Hi,

Even as this crisis deepens, spring has arrived. Our photinias are blossoming like nobody’s business, the grass is greening up, and the flowers are blossoming. It all reminds me that this world still belongs to God, not to the virus.

Here’s a few updates:

* The links to the on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). This week’s videos and podcasts are all uploaded.
* **My Sunday class will begin meeting this weekend, at noon**, not 11am. It will be on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle), just like the weekday classes that have met the last two weeks. You do not need a Facebook account to view the class, but you will need an account to comment. Just follow the link to my page. If you and I are not friends on Facebook, just send me a friend request and we will be. We will be walking through Holy Week in the class, with lots of maps and photos.

These are tough days, yes, but in them we see many wonderful and encouraging acts of love and caring. So, let’s take a few moments and reflect on the love to which God calls us.

***1 Corinthians 13:4-7,11-13***

**4Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

**11When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.**

***1 John 3:16-17, 4:7-11***

**16We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?**

**7Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.**

*Eros, Phileo, and Agape*

If we really want to grasp the biblical perspective of love, we need to begin with the Greek word choices made by the NT writers.

*Eros* is a Greek word that has been taken directly into English. For the ancient Greeks, *eros* was the passionate love that desired the other for oneself. Often equated with sexual lust and fulfillment, the basic idea is that of erotic intoxication or ecstasy. *Eros* is never used by the NT writers. Paul could have used this word in his discussions of love and marriage, but he did not. This choice begins to point us in the biblical direction – love is never about the fulfillment of our own desires, regardless of how powerful or wonderful the experience might be.

*Phileo* (verb form) is a Greek word that is a little more familiar than you might think. After all, Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. *Phileo* carries the sense of relatedness, specifically, to treat someone as if they were one of your own people. For example, we sometimes treat someone as if they were a member of our family -- that would be *philia* (the noun form). The NT writers use *phileo* a few times, but very infrequently. There is little theological significance to its occasional use (only about twenty times). *Phileo* is often used synonymously with *agape*, the NT word for love.

*Agape* is used about 250 times by the NT writers. Just as significant, when Greek-speaking Jews translated the Hebrew OT into Greek, they almost exclusively used *agape*. Why did they choose this word? Because *agape,* which was used very little by Greek writers in the ancient world, was a weak word, lacking the power of *eros* and the warmth of *phileo*. Perhaps the best way to describe *agape* was “colorless.” It just didn’t have a lot of meaning – which made it perfect for the Biblical authors! No Greek word really meant what they wanted to say.

Because *agape* was a colorless word, its meaning to the original readers came solely from its context. The biblical translators and authors knew that the scriptural meaning of love, God’s meaning, was far different from what the world meant by love. If they used *eros* or *phileo*, readers would bring to Scripture many misconceptions. But by using *agape*, this colorless word, Paul, Matthew, John, and the rest could shape the word’s meaning to God’s meaning for it.

So what, you might ask. Look at the verses for 1 Cor 13 on page 1. We have in our minds certain meanings of the word “love,” whether it is romance or friendship or something else. We need to set all those aside and let Paul define “love” for us as he writes, “Love is patient . . . kind . . . not envious or boastful or arrogant . . . .”

*“Love is . . . ”*

Love is . . . what? That is the question for today. If we are going to get anywhere with this, we have to begin with the biblical meaning of love. And this will not be easy for us. The gulf between the biblical and the secular understandings of love is so vast that it renders the word “love” nearly useless to us. For much of the world, love is all about romance and wonderful feelings. It is about that ecstatic experience of new love, of being “in love” which, as exhilarating as it might be, is no more than the light of a candle compared to the brilliant sunlight that is God’s love, a love to which God calls us. So we’ll try to come to this topic with a bit of a blank slate. There are three keys to the biblical understanding of love: (1) love is a bond of total trust and commitment (2) love is about actions, not feelings, and (3) the best synonym for love is sacrifice.

*Trust and commitment*

Though there are many dimensions of love in the OT, including the romantic and sexual in the Song of Solomon, the dominant love theme is covenantal. God loves his people and the people are to love God within the bounds of a covenant that binds them in mutual obligation. Though the covenant is never devoid of passion, it is focused upon trust, high regard for each other, faithfulness, and obedience. God uses marriage as a metaphor for this covenantal love. For example, the people are not to commit “adultery” against God by chasing after false gods. Seven centuries before Jesus, God would speak through his prophet Hosea of his love for his people in shockingly personal terms. There was simply no parallel in the ancient cultures.

Jesus and the NT writers built upon the OT understanding of love. Indeed, Jesus cleared up any possible confusion about this covenantal love. Love is total trust, total commitment – the neighbor whom we are to love becomes anyone in need, even (especially?) our enemy. And, as in the OT, this is no abstract love of humanity – it is about what we do. Authentic love calls us to the hard work of repentance and discipline, of forgiveness and caring.

*Actions, not feelings*

Though, in keeping with the OT law, Jesus teaches that the two greatest commandments are to love God and neighbor, he actually doesn’t throw around the word “love” very often. Instead, Jesus speaks of mercy, caring, kindness, and forgiveness. Jesus, and later Paul, constantly reminds the disciples that love is not about what we feel, it is about what we do. Are we patient with others? Are we kind? Do we resist the temptation to boast or envy? Do we even avoid being irritable toward others? (1 Cor 13:4). Understanding that love is about actions, not sentiment, makes sense of Jesus’ teaching to “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44). Though we may not have loving feelings toward our enemies, we can still be merciful, caring, and forgiving. We cannot control how we feel, but we can control what we do – and God calls us to “do love.”

*Love as sacrifice*

John cuts to the heart of this in 1 John 3:16: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” What the NT means by love is the cross. The cross is the concrete embodiment of love. God so loved the world that he gave up the life of his own son. Jesus so loved us all that he laid down his own life. If we want to know what love is, look to the cross. The essence of love is sacrifice. Love is self-giving, never self-seeking. My that be our love.

*A link to check out*

[N. T. Wright recently offered a few thoughts on the virus](https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/) that were published by Time. I thought you might enjoy reading it, if you haven’t already.

*A TV series recommendation*

Patti and I discovered *Doc Martin* a few years ago and have thoroughly enjoyed it. It is the story of a renowned surgeon who develops a blood phobia and becomes the GP for a small picturesque village. Oh, and he is, well, socially awkward. You might give it a try. It is on Acorn, a streaming service that you can get for about $6/month. You could sign up for the free trial and sample the show.

*Book Recommendation*

In my Genesis class on Tuesday, I used a diagram of ancient cosmology with pillars holding up the flat earth, as in . . . *Pillars of the Earth*. So sure, if you never read this epic novel by Ken Follett now is a perfect time. One of my favorites.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott