

What Does the Bible Say About . . .?

October 7, 2009

How We Love God?

- I. Introduction
 - A. Announcements
 - 1. Open with prayer
 - 2. Any new people? If so, summarize need to bring paper, pen, and Bible (various versions helpful for comparison, but NRSV will be main one for reading, NASB for studying).
 - 3. Get list of names and how to contact (email preferred)
 - 4. 90 minutes on 4th Mondays at 7 p.m.
 - 5. Need volunteers to read passages listed in **bold**.
 - B. Does anyone have any questions/topics for us to consider for next time?
- II. Review and Introduction
 - A. We're starting a new season of our studies on a new date and time. So it seems appropriate to try something a little different.
 - 1. Our studies in the past have taken the approach of gathering a lot of data, analyzing it, then putting it all together for our conclusion.
 - 2. It's been a bit like conducting a trial where we the jury gather the evidence, weigh it, and decide.
 - 3. I think it's been good and useful, and we will no doubt do it again, but I've noticed that from one class to the next we can't seem to retain all that information.
 - 4. So we're going to try a somewhat different approach this time. It's going to require more discussion from everyone, and it will come at our question from a different direction. Please let me know what you think of it.
 - 5. And although there will be a lot in the notes I will hand out, not everything will be there. A lot will be in our discussions, so take notes as we go along.
 - B. We have all heard again and again that God loves us. But any relationship in which the love is all from one side and not from the other, would be a relationship that's in trouble. We don't want that.
 - 1. So for today we will take the fact that God love us as a given and explore the other side of the coin.
 - 2. Our question to consider and hopefully find answers to is this: **"How can we love God? And how can we grow in that love?"**
 - C. We want to know how to move from passively receiving God's love to actively returning that love to God.
 - 1. So we'll spend a good deal of our time (more than we usually have done in our classes) in discussing what we have learned from our own life experiences.
 - 2. And along the way, we're going to look to the Scripture for guidance.
 - 3. But instead of digging into the Bible for its meaning, we'll let the Bible dig into us for its application.

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- III. Each of us have in some way or another loved another person. There is a lot we can learn about loving God from what we have already learned about loving people.
- A. After all, didn't Jesus himself tie the two together in what he told us is the Greatest Commandment?
1. Someone read it for us, please. Mt 22:37-40; **Luke 10:27** (greatest command)
 2. And John said pretty much the same thing from the negative aspect.
 3. **1st John 4:19-21** (if not love those we see, can't love God whom we can't see.)
- B. Since we hope to end today on a positive note, let's follow John's lead and start with the negative. **How many here have experienced the deadening/dying of a relationship that once you knew as love? Without naming any names, what are some things that cause that; what deadens a love? (Make a list on the board. Some possibilities listed below)**
1. Secrets. Hiding things from one another
 2. Finding other things/people to spend most enjoyable or interesting times with.
 3. Boredom. Nothing ever changes.
 4. Holding grudges.
 5. Feeling betrayed, hurt, disrespected, etc. by the other.
 6. Nagging, argumentativeness, complaining. **Proverbs 15:17** better vegetables where there is love, than fatted ox where there is hatred. **Prov 17:1** better crumbs with quiet than feasting with strife. **Proverbs 21:19** (better to live in the desert than with a quarrelsome woman.)
- C. Let's take our list and see how each of these might apply to a deadening of love for God.
1. **How do we try to keep secrets from God and why? And how does that affect how we might feel about God?**
 - a. **Does this make any sense?** Read **Luke 16:15** (God knows our hearts)
 - b. **Mark 4:21-23** (nothing hidden that will not be revealed)
 - c. **Ecclesiastes 12:14** (God will judge every secret thing)
 - d. **What should we do instead?**
 - e. **James 5:16** (confess to one another)
 - f. **1st John 1:9** (confess your sins)
 2. **What kinds of things might we find becoming more attractive to us or more important to us than God? How can we recognize when that is happening?**
 - a. **Exodus 20:1-6** (no other gods - no idols - nothing before God)
 - b. **Mt 10:37-39** (don't love father or mother more than the Lord)
 3. **What about boredom? Is it possible for us to become bored with God?**
 - a. **Why? What causes that boredom?** (Same today, yesterday, and forever? Heb 13:8)
 - b. Teenagers and younger children often complain about being bored. **Why is that? What are they expecting when they make that complaint?** (Entertain me; give me something fun, interesting, to do - something I

