



Paul writes that the Lord opened an effective door for the gospel in the south-west corner of what we now call Turkey. People were converted, had fellowship with each other and formed churches. On his last journey Paul issued a warning to the elders. They must care for the flock because there are wolves coming. John the Apostle worked in that area among at least seven principal churches. When you read their profiles in Revelation some are doing well others are not because there are wolves at work in the churches. John says that another spirit, the spirit of anti-Christ is already at work so that these churches are beginning to experience the circling wolves, picking off the weak and the vulnerable that

linger on the edges. The fellowship is fracturing as people leave and join other beliefs. The primitive Christian love between brothers is starting to turn sour because anger, bitterness and resentment are growing and turning to hatred.

John is trying to bring people into the church but this letter is an effort to stop them leaving. He takes them back to first principles. The truth that 'God is love' has 'gone out to the ends of the earth' (Ps 19) from this passage. Ninety to ninety-five percent of people's frustrations, objections, disappointments, lack of faith, hostility, resistance, rebellion all come from the fact that they believe that God is love and yet the circumstances of their lives do not seem to add up to that love. 'If God is love, then why...? Then how...? Then when...?' In that place they are vulnerable to wolves because their confidence, faith and trust in God who is love, is being eroded by their own misunderstanding of the circumstances where God shows this incredible love.

Proper and accurate measurements are so important to us and yet there are always failings. A plumbline will give you the closest possible proximity to true vertical. A right-angle from that line will give you an absolute horizontal. Even then there are miniscule distortions as seen in the France's platinum example of an absolute metre. God's love is not a close proximity. God is love. He is the gold standard of what absolute, exact and pure love is. All other loves are measured against God. They are warped, distorted, flawed, imperfect and erroneous. There is no other love that is like the love that is God.

The love of God is that pure, pure absolute love that cannot be kept secret. It has to be demonstrated. You can see it in everything that is made. If you want to see it in its unalloyed purity look at Jesus. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16) This is pure unconditional love for sick, simple, broken, unworthy sinners, (all of us) if you will just find the grace to accept and believe this incredible love.

Here we are offered knowledge, reliance and life. It is possible to know this sublime love. You can know God. He wants you to know him who he is, what he

has done and what he is like; all about him. He wants you to be with him in his house, in his eternal habitation and to know him completely. Amazingly, the God who made you wants you for himself, forever; not in a greedy possessive, human way but by pure love of which you are the object. You can know it by experience because you've been there and understand it from the inside.

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.” (v16) This where faith comes in. You remember manna in the Old Testament when it came down and the people asked, “What is it?” They kicked it around suspiciously because they'd had so little experience of this kind of love. Is it a scam? We know this love and we have come to rely on it because the world can be a loveless place. Relationships are conditional, transactional and your worth is calculated by the degree that you serve someone else's ends. Love is withdrawn if you have a different view, skin colour or accent. There is real evil and hatred at work in this world. When you find yourself unloved and isolated, you can rely on the love of God and he will fill you completely! He will satisfy you so you can say, ‘I don't care if you don't like me, understand me or know me because honestly, I am happy in Jesus’. Are you happy in Jesus? Are you filled? God is love! We rely on his love time and time again; when we fail and are conscious of our sin and short-comings and we look to God expecting a frown or judgement or criticism and he smiles and talks to you and hears your cry, settles your heart, puts you back in the right place maybe with a word of correction but in a way that you can accept. What would we be without the love of God? Perish the thought! Without the love of God where would we be going? Perish the thought. Woe!

We live in the love of God. We soak up the love of God and then we let it out. God's love starts to go through you and you start to love the unlovely, forgive the sinners, the hurt and the harm. You become a little more understanding and patient, kinder and joyful, less miserable because of the love of God. It starts to change you and it starts to be your life.

You get to the point where the phrase ‘going to church’ seems like a nonsense. I am caught in this inextricable web of God's plan and design that has made me an organic part of his eternal body that will live in glory forever. I am part of the church. We meet and fellowship with each other. Go to church?! You are the church! Yes, there are people who are coming to the church and the love of God opens our hearts to them and welcomes them in all their confusion and misunderstandings, misapprehensions and disappointments. We meet them and walk them into his incredible love. “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” (v16) We are all a ‘whoever’. If you do believe you will end up looking like Jesus. The highest prayer we can pray is that we will look a little more like Jesus; more of him in me and more of me in him so that “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” Lord help us to be more like Jesus!