

**TRIUMPHANT LIVING**  
*“Not Sentimentalizing the Love of God”*  
**by Bishop John Rodgers**  
**October 4, 2013**

Good morning gentlemen.

**Audience Members:** *Good morning.*

Don, do you want to bring us into the Lord’s presence with song?

*[MUSIC]*

Lord, we do bow down before you and give you praise. We thank you for this creation, which is beyond our full comprehension. But above all, we thank you for your work upon the cross for us. We ask that you would strengthen us that we might give you the glory in all that we say and do, for we ask it in the strong and sovereign name of Jesus Christ our Lord and our Savior. Amen. Thank you, Don.

Well, if you have an outline, I’ll try to stick close to it, and I’ll even try to stop on time. Dale is going to wave at me when I’ve got five minutes.

I was quietly minding my own business and sitting back there and Bruce came up and said, “Would you speak on the sentimentalizing of God’s love. It’s not a topic I had spent a whole lot of time thinking about. This week has not been one with a lot of free time for me. We’ll make seven brief points. This is a serious issue—maybe a lot more serious than I thought when I started. The more I reflected on it, the more serious the issue seemed to me to be.

Let’s look at these seven points. First, point 1, we need to be more aware of how we experience this sentimentalizing of God’s love. I understand to sentimentalize, to put an emphasis on emotion over mind and warm fuzzies over tough accountability. Let me just mention a few things that come to my mind in my experience about this rather prevalent, widespread sentimentalizing of God’s love in our culture, and frankly in the church, and in Christian bookstores. Tom and I were just talking about that. I’ll mention a few things and I’m going to give you a few moments to think about ways you’ve experienced this.

I waste at...I can’t remember the name of the big Baptist retreat center in North Carolina. It’s huge. They have a great big large bookstore. I went in there to look at the doctrine section. Guess what I found? No doctrine section. None whatsoever. That’s shocking to me.

Here are some of the things. Contemporary music. Not all renewal music songs are sentimental, but a lot of them are. They’re very romantic. This use of the erotic or the romantic in our relationship with God tends to give me, many of us guys, I think, the willies when it sounds too much like a boyfriend or a girlfriend in its language. It’s not how the Bible usually speaks of our being in the presence of God. “Take off your shoes. The ground on which you stand is holy ground,” is not the same as a date.  
{LAUGHTER}

Now it’s not totally wrong because there is a deep attraction for us as creatures to God our Creator, and us as sinners, to God our Savior. It’s not totally wrong, but it’s a subordinate theme, but it becomes, for

many, kind of a love song that dominates the music. I don't know about you, but my skin begins to crawl after a while. It's a little too familiar.

Most contemporary music tends to emphasize God's love, but few modern hymns emphasize his holiness and his righteousness. Sing it with me, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee. Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty. God in three persons, Blessed Trinity." You just had more theology than I've heard in about 9/10 of modern music...in one verse of Holy, Holy, Holy.

Upon hearing an act of God's judgment being preached upon, one lady commented to her preacher, "My God would never do such a thing." The preacher said to her, "Sue, your God would never do anything. He's a figment of your imagination." {LAUGHTER} How true that is in so many respects in the contemporary church and culture.

Think of the many TV comments concerning favored people who have died and are now "above," never below. Below just doesn't get a mention. Or the funerals in which the deceased is in heaven regardless of his/her relationship to Christ.

Some preachers on TV suggest that if we trust God, our lives will be happy and trouble free and God will see to it. The health and wealth preachers. What does that mean? Does that mean if we're sick or poor, God doesn't love us? You've got a tough message if your wife's in bad shape, which is mine. Much popular theology seems to hold that God loves everybody in exactly the same way to the same extent and unconditionally. In this regard, a famous TV preacher last week, last week...I can't remember his name, he smiles all the time.

***Audience Member: Osteen.***

Osteen suggested that the Bible had it wrong when it excluded some people from the kingdom of God, even if they were unrepentant. Think of Galatians. Paul should never have written this according to our brother. Galatians 5:19-21, "<sup>19</sup>Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup>envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (ESV)

***Sig: But that was then.***

That was then. {LAUGHTER} No, it's do such things in the sense of being given over to it and continually. Not that anybody, of course, is without sin. He was just offended that anybody might be excluded. Having been a former Episcopalian, that's certainly become the dominant doctrine of the Episcopal church—inclusiveness. It began with the election of presiding Bishop Ed Browning, whose line was this...the first thing he said after he was elected, "There will be no outcasts." The Gospel is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ; it's the Gospel of inclusiveness. No matter what.

