

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
BUILDING HIS CHURCH
FALSE TEACHERS IN THE LAST HOUR
1 JOHN 2:18-27
01/28/2018



MAIN POINT

If we want to avoid falling prey to false teaching, we need right discernment and right doctrine.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever unknowingly found yourself in the middle of a sales pitch for something like a time share or some kind of pyramid scheme?

What was the person trying to sell you? Were you surprised when you found out the truth of the situation you were in?

How sensitive are you in general to recognizing scams? What are some of the indicators that help you recognize them?

We are frequently bombarded day in and day out with “deals of the century” and sales that are “too good to pass by.” In a spiritual sense, too, we are confronted with messages that might seem innocent at first, but in reality contradict the message of the gospel. John knew that such false teaching would abound, so he wanted his readers to be ready to fight them. He taught that we can do so through a combination of right discernment and right doctrine.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 2:18-23.

What images come to your mind when you hear the word “antichrist”?

Why is it significant to note that these antichrists went out from the church (v. 19)?

Why might that fact make these false teachers more difficult to recognize?

What does the fact that they went out from the church tell us about the role of the church in recognizing teachers that aren't true to the gospel?

The reference to "antichrist" here is probably to leaders who were once a part of the church, but weren't true believers in the message of Jesus Christ. Evidently the church had recognized their falsehood and had separated from them. The church plays an important role in not only recognizing threats and false teachers, but also making sure she protects her people from it.

Look back at verses 20-23. What are the key pieces of doctrine that mark true believers?

What is this anointing from the Holy Spirit John described? What is the effect of that anointing? What does this show us about the centrality of right doctrine?

Because we live in an age of tolerance, some would argue that we shouldn't split hairs over doctrinal matters. But often these points of doctrine make all the difference in the world, not to mention eternity. Doctrine matters; we must hold true to what we have seen in the Bible as revealed through Jesus if we want to truly follow Him. Because the Holy Spirit lives in the Christian, we can rightly understand and obey the Bible. God has revealed Himself fully through His Word, the Bible, and His Living Word, Jesus Christ—and that is His final Word to us.

What are some ways you have seen people try and search for some other kind of knowledge than what we already have through God's Word?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 JOHN 2:24-28.

What are some ways we can make sure that what we have heard from God remains in us? What are some ways we might be tempted to not let that remain in us?

What is the promise God gives to those when this truth remains in them?

For those that remain true to God's revelation in His Word and in Jesus, eternal life is a reality. We must be all the more vigilant to be aware of that truth given the deception around us.

We can recognize false teaching with right doctrine, but also through right discernment. What does the word "discernment" mean?

Is discernment a feeling or something more than that? How do right doctrine and right discernment work together?

What role does the Holy Spirit play in both right doctrine and right discernment?

The Holy Spirit is truer to God's Word than any of us. That's how discernment and doctrine work together; if we sense we are witnessing some kind of spiritual untruth, then the most sure way to check our discernment is with our doctrine. God will not contradict Himself; He won't say something now that is different than what He said then.

What implications does this text have for our study and memorization of the Word of God?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Is there any pattern of belief or behavior in your life that you need to check for false teaching?

What about in those close to you? Do you need to have an important but difficult conversation about doctrine and discernment with those closest to you?

How does your commitment to the Word of God need to change based on the threat of false teaching?

PRAY

As you close in prayer, thank God for the gift of His Word and the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to give you the ability to recognize truth and error, and the courage to remain true to what you have heard from the beginning.

COMMENTARY

1 JOHN 2:18-27

The problem John addressed in these verses is not a new one. He addressed a similar situation where an early form of gnosticism was contradicting the factuality of the full deity and humanity of Jesus. John countered these erroneous messages by issuing a warning against false teachers, followed by an assertion that true believers are marked by crucial characteristics.

In these verses, John warned against many antichrists. This is probably a reference to misguided or diabolical individuals who were guilty of the sins that he described and condemned. They opposed and sought to replace the true Christ. The phrase they went out from us shows there had been a division among the church members to whom John wrote. But not all who were in the church were authentic believers. Their departure from the fellowship and the apostolic truth was proof of this.

David Walls and Max Anders, I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude, vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 176–179.

It is the last hour. This is the only time this phrase occurs in the New Testament, and it is not clear what it means. A strong likelihood is that “the last hour” refers to the time between the first coming of Christ and his second coming. Some believe it means there was only a little time left before Jesus would return, in which case John would have been mistaken.

Therefore, it seems preferable to equate the “last hour” with the “last days,” in which God’s plan of salvation directly through Christ is inaugurated (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28; Mic. 4:1). From these passages we learn that the end has come, but the end is not a short period of time. Rather, the end is a distinct period of time of uncertain length. The time of Adam was not the last hour. The time of Abraham was not the last hour. Nor was the time of Moses, or the time of David, or the time of Ezra the last hour. The time between Jesus’ first coming and second coming is the last hour.

The readers knew about the predicted coming of the Antichrist. John warned them about the coming of many who would display the same hostility and opposition to Jesus. Not only is the Antichrist coming, but many antichrists (people who embrace his values and agenda) are already here.

The fact that the antichrists have come proves that the last hour had begun. Some people in the church followed the antichrists, leaving the church. This proved that they had never been Christians. If they had been, they would not have left. Apparently, they had made a profession of faith that was not genuine.

2:20–23. We have an anointing from the Holy One. This anointing might be either the Holy Spirit, or the Word of God, or some body of information/knowledge passed down to the elders in the church from apostles.

The first impulse is to understand the anointing to be the Holy Spirit. After all, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel of John teaches us that Jesus will send us the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17) who “will teach you all things” (John 14:26).

The second impulse reveals some significant problems with this interpretation, however. It does not tell us how the Spirit enables us to understand all things. Is it by some inner guidance, an internal, subjective experience? This seems