

Evidences of the Lack of Love to God

~Other Speakers A-F: Samuel Davies:

Evidences of the Lack of Love to God

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"But I know you—that you have not the love of God in you." John 5:42

Nothing seems to be a more natural duty for a creature—nothing is more essential to true religion—nothing more necessary as a principle of obedience, or a qualification for everlasting happiness—than the love of God; and it is universally confessed to be so. Whatever is the object, or whatever is the religion—all acknowledge that the love of God is an essential ingredient in it.

Should we consider only the excellency of the divine Being, and the numerous and endearing obligations of all reasonable creatures to him—we would naturally think that the love of God must be universal among mankind; and not one heart can be destitute of that sacred, filial passion. But, alas! if we regard the evidence of Scripture or observation, we must conclude the contrary. The love of God is a rare thing among his own offspring in our degenerate world.

Here in my text, a company of Jews, highly privileged above all nations then upon earth, and making large professions of regard to God, are charged with the lack of his love; charged by one who thoroughly knew them and could not be deceived. "I know you—that you have not the love of God in you."

But, blessed be God, his love is not entirely extinct and lost—even on our guilty globe. There are some hearts that feel the sacred flame, even among the degenerate sons of Adam.

These two sorts of people widely differ in their inward disposition; and God, who knows their hearts, makes a proper distinction between them. But in this world they are mixed—mixed in families, and in public assemblies; and sometimes the eyes of their fellow mortals can discern but little difference. And they themselves, very often mistake their own true character, and rank themselves in that class to which they do not belong! While they continue in this mistake, the one cannot possess the pleasure either of enjoyment or hope; and the other cannot receive those alarms of danger which alone can rouse them out of their ruinous security, nor earnestly use means for the implantation of the sacred principle of divine love in their souls. To remove this mistake, is therefore a necessary and benevolent attempt; benevolent not only to the former sort—but even to those who are unwilling to submit to the search, and who shut their eyes against the light of all conviction.

I am afraid many of my hearers, especially in places where I have not frequently officiated, are excited to attend by curiosity, and not by an eager thirst for pious instruction. And while hearing, they are either staring with eager expectation to hear something new and strange—or they are lying in wait to catch at some word or sentiment to furnish them with matter for cavil or ridicule; or they stand upon their guard, lest they should be caught and ensnared inadvertently to a party, or seized with the infection of some false doctrine.

And thus all my labors and their attendance are in vain; and immortal souls perish in the midst of the means of salvation!

But I tell you, once for all, you need not indulge an eager curiosity; for I have nothing new to communicate to you, unless it be a new thing to you to hear that the love of God is essential to a Christian, and an absolutely necessary pre-requisite to your salvation; and that you cannot be lovers of God, while your disposition and conduct have the evident marks of enmity or disaffection to him.

Or, if cavil or ridicule is an agreeable entertainment to any of you—then you are not likely to be gratified: for the things I have to say are too plain and convictive to be cavilled at by men of sense and candor, and too serious and important to be laughed at.

Nor need you be cautiously upon your guard; for I assure you, once for all, I have something else to do, than to come here to hang out baits to catch graceless proselytes to a party, or to propagate the infection of some false opinion. I come here to use my poor endeavors to build up such of you as love God, in your most holy faith; and to reconcile such of you to him as are now destitute of his love. This is my professed design: and when you find that the drift and tendency of my labors here aim at something opposite to this, pronounce my anathema,

and reject me with just abhorrence. This I not only allow—but invite and charge you to do!

The subject now before us is this: Since it is evident that some, under the profession of religion, are destitute of true love of God; and since it is of the utmost importance that we should know our true character in this respect, let us inquire what are those MARKS whereby we may know whether the love of God dwells in us or not. Let us follow this inquiry with impartiality and self-application; and receive the conviction which may result from it, whether for or against us.

Now it is evident that the love of God does not dwell in you:

if the native enmity of your hearts against him has not been subdued;
if your thoughts and affections do not fix upon him with peculiar endearment, above all other things;
if you do not give him and his interests the preference of all things that may come in competition with him;
if you do not labor for conformity to him;
if you do not love to converse with him in his ordinances; and
if you do not make it the great business of your lives to please him by keeping his commandments.

First, The love of God is not in you—if the native enmity of your hearts against him has not been subdued.

This will appear evident to everyone who believes the Scripture account of human nature, in its present degenerate state. By nature we are "children of wrath," (Ephesians 2:3:) and certainly the children of wrath cannot be the lovers of God, while such. "That which is born of the flesh—is flesh," John 3:6. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Romans 8:7. And hence it is, that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Romans 8:8. Paul gives this character of the Colossians, in their natural state; and there is no reason to confine it to them: that they "were once alienated, and enemies in their minds by wicked works." Col. 1:21.