Much popular religion seems to hold the conviction that God is our Father, but not our judge. He's a kind of Santa Claus figure in the sky. To fear God only means to have awe of him, but no regard for his condemnation or his displeasure or his discipline. Jesus never should have said, "I tell you my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, but fear him who after he kills the body, can cast into hell." These strong, stern notes simply are ignored. When they notice that they're there, suggested that they shouldn't be there. Is Aslam tame? No. He is kind, but he is not tame.

Well, let me just take a moment and ask you to tell me how you have experienced this sentimentalizing of God's love. Anybody have any thoughts?

**Audience Member:** *I think one of the dangers with evangelism is people would just say, "God loves you and has a purpose and a plan for you. Yeah, you're a sinner, you need to repent," but if you look at the history of stuff like that great awakening, those guys would preach for days on just the sin of man and just plow their hearts and wouldn't even give an invitation. It's like today, I wonder how much people actually understand the depth of sin and what their...*

They don't really hear much about it, do they?

**Audience Member:** *Yeah, it can be very dangerous for evangelism.*

I notice that all...I used to teach evangelism. We looked at materials, and almost none of them included the cost of discipleship. The real place of repentance was just ignored.

**Audience Member:** *I noted in the discussions about gay marriage, etc., some religious people, when you point to what it says in the Bible, said, "Well, what's been written by man can be rewritten by man," so you get into the whole challenge of the authority of Scripture.*

That was the Bishop of Philadelphia. He said, "We wrote the Bible. The church wrote the Bible. We can change the Bible." There's a thought for you, right? You know you're in deep trouble when you have a comment like that.

**Audience Member:** *I know for my generation growing up, especially in college, we're really, the big thing was emphasized on the sentimental love part. I know me, and talking to some other people my age, it's kind of screwed up our thinking and sort of like after getting out, I have to reprogram to how it really is.*

Absolutely. You have to come to a place like this where you hear Bruce teach and preach regularly to begin to get the sharper, tougher notes in the Scripture, and you begin to hear the Lord again speak what he really, truly speaks.

**Don:** *When I have mentioned to people, some people, even some family members, about my doubts as to whether someone who died had gone to heaven, immediately, I'm confronted with, "Judge not lest you be judged." And I said, "Well, wait a minute. I'm not making...God is making the judgment; I'm just stating an opinion." I remember, for example, when John Lennon died, of the Beatles, in 1980, "Oh, he must be in heaven." "Well, wait a minute. He wrote Imagine, there's no heaven." I hope he repented of that. They just assume...people just assume that someone's in heaven because, well, they are. Justification by death.*

Somebody said funerals are the place where more lies are told about more people than anywhere else in our culture. Everybody goes to heaven in the funeral.

**Sig:** *My experience has been, the liberal side tends to talk about experience, and this inclusivity. Like everyone should be welcome. The church of Christ should not deny anybody. But they don't talk about change. Like Christ would accept everybody into the church, but isn't there an expectation for people to change. When we talk about the gay issue, I don't know about you guys, but I like women. {LAUGHTER}*

*[UNCLEAR] If I had my way, I'd be with a lot of women. But I had to change! I have to give that up!*  
*{LAUGHTER}*

**Bishop Rodgers:** A real blessing to the women. *{LAUGHTER}*

Sig, you are not alone. You are not alone, brother. *{LAUGHTER}* I remember telling my youngest son when it was time to have that conversation, "That I still notice women." He said, "As well dad!" *{LAUGHTER}* He thought was a terrible thing.

**Audience Member:** *Since we're talking about women {LAUGHTER} do you think there's a connection here with the feminism in the church?*

Oh absolutely. That's one of the reasons why I...it's given to women to have a mother's heart.

**Audience Member:** *Repeat the question please.*

Is some of this romanticism and sentimentalizing of things in the church due to the feminist movement that has found a very real purchase in many, many of our churches? Frankly, it's one of the reasons why I believe the Scripture does not really invite a view of women as the head of a congregation. A church, they tend to sentimentalize everything. They're partly given to that as mothers. I mean, that's just the way women are. We need that in our life, and in the life of the church, but we don't need that to be the dominant view of a congregation. Yeah, I think that's true. Not exclusively. Women are on a sliding scale in terms of this, too.

