

## What's Your Spiritual Temperature?

*Let love be without hypocrisy (Romans 12:9. NASB)*

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a famous tract entitled *On Loving God*. For centuries this classic of Christian devotion has challenged followers of Christ to grow in grace by moving from one degree of love to another. Although Bernard's vocabulary is archaic, his logic often difficult to understand and his theology sometimes troubling (!), I find great benefit in what he writes. In the following outline, I have taken liberties with Bernard's degrees of love and revised them in a manner that I find more helpful and, frankly, more theologically correct.<sup>1</sup>

**The First Degree of Love: I love myself for my sake.** The word "love" seems hardly appropriate for this conceited expression of self-infatuation, but the unbeliever simply has no other frame of reference but self. It's all about me. Everything in my ego-centric universe is measured by its ability to meet my needs and make me happy.

**The Second Degree of Love: I love God for my sake.** Conversion to Christ makes me suddenly aware of Another. God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life. My heart is transformed and his love enables me to love. However, self-examination reveals a troubling reality: I don't love God because he is good but rather because he is good *to me*. To say that I love God because of what I can get is to acknowledge that I don't yet know the real meaning of love.

**The Third Degree of Love: I love God for God's sake.** But how can I love the Holy One when my heart is so polluted by unholy self-interest? Only the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit can purify my motives so that my love for God is "without hypocrisy" (Rom. 12:9). The universe is Christo-centric! It's all about him! Ironically, when I lose myself in loving God I find myself. For the first time I'm able to love myself correctly.

*O pure and sacred love! O sweet and pleasant affection! O pure and sinless intention of the will, all the more sinless and pure since it frees us from the taint of selfish vanity... As a drop of water seems to disappear completely in a big quantity of wine, even assuming the wine's taste and color... so it is necessary for the saints that all human feelings melt in a mysterious way and flow into the will of God (p. 30).*

Friends, prayerful reflection on these degrees of love will enable you to get an accurate read on your true spiritual temperature.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard outlined four degrees of love. His fourth degree was: I love myself for God's sake.