

SUMMER of LOVE

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st John 2.18-27
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I. Connecting With One Another

How will you celebrate the 4th of July this year? What are some of your favorite 4th of July memories?

II. Introduction to this Series and Study

The community addressed in 1 John was a community torn by conflict—their fellowship had been broken. The two sides of the dispute were represented by those loyal to John, the author of this letter (the “Elder” (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1), and those who had left the community. Were their disagreements non-essential, so that unity could have been maintained? Or were they so great and so central to the faith that no compromise was possible?

Our passage this week answers that question, as John seeks to pastorally help the people under his care identify false (counterfeit) teachers and encourages them to hold on to the gospel they have been taught. These teachers and their followers may have held beliefs that seemed to differ only minimally and subtly from those of John and his congregations. But when examined with care, they are shown to be worthless, cheap imitations of the one real thing of great value: a true and abiding faith. By labeling these false teachers *antichrists* John makes it plain how seriously he regards their offense.

Study the Text

- a. Read through 1 John 2.18-19. As noted above, John calls these false teachers *antichrists*. The early church believed that one of the signs of living in “the last hour,” that is, the time immediately before Jesus returned, would be the appearance of false teachers who would attempt to lead the faithful astray. Many believed that this period would culminate in one, specific figure, “the antichrist,” who would stand “against Christ” and deceive many. The false teachers are the “They” that begins verse 19. They have left the fellowship.

What conclusions does John draw from their departure?

- b. Read 1 John 2.20-21. Commentator Thompson notes an interesting play on words to help us understand what John is saying:

...the words antichrist, anointing and Christ all have the same [Greek] root (Christos, chrisma). A true anointing (chrisma) enables a true confession of Christ (Christos); but those who are not anointed by the Spirit of God are, in fact, antichrists (antichristoi).

Read 1 John 4.2-3. What advice does John give to Christians (“anointed ones”)? Do these verses give us any clues as to what the false teaching may have been? What do you think?

- c. Read 1 John 2.22-23. How does John further define those who are *antichrists*?

What are these false teachers denying? Again commentator Thompson helps us understand:

The secessionists—those who left the community—apparently held a view that those who were the children of God had a special spiritual status that not only delivered them from the guilt and power of sin, but actually rendered them sinless. They claimed to be without sin and to have attained a state of perfect righteousness.

Read John 1.7-2.2 to see how John has already addressed this false teaching earlier in his letter. With all of this in mind, and looking back at 2.22-23, how does such a viewpoint deny “that Jesus is the Christ”? How does it deny “the Father and the Son”?

(Note: We’ve talked before in this series about the heresy of Docetism (from the Greek *dokein*, “to seem”). Docetism is the belief that Jesus only “seemed” or appeared to have a human body and to be a human person. The result was that the material world (the flesh) was seen as unimportant—only the spirit mattered. So, what one did with one’s body (flesh) was not of consequence, since one’s “spirit” had been made new by the “spiritual” Jesus.)

- d. What would it look like for these secessionists from the church to live as if they were “sinless”? What impact would that have on the church community?
- e. Now read 1 John 2.24-27. Understanding the context of this passage what is it that John’s readers “have heard from the beginning” that he wants to be certain “remains” in them? What benefits are associated with this?

John writes, “...the anointing you received from [God] remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you.” What does this say about the role the Holy Spirit plays in our lives? John is referring specifically to these false teachers when he says “you do not need anyone to teach you.” By what means has the Holy Spirit taught you in your Christian life?

III. Reflect and Respond

- a. The main problem facing John’s community was subtle, false teaching. Are there any teachings that you see within the Church that may look good on first glance, but don’t stand up to examination? What are they? How should the Church respond?
- b. In what ways do you see the Church or individual Christians watering down or ignoring the realities of human sinfulness? In what areas might you be tempted to do this?
- c. In your experience as a follower of Jesus, what has helped you to “remain” (abide) in him, and hold on to “what you have heard from the beginning”? What threatens that abiding?
- d. What does it mean to you that you have been anointed by the Holy Spirit?

IV. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Spend time in adoration of God...praise God for who He is.
- b. Spend time in confession, silently or aloud...in what ways have you fallen short of God’s intentions for you? Be honest with God and receive His forgiveness.
- c. Spend time in thanksgiving...for health...this church...your small group...family...friends...creation...and other gifts from God.
- d. Spend time in supplication...what needs do you have? What burdens are on your heart? Ask God to intercede in your life, like the life of Good Shepherd, our community, and our world.