

THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ May 1, 2016



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. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ 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. ⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

How well do you read maps? I know, it may seem like an archaic question now that just about everyone has GPS and Google maps on their smartphones, but what about if you didn't have coverage, or your phone was out of battery? Yes even in a world with Google maps and Yelp, being able to read a map has value. One of our neighbors is a navigator in the Airforce, she needs to be able to read a map. At Grace, we use maps when we are canvassing, it is helpful to be able to read a map so you don't double canvass the same area.

But maps are only valuable as long as you know what the map is about or for. For instance, it doesn't do me any good to have a map of Boston when I'm trying to find my way around Tucson. When hiking, a map is useless if I don't know which direction is north. So generally, on most maps you will have a legend, something that helps you to read the map. Now the same is true for the Bible. This Easter season, we have looked at the different ways that God blesses us because of Easter. The final gift in this series is a map. But we also see that God doesn't just give us a map, he gives us a legend too, he gives us a way to read this map. Both are important, both are needed.

This map that God gives us is centered in love, and the legend to that map, how we are to act in love, is Jesus Christ. We don't do what we love, but what he loves, this is the love God wants us to show. In short, this is THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE.

1. Love: the right way
2. Love the right way!

(1)

The inspired author who brings us this TRUTH ABOUT LOVE, is none other than the apostle John – the writer of the gospel of John, the writer of Revelation, and he also happened to be the disciple whom Jesus loved. As far as we know, he was the only apostle to die a natural death. A few weeks ago, we took a look at another portion of this particular letter that John wrote. He wrote in response to false teachers, false prophets, distorting the Word of God for their profit and discrediting John himself. We see this theme come forth in the first portion of our lesson this morning.

“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.” John encouraged his readers to not be taken in by anyone who comes claiming to have a message from God. But did you notice how John began? He began with **“dear friends.”** In the Greek, it’s even more emphatic, **“Beloved ones,”** using that famous Greek word for love, **“Ἀγαπή.”** John was more than just a teacher, he was a close friend who loved them, and people loved him back. He was one who was looking out for the interest of others, not his own popularity.

That’s what is important to know when we talk about THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE. Love is more than just a feeling, love is more than just doing whatever you want whenever you want. Love is central to what John is talking about. But with so many misconceptions out there about love, John wants to talk about love: the right way. And that right way comes from God. John writes, **“love comes from God”** and a little later **“God is love.”** He nails it down even further when he says, **“this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”**

This is completely upside down from the way that the world views love. This is completely upside down from the way that sometimes we view love. When we make love about me, about what’s good for me, or at very least, something we do. But John doesn’t start there. Instead, John says, **“this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.”** This is love: the right way.

And when you think about it, how great that is, when you think about the love we show others, it can be so subjective at best. We love those who love us, we love those who can do something for us, we love some because of a certain sports team they play for, or how beautiful they look. Let’s face it, our love is so subjective. And sometimes the people we love today, we will love a little less tomorrow. Just imagine if God loved like that? If God followed our example of love, loving us on the basis of what we’ve done. Loving us one day and not loving us the next. Could we ever have certainty that God would love us when it mattered most? This is love the wrong way.

That’s not even beginning to look at the reasons we give God to not love us. Do you realize how many reasons you give him to not love you? There would not be a laundry list long enough for us to give every reason why God should not love us. **“Our sins were as scarlet”** one writer said. Another said, **“I was sinful from the time my mother conceived me,”** meaning before I even took a breath. Our sinful mind cannot

even begin to fathom how bad and how often we have offended our God. The only way we can begin to fathom how unlovable we have been is to look to the Bible.

But where our love is inconsistent, God's love is constant, over centuries. Where our love is fickle, God's love is sure. God's love compelled him to send Jesus, his Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. And anyone who knows anything about his life, and his ultimate death, knows that it wasn't pretty. There was nothing humane about the torture or crucifixion Jesus went through, to say nothing about God the Father turning his back on his Son. It's a punishment that should cause us to recoil in horror at the brutality. And we realize that's what we deserve for what we have done. Our sins nailed Jesus to the cross. And Jesus in love took our place. You want to know THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE? This is love: the right way.

While we were still sinners, while we were still unlovable, Christ died for us. This is God's love, it is a love that is sure, because it is a love that is complete. Jesus won't undo what he did. It is a love that never thought about what was best for God, but what was best for us. There's nothing we can do to earn this love, it is a love that is completely independent of our actions. It was put in a very simple way to me recently. In other religions – you obey, you follow, and then you get your reward. In Christianity – you get your reward first and you have it, and then you follow. This is love: the right way.

(2)

Love: the right way, leads us to the second TRUTH ABOUT LOVE, which is what John spends the rest of this section talking about, he encourages his readers and us to love the right way! There's plenty of people out there who will tell you the key to everything is love. And while there's certainly some truth to that, it's not the answer to all of our problems. Certainly if more people showed love to others we wouldn't have as many fights over politics, we wouldn't see as much violence on the evening news and there wouldn't be as much backlash over certain company policies.

But when we remember love: the right way, we can learn to love the right way. And the first key to loving the right way is to understand what kind of love we're talking about. The ancient Greeks may have understood love better than we do. Where we only have one word, the Greeks had multiply. Because they understood there was a difference between the love of two friends, the love of husband and wife, and the love of a God. And so this love that John is talking about is a love that is self-less, a love that thinks about another person's interests above one's own.

This is the kind of love that a husband shows to his wife. Instead of just plopping down in a comfy chair at the end of a hard day of work or retirement, he asks his wife what she needs and wants. This is the kind of love that a mother has for her children – getting up in the middle of the night when it would be so much easier to just forget about a crying baby. And this is the love John says Christians should have for one another. A love that cares more about other people than self. This is the first key to loving the right way.

But caring about other people is more than just helping them achieve their goals and their desires. It's helping them get what's best for them, even when they don't realize what is best for themselves. It's helping them understand what is best for them. And let me explain what I mean. Take the example of a parent and a child. What a child wants and what's best for a child often are not the same. So it would not be loving for a

parent to always give in to what the child wants. It would not be loving to let Susy stay up as late as she wants, it would not be loving to let George eat all the candy and chocolate he wants, it would not be loving to let Paul play in the middle of a busy street. A loving parent will show love for their child not only in what they allow the child to do, but also in what they don't allow the child to do.

And the same is true for the love we show as Christians. And the guiding principle, the legend to our map of love is Christ. It is not loving for us as Christians to allow people we care about to do things that harm their relationship with Christ. And you know what? Sin harms a person's relationship with Christ. And sometimes we show love, not only in what we do for others, but also in what we don't do for others. When we don't condone their sinful behavior, when we actually speak out against what they're doing and say that it's wrong. But not just that it's wrong, but that it's harming their relationship with their Savior.

This is at the heart of what John is talking about when he says, **"do not believe every spirit but test the spirits."** What some 'spirits' are saying could be leading you away from your Savior. We are able to be confident in the love we show to not only other Christians but non-Christians as well, because whatever the result, our love is motivated by one who is greater than the world, our love is motivated by the God who loved you more than you can ever know.

Now, I doubt I'm telling you anything new this morning. I'm sure you've heard all about how we as Christians are to show love to one another. But here's something I do want you to take to heart. I want you to not just listen to John's words and but also follow through on them. Think of two people in your life that you can practice John's words on this week. Think of two people to whom you can show this "agape" love. A love that is selfless, a love that looks out for that person's faith. Maybe they are here with us this morning, but maybe they're not. This is the wonderful gift of love God gives us, a map. He gives us THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE. He shows us love: the right way, and encourages us to love the right way! Amen.