

Easter 6
May 6, 2018

1 John 4:1-11
141-492-377-147, vv. 4 & 5

“Beloved!”

I. “Test the spirits.”

II. “Let us love one another.”

Dear Christian friends,

“Dear Christian friends.” So I usually begin the sermon. **“Dear friends,”** John writes three times here. LITERALLY in the Greek John writes, **“Beloved!”** We may not use that word **“beloved”** very much but here’s it’s SO MUCH BETTER than just **“dear friends.”** **“Beloved”** means you’re **loved** – but loved BY WHOM? Obviously we’re loved **by God** – and what a love God has for us! That’s John’s point here and **throughout** this letter.

But let’s not limit **“beloved”** to JUST loved **by God**. These Christians were also loved by John. When God establishes that SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP between pastor and people – between called workers and **congregation** – it’s one of **“beloved.”** Yes, we are Christian friends – we are brothers and sisters **in Christ** – but so much more we are **“beloved”** – loved by God AND each other.

As one loved by God – and as one loving these **dear** Christians – John writes, **“Beloved!”** LOVED and loving John writes, **“Beloved!”** – 1) Test the spirits” and 2) Let us love one another.”

I. **“Test the spirits.”**

Loving someone doesn’t mean GIVING IN to their every whim. How many moms (and dads!) – after telling their child, “NO, you can’t whatever” – then hear from that child, “You DON’T LOVE me! If you loved me you’d **let me** whatever...” Love means sometimes having to say, “NO! Be careful! WATCH out!” **“No, you can’t play** with matches. **Be careful** crossing the street!” To just watch someone do something **dangerous** – or where they could get hurt – and NOT SAY anything – that’s not love. That’s being COLD and uncaring.

With such a caring love John writes, **“Beloved! – do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God.”** **“Beloved”** – because you are LOVED SO MUCH by God AND by me – **“test the spirits.”**

John explains the need for such a LOVING WARNING. **“Because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”** A prophet is simply a SPOKESMAN for God. A faithful prophet SIMPLY PROCLAIMS, **“This is what the LORD says.”** A FALSE prophet also claims such DIVINE INSPIRATION for what he’s saying when in fact **God never said** whatever. **In other words**, the **“false prophet”** is lying – and lies don’t bring anyone closer to God.

There’s nothing new about **“false prophets”** and their **lies**. God repeatedly warned the Israelites about false prophets **“prophesying lies in (His) name.”** Jesus warned about false prophets who **“come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”** Being a “false prophet” doesn’t mean EVERYTHING he says is false. The Baptist preacher says MANY TRUE things I totally agree with – but when it comes to Baptism or Communion he’s a **“false prophet”** – telling lies **in God’s name**.

So the LOVING WARNING, **“Beloved! – do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits.”** The **“test”** for false prophets is NOT their personality or popularity. **Many** are false prophet is very personable and **sincere**. That **many** are very popular and have large followings SHOULDN’T SURPRISE us. **“They speak from a worldly perspective”** John explains, **“and the world listens to them.”** Paul tells us, **“The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn away from the truth and turn aside to**

myths.” Micah sarcastically nailed the Israelites of his day, **“If a liar and deceiver comes and says, ‘I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,’ he would be just the prophet for this people!”** Look how many people QUIT the church because they don’t like what GOD SAYS. “I can go somewhere else.”

“Beloved - this is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God.” That’s NOT TO SAY that if a preacher has it right about Jesus it’s OK if he’s wrong about other things. It’s always a sin FOR ANYONE or ANY CHURCH **“to add or subtract anything”** from God’s Word. John’s point is that what’s REALLY AT STAKE is the gospel itself. ALL false doctrine is eventually an attack on the gospel. If they devil can get us to IGNORE or question what God says about creation then we can proceed to ignore what God says about marriage and the family and move along to FINALLY IGNORING the gospel itself.

“Jesus Christ come in the flesh from God” is the very heart of the gospel. Jesus is not just a great guy or a wonderful teacher. He is the eternal Son of God born a real man TO BE the **“Christ”** – our sent from God Prophet – Priest – and King. ONLY Jesus **“has the words of eternal life.”** ONLY in Jesus’ blood shed on the cross do we have God’s forgiveness of all our sins. ONLY in Jesus do we have the victory over sin and guilt, death, the devil and hell. ONLY in Jesus are we **“beloved”** of God.

