

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. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but 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.

⁴You, 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. ⁵They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We 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.

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (NIV84)

Theme: Defend the Truth with Love

1. Teach the gospel of Christ
2. Show the Love of Christ.

What exactly is love? People of all kinds of ideas about what love is. Countless books, songs, and movies have been written about the subject. And for the most part, love is portrayed as a sappy, emotional feeling deep inside of someone.

But that's not how love is portrayed in the Bible. To God, love is not a feeling or emotion, but an action. Sometimes we may show love to someone and they will not be happy in the least bit about it. We can show love to someone in many different ways—sometimes it's pointing the truth out to someone whether they want to hear it or not.

Today John tells us to defend the truth in love. Teach the gospel of Christ and show the love of Christ.

The best way to show love to someone is to simply tell him about his Savior. Teach him about who Jesus is and what he has done. Jesus is true God. He willingly gave up the glories of heaven to live on this earth. The eternal, almighty God was conceived in a virgin. God was born as a helpless little baby. Jesus, then, is true God and true man. And as he lived on this earth for more than 30 years, he never once sinned. He kept all of God's law perfectly. And yet he was put to death. Only to rise from the dead three days later on Easter. Of course, showing love to someone is explaining to them what Christ and his work mean for us. Christ didn't just die on the cross. On the cross he paid for our sins. He took away their guilt. He covered over our sins so God doesn't look at us like sinners, but as his own dear children. As a result we will not be condemned, we will not suffer through hell—for our sins are not counted against us. And through his resurrection we know that we too will rise again. Just as Jesus' body came to life after three days, we know that our bodies will rise again and join us for eternity in heaven. And God has given us these gifts—the forgiveness of sins and eternal life not because of anything we have done. But only because of the work of his Son.

Teaching this to someone is the best way to show them love. For there are some who deny this. Even those who claim to be Christians deny this basic teaching of Christianity. John dealt with some of these people himself. At the time of John, there were those who were going around in the early Christian Church who said that Jesus didn't really have a body. Sure, he existed but not with a regular human body like you and I have. Or there were those who claimed that Jesus was only God during part of his life here on earth. From the time of his baptism to on the cross he was God. But before that—for the first 30 years of his life and the last few hours, he was not God. But these false teachings were detrimental to the truth and people's souls. For if Jesus isn't fully God and fully man he cannot be a Savior. And those that believed these lies did not truly believe in Christ. So John vehemently defended the truth against these attacks. Today we face all kinds of attacks on the truth. Some say things similar to

the people of John's day. Others today deny that Jesus ever existed. Or perhaps that he did exist, but not to save us. They say he was a good man who showed us the way to live our lives. He was a good example for us to follow—how to be loving. It doesn't take you long to find someone who questions everything the Bible says. The wonder is if the Bible is a complete fantasy or mixture of fact and fiction.

That is why John tells us in verse one, **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.** We are to match up what someone believes and teaches with what God's Word says. Those who don't agree with the Bible says do not speak from God. They have positioned themselves in place of God and against him. Anyone who doesn't confess that Jesus is truly God and man is not from God. Anyone who says that we are saved in any other way other than the work of Jesus Christ alone is not from God. Anyone who points to Christ as simply an example is not from God. Neither are those who deny that the Bible is completely true. They speak from the viewpoint of the world. **They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.** We are not only supposed to test those who teach, but also the audience. Why do they listen to the person they listen to? Paul tells Timothy, **the time will come when men 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.** There are some people who simply don't want to hear the truth. They don't want to be told that they are helpless sinners, enemies of God who can't do anything to please him or earn eternal life. They don't want to be told that their teachings or viewpoints are false. They want to live their lives the way they want to live. They don't want to be told that what they do, think, or say is displeasing to God. So they listen to those who will teach what they their itching ears want to hear.

