

SUMMER OF LOVE

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st John 4.1-6
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I. Connecting With One Another

What do you think of when you hear the word "test"? Why do you think that comes to mind?

II. Introduction to this Study

As we continue our "Summer of Love" study of the Letter of First John, our author turns his attention toward teaching in the church: How do we know what is of God - and what isn't!? Surely this question was of vital importance for John and his church community, who had recently experienced members leaving the church with unorthodox views of Jesus.

In the same way, this question is vital to us as well, for we live in a world filled with news and information, coming at us constantly, from all directions. How do we know what to trust? How do we discern what to believe? In 1st John 4.1-6, our author offers a simple way to "test" the spirits both in his world and in ours.

III. Study the Text

- a. Recall the conclusion of chapter 3 that we discussed together last week: "And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."

Meditate on that for a moment, then read the passage before us this week: 1st John 4.1-6.

What connection(s) do you see between the conclusion of chapter 3 and the first six verses of chapter 4?

How many times do you see the word spirit/Spirit in 4.1-6? How do you understand John's use of that word? What do think he is referring to?

- b. Remember that those who left John's congregation had become convinced of an ancient heresy known as *docetism*, the belief that Jesus was not *really* human, but merely *appeared* to be human. As such, they reasoned, Jesus was only Spirit, not material flesh, and as such, the important part of us isn't material flesh, but spirit.

With that in mind, look at our passage again, noticing all the times John uses the word "spirit" (in lowercase), by which he is referring to *people* (notice, in particular, verse 1: "because many false prophets have gone out into the world"). Perhaps this is a little dig against those who've left the church, as if John is saying, "Oh, people are just *spirit*? Okay then, test the *spirits*, because even if we're *spirit*, it doesn't mean we're of the *Holy Spirit*."

Return to the text: What "test" does John give for discerning the spirits (check verses 2-3)? Have you ever seen this at work, someone who claims *inspiration* who doesn't believe in the incarnation of Jesus?

- c. Read Acts 2.1-21. How did the Holy Spirit use the apostles on the day of Pentecost? What spiritual gift were they enabled with?

Remember that John opened his letter with the bold proclamation that he (and others) had heard, seen, looked at, and touched the Word of Life (turn to 1st John 1.1-4 if you'd like a reminder). As we have seen implied throughout our study, there were others who *had not* had a personal encounter with Jesus who were teaching. And teaching erroneously.

In an age without formalized theological education, multiple copies of the Bible, or mass communication, why would someone who claimed inspiration by the Holy Spirit lead churches astray?

- d. Read 1st Corinthians 12.1-11 and 14.1-5. How does the Apostle Paul help clarify the role of speaking in tongues? What do you think he means by "prophecy"? Does that only mean "predict the future"? What else could he be referring to?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. In the first century, some overemphasized Jesus' spiritual nature at the expense of his humanity. Today, this often goes the opposite direction, with people discussing his humanity while ignoring his divine nature. In the 1st century, John wrote, "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." How might he add to this in the 21st century?
- b. The word "test" that John uses depicts testing the value of a coin, much like the pens that test high value dollar bills in our day. How could you test the news or information you receive? Does this mean we should only get our news or information from Christian sources - or that we should judge our sources closely?
- c. The Holy Spirit used the Apostles on the day of Pentecost to boldly proclaim the Word of God in the various languages of the people who were gathered. And yet, as we see in 1st Corinthians 12 and 14, speaking in different languages is not the only gift of the Holy Spirit. What spiritual gift have you been given? Have you prayed that God would reveal that to you and help you use it for His glory?

V. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Ask God to use Good Shepherd to boldly proclaim and enact the good news of His love throughout our community,
- b. Pray that the Holy Spirit would reveal your spiritual gift(s) to you, and that you would be bold in using it to build up fellow believers and engaging non-Christians as well,
- c. Ask God for wisdom, for discernment, for continual guidance by His Holy Spirit, that we might not be led astray by false teaching,
- d. Thank God for the many children that have gathered for Vacation Bible School on our campus this past week, praying that they would continue to grow in faith throughout their lives.