In short, it is evident from the uniform tenor of the gospel, that it is a dispensation for reconciling enemies and rebels—to God. Hence it is so often expressly called the ministry of reconciliation; and ministers are represented as ambassadors for Christ, whose business it is to beseech men, in his stead, to be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

But reconciliation presupposes variance and alienation to God. From these things, it is evident, that, according to the Scripture account, the present state of nature is a state of disaffection and hostility against God. The authority of Scripture must be sufficient evidence to us, who call ourselves Christians. But this is not all the evidence we have in this case. This is a sensible matter of fact and experience. For I appeal to all of you that have the least self-acquaintance, whether you are not conscious that your disposition, ever since you can remember, and consequently your natural disposition, has habitually been indisposed and disaffected, or, which is the same, lukewarm and indifferent—towards the blessed God—whether you have had the same delight in him and his service, as in many other things—whether your earliest affections fixed upon him, with all the reverence and endearment of a filial heart. You cannot but know—that the answer to such inquiries will be against you, and convince you that you are by nature enemies to the God that made you, however much you have flattered yourselves to the contrary.

Now, it is most evident, that since you are by nature enemies to God, that your natural enmity to him must be subdued; or, in the language of the New Testament, you must be reconciled to him—before you can be lovers of him. And have you ever felt such a change of disposition? Such a change of disposition could not be wrought in you while you were asleep, or in a state of insensibility.

I will not say, that every one who has experienced this, is assured that it is a real sufficient change, and that he is now a sincere lover of God; but this I will say, and this is obvious to common sense—that every one who has experienced this, is assured that he has felt a great change, of some kind or other, and that his disposition towards God is not the same now as it once was. This, therefore, may be a decisive evidence to you: If divine grace has never changed your disposition towards God—but you still continue the same, you may be sure the love of God is not in you.

And if this change has been wrought, you have felt it. It was preceded by a glaring conviction of your enmity, and the utmost horror and detestation of yourselves upon the account of it. It was attended with affecting views of the attractive excellencies of God, and of your obligations to love him; and with those tender and affectionate emotions of the heart towards him, which the passion of love always includes. And it was followed with a cheerful universal dedication of yourselves to God and his service. And does conscience (for to that I now

address) speak in your favor in this inquiry? Listen to its voice—**as the voice of God.**

Secondly, It is evident, that you have not the love of God in you—if your thoughts and affections do not fix upon him with affectionate endearment above all other things.

This is so obvious to common sense, that I need not take up your time with Scripture quotations: for you would not have the face to profess to a person that you loved him—if, in the mean time, you have told him that he had little or no share in your thoughts and affections. You know by experience, that your affectionate thoughts will eagerly pursue the object of your love over wide-extended countries and oceans: and that in proportion to the degree of your love.

Now if you love God sincerely at all—then you love him supremely; you love him above all people and things in the universe. To offer subordinate love to supreme perfection and excellency, what a gross affront! It is essential to the love of God, that it be prevalent, or habitually uppermost in your souls. Now if every degree of love will engage a proportionable degree of your affectionate thoughts, can you imagine, that you may love God in the highest degree—and yet hardly ever have one affectionate thought of him? Can you love him above all—and yet think of him with less endearment and frequency than of many other things that you love in an inferior degree? Certainly, it is impossible.

And is it not as evident to some of you, as almost anything you know of yourselves, that your affectionate thoughts are not frequently fixed upon the blessed God? Nay, are you not conscious, that your thoughts fly off from this object, and pursue a thousand other things with more eagerness and pleasure? Certainly, by a little inquiry—you may easily find out the beaten road of your thoughts and affections, or their favorite object.

And why will you not push the inquiry to a determination? Is there any matter of daily sensation and experience more plain to some of you than this—that God is not the object of your highest reverential love, and of your eager desires and hopes? Do you not know in your consciences, that you delight more in a thousand other things: nay, that the thoughts of him, and whatever forces serious thoughts of him upon your minds—are disagreeable to you—and that you turn every way to avoid them? Do you not know that you can give your hearts for days and weeks together, to pursue some favorite creature, without once calling them off, to think seriously and affectionately upon the ever-blessed God? Are not even all the arts of self-flattery unable to keep some of you from discovering a fact at once so notorious, and so melancholy?

Well, if this is your case—then never pretend that you love God. You may have many commendable qualities—you may have many splendid appearances of virtue—you may have done many actions materially good: but it is evident to a demonstration, that the love of God—the first principle and root of all true religion and virtue—is not in you.

