The “Love Wins” Lie

DAY ONE

Love Is Central

One of the things I appreciate about the people who push back on traditional Christian teaching about sexuality and marriage is that they usually start with something true. They start with love. They point to the moment a religious leader asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest, and they quote his answer. Love God. Love your neighbor. And then they point to his next line: the whole law hangs on these two.

They are not wrong that he said that. They are not wrong that love is at the center of everything Jesus taught. Sometimes the way Christians respond to the "love wins" argument makes it sound like we are suspicious of love, or like love is the soft thing and truth is the serious thing. That is not right either.

Jesus really did put love at the top. The question is what he meant by it.

> **Matthew 22:37–40** “Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.””

Notice that the first and greatest commandment is not "love your neighbor." It is "love the Lord your God." The direction of love matters. Everything starts with God, with who he is and what he says, and flows outward from there. Love that begins with human desire and then works its way toward God will always arrive at a different place than love that begins with God and works its way into every relationship and decision.

The argument that love overrides moral teaching misses something built into this passage. Love is not the replacement for God's instruction. Love is what you have when you are fully oriented toward God. The two are not in competition. They are the same thing, properly understood.

REFLECT

When you hear the phrase "love wins," what does it bring up for you? Where have you seen this argument used in ways that felt compelling?

DAY TWO

When Love Gets Redefined

Most arguments are won or lost at the level of definitions. The "love wins" argument wins a lot of ground in our culture not because of the quality of the reasoning but because they have already redefined love.

In the cultural version, love means affirmation. It means accepting someone completely as they are, endorsing the desires and choices that feel most central to their identity, and never saying anything that introduces distance or difficulty into that acceptance. To love someone is to be for everything they are for. Any other response is not a harder love. It is a failure to love.

Once love has been defined that way, the argument is essentially over. If love equals affirmation, and love is the highest commandment, then full affirmation of any desire or identity becomes a moral obligation. But that is not how the Bible defines love. Not even close.

> **1 Corinthians 13:6** "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

Love, in Paul's account, is not neutral about truth. It does not politely step aside while something harmful is called good. It rejoices with the truth. That pairing, love and truth held together in the same breath, runs all the way through the New Testament.

> **John 1:14** "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The word "full" matters. Jesus was not mostly grace with a little truth mixed in, or mostly truth occasionally softened by grace. He was full of both, at the same time, without one diminishing the other. Grace and truth are not opposites that have to be balanced. In Jesus they are two facets of the same thing.

A doctor who only tells you what you want to hear is not being loving. A parent who never says no to a child is not being loving. A friend who affirms every decision you make regardless of where it leads is not loving you well. Love that loses its grip on truth does not become purer. It becomes weaker. It becomes something that feels good in the moment but cannot actually help anyone.

REFLECT

Where in your own life have you confused affirmation with love?

Has someone loved you by telling you something true that was hard to hear?

DAY THREE

What Jesus Actually Taught

It is worth slowing down on what Jesus actually said, because the "love wins" argument depends on a particular reading of him that does not hold up when you look at the whole picture. The argument is roughly this: Jesus elevated love above everything, he criticized the religious leaders for their rigid rule-keeping, and he welcomed people that the respectable crowd excluded. Therefore, the specific moral teaching of Scripture, especially on sexuality and marriage, should yield to the larger principle of love.

But that is not what Jesus taught. And the place to see that most clearly is in what he said about the law itself.

> **Matthew 5:17** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Jesus was not loosening the moral demands of Scripture. He was, if anything, deepening them. The Sermon on the Mount, where this verse appears, goes on to say that anger is as serious as murder and lust as serious as adultery. He was not offering a more permissive reading. He was showing that the law's real reach goes deeper than behavior into the heart.

And when Jesus was asked directly about marriage, he did not appeal to love as an override. He went back to creation.

> **Matthew 19:4–6** ""Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.""

The same Jesus who said love is the greatest commandment also defined marriage with precision, grounding it in the design of creation rather than in cultural convention or personal desire.

And then there is this, which tends to get lost in these conversations.

> **John 14:15** "If you love me, keep my commands."

For Jesus, love and obedience are not in tension. They flow in the same direction. Love for God expresses itself in taking seriously what he says. The "love wins" argument as it is often used pits love against Jesus's teaching. But Jesus himself did not make that separation.

REFLECT

Have you ever heard someone appeal to Jesus's teaching on love while setting aside something else he taught? What do you do with the fact that he held both together?

DAY FOUR

The Self We've Built

The "love wins" argument is not just a theological claim. It is the surface expression of something much deeper that has been happening in the culture for a generation. Three shifts, in particular, have made this argument feel not just persuasive but obvious to a lot of people, including a lot of people inside the church.

The first is the elevation of feeling as the primary guide to truth. For many people, especially younger ones, the question "is this true?" has been largely replaced by "does this feel right to me?" Moral intuition, especially the intuition around acceptance and love, has become a complete moral argument. When someone says "I know in my heart that God accepts me exactly as I am," they are not usually making a theological case from Scripture. They are describing a feeling, and treating the feeling as authoritative.

The second is the cultural premium on authenticity. The supreme virtue in our moment is being true to yourself, living in full alignment with your inner desires and identity without apology or suppression. Within that framework, anything that asks you to resist or redirect your desires is not just difficult. It is morally wrong. It is asking you to be inauthentic, which is the one thing a person in this cultural moment must not be.

The third, and deepest, is the relocation of identity. For most of human history, and certainly within the biblical framework, identity was understood as something given from outside the self — made in the image of God, known and named by God, belonging to a community and a story larger than individual experience. In our moment, identity has moved inside. I am what I feel most strongly and most persistently. My desires, especially the ones that feel central to who I am, are the definition of me.

> **Romans 1:24–25** "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator, who is forever praised. Amen."

When identity is built on desire, any challenge to those desires is received as a challenge to the person's existence. And love must mean affirmation, because anything less feels like a denial of who the person is. The "love wins" argument makes sense from inside that framework. But the framework itself is the lie Romans 1 describes: the exchange of the truth about God for something smaller, the worship of the created thing rather than the Creator.

The answer is not to tell people their feelings do not matter. The answer is to offer them something truer and more stable to build an identity on.

REFLECT

Where have you built your sense of self on something other than who God says you are?

What would it mean to let that be the foundation instead?

DAY FIVE

Grace and Truth Together

I want to come back to John 1:14, because I think it is the key to everything. Jesus came full of grace and truth. Not grace as a softening of truth. Not truth as a limit on grace. Both, fully, at the same time. That is the model. And it is harder than either alternative.

It is easier to be all grace and no truth. To affirm, to welcome, to never introduce difficulty into a relationship. That version of love feels generous and costs very little in the short term. It also cannot actually help anyone, because it has no way to name what is wrong or point toward what is better.

It is also easier, and the church has often chosen this, to be all truth and no grace. To hold the right positions at a distance, to engage with people's situations as theological problems to be solved rather than lives to be walked alongside. That version of truth is also a failure, because it has detached truth from love and therefore from the only context in which truth can actually be.

> **Ephesians 4:15** "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."

Speaking the truth in love is not a compromise between two things in tension. It is the description of what it looks like to actually follow Jesus into a relationship. Truth, spoken. In love, always. Not truth first and then maybe love, or love as long as truth isn't too costly. Together.

The "love wins" argument gets something right. The church has too often offered truth without genuine love, without real relationship, without the kind of costly presence that earns the right

to say hard things. The correction to that is not to abandon truth. The correction is to go after love more seriously.

What does it actually look like to love people well who experience same-sex attraction, or gender dysphoria, or who have built their identity around something the Bible would name differently? It does not look like a policy position held from a safe distance. It looks like knowing people, sitting with people, belonging to one another's lives in ways that make the truth something received from a friend rather than fired from a stranger.

Love does win. Just not in the way the argument usually means. Love wins when grace and truth arrive together, the way they did in Jesus. That is a harder and more costly kind of love. And it is the only kind that actually helps anyone get anywhere.

> **John 1:14** "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

REFLECT

Think of someone in your life who needs both grace and truth from you. What would it look like this week to offer them both, without letting one crowd out the other?