

# Love Wins

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.  
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## 2 John 6

*This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.*

On June 26th the Supreme Court of the United States issued its 5-4 decision to redefine marriage and legalize same-sex marriage. Within minutes of the decision's announcement, the President of the United States tweeted his delight with the high court's ruling, hashtagging #lovewins.

Really? Love won? Or did it? If there was any doubt that the word *love* is so misunderstood, then surely this statement from the president must put all doubt to rest. If God is love and thus defines what love means, then love did not win.

On May 9, 2012 the President Obama even quoted the Scripture to defend his change on same-sex marriage.

At a certain point, I've just concluded that for me personally it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married. . . . The thing at root that we think about is, not only Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf, but it's also the golden rule, you know? Treat others the way you'd want to be treated.

Is this the logic that now dictates from the White House to the church house—that a man would use the death of Christ on the cross for sin to justify sin? This is the outcome of unbiblical liberal theology that makes the death of our Lord nothing other than a mere moral example that we should be sacrificial. True enough we should be sacrificial because Jesus was, but His death was more than an example. It was about suffering the wrath of God for our sin, all sin including homosexuality.

But that statement puts me outside the realm of love and acceptance and now popular theology wants to bring its vengeful intolerance down upon me and anyone else that will assert the same. We, who hold a conservative, traditional, and historical understanding of the Christian faith, are the problem. We are the menace to our society because we are unwilling to bend or change.

Blogger and author John Shore argues in a Huffington Post article,

When you tell a gay person to “resist” being gay, what you are really telling them---what you really mean---is for them to be celibate.

What you are truly and actually saying is that you want them to condemn themselves to a life devoid of love. . . . Be alone. Live alone. Die alone.

The “sinful temptation” that Christians are forever urging LGBT people to resist is love.

Being, of course, the one thing Jesus was most clear about wanting his followers to extend to others.

Is it true that this is what we are doing, “hating our neighbor” rather than “loving our neighbor”? We live in a culture that has decided that anything that emotionally wounds, offends, or opposes someone’s absolute freedom to satisfy his or her desires is immoral, including historical, traditional biblical interpretation. If we cannot accept the homosexual life as moral, then we are the ones who are morally bankrupt. We are the ones who instead of love our neighbor hate our neighbor.

We must exercise a great deal of compassion and care when dealing with this subject because we are dealing with the lives of real people and we never should be insensitive or cavalier. It is never easy or simple when dealing with real people and their hearts. You and I should be genuinely heartbroken over the way homosexual people are often treated by professing Christians. I am appalled and ashamed at how some who claim to represent Christ and in His name abuse and belittle those who have same-sex dispositions. It’s wrong and should not be happening.

But at the same time all parties must come to understand the word *love* and not use it carelessly or wrongly. I suggest that this is a problem for both the homosexual and heterosexual communities. In fact, it’s a problem within the church as well. The word *love* gets bandied around with little to no resemblance to a true biblical definition.

Love must be grounded in truth otherwise it remains open to serve any person’s lusts and pleasures. That is why one of the greatest threats against the Christian faith is not coming from the militant homosexual who hates anything and everything to do with Christianity but is coming from those who claim to be both Christian and homosexual.

Those who have been most successful in leading us to where we are as a culture on this subject has been those who pronounce they are Christians and believe the Bible teaches that Christian love permits same-sex marriage. These are the ones who level arguments from emotions and a twisted theology that are working to change evangelical Christianity’s long standing traditional doctrinal position on marriage. And they have done it in the name of the love of God. So it’s necessary that we take a morning like this and address what it means to love our neighbor. What does it mean to love? What is love? What’s it like? How do you recognize it and know it? How would you describe it?

We have to establish some kind of biblical perimeters, a fence in order to know and protect this word *love*. G.K. Chesterton said many years ago that when you get ready to move a fence you

ought to ask yourself why it was put there in the first place. Why have there been these social and moral norms concerning marriage and sexuality for centuries? You don't just pick up and move the fence at a whim. You need to ask yourself why it was put there. I want to do so today, using this text.

