For Personal Reflection

?

1. Francis de Sales describes affective love as having an affection or attraction to what is good. Are the things to which I am attracted good in the eyes of God?
2. What steps do I take each day to deepen my affection for God and the things of God?
3. In what ways might my affective love need to be purified?
4. On a scale of one to ten, how would I rate my effective love? How well or consistently do I act in ways that give witness to those good things or values for which I have affection?
5. In what ways might my exercise (or not exercise) of virtue be inconsistent with the objects of my affection?

Further Reading

Treatise on the Love of God. St. Francis de Sales.

Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction. Peronne Marie Thibert, VHM, Trans. Wendy M. Wright and Joseph Power, OSFS. Paulist Press. 1988.

De Sales

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Two Kinds...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Of Love

St. Francis de Sales is a Doctor of the Church. Because of his extensive writings on the love of God and the love of neighbor, he is also known by many as the "Doctor of Love."

There must be as many definitions of love as there have ever been people...and then some. Francis de Sales had his own: "To put it clearly and precisely, love is simply the movement, outpouring and progress of the heart toward the good." (Treatise, Book I, Pt. 7)

"We nurture affective love primarily through prayer. In prayer we reinforce our affection for God and the things of God."

In the Salesian world, the language of love is, above all else, the language of the heart.

"The heart is the vital core of the entire personality. It is there, through the heart, that one comes to know and love God, for it is especially by virtue of the heart that humankind can be said to be made in the divine image and likeness...The heart is a living, ceaselessly pulsing organ which in one movement draws in God's goodness and life and, in another, breathes forth God's praise." (Letters of Spiritual Direction, p. 57)

The heart is the place in which love is both conceived and grows. The heart is the place in which we become enamored of the good and pursue the good. Herein we come to discover that there are two kinds of love, or, put another way, two ways of experiencing the one love.

"We have two principal ways of exercising our love for God; the first is affective, and the second, effective.

"The heart is the vital core of the entire personality. It is there, through the heart, that one comes to know and love God, for it is especially by virtue of the heart that humankind can be said to be made in the divine image and likeness…"

By affective love "we have affection for God and for the things that God loves." By effective love, "we serve God and do what God ordains." (Treatise, Book 6, Chapter 1)

Francis illustrates how these two kinds of love interact with each other, the expansion and contraction of the human heart.

"The first joins us to God's goodness; the second enables us to fulfill God's will. The first fills us with complacence, benevolence, and spiritual impulses, desires, aspiration, and fervors, and causes us to use the sacred infusions and minglings of our spirit with that of God. The second pours into us the solid resolution, firm courage, and inviolable obedience required to carry out the ordinances of God's will, and to suffer, accept, approve and embrace all that comes from God's good pleasure. The first enables us to find pleasure in God; the second makes us pleasing to God. By the first love we conceive; by the second love we give birth. By the first love we place God upon our heart like a banner of love around which all our affections are ranged; by the second love we place God upon our arm, as a sword of dilection whereby we accomplish all victorious exploits. (Ibid)

We nurture affective love primarily through prayer. In prayer we reinforce our affection for God and the things of God. "Truly," wrote St. Francis de Sales, "the chief exercise of prayer is to speak to God and to hear God speak in the depths of the heart...Eye speaks to eye, and heart speaks to heart, and no one understands what passes between them except the sacred lovers who speak." (Ibid)

By affective love "we have affection for God and for the things that God loves." By effective love, "we serve God and do what God ordains."

Of course, this affection for God and things of God cannot remain in the heart. This affective love must spill out into our minds, attitudes and actions. Affective love must be transformed and translated into effective love, that is, the practice of virtue, The practice of virtue, in turn, deepens that affective love: doing what is good deepens our attraction for the good.

Desire for the good. Pursuing the good. Divine love consists of both.

How does our love measure up?