

“GOD IS LOVE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: I John 4:7-12, 16

Introduction.

Tonight, we come to the conclusion of our sermon series on John's first letter. For those who like statistics this is sermon number 20 on these five chapters. If you think that's a lot, consider the great preacher, D.M. Lloyd-Jones, who preached 67 sermons on this letter. I have those sermons in five volumes.

In one of those sermons he digs deeply into one of the things John emphasizes the most in his letter, that God is love. I decided to do the same as a way of wrapping up and summarizing our time in this great little love letter from the apostle John.

What can be more important than knowing the love of God? John certainly doesn't think there is anything more important. In the short section of John, I just read he uses love 18 times.

John wants us to know something and he wants us to know it so that our joy may be complete (I John 1:4). He wants us to know the love of God.

He wants our knowledge to be objective and subjective, grounded in truth and doctrine, and at the same time experiential, felt, personal, practical, living. Mind and heart will and emotion.

Six tests to know if you love of God.

[See D.M. Lloyd-Jones, The Love of God, based on I John 4:16]

Here are six tests to know you know the love of God for you.

First, you know God's love if you have a strong and increasing realization that you owe everything to Jesus, you are completely dependent on Him, that apart from Him you are nothing, have nothing, can do nothing. His perfect work on the cross is your salvation, hope and future.

I John 4:9-10 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

We know we love God when we love Jesus. The love of God can only be truly known and felt through our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the fullest and most complete expression of God's love, the direct manifestation of the real nature of the love of God. It is tangible and real, there is nothing theoretical about it. It is a love that holds nothing back.

Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

If people talk about God being a God of love and all about love, but they make no mention of Jesus Christ, then they don't know God and they don't know His love. Anything that leaves out Christ is not Christian.

Second, you know the love of God for you when you know that God is not against you, and that He is actually for you. These are two sides of the same coin.

People who don't know the love of God often have a sense God is against them. They blame God for all that is wrong in the world and in their lives, they feel God is unfair, they say He hasn't been there for them or He has abandoned them. They feel He is only a judge, never a father. You know the love of God when you don't have this sense about God.

You know the love of God when you really believe Romans 8:32 is true, that God is for you. You believe Ephesians 1:5, that God really did choose you from before the foundations of the earth. You believe Habakkuk 3:17 that God rejoices over you and delights in you.

You don't have a sense that you have displeased God to the point that He doesn't want to have anything to do with you anymore. You know the love of God when you have a sense in your gut of God's incredible kindness toward you, that He is a Father-God who cares for you and cares about you, that He truly loves you and can't stop loving you.

I John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Third, you know the love of God when you have a real sense your sins really are all forgiven. You know your sins, you remember them, but you know in the depths of your heart when you confess and repent God remembers them know more.

With the Psalmist you know the love of God when you are able to say:

Psalm 32:1-2, 5 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit, there is no deceit.
5 I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

You know your sin and you can't believe God would forgive it all, but you know He does and that He loves you.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Fourth, you know the love of God when this knowledge of His great forgiveness leads to a deep sense of gratitude and thanksgiving.

You are in awe that God would send His only Son to die on a cross not just for the world but for you. You can't get over the fact that God opened your blind eyes and softened your cold, hard heart to the reality of His grace and love.

You are filled with gratitude, with a desire to pay back even though there is no way you can. You are glad to worship Him, glad to praise Him, often saying thank you, over and over again. When you pray it's not just asking, but there is much thanking. This is proof you know the love of God and have experienced it in a real way.

And not only do you want to praise Him and thank Him and tell you how you feel about Him, but you want to tell others. We love to talk about what we love, whether sports or a vacation or a person. We praise our spouse or kids to others. We want others to affirm and agree and love what we love. True love for God can't be silent.

Fifth, you know you know the love of God when you love what He loves and hate what He hates, again two sides of the same coin. You are acting like God and reflecting God when you do both of those.

