

## C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE - BASIC APOLOGETICS COURSE

### Small Group Participant Guide

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*"This is a journey of faith and reason — learning to know why we believe, defend truth, and share Christ with grace."*

## SET 4 - Session 5 – Argument From Agape

### Introduction (from CSLI)

#### ***Can Love Lead You to Knowing Christ?***

It is well known that love is central in biblical faith. But few are aware that a central argument for Christ and against other worldviews such as materialism (atheism) and pantheism (New Age) is the reality and nature of Christ's love. "Agape" love could be defined as the sacrifice of self in the service of another. There is no basis to motivate or justify this kind of love in materialism (atheism). Richard Dawkins (atheist) author of *The God Delusion* calls agape love a "genetic misfiring" or a "Darwinian mistake." He also writes about *The Selfish Gene* (the title of one of his books). Darwin maintained that even one act of unselfish love would annihilate his system. Christ's love and that of many believers after him demonstrate such love. Agape love is utterly unique and acts as a pointer to the truth and reality of Christ's claims. This lecture develops these themes.

## Lecture Synopsis

This lecture teaches how Christians should respond to cults, which are groups that teach things that are not true about God or the Bible. It explains that not everything that looks good is actually good. Sometimes people who teach false ideas can seem kind, smart, and even loving, but they may still be wrong. The Bible warns that even evil can disguise itself as something good, like an “angel of light.”

The speaker explains that people are often drawn into these groups because they feel loved, accepted, or are going through a hard time. These groups may use strong emotions, friendships, or exciting experiences to pull people in. That’s why it’s important not to believe something just because it feels good, but to ask, “Is it really true?”

The lecture also teaches that we should test what people say by using the Bible. We should look at both their teaching and how they live. A good teacher will show good “fruit,” meaning their life and message match God’s truth.

Another important idea is that church leaders should teach the “whole truth” of the Bible so people are not easily fooled. If people don’t know the truth well, they may believe something false.

When talking to someone in a cult, Christians should be kind, patient, and respectful. The goal is not to win an argument, but to help the person. It’s important to listen carefully and understand what they believe before responding.

Finally, the lecture says the best way to avoid being tricked is to know the truth deeply. Just like people who study real money can spot fake money, Christians who know the Bible well can recognize false teachings.

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## Ten Life Applications

### 1. Pursue Other-Centered Love

Application:

Seek to love others sacrificially, not just when it is easy or beneficial.

Example:

Choosing to serve a struggling friend even when it costs you time, energy, or comfort.

Exercise:

This week, intentionally do one act of kindness for someone who cannot repay you.

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### 2. Anchor Love in God's Nature

Application:

Recognize that true love flows from God, not just human effort.

Example:

Instead of relying on feelings, you choose to love because God first loved you.

Exercise:

Spend time each day reflecting on how God has loved you, then ask how you can reflect that love to others.

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### 3. Love Even When It's Difficult

Application:

Commit to love others even in conflict, disappointment, or pain.

Example:

Continuing to care for a spouse or friend during a season of tension rather than withdrawing.

Exercise:

Identify one strained relationship and take a step toward reconciliation this week.

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### 4. Practice Forgiveness

Application:

Forgive others as Christ has forgiven you, even when it feels undeserved.

Example:

Letting go of bitterness toward someone who wronged you instead of holding onto resentment.

Exercise:

Write down a hurt you've been holding onto and pray, asking God to help you release it.

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## 5. Let Love Be Your Witness

Application:

Understand that your love for others is one of the strongest testimonies of your faith.

Example:

A coworker notices your patience and kindness and becomes curious about your beliefs.

Exercise:

Ask yourself daily: "Would someone see Christ in how I treat people today?"

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## 6. Examine Your Motives

Application:

Check whether your actions are truly selfless or driven by recognition or return.

Example:

Helping someone quietly instead of seeking praise or acknowledgment.

Exercise:

Do one good deed this week anonymously, without telling anyone.

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## 7. Build a Loving Community

Application:

Contribute to a church or group environment where people feel genuinely loved and valued.

Example:

Welcoming newcomers warmly and making space for them to belong.

Exercise:

Reach out to someone new or overlooked at church and invite them into conversation.

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## 8. Grow in Character

Application:

Develop the inner character needed to sustain love over time.

Example:

Choosing patience, integrity, and humility in daily interactions.

Exercise:

Pick one character trait (e.g., patience) and intentionally practice it in every interaction this week.

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## 9. Choose Commitment Over Convenience

Application:

Stay committed to loving relationships rather than walking away when things get hard.

Example:

Working through challenges in marriage or friendship instead of giving up.

Exercise:

Reflect on one relationship where you've been tempted to withdraw and recommit to investing in it.

## 10. Demonstrate Courageous Love

Application:

Be willing to love boldly, even when it involves risk, vulnerability, or sacrifice.

Example:

Standing by someone who is rejected or reaching out to someone who has hurt you.

Exercise:

Take one courageous step this week—initiate a hard conversation or extend kindness where it's uncomfortable.

### STUDY QUESTIONS (from CSLI)

**1** | How will people know Christ's true disciples?

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**2** | Why do so many people not know the reality of Christ?

