

***BIB 493 Love in Earliest and Contemporary Christianity***  
***COLORADO CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY***  
**<http://faculty.ccu.edu/tphillips/>**

**Prof: Thomas Phillips, Ph.D.**  
**Aspen 101**

**(303) 963-3424**  
**tphillips@ccu.edu**

**Course Description:** This course will investigate love, the primary characteristic in both the Christian conceptions of God and of the good life. It will explore love in four distinctive contexts: (1) in non-Christian Greco-Roman writings; (2) in early Christian writings both inside and outside of the Christian canon; (3) in classic and contemporary scientific discourse; and (4) in contemporary theological discourse. This course will seek to bring together what John Wesley called “vital piety and holy learning” by requiring both reflection and practice.

**Prerequisites:** BIB 114 and BIB 220

**Course Objectives:**

- (1) To introduce the students to discourse regarding love in two different eras (the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century setting and the contemporary setting);
- (2) To help the student appreciate how early Christians—both in the canonical and non-canonical traditions—interacted with the traditions about love in their culture;
- (3) To assist the students in formulating a meaningful theology of love for their 21<sup>st</sup> century context in light of classic and contemporary scientific understandings of love; and
- (4) To engage the student in a practical experience with the power of personal altruism.

**Required Texts:**

- V. P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament*
- T. Oord, *An Essentially Loving God*
- S. Post, *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service*
- C. Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*
- M. Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*
- S. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

***“We must study love. We must be able to teach it, to understand it, to predict it, or else the world is lost to hostility and to suspicion.”***

***–Abraham Maslow***

## **Course Requirements:**

- (1) Consistent attendance;
- (2) Six to eight additional hours of study each week;
- (3) A careful reading of assigned texts;
- (4) Two tests;
- (5) Ten 200 word reflection essays (see details below);
- (6) One 500 word book review (see details below);
- (7) One 10-15 page research paper;
- (8) One “love in action” project;
- (9) Three 200 word “love in action” reflection essays; and
- (10) Ability to follow simple instructions.

### **(1) Attendance:**

Having examined the class role for this course, I have confidence in the students who are enrolled in this course. Therefore, I will dispense with the traditional penalties for absences and offer a system of positive reinforcement in their place. Students who miss no classes at all will receive a 5% bonus to their grade. Students who miss no more than 1 class will receive a 4% bonus to their grade. Students who miss no more than 2 classes will receive a 3% bonus to their grade. Students who miss no more than 3 classes will receive a 2% bonus to their grade. Students who miss no more than 4 classes will receive a 1% bonus to their grade. Students who miss more than 4 classes will receive my prayers (since they must be suffering from a terminal illness).

### **(2) Study Time**

Life demands much from us. At this point in your life (and throughout all of your life), you serve by learning. Learning is hard work, but not impossible or overwhelming. The assignments for this class are designed to take a mature and disciplined student about 6 hours per week. Students who wish to excel or who learn more slowly may need up to 8 hours per week.

### **(3) Reading Assigned Texts**

The texts for this class are highly varied, but none is particularly difficult to read or understand. Students should come to class ready to discuss the texts and their ideas. This class is designed for discussion, not lecture.

***“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it***

***does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”***  
***--The Apostle Paul***

#### **(4) Tests**

Students will take two tests in this class, a midterm and a final. The midterm exam will cover Greco-Roman traditions of love and early Christian responses, adaptations and accommodations to these traditions. The final exam will cover contemporary scientific treatments of love and contemporary Christian discussions of love in light of those scientific traditions. The exams will be take-home essays. Take-home tests should be emailed to [cculoves@yahoo.com](mailto:cculoves@yahoo.com) with the student's name and the letters "CCU" in the subject line (e.g., "CCU--Elvis Presley"). Put the essays in the text of the email message; do not send attachments.

#### **(5) Reflection Essays**

At the end of this syllabus (in the course schedule), the student will find weekly reading assignments and reflection questions based on those assignments. Each student will choose 10 of these questions to answer in well-formed 200 word essays. Each essay is due by 9:00am on the day when that topic will be discussed in class. Essays should be emailed to [cculoves@yahoo.com](mailto:cculoves@yahoo.com) with the student's name and the letters "CCU" in the subject line (e.g., "CCU--Elvis Presley"). Put the essay in the text of the email message; do not send attachments.

Students may submit only one essay per week. Students may submit essays only on topics related to the topics being covered within the next two class sessions. The student will need to submit essays over 10 of the 13 weeks of reading. Therefore, the student should plan to submit an essay nearly every week. Since the purpose of these essays is to foster reflection over the reading *in preparation for class discussion*, no late essays will be accepted.