It is like the saying the enemy of your friend is your enemy. Whatever hurts your friend, hurts you. What is an enemy of God is your enemy, Satan and sin. You hate what He

hates, you call evil what He calls evil. The love of God is growing in you when hatred of your sin is growing in you.

We will grieve over whatever God grieves over. We fear dishonoring and displeasing God. We will be like Peter after he denied Jesus, he wept bitterly over his sin.

We will hate whatever hinders our relationship, or separates us, or comes between us and the one we love. Those who love God don't love the world.

Psalm 97:10 O you who love the Lord, hate evil!

Psalm 119:128 I hate every false way.

I John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

I John 5:4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

The realization of God's great love for us doesn't just make us hate sin and sinful desires, but it stirs up a greater desire to live for God and obey His word and do what pleases Him. Not to get mercy or grace, but as a response to the mercy and grace we have been given. Do you desire to live a more holy and godly life? Maybe you aren't very well, but do you desire to? Do you want to love and keep God's commandments? This desire can only come from God.

Do you have regret that you don't love God more and follow His way more? Are you sad about your lack of love for God? Do you regret how little spiritual progress you seem to be making? All of this is proof of a love for God.

Think about it. A non-believer never for a minute thinks his love for God is weak or cold. He could care less. It is the believer, the one who loves God who feels his love is weak or cold, that he has missed the mark and fallen short, who grieves over his spiritual poverty and lack of progress. That you feel that way is proof of the Holy Spirit of God in you and the love of God in you. Love is never satisfied with where it is, it always feels inadequate and insufficient.

I don't have regrets I don't love some stranger I don't know more. But I do have regrets I don't love my wife and kids more. That is proof of where my affections lie.

Do you love what God loves? Do you love God's favorite things? Do you love His Son and His Spirit, do you love His Word, do you love His children, His people, His Church?

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Sixth, the last proof that you know the love of God and love God, is you want to hear what I am talking about, you want to hear more about God and how to know Him and love Him. Non-believers think everything I am saying is just blah, blah, blah. They are bored by anything to do with God. They are spiritually dead. And the unspiritual have no interest in spiritual things.

If you have any interest at all, and it might be very small, but nevertheless it is there, then that is love for God. It might not be a bonfire, it might not be a propane torch, it might not even be a candle. It might just be a smoldered wick, like a punk you use to light fireworks. But that smoldering wick was lit by God, not you, and it is capable of starting a much bigger fire.

Pray like the Psalmist:

Psalm 42:1-2 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

John 7:37:38 "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

Our greatest calling in this life is to be utterly captivated by God's love for us in Jesus Christ. This is the highest and the best.

Implications and application.

Do you know the love of God in your soul? Do you know the love of God that sent His Son to die for you and rescue you and redeem you from your sin and make you His

chosen and adopted child? Do you know the depths and lengths to which He has gone to show you His love and make it real and personal?

Can you say, “Yes, I know in my heart the love of God”?

Do you look forward to an eternity in which the infinite riches of God’s love and grace will be revealed to you and it will be cause for infinite praise and worship and love and joy?

The love of God is like the Pacific Ocean, you can get in it, you can swim in it, you can know and experience it, but you can never know and experience all of it. We cannot plumb the depths of it. One of my favorite images of this is painted in an old hymn.

Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made,
Were ev’ry stalk on earth a quill and ev’ry man a scribe by trade
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole tho stretched from sky to sky.
(The Love of God by Frederick M. Lehman)

All of eternity will not be long enough for God to show us the unfathomable and unmeasurable and unsearchable riches of His love and grace in kindness toward us in Christ (Ephesians 2:7).

The path toward peace and joy in this life, in the midst of all the evil and the devils work and the effects of the fall and sin, is to know the love of God. His perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18), doubt and anxiety. When we know that, then we can say with Peter:

I Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, we praise you for the greatness of your love and for the incredible reflection of that love in Your Son, our Savior, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world. We rejoice at your gift. May your great love to us make our faith in Christ unshakable, our love more unconditional, and our witness more bold.