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**3** | Why does pantheism (New Age) necessarily contradict agape love philosophically?

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4	<b>Why would the existence of agape love prove materialism (atheism) false?</b>
5	<b>How does the New Testament emphasis on love contrast with Judaism (of Jesus' day) and with the Greek religion?</b>
6	<b>How does the affirmation "God is love" contrast with other religions throughout history?</b>
7	<b>What's the biggest difference between the Old Testament view of love and that of the New Testament?</b>
<b>BUILDING FAITH CONVERSATIONS</b>	
1	<b>Why do you think people are drawn to the idea of love and forgiveness, even if they don't believe in God?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> What might that tell us about what people feel is important deep inside?	
2	<b>What is the difference between loving someone because you want something back and loving someone with no strings attached?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> Which kind of love do you think is harder to live out, and why?	

3	<b>Why might it be hard to keep loving someone when they hurt you or disappoint you?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> What could help a person keep loving in those situations?	
4	<b>How can the way a group of people treat each other make others want (or not want) to be part of that group?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> Can you think of a time when someone's kindness made you feel welcomed?	
5	<b>Why do you think forgiveness can sometimes take a long time, like in the story shared in the lecture?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> What might change in a person's heart during that time?	
6	<b>What does it mean to say that love is shown more by actions than by words?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> What are some simple ways someone your age can show love through actions?	
7	<b>Why might someone choose to help a stranger, even if they will never be thanked?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> What does that kind of action show about a person's character?	
8	<b>How can love change a person's life, even someone who has made serious mistakes?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> Why do you think love can have that kind of power?	

9	<b>Why do you think Jesus told people to love their enemies, not just their friends?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> What makes loving enemies so different from loving friends?	
10	<b>How can small everyday choices (like being kind or patient) show a bigger kind of love?</b>
<b>Follow-up:</b> What is one small choice you could make this week to show that kind of love?	

Links to Lectures and Notes: <https://srmattthews.com/tsg>



## SAMPLE ARGUMENTS FROM THIS LECTURE

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### 1. The Argument from Agape Love

**Context:** People across all worldviews value love, especially deep, selfless love.

**Claim:** True, other-centered (agape) love is best explained by Christianity.

**Case:** Agape love involves sacrifice without expecting anything in return. Christianity teaches that God is love and demonstrates this through Christ's sacrificial death. Humans, made in God's image, are called to reflect this same kind of love.

**Challenge:** If all worldviews can explain love equally well, then Christianity has no unique claim here.

**Conclusion:** Since agape love is uniquely grounded in God's nature and example in Christ, it strongly supports the truth of Christianity.

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### 2. The Limits of Materialism (Atheism)

**Context:** Materialism teaches that everything can be explained by physical processes like evolution.

**Claim:** Materialism cannot adequately explain true selfless love.

**Case:** Evolutionary explanations reduce love to survival strategies (kin selection, reciprocity, reputation). Yet people often love strangers or enemies with no benefit to themselves. Even thinkers like Darwin and Dawkins admit this kind of love is difficult to explain.

**Challenge:** If selfless love can be fully explained by biology, then it does not point beyond materialism.

**Conclusion:** Because true agape love goes beyond survival and self-interest, it points beyond materialism and toward a deeper reality.

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### 3. The Inward Focus of Pantheism

**Context:** Pantheism (New Age/Eastern thought) teaches that all is one and distinctions are ultimately illusion.

**Claim:** Pantheism undermines the basis for outward, sacrificial love.

**Case:** If the world and other people are ultimately illusory, then sacrificing for others loses meaning. The focus becomes inward (self-realization) or upward (union with the one), not outward toward others.

**Challenge:** If pantheism can still support strong, outward love, then this critique fails.

**Conclusion:** Because pantheism weakens the reality of the “other,” it struggles to support true agape love.

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### 4. The Uniqueness of “God Is Love”

**Context:** Different religions describe God or ultimate reality in different ways.

**Claim:** The statement “God is love” is uniquely and distinctly Christian.

**Case:** Other religious views often describe God as distant, unknowable, impersonal, or without emotion. In contrast, Christianity teaches that love is central to God’s very nature, shown most clearly in Christ.

**Challenge:** If other religions equally teach that God is essentially love, then Christianity is not unique.

**Conclusion:** Because the idea that God is love is not found in the same way elsewhere, it highlights a unique and powerful feature of Christianity.

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### 5. Love as the Ultimate Apologetic

**Context:** People often question Christianity due to hypocrisy or lack of evidence.

**Claim:** Authentic Christian love is one of the strongest evidences for the truth of Christianity.

**Case:** Jesus said people would recognize His followers by their love. Real-life examples—such as radical forgiveness and sacrificial care—have drawn people to faith. Communities marked by genuine love attract others.

**Challenge:** If love does not actually point people toward truth, then it has little apologetic value.

**Conclusion:** When Christians truly live out agape love, it powerfully demonstrates the reality of Christ and draws others to Him.

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**BUILDING ARGUMENTS USING THE 5C FRAMEWORK:****👉 5C = Story Flow**

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- **Context** → What's going on?
  - **Claim** → What am I saying?
  - **Case** → Why is it true?
  - **Challenge** → What about the other side?
  - **Conclusion** → Why does it matter?
- 

Topic:

Context:

People believe...