That is why it is so important to defend the truth with love. And speaking the truth in love might not be viewed as loving. We might have to tell someone that their lifestyle is one that is displeasing to God. That what they do is leading them to eternal damnation. And for the most part, people aren't going to like it much when you tell them

this. They will call you a bigot, an extremist, or simply intolerant. And of course, they will claim that you are not being very loving by judging them. It can be intimidating when you have to defend the truth in love to someone. And we may hesitate to do it. But we have nothing to fear. For we have Christ on our side. **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.** Christ has already defeated the devil through his death and resurrection. From heaven he rules over all things. He has complete control over everything in the world—even the Antichrist and all who speak in the same vein. As we defend the truth in love we don't have to be afraid because Christ will defend us against the world just as he defeated Satan and his followers. So we speak boldly and often, as we defend the truth in love.

It certainly is an act of love when we defend the truth of God's Word. It is also an act of love when we show Christ's love for the world by showing love for him and others.

God's love for us is the ultimate example of love. **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.** John's words here are similar to Paul's in Romans. **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** God willingly sent his Son into the world. He sent him into a world that was full of sin and hate. He knew that Jesus would suffer. He knew that Jesus would be brutally murdered on a cross. God did this even though he knew who we were. He knew that we are sinners who constantly sin against him. He sent his son to die for his enemies. God knew full well that he would send his Son to die for those who wanted nothing to do with him. But he also knew he was sending him for those who were helpless. He sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Through him all our sins are forgiven as they were washed away in Christ's blood.

Christ certainly loved the world. But we often don't. We fail to show love to God. At times we fail to obey his commands. We don't defend the truth of his Word. Instead of speaking the truth in love, we often let people live in sin. We also fail to show love to others. We

have feelings of hate and rage. At times we don't treat others as we treat ourselves. We spread rumors about someone, keep things for ourselves, and so on.

We often act like the world. For the world also fails to show love. And this shouldn't really surprise us—we are living in a sin-filled world. We don't have to look very hard to notice that there is a lot of hate in our world today. The United States commits almost twice as many crimes as any other nation. In our own backyard—Detroit, Saginaw, and Flint have some of the highest rate of violent crimes in any city in our country. We watch the nightly news and we see people who were murdered, robbed, raped, or beaten up for no reason what so ever. This world is full of hate, not love. As John tells us, **Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.** So this shouldn't really surprise us. We can't expect people to show love to one another if they are not Christians.

As John says in verse seven, **love comes from God.** Unbelievers don't know God's love. They have no true motivation to show love to others. So why should we expect them to follow Christ's example of love if they have no idea what Christ's love is? For true love can only be done through faith in God. It can only stem through him. Without God, there is no love.

At times it may seem as if someone is showing love, but they really aren't. Because their motivation is off. And motivation is key. He shows love for the wrong reason. He loves so that he could be loved back. Or because it makes him feel good. Or so he could be recognized by someone else as loving. Perhaps he gives to others simply for the tax-right off. Ultimately his motivation for loving is selfish. And it's not true love. This type of love may look good on the outside, but God doesn't care about that. God cares about the heart.

True love can come only through faith in God. It is obeying God's will in respect to how you treat others. And this is done out of love and thanks for everything Christ has done for us. **We love because he first loved us.** And sometimes when we obey God, the world may not think that we are showing love. As Christians, we cannot tolerate false teaching. So we show love to God by defending the truth of the gospel. They may think that we are not being loving—but judgmental. “How dare you point out someone else's sins or errors—that's not a

very loving thing to do!” But it's scratching ears that is not loving. To let someone believe a lie, or live a life on the way to eternal damnation is not loving. No, it is true love to defend the truth of the gospel and to point out sin so we may lead others to the love of Christ.

For he is true love. **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 prime example of love is that Christ gave up his life for us. What he has done is now and will always be the focus. For through his love alone, and not our love for him, do we have eternal life. If we lose Christ's gospel we lose his love. That is why we stay so vigorously defend his gospel. For if we fail to show love to others by defending the truth then we fail to show them the love of Christ. We fail to show them the love of Christ that he forgives us when we fail to love.

In verse 11 John perfectly sums up this section, **Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** Christ gave up his life for us. He showed us what true love is. In return we show love to God and to others by defending the truth of his Word so all may see the love of Christ. Amen.