

1 John 4:1-11May 17, 2009 – 6th SUNDAY OF EASTER**Love One Another**✠ **Testing the spirits** (vv.1-6)✠ **Sacrificing self** (vv.7-11)

In the name of Jesus, the full, bright projection of God's eternal love, dearly beloved believers:

The theme of this sermon is still a favorite among Christians, and for good reason. Didn't our Lord Jesus speak warm and wonderful words about love just before He died for us? ***“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*** (John 15:13 NIV) And who can forget? ***“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*** (John 13:35 NIV) Christian love caught the attention of a Roman soldier who had helped throw hundreds of Christians to the lions and gladiators. As the ancient story goes, he finally shook his head in wonder at the way the dying Christians cared for each other. He said, “See how they loved!” And not just each other. Christians loved their sick pagan neighbors thrown out into the streets by fearful relatives during plagues that swept across the Dark Ages. Christians called “hospitalers” would gather the ailing into their homes and nurse them back to health. Such love won many hearts for Christ. Christian love began what we call “hospitals” today.

But Christ's command to **Love One Another** is not about the fantasies of Hollywood “soaps” where famous actors claim to be “in love” only to break up for some other “honey” in a hotly contested divorce. Jesus' heart was aching on His way to torment on the cross when He showed His love by washing His disciples' feet. Persecuted Christians were dying and plagues were ravaging their neighbors when Christ's love shown in their lives of service. The darker the night, the brighter shines God's love in Christ. Sweet, but tough, this love, yet how much deeper and richer it is when we **Love One Another**...

✠ **Testing the spirits** (vv.1-6)

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Since it's talking about ***“false prophets”*** or more literally, ***“lying preachers,”*** why doesn't God just tell us to “test the preachers”? Some churches do that before they “hire” a new preacher. They have a committee listen to recordings and then let the candidate preach some practice sermons to see whether toothpicks will be needed to keep their eyes open. But pay attention, ***“Dear friends.”*** The Lord's Apostle of Love warns us: ***“Test the spirits”*** of the prophets. Test the pre-suppositions behind their theology. For instance, if a preacher believes that “faith must be reasonable,” then whatever he cannot understand by human reason, he will not believe. The famous Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli said that, then refused to accept the Real Presence in Christ's Holy Supper. After all, how can reason ever grasp: ***“This is my body. This is my blood”***?

So ***“test the spirits”*** is the Lord's command. But how? What's the yardstick? If you left it up to us preachers, sinners one and all, a kind of “fisherman's yardstick” would be the first choice. I still remember the first time I held one in a store. “Look, Dad! You could catch a fish a few inches long and call it a foot!” Wouldn't you like that kind of measure if you owned a gas station? Dispense a few ounces and call it a gallon. Preach your own opinions and call it “God's word”? Think of the profits! Think of the false prophets who do the same! **Love One Another by Testing the spirits.**

They were popping up all over in the ancient world, and we have even more today. The “higher knowledge” of the ancient Gnostics has been replaced by secular humanism. But it's all the same “fisherman's yardstick” to try to measure the infinite wisdom of God by the tiny mind of man. Can't understand how a virgin could give birth to God's eternal Son? Most seminaries and preachers today deny the virgin birth and explain, if anyone dares to ask, that an itinerant Roman soldier got to Mary. They're serious – and so, so lost. For then they have no Savior and no saving relationship with God.

Then they're failing the test as God's Son says through His Apostle John: ***"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges,"*** literally, *says the same thing, "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not [say the same thing as] Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."* ***"The spirit of the antichrist"*** was the basic belief that condemned Jesus to be crucified because the Jewish religious leaders would not accept Him as God's own Son, the promised Messiah. Later when the Roman government was finally out of the way, the person of ***"the antichrist"*** came along to call himself the "Vicar" or "Substitute of Christ," the head of Christ's church on earth. One pastor was nervous about saying this to a former Roman Catholic. But as they studied the Bible passages (See also 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.), the student asked the pastor, "Is this talking about the papacy"? But lest we all become Lutheran Pharisees, we need to recognize the ***"spirit of the antichrist"*** in us. It wants to question God's will for our lives and put our love life or job or sports in first place *instead of Christ*. Here in this sinful heart of mine, I need to seek the Lord's forgiveness in repentant faith.

Can you see this beyond "tough love"? ***"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."*** The only true preacher's yardstick on real *truth* against the *spirit of falsehood* is this: Do they listen to Christ and His apostles or not? Peter says, ***"Baptism doth also now save us."*** (1 Peter 3:21 KJV) One woman told me that was hard to understand. Yet it says what it says. **Testing the spirits** means, do you believe Christ enough in to be...?

✠ **Sacrificing self (vv.7-11)**

What would make a dying Christian care more for a fellow Christian bleeding next to him on the sands of Roman theater? What is missing from Christians who applaud pastors and fellow parishioners sacrificing time and sweat for Jesus, but rarely lift a hand themselves? The holy Apostle explains: ***"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*** (1 John 3:18 NIV) "Words are cheap" and "actions do speak louder than words." And no love speaks louder than **Sacrificing self**.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." Some people are only kind to their friends. They only give gifts to people who will pay them back with a gift. But Jesus is God's great Gift of the opposite. There was no waiting in heaven for us to get our act together and start caring for God and each other. Our selfish hearts never could. So from eternity God planned the greatest rescue mission ever. And when His time came, ***"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."*** And did Jesus only die for a few who would love God in return? No, ***"He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."*** (2 Corinthians 5:15 NIV) God's self-sacrificing love in Christ empowers us to **Love One Another** by **Sacrificing self**.

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." The stinking garbage dump of our sins has been covered by the body and blood of God's own Son, the only *Sacrifice* that could ever remove such a mountain of guilt. Do try this at home. Fill a box with rocks, one for every bad thought or unkind word. Add another rock for each selfish attitude that keeps you from reaching out to someone who irritates or infuriates you. For me, less than a day. For you, how long before the box of rocks is too big to carry? Christ stumbled under our guilt which God piled on His cross. But when Christ's blood dripped into the sands of Golgotha, the boulders of our guilt dissolved in the love of God. He hurled that box of rocks into the depths of the sea never to be seen again. Now think of your worst hurt, your most difficult coworker. That's you in God's eyes before, but now in Christ we're reconciled to God. ***Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*** Live like Jesus: ***"Love each other as I have loved you."*** (John 15:12 NIV) Amen.