Thirdly, The love of God is not in you, unless you give him and his interests the preference above all other things.

I have told you already, that if you love God at all in sincerity, you love him above all. And now, I add, as the consequence of this, that if you love him at all, you will give him and his interest the preference before all things that may come in competition with him. You will cleave, with a pious obstinacy, to that which he enjoins upon you, whatever be the consequence: and you will cheerfully resign all your other interests, however dear, when they clash with his.

This you will do, not only in speculation—but in practice. That is, you will not only allow him the chief place in your hearts—but you will show that you do allow him the supremacy there, by your habitual practice. I beg you to examine yourselves by this test: for here lies the dangerous delusion of multitudes. Multitudes find it easy to flatter themselves, that they love God above all his creatures, while, in the meantime, they will hardly part with anything for his sake, that their own imaginary interest recommends to them.

But this is made the decisive test by Christ himself: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:26. By hating these dear relatives, and even life itself, Jesus does not mean positive hatred: for, in a subordinate degree, it is our duty to love them. But he means that every sincere disciple of his must act as if he hated all these—when they come in competition with his infinitely dearer Lord and Savior. That is, he must part with them all, as we do with things that are hateful to us. This was, in fact, the effect of this love in Paul. "But whatever was to my profit—I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss—compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I

have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Phil. 3:7, 8.

Now, perhaps, this trial, in all its extent, may never be your lot: though this is not at all unlikely, if a mongrel race of Indian savages and French papists, by whom your country now bleeds in a thousand veins, should carry their schemes into execution! For popery has always been a bloody, persecuting power, and gained its proselytes by the terror of fire and faggot, and the tortures of the inquisition—and not by argument, or any of the methods adapted to the make of a reasonable being. But though this severe trial should never come in your way—yet, from your conduct in lesser trials—you may judge how you would behave in greater.

Therefore, inquire, when the pleasures of sin—and your duty to God interfere—then which do you part with? When the will of God—and your own will clash—then which do you obey? When the pleasing of God—and the pleasing of men come in competition—then which do you choose? When you must give up with your carnal ease or applause among mortals—or violate your duty to God—then which has most weight with you? When you must deny yourself—or deny your Savior—then which do you submit to?

What is your habitual conduct in such trying circumstances? Do you in such cases give to God and his interests the preference in your practice? If not, your pretended love is reprobated, and appears to be counterfeit. Friends, it is little matter in this case, what you profess, or speculatively believe: but the grand inquiry is—what is your habitual practice? And if you must be judged by this—is it not evident, that some of you have not the love of God in you?

Fourthly, The love of God is not in you—if you do not labor for conformity to him.

Conformity to him—is at once the duty and the peculiar character of every sincere lover of God. "Be holy—as I am holy," (Lev. 19:2; 21:8,) is a duty repeatedly enjoined. And all the heirs of glory are characterized as being "conformed to the image of God's dear Son." Romans 8:29. Indeed, love is naturally an assimilating passion. It is excellency, real or apparent, that we love: and it is natural to imitate excellency. We naturally catch the manner and spirit of those we love. Thus if we sincerely love God—then we shall naturally imitate him—we shall love what he loves—and hate what he hates. We shall imitate his justice, veracity, goodness, and mercy; or, in a word, his holiness. If we love him, nothing will satisfy us until we awake in his likeness.

Now, my friends, does your love stand this test? Are you laboring to copy after so divine a pattern? Have you ever been renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after the image of him who created you? And is it the honest endeavor of your life to be holy in all manner of conversation: to be as holy as God is holy? Can you have the face to pretend that you love him—while you do not desire and labor to be like him? And while there is such an indulged contrariety in your disposition to his? The pretense is delusive and absurd.

Since your conformity to him consists in holiness—then let me beg you to inquire again, Do you delight in holiness? Is it the great business of your life to improve in it? and are your deficiencies, the burden of your hearts, and matter of daily lamentation and repentance to you? Alas! is it not as evident as almost anything you know concerning yourselves, that this is not your habitual character, and, consequently, that the love of God is not in you?

Fifthly, You have not the love of God in you—if you do not delight to converse with him in his ordinances.

I need not tell you, that sincere friends are fond of interviews, and delight in each other's company. But people disaffected to one another, are shy, and strange, and keep away. Now God has been so condescending, as to represent his ordinances as so many places of interview for his people, where they may meet with him, or, in the Scripture phrase, draw near to him, appear before him, and carry on a spiritual fellowship with him. Hence it is, that they delight in his ordinances: that they love to pray, to hear, to meditate, to commemorate the death of Christ, and to draw near to the throne of grace in all the ways in which it is accessible. These appear to them, as not only duties—but privileges; exalted and delightful privileges, which sweeten their pilgrimage through this wilderness, and sometimes transform it into a paradise!

Now, will your love, my friends, stand this test? Have you found it good for you to draw near to God in these institutions? Or are you not indisposed and disaffected to them? Do not some of you generally neglect them? or is not your attendance upon them an insipid, spiritless formality? Have not some of you prayerless closets—prayerless families? And if you attend upon public worship once a week—is it not rather that you may observe an old custom, that you may see and be seen, or that you may transact some temporal business—rather than that you may converse with God and his ordinances? In short, is it not evident, that devotion is not your delight; and consequently not your daily practice?

How then can you pretend, that the love of God dwells in you? What! can you love him—**and yet be so shy of him, so alienated from him, and have no pleasure in drawing near to him, and conversing with him?** This is contrary to the prevailing disposition of every true lover of God. Every true lover of God is of the same spirit with David, who, in his banishment from the house of God, cries out in this affecting strain, "My soul finds rest in God alone!" Psalm 62:1. "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water!" Psalm 63:1. "As the deer pants for streams of water—so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God! When can I go and meet with God!" Psalm 42:1-2. This is certainly your disposition, if his love dwells in you.

Sixthly, The love of God is not in you, unless you make it the great business of your lives to please him by keeping his commandments.

It is natural to us to seek to please those we love; and to obey them with pleasure, if they are invested with authority to command us. But those whom we disaffect, we do not study to please: or if we should be overawed and constrained by their authority to obey their commands, it is with reluctance and regret.

So, my friends, if you sincerely love God, you will habitually keep his commandments, and that with pleasure and delight! But if you can habitually indulge yourselves in willful disobedience in any one instance; or if you yield obedience through constraint to his commands—then it is demonstration against you, that you are destitute of his love. This is as plain as anything in the whole Bible.

"If you love me," says Christ, himself, "you will obey what I command." John 14:15.

"If anyone loves me—he will obey my teaching. He who does not love me—will not obey my teaching." John 14:23, 24.

"You are my friends—if you do whatever I command you." John 15:14.

"This is the love of God," says John, "that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3. That is, keeping his commandments is not grievous—when love is the principle.

You see, my friends, that obedience, cheerful, unconstrained obedience, is the grand test of your love to God. There is more stress laid upon this, in the Word of God, than, perhaps, upon any other—and therefore you should regard it the more.

Now, recollect, is there not at least some favorite **SIN**—which you willfully and knowingly indulge yourselves in? And are there not some self-denying mortifying **DUTIES**—which you dare to omit? And yet do you pretend that you love God? You pretend that you love him, though your love is directly opposite to this grand test, which he himself has appointed to test your love. You may have your excuses and evasions: you may plead the goodness of your hearts, even when your practice is sinful; you may plead the strength of temptation, the frailty of your nature, and a thousand other things; but plead what you will, this is an eternal truth, that if you habitually and willfully live in disobedience to the commandments of God—then you are entirely destitute of his love! And does not this flash conviction on some of your minds? Does not conscience tell you just now, that your love does not stand this test?

And now, upon a review of the whole—what do you think of yourselves? Does the love of God dwell in you—or does it not? that is, Do those characters of the lack of love belong to you—or do they not? If they do, it is all absurdity and delusion for you to flatter yourselves that you love him; for it is all one as if you should say,

"Lord, I love you—though my native enmity against you still remains unsubdued.

I love you above all—though my thoughts and affections are scattered among other things, and never fix upon you.

I love you above all—though I prefer a thousand things to you and your interest.

I love you above all—though I have no pleasure in conversing with you.

I love you above all—though I am not careful to please you!

That is, I love you above all, though I have all the marks of an enemy upon me!

Can anything be more absurd? Make such a profession of friendship as this to your fellow creatures, and see how they will take it! Will they believe that you really love them? No! common sense will teach them better. And will God, do you think, accept that as supreme love to him—which will not pass current for common friendship among mortals? Is he capable of being imposed upon by such inconsistent pretensions? No! "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked!" Galatians 6:7. Draw the peremptory conclusion, without any hesitation, that the love of God does not dwell in you!

And if this is your case, what do you think of it?

What a monstrous soul you have within you—which cannot love God!
Which cannot love supreme excellence, and all perfect beauty;
which cannot love the origin and author of all the excellence and beauty that you see scattered among the works of His hands;
which cannot love your divine Parent, the Author of your mortal frame;
which cannot love your prime Benefactor and gracious Redeemer;
which cannot love Him, "in whom you live, and move, and have your being, in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways," and who alone is the proper happiness for your immortal spirit;
which can love a parent, a child, a friend, with all their infirmitates about them—but cannot love God;
which can love the world; which can love sensual and even sinful enjoyments, pleasures, riches, and honors—and yet cannot love God;
which can love everything that is lovely—but God, who is infinitely lovely;
which can love wisdom, justice, veracity, goodness, clemency, in creatures, where they are attended with many imperfections; and yet cannot love God, where they all center and shine in the highest perfection!

What a monster of a soul is this! Must it not be a devil—to be capable of such unnatural horrendous wickedness? Can you be easy, while you have such a soul within you? What a load of guilt must lie upon you!

If love to God is the fulfilling of the whole law—then the lack of love must be the breach of the whole law. You break it all at one blow! Your life is but one continued, uniform, uninterrupted series of sinning!

"If anyone does not love the Lord—that person is cursed!" 1 Corinthians 16:22

The lack of love to God takes away all spirit and life from all your religious services, and diffuses a malignity through all you do. Without the love of God: you may pray, you may receive the sacrament, you may perform the outward part of every duty of religion; you may be just and charitable, and do no man any harm; you may be sober and temperate; but, without the love of God, you cannot do one action that is truly good and acceptable to God; for how can you imagine that He will accept anything you do, when He sees your hearts, and knows that you do it not because you love him—but from some other low, selfish principle?

If a man treats you well, and perform for you all the good offices of the sincerest friendship; yet, if you know in the mean time, that he has no real regard for you at all—but acts from some sordid, mercenary views, are you thankful for his services, or do you love him in return? No! You abhor the deceiver, and secretly loathe his services. And will God accept of that as obedience from you, which he knows does not proceed from love to him? No! Hence it is, that as Solomon tells us, that the prayers, the sacrifices, and even "the ploughing of the wicked, is sin." Proverbs 21:4.

Now, I appeal to yourselves—is not this a very dangerous situation? While you are destitute of sincere love of God—can you flatter yourselves that you are fit for heaven?

What! fit for the region of divine love!

What! fit to converse with a holy God, and live forever in His presence!

What! fit to spend an eternity in His service!

Can you be fit for these things—while you have no love to Him? Certainly not! You must perceive yourselves to be fit for destruction—and fit for nothing else! You are devilized already! Lack of love to God is the grand constituent of a devil, the worst ingredient in that infernal composition. And must you not then be doomed to

that everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels? Are you capable of hoping better things, while the love of God is not in you?

And now, what must you do, when this shocking conviction has forced itself upon you. Must you now give up all hopes? Must you now despair of ever having the love of God kindled in your hearts? Yes; you may, you must give up all hopes, you must despair—**if you go on, as you have hitherto done—thoughtless, careless, and presumptuous in sin, and in the neglect of the means which God has appointed to implant and nourish this divine, heaven-born principle in your souls. This is the direct course towards remediless, everlasting despair.**

But if you now sincerely admit the conviction of your miserable condition; if you endeavor immediately to break off from sin, and from everything which tends to harden you in sin; if you turn your minds to serious meditation; if you prostrate yourselves as humble earnest petitioners before God, and continue instant in prayer; if you use every other means of grace ordained for this purpose; I say, if you take this course—then there is hope—there is hope for you!

There is as much hope for you, as there once was for anyone of that glorious company of saints, now in heaven—for they were once as destitute of the love of God as any of you presently are!

And will you not take these pains to save your own souls from death? Many have taken more, to save the souls of others: and you have taken a great deal to obtain the transitory, perishing enjoyments of this life. And will you take no pains for your own immortal interests?

Oh! let me prevail, let even a stranger prevail upon you—to lay out your endeavors upon this grand concern. I must insist upon it, and can take no denial. You cannot be saved without sincere love to God! And if you entertain hopes of heaven without it—the common sense of mankind is against you. Therefore, oh, seek to have the love of God shed abroad in your hearts.

As for such of you, and I hope there are sundry such among you—who love God in sincerity, I have not time to speak much to you at present. Go to your Bibles, and there you will find abundant consolation. I shall only refer you to one or two passages, as a specimen.

"All things shall work together for good—to those who love God!" Romans 8:28.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared—for those who love him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9.

This sincere love of God in your hearts is a surer pledge of your salvation, than an immediate voice from heaven could be. Heaven, the element of love, was prepared for such as you—and you need never dread an exclusion!