**Claim:**

The best explanation is...

Case:

1.

2.

3.

Challenge:

Some people say..., but how do they explain...?

Conclusion:

So the best explanation is...

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Note: C.S. Lewis Institute provides this course at no charge. They are supported by faithful friends who give of their time, expertise, prayers, and finances to further the work of the institute. You can partner with CSLI through this link: <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/give/>

**Set 4 - Lecture 5**

(0:18 - 4:53) We're here in this session to deal with the unique argument that I call the argument from agape or the argument from love. We already talked about the moral argument which goes like this, premise A, unless God exists, there is no evil or good. There is objective evil and good, therefore God exists. That's the moral argument and we've tried to defend that in earlier sessions that we've done in this course. This argument from agape is similar to it, that talks about the uniqueness of other-centered agape love and how other religious perspectives fail or are inadequate to be able to

explain the existence of this kind of love. So let's start out here this session with a prayer and I'll try to lay out a sketch of the argument for you.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for this time. We pray that you might be present by your spirit. You've promised that you would send your spirit if we ask and I do ask for your spirit to be present in this time to give us clarity, to understand the message that's given and above all to empower us to love, really love, love our neighbors, love our friends and especially even love our enemies. Something that only you can empower us to do. We pray for your presence in this time. I pray that the words of my mouth in the meditations of our hearts might be acceptable to you.

Oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Well this argument from agape, I first used it a number of years ago when my wife and I were on a train ride to Budapest, Hungary. We were over there speaking. I was speaking particularly on cults and new religious movements, the new age movement and other groups in Eastern Europe and I'd spoken in Vienna. We're on the train ride from Vienna to Budapest and we were sitting in a car, my wife and I, with four other young people. Two of them had been believers at least in their past but they were lapsed, you might say, or at least not practicing in the way that they once had and the interesting irony was that one young man, Connie knew his uncle, who was a prominent leader in Christian ministry. He'd had a very difficult time in his ministry too, so we got talking about that. Well in the car too, there were two other young people that were atheists and they were listening on to our conversation as we talked about the difficulties that the uncle had had and the need for forgiveness and love and the uniqueness in the way that faith in Christ can motivate us to forgive and to love.

One of the atheists, a young man, very bright, very open to discussing these things, said, well can't an atheist love and forgive? I said, well yes, of course an atheist can love and forgive but let's look at the various worldviews and compare them because this young man shared that what he wanted in his life, even though he was an atheist, was a great marriage that was very loving and forgiving and a great family that he could love the kids and love his wife, so it was a very high value to him to be able to love and forgive. And I said, well let's compare the various worldviews and in light of the various things that we've talked about before, I pointed to Jean-Paul Sartre, that no finite point in this world has any meaning apart from an infinite reference point and how the idea of love and forgiveness and morality and all those things that would be necessary to a good relationship are not necessitated at all by atheism. In fact, it's either a meaningless proposition to talk about those things or you could just choose it according to your own personal preference.

So you could choose to be loving but what happens, I said, when life gets difficult, when there are real tensions in the marriage, when there are real difficulties, then it's all too easy to walk away from it. So there's a struggle there. And I pointed out Camus, that the only really serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide.

(4:54 - 11:29) That you can choose to love and forgive but there's no solid basis for anything to be moral or to uphold love within an atheist system. And I laid out a few other reasons for it. Then I went on to talk about, by contrast, look at faith in Christ and what it calls us to.

From the very origin of all things, eternally, you have a God who exists, who is a triune, personal, as a matter of fact, tri-personal. So that personality is at the very root of the cosmos. That there's relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that's even before creation.

And there's love between the members of the Trinity, between the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit from all eternity. So love, personality, and relationship are right at the very core of reality. And God has made us in his image. So that we are made for personality, to understand the fullness of our personhood. For relationship is right at the core of what we're made for as people. And for love. And so right from the very beginning, you have that foundation. You have people made in the image of God. A certain kind of likeness to God in these ways.

And then you have the great commandment given in Deuteronomy to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and strength. And then later also in another passage, love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus points to those later when asked, what are the greatest commands? He combines them together. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself. He later says, love one another as I have loved you.

And he calls us also to love our enemies. So that Jesus calls us to a radical and deep love that's unique, that pushes us out even further. He also calls us to forgive.

In fact, he argues right after the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, that whoever does not forgive will not be forgiven. That's a very strong statement. So there's a necessity to love and a necessity to forgive.

And I said, which worldview provides a stronger basis to motivate and sustain love? Is it atheism that provides really no basis? I mean, you could choose it as an option. But what would make you stick to it even in a difficult circumstance? Certainly not atheism. But faith in Christ very much does.

In fact, John, in John 13, Jesus gives a new commandment. He says in John 13, 34 and 35, a new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you. So you must love one another.

And by this, everyone will know that you're my disciples if you love one another. Now notice a couple things about this statement. First of all, it's a new command.

Certainly it's not new to call us to love, but the new command is love one another as I have loved you. So that the example and picture of Christ is put in its place. And we'll draw out that more fully. It includes everything in Jesus' life up to and including the crucifixion, the giving of his life, his very being, his existence in life for others. And it says this. First of all, note that it's a command.

