

Christ the Atoning Sacrifice

You seem to have a lot of white friends,” Alyssa said to Mia.

“Emma?” responded Mia. “Yes, she is a sister in Christ and a good friend.”

Alyssa and Mia were two of the “mature” women in their master’s-level course and had been studying together for a few weeks. Tonight, they were studying at Mia’s house, and Emma had arranged to stop by with some treats.

Mia and Emma met at a women’s luncheon that had brought together four churches in the area. Alyssa’s response was funny and sad at the same time, since Mia’s family said the same thing. But Mia knew the family of God was bound by love for Christ, and race isn’t a barrier between family.

Mia had prayed about sharing God’s love with her study partner, and now seemed an opportune time.

“I am able to love and befriend others regardless of who they are, because I have the Spirit of God on the inside,” Mia said. “More importantly, I am able to love because God loved me first in sending His Son to die, for not only me, but the sins of the entire world.”

“Do you have a personal relationship with Christ, Alyssa?”

“Well, I try to be good,” said Alyssa.

“Being good will never pay for your sins or transform you. Through believing and following Christ, God has made a way for all of us to be changed. God loves you, and He’s already prepared a way!”

1. *Is there anyone you are holding a grudge against or someone you are finding hard to love?*

2. *What are ways you can begin to love them with the love of God?*

3. *How do you define genuine love? How does the world?*

Our Advocate

1 John 2:1–6 KJV

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. 6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

1 John 2:1–6 NIV

¹ My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

John addresses “dear children” (v. 1). This has nothing to do with their relative age, since the audience includes “fathers” and “young people” (2:13). John writes “so that [they] will not sin” (1 John 2:1). Yet, if they did sin, they would “have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1). Sometimes the letter of 1 John appears to say that believers do not sin at all (see 1 John 3:7–10). But verses like this one show that forgiveness of sins isn’t something that we receive once and will never need again. Jesus will continue to advocate for His people, precisely because “He is the atoning sacrifice” (v. 2). Only

Jesus can appear before God to continually advocate on our behalf, as the “Righteous One” with no sin. The former priests represented Israel (Lesson 3); Jesus shall represent His followers and be a superior priest in heaven (Lesson 6).

John’s readers can be certain that they know Jesus “if [they] keep his commands” (v. 3). The opposite must also be true: “Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person” (v. 3). Those words of warning may sound harsh, but how can anyone know and love Jesus, but reject what He says? How would that person be His follower? But for those who obey, “love for God is truly made complete in them” (v. 5). Words alone mean nothing (“[claiming] to live in him”) unless matched with actions (“[living] as Jesus did,” v. 6). Thus, listening to and obeying God’s Son is what makes us God’s children.

4. *What can John’s “dear children” do if they sin?*

5. *How can we be sure that we truly know God?*

Our Sacrifice

1 John 4:9–12 KJV

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

1 John 4:9–12 NIV

⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

In 1 John 4, John describes the central message of the Christian faith: God shows His love to the world by sending “his one and only Son . . . that we might live through him” (v. 9). Love does not—cannot—originate in God’s people, apart from God. Love comes “not [because] we loved God, but [because] he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (v. 10). God took the initiative, sending Jesus to die while people remained hopelessly lost to sin. Those who trust in Him have the opportunity to experience God’s love and share it with others.

John encourages readers to love one another with the selfless and sacrificial love that only God can model: “since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (v. 11). We have never seen God’s throne, but our love for one another becomes all the evidence we need: “God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (v. 12).

6. *What kind of love has God shown by sending Jesus?*

7. *How are John’s readers to respond? What evidence can display God’s love?*

Our Response

1 John 4:13–17 KJV

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.

God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth

1 John 4:13–17 NIV

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God

in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

in them.¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

John declares that believers can “know that we live in him and he in us” (v. 13). They have an experiential knowledge because “He has given us of his Spirit” (v. 13). Through the atoning work of Jesus and gift of His Spirit (see John 20:22), believers experience communion and relationship with God. They can be “in God” (1 John 4:15).

Followers of Jesus have an inner and outer testimony (v. 14). The original apostles could say, after years of being with Jesus, “We have seen.” People today have not been with Jesus in the flesh, haven’t *seen* in the physical sense meant here. But followers of Christ also testify through their changed lives. All believers can be certain of their inclusion: “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God” (v. 15). None of Jesus’ followers have missed inclusion in God’s kingdom and God’s redemptive purposes, for “God is love” (v. 16).

God’s love is not some abstract ideal of positivity. John tells readers to stand in “confidence on the day of judgment” (v. 17). In other words, divine love isn’t perpetual relativism; God’s justice is still coming! One response would be to quake with fear, to hide from the light of God’s presence. But believers can live like Jesus, empowered by His Spirit. They can stand before God on the day of judgment, with confidence.

8. *How can believers be certain they know God (using the words of verses 13–15)?*

9. *What confidence can believers have, according to verses 16–17?*

10. *What does the short statement “God is love” really mean?*

Love Manifested

It was the first Christmas without our elderly mother, who had passed away in July. As a family, we wanted to do something in her honor. We thought about various gifts we could give, perhaps trips we could take together. But in the end, we decided to spend our Christmas assembling care packages for the homeless people in our city. After all, we thought, Mom was such a giver herself.

Our city and state continue to have thousands of people without a place to go. On Christmas night, we arrived to an endless city of tents, and the need felt overwhelming. What we didn't know was that most of the tents had been recently donated; for every tent there was another person with a shelter constructed of tarps, blankets, plastic, and sticks. There was more need than we even realized.

As we were handing out clothes and food and supplies, I was struck to notice the humble decorations—even a few Christmas trees—around us. As we greeted people and spent a few moments getting to know them, I kept wanting to bring up my mom. It was because of her that we had come, but none of the people we met would know that. A few times I caught a flash of a smile and thought, “Mom would be pleased.”

My experience of reflecting my mother's kindness is a reminder of what God asks us to do, in all circumstances. God didn't wait until we were accomplished or worthy. Neither does God make us wait, if we want to feel confident before God. If we want confidence before our day of judgment, we can have it. We find communion and relationship with God by following the way of Jesus.

11. *What concrete demonstrations of love does God expect us to show?*

12. *What is the difference between love that “waits” and love that initiates?*

13. *How can we feel confident before final judgment?*

God Loves Me

When you think about God being the creator of heaven and earth, it can be overwhelming to realize that He loves you. How do we respond to that fact? We pass along His love to others. We love others as He first loved us.

- ▶ *Take a moment to process that God loves you. Does that feel easy or difficult to believe? I sense that God is saying this:*

- ▶ *God's love makes me want to surrender to Him in these ways:*

KEY VERSE

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

—1 John 4:10 KJV

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

—1 John 4:10 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 14 through April 20

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

Mon. Psalm 71:12–24—I Will Rise Again.

Tues. Hebrews 2:1–13—Made Perfect through Suffering.

Wed. Genesis 22:1–14—The Lord Will Provide.

Thurs. Matthew 26:17–30—Servanthood, Suspicion, and a Sign.

Fri. Matthew 27:38–44, 45–54—Darkness, Despair, and Death.

Sat. Psalm 49:1–15—Ransomed!

Sun. Matthew 28:1–10—He Has Risen!