**Don:** *I also think that it's rather ironic, if you look, for example, talking about the sentimentalizing of the love of God, in Psalm 136, the constant refrain there is "for His steadfast love endures forever." But then you get down to the later part of the Psalm, and it says, "who destroyed the firstborn in for Egypt, for his steadfast love endures forever," or who defeated King [UNCLEAR], "for his steadfast love endures..." It's more than just a sentimental love here, that's for sure.*

That's right. His love is always holy. We'll come to that in a minute. That's true. Well let's turn now to ask how we're tempted to sentimentalize God's love. We've talked about how the culture does it, but how about us? Where do we struggle with this as an issue? I'll give you some examples out of my life.

I have a very high regard for my son-in-law. He's a really fine young man. Not only that's, he's able to live with my daughter. *{LAUGHTER}* And I bless him for that. They have a good marriage. But he's an unbeliever. So I tend to say to myself, "Surely God would not condemn him. He was raised in a non-Christian home."

When you think of people we love, in the family, and other people dear to us who are not believers, I tend to find myself making excuses for them, or being silent about the tougher notes. Perhaps they haven't heard. Maybe some experience with a Christian in their early life put them off. On and on I go in my mind. And then, really, I hit bottom when I say this, "Gosh, just not believing in Jesus doesn't seem to be serious enough to merit eternal condemnation. They haven't killed anybody. They're basically often nicer people than I am." So I end up actually contradicting the Word of God in my mind. How about you? Where do you tend to slough off the tougher notes in Scripture? Anybody want to volunteer a thought?

**Don:** *I think that where I tend to wonder is, you touched on it, well, boy, people in far off countries who've never heard of Christ. Surely, surely God wouldn't...or...I'm going to really step on toes here... infants. We know that there were infants in Sodom and Gomorrah. God only wanted ten righteous people, "If I find ten righteous people, I won't destroy it." There had to be infants. Had to be infants during the flood. It's those kinds of things where I'm tempted to say it can't be.*

**Audience Member:** *I have a comment. I've noticed that some people, it takes longer to come to Christ than others. You've got to wonder, does God work harder on some people than others? Does he say, well, like you get so many times and that's it? I mean, why do some people come to Christ, and some people come people come to Christ quickly. Some people, they're younger and their whole life they're Christians. Some people, it takes 20 years to come to Christ. Sometimes there's a spouse who's an unbeliever and all of a sudden, 30 years into their marriage, they come to Christ. Why is that? Are some people more stubborn or some people, are there influences? Does the way they grew up hold them back? What do you think are the reasons for that? You've got to wonder.*

You do have to wonder. One of my former teachers used to tell this story. He had a friend who was deeply converted. This friend had a friend and he would take his friend to all the evangelistic events he could. Some of the great evangelists had come through the town and he had taken his friend. His friend never budged. One time he took him to a traveling evangelist and it was the worst presentation of the Gospel he had ever heard. He was embarrassed that he had brought his friend. The evangelist finally said, "Those who would like to come, come forward." His friend got up and went forward.

He was riding home with the guy, and he was trying not to be angry, because he had taken him to all these great presentations. Finally he said to his friend, "Fred, I'm really, really thankful that you've come to the Lord. But why tonight?" Fred said, "It was so clear. It was so clear." It wasn't clear. It was absolutely terrible. But to Fred, it was clear.

It is a mystery. I don't think we can answer your question. It's up to God. It's up to a lot of elements that we just can't track. Only God looks upon the heart. It's when he chooses to move that he moves.

**Audience Member:** *I think about like if I didn't have the influences that I had, would I have accepted Christ? If God didn't bring people to my life that he did and used, would I have been stubborn enough never to accept Christ. I wonder about that.*

I think the answer is yes.

**Audience Member:** *I'm thankful that he pursued me and he gave me that gift, and that he picked me out other billions of people there on this earth, that I was actually one of those choices. But it's amazing that some people, you've got to wonder, that relative that you think about, will they ever accept Christ. What's their fate?*

**Don:** *Where there is life, there's hope.*

Well I think of myself. I had strong Christian parents. But I was well into my...I think I was almost...I even was in seminary before I really, really took the Gospel seriously. It was an act of God's mercy and grace. I would not have...I would have gone on just [UNCLEAR] the ministry and do another project. You can see it.

**Audience Member:** *I think the testimony of the person that did not respond to the many clear presentations, we've gotten into this whole thing about marketing the church and marketing the Gospel. That's part of the sentimentality of God...sentimentalizing of God. That person's testimony confirms what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians beginning in chapter 2, "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God." Isn't that what [UNCLEAR] do?*

It's what happens.

