

6th Sunday of Easter

May 6, 2018

1 John 4:1-11

Truth and Love are not Mutually Exclusive

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Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

Some wrongly believe that truth and love do not go together. They may not say it but their practice shows it. Either they hold selfishly to the truth about Christ but have little or no love for others; or they love without any thought for the truth about Jesus. John teaches us that **Truth and Love are not Mutually Exclusive**. Quite the contrary, truth and love go hand in hand. Truth centers on Jesus' person and work. Love centers on God's love in Christ

The sad reality is there are false teachings and false teachers in the visible Christian church. The cults misuse the Bible to establish and support their false beliefs about Jesus' person and work as the only way of salvation.. John's words have come true. Many false prophets have gone out into the world and claim to be God's inspired spokesmen.

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit." We must "test the spirits to see if they are from God." We do that by examining critically and carefully all claims of those who say they speak for God. Believing everything is just as deadly to faith as believing nothing.

Think of a balance. On one side we have the Spirit's revelation in Holy Scripture that Jesus is God's incarnate eternal Son. Jesus is both human and divine. Those "spirits," or preachers, who preach the deity of Christ are from God. On the other hand are those who either deny Christ's deity, or say that I must add my own works in order to be saved. They are spirits who do not come from God.

This testing reveals false signs or miracles this or that prophet performs. Such testing prevents the lure of a preacher's personal magnetism or winning style as the bases for following him. The truth of what the spirit says is more important than great intellect or scholarship. Most of all such testing reveals the false idea of Jesus' work; it is incomplete or insufficient and I must add my own works and righteousness to it.

We Christians need constantly to be on guard and weigh the truth of God's Word against other claims. Those false claims are "the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and is already in the world." These teachings and those who proclaim are not from God. They can't be. Their doctrine has another source, the liar and the father of lies, Satan.

The way we overcome lies is not because we have any special quality of our own. The Holy Spirit is in us. The Spirit of truth is greater than that liar, Satan, who is in the world. We are God's "dear children." Since we are from God, "whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us." The "us" is the apostles and others who do speak God's Word. It is the truth about Christ's person and work that unites us.

This is how we distinguish the Spirit of truth from the spirit of falsehood. We examine the message to see if it is the full truth about Jesus Christ. Such knowledge does not move us to selfishness and lack of love. The second thing we are to have not mutually exclusive with the truth is love that centers on God's love for us in Christ.

John addresses his readers is a play on words lost in the English, "friends." John wrote, "Beloved, let us love." First, the love God is God's love for us in Christ. It is agape. This love cannot be known, experienced or shown apart from God. God's love for us in Christ ties us to the truth and to one another. This is our unity in the church. Love does not lead us to say truth does not exist or does not matter.

The love God has for us in Christ is our agape for each other and our neighbors. We demonstrate that we are dearly loved by dearly loving others. Unlike God's love for us, our love for each other is imperfect. Sometimes it is lacking all together in what we say or do not say, or in what we do or fail to do. Still, with our agape we manifest our heavenly Father's nature to some degree. Agape is there.

John contrasts those born of God and who know God with those who do not know him. Those who claim to be the children of God but do not love show their claim to be a hollow one. We heard that a couple weeks ago in chapter five of this epistle, that those born of God who love the Father also love his children as well.

St. John describes true love. True love is not a feeling or desire but an action. God is love and showed that love among us. Demonstrated is a better word than showed. The Father sent his one and only Son. That Son sacrificed himself for us who did not deserve anything from God. Regardless of the cost to himself, Jesus loved us as the atoning sacrifice for all our sins. This is the truth of Christ and the truth of the entire Scripture in which we are to remain.

“Dear friends, (beloved), if God loved us so much, we also should love one another.” This is the only conclusion to which the Spirit leads us. I weigh both sides and then answer the question, Will I love the other person in spite of their sins and faults? Yes, this is the only way to go. It is the way of love.

Will I use the Holy Word to judge truth and truth tellers and follow the Spirit of truth, or, the spirit of error? I will go the way the Spirit leads. It is the only way to go. It is the way of Christ. Truth and love are not mutually exclusive. When I have the truth about Jesus in his person and work for my righteousness, I will, as Luther wrote, “practice good works and love for God’s sake, freely and without seeking anything else.” Amen. <SDG>