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- want to do) Being bored often says a lot more about us than about what's around us. **If we are bored with God, where is the problem?**
- c. **Lamentations 3:19-24** (new every morning)
4. **What about holding grudges or feeling like God has betrayed or hurt us? What could that do to our relationship with God?** (i.e., blaming God for something)
- a. **Do we hope to somehow punish God? Does God need to be forgiven?**
- b. Look for a moment at Job on the day that he lost all of his sheep and oxen and camels and then his sons and daughters. **Job 1:20-22**
- c. **Psalm 30:4-5** (Lord is upright, world full of God's lovingkindness)
- d. John puts it in familiar symbolic terms. **1st John 1:5** (God is light)
- e. **If God is not at fault, then who or what is?** (self, Satan)
- f. Listen to what Moses said: **Deut 32:1-4** (God perfect, we're degenerate)
- g. **When we have those feelings about God, what can we do with them?**
5. Nagging or complaining against God or to God is something a little different. This is not about the accusation of God doing something wrong. It's more about getting God to do what we want God to do. "God you know I need X, why don't you give it to me?"
- a. **What if God doesn't give us what we want? What if God doesn't fulfill our dreams? How do we react and what happens to our love for God?**
- b. **What does our complaining say about our view of God? How do we stop this from deadening our love for God?**
- c. **Galatians 2:20** (I no longer live . . .)
- d. **Luke 22:41-43** (Jesus in Gethsemane)
- e. **Matthew 6:9-10** (Lord's Prayer)
- D. Our love for God can be deadened **(1)** by treating God as our servant instead of our Lord, **(2)** by blaming God as if God were the source of evil in the world, **(3)** by our own boring self-centeredness, **(4)** by letting someone or something else become an idol in our lives — more important to us than God, or **(5)** by trying to keep secrets from God instead of confessing them. These then are the first things we need to correct before our love for God can grow.
- IV. There is a long-running debate among pastors, Bible scholars, those who write commentaries. It's a debate about what the Bible means by the word "love." Love is not a feeling, some say. It is a decision. Or others will proclaim love is not an emotion, it is an action.
- A. They are all right. And they are all wrong.
1. When Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb, the people said "See how he loved him." That's an emotion. (John 11:35)
2. "You cannot love both God and money," said Jesus. That's a decision. (Mt 6:24)
3. When he was asked about loving our neighbors Jesus told the story of a good Samaritan who rescued a man that had been beaten and robbed, tended his wounds, and paid for a place for him to stay and recover. That is action. (Luke 10:25-37)

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4. So when we talk next about how to revitalize or deepen love, let's remember that love is an **emotion** that we **choose** to hold onto and nurture into **action**.
- B. Let's think now about our own experiences of love. Talk about someone you love. **We don't need the name necessarily, but why do you love that person you are thinking of?** (Write list on the board)
 1. S/he loves me.
 2. S/he does amazing things
 3. S/he shows characteristics I deeply admire. Patient, kind, forgiving, etc.
 4. (Attractiveness, similar interests, etc. Our interests or God's interests?)
- C. Now let's take what we have said and apply it to loving God.
 1. God loves us: **Can you think of a scripture passage that helps you know that?** (e.g., John 3:16-17; 1st John 4:9)
 2. **What has God done that amazes you?** Talk about something you've seen or experienced that stirs up love for God in you. (Creation, salvation, love us, etc.)
 3. **What about God do you deeply admire? What characteristics of God attract you or inspire you?**
 - a. **Psalm 103:11-12; Micah 7:18-19** (transgression cast from us)
 - b. **Psalm 36: 5-9** (faithfulness, lovingkindness, righteousness, judgement, protection, life)
 - c. **Psalm 27:4** (behold the beauty of the Lord)
- D. **How can we keep our love for someone vital if that person is far away or out of contact for an extended time?** (Make list)
 1. Remember good things about the person.
 2. Send messages. Stay in touch.
 3. Do things that person would be doing if here with you.
 - a. **But what our motivations are make a difference, don't they?**
 - b. When Janet's away and I take care of our cats, I can either think "I wish I could just lie in bed instead of getting up to feed those cats and clean the litter box." Or "These cats really need me, I hope they appreciate what I'm doing for them." Or "Janet loves these cats and delights in taking care of them. I will too. It will make me closer to her in a way."
- E. Alright, let's apply these observations to how we keep love for God alive and dynamic.
 1. **What can we do to remember things about God?**
 - a. **Joshua 4:1-7** (memorial stones in the Jordan)
 - b. **Psalm 119:14-16** (meditate on God's Word)
 - c. **Acts 19:4-5** (baptism into Jesus; remember our baptism)
 - d. **1st Timothy 6:12** (our confession of faith; remember it)
 - e. **Acts 8:26-35** (Phillip and Ethiopian - told about Jesus)
 2. **How can we stay in touch (communicate) with God?**
 - a. **Philippians 4:4-7** (rejoicing and prayer)
 - b. **Eph 5:18-20** (singing, thanksgiving)
 - c. **Luke 24:50-53** (worship)

