

A Test Of Assurance: How May We Know Whether We Love God?

By Thomas Watson (Puritan preacher & author 1620-1686)

He who loves God desires His presence. Lovers cannot be long apart, they soon have their fainting fits, for want of a sight of the object of their love. A soul deeply in love with God desires the enjoyment of Him in His ordinances, in word, prayer, and sacraments. David was ready to faint away and die when he had not a sight of God. "My soul fainteth for God" (Psalm 84:2). Such as care not for ordinances, but say, "When will the Sabbath be over?" plainly reveal their lack of love to God. He who loves God, does not love sin. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil" (Psalm 97:10). The love of God, and the love of sin, can no more mix together than iron and clay. Every sin loved, strikes at the being of God; but he who loves God, has a hatred of sin. He who would part two lovers is a hateful person. God and the believing soul are two lovers; sin parts between them, therefore the soul is implacably set against it. By this try your love to God. How could Delilah say she loved Samson, when she entertained correspondence with the Philistines, who were his mortal enemy? He who loves God is not much in love with anything else. His love is very cool to worldly things. His love to God moves swiftly, as the sun in the firmament; to the world it moves slowly, as the sun on the dial.

The love of the world eats out the heart of religion; it chokes good affections, as earth puts out fire. The world was a dead thing to Paul. "I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me" (Galatians 6:14). In Paul we may see both the picture and pattern of a mortified man. He that loves God, uses the world but chooses God. The world engages him, but God delights and satisfies him. He says as David, "God my exceeding joy," the gladness or cream of my joy (Psalm 43:4). He who loves God cannot live without Him. Things we love we cannot be without. A man can do without music or flowers, but not food; so a soul deeply in love with God looks upon himself as undone without Him. "Hide not thy face from me, lest I be like them that go down into the pit" (Psalm 143:7). He says as Job, "I went mourning without the sun" (Job 30:28). I have starlight, I want the Sun of Righteousness; I enjoy not the sweet presence of my God. Is God our chief good, and we cannot live without him? Alas! how do they show they have no love to God who can do well enough without Him! Let them have corn and oil, and you shall never hear them complain of the lack of God. He who loves God will be at any pains to get Him. What pains the merchant takes, what hazards he runs, to have a rich return from the Indies! Jacob loved Rachel, and he could endure the heat by day, and the frost by night, that he might enjoy her. A soul that loves God will take any pains for the fruition of Him. "My soul follows hard after God" (Psalm 63:6).

Love is *pondus animae* (Augustine). It is the weight which sets the clock going. It is much in prayer, weeping, fasting; it strives as in agony, that he

may obtain him whom his soul loves. Plutarch reports of the Gauls, an ancient people of France, that after they had tasted the sweet wine of Italy, they never rested till they had arrived at that country. He who is in love with God, never rests till he has a part in Him. "I sought him whom my soul loveth." (Song of Solomon 3:2). How can they say they love God, who are not industrious in the use of means to obtain Him? "A slothful man hides his hand in his bosom" (Proverbs 19:24). He is not in agony, but lethargy. If Christ and salvation would drop as a ripe fig into his mouth, he would be content to have them; but he is loath to put him himself to too much trouble. Does he love his friend, who will not undertake a journey to see him? He who loves God prefers Him before estate and life.

1) Before estate. "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things" (Philippians 3:8). Who that loves a rich jewel would not part with a flower for it? Galeacius, Marcus of Vico, parted with a fair estate to enjoy God in his pure ordinances. When a Jesuit persuaded him to return to his popish religion in Italy, promising him a large sum of money, he said, "Let their money perish with them who esteem all the gold in the world worth one day's communion with Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit."

2) Before life. "They loved not their lives to the death" (Revelation 12:11). Love to God carries the soul above the love of life and the fear of death. He who loves God loves His favorites, the saints (1 John 5:1). To love a man for his grace and the more we see of God in him, the more we love him, that is an infallible sign of love to God.

The wicked pretend to love God, but hate and persecute His image. Does he love his prince who abuses his statue, or tears his picture? They seem indeed to show great reverence to saints departed; they have great reverence for Saint Paul, and Saint Stephen, and Saint Luke; they canonize dead saints, but persecute living saints; and do they love God? Can it be imagined that he loves God who hates His children because they are like God? If Christ were alive again, he would not escape a second persecution.

If we love God we cannot but be fearful of dishonoring Him, as the more a child loves his father the more he is afraid to displease him, and we weep and mourn when we have offended him. "Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75). Peter might well think that Christ dearly loved him when He took him up to the mount where He was transfigured, and showed him the glory of heaven in a vision. That Peter should deny Christ after he had received such signal tokens of His love, this broke his heart with grief. "He wept bitterly." Are our eyes dropping tears of grief for sin against God? It is a blessed evidence of our love to God; and such shall find mercy. "He shows mercy to thousands of them that love Him." Use. Let us be lovers of God. We love our food and shall we not love Him that gives it? All the joy we hope for in heaven is in God; and shall not He who shall be our joy then, be our love now?

It is a saying of Augustine, Annon pana satis magna est non amare te? Is it not punishment enough Lord, not to love thee? And again, Animam meam in odia

haberem. I would hate my own soul if I did not find it loving God.

This writing of Puritan divine Thomas Watson was first published in his classic work A Body of Divinity in 1692. A few archaic words have been changed.

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