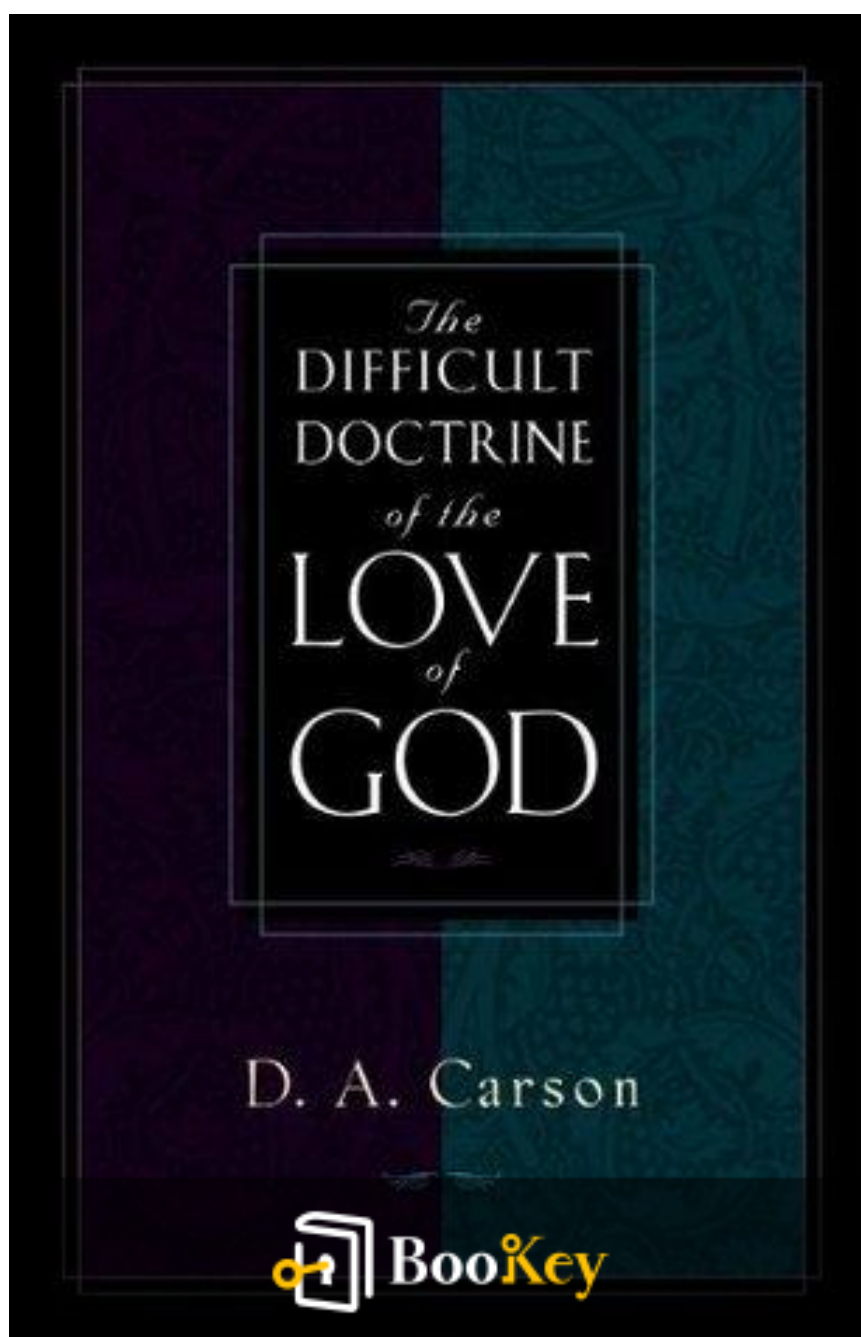


The Difficult Doctrine Of The Love Of God PDF (Limited Copy)

D.A. Carson



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The Difficult Doctrine Of The Love Of God

Summary

Rediscovering the profound complexity of God's love in Scripture.

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In **The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God**, D. A. Carson embarks on an insightful exploration of the complexities associated with understanding divine love amid a society that often misinterprets it. He begins by asserting that while contemporary culture readily accepts the notion of God's love, it frequently neglects other essential attributes of the divine, such as holiness, sovereignty, and justice. These traits are often seen as incongruous with the concept of a loving deity, leading to misunderstandings about the nature of God.

Carson challenges popular slogans like "God hates the sin but loves the sinner," highlighting that these oversimplifications fail to capture the biblical intricacies of God's love. He argues for a holistic understanding that encompasses the entirety of God's attributes. By diligently analyzing Scripture, Carson elucidates the interconnectedness of divine love with holiness, sovereignty, and justice. This approach reveals that God's love is not at odds with these attributes but is instead informed and enriched by them.

