

First published in Loveland Reporter Herald as Guest Opinion article 5/30/2026

By Don Overcash

Tough, honest love is still love

Biblical love does not avoid truth; it speaks with grace, courage, and a concern for another's good.

We live in a moment where “love” is often reduced to one simple rule: never make anyone uncomfortable. To challenge someone’s choices, even gently, is often called judgmental. To stay silent is praised as compassion or tolerance. But that definition of love comes at a cost. When affirmation replaces truth and comfort becomes the highest good, we risk confusing love with approval and leaving people on paths that ultimately bring them harm.

That tension appears in everyday life. A parent hesitates to correct a child because discipline feels harsh. A friend sees another drifting into destructive habits but says nothing to avoid conflict. A loved one notices a moral or spiritual struggle yet remains quiet in the name of being “supportive.” A church member sees someone drifting morally and spiritually yet stays silent to avoid tension. In each case, silence may feel kind, but it can also be a way of protecting personal comfort.

The Bible offers a much fuller picture of love. Scripture does not define love as simple agreement, but as a commitment to another person’s true good. Proverbs 27:6 says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” A loving friend may say something hard to hear, while a flattering voice may leave us comfortable and deceived. Honest love may sting for a moment, but it aims to heal.

That is why tough love is not cruelty. It is the courage to tell the truth when silence would be easier. It is the willingness to warn when danger is near. It is the refusal to bless what God calls harmful. In 1 Corinthians 13:6, Scripture says love “does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.” Real love cannot celebrate what bends or breaks a person’s life.

This matters because sin is not a small matter. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death.” If those who follow Jesus believe that turning away from God leads to destruction, then refusing to speak when someone is headed that direction is not kindness. It may feel tolerant, but it is not loving. Love cares too much to remain indifferent.

At the same time, biblical love must never become harshness. Galatians 6:1 tells believers that if someone is caught in wrongdoing, he should be restored “in a spirit of gentleness.” Ephesians 4:15 calls us to speak “the truth in love.” Truth without love becomes cold and severe. Love without truth becomes shallow and sentimental. The life of a disciple calls for both.

Jesus showed that balance beautifully. In John 8, he refused to join the crowd ready to condemn the woman caught in adultery, revealing mercy. Yet he also told her, “Go, and from now on sin no more.” He did not shame her, but neither did he affirm what was destroying her. His love was gentle enough to forgive and strong enough to call her forward.

This is where agape love matters. Self-love avoids difficult conversations because they carry a cost. It protects comfort, reputation, and emotional ease. Agape love, by contrast, is willing to risk misunderstanding for another person’s good. Biblical tough love is not harshness; it is agape love in action. It speaks with honesty because it seeks healing, not merely peace.

In a culture that prizes affirmation above all else, disciples of Jesus are called to something better, not they are called to something much different. They are called to love with courage, humility, and tenderness. Tough love is not about winning arguments or policing people. It is about caring enough to tell the truth with grace.

The real question is not whether truth may make people uncomfortable. The real question is whether we love them enough to care where their path will lead. In a world, including among believers, that often prefers to deny or redefine sin to fit cultural norms, hope remains. God is light, and when we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That is how disciples of Jesus remain salt and light in a darkened world.