#### **(6) Book Review**

Each student will submit an original book review over Vacek's book. This review should be 500 words and emailed to [cculoves@yahoo.com](mailto:cculoves@yahoo.com) with the student's name and the letters "CCU" in the subject line (e.g., "CCU--Elvis Presley"). This review is due at the time of the final. Put the essay in the text of the email message; do not send attachments.

#### **(7) Major Research Paper**

Each student will write a 10-15 research paper related to the topic of love (attached bibliography will help). The student may research any writer, topic or approach discussed in class, but all papers should be interdisciplinary in nature, that is, all papers should draw upon more than one discipline (e.g., biblical studies, philosophy,

psychology, sociology and biology). This paper is due by Dec. 3. A printed copy (with 12 point font, one inch margins and laser-quality black ink) must be submitted by 12:00 noon. Late work will be penalized 15% per school day (Monday-Friday).

*“Greater love has no person than that they should lay down  
their life for their friends.”  
--Jesus of Nazareth (as spoken in John’s Gospel)*

### **(8) “Love in Action” Project**

Love is inherently active, therefore, no course on love can be strictly theoretical. In light of this obvious truth, each student in this class will be required to envisage, implement and evaluate a project designed to put love in action. The student is encouraged to employ his or her moral imagination in order to conceive of ways in which the world could become a better place through the simple practice of love. Ask yourself: how may I love? Think broadly; dare to try the unconventional. Use your creative powers to grace your world!

### **(9) “Love in Action” Reflection Essays**

The student must **envisage** a project in which he or she engages in the practice of love. These ideas can be traditional and obvious (e.g., visiting nursing home patients), religiously oriented (e.g., teaching Sunday school), socially progressive (e.g., helping at a victims’ shelter), or even politically engaged (e.g., helping the disenfranchised to vote). The student should think about concrete ways in which his or her love can be expressed. The only limit on this assignment is the student’s imagination. A 200 word development essay about the student’s project is due **Sept 2**. This brief essay should be emailed to [cculoves@yahoo.com](mailto:cculoves@yahoo.com) with the student’s name and the letters “CCU” in the subject line (e.g., “CCU--Elvis Presley”). Put the essay in the text of the email message; do not send attachments.

The student must **implement** a project in which he or she engages in the practice of love. After the idea has been conceived, the student must seek to implement at least part of that idea in order to make one’s vision into a reality. A 200 word essay about the student’s implementation of the project is due **Oct. 14**. This brief essay should be emailed to [cculoves@yahoo.com](mailto:cculoves@yahoo.com) with the student’s name and the letters “CCU” in the subject line (e.g., “CCU--Elvis Presley”). Put the essay in the text of the email message; do not send attachments.

The student must then **evaluate** the project in which she or he has been engaged. The students’ self-evaluation of the project should ask the questions of whether or not their projects were genuinely expressing love, whether or not their projects expressed love effectively, and whether or not their projects could have broader implications or applications. Most importantly, the students should evaluate the degree to which their projects affected themselves and those whom they sought to serve. A 200 word evaluation essay about the student’s project is due **Dec. 13**. This brief essay should be

emailed to [cculoves@yahoo.com](mailto:cculoves@yahoo.com) with the student's name and the letters "CCU" in the subject line (e.g., "CCU--Elvis Presley"). Put the essay in the text of the email message; do not send attachments.

***"I love you; you love me; we're a happy family with a great big hug from me to you. Won't you say you love me too?"***  
***--Barney the Dinosaur***

### **(10) Ability to follow simple instructions**

Please consult this syllabus often and follow its detailed instructions for assignments, due dates and requirements.

### **Late Work Policies:**

Unless other specified on this syllabus, all work is due at 12:00 noon on the due date. Under no circumstances will any work will be accepted after the time of the final exam.

### **Grading Scale:**

A	97-100	A	94-96	A-	90-93
B+	87-89	B	84-86	B-	80-83
C+	77-79	C	74-76	C-	70-73
D	67-69	D	64-66	D-	60-63
F	below 60				

### **Note Bene:**

All work submitted for this class must be created specifically and originally by you for this class. If any work submitted for this class is found to have been submitted—partially or entirely—for another class, the assignment will receive a zero and the student will be reported to both the office of student development and the office of the provost for disciplinary action.

### **Grading Components:**

Tests	20% (10% each)
Reflection essays	25% (2.5% each)
Book review	5%
Research paper	20%
"Love in Action" project	30% (10% for each essay)

### **Note Bene:**

If you desire to earn no higher than a 'B' in this class, you may omit the book review from your assignments (the omitted assignment will be given an 80 for

computational purposes). If you desire to earn no higher than a ‘C’ in this class, you may omit the book review and 4 of the reflection essays from your assignments (the omitted assignments will be given a 70 for computational purposes). If you desire to earn no higher than a ‘D’ in this class, you may omit the book review and all the reflection essays from your assignments (the omitted assignments will be given a 60 for computational purposes).

