1 John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Once again we have one of those texts before us that just contains a wealth of information and wonder. I want you to recognize that though you could say there are four clear bents to what is being said here, yet all four of those points come back to one thing: Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Let’s make this simple and just jump in. Our theme will be: **HE SENT HIS SON.**

Now did you notice the very opening lines? They said this, **“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone into the world. 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, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”**

What we have here is a simple way to tell if someone is a believer or not. That needs to be our concern because in truth, as we are warned many times in God’s Word: the world will be filled with false prophets and teachers: those who purport to tell you about God and faith, salvation and heaven, good and evil. Because these false teachers do and will exist, God here is advising us clearly: Test them! Test them and see if they are from God or not. And with that encouragement, we are then given the simplest of all tests to measure them by. Do they acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and is from God?

Now be careful here. This is a bit more complicated that just having someone say, “Sure, I believe in Jesus.” Do they believe Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary? Understand, there are churches out there that deny that. Do they believe that Jesus, true man, was also true God? True God in every way. True God is such a spectacular way that Scripture declares: **“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”** We are not talking that Jesus was just pious or a very good man. We are talking Jesus is God, pure and holy God. And this God of ours came to our world and took on human flesh and blood. Any denial of this aspect of Jesus is godlessness. This Jesus, in the flesh, went to the cross, suffered, died and was buried. But the third day Jesus rose from the dead! He physically came back to life as a true and very human flesh man. If you deny the resurrection you deny this truth of God. If you deny that Jesus, as man, ascended into heaven you deny this very truth of God: that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and is from God.

So if you have a church that denies the virgin birth, denies the miracles of Jesus, denies the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, denies the resurrection of Jesus or denies in any way that Jesus is God that is a church of the antichrist. That church is not of God or from God. It does not teach the truth of God and that church is not going to lead you to eternal life and salvation. That is not what the antichrist does. The spirit of antichrist is opposed to and against what is of God. And this antichrist is extremely influential in the world.

Next lesson. **”They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 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.”** I think this truth self-evident. The false teachers, those not of God, are accepted, celebrated and embraced by the world. Their message is the world’s message. We are told all of this because we need to be on our toes, our spiritual toes. Why? Our text told us. **“We are from God.”**

God is our source of knowledge and wisdom. God is our help and comfort, our strength and fortress. We listen to and believe God. We trust what God says. Now to help you grasp that all the more, please note that our text put this truth this way: **“whoever knows God listens to us.”** The “us” in this case is the Holy Spirit inspired Apostles and Evangelists of the Bible. They were people given the message of God, by the power of God, a message that is without error. In truth, it is the very message of God himself. What, you don’t believe God is capable of giving us his book, his words and wisdom through the hand of sinful men? You don’t believe God has the power, the ability to grant us his Word in this way? Then I submit you do not believe in God. Because God, the true God could and did do this. In and through this Word of his, the Holy Bible, we can and will be able to grasp the difference between truth and falsehood. In today’s world, to be able to discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of falsehood may be the difference between faith and unbelief. And just so you know, this very same lesson was given us this past Wednesday in our Bible class as we read Hebrews 5:14 **“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”** God’s Word does not change its message and focus.

Our text goes on in lessons. **“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love…we also ought to love one another.”**

It is at this lesson that I chuckle and smile. I have a social media friend who loves to post things about love and how important it is to love one another. Post after post of how love can solve all the problems and love can overcome all the evil. But in all the posts that person has made, I don’t ever recall that God or Jesus has ever been mentioned or pointed to as the example of love. Because if you don’t have God and his love, then just what is love or just what is the example of love we are to have?

