

SUMMER OF LOVE

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st John 2.28-3.3
July 6-7, 2013

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I. Connecting With One Another

Have you ever heard the expression “Like father, like son”? How was it used: positively or negatively? What trait was the expression used to comment upon (looks, personality, intelligence, etc.)?

II. Introduction to this Study

Throughout our “Summer of Love” series in the Letter of First John, we’ve seen reiterated time and time again the truth that Jesus Christ embodies the fullness of God in human form! Indeed, like Father, like Son! As John wrote in 1.2: “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”

What’s more, because Jesus expressed the attributes of God, we can too! As children of God and “brothers and sisters” of Christ, we take on a new spiritual nature. John boldly declares, “We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” An incredible statement, isn’t it!? “We shall be like him”!

III. Study the Text

a. Read 1st John 2.28-3.3.

What strikes you as you read these verses? Do these verses remind you of anything from previous study guides or messages? Do you have any questions about what John is getting at here?

b. In verse 28, John (again) reiterates a common theme in his letter: that Christians must “continue” or “abide” in Jesus. True faith is not content in a one-time acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior, but is rather exhibited in a continual, ongoing discipleship. This is 1 of 18 times John instructs the church to “remain” in Christ!

What spiritual disciplines help you to abide or remain or continue in Christ?

In his book *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Richard Foster notes 12 disciplines that help us abide in Christ. Have you tried any of these?

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Meditation | <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer | <input type="checkbox"/> Fasting | <input type="checkbox"/> Study |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Submission | <input type="checkbox"/> Solitude | <input type="checkbox"/> Simplicity | <input type="checkbox"/> Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confession | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship | <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance | <input type="checkbox"/> Celebration |

c. Reread verse 29. We should remember John’s concerns as he writes to this church, which includes some who have departed from the fellowship because they didn’t believe that following Jesus required them to live changed lives. As such, when he writes that everyone who “does what is right” is born of God, he does not mean anyone, like those who don’t believe in God! Rather, he is encouraging those who seek to remain in Jesus to live holy lives as a result.

Being “born of God” is of profound importance to John and this community, centered as they were upon the Gospel of John. Read Jesus’ interaction with Nicodemus in John 3.1-21. What does this passage teach us about being “born of God”?

Read 1st John 3.9, 4.7-8, 5.1, 5.3-5, and 5.18. What do these passages tell us about the result of being born of God?

- d. Scholars note that 3.1 begins the second half of John's letter, which closely parallels the first. While the first half was directed primarily at those who've left the church, the second half is directed primarily at those who remain. Here's a basic outline of the parallels:

Live in the Light (1.5-2.29)

- a. God is light
- b. 1st condition: Renounce sin
- c. 2nd condition: Be obedient
- d. 3rd condition: Reject worldliness
- e. 4th condition: Keep the faith

Live as Children of God (3.1-5.13)

- a. God is Father
- b. 1st condition: Renounce sin
- c. 2nd condition: Be obedient
- d. 3rd condition: Reject worldliness
- e. 4th condition: Be loving
- f. 5th condition: Keep the faith

If you have time, work your way through the letter, finding these sections. Why do you think John encourages those who remain to love another and not those who've left?

- e. Reread 1st John 3.1-2 out loud. Say it like John would have!

As I type this at an It's A Grind coffee shop, a group of a few new mothers have gathered together for a "Mommy Group." As they talk together while sipping coffee, they dote on their own and one another's babies. In the first century you would be hard pressed to find a scene like this, and not only because there weren't any coffee shops! Children were *not* seen as the adorable little people we now know they are!

Read Mark 10.13-16 to see how Jesus redefines the role of children – and would-be disciples! What do you think Jesus means when he says that "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it"? How does that help you understand 1st John 3.1? What role does being childlike have to do with continuing, abiding, remaining in Jesus?

- f. 1st John 3.2-3 declares that while we're already children of God, one day we will become even more so, like Jesus himself! Now, that doesn't mean we'll be divine, but rather, that we'll take on a new spiritual nature, becoming like Jesus in his resurrected body. For that reason, we join in God's work of new creation by purifying ourselves (see verse 3).

While there were specific purifications rituals in the first century, we don't currently practice such things. And yet, in what ways could you purify yourself to become more like Jesus?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Are there any disciplines listed above that could help you in your "purifying"?
- b. Can you point to a specific time that you were "born of God" like Nicodemus? Or has your rebirth been an ongoing process? Spend some time prayerfully thinking through those spiritual milestones.
- c. How have you tangibly shown love to others in our faith community? In what ways could you be even more loving to fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?
- d. How could you become more childlike? In other words, in what ways are you too grown up!?

V. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Lift up others in our community – those you know and those you don't know – that they might continue to abide in Jesus, purifying themselves to be and become more like Him,
- b. Pray for our ongoing discernment process, that we would be led by God's Spirit regarding our denominational affiliation,
- c. Ask God to lead us in worship this weekend, and that through our time together we might be further purified into the likeness of Jesus.