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- d. **Heb 10:23-25** (not cease meeting together) Worship is not just between us as individuals and God, but we are “one body.” We also stay in touch with God as a whole body of believers, as a church.
3. **What things can we do that are like what Jesus did?** (Not just do good things in general, but “in remembrance of me.”) (Two of my favorites below)
 - a. **Romans 12:9-10** (outdo in showing honor NRSV)
 - b. **Philippians 2:3-4** (others better than self)
 - c. **How do these kinds of actions increase our love for God?**
- F. **How do we keep our love for someone vital if that person is near but we’ve become very used to his/her presence? (i.e., if start taking person for granted?)** (Make list)
 1. Doing things together both enjoy. Have fun too.
 2. Notice things other does and compliment them.
 3. Get out of the routine. Do something new and interesting together. Expand your horizons.
 4. Set aside special times to spend just with each other. No distractions.
 5. Get to know new things about each other.
- G. **Can Churches or Christians take God for granted too? How?**
 1. Let’s see if we can apply similar remedies to a love of God that has gone stale.
 2. **How can we do things together with God?**
 3. **What are some ways we have (or can) notice what God is doing and compliment God? What does that do to our feelings about God?**
 4. Perhaps it’s not God who has gotten into a rut, a routine. Perhaps we have. **What are some things we can do (as individuals or as a church) to bring new excitement?**
 - a. New projects, new ministries, new roles in Church or outside for Jesus
 - b. New or renewed devotional life, prayer life, etc.
 5. **How about special times with God? How can we get to know God better?**
 - a. Personal time reading scripture, praying, even singing hymns
 - b. Worship services with others can be profound too (e.g., Taize service, especially meaningful Sunday worship, etc.)
- H. We are told, or even commanded, to love God. The original command in **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** is familiar to us. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.”
 1. Literally it says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind/will (בבִּלְבָב *le’bab*) and all your soul/life (*nephesh* נֶפֶשׁ) and with all your very much (*me’od* מְאֹד).
 2. It’s not simply telling us to have an emotional attachment to God. Emotions come and go, rise and fall. They are important, but they’re not enough.
 3. It’s telling us to set our minds on God—with everything that’s in us and everything that we are—to let nothing nor anyone come between us and our absolute commitment to God.

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4. Today we've discussed many ways we can keep that commitment—that love—vital and strong and growing—not just for ourselves, but also for our church.
5. Look at your notes. Think over what we've discussed. Pay attention to the “nudging” from the Holy Spirit. And let's each make a commitment now in our own le'bab/mind as to what we will do to make our love for God—and our church's love for God—grow stronger and more alive than ever before.

I. Some more passages on our love for God.

1. 1st John 4:10-21, esp. v. 20-21 (if not love one we can see, not love God whom we cannot see.)
2. 1st John 5:1-4; John 14:15, 21-24 (keep his commandments)
3. Mt 10:37-39 (don't love father or mother more than the Lord)
4. Mt 22:37-40; Luke 10:27 (greatest commandment)
5. Luke 7:44-50 (forgiven much, so loves much)
6. Luke 11:42 (woe for neglecting love of God)
7. Luke 16:1-13 (love God or love money - can't love both)
8. John 21:15-17 (Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?”)
9. Rom 13:8-10 (love of neighbor fulfills the law. Do no wrong to neighbor)
10. 1st Cor 2:9 (eye not seen what God prepared for those who love God)
11. 1st Cor 8:1-3 (if love God, known by God)
12. 1st Cor 13 (a kind of litany of definition of love)
13. 2nd Cor 8:1-6, 24 (show love by giving to others in need)
14. 2nd Cor 9:6-7 (cheerful giver)
15. 2nd Thess 3:5 (prayer to grow in love of God)
16. 2nd Tim 4:6-8 (loved Christ's appearing)
17. Heb 6:9-10 (love of God shown in loving other Christians)
18. James 1:12/ 1st Pet 1:6-8 (persevering under trial shows love of God)
19. 2nd John 1:4-6 (love = obey God's commandments)
20. Rev 2:1-5 (doing good deeds, but left first love - repent!)
21. Matt 6:21 (where treasure is, there heart is also. How make God our treasure?)
22. Heb 10:23-25 (not cease meeting together)
23. Psalm 8:1-4 (the splendor of God in the heavens)
24. Psalm 116:1-2 (love because God heard my prayers; rescued me)
25. Psalm 18:1 (love God my deliverer)
26. Lamentations 3:19-24 (new every morning)

V. Summary

- A. Have we answered today's questions satisfactorily? Are there still questions on this topic we need to discuss more? What questions for next time?
- B. **Next meeting: Wednesday, November 4, 2009. 7:00 p.m.** (Or new time/day?)
- C. Closing prayer
- D. Archives of class notes can be found online at: www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa