

# Chapter 2: Love: The Answer to the Problem of Evil

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*"If I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing."*

— 1 Corinthians 13:2

*"The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself."*

— Catechism of the Catholic Church 27

*"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."*

— Pope St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* 10

*"The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope, or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love."*

— Catechism of the Catholic Church 25

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## The Question That Changes Everything

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In Chapter 1, we saw that evil originates in the human heart when we choose against love, and that perfect love is the complete answer to the problem of evil. But this raises the most crucial question of our time: if love is the answer to evil, what exactly is love and how can we live out "perfect love"?

This question becomes urgent when we look around at the teenagers and young adults in our culture today. These beautiful young people carry a hunger so deep it's almost visible—they're desperate for love that is authentic, lasting, and transformative. But everywhere they turn, our society is feeding them counterfeits that flow from the disordered hearts of adults who have themselves accepted lesser goods.

Our culture teaches young women that they must give their bodies away to be loved, that their worth is measured by their sexual desirability. Young men are told that commitment is optional, that "real men" avoid emotional vulnerability, and that conquest is more valuable than covenant. Children from broken homes often conclude that marriage is a joke and that promises are made to be broken. Meanwhile, social media and entertainment bombard them with messages that reduce love to feelings, pleasure, or personal fulfillment. They are told that the most important goals in life are career and financial success.

These cultural counterfeits don't emerge from nowhere—they flow from individual hearts that have chosen to worship lesser goods instead of the Supreme Good. When adults choose career over family, pleasure over purity, convenience over life, or self over service, they create a culture that teaches these same disordered priorities to the next generation.

They are all hungry for authentic love, but our society has stripped them of any vocabulary for the real thing. This is the tragedy of our time: a generation starving for love while being fed poison by men, women, parents, teachers, politicians and even religious leaders who have forgotten what love truly means.

This is the universal cry for love—the deepest longing of every human heart. And if we can't answer the question "What is love?" clearly and completely and live that out in our lives, we're failing the next

generation just when they need us most.

We also hear cries in our society today for justice and mercy, which we will address in subsequent chapters, but if we don't understand love correctly, we will be unequipped to help them find true justice and mercy—or to identify the counterfeit loves that keep our society in bondage to sin and deeper injustice.

## The Universal Experience of Longing

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The cry for love isn't just a preference or a nice-to-have. It's written into the very fabric of our being—body, mind, and soul. This longing engages our entire nature, revealing that we are created for relationship at every level.

**The Body's Cry for Love:** Our bodies are designed for relationship. From the moment we're born, we need physical touch, comfort, and presence. Watch an infant reach for their mother's face, or observe how a child runs into their parent's arms after a nightmare. Our bodies literally recoil from isolation and thrive in loving presence. We're created for embrace, for gentle touch, for the physical comfort that says "you are not alone."

**The Mind's Cry for Love:** Our intellects hunger to be known and understood. We long for someone to "get" us—to see our thoughts, dreams, and ideas as valuable and worthy of attention. There's a special joy that comes when someone truly understands what we're trying to communicate, when they see the world through our eyes and appreciate the unique way we think and process reality.

**The Soul's Cry for Love:** At the deepest level, our souls hunger for unconditional acceptance and eternal commitment. The soul knows instinctively that human love, however beautiful, points beyond itself to something perfect and permanent. The deepest cry of the soul is for the love that will never end, never disappoint, and never fail—the love that can only come from God Himself.

When these three dimensions work in harmony, we seek authentic love that honors the whole person. When they're disordered, we either become purely physical (using bodies without engaging hearts), coldly intellectual (analyzing love without experiencing it), or unrealistically spiritual (expecting perfection from imperfect human beings).

## Why This Longing is Universal: Made in the Image of God

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This universal longing for love isn't accidental or merely cultural—it's written into our very nature because we are made in the image of God. As Scripture reveals in the very first chapter of Genesis: *"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"* (Genesis 1:27).

The Second Vatican Council beautifully explains what this means: *"Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself"* (Gaudium et Spes 24). We are the only creatures that were not made for some useful "end"—yet paradoxically, we achieve our greatest dignity when we are willing to give away what and who we are for the good of others, following Christ's example.

*"If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."*

— Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:24-25)

Pope John Paul II, in his Theology of the Body, taught that being made in God's image means we are created with the capacity for love and called to love. As he explained, *"Man cannot live without love. He*

*remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own" (Redemptor Hominis 10).*

## What Makes Us Different

Being made in God's image means we share certain qualities that make us fundamentally different from all other creatures:

- **We can think and reason (intellect)** about truth, beauty, and goodness—not just react to stimuli
- **We can choose freely (will)** between good and evil—we're not slaves to instinct or programming
- **We make moral choices (intellect and will)**—we can be held accountable for our choices
- **We can love sacrificially (soul)**—putting another's good above our own immediate desires
- **We long for the infinite (soul)**—no finite good can fully satisfy us
- **We are called to communion (body, mind, and soul)**—designed for relationship with God and others

These are the heart, mind and soul all working together to know, choose, and love.