**Audience Member:** *Eloquence? Our friend, Joel Osteen. "But I resolved from them nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but on God's power." That's offensive to the flesh.*

It is. It's not a project that we can do. It's a supernatural act of God. Every believer is a miracle. Including ourselves, as you know.

Point 2 on the outline—the consequences of sentimentalizing the love of God are fundamentally two-fold. First, it's a false doctrine. It is a lie about God. It dishonors him and misrepresents him. The German poet, [UNCLEAR], said, "I love to sin. God loves to forgive. It's an admirable arrangement." {LAUGHTER} This is a lie about God. God does love to forgive, but he also is a holy God.

It's also a false doctrine about us. It tends to imply universalism and puts sinners to sleep...sound asleep regarding repentance, faith and holy living. The unconverted person says to himself or herself, "Why should I be concerned with God if there's no danger from God? I'm doing fine." That's why Bruce says you start the presentation with the holiness of God and the sin of man...but in that order. I really have found very little literature on evangelism that starts really seriously with the holiness of God.

It also puts us believers asleep, this sentimentalizing of God. It puts us to sleep, regarding our concern with holiness in our life, with repentance, with confessing our sins to God, with asking for the grace to be different, to grow, and in giving God thanks for his work on the cross. Why would I rejoice in the cross if I've not been delivered from anything serious? But for the grace of God I'd be eternally lost. If I don't believe that then look how I've reduced the grace of God and the whole purpose of the cross.

Those two are the fundamental consequences of this sentimentalizing. It is, right, very serious, both for those of us who are converted as well as the unconverted. It's why we have an immature Christian body in large measure. I think I've mentioned before that George Gallup did a study...his assumption is that it takes 20% of a culture, vividly and deeply Christian, to lift the culture up like yeast. Well, we have what, 50% roughly, saying that they're Christians in our culture. But when he did a study on how people lived, it turns out that only 10% of that 50% lived lives that were discernibly, significantly impacted by their faith. So that really reduces the 50 down to 5%. We're 15% off really having an effect on our culture. That's because we have a lot of immaturity in our...because our preaching has produced that.

Point 3—we need to be aware of the connotations of the word "agape" for God's love in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the nearest thing to agape is "hesed", or God's covenant love, his sovereign, committed loyalty to his people Israel. Psalm 36:5-12 kind of rehearses that. Yet God took his people into exile. Not any sentimentalizing there. In the New Testament, in the Greek-speaking world at the time of Jesus, there were a number at the time of the writing of the New Testament, there were a

number of words for love—eros, the desire to possess that which is attractive and desirable—the love of man for a woman, or of a middle-aged man for a red convertible. The Bible has the Song of Songs in which, a love song really, a love poem, is used to describe an aspect of our relationship to God as his creatures. There are elements of this eros in our love of God, but it's subordinate to agape, which is enabled in us by God's agape for us. We'll come to agape in a minute.

Then there's storgay (spelling). I'm not aware that it's ever used in the Bible, and I'm not entirely clear in my own mind what storgay is. I think it's the love of a nation, love of that which you're a part.

Then there's phileo—love of the brothers, of family, of friends and neighbors...Philadelphia. But the big word, the big word is agape—Christian love. The New Testament uses phileo some, for God's love, but the word that's used overwhelmingly in the New Testament for God's love for us is agape. It was a word not much used in the culture of that day. It was kind of a neutral word. So the New Testament writers took it and claimed it for their own, co-opted it, and gave it a special meaning. They filled it with the meaning of the way, of the nature of God's love for us—agape.

It's not like eros, a matter of the attraction of the desirable. Agape is the subtle commitment to act; a commitment to act, to serve, the well-being of another. Subtle conviction to act for the well-being, to serve the well-being of another. To give oneself to serve the other, even sacrificially. At its fullest expression, agape is God's love, his commitment to serve those who deserve his wrath, who are his enemies. Agape is his love for sinners. God's love is costly. It's not sentimental or blind. In love, he addresses the reality of the sin in the beloved, by the cross and transforming work of the Holy Spirit, he exercises his love for us.

In him, our love, our agape, finds its source and enables and contours, or shapes our love, which like his, is not sentimental or blind, and can be costly. Look at 1 John 4:7-11, <sup>7</sup>“Beloved, let us love (agape) one another, for love (agape) is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so 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. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.” (NASB) Now that's only possible in the love of God, and imperfectly, in this lifetime. His love, his agape, shapes ours.