And any command is possible to obey. But of course, it's also possible to disobey a command. And how do we explain unloving Christians? The hypocrisy that believers often point to, that the church is full of hypocrites, is often one of the top criticisms that people make.

Well, I would say the way we explain it is to say they have not obeyed Jesus' new command to love one another as I have loved you. If it's possible to obey it, it must be possible to disobey. G.K. Chesterton has argued that the greatest argument against Christianity is Christians.

But you could also say that the great, he also says the greatest argument for Christianity is Christians. You find magnificent examples of people who have loved and given themselves sacrificially in the service of others. So it's possible to obey.

It's also possible to disobey. Believers are not automatically loving. In many ways, the unbelief that we find in the culture in the West and in America, United States in particular, is in part the unpaid bills of the church. It's not only due to the lack of apologetic or giving reasons, although that certainly has helped foster unbelief. There haven't been solid answers for the objections that have been raised. But one of the things that has been missing is the mark of the Christian, the demonstration of love that's shown.

If you had a community that was incredibly loving, it acts as a magnet to draw people in. There's a centripetal force. If you have a community of believers that really love one another, that people will want to be part of that.

People want to be part of community. They want to be part of a community where they're accepted or embraced, where they're loved as they desire to be loved. And if believers are demonstrating that, they will have a powerful magnetic force to draw people towards that community.

And I think often believers have not loved each other as they ought to love. But note that people will know that Jesus is true and that you are my disciples, particularly by the way that you love one another in this community. And I presume also we can extend that to the world as well.

(11:31 - 18:36) Often when non-believers see that kind of love, it's one of the most persuasive things to lead them to Christ. I may have mentioned in an earlier talk, and if you haven't seen it, you might go to the one on the New Age movement, but Tal Brook, who's the head of Spiritual Counterfeits Project, was the closest Western disciple of Sai Baba, the guru of gurus over in India. And he, by his philosophical brilliance once, was going to a missionary couple.

And he was being groomed to be a Western spokesman for Sai Baba because of his genius and his articulateness, his powerful presence. He was being groomed to come over to the West and be an advocate to be a leading teacher of Hindu philosophy. And he used his philosophical brilliance to attempt to argue this missionary couple to belief in Christ.

And they made dents in his argument, but over time and a number of different encounters, he noticed the strange new quality about this missionary couple. That it seemed to him that they loved him more than they loved themselves. They cared for him more than they even cared for themselves.

And he started to notice an absence of that with regard to the Hindu disciples that were around Sai Baba. And above all, after a number of private audiences with Sai Baba, which were almost unheard of. Many New Agers or Hindu disciples went to be in massive crowds to even catch a distant glimpse of Sai Baba. He was the rock star, you might say, of Hinduism, the miracle working guru. And yet, Tal got many private audiences with Sai Baba. And what he noted in Sai Baba was an utter lack or absence of this other-centered agape love.

He wants a full account of this. Go to Tal Brook's book, Avatar of Night, and you'll see a full account of his conversion story. But as Tal told the story to me over dinner one night, I got goosebumps because I thought, how will they know that they are my believers? They will know them by their love.

And a great reason that Tal came to Christ was because of the love that this missionary couple showed him. There were other reasons as well that you can read about, but that was a central reason, the utter uniqueness of the love that he saw by comparison to what he saw in this other religious leader or in Hinduism in general. But could this love come equally from all religions and worldviews? And my answer is no.

I've said a number of different times in this series that even though it's bewildering to look at all the different worldviews that are out there, you can reduce the options to fundamentally three. First of all, all is matter, materialism, atheism, that matter is all there is. Secondly, all is spirit.

That's the new age or eastern religion, Hinduism and Buddhism, Taoism and Neo-Paganism, that says that really all is spirit or all is one. There is no distinction in terms of matter, time, and space. Those things that we think are distinct are really non-distinct or illusory.

Or there is matter in their spirit, and that's the great theistic face, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and other religious perspectives of some variation under those various categories. So could this love equally come from all religions and worldviews? I would say no, and I'm going to look first at pantheism, second at materialism, and then a very little bit at different theistic perspectives. But first of all, I want to clarify, I'm not saying that believers are incapable of loving, they are.

Many non-believers are more loving than many believers. Certainly people love because I think they're made in the image of God, they're made to love, they know love is right, they do care. They care not only for members of their family, which could be explained, I suppose, but they even care for total strangers, and will go to considerable lengths to help them at times.

So I'm not saying that non-believers are incapable of love, but I say non-believing worldviews don't cause you to motivate and sustain this kind of other-centered love. Let me just illustrate with respect to pantheism, this view that all is spirit, or that all is one, that the world is illusory. If the world is illusory, why would you give your life for another, or sacrifice a great deal for another, if you believe that the other is technically speaking, or according to your own philosophy, illusory? I would say that the more consistent you are with this all-is-one philosophy, the more inward you become, that the whole thrust of Eastern philosophy is inwards to the divine within, or upwards to merge your identity with that of the one.