This is why the cry for love is universal. Every human heart knows instinctively that we're made for something more than mere survival or pleasure. We're made for love because we're made in the image of Love Himself.

## What Children Know About Love

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Before we examine how great minds have tried to define love, let's look at an unexpected source of wisdom—our children. Watch how children naturally understand love before the world teaches them otherwise:

**Love is Sacred.** When parents divorce, children don't just feel sad—they feel like something holy has been broken. They instinctively know love deserves reverence, not casual treatment.

**Love is Sacrificial.** A child giving their last piece of candy to comfort a crying sibling isn't being taught generosity—they're expressing what they know love requires.

**Love Creates Covenant.** Children are devastated by divorce because they understand "I love you" means forever. They can't comprehend why adults treat love as temporary or conditional.

**Love Requires Truth.** A child discovering their parent lied feels betrayed at the core. They know love and deception cannot coexist.

**Love Demands Justice.** Children become furious at bullying because they know love means protecting the vulnerable. "That's not fair!" reveals their understanding that love requires standing up for what's right.

**Love Shows Mercy.** When children break something precious, they cry out for mercy with genuine anguish, knowing they need forgiveness to restore the relationship.

This childlike understanding isn't naive—it's profound. Jesus said, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Children see love clearly because authentic love is written on the human heart as natural law.

## Traditional Definitions and Their Contributions

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Throughout history, great minds and holy saints have offered profound insights into the nature of love, each contributing essential pieces to our understanding.

**Classical Philosophy** provided foundational categories that remain invaluable. Aristotle's distinction between eros (romantic love), philia (friendship), and storge (familial affection) helps us recognize love's different expressions. Plato's vision of love as the soul's journey from physical beauty to spiritual truth reveals love's transformative power. The Stoics' emphasis on love as rational benevolence shows us love's connection to virtue and duty.

**Christian Tradition** brought revolutionary depth through the saints and doctors of the Church. St. Augustine's teaching that love is the ordering principle of all virtue—"Love God, and do what you will"—reveals love as the foundation of moral life. St. Thomas Aquinas's definition of love as "willing the good of another" emphasizes love as an act of the will directed toward another's benefit. St. John of the Cross explored love as mystical union with God through purification and surrender.

**Modern Insights** have added valuable psychological and social understanding. Romantic love's emphasis on emotional attraction shows us love's affective power. Humanitarian love's stress on universal compassion reveals love's social dimension. Psychological insights about healthy attachment help us understand love's developmental aspects.

Yet while each tradition offers valuable insights, none provides the complete picture that our hearts truly seek and that our world desperately needs.

## Why Love Is the Complete Answer to Evil

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As we saw in Chapter 1, sin chooses our own good at the expense of others, while love chooses others' good at our own expense. This is why love is the complete answer to evil: it reverses sin's fundamental pattern. Where sin creates harm through selfishness, love creates healing through sacrifice. We will explore this sacrificial heart of love in depth in Chapter 6.

## A Complete Definition of Perfect Love

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Through careful study of Scripture and the Church's teaching on love, we can see that perfect love cannot be reduced to a single dimension. It must integrate all the essential elements that Scripture and the Church reveal about love's nature. Here is the definition that will guide our entire journey:

**Perfect love is the sacred, sacrificial gift of covenant which binds true justice and true mercy into life-giving communion.**

Let's understand what "perfect" means here. Perfect doesn't mean flawless performance or earning God's love through our efforts. Rather, perfect means *complete* and *integrated*—love that includes all its essential facets working in harmony. Jesus calls us to this perfection: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). This is possible not through human effort alone, but through grace that transforms us and through understanding the comprehensive definition of love that the Church has given us.

This definition reveals love as the Trinity lives it—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternal self-giving communion. As St. Paul teaches, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5), making this divine love accessible to us.

Every word matters:

**Sacred:** Love participates in the divine nature and reflects God's own love. Because every human person is made in God's image, love is never merely human emotion but a participation in the very life of God. When we love another person, we're honoring the divine image within them and expressing our own divine calling. God is Love.

**Sacrificial:** Love is ordered toward the good of the other. It's not mere sentiment but proven through action that puts another's wellbeing before our own preferences. As Jesus taught, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Love runs into the burning building.

**Gift:** Love is freely given, not earned or demanded. It cannot be bought, manipulated, or coerced. Love that must be earned isn't love at all—it's a transaction. Love is always voluntarily given and received.

**Covenant:** Love creates permanent, binding relationships that endure through difficulties. It operates at multiple levels—binding us first to God, then flowing into faithful family bonds, and extending to create just society ordered toward the common good. Love binds us together.