As the book progresses, Carson invites readers to move past well-worn clichés to engage more deeply with the scriptural truths about God's nature. This journey through Scripture urges a fuller appreciation of God's enduring love for humanity—one that is nuanced, complex, and inseparable from His

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other qualities. Through this careful theological examination, Carson hopes to foster a richer understanding of who God is, ultimately leading individuals to a profound recognition of the depth and breadth of divine love.

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About the author

In the chapters penned by Donald A. Carson, the narrative delves into vital themes and theological concepts that underscore the New Testament's significance, framed within the context of early Christianity.

The chapters begin with a focus on the historical backdrop of the New Testament, illustrating its emergence in a complex tapestry of cultural and religious influences. Carson strategically sets the stage by discussing the Roman Empire's operational dynamics, where the early Christian church struggled to find its identity amid Jewish traditions and Hellenistic philosophies. This framing allows readers to appreciate the tension inherent in the narratives presented within the New Testament, as early believers navigated their faith against a backdrop of skepticism and persecution.

As the narrative progresses, Carson introduces crucial characters that shape the Pauline epistles, notably the Apostle Paul. Known for his transformative encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul's theology and missionary journeys significantly expanded the outreach of early Christianity. Carson elaborates on Paul's theological contributions, such as the concepts of justification by faith and the implications of grace, which resonated deeply within the burgeoning Gentile communities.

Interspersed throughout the chapters are discussions on key theological

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themes, such as the nature of salvation, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the concept of the church as the body of Christ. Carson effectively elucidates these themes with scriptural citations and historical context, making them accessible to readers who may not have extensive theological backgrounds.

Moreover, the chapters delve into the diverse authorship of the New Testament texts, exploring how each writer's unique perspective contributes to a cohesive message of hope and redemption. Carson discusses figures like Luke, whose Gospel and Acts provide a narrative continuity for understanding the life and works of Jesus alongside the early church's development.

As the conclusion of the chapters approaches, Carson emphasizes the enduring relevance of New Testament teachings in contemporary faith practices. He challenges readers to engage with the text actively, encouraging reflection on how its themes can inform modern Christian life.

Through logical progression and engaging exposition, Carson's chapters not only recount the historical and theological underpinnings of the New Testament but also invite readers into a deeper understanding and appreciation of its transformative message.

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Chapter 1 Summary: ON DISTORTING THE LOVE OF GOD

ON DISTORTING THE LOVE OF GOD

A. Why the Doctrine of the Love of God Must Be Judged Difficult

The concept of God's love may seem simple at first glance, but it is fraught with complexities that challenge its comprehension. Several factors contribute to the difficulties in articulating this doctrine:

- 1. Cultural Misinterpretation:** Interpretations of God's love are often shaped by varying cultural influences, which can differ significantly from biblical perspectives. This cultural lens can result in misunderstandings that hinder effective communication of God's nature as love.
- 2. Reduction of God's Attributes:** In contemporary thought, there is a tendency to separate God's love from other essential divine attributes like sovereignty, holiness, and justice. This has led to a diluted and overly sentimental view of God that fails to capture His full essence.
- 3. Postmodern Skepticism:** The advent of postmodernism has made it challenging to assert the uniqueness of Christian views on God's love. With

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the belief that all viewpoints hold equal validity, traditional claims about the exclusivity of God's love face considerable skepticism.

4. Experiential Challenges: The presence of suffering, war, and evil in the world raises profound questions about the nature of God's love. How can a loving God allow such atrocities? These difficult experiences can lead to a crisis of faith regarding God's love.

5. Biblical Oversimplification: Within the Christian community, there is a tendency to simplify the complexities of God's love, neglecting the rich nuances present in Scripture.

B. Some Different Ways the Bible Speaks of the Love of God

To better understand God's love, it's essential to explore the various dimensions through which the Bible articulates it:

1. Intra-Trinitarian Love: The unique love shared between the Father and the Son lays the groundwork for our understanding of love itself, serving as an ultimate model for human relationships.

2. Providential Love: God's love is evident in His ongoing provision and care for creation, demonstrating a loving nature that extends to all living beings.

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3. **Salvific Love:** Highlighted in passages like John 3:16, God's desire for humanity's redemption reveals a love aimed at healing a morally flawed world.

4. **Particular Love for the Elect:** God exhibits a special, selective love for His chosen ones, as illustrated by His affection for Israel and the church, emphasizing a deeper relational aspect.

5. **Conditional Love:** God's love can also be understood through a lens of conditions, where obedience and faithfulness of His followers play a crucial role in maintaining the relationship with Him.