That's the central drive of all of the different psychotechnologies or meditation techniques that are used in the various, or the various approaches that are used to transcend self. The whole thrust is inwards to the divine within, or upwards to merge your identity with that of the one, but definitely not outwards. Again, why is it not outwards? Because the other, the outwards, does not really exist.

It's illusion. It's non-distinct. It's actually one, even though you think it's distinct.

If you don't understand this, and you haven't gone through the earlier talks on the New Age movement, it would be good to do so. Os Guinness puts it this way. He says that this view, this pantheist view of ultimate reality, means that neither traditional Hinduism nor traditional Buddhism shows the slightest concern about human rights.

Entirely logical within their own frames of thinking, Hinduism and Buddhism regard the Western passion for human rights as a form of narcissism as well as delusion. R.C. Zaner, who followed Rahad Krishnan in the Spalding Chair of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University, underscored their logic bluntly. In practice, it means that neither religion in its classical formulation pays the slightest attention to what goes on in the world today.

(18:37 - 22:10) And why does it not pay the slightest attention in its classical formulation? Because not only it doesn't matter, but it doesn't really exist. The more seriously you take the external world, the less consistent you are with your philosophy. It would be the most consistent to go away in a cave, close your eyes, and shut yourself off from the world as much as possible in order to achieve the more enlightened state. So the more consistently you work out your philosophy, the more narcissistic you become, the more inward or upward, and the less outward you become. Secondly, with regard to materialism or atheism, Darwin said this, and this is a neglected quote from Darwin's work. He said, any truly other centered trait would annihilate my theory, for such could not have been produced by natural selection.

Again, Darwin says, any truly other centered trait would annihilate my theory, for such could not have been produced by natural selection. Richard Dawkins says in his book, *The Selfish Gene*, that universal love and welfare of the species as a whole are concepts that do not make evolutionary sense. That the whole drive of the Darwinian perspective is towards a survival of the fittest.

And the idea of universal love, or love for the species as a whole, goes against this drive for the survival of the fittest. Now there are various attempts, you might say, or workarounds that you can use to try to explain this other centered love within a Darwinian perspective. The first workaround is the idea of kin selection.

That you could understand, for instance, how a mother bear would care for its cubs, and explain that in a Darwinian perspective, because the mother is, unbeknownst to her, trying to preserve her own genetic material, her own gene pool, in fighting to protect her cubs. Haldane, who's an atheist, jokingly, or as a quip said, I would give up my life for, I think it was two brothers and seven cousins. You'd fight for people that are part of your more immediate family, and the more remote, perhaps the less you would fight for them.

But you could understand that, or explain that in a Darwinian perspective, the idea of fighting for people of your own immediate, or perhaps even extended, family. Another way that Darwinians have tried to explain it, is the direct reciprocal argument. And that would be that if I scratch your back, you might scratch mine. There's a kind of tit-for-tat. So the more I help you, the more you would help me. And there's a kind of fair trade.

Jesus speaks about this in the Sermon on the Mount, that even the pagans love those that love them. There is certainly that kind of thing. There's a certain advantage to being generous to other people, because they might be generous to you.

There's a certain reason to be helpful to people, because they might help you. So there's some kind of reciprocal return that you're expecting for what you do. Like you invite somebody to dinner, then they might feel obligated to invite you to dinner.

(22:11 - 27:15) So there's a certain benefit, I suppose, you can argue for. But does that explain everything? I think not. Here's another one, the indirect reciprocal argument. That perhaps by being altruistic, or caring, or helping people in need, people that are hurting or struggling, perhaps you're going to gain a reputation. That you don't receive an immediate benefit, but you'll get this reputation that will benefit you eventually, or down the road. But does this explain it all? Even Dawkins thinks that it does not. And towards the end of the selfish gene, he admits that this love is something that is utterly new. It's something that has never before existed. You don't see anything of it in the animal kingdom.

It can't be explained within a Darwinian perspective. He's glad that it's present in human beings, but he can't quite explain it. The only way he does explain it a little bit, in light of some of our previous lectures, is the idea of memes.

These invisible entities that are in many ways like genes, but genes are inside us. Somehow memes can jump from person to person like a virus. And so perhaps somebody acted in an altruistic way, and then the virus, you know, this

problem spreads from person to person. But they try to explain this idea of love as non-material, ethereal, spiritual entities. However, that is very problematic, to reduce love in that way. In fact, Dawkins agonizes with it in the God Delusion. In fact, there's a chapter in the God Delusion where he says that love, other-centered agape love, does exist, but it's a Darwinian mistake. It's a genetic misfiring. Again, a Darwinian mistake, a genetic misfiring.

Later, he's embarrassed by having to say that, and he realizes how it will sound, so he calls it a blessed mistake. And my question is, blessed by whom? But he realizes that such a thing exists, that there are people that give themselves for enemies, for strangers, where there's going to be no recognition for it. You're not going to get any reputation down the road for doing it. You just help somebody out of the goodness of your heart. It seems to go directly against, Dawkins admits, the Darwinian perspective on things. So that the more you love in an agape way, a truly other-centered way, without expecting anything in return, the more you not only demonstrate the reality of Christ, but demonstrate materialism to be false.