***“I know one thing—God always acts in redemptive love  
and calls me to do the same.”***

### **Mailing Address for Assignments & Tests:**

Take-home tests and assignments should be emailed to [cculoves@yahoo.com](mailto:cculoves@yahoo.com). No attachments or printed documents will be accepted (except the final paper, which must be submitted in printed form).

### **You’re a Person:**

I will learn your name. In fact, if you submit all work on time, take all tests, and miss no more than two classes, and I still don’t learn your name by the end of the semester, you will get an automatic ‘A’ in this class. (But note well, I have taught scores of classes and over a thousand students without ever giving away an ‘A.’)

### **Tentative Class Schedule:**

#### **Introduction**

Week 1a: “Life Boat” (round 1)

Week 1b: Syllabus & Orientation

K. Evans, “Friendship in the Greek Documentary Papyri and Inscriptions: A Survey,” *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*, 181-202. (on reserve in library)

#### **Unit I: The Greco-Roman Context**

Week 2a: Seneca & the Art World

“On the Fellowship of the Wise Men,” and “On Benefits,” *Epistles*, vol. 3, Loeb Classical Library; M. Griffin, “*De Beneficiis* and Roman Society,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 93.2 (2003): 92-113 (on reserve in library).

**Reflection Essay Question:** What do these essays reveal about the dominant value system of the Greco-Roman world and the nature of love? How would the “wise” person love in the G-R world?

## Week 2b: Greco-Roman Constructions of Gender in Art

Slide show

E. O'Neil, "Plutarch on Friendship," *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*, 105-22 (on reserve in library).

## Week 3a: Plutarch

"Dialogue on Love," "On Brotherly Love," "On Affection for Offspring," *Moralia*, vols. 6, 9, Loeb Classical Library (on reserve in library).

**Reflection Essay Question:** What cultural presumptions within the Greco-Roman world made Plutarch's arguments necessary? Why would it be necessary for Plutarch to argue that it was possible for a man to love his wife and children truly?

## Week 3b: First Century Judaism

"4 Maccabees" (*New Interpreter's Study Bible*)

**Reflection Essay Question:** In what ways were the depictions of virtue and love in this Jewish document both culturally accommodated to Greco-Roman values and culturally challenging to Greco-Roman values?

## **Unit II: Early Christianity**

### Week 4a: Mark & Matthew

Furnish, *Love Command in the NT*, 70-90

**Reflection Essay Question:** How do Matthew and Mark differ in their presentations of the command to love God and neighbor? In what ways, do they offer significantly different responses to their ancient contexts?

### Week 4b: Luke

A. C. Mitchell, "Greet the Friends by Name," *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*, 225-62.

**Reflection Essay Question:** Why do you think that Luke is significantly less reluctant to employ the language of friendship than is Paul? How does Luke adapt the language of friendship to suit his Christian agenda?

### Week 5a: Romans & Galatians

Furnish, *Love Command in the NT*, 91-131.

**Reflection Essay Question:** How would you respond to the assertion that for Pauline theology the problem facing humanity is not guilt, but rather bondage to self-love? Is it accurate to say, “For Paul, the power of the gospel is the freedom to love.”?

#### Week 5b: 1 & 2 Corinthians & 1 Thessalonians

**Reflection Essay Question:** Why do you think that Paul prefers to use the language of “love” and the metaphor of “family” instead of the more common Greco-Roman language of friendship?

#### Week 6a: John

Furnish, *Love Command in the NT*, 132-58.  
A. Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*

**Reflection Essay Question:** Why does John’s gospel feel comfortable using both the language of “love” and “friendship”? How is this language challenging to and yet reflective of his ancient context?

#### Week 6b: 1 John

R. Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 93-144.

**Reflection Essay Question:** Why does 1 John gravitate away from the language of friendship, but retain the language of love? What is the nature of the love under such prominent consideration in 1 John?

#### Week 7a: James, Pastorals, Hebrews, & 1 Peter

A. Batton, “God in the Letter of James: Patron or Benefactor,” *NTS* 50.2 (2004): 257-72; B. J. Bauman-Martin, “Women on the Edge,” *JBL* 123.2 (2004): 253-79; and Patrick Gray, “Brotherly Love and the High Priest Theology in Hebrews,” *JBL* 122.3 (2003): 235-51.

**Reflection Essay Question:** In this context of late 1<sup>st</sup> century Christianity, how were attitudes towards the subjects of love, patronage and gender accommodated to Greco-Roman ideals? Why do you think that the later documents in the NT (like these) are also often the most culturally accommodated to Greco-Roman ideals?

#### Week 7b: Apocryphal Acts (Acts of Paul & Thecla)

“Acts of Paul and Thecla,” *NTA* (on reserve in library)

**Reflection Essay Question:** Why do think that this strain of early Christian tradition made significant strides both toward equalitarian ideals (in terms of women’s involvement in the community of faith) and also toward asceticism (in terms of sexual ethics)?

Week 8a: Apocryphal Acts (Acts of Peter & the 12 Apostles; Acts of John)

“Acts of Peter & the 12 Apostles” and “Acts of John,” *NTA* (on reserve in library)

**Reflection Essay Question:** What ideological shifts would have to occur in order to motivate people to accept the conception of love for God as loathing for oneself (as in *API2*) or as completely ethereal (as in *AJ*)?

Week 8b: Life Boat (Round 2)

Week 9a: Midterm (time to test the power of prayer)

### **Unit III: The Contemporary Context (Science)**

Week 9b: Darwin and Evolutionary Biology (Dr. Barb Wilkin)

J. H. Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, 275-320; J. Rohr, *Science & Religion: Opposing Views*, 54-98; H. Rolston, *Genes, Genesis and God*, 249-79.

Dr. Barb Wilkin, professor of biology at Colorado Christian University, will speak to the group about the two principles of Darwinian evolution, natural and sexual selection.

Week 10a: Darwin and Evolutionary Biology

J. P. Schloss, “Emerging Accounts of Altruism: ‘Love, Creation’s Law?’” *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, 21-42; Post, *Unlimited Love*, 1-90.

**Reflection Essay Question:** What challenges does an acceptance of evolution present to persons who are committed to the practice and promotion of genuinely altruistic love? In what ways, does Post’s discussion help one to move toward an understanding of evolution that allows for genuine altruism? Does kinship theory have any correspondence to the Pauline choice of family metaphors?

Week 10b: Neurobiology

T. R. Insel, “The Implications the Neurobiology of Love,” *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, 254-63.

Dr. Will Saxby, professor of psychology at CCU, will introduce students to contemporary neurobiology and the patterns that form, enable and limit a human being’s capacity for love.

Week 11a: Neurobiology

S. Post, *Unlimited Love*, 90-176; and T. Oord, *An Essentially Loving God*, 37-50.

**Reflection Essay Question:** If one's ability to give, receive and even recognize love is dependent in (at least in part) upon the physical structures of the human brain, how can we meaningfully speak about a commitment to love? In what ways is it appropriate to claim that our brains have been created/evolved for love?

### Week 11b: Empirical Psychology

D. Batson, "Addressing the Altruism Question Experimentally?" *Altruism and Altruistic Love*, 89-105. (Video: "The Altruists"); M. Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 169-97.

Dr. Ron Welch, associate professor of psychology at CCU and former staff psychologist for the Bureau of Prisons, will discuss psychological pathology. He will discuss the presence of persons whose brains are predisposed to hatred, violence and anti-social behavior. He will discuss how his professional and clinical experience with such people has influenced his understanding of love and the Christian faith.

**Reflection Essay Question:** Does the empirical evidence suggest that genuine altruism exists? How should empirical studies address the divide between is-and-ought?

### Week 12a: Empirical Psychology

S. Freud, *The Future of An Illusion*

**Reflection Essay Question:** Is it possible that the Christian focus upon love is nothing more than a remnant of our infantile desires for a parent? How are moral courage and dependence upon love reconciled in a mature person?

### Week 12b: Life Boat (round 3)

## **Unit IV: Contemporary Christianity**

### Week 13a: The Nature of God in Process Theology

Oord, *An Essentially Loving God*, 1-36

**Reflection Essay Question:** Why does Oord think that it is valuable to reject the Augustinian doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*? How does Oord's embrace of process theology help him to address the problem of evil?

### Week 13b: Love: Coercive or Persuasive?

Oord, *An Essentially Loving God*, 51-116

**Reflection Essay Question:** What difference does it make if one conceives of divine power as solely persuasive? Which would be better: a God limited to persuasive power or a God with unlimited coercive potential?

### Week 14a: A Theology of Love?

Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*

**Reflection Essay Question:** What are the attractive and unattractive aspects of Wesleyan theology (as laid out by Wynkoop)? Is love an adequate organizing principle for all of Christian theology?

Week 14b: Life Boat (round 4)

Week 15 Final Exam (an end to love!)