

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact Information:

Rodney Weems

raweems@gmail.com

908-200-9926

<http://consciousoflove.com>

Love: The Foundation of Christian Thought and Wisdom

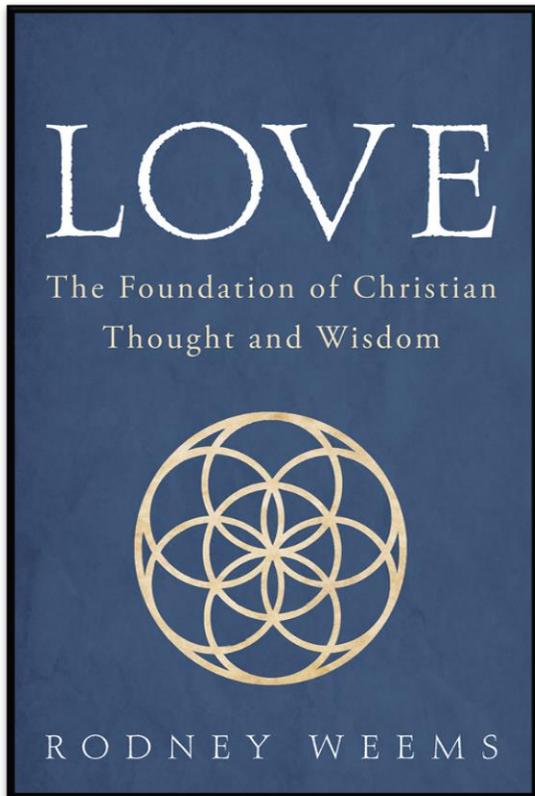
by Rodney Weems

Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

978-1-6667-3209-2 / paperback / \$14

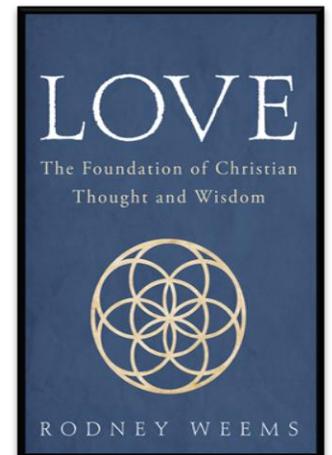
www.wipfandstock.com

New Title from Rodney Weems
Love: The Foundation of Christian Thought and Wisdom



After receiving a 2016 diagnosis of cancer, the author began to ask, "If I had time on earth to complete only one more dream, what would it be?" *Love: The Foundation of Christian Thought and Wisdom* is the beginning of that answer. It is a hopeful work that invites Christians to embrace not just the theology of the Bible but the Christology as well. Noting that hard-edged theology often ends up closing circles and hearts, the author points toward a holy Word whose gentle, daily Christology asks us to open our hearts, warts and all, to God, ourselves, and others. *Love* highlights 1 Corinthians as the Bible's christological center in co-narrative with its Romans theological center. In so doing, it shines an unexpectedly simple but deep light on exactly what God is asking of us in the name of Christian love.

Rodney Weems has taught secondary school mathematics for over twenty-five years. He is the author of *Teaching Math as a Language* (2007) and numerous short essays for his students on the interface between faith, philosophy, and mathematics.



Why did you decide to write *Love: The Foundation of Christian Thought and Wisdom*?

After a cancer diagnosis, I began asking what I wanted to do if I had time for only one more major task. Trying to make the world a better place for my sons to grow up in was my answer. *Love: The Foundation* is dedicated to my boys, Ethan and Eric. It was my practical way of trying to leave something behind to make their way easier.

But why focus on Christian love? Why not politics, education, or something else more practical?

Many people in America perceive us as a Christian nation. I'm a Christian myself. But looking at the religious justification for slavery, thinking about various incidents that happened to my family and me in church as a consequence of our skin color, I began to ask, "Why does a religion that is supposed to embody love end up being responsible for so much hate?" I felt that if I could shed some light on the answer to that question, then in the future, it might make it harder to use the Bible as a tool to justify such hatred.

Could you summarize some of your conclusions about how people have used Christianity to foster hatred?

Well, there are several stories that I delve into that many people might be familiar with. There are the narratives surrounding Cain's descendants being black or Noah's son being punished with a black mark. But the overriding conclusion I came to is that the Bible is almost like a spiritual optical illusion. What you see depends on who you are as a person. As I put it in one of my blog posts, "Read the Bible with humility, and you come away with love. Read it with arrogance, and the message delivered is hate. Both roads are there for the taking." Some people just prefer to take the hate.

Would you like to say more on that point?

Another way I think about the Bible, and most religious texts now, is like spiritual Rorschach tests: I no longer believe our holy books are lists of commandments telling us what to do. They are questions asking us who we are and who we wish to become.

So why this particular title to the book? It seems a bit, well, let's say, "heavy." But when you open it up, it is very accessible.

I'm glad. Easy to read and understand was my goal. I was a math teacher for 25 years before writing this. Any good teacher knows that just because you say something doesn't mean the person on the other end of what you say will understand. So I really wanted to make the ideas in the book accessible. I wanted what I wrote to be something anyone would feel comfortable picking up, reading, and thinking about.

Who do you think might find this book useful?

It's for anyone seeking to understand how the Bible can end up being used for hate. It's also for people who realize that the negative biblical message they might be getting from friends or popular culture is not a message they fully agree with and want to understand more deeply why that is the case. So *Love* is mostly aimed at younger adults, 18–35 years old. Churches, pastors, and religious organizations wishing to address issues of hatred from a biblical perspective will also find it helpful. In addition, many of the resources on my website parallel the book and provide useful tools for leading or starting discussions.

If you don't mind my asking, how is your cancer now?

I receive a PSA test every six months. So far, those results have been perfect, with no detectable PSA. I am incredibly thankful to God for that and the doctors at Memorial Sloan Kettering who have overseen my treatment. Also, if I could add one more comment: Prostate cancer is only now getting the attention breast cancer has been getting for quite a while. So I wanted to mention a few things I learned and wished I had known earlier. It turns out that seven factors noticeably increase a person's risk of getting and dying of prostate cancer: 1) being African American, 2) being of Caribbean descent, 3) being bald or balding, 4) being over five feet nine inches tall, 5) having Peyronie's disease, 6) of course, having a family history of prostate cancer, but also having a family history of breast cancer, and 7) having high levels of stress, which in my case was accompanied by a measurable, long-term increase in inflammation. But again, thanks to my doctors and to the many prayers on the part of my friends and family, I am doing much better now.

Is this your first book?

It is my first traditionally published book. In 2007, I also published another book, titled *Teaching Math as a Language*. But that one was self-published.

You mentioned that you were a math teacher for twenty-five years. Was that your first career?

No, I graduated from the Naval Academy. So my first career spanned five years as a naval officer during the early eighties. After resigning my commission from the Navy, I spent six years as an Olympic fencing hopeful (epee) before finally falling in love with teaching.

Are there any last thoughts you would like to add?

Just that I hope my book will help people begin to discard what I call negative Christianity, which offers a very traditional "thou shalt not do" message. Without humility, that is a message that often turns into hatred. I hope that the world my sons grow up in will be a world that embraces a more positive Christianity that focuses more humbly on what Jesus is asking us to do in the name of love.

An Excerpt from *Love: The Foundation of Christian Thought and Wisdom*

Faith, Hope, but Especially Love, Paraphrased

The Bible is not a dead book. The breath of God is alive and well within it. That indwelling—the Spirit of love—converses with the voice of every age. Of the Christian, it asks, Are you what a humble, merciful person looks like in such a time and place? Of the nation, Is this how a patient, generous, redemptive police force, school system, or society manifests itself? In each era, the dialogue and the answers it yields are different and the same, all at once.

What might that conversation sound like if Paul could pen 1 Corinthians 13 for this American moment? To my mind, it would sound something like this: You have heard it said that if I speak in the tongues of men—whether speaking Spanish, English, or some other language—or even if I speak as the angels, if I have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. You have heard that if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, if I have not love, I am nothing.

It is true. It makes no difference how smart I am, how big my house is, what job title I have, or how much I earn; if I have not love, I deserve nothing. I could be tops on whatever meritocratic scale society sets up to judge winners and losers, but without love, all my supposed merit is worthless.

Love is patient and kind. It does not go around bragging that it is real and others are not real. It does not assume it is exceptional and others are less so because that would be arrogant and rude.

Love is not jealous. It does not boast that this cafe counter, this bus seat, this space, land, or nation belongs to it and it alone. Nor is love irritable or resentful, believing it is losing something whenever someone else gains a seat at the counter, on the bus, or at a table. For this land is not ours but God's. Not even our bodies are our own. They were bought with a price, and if we are Christians, they are the Holy Spirit's personal property and are meant to be temples of love (1 Cor. 6:19).

Such love does not insist on its own way because wise-love is meant to meet others where they are, not where the presumption that often masquerades as love thinks they should be. In trying to meet others where they are, wise-love is a dreamer. It does not say, "Forget the attempt because heaven on earth is impossible." It is willing to bear, believe, hope, and endure all things, even if the end of that effort means only one more small step toward God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

Any honest attempt at such love knows how far short of fullness it is falling. It understands that even now, even having passed through the door of faith, we see through a mirror dimly. It realizes that in every moment we are at risk of acting more like the fractious child described in 1 Corinthians 3 and less like the wise-loving adult at the end of 1 Corinthians 2. For our knowledge of what it means to love in this way and our prophecy in the name of such love are imperfect. But when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. Now we know in part, then we will understand in full, even as we have been fully understood.

So, faith, hope, and love abide. The faith of Abraham, the hope of Christ, and the love of the Spirit, these three abide. But the greatest of these—the beginning, middle, and end of the journey—resides in love.

Praise for *Love: The Foundation of Christian Thought and Wisdom*

"How might we transform our deeply polarized society if those who count themselves as Christians . . . sought daily to become practitioners of 'wise-love' with everyone? Weems offers a path toward spiritual maturity that challenges complacent Christians across the theological and political spectrum. If taken seriously, it will lead to the healing we desperately need."

—**Elizabeth W. Corrie, Candler School of Theology, Emory University**

"Boldly calling for a 'new Reformation,' Rodney Weems seeks to address the ugly divisions and refusals to listen that characterize our culture today. In directing our attention to the biblical teaching on love ('wise-love,' as he calls it), Rodney urges us to rediscover the revolutionary ethic that is the foundation of Western civilization. . . . This book will challenge your thinking, warm your heart, and call you to biblical self-examination."

—**Stan Key, The Francis Asbury Society**

"At a time in our national history when there is so much division, this delightful volume brings us back to first principles. The focus on the virtue at the heart of the greatest commandment is one that should ring true for all Christians. Through a serious reading of Paul's writings on love, Weems introduces how this virtue might be lived out today. Such an introduction is a breath of fresh air."

—**Daniel Cosacchi, Marywood University**

"Rodney Weems offers a thoughtful and well-reasoned exploration of the importance of love, and how we are to live it out in a world around us, where this quality is too often lacking."

—**John Goodale, Pastor of Caring Ministries, First Pres**

"Rodney Weems has invited us into a way of 'heart living.' His writing reveals the integrity of his character and a humility that offers the reader a gateway to transformation. Rodney's concept of opening the Scriptures through the lens of 'wise_love' offers the reader an opportunity to see and live in a grace-filled way that 'builds one another up and forward.' A timely offering in our challenging times."

—**Anthony R. Pompa, Vice-Chair, Episcopal Preaching Foundation**

Conscious

 **LOVE**

ConsciousOfLove.com