

Love Within the Community

God's Word:

I John 2:1-17

Key Verse:

“The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.”

I John 2:9

Breaking It Down:

The Bible is a love story. It is the story of God, who *is* love (I John 4:8b), and His actions on behalf of mankind, with whom He desires a relationship.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends,” Jesus said and then He did just that. (John 15:12)

Jesus said the two “great,” or overarching, commandments are, first, that we love God with our whole heart, soul and mind; and second, that we love our neighbors as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Notice two things common to the above passages. First, love is to be focused on God. We are to give Him our priority, our devotion and our service. Second, love reaches out to others, looking to meet a need. Biblical love--also known as *agape*--is an action, not an emotion.

Love is a dominant theme in both the apostle John's gospel and his first epistle. Here, in I John, the apostle declares that God *is* love (I John 4:8 b) and, also, that God is light. (I John 1:5)

In this week's passage, I John 2:1-17, John identifies three tests of whether we truly have a relationship with God, which, as we know comes through accepting His Son as our Savior.



First: “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” I John 2:3

Second: “The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.” I John 2:9

Third: “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” I John 2:15b

Note that each test is passed or failed as a result of action. Did we keep (obey) the commandments? Did we hate a brother, translated as behaving in an ugly manner or not helping meet a need? Did we direct our attention and actions toward things with eternal consequences or just pursue what makes us happy for the moment?

Living It:

The message here is simple: If we truly are God’s children, and thus followers of Christ, we will walk as Christ walked. That’s no easy path, but it shows we have been born again and have begun to live a new life in Christ.

First, our love for God will compel us to live as He directs us to live. We will no longer be determined to live according to our ideas but we will gladly follow what He commands, knowing that God is love and He is directing us to follow paths that are good for us. For example, we will obey our parents, even if they don’t let us do something we think would be great fun.

Second, like Christ, we will love our Christian brothers and sisters, in particular. If we can’t show kindness and concern for the people in our Sabbath School class and youth group, we aren’t really Christ’s followers. If we can’t love those folks—people who should be easy to love—there’s little chance we’ll love other folks. Remember the Sermon on the Mount? There, Jesus commanded us to love folks who weren’t acting loving toward us. Jesus instructed His followers:

“whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew 5:39) He also said: “love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44)

Third, the test of whether we love God is whether our focus is on building and glorifying His kingdom, or on building and grabbing attention for our own. Do you need to have the latest upgrade even though your current Ipod or cell phone works just fine? Do you always take a huge helping of food at the church meal or the last dessert without regard for who is yet to eat? Do you beg your parents to buy you the latest style in sneakers or jeans or to pony up for that expensive hairstyle?



Do any of those things glorify God? Or just glorify you?

What if, instead, you stuck with your current electronics and used the other money to help a less-fortunate friend get something he or she needed?

What if at church meals, you took a minimal portion of food until everyone was fed? Or, what about serving others and being willing to go without a meal to make sure someone who doesn't have food at his house got a good meal for a change? Have you ever considered that someone in your congregation might not have a full cupboard or full refrigerator?

And, finally, what if you quit caring what your school classmates thought of what you wear or how you style your hair and instead focused on giving away clothing to someone who had nothing more than the clothes on her back?

God is love. He demonstrated it to us by sending His Son to die for our sins. Our gratitude for what He did should move us to demonstrate love for others. Just remember, it's not about feelings but action.

Jesus didn't really *feel* like being spat upon, whipped mercilessly and nailed to a cross. He even asked God in the garden of Gethsemane if there was another way. But He did it because He loved His Father and He loved us.

That's love. Is it in you?

Understanding It:

1. In your own words, write down the three tests in this lesson about whether our lives demonstrate that we are God's children and Christ's followers.
2. In the following verses, circle the action words.
"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have eternal life."
"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."
3. Identify who within your church body is your "brother." (I John 2:9)
4. Explain how loving the world is in conflict with loving God. (I John 2:15b)

Doing It:

Consider the people you identified in Question 3. Now, pick someone from that group that you have found annoying or that you have had trouble being kind to in the past. Tell your teacher privately who this person is and then start this week showing love toward him or her. Look for ways to show kindness or meet a need. Report back to your teacher next week and tell him or her what you learned during the experience.