C. Three Preliminary Observations on These Distinctive Ways of Talking About the Love of God

When discussing the love of God, it is vital to approach it with care and depth:

1. **Avoiding Absolutization:** Isolating one aspect of God's love could lead to theological distortions. Each expression of love contributes to a fuller understanding of who God is.

2. **Interconnected Love:** The different ways in which God's love is

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manifested should be seen as interrelated rather than contradictory.

Understanding these connections is essential to grasping God's complete character.

3. Reevaluating Evangelical Clichés: Common phrases about God's love might not fully reflect scriptural truths. For example, while His love for the elect can be interpreted as unconditional, the dynamic of love towards His people necessitates an understanding of obedience and relational obligation.

Conclusion

A faithful and comprehensive understanding of God's love requires an engaging with biblical texts that reveals the complexities and implications of this fundamental doctrine. This nuanced exploration is essential to avoid distortions and embrace the fullness of God's character as revealed in Scripture.

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Chapter 2 Summary: GOD IS LOVE

Chapter 2: God is Love

The affirmation "God is love," as expressed in the letters of John (4:8, 16), conveys the profound and extraordinary nature of God's love towards humanity, particularly in its waywardness. To fully appreciate this concept, a deeper exploration beyond mere vocabulary is essential.

A. Understanding Love: Missteps in Analysis

Traditionally, discussions surrounding divine love have hinged on Greek word distinctions, especially the dichotomy established by Anders Nygren between **agapao** (willful love) and other forms such as **eros** (romantic love) and **philia** (brotherly love). While some argue that **agapao** signifies a higher, non-emotional form of love, this perspective faces increasing scrutiny for several reasons:

1. **Linguistic Complexity:** The Greek terms for love do not fit neatly into emotional versus non-emotional categories.
2. **Biblical Contexts:** The Septuagint—a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible—features **agapao** in situations that do not necessitate a

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noble interpretation.

3. **The Gospels' Usage:** Both *agapao* and *philia* convey God's emotions towards Jesus without indicating varying emotional depths.
4. **Pauline Insights:** In Paul's writings, *agapao* does not consistently denote selfless love, indicating a nuanced understanding of the term.
5. **Richness of 'Love' in English:** Just as in Greek, the English word "love" encompasses a spectrum of meanings shaped by context.
6. **Christian Love:** Love shouldn't be narrowly defined as voluntary altruism, as self-sacrifice can occur without the presence of genuine affection.
7. **Historical Interpretations:** Traditional theological views often depict divine love as emotionally detached, skewing our understanding of God's true nature.

B. Towards a Proper Understanding: Scripture in Context

To accurately comprehend God's love, it is imperative to analyze related scriptural texts, especially considering the dynamics of love within the Trinity, as illustrated in passages like John 5:16-30.

In this narrative, Jesus proclaims his actions mirror those of the Father, hinting at a unique relational and functional bond with God. This statement yields several key insights:

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1. **Dependence and Authority:** Jesus articulates his complete reliance on the Father, displaying profound subordination without negating his divine authority.
2. **Father-Son Relationship:** The Father's love for the Son establishes a distinctive connection, wherein the Son receives knowledge from the Father, emphasizing a love that fosters revelation.
3. **Obedience as Revelation:** This obedient relationship allows the Son to unveil God to humanity in a perfect manner.
4. **Foundation of Divine Love:** The love between the Father and the Son undergirds all other expressions of God's love, forming a critical basis for understanding His love for humanity.

C. Synthesis and Reflection on Divine Love

The term "the Son" encompasses both the pre-incarnate and incarnate Christ, reflecting an eternal and dynamic love between the Father and the Son that fundamentally characterizes God's essence. This divine love embodies an orientation toward others, contrasting with portrayals of a self-centered deity.

The relationship dynamics illustrate the functional but not essential subordination of the Son to the Father, reinforcing their equality in essence.

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Christ's embodiment of obedience serves as a model for believers, emphasizing that divine love manifests through personal relationships grounded in both obedience and friendship.

Ultimately, this exploration of intra-Trinitarian love reveals a God who is deeply engaged with creation, inviting believers into a relationship steeped in friendship rather than servitude. Through the lens of salvation, God's love becomes vividly apparent, shedding light on the depth and richness of divine affection that believers are invited to experience and understand.

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Chapter 3 Summary: GOD'S LOVE AND GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

In the chapter titled "God's Love and God's Sovereignty," D.A. Carson delves into the intricate relationship between the doctrine of God's love and His sovereignty, presenting a comprehensive framework to understand these core theological concepts.

Introduction

Carson sets the stage by emphasizing the necessity of understanding God's love in conjunction with His sovereignty and transcendence. He organizes his discussion into three main points, providing a holistic view of how these attributes interact.

A. The Affective Element in God's Love

Carson begins by challenging the view that God's love is purely intellectual or devoid of emotional depth. Referencing the book of Hosea, he illustrates God's profound affection for Israel, highlighting God's willingness to offer grace and the promise of restoration despite Israel's unfaithfulness. This portrayal accentuates that divine love encompasses genuine emotions, such as grief and compassion, which stem from God's unchanging and immutable nature. Carson argues that these emotional responses do not contradict God's

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sovereignty; rather, they enrich our understanding of His character.

B. The Sovereignty and Transcendence of God

- 1. God's Sovereignty:** Carson asserts that God's sovereignty is all-encompassing, influencing both the grand events of the cosmos and the minutiae of individual lives. Rather than a distant deity, God actively governs His creation.
- 2. Election:** The concept of election is crucial within this framework, as it reflects God's decision to choose certain individuals and communities for salvation. This choice underscores the steadfast nature of God's love and divine purpose.
- 3. Human Responsibility:** Introducing the idea of compatibilism, Carson presents a balanced view where human free will coexists with divine sovereignty. He illustrates this with biblical narratives, such as the betrayal of Joseph by his brothers and Christ's crucifixion, where human actions, even when malevolent, ultimately fulfill God's good plans.
- 4. Immutability:** Carson emphasizes God's unchanging essence, assuring believers of the fulfillment of His promises. Although God dynamically interacts with humanity, His essential nature remains constant.

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5. Responses to Modern Views: The chapter also addresses modern theological challenges, such as process theology and the "open" view of God. Carson defends the biblical coherence of God's immutability and active involvement in the world, reaffirming that such a view does not diminish His sovereignty.

C. A Rightly Constrained Impassibility

Carson further explores God's emotional nature in relation to His sovereignty. He argues against reducing God's love to mere anthropathism (the attribution of human emotions to non-human entities), instead positing that God's love is a conscious choice, emanating from His perfect character. This understanding asserts that God's love remains independent and sovereign, rather than reactive or contingent upon humanity's qualities.

Carson concludes by affirming that God's love is not derived from the worthiness of its recipients but rather is a reflection of God's own character. This divine love empowers believers to love selflessly, mirroring the profound love they receive from God. The chapter eloquently encapsulates the idea that while God's love is emotionally engaging, it is anchored in His sovereign and transcendent essence, highlighting the harmonious balance between these crucial aspects of His nature.



Chapter 4: GOD'S LOVE AND GOD'S WRATH

In this chapter, D.A. Carson delves into the intricate relationship between God's love and His wrath, clarifying common misconceptions about divine forgiveness and emotions associated with sin. He emphasizes that understanding these concepts is essential in grasping the nature of salvation.

A. The Love of God and the Wrath of God

Carson begins by examining the intense language employed in the Bible to describe God's wrath, highlighting its seriousness as a reflection of His holiness confronted by sin. He argues that minimizing God's wrath undermines the significance of His holiness, suggesting that wrath is not an irrational outburst but a justified reaction to sin.

The chapter addresses a prevalent belief that God can love sinners while hating their sin. Carson counters this by asserting that God's wrath is directed at both sin and the sinner, a complexity that human emotions do not fully capture. Unlike humanity, where love and wrath can be compartmentalized, God's nature allows for these qualities to coexist as responses to rebellion.

Carson further dispels the notion that the Old Testament portrays a more wrathful God compared to the loving Jesus depicted in the New Testament.

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Instead, he points out that both love and wrath are consistently present throughout Scripture, culminating in the crucifixion. The cross serves as a profound demonstration of both God's love and His wrath, uniting them through the sacrificial act of Jesus.

B. The Love of God and the Intent of the Atonement

Transitioning to the atonement, Carson critiques the doctrine of "limited atonement," proposing a reinterpretation as "definite atonement," which refers to its effectiveness for the elect while remaining sufficient for all. He stresses the importance of understanding God's intent behind Christ's death, suggesting that both Arminians and Calvinists can agree on the dual sufficiency and effectiveness of atonement for different audiences.

C. The Love of God for the World

The chapter continues by addressing the tension in Scripture regarding God's love for the world contrasted with the exhortation for believers to avoid loving the world. Carson clarifies that God's love embodies sacrificial action rather than conformity to sin. Believers, therefore, are called to reflect this divine love through their actions, primarily by sharing the Gospel.

D. The Love of God and the People of God

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1. Parental Love

Carson illustrates God's love for His people by comparing it to parental love, encompassing elements of discipline and the responsibility to remain in His love.

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