Because if there is one thing I have finally learned in this world it is that the world does not get the idea and concept of love. Just look at how we speak of love. We say, “I love pie.” But that means we like to eat it, to devour it and in the process really we destroy the pie for our pleasure. We say, “I love to drive.” But that means we like the feeling and control we have over this big machine. And if we can, we like to put that car through the paces, to take that curve a little hard, to turn that corner just on the edge of fast, or to take off and hear that engine roar through the gears. In this case love is a feeling of power and control. We say, “I love you.” But if you don’t meet my expectations, don’t satisfy my wants and desires, don’t give me what makes me happy, then I will no longer love you and we will divorce. We as sinful humans, make our love conditional. And although we all plead that we should be more accepting, more loving to those who are different, we all know that we use love to declare that our selfish differences count more than yours. Such is the world’s love. Fickle, undefinable, and in many cases dangerous.

Yet God encourages us to love one another. Not with the human idea of love but with God’s idea. A love that is, well, God actually tells us what our love is to be in 1 Cor. 13. God says. **“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.”** Is this how we behave? Is this the love we practice? Note that, love is not just what we say, it is how we live, our attitude, our very outlook and point in life. A careful study of what God says love is and you realize that love is not so much an emotion as it is an action and outlook. And the only way we know of this kind of love is because of God.

And that brings us to our final lesson. **“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. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so love us, we also ought to love one another.**”

There it is. There is the whole point and focus of our lives. Jesus, the Son of God came to be our Savior. Why? Because God so loved us! God showed us the perfect and holy love that only He has. A love that continued to love even when mankind fell into sin, when mankind abruptly turned away from God and chased after every whimsy and imaginary being they could conjure up to be their gods. Man wanted anything but the True God, the Real God, the God of love and grace, peace and hope. Why? Because man has the problem of sin. Sin that God in love has a solution to.

That’s the whole point of Jesus coming in the flesh. God become man that God might do everything necessary to save us from our sins. God sent His Son. Jesus stepped out of heaven, stepped down to the realm of man and there did what we could not. Jesus in love kept the law for us. Endured every temptation and trial, every bit of ugliness that Satan could throw at him and Jesus remained perfect. Then this perfect Jesus went to the cross. Not for himself, but rather for us.

Have you ever seen love like this? Love freely given. Love that took on the punishment we deserve for our sins. That’s what our text told us when it said that Jesus was sent **“as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** There is a wonder to grasp. Sin needed to be paid for and God the Father with God the Son and the Holy Spirit conspired, yes, planned and plotted so that at a point in time Jesus would come and pay for our sins. Atone…redeem…a propitiation, a means of forgiving and appeasing, a way of reconciliation. That’s Jesus. God’s Son, born in the flesh, that He might display for us the full and gracious depth of God’s love. God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit…made sure that heaven could be our home. That heaven is our destination, our forever destination because God has done it all for us.

And did you notice that little phrase…don’t miss it…that said, **“This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us…”** You want to measure love and talk about love? Then let’s leave mankind out of it. Let’s not talk about us and what we can do or be. Let’s not focus on our abilities and our powers to get things loved. Let’s talk about God’s love. Because it is only because of God’s love that we can love, yes, begin to practice love.

So God then encourages us: **“Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”** Practice being patient, being kind, without envy or boasting. Practice setting aside your needs and desires to meet the needs and desires of those around you. Practice keeping that anger, rudeness, self-centeredness and evil shut out of your life. Practice what God says love is and then apply it to one another. In other words, practice what God’s Word reveals in everything. And yes, I believe if we actually practiced God’s love that this world would be a better place…at least for us. For us because we would know we are living God’s way and not the world’s way.

Lots of things here to think of. Keeping falsehood away by focusing on Jesus. Keeping the world’s garbage and lies out of our lives by focusing on Jesus. Practicing love as God has shown it and as God has demonstrated it in Jesus. And especially grasping God’s awesome love for us. The plan and promise to redeem us. The Savior who came to die for us and rise again from the dead. A God who so loved us that he is the very point, heart and core of love. For in Jesus is forgiveness and eternal life…the promise of forever love with the Father because God has so loved us. Thank you Lord for your love. Help us then to love your way, graciously and in Jesus. Amen.