Point 4—In considering God's love, we need to take account of all of the attributes of God. See Bruce's sheet of the 28 attributes, particularly regarding God's love. His love is always holy love. God's love is always holy love. It's also wise love, powerful love, and a lot of other things. It's important in terms of sentimentalizing God's love to keep in mind that it is always holy love.

We thought a bit about God's love under the category of agape. We now need to consider holiness. His holiness, the holiness of God in the New Testament has two primary uses. First, the holiness of God in the Old Testament “kadosh” refers fundamentally to his being set apart. He is distinct from, infinitely greater than, and other than his creation, over which he is Lord. In the Bible, holiness, God's holiness, often refers to God in all of his attributes taken together. All of them seen together. To his excellence, his eminence, and his glory. Exodus 15:11 says, “Who is like Thee, O God, among the God's? Majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders.” All of his attributes on display. “Holy, holy, holy...” it's the greatness of God as well as his, the second frequent use, which is included in the first, of course, but focuses more on, specifically, God's absolute moral purity. Absolute moral purity, and righteousness.

Habakkuk 1:13, God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil.” He can’t just ignore evil. He cannot behold evil, without dealing with it. In Hebrews 12:10, he disciplines us so that we might share in his holiness. In the New Testament, holiness is *haggios*, “Be holy for I am holy,” God says to his people—to you, to me. We are frequently called saints—*haggio*—that is, that we are set apart and consecrated to God’s service and called to moral purity ourselves.

The basic point I want to make is that the attributes of God cannot be separated or played off against one another. In God, justice and love meet together. God’s love always honors or satisfies his justice and his righteousness. Let me say it again—God’s love always satisfies his justice and his righteousness. Hebrews 9: 22 says this—there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. Hardly sentimentalizing. There is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. That was true in the Old Testament, prefiguring the cross, and it’s true in the New Testament.

There is throughout the Scriptures a moral seriousness in God that decries all sentimentalism. This is true from the very beginning. Beginnings are so important because they set the structure in which fulfillment can take place. Notice, in Eden, is a moral reality. There is a command given. Even before the fall, there is a responsibility, accountability to God. His love and his accountability are hand-in-glove. Notice the fall. The fall is the violation of a command. It’s a moral act, which has terrible consequences in our reproducing this immorality in our own life. The fall is a rebellion against his righteous and rightful Lordship, corrupting our nature, our self, at the heart or center, and we reproduce how it all began. The solution has to be equally dealing with the moral reality of our sinfulness.

Point 5—let’s look quickly at God’s love encountered and revealed in Scripture. Isaiah 6, the call of Isaiah. “<sup>1</sup>In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup>And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy, “*is* the Lord of hosts;”(triple emphasis; you don’t get triple emphasis very often in the Bible; here’s the great majesty and moral purity of God right at the very beginning of this.) “The whole earth *is* full of His glory!” <sup>4</sup>And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke (a little high church for some of us {LAUGHTER}) <sup>5</sup>So I said: “Woe *is* me, for I am undone! (Why is he lost? Because he’s small and tiny and in the presence of the greatness and holiness of God? No, that’s not the fundamental issue.) “Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts.” (He’s aware of his sin, and the sin of his people.) <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar (which prefigures the altar of the cross itself; took it from the altar of sacrifice). <sup>7</sup>And he touched my mouth *with it*, (very painful by the way; it’s the most painful part of the human anatomy) and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away (God’s love, but dealing with his guilt and with his holiness and his love, hand in glove), And your sin purged.” <sup>8</sup>Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here *am* I! Send me.”

Well, we could go on further...but you see, bringing together of both the holiness and the love of God. They’re hand in glove—you don’t get one without the other.

2 Corinthians 5:21—the cross. The cross is the perfect example of both God’s love and his righteousness and his justice. Paul says he set him forth that God might be known to be just, the justifier of those who put their faith in Christ Jesus. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. It’s in the blood of Christ, constantly in the New Testament that you and I are saved.



2 Corinthians 5:21, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us...” The innocent Son taking our place. He put sin upon Him, made Him to be sin, in our place, “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Love and righteousness. You can’t get one without the other. We cannot sentimentalize the love of God. It is as foreign to the New Testament, and foreign to the Old Testament as well.