In other words, you can show materialism false by your love, just as you can show Christ to be true by the kind of love that you show for other people, and for brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as people outside the church. It's a very interesting and provocative argument. I have a friend who's head of the biology department at Westmont College that's written many technical articles on this issue, and he often talks to leading evolutionary biologists on this argument from agape in national and international settings, and there isn't a solid answer to this.

Francis Collins, who's head of the National Institute of Health, also uses this argument regularly when he's with evolutionary biologists, and there's no solid answer to it. Even though Anne Rand tries to make her perspective that you can explain everything in terms of selfishness, Dawkins admits that there is such a thing as true unselfishness, but admits, too, that there's no easy basis, no way that's in an unashamed way he can explain it. You could also perhaps look at other religious perspectives. For instance, at least within Judaism of Jesus' day, that Jews, and even to this day, see God as in many ways remote. The Tetragrammaton, YHWH, the great consonants, the four great letters have been held by Jews to be so holy that you couldn't even add the vowels here. Even to this day, I've seen in contemporary literature where Jews will write God G-D.

(27:16 - 27:35) They won't even put the vowel in here. The name for God, even G-O-D, is not to be pronounced. God is so holy, so remote, so transcendent, that he's not even to be mentioned.

(27:36 - 28:13) And that was the case in Jesus' day, when Jesus spoke about God in a familiar way, and spoke about God as Father, as I talked about in another of the lectures of this series. The Pharisees and Sadducees were offended about this kind of familiar form of speech, or when he calls God Abba, or addresses God as Abba, a more familiar form of address, equivalent to Daddy, or at least something along that line in the Jewish culture. I can imagine the Jewish leaders were aghast, this kind of familiar approach to God.

(28:15 - 33:25) There is only one example, I mentioned it in another lecture, of a Jew addressing God as Father in prayer, and it's 974 A.D. in Italy, and perhaps as a result of hearing about Christians addressing God in that way. So it was something that's utterly unique, this more familiar form of address within Judaism. Certainly not a familiar personal relationship, easy relationship with God.

In the Greek culture of Jesus' day, the gods are not exactly generous. You might even call them grudging. For instance, Prometheus was said to steal fire from heaven to give to men. Consequently, Zeus was angry, so he changed Prometheus to a rock and sends a vulture to tear out his liver every day. Sadly for Prometheus, it grew back. As this example shows, the Greeks experienced continual hostility between gods and men. Not only are they grudging, but they're unknown. In Acts 17, you have the apostle Paul who goes to Athens and finds an altar to an unknown god. There were many other gods and goddesses, but this altar to the unknown god was remarkable.

But in many other ways, the philosophers of that day, or the earlier days surrounding the Bible, didn't see God as knowable, or intimately knowable, certainly. For instance, Plato said it was difficult to find out about God and impossible to tell anyone else about him, even if you did discover something. Plutarch said this, all we could expect was a flash of illumination. He said, to whom then shall I recite my prayers? To whom tender vows? To whom slay victims? To whom shall I call to help the wretched, to favor the good, to counter evil? In other words, the gods were beyond men. In the early Greek culture, Paul often, like in Areopagus in Acts 17 in Athens, were speaking to Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. The

Epicureans held up the virtue of ataraxia, which has the idea of the gods being somehow remote up in the heavenlies and not really caring about the world down here.

It wasn't as if God is always watching and protecting and loving, but the gods were really without care. The Stoics upheld the idea of apatheia, the Greek word apatheia, kind of apathy. We take it over into the English in that way. The gods had no feelings. They were gods without heart, without really caring about things, and that was how we were to be. In other words, if you don't expect too much, you won't be too disappointed. If you can anesthetize your feelings, then you're not going to be hurt by anything that happens in life, but you do that at the expense of feeling positive virtue as well as suffering or grief. But in any case, the Stoics viewed the gods as being gods without heart. Into this setting of the Jews that thought about God as remote and the pagans that saw God as either unknown or unknowable or without feelings, without care, you have a radical message of God's love and Christ's love into that setting.

Montefiore, a Jewish liberal scholar, talks about the message of the gospel and God's pity and care for people as being radical. He said, so far as we can tell, this pity for the sinner was a new note in religious history. It was an utterly radical thing to believe that God really cared for the world and God really cared not only for groups of people, but God cared for the individual. In fact, Augustine's statement is so radical, sometimes today you see it on a little plaque, but we're totally unaware of how radical it is in the setting in which it came. Here's what Augustine said, God loves each one of us as if there's only one of us to love. Again, God loves each one of us as if there's only one of us to love. Now you can hear that statement and maybe even believe it, but I wonder if any of us, even believers, have believed that to the core of our being, that God loves each one of us as if there's only one of us to love. God gives you your full attention when you pray, gives you his full attention. That's an amazing thing, is it not? It boggles our minds. Only an infinite God could possibly do so. That's a radical message. There's a uniqueness of this word agape, which we, this idea of other-centered agape love is very unique.

(33:26 - 35:56) John Stott defines agape love as sacrifice of self in the service of another. Again, John Stott defines agape as sacrifice of self in the service of another. But to show you how radical and unique this is, even though it's used many different times in the New Testament, and we often speak about the four loves, particularly three, phileia, friendship, eros, romantic love, and agape, this other-centered love, are often spoken about in Christian literature and in the history of thought.

