

Summary

In this sermon from 1 John 4, the pastor explores two major themes: testing the spirits and walking in agape love. He warns the congregation not to accept every spiritual experience or teaching at face value, reminding us that false prophets and deceptive spirits are active in the world. The Holy Spirit serves as our spiritual compass, always pointing us toward the true biblical Jesus who is both fully God and fully man. Any teaching that denies this truth, or that glorifies man over God, is out of alignment with Scripture and should be rejected. The second half of the sermon focuses on agape love as the defining mark of a true follower of Christ. Agape is a giving, self-sacrificial love that mirrors what God demonstrated by sending His Son as the propitiation for our sins. Because God has forgiven us an unpayable debt, we are called to extend that same forgiveness and love to others. The pastor challenges the congregation to examine their hearts, especially in relationships where hurt and unforgiveness linger, and to choose agape even when an apology never comes.

Intro Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You today grateful for the gift of Your Word and the guidance of Your Holy Spirit. As we open our hearts and minds to discuss what we have heard, we ask that You would be the center of this conversation. Remove any distractions, any pride, or any preconceived ideas that might keep us from hearing what You want to say to us today. Let Your love be the compass that guides this time together, and may we leave this place more aligned with You than when we arrived. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ice Breaker

What is one thing you are known for loving deeply, whether it is a food, a hobby, or a place, and why does it mean so much to you?

Key Verses

- 1 John 4:1
- 1 John 4:2-3
- 1 John 4:7-8
- 1 John 4:9-10

- 1 John 4:18
- 1 John 4:20-21
- Matthew 18:35

Questions

- The pastor described the Holy Spirit as a spiritual compass that always points us toward the true biblical Jesus. In what areas of your life do you feel most aligned with that compass, and where do you sense it might be getting pulled off course?
- First John 4:1 tells us to test the spirits because many false prophets have gone out into the world. What are some practical ways you personally evaluate whether a teaching or spiritual experience is genuinely from God?
- The pastor pointed out that some false teaching does not outright deny Jesus but instead glorifies man over God, focusing more on personal happiness than holiness. Have you ever encountered teaching like this? How did you recognize it?
- The sermon described agape love as a giving love extended to someone who cannot repay it in equal measure. How does that definition challenge or change the way you think about love in your closest relationships?
- In the parable from Matthew 18, the servant who was forgiven an enormous debt refused to forgive a much smaller one. Where do you see yourself in that story, and what does it reveal about your own heart?
- The pastor said that people who have hurt us are often completely convinced they were right and will likely never ask for forgiveness. How does that reality make forgiveness harder, and what does the Bible say about whether their repentance is required before we forgive?
- First John 4:18 says that perfect, mature love casts out fear. What fears in your life might be a sign that agape love still needs room to grow and mature in you?
- The sermon closed with a challenge about unforgiveness that resurfaces even years later. Have you experienced a moment where old hurt came back up unexpectedly? What did you do with it, and what would it look like to release it again today?

Life Application

This week, identify one relationship where you have been holding on to a debt, whether it is a hurt, an offense, or a disappointment. You do not need to wait for an apology or for the other person to acknowledge what they did. Choose to release that debt in prayer, even if it is only a small step forward.

Write down what you are choosing to forgive and bring it before God each day this week. Remember the 200,000 years of debt that has already been forgiven over you, and let that truth fuel your willingness to let go of what others owe you.

Key Takeaways

- The Holy Spirit is our spiritual compass, and He always points us toward the true biblical Jesus. We must test every Spirit and every teaching against the standard of Scripture to avoid being led astray.
- True doctrine presents and glorifies the biblical Jesus, who is both fully God and fully man. Any teaching that denies either of these truths, or that shifts the focus to glorifying man, is out of alignment with God's Word.
- Agape love is the defining mark of a genuine follower of Christ. It is a self-giving, unconditional love that mirrors God's love for us, demonstrated through the sacrifice of His Son as the propitiation for our sins.
- Because God has forgiven us a debt we could never repay, we are called to extend that same forgiveness to others, even when they never ask for it and even when the hurt runs deep.
- Walking in agape love is not what saves us, but it is the proof that we are saved. As our love matures through the Holy Spirit, fear is cast out and we grow in confidence before God.

Ending Prayer

Lord, thank You for this time together and for the truth of Your Word that does not let us stay comfortable in places where we need to grow. We confess that agape love is not always easy, and that there are relationships and wounds in our lives where we need Your help to forgive and to let go. We ask that Your Holy Spirit would continue to be our compass, keeping us pointed toward You and away from anything that would pull us off course. Where there is fear, let Your perfect love cast it out. Where there is unforgiveness, give us the grace to release it. And where we have been confused by false teaching or imbalanced doctrine, bring us back to the truth of who Jesus is. May the love we carry out of this place be a testimony to the world that we belong to You. In Jesus' name, amen.