Point 6—note there are different ways in which God loves sinners. First, there is his benevolent love, a kind of common grace, general to all mankind, his general blessings of let the sun fall on the just and the unjust, the rain on the just and unjust. The blessings of life and family. There’s the goodness of just being alive in God’s world. There’s also the general call or invitation of the Gospel to be addressed to all people everywhere. A broad, general benevolence and love of God for us sinners.

But secondly, there’s also his specific, particular saving love of the elect. His efficacious call applied by the Holy Spirit, the thing we wrestled with a little earlier. Why now? Well, that’s when the Spirit moved.

These two expressions of God’s love are not the same. One is general and benevolent; the other is particular and saving. The first is not saving.

Point 7—lastly, we will not sentimentalize the love of God if we consider the fact that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Final judgment—2 Corinthians 5:10—all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

For us believers, this will be a just judgment leading to degrees of blessing in heaven. For those who have rejected Christ, this will be a just judgment leading to various degrees of suffering in hell. That’s the way the Bible puts it, frankly.

Now here, too, there’s a great neglect and denial. Hell is not a popular subject. You don’t talk about it at cocktail parties. If you try, you’ll be alone in the corner. Hell is painful to consider, especially when considering our unbelieving loved ones, or even regarding our enemies, when you get right down to it. There are whole books being written today about denying the reality of hell, even though Jesus teaches it, and teaches it clearly, and teaches it most. Here is love warning about the reality of hell. It flies in the face of the strong teaching of Christ.

The fact that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ therefore is a very weighty reason for not sentimentalizing the love of God. If friends don’t let friends drive home drunk, Christians don’t let non-Christians go to hell unwarned, without the Gospel as an alternative.

At the very least, if we hear this sentimentalizing of God’s love being promulgated, we could all pipe up and say, “That is not what the Bible teaches.” You don’t have to go into a lengthy discussion if you don’t have the facts, but you could simply say, “I know that isn’t what the Bible teaches; here are a couple of texts.” We can’t just sit silently by. As bad as the threat of hell is, such sentimentalizing of God’s love is dishonoring also to God. It’s a lie about him.

**Don:** *Bishop, there is a question I have. Where do you draw the line between a legitimate emotional response and sentimentalism? I mean, you can’t help but read the accounts of the crucifixion, for example, without being moved to tears, and I think rightly so. But where is that line drawn?*

My own sense is it's not up to us to draw the line. It's up to us to tell the truth and let God deal with the sentiment. If you're drowning and somebody throws you a ring and pulls you to safety, you're not going to say, "Oh, yawn, I was just saved." You're bound to be thankful and so forth. There's plenty of room for sentiment, but it's sentiment that is aroused by the truth of the Gospel, the truth of Scripture. It's not that you're playing on the sentiment. You're not starting there; you're starting with the truth, with the truth of God's Word.

**Tom:** *Don, I think it also has a lot to do with how you respond to what you know. When you read about the crucifixion, then what are you going to do? Sentimentalism, like I had a neighbor who wanted me to be a Christian, and I wasn't. But he just didn't have nice thoughts about me. He got four of his buddies, and for months, they prayed for my wife and I, and by his prayers, God acted in us and he brought us to him. It's putting into action what you really feel.*

In terms of sentiment, we were not all in the same exact nature on this. Some of us are more sentimental than others. Our emotions are more available than others. One of the failings of the piteous movement was they wanted you to have certain experiences rather than to hear the truth. God handles the experiences. It's good to have the experience. They're not bad. We're not against experience, it's just that it accompanies and is under the Word, the Truth. It's the card that you guys produced.

**Audience Member:** *The great commission teaches us to go out into all the world to preach and teach the Word, which is the truth, and then baptize. The part in the middle, the salvation, is left to the Holy Spirit.*

That right.

**Audience Member:** *I just had a discussion Tuesday night at the Bible study that I have an opportunity to teach, and somebody said, "You've got to get a commitment." I don't have to get a commitment from you. I have to preach the truth. When the Holy Spirit, if you give yourself over to the Holy Spirit, as Lance said he did, then he had opportunity to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I can't save anybody, but I can [UNCLEAR] and teach the truth.*

I think it was J. I. Packer who said he wouldn't dare to evangelize if he didn't trust that the Spirit of God would use the Word of God to change hearts.

We have to stop; our time is over. Let's bow our heads. Lord, we do not want to be agents of sentimentalizing your love. It's too precious for us to misrepresent you and to put ourselves and others to sleep. We ask that you would give us the courage and the wisdom and the tact necessary to speak your Word appropriately in the given situations in which you place, for we ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen!