

How Shall I know that the Lord Loves Me?

~Other Speakers S-Z: Thomas Shepard:

Quest. How shall I know that the Lord loves me, despite my sin?

Ans. 1. If the Lord loves thee for his name's sake, it will draw thee to that fellowship with itself, that whatever thou lackest thou wilt seek for it hence, by presenting that name of God, that for his own sake he would supply. I know the Lord loves for Christ's sake; but why should Christ help for his name's sake? For thus many hypocrites think, when they see God's anger against them for their sin, they seek to remove sin, and when that is done, think God is at peace, and now all is well. They see the Lord is delighted with the obedience of his people; hence fall to that work, and now think the Lord is pleased with them. But if ever the Lord loves any man, he will first stop his mouth, whether Jew or Gentile, (Rom. 3:19,) and make him, on his knees, know there is no reason for it, nay, all reason against it. Now, has not the Lord brought thee to this? And hence, having nothing to quench God's anger but Christ, hast held up him before God; and having nothing to move Christ, hast held up his name before him, and here hast rested thy wearied heart looking to him, if any grace be begun in thee, that he would perfect it; if none, that he would begin it; if unfit and unworthy, to prepare thee for it, only for his own good pleasure. This is one evidence of it. As it is in some seals, you can hardly perceive in the seal what is engraven there, but set it on wax, you may see it evidently. So here, hardly can you see the Lord's love for his own sake; if thou cleavest with dearest affection to this love for its own sake, there thou art safe. Prov. 18:10, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower," etc.; and this is not only at first conversion, but ever after all duties, all enlargements. Ezek. 16:ult. And this does evidence love.

1. Because, if thou hadst the righteousness of angels, thou wouldst think it a good evidence; but this of Christ is a thousand times dearer.

2. This is a setting of God against himself, i.e., to answer himself; and hence saints, in all their straits and sorrows, hither had recourse. I speak not now of temporal blessings, but of everlasting love, and all the fruits of it, that here it hangs. Now, I say, you are built in a rock higher than all powers of darkness; now a key is put into thy hand to unlock all God's treasure; now thou art in the very lap of love, wrapped up in it, when here thy heart rests; and therefore, if this be thus, see it, and wonder his name has moved him to love me.

3. You shall find this, if the Lord for his name's sake loves thee, there is not any carriage or passage of providence of him to thee, but he gets himself a name first or last by it; for if this be God's purpose, every passage of providence is but a means to this end. Hence he will attain this end by every act of his providence toward thee. Hence you shall find that those very sins that dishonor his name, he will even by them (and if by them, by all things else) get himself a name; he will be so far from casting thee out of his love, that he will do thee good by them. Those very sins that God damns others for, he will make to humble thee, empty thee.

Pharisees persecuted Christ, and lost all for it; Paul was so, and it humbled him all his life — "Not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God; "and it made him lay up all his wealth in mercy — "I was received to mercy." 1 Tim. 1. Mary sins much, and God forgives much, and she loves much; others sinned much, and God hardened much. Judas betrays Christ and repents, and hangs himself, and flies from him; Peter denies him and weeps, and hence he is the first that preaches him. And this is certain, in the best hypocrite, sins left in him either never make him better, but blind and harden him, and he has his distinctions of infirmity, etc., that he slights them day by day, till all his days are run out; or if any good, it is no more than Judas or Cain, some legal terrors, or other light flashes of comfort; but to be more humble indeed, etc., this he finds not.

Now, is it not so with thee? Doth not thy weakness strengthen thee, with Paul? Doth not thy blindness make thee cry for light? And those cries have been heard; out of darkness God has brought light. Thou hast felt venom and risings of heart against Christ; and do they not make thee loathe thyself more, that thou thinkest never any so beholding to grace? Do not thy falls into sin make thee more weary of it, watchful against it, long to be rid of it? And so sin abounds, but grace abounds. Why should this be so? For his name's sake, because he will love thee; hence it is so great and unmatchable, that he will make thy poison thy food, thy death thy life, thy damnation salvation, thy very greatest enemies thy greatest friends. And hence Mr. Fox said he thanked God for his sins more than his good works. I have marveled at God's dealings with his people; they depart, and stay long, and care not for returning again; in that time a mighty power teaches, humbles, brings back, when they never thought of it. O, the reason is, God will have his name. Now, if thus, your assurance will be strong and constant; but, if you build thus, I have done this, etc., I have that, your assurance will not stand; therefore

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look and see if it be not thus with you.