“Beloved – test the spirits.” Realize what’s AT STAKE – your soul’s eternal salvation – your personal relationship with God. **“Test the spirits”** and IF it’s anything contrary to God’s Word you’re dealing with a **“false prophet.”** **“Watch out – keep away”** God LOVINGLY commands us. Don’t let the devil lead you away from Jesus – EVEN IF it’s only baby steps at first.

Last week’s epistle reading was the verses right before these. There John had told us, **“Dear children, let us love not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth.”** John picks that thought up again.

II. “Let us love one another.”

“Beloved! – let us love one another, for (this) love comes from God.” John uses a SPECIAL Greek word for love. You may have heard it before – agape. This is more than the love OF FRIENDS for each other. Our friends are people we LIKE – people we get along with, etc. There’s something about our friends that ATTRACTS us to them.

Agape love goes way beyond that. Agape love is not based on WHAT WE SEE in the other person – in fact what’s in the other person could totally turn us off from that person. Agape love is NOT JUST words or a warm, fuzzy feeling. Agape love is an action – a giving of ONESELF to the other person FOR the other person’s good. Agape love is the love God IS and that God HAS **“for the world.”**

John’s words are familiar but SO WORTH SAVORING! **“This is how God’s love for us was revealed: God has sent His only-begotten Son into the world so that we may live through Him. This is love: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”**

“Not that we loved God.” Jesus said that the **“first and greatest commandment”** is **“LOVE the Lord your God with ALL your heart and ALL your soul and ALL your mind.”** **“This is love for God,”** John writes in the next chapter, **“to obey His commands.”** To say we **“love God”** but then IGNORE and avoid and defy God – what’s that really saying about our love for God? Every sin reveals a LESS THAN PERFECT love for God. When God says with His 10 Commandments, **“THIS IS HOW I want you to live your life”** – is it real love for God to say, **“SAY WHAT You want God but I’ll do as I please.”** Isn’t that the real attitude behind EVERY sin? God may say we need to REARRANGE our priorities – clean up our language – stop worrying and trust Him instead – be a faithful, loving spouse

– an obedient, respectful child – but “HEY GOD, tough luck!” Could you love people who CONTINUALLY TREAT you like that? Would you finally get fed up with such people?

“This is love: not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” God had every right to GIVE UP on us and send us to hell. **Instead** God sends us to Bethlehem and GIVES US His eternally **“beloved Son”** to be our Savior. That’s AGAPE love! God loves us not because WE’RE SO LOVABLE but only because God is SO LOVING. God saw us in our **rebellion** and **defiance** – saw us heading to a **justly deserved** hell – and in AGAPE LOVE God said, “I love them – I must save them – I WILL save them!”

God’s love doesn’t cancel out His **holiness**. God didn’t take back His commandments with a “That’s OK.” **“Jesus Christ came in the flesh”** and took the place of all people under God’s law. IN our place and TO our credit Jesus lived that life of **perfect love** and **obedience** that we owed God. Then Jesus took the blame for the sins of the whole world and was punished in our place. Jesus endured the WRATH – the REJECTION and **condemnation** we had coming because of our sins. Jesus was **“forsaken”** so we could be forgiven. Jesus endured the hell of the cross so we could live forever with Him in heaven. BECAUSE God in agape love gave us Jesus – **because Jesus in agape love died** on the cross for us – we now have and enjoy God’s FULL and FREE forgiveness of all our sins. Trusting in Jesus we can be ABSOLUTELY SURE that we are going straight to heaven when we die. What a joy – what comfort – to be so **“beloved”** BY GOD!

“Beloved! – if God loved us so much, we also should love one another.” Think of how our sinful natures OFTEN RESPOND to **situations** and **requests**. “What’s in it FOR ME?” Do I HAVE to? I’m busy – tired, etc. DON’T LOOK at me. Get somebody else. I don’t FEEL like it. I’ve done enough already. Let somebody else do it. Leave me ALONE.” You can probably think of more just like those. That’s not AGAPE love. That’s selfishness and **laziness**. There may be SOME TRUTH **behind** those answers but it’s being used as an EXCUSE to **not help** or **get involved**. Jesus could have HONESTLY looked at the cross and said, “I’ve DONE ENOUGH already. That’s asking too much. They don’t appreciate Me.” But Jesus showed us – Jesus showered on us! – AGAPE love.

“Beloved! – if God loved us so much, we also should love one another.” Amen.

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