But the word agape is only once used as a noun in all of Greek literature in Jesus' time. We have no parallel of the, only one case where agape is used as a noun. Now the verbal form of agape is sometimes used in Greek literature, but basically that Christians took this idea of agape and made it a central plank, put it right at the very core of the New Testament. Essentially, agape is a Christian invention. It took a word that's very infrequently used, in fact only one instance we know of in our records where it was used, and made it a centerpiece for the New Testament, the core of the whole New Testament thought. Put love, or this other-centered agape love, at the very center.

Also in the New Testament, you have the radical idea that God is love, and it really is radical. No other religion sees it so. Leon Morris says in his book Testaments of Love, why does God love sinners? I've been arguing that he loves them because it's in his nature to love, because he is love. Unceasingly, he gives spontaneous love. He loves not because of what we are, but because of what he is. He is love.

This is a new and distinct idea in Christianity, though in part of the Old Testament, notably in Hosea, we read about something very much like it, but it is not found in the non-biblical traditions. Yet it's a couple times mentioned in the Gospel of 1 John, that God is love. It becomes an essential attribute of God.

(35:58 - 36:43) There's an analogy that Emil Bruner uses, that you could talk about radium, the element radium, but if you left out in your chemical description of radium that it radiates, you'd be missing something essential. Now you could talk about many different attributes of God, that God is just, and holy, and good, and righteous, and a God of wrath, and you list many different attributes or elements of God, but if you left out the idea that he loves, or that he is love, then you'd be missing something very important and essential to who God is. Emil Bruner wrote at one point, that the message that God is love is wholly new in the whole world.

(36:44 - 45:55) We perceive this if we try to apply the statement to all the divinities of the various religions of the world. Just try this on for size. Wotan is love, Zeus is love, Brahma is love, Ahura is love, Mazda is love, Vishnu is love, Allah is love. All these combinations are obviously wholly impossible. Even the God of Plato, who's the principle of all good, is not love. Plato would have met the statement, God is love, with a bewildered shake of the head. From the standpoint of his thought, such a statement would have been utter nonsense. We could expand on that quite a bit, but I think that quote is very powerful and provocative, ought to stimulate thought for us all. Like in Muslim thought, Allah is so remote that he's hardly noble. He's more noble in what he's not than in who he is, but certainly not personal and intimate. The idea of Allah is love doesn't seem to compute or make sense with Muslim theology, as Bruner points out there. What's the distinctive difference between the Old Testament and New Testament? Here's what one author says. What is the distinctive difference between the Old Testament view of God's love and that of the New Testament? The most obvious and most important difference, in fact, the only significant difference, is the cross. This death, this other-centered sacrificial love. As I said, agape is sacrifice of self in the service of another.

In Christ's death on the cross and in crucifixion, you have the ultimate sacrifice for other, for the other, for others. Leon Morris says this, it's the cross that brought a new dimension to religion that gives us a new understanding of love. The New Testament writers saw everything in its light, finding their ideas about love revolutionized by what the cross meant. For instance, there's a passage in Ephesians chapter 5 that talks about husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. And C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Four Loves*, has a chapter on the four loves, and in his chapter on agape love, he imagines or speculates about what this headship of the husband might mean. Often people find it objectionable, the idea that the husband is head over the wife, but here's his comment about it.

He says this headship, the headship of the wife, of the husband over the wife, then is most fully embodied not in the husband we should all wish to be, but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion, whose wife receives most and gives least, is most unworthy of him, is in her own mere nature least lovable, for the church has no beauty for what the bridegroom gives her. He does not find but makes her lovely. The chrism of this terrible coronation is to be seen not in the joys of any man's marriage, but in its sorrows, in the sickness and sufferings of a good wife, or in the faults of a bad one, in his unwearying, never paraded care, or his inexhaustible forgiveness. Forgiveness, not acquiescence. Now, I don't know if that quote has gone by you too quickly, but it's pretty profound in the call to love as Christ loved, even in the midst of great suffering, as Christ did. That's the call of the husband for the wife, that all of us husbands need to take note, realize how far short we fall of that kind of love, and how much we should strive to give ourselves more for the sake of our wives, in order to love as Christ has loved us, in a truly other-centered, sacrificial fashion. Well, I talk about this more in my book, *Love, The Ultimate Apologetic*, and I give further arguments along this line to talk about other religious views, not being able to motivate or sustain love. And I also talk about the pathway to love. How can you come or learn to love on a biblical basis? I'd say that this pathway to love follows the pathway of commitment, conscience, character, community, and courage. And at every point, not only in general do these other religious perspectives not uphold or motivate and sustain love, but at each point they undermine the pathway to love. And I have different chapters on each one of those—commitment, conscience, character, community, and courage—and I have five statements that I won't really develop right now, but you can find in *Love, The Ultimate Apologetic* that says this. It's really the beginning or title of each chapter.