If you look at our text this morning, you'll see that John finds it difficult himself to define *love*. In fact, it's almost impossible, so he describes it for us.

## **I. Love is an Act of the Will**

### **A. Love is Tied to Actions.**

*“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.”*

We walk. We have a lifestyle and we act accordingly. If we love God, then we will, we choose to, act a certain way. We will choose to live a certain way. Love is an act of the will, therefore, John says love is identifiable by actions, which is the product of the will choosing to behave in a certain manner. “This is love”

Why does John not just give us a biblical definition that would solve all of these problems? He does in his previous epistle. “God is love.” But now you have a tougher job—define God. Do you see the problem? God is undefinable. God is immutable, how do you explain that? So you try to find similes, similar illustrations, and that's what John is doing. This is love, if we walk in His way.

### **B. Love is Not Desire.**

Love has desires but is more than desire. Yet our culture defines love as desires, and if you tell me I cannot fulfill my desires, then you are acting in an unloving manner toward me because the essence of all love is desire and the ability to gratify those desires. That is not what John is saying about this. A few weeks ago I tried to prove this when I illustrated with the statement, “I love ice cream.” But the truth is I don't love ice cream; I desire ice cream. If I loved ice cream I would, first of all, have compassion for it, the secondly care about it. I would try to preserve it no matter what and make sure it never melted. No, I don't love ice cream, I desire it—sometimes greatly—for the pleasure it gives me.

This is the fundamental mistake made about love, that love is the ability to pursue your desires and fulfill them by taking from someone else. Satisfying your desires at the expense of someone else. And when love is defined this way it is based upon the value we place on ourselves not someone else. In this case love is the act of the will to satisfy one's own desires because there is nothing more important than self. That's not what John says about love, nor is it Christian testimony.

Love saves and serves and sacrifices. The very thing the president wanted us to see, he missed. Love sacrifices. Love saves. Love serves. Love doesn't say, "Meet my needs." The Apostle Paul says love is not self-seeking. "Love seeks not its own." Desire uses and consumes, not love.

In this country every fifteen seconds, a spouse is abused—maybe killed—by someone, who has said "I love you." What's the problem here? We don't know what love is. We've misdefined it, misused it and misunderstood it and we use the word to defend our selfishness. So John begins by saying love is an act of the will.

## **II. Love is to Will and Work For the Good of Another**

To see this you have to get the context. So go up one verse.

*And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. <sup>6</sup> This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it." (2 John 1:5 )*

### **A. Love Wills and Works Based Upon the Value of Another.**

Not on self but on the other. This is an act of the will based upon the value the mind and heart place upon someone else. Where does this come from? God Himself. But not just the value of another human being, it transcends you and me altogether, and ultimately values God. In other words, when I value God as He is to be valued by the human soul, I will see your worth and then the value of willing and working to your good. Why?

*<sup>6</sup> This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.*

### **B. Without God Love Has No Meaning.**

If you take God out of the equation all together, then love has no meaning. Once again, God is love.

*"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:8-10)*

Although John cannot give us a clear definition, he has given us a great deal to think about. God is love. If you know God, then you know how to love. In verse nine he gives us another demonstration, another example of what love is like. He even uses the word *manifested*. How? He sent His only Son. It's not that you first loved God but that God first loved you. There it is. God first loved you. Not when you reciprocated His love. Not when you showed Him some affection or honor, no, God loved you when you had no honor for Him. This is the example of biblical love. The love

of God in Christ Jesus has to establish the perimeters of all form of love, but my question is why God would have done that for me? Why would He have loved me in the first place? What value and worth could He ascribe to me?

Paul quotes the Old Testament that says we are all together unprofitable. We are unprofitable to God. There is no profit in us. There is only one thing left that has any worth in us and that is the Imago Dei—the image of God. There's a semblance of worth and value. The very image of God, yes, marred, but still there. Because God has made us in His own image and likeness He finds us worthy of His Son's life. He shed His blood for us that He might redeem us and He did. Not because we first loved Him but because He looked upon you and saw His very image, His thumbprint, and He loves His own creation and His own glory.

Therefore God determines what love is. Not the president, not the Supreme Court, or you and I, not even the church; God determines love because He is love. God is love, but this is quite different from our culture's understanding of love. To define God's love by the culture's definition of love is a serious mistake and is leading us to some serious problems. We're already reaping these problems today. I'm not talking about the Supreme Court's decision, I'm talking about the lives being ruined daily in this nation. Think about the young people who are facing what we never had to face. When I was growing up in school we had drugs, we had all of that stuff, but we still had some moral framework from which to navigate. But when there's no true north or true south or east or west, you don't know where you are or how to go. You're not sure how to get there or how to get anywhere at all.

God is the definition of love. God has determined marriage to be for one man and one woman. This is God's determination, not some evangelical church's doctrinal statement.

So love is the act of the will, willing and working for the good of someone else.

### **III. Love is Not Free**

*“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”*

When you start talking about commandments you're not talking about absolute freedom. You're not talking about having no restrictions; you're talking about how there is some sense of order, right and wrong, morality, good and evil. And when you suggest there is good and evil you're suggesting there is a moral law of some sort and if you're suggesting there's a moral law of some sort then there has to be a moral law giver, does there not? And the moral Law Giver, God, says love is never free because love surrenders rights.

#### **A. Love Surrenders Rights.**

True love is not free. Look at Jesus. He laid down His privileges, His prerogatives of divinity, and took up the work of a slave on our behalf. Love is not free to live without boundaries. Love by nature restricts freedom for the purpose of being devoted to one person. Again, G.K. Chesterton said, “It is most amusing to listen to the opponents of marriage . . . They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words—’free-love’—as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free. It is the nature of love to bind itself.”

Pure love is always exclusive. You cannot give yourself to other women and truthfully tell your wife that you love her. She will know two things about you: that you really don’t love her and that you’re using her. Love is pure and true when it restricts its freedoms. When I pledged myself to my wife I was saying, “You at the expense of all others. To you only do I pledge my troth,” which automatically limited my freedom. True love always binds itself.

When God limits marriage and sex to one man and one woman, He is saying that if you want to experience and enjoy true love, then you must limit your desires and love for one person only. Romantic love without God’s kind of love, that motivates one to save him or herself for one person, is a perverted kind of love. Any kind of love that removes the love of God is perverted at best.

One of the positions of the homosexual movement, especially for the gay “Christian,” is stated this way, “We’re not advocating gross immorality and having many different partners. We believe the Bible says we ought to have a monogamous relationship, just one person for life, just like the heterosexuals. Therefore, we are following the guidelines of Scripture.” But I say that is not possible. When you remove God’s definition of what love is, you remove love’s surrender. Sexual expression without the love of God is not pure and true love.

I’m not saying two people of the same sex can’t love one another. I’m not saying they don’t have genuine feelings for one another. What I’m saying is that at best it is perverted. Before you jump on the bandwagon and say I’m singling out homosexuality as the only perversion, no I’m not. Every manifestation of sin is a perversion of some kind.

Love has to be protected. Love without boundaries is not love but lust. And when that happens, love doesn’t win, lust does.

## **B. Objections.**

There are many objections that the gay Christian movement is trying to argue against our biblical traditional understanding of marriage but I do not have time to go into all of them, nor is this designed to be an exhaustive rebuttal against every argument of that movement. But I want to give you two and I believe if I satisfactorily, biblically answer these two, then all other objections are muted.

The first objection is that the traditional understanding of the Bible’s prohibition of homosexuality denies that person’s freedom of personal identity and expression.



They're saying if we restrict relationships to be between one man and one woman we have essentially denied them personhood. For that to be the case that would mean your identity would be in your sexuality. But in all of human history, never has identity been defined by sexuality except in the last 50 years, since the 1960s and the sexual revolution. A true Christian's identity is never in what he or she does.

The Bible defines your identity, your personhood, your worth, not by what you do but in who you are. For the Christian, there is only one place for identity to reside and it's in the person of Jesus Christ and Him alone. Why would I want my identity to be in the fallen, corrupt person that I am? No, I've got something better. "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit," "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." My identity is not in any sin or action, it's not even in my preaching. So many preachers get sidetracked in their ministry and their whole identity becomes their occupation. My identity ought to be in the second person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, my High Priest, my Advocate, my Kinsman Redeemer, my Brother. I've been joined to Him. There's my identity—I am a fallen human being who has been redeemed by the blood.

The question of homosexuality or any sexual deviation from God's standard is not a question of love but of choices and behavior. Two men or two women who are friends can truly love one another but not have sexual activity. What makes that relationship homosexual is engaging in homosexual acts. Therefore, the act of homosexuality does not need love any more than a man consorting with a prostitute requires love.

Consequently, "homosexual" refers not to one's nature or disposition sexually but to one's behavior. The Bible treats homosexuality as one more expression of "the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16-21; Romans 1:24-26) not the sum total of human nature. We should not define personhood based on desires or our behavior.

The second objection is that the Christian interpretation of slavery was wrong for centuries but the Church finally "saw the light." The same is true about same-sex marriages and sooner or later the Church will again need to see the light.

My answer is that one's race is sacred, given to the person by God. I did not choose my ethnicity; you did not choose your ethnicity. It was given to you by God. Therefore, it is sacred because it is determined by God and given to us accordingly. To try to subjugate another person or persons because of their race is a violation of God and His sovereign choice. To suggest they are somehow inferior because of their skin color is to suggest that God made them inferior; meaning His workmanship in their creation is inferior. Slavery was wrong, is wrong, and always will be wrong. To believe there is a superior race above others is to denigrate God's creative variety.

But sexuality is also sacred. Our genders and the act of sex within the confines of marriage is a sacred gift of God. It is His workmanship. The cultural argument made against Bible believing Christians is that we once believed that slavery was permissible and justifiable, but Christianity

has come to understand it was on the wrong side of history and has changed its views about slavery and we now deem it a sin is fallacious. It's a false argument.

They attack us and say that we are now on the wrong side of history about sexuality and eventually we need to wise up and see that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. Yet these same people who accuse you and me of bigotry are the ones who have desacralized sexuality while maintaining the sacredness of race. Where is the contradiction?

Let me explain. Sex is a sacred gift from God. That is why homosexual behavior is as wrong as man betraying his marital covenant and committing adultery against his wife. Both are a violation of God's boundaries for this sacred gift. According to Jesus, when a man looks upon a woman and lusts in his heart for her he has already committed adultery. Does that mean he doesn't need or intend to love his wife? No, it is the sinful reaction to sight triggering the imagination and the man not shutting down the imagination when he should have. It has nothing to do with love and has everything to do with desire. Sinful desire.

It is the same power of sin that makes a child steal a piece of bubblegum. It's called the power of desire, strong desire. A strong sexual desire or disposition is not enough reason to satisfy it. If you do love doesn't win; lust does. The ones on the wrong side of the argument, it seems to me, are the ones who have desacralized sexuality while trying to maintain the sacredness of race. It's both. You can't have it one way and not the other.

Listen to the holy text of Scripture. It says God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18). God made Adam with certain emotional, psychological, and physical needs that only one who was like him—comparable—but different from could meet. Note the words, "a helper comparable to him." God did not make man in a way that God could meet those needs personally but He could meet those needs through creating a woman—a person like a Adam but not the same as Adam. So the Bible says, "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). It doesn't say God made Adam and Steve, but Adam and Eve, male and female. And when Jesus was asked about the subject of marriage, the Lord goes back to this very passage and tells us what God intended,

*"But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.'<sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,<sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.<sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mark 10:6-9)*

One of the arguments from the gay Christian movement is that Jesus never prohibited homosexuality, He never addressed it, He never said anything about it. Friends, there is a danger in arguing from silence. Jesus didn't talk about pedophilia either, He didn't talk about bestiality, or polygamy. Surely that doesn't mean He approved of those actions, does it? Of course not. I maintain that He did address every sexual deviation, including



homosexuality, when He quoted this passage. He made it absolutely clear—one man, one woman, for your lifetime.

### **C. Love is Not Free to Silence the Truth.**

“We have to be quiet, even if we don’t agree.” No, that’s not love. God commands us to love our neighbor. And love takes the person as they are without requiring that person to change. Another way to say it is this, love does not demand you change for it. I am so thankful. God never asked me to change before He loved me. He loved me even when I was His enemy, ungodly, unrighteous, completely unlike Him. You do not truly love a person if you require them to change in order for you to love them.

Listen to me. I want us to reach people who are attracted to the same sex. I want us to reach them and love them and accept them. They need the Gospel. To elevate that sin above all other sins and make it akin to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is taking Scripture out of context and coming to a wrong conclusion. They are sinners that need grace just like you and I are sinners who need grace. We would not allow a person who was living with someone in sin to be a member of our church, therefore we would not allow a practicing homosexual to become a member of our church. But if the man repents and stops practicing his sin and gives us evidence to believe that he is following Jesus, we ought to love and welcome him.

How many of you have stopped your sinning? How many of you have all together perfected even some of the areas of your life from before you were saved? No, we’re a work in progress. Love can see a person for who they are and accept the person.

But love must also tell a person the truth. Love accepts them even if it disagrees with their ideas and behavior, but it also must tell them the truth. God has given to each one of us the gift of self-determination. This too is another of God’s sacred gifts; it is a gift of His love to you. You have the right to choose according to your desire but you do not have the right to determine the consequences of your choice. Consequences are intrinsic to (built-in) the choice. You do not have the privilege or the power to produce a different outcome to what is bound to your choice.

God has given you as an act of His love the ability to choose. If you want to fulfill every desire as much as possible, God gives you the freedom to do that. But you have no right, nor should you even begin to expect that the outcome should be different than what He says. Every decision will bring a determined set of results. And if you choose to disobey God’s sacred commands concerning His sacred gifts, you will reap the predetermined consequences. The Bible says it this way, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:7-8).

You cannot choose a different outcome than what your choice has already predetermined. God gives you the freedom to make choices but He also loves you, therefore He warns you. And if I love you, I should also warn you, no matter what the sin is.

So how do we define love? Love is God and we see from God that He loves and works for our good for our own sakes. This is what love is—it is to will and work for the good of God and others for their own sakes.

I want to conclude with something I heard Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias say,

When I say ‘I love you’ and you refuse to love me, I hurt because I have lost something. When God says He loves you and you refuse to love God, God hurts too. Not because God has lost something, but you have lost something. That’s the very perfection of His love. . . . You today, if you know Him, are loved by Him not because of any merit that you and I displayed.

God loves us for His own sake, that is for His glory, but He also loves us for our own sake. He knows that the best thing we can experience in these three score and ten years of pain and disappointment is the experience of His love. But His love has perimeters. Even His love cannot permit or excuse or ignore our sin. And when you refuse His love for you for the sake of preserving self and your individual freedom, you have lost your freedom to love and experience pure love.

When you reject the love of God, you have just denied yourself the ability and freedom to experience true love. It doesn’t matter what your sexual preference is, speaking to all of us, the love of God is a gift granted to us and in that love comes the gift of choice. Choice. You can choose to reject God’s love or you can choose to accept it and its limitations, because true love always binds itself, restricts itself, for devotion to that person. That’s what God asks of you, that you restrict your freedom. He said it this way, “Deny yourself, take up your cross, and come follow Me.”

Friends, that’s always been the Gospel, it will always be the Gospel, and anyone who comes along, it doesn’t matter if they’re heterosexual or homosexual, and they try to give us another Gospel and remove the boundaries of God’s love and tell us that we’re absolutely free to do whatever we want with no consequences is dead wrong. It’s anathema—a lie from hell itself.

So in the name of love I plead with us all. Accept God’s love. Heed His voice. Follow His commandments. He, in love, has given those restrictions, those perimeters, those boundaries for love and for the enjoyment of love, not because He is some evil monster who’s only joy is making us miserable. Not at all, it’s exactly the opposite. He offers us joy now and forever. Amen.