

SERMON NOTES

SUNDAY 20.10.24

PREACHER: PS NATHAN BEAN

ALREADY LOVED -
TESTING OF THE SPIRITS

BECOMING CHRISTLIKE

BEING, THINKING & DOING

Conviction of a Disciple: As we continue in our journey to Christlikeness, our knowledge (experience) of God's love deepens. As we grow, we partner more and more with God's Spirit, the outworking of which is revealed in our love for others.

OVERVIEW

John wants us to know that we are IN CHRIST and IN HIS LOVE. We are called to discern the spirits at work around us and test them to see if they are from God or from the world - ultimately, the way we know is by their fruit - God's Spirit is always revealed in our love for each other.

ACTION

Step 1: Reflect: How have you experienced God's love in your life lately? How has His love shaped how you view yourself and others?

Step 2: Commit: Where might you be partnering with spirits not from God? How can you commit to turning toward The Spirit in these areas?

Step 3: Act: Think of someone in your life that might be difficult to love right now. What is one practical way you can show Christ-like, sacrificial love to them this week?

THOUGHT

SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 4

What does it mean to know something? We can think it, we can agree with it, we can even argue for it, but from the perspective of John and the other writers of scripture - Old and New Testaments - to “know” is an experiential, relational reality that is lived out.

John references this “knowing” 32 times in his letter (1John). And what does he want us to know? That we would KNOW we are in Christ and already loved by God. Still, John would think it silly for us to say we “know” this fact and yet not have the fruit in our life that shows we “know” it. How do we know that we really know that we are loved by God and that we are in Christ? Quite simply, that we love each other.

In a fun coincidence, we could say that our life in Christ should be anchored to two passages, both written by John - John 3:16 and 1John 3:16. The first speaks of God’s sacrificial love for us, the next of our sacrificial lives for each other. In both, love is acted out in service for the other - from God to us, from us to one another. This is how we know that we actually are in Christ.

As John writes in chapter 4, he speaks of the “testing of spirits”. There are multiple spirits at work in the world - and then there is THE SPIRIT, which comes from God. He challenges his readers/hearers to begin building their discernment of these spirits - to know which is from God and which are against God. He says we can tell when a spirit is from God because it “acknowledges” the reality of Jesus.

Here again, John is not talking about a simple verbal statement that Jesus was a historical figure. This too is a lived “knowing” - in other words, look for the fruit of what the spirit produces. He calls us to partner with the Spirit of God in all things and turn from anything opposing the truth of Christ. These opposing spirits are not always immediately evident, which is why John calls us to “test” things in our lives. What are our thoughts based on, what are they producing in us?

In reality, everyone has an originating point - a spirit - from which their life is built. For the Christian, our starting and ending point is that Jesus has completed in-full everything we need for life and salvation. Because of Christ, we are IN HIM and are ALREADY LOVED. When we partner with and live from this place, the fears and anxiety that drive the world begin to dissipate and the love of God begins to grow within us.

John reminds us that God's perfect love casts out fear. When we live in the reality that we are already fully loved by God, fear no longer drives our actions—instead, love becomes our motivation and the fruit that others see. Not only does it grow inside of us, but as a result, this great love has no choice but to spill out into love for those around us.

There are plenty of post-church people out there who say things like “I love Jesus, but hate the church”, or who refuse to participate in church community because of the people who are there. From John's perspective, this is impossible. We cannot say we love God and not love people (vv.19-21). This is the whole deal. We love because we are loved. When we let this reality grow roots deep within us, everything in our life changes to the glory of God and the world will see that we are the people of God by the love that we have for each other.

DISCUSSION

1. In what ways do you see the love of God growing in this group? How can we continue to encourage one another to live out our knowledge of God's love in practical ways?
2. John teaches that we cannot love God without loving others. How do we as a group ensure that our love for one another is authentic and not just something we claim? What are some signs of genuine love we should be looking for?
3. As a group, how can we tangibly love and serve people both inside and outside of the church community? Brainstorm a way to partner together in demonstrating God's love in our local area this month.

PRAYER

Creator and Father,

We are so grateful for the incredible love you have poured out on us through Christ. Help us to truly know and experience this love, so that it shapes every part of our lives. As your children, teach us how to love others as You have loved us. Help us see areas where we have partnered with fear and anxiety instead of your perfect love. Empower us by your Spirit to walk in love, to discern what is from you, and to live as your people, and be your image-bearers in the world.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.