First one is, love is never sure apart from commitment. Second is, love is never sane apart from conscience. Third is, love is never safe apart from character. Fourth, love is never stimulated apart from community. And fifth, love is never seized apart from courage. And this pathway is the pathway to love. It's a pathway that the New Testament calls us to, and we need to, if we're going to love, and if you want to learn to be more loving, follow this pathway. And if you follow this pathway, you will more and more be able to love, and that will be a unique demonstration or element for what Christ calls us to, and you'll be able to show the truth of Christ by your love. So in conclusion, love is the utterly unique legacy of faith in Christ. There's something about love, this truly other-centered love, that when it's produced in its fullness, in its right form, becomes the best argument for Christianity. Remember, we talked about Chesterton, the best argument against Christianity is Christian, but the best argument for Christianity is Christian. When we see love, this other-centered agape love, demonstrated by Christians, it's something that not only is argument, but it's a reality that communicates itself, and you say, wow, there's something that's immensely attractive and overwhelming about the kind of love that we see in many different examples throughout history. When it's truly demonstrated, it will point to Jesus and draw people to him. I could give you many examples throughout history of how believers have loved. Let me just give you one from my own experience as a final story.

I spoke in many different federal and state prisons with prison fellowship. I would go for two to three days at a time to prisons all around the United States and speak as a representative and do discipleship seminars for believers in the prisons, and we used to have anywhere from 20 to 100 to a couple hundred people at a time come to these seminars, and it was an amazing experience to be able to not only speak to prisoners, but be part of their small groups, to sit down one-on-one, to hear their stories, and I give some of those stories and love the ultimate apologetic, but perhaps the most striking one I remember is an Avon Park Correctional Institution in southern Florida. I met a man, and everybody said, you've got to meet him. He's got such a glow on his face and such a smile that graces his presence, but he's in prison for first-degree murder with a life sentence. In Florida, life means life unless the governor commutes your sentence, so he was in there for the long haul for a murder he'd committed, and then I later met a woman, Judy Lawson, and Judy Lawson was the mother of the man that Richard Wyne murdered, and what I found is that Richard Wyne was led to Christ by Judy Lawson, the mother of the man that he murdered, and here's the way it goes, in short, that Richard had committed the murder, and you can imagine the anger and pain and bitterness and resentment that Judy felt about this man who'd murdered her son, and she was a believer and even involved in prison ministry at the time, but she just was obsessed by this. It was destroying her from the inside out.

(45:55 - 46:51) She knew she had to deal with it, so after a period of time, quite a period of time, really agonizing with these feelings, she knew she had to let it go and turn over her anger to the Lord, and she finally was able to do it, and when she did it, she felt, well, perhaps I ought to write to Richard and tell him that I've done this, and so she wrote him a letter, something to this effect, I'm Judy Lawson, I'm the mother of the man that you murdered, and I want to let you know that I've been praying for you, and if you ask for forgiveness for your sins, you'll be forgiven for all your sins on the basis of what Christ has done, even the murder of my son, something to that effect in Judy Lawson, and obviously there was more to the letter than that, but there was something along that line. When Richard got the letter, he thought this woman's crazy. He bolted up the letter and he threw it away in the garbage.

(46:54 - 48:32) What's this woman do? She's just off the wall. Well, over the period of the next five years, she would write him an occasional other letter just reminding him that she was praying for him, but finally it got to the point where it was obsessing Richard. What is this woman doing? He started thinking about Christ and the message of the gospel, and he had a period where because of something he had done, he was thrown into solitary confinement, what they called the hole, for two weeks, and he decided to take a Bible with him, and as he took the Bible, he decided, I'm going to read the whole Bible in these two weeks, since he only had an hour for exercise, he had all the rest of his time to read, so he started with Genesis and he read all the way through to Revelation. He said when he got to Isaiah, something started to change in his heart, and by the time he finished the book of Revelation, he'd committed his life to Jesus Christ. And the first thing he did when he got out of solitary confinement is he wrote to Judy and he said, I just wanted to let you know I just committed my life to Christ, and I wanted you to be the first one to know. I suppose she could have left it there, but she decided that she would go visit him in that maximum security prison chapel, and she did, and I don't quite know how that happened or why they, how they even let it happen, but somehow or another they met, and he asked for forgiveness for the murder of her son, and she granted it, and they affirmed each other as brother and sister in Christ.

(48:33 - 50:04) Now, I would suggest only the gospel of Christ can do that. Just before I arrived at the prison, I found out more of the story, that just before I had gotten there, she presented to him a Thompson chain reference Bible inscribed inside the front cover of the Bible on the dedication page. It said, to Richard, my beloved adopted son, from your adopted mother. Now again, I would suggest that only the grace of Christ can do that. Now, it took Judy 10 years to get there. Now, I don't know if I could do that. It took her 10 years to get to that point, but you know Judy, who's not a brilliant scholar, she's not a phenomenal professional woman, something like that, but knowing her and having a number of different times to hear her speak, he knows something about reality, about the reality of love and forgiveness. I think very few, if any, other believers understand because of that. I would suggest that there's something very real and powerful about that kind of love that comes in an utterly unique way from who Jesus is.

(50:05 - 50:27) So, I would suggest that you look at this argument from love, because at the very root, if you follow what Jesus says, love one another as Christ has loved you, then the world will know you are believers by your love.