

Leader's Guide

LESSON 21

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In response to the sermon on February 10th.

Romans 12:9-12 **Spiritual Community**

Key Points

In this text we are reminded that the product of inner transformation is relational; as internal change takes place through the work of the Holy Spirit, it will be visibly and powerfully demonstrated in the way we relate to one another. Paul now gives us a list of internal attitudes and external expressions of authentic love among believers. In this passage we will discover:

- Sincere love for one another
- Sincere hatred toward sin/evil
- Internal changes that compel us toward love
- External actions that demonstrate our love

As our understanding of God's love for us increases, as we accept that love and are willing to be changed by it, our love for one another increases. For those who have been transformed by the love of God, love for others becomes more natural. We are enabled through God's Spirit to love the Lord with all of our heart and to love others as ourselves. Without this premise, we can look at this passage and go to "work" on loving others. But without a transformed mind and heart, our efforts may be short-lived, ending in frustration and defeat. Or we may be tempted to love from insincere motives, which can result in relational distancing when our efforts don't produce the kind of results we want (which is the antithesis of love for one another). While this passage will always remain challenging, hopefully we are experiencing progress in our actions and reactions toward one another. For the body of Christ to function properly, these principles need to be operating in increasing measure.

Personal Reflection

- As you read this passage, what happens internally? Can you identify areas where God has changed your thoughts and attitudes? Do you find these verses comforting? Challenging? Revealing? Overwhelming? Your answer may be “yes” to all of the above! You may be able to identify areas of spiritual progress and at the same time, realize that in other areas you still have a long way to go. The good news is that we *are changing*, one thought, one action, one discipline at time. The Spirit is faithful to do His work in us! Take time to consider where you have been, and thank God for the work of his Spirit.
- As you think of your small group, no doubt there are those who exemplify selfish love and those who still struggle with loving others sincerely. Take time to affirm the Christ-like character traits in one another, especially if you have watched change take place in your group.
- We encourage you to take time on Question 8, helping to cast vision and praying toward that end for an increase in our responsive love toward one another.

Discussion Questions

1. “Love must be sincere.” Authenticity is vitally important to loving relationships. In what ways do we present a false front? Why do we do it? What is the harm of insincere love?
2. Sin always causes relational damage. How are you tempted to marginalize sin, or continue to embrace it? How do you develop a hatred toward sin? What does it mean to cling to what is good?
3. In Vs. 10 we are to “be devoted to one another in brotherly love” and to “honor one another above ourselves.” In order to love unselfishly we need to have a renewed mind (12:2). What thought process needs to change? How does change take place?
4. What internal changes are listed? (*Do not be proud, do not be conceited, do not repay evil with evil, be careful to do what is right, live at peace, do not take revenge.*) What means does God use to change our attitudes and enable us to live this way?
5. According to this passage, what is produced in us as change takes place? (*spiritual fervor/passion, a servant heart, the ability to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*)
6. When transformational change takes place, our love for our selfish, sinful desires will diminish as our love for one another increases. In what ways will this love be demonstrated? (*share with those in need, practice hospitality, bless those who persecute you, rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn, live in harmony, if your enemy is hungry, feed him, thirsty, give him something to drink*)
7. What is your greatest challenge in loving others?
8. As it relates to loving others, what is your greatest desire? What, then, is your greatest prayer?