Son to the Son’s love of His people in redemption. Jesus is thus the Mediator of His Father’s love. Receiving love, He in turn has loved. Then He adds, “Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (15:9b–10). We do well to reflect on the parallelism: the perfection of Jesus’ obedience in the Godhead (which is the mark of the Son’s love for his Father, 14:31) is precisely what it means for the eternal Son to remain in the love the Father has for Him. This is a *relational* matter (i.e., the Father and the Son are related to each other in this way), but it is also a *constitutional* matter (i.e., this is the way God Almighty is constituted). This pattern of love, both relational and constitutional, in the very being of God, becomes the model and incentive of the believers’ relationship to Jesus. If we love *Him*, we will obey Him (14:15); here, if we obey Him, we remain in His love (15:10). And thereby our relationship to Jesus mirrors His relationship to His heavenly Father, which is of course a major theme in John 17.

Then the passage explicitly harks back to John 5. Jesus says, “You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (15:14–15).

Here Jesus made a distinction between slaves (*δοῦλοι*; not “servants”) and friends. But the distinction is initially surprising. We are Jesus’ *friends* if we do what He commands; this sounds rather like a definition of a slave. Certainly such friendship is not reciprocal. I cannot turn around to Jesus and thank Him for His friendship and tell Him He is my friend, too, if He does everything I command Him. Strangely, not once is Jesus or God ever described in the Bible as the believer’s friend. Abraham is God’s friend, but the reverse is never stated.

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*Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 322–23). He prefers to think of it as “the free act of the Son.” This may not be an adequate formulation, but even if it were it is difficult to imagine any complementarian advocating something other than the free act of the woman in any distinction in roles to which they hold.

Of course in one sense Jesus is the best Friend a poor sinner ever had. But that is not the terminology of Scripture; it is almost as if the Bible is reluctant to descend into the kind of cheap intimacy that brings God or Jesus down to our level. In this context what then is the difference between slave and friend? Our culture teaches that the slave obeys and the friend may or may not; clearly, however, that is not the distinction Jesus has in mind.

He says believers are His friends because He has made known to them all He learned from His Father. Suppose that an army colonel tells a GI to fetch the hummer. If the GI says he will do so only if the colonel tells him exactly why, and gives him permission to use it as a runabout while the colonel spends his time at headquarters, that GI is asking for about six months of KP duty. But suppose the colonel has been a friend of the GI's family for years and has watched the young man grow up. He may say to the GI, "Jim, fetch the hummer, please. I need you to drive me to headquarters. I'll be there about two hours. You can use the vehicle in that gap, provided you're back to pick me up at 1600 hours." In this case, of course, the GI is required no less to obey the colonel. The difference, the difference of friendship, is that full information has been conveyed. It is an informational difference, a difference of revelation, not a difference of obedience.

God's people are no longer slaves. At this point in redemptive history, the fullness of God's revelation has come to us in the Son, who was perfectly obedient and thereby perfectly disclosed God. We are *no longer* slaves (a redemptive-historical marker); we are friends. And what has brought this change about is that in the fullness of time God sent His Son into the world, and the Son obeyed; the Father in love for the Son determined that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father; and Father and Son, in perfect harmony of plan and vision, at the time God ordained, played out their roles: the Father sending, commissioning, "showing," and the Son coming, revealing, disclosing what had been "shown" Him, and in obedience going to the cross. And now believers, the heirs of the New Covenant, are unfathomably privileged to be included in this stupendous plan as friends of God.

We are the friends of God by virtue of the intra-Trinitarian love of God that so worked out in the fullness of time that the plan of redemption, conceived in the mind of God in eternity past, has exploded into space-time history at exactly the right moment. We have been incalculably privileged not only to be saved by it, but also to be shown it, to be informed about it, to come to know the mind of God. God is love; and we are the friends of God.