

SUMMER of LOVE

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st John 2.3-6
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I. Connecting With One Another

Let's start with a sort of silly question (or three): What do you know? How do you know it? How do you know that you know it?

II. Introduction to this Study

Okay. Enough silly questions! (though we'll get back to them in time)

We continue our Summer of Love this week in the Letter of 1st John 2.3-6. Two weeks ago, we engaged the good news that Jesus took on flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood, and last week we saw the importance of fellowship with one another as we journey through our lives of faith.

In 2.3-6, John begins to explain the necessary connection between our faith in Jesus and the lives we lead. It's easy – though perhaps somewhat unpopular – to declare that we're Christians. And yet, it's an entirely different thing for our faith to inform our daily lives. Put another way, we can be intellectually convinced of the truth of Christianity, and even faithful in worship, without our conduct being changed. But, as John points out, if we claim to know Jesus, then our lives should reflect Him.

III. Study the Text

- a. As we have noted in previous weeks, there is an integral connection between the Letter of First John and the Gospel of John. Perhaps John the Apostle wrote both. Or perhaps the letter was written by someone else with an intimate knowledge of John's gospel, as well as this community, who was centered upon the John's account of the life of Christ. Either way, there is an undoubted connection between the two.

As such, let's start this week's study in the gospel. Read John 15.1-10.

Now, read it again, emphasizing the word "remain" or "abide" (depending on your translation) every time you read it.

Did you notice that!? John uses the word "remain" or "abide" eleven different times in only ten verses! How does emphasizing this word as you read these verses shape your understanding of Jesus' statement to His disciples? What does it mean for you to remain or abide in Him?

- b. Keep a bookmark in John 15, but read 1st John 2.3-6.

In verse 6, the phrase "Whoever claims to live in him" contains the same word translated "remain" or "abide" in John 15 (in 1st John it's translated "live" instead). While perhaps reading between the lines a bit, bible commentators wonder whether some members of the church to which John was writing wanted to "abide" or "remain" in Jesus without following His commands. And yet, as John points out, our abiding in, remaining in, or knowledge of Jesus is shown by our obedience.

Have you heard other ways in which people try to "prove" that they know Jesus or show that they're Christians? What are they?

- c. Alongside the docetic heresy (the idea that Jesus only *seemed* human), the church to which John was writing was also influenced by Gnosticism, derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge” or “insight.” Pastor Jim engaged this idea in last week’s message when he described seeking a spiritual connection with Jesus without any sort of obedience.

John purposely uses the word *gnosis* twice in verse 3, engaging this idea of knowledge, while seeking to indwell it with an orthodox Christian meaning. Have you ever heard someone declare they believed in Jesus, though they didn’t also follow Him? Why would this kind of thinking be problematic for a church?

Turn back to John 15 for a moment, rereading verses 9-10, then following along through verse 17. What is the command to which Jesus is referring? Does it reframe our earlier discussion about “remaining” or “abiding”? How does it open up your understanding of 1st John?

- d. Imagine you’re a member of the church to which John is writing in the first century, sitting next to those who declare they have a mystical, spiritual connection with Jesus but do not show love to others. How would you feel as these verses are read? How would you feel if you were one of those people who struggled to love others?
- e. In verse 5, John discusses God’s love being “made complete.” In the Greek, this phrase is somewhat ambiguous: It could mean God’s love for us, our love for God, or a qualitative statement about loving like God loves. Which of these three options makes the most sense to you? Why?
- f. St. Augustine once wrote, “Love God and do whatever you please.” How do you react to that quote after working through this study guide? Is it Scriptural? What would John say!?

What if I told you the full quote was “Love God and do whatever you please: for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is Beloved”? Does the second half of the quote change what you think he was getting at? Why – or why not?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. In what ways do you seek to *abide* or *remain* or *live* in Christ? What kind of devotional practices have you found meaningful as you seek to open yourself up to Jesus’ supernatural presence?
- b. Have you ever wanted to abide or remain or live in Christ without also following His commands? (Just so you know: We all have) What commands of Christ did you want to ignore? How have you been convicted and repented of such sins? To ask it another way, how has your abiding, remaining and living transformed you?
- c. What does it mean to “love one another”? How do you show your love for others? What’s your “love language”?
- d. Reflecting upon Augustine’s quote, how does a wholehearted love for God reframe the rest of our existence?

V. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Pray that God would help each of us individually – and Good Shepherd as a community – to abide, remain and live in Him, that we might follow His commands for our lives,
- b. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of the ways you have not fully loved others (in your family? in your workplace? in your school? in our church?), and renew you to do so through the presence of Christ,
- c. Lift up our church and presbytery during this season of discernment, asking God to guide us by His wisdom.