**True Justice:** Love gives to our Creator and each person what they are due based on the truth and dignity as image-bearers of God. It provides objective standards and prevents love from becoming mere sentiment. Love is 100% just.

**and:** - Justice without mercy enables cruelty. Mercy without justice enables evil.

**True Mercy:** Love goes beyond what is due, offering forgiveness and second chances. It provides compassion when justice alone would crush. Love is 100% merciful.

**Life-giving Communion:** Love creates authentic relationship and community and life. It builds up rather than tears down, unites rather than divides, and generates new life and hope. Love is 100% life-giving.

When all these elements are present together, love becomes perfect—capable of conquering all forms of evil and creating authentic communion between persons. This is what children instinctively understand, what the saints lived, and what Jesus demonstrated perfectly on the cross.

You can see from these facets of love that people understand bits and pieces of this and live these things out imperfectly.

## Why We Need Liberation to Love

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But here's the problem we all face. As we saw in Chapter 1, something has gone wrong with our ability to love. We know what love should look like, but we struggle to live it. We want to be loving people, but we find ourselves being selfish, petty, or hurtful instead. We long for deep, authentic relationships, but we keep settling for shallow connections or getting trapped in toxic patterns.

Jesus put His finger on the real issue when He said, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). The deeper problem is that our hearts have become enslaved to what Scripture calls idols—things that can be good in themselves, but become evil when we worship them instead of God.

### The Slavery of Idolatry

An idol is any finite good that we treat as if it were the infinite good that only God can be. When we make an idol of something, we become enslaved to it, and our ability to love authentically becomes corrupted:

- **Money and Career:** When we worship financial security or professional success, we sacrifice relationships and moral principles for advancement. Love becomes transactional—we "love" people for what they can do for our careers.
- **Romantic Relationships:** When we make our spouse or romantic partner our ultimate source of happiness, we place impossible burdens on them and become possessive, jealous, or manipulative. Love becomes stifling rather than giving.
- **Family and Children:** When we make our children our ultimate purpose, we can become

overprotective, controlling, or living vicariously through them. Love becomes suffocating rather than liberating.

- **Pleasure and Comfort:** When we worship immediate gratification, we become incapable of the sacrifice that authentic love requires. Love becomes selfish rather than self-giving.
- **Power and Control:** When we worship our own will being done, we become incapable of the submission and service that love requires. Love becomes domination rather than covenant.

## The Pattern of Slavery

Here's how idolatry enslaves us and corrupts our love:

- **We know what love looks like** but find ourselves choosing what serves our idol instead
- **We want to be patient and kind** but lose our temper when people threaten what we worship
- **We long for faithful, committed relationships** but get caught up in patterns that serve our idols rather than the good of others
- **We want to put others first** but end up being selfish when our idols are at stake

This isn't just a matter of trying harder or having better willpower. There's something broken in our ability to love consistently and authentically. We're not free to love the way we want to—we're trapped by the very things we've made into gods.

And when our idols inevitably fail us—when we lose our job, when a spouse leaves, when a child dies—our lives collapse into devastation. We lose all sense of meaning, purpose, and value because we were depending on these created goods to provide what only God himself can give.

## The Path to Liberation

This is exactly why Jesus came—not just to teach us about love, but to break the chains that keep us from living it. As Bishop Barron often explains, using an analogy that traces back to G.K. Chesterton's insights about orthodoxy, the Church's moral teachings are like the banks of a river. Without banks, water doesn't become a powerful, life-giving river—it becomes a destructive flood or a stagnant swamp. The banks don't restrict the river's power; they give it direction, purpose, and the ability to reach its destination.

Similarly, when the Church teaches about marriage, family, sexuality, or relationships, it's not trying to control us—it's providing the "banks" that allow love to flow with power and purpose rather than dissipating into chaos. Without this kind of guidance and grace, our cry for love becomes like being hungry but not knowing which foods will nourish us and which will poison us.

## The Foundation for the Entire Book

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In these first two chapters, we have laid a crucial foundation: the fundamental problem facing humanity is the evil in man's heart, and filling the heart with love is the answer to that problem. We've seen that this isn't just theological theory but corresponds to the deepest cry of every human heart and the natural understanding that even children possess.

Our comprehensive definition—perfect love as "the sacred, sacrificial gift of covenant which binds true justice and true mercy into life-giving communion"—now serves as our roadmap for the entire journey ahead. Every subsequent chapter will unpack one aspect of this definition, showing in detail how each facet of authentic love directly combats specific forms of evil in our hearts and in the world.

At every step, we will see how perfect love—integrating all these elements—is not just a beautiful ideal but the practical, powerful answer to evil that the world desperately needs. Through the Catholic Faith, we

have access to the fullness of this love, and through living it authentically, we become agents of the world's salvation.

Perfect love stands against all forms of evil and counterfeit love. It opposes mere sentiment by including objective standards of justice, harsh legalism by offering merciful forgiveness, individualism by emphasizing covenant relationships and communion, utilitarianism by recognizing the sacred dignity of each person made in God's image, relativism by grounding love in the objective reality of human dignity, and temporality by establishing permanent covenant bonds.

We will explore these counterfeits and how authentic love defeats them in much greater detail in subsequent chapters. Our exploration of perfect love's components begins by addressing the most immediate and universal reaction to its absence: the cry for justice. This cry, as we shall see in the next chapter, reveals the foundational structure that love requires to be true and lasting, and why it is an indispensable part of the perfect love that answers the problem of evil.

## Living the Response

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Understanding what love truly is changes everything. It means we can resist counterfeits—either in our own hearts or in the culture around us. It means we have a standard by which to measure every relationship, every choice, every commitment. Most importantly, it means we can be liberated from the slavery of idolatry that corrupts our ability to love.

The saints understood this liberation. St. Thérèse of Lisieux called love "the vocation which includes all others." St. John the Apostle spent his final years proclaiming the simple truth: "God is love." St. Augustine built his entire theology on the foundation that love is the ordering principle of all virtue. But they also understood that sin and idolatry enslave us and prevent us from loving—which is why they embraced the Church's teachings not as burdens, but as the very tools of their liberation.

These saints didn't just understand love intellectually—they lived it. They allowed God's perfect love to transform their hearts and liberate them from the slavery of idolatry, and through them, it transformed the world. This is our calling also: to understand love so deeply that it transforms us from the inside out, freeing us to become instruments of God's love in a world desperately hungry for both truth and liberation.

*Heavenly Father, You are Love itself, and You have written the cry for love in every human heart. We confess that sin and idolatry have enslaved us and corrupted our ability to love authentically. Liberate us through the truth of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to set the captives free. Help us to understand what love truly means—not the counterfeits the world offers, but the perfect love that flows from Your own divine nature. Break the chains of idolatry that prevent us from loving as we should, and give us the grace to live this love authentically, so that through us, others may encounter both the truth that liberates and the love they're truly seeking. Through Christ our Lord, who is Love incarnate and our Liberator. Amen.*

## Examen: Recognizing the Cry for Love

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### Reflection Questions:

1. How do I see the cry for love manifesting in my own life—in my body, mind, and soul?
2. What idols have I been tempted to worship instead of God, and how have they corrupted my ability to love?
3. How does understanding love as "sacred, sacrificial, covenantal, just, merciful, and life-giving" challenge my current relationships?
4. Where do I see the pure understanding of love that children possess, and how can I return to that



clarity?

5. How has idolatry enslaved my ability to love, and where do I need Christ's liberation most?

**Daily Practice:** Each day this week, when you encounter someone (family member, coworker, stranger), try to recognize the cry for love in their words and actions. Ask yourself: "What is this person's heart truly longing for?" Then consider: "How can I respond with authentic love rather than a counterfeit?" Remember that your own liberation from idolatry enables you to help liberate others.

**Act of Contrition:** *My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against You whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with Your grace, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In His name, my God, have mercy. Amen.*

Understanding the universal cry for love is the first step toward becoming the kind of person who can satisfy that hunger in others. In the next chapter, we'll explore another universal cry that echoes through every human heart: the cry for justice. Together, these fundamental longings reveal the complete picture of what authentic love must include.

## Further Study

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### Scripture

- **John 8:31-36:** Jesus' tells us what His Salvation is all about
- **Matthew 5:** Jesus' comprehensive teaching on perfect love (complete analysis)
- **1 Corinthians 13:** The great hymn to love that describes its characteristics
- **1 John 4:7-21:** God as the source and model of all authentic love
- **John 15:9-17:** Jesus' teaching on love as laying down one's life
- **Romans 5:5-8:** God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit
- **Ephesians 5:25-33:** Covenant love modeled in marriage

### Catechism

- **CCC 1822-1829:** The theological virtue of charity
- **CCC 2196-2200:** The family as school of love
- **CCC 1601-1666:** The sacrament of matrimony as covenant love
- **CCC 27-30:** The human desire for God rooted in our creation

### Saints

- **St. Teresa of Calcutta:** Who showed love's sacred dimension by seeing Christ in the poorest of the poor
- **St. Maximilian Kolbe:** Who demonstrated sacrificial love by taking another's place in death
- **St. Augustine:** The doctor of love whose *Confessions* reveals the restless heart that finds peace only in God's love
- **St. Thérèse of Lisieux:** The little flower who discovered that love is the vocation that includes all others and lived the "little way" of complete trust
- **Pope St. John Paul II:** The pope of the family who taught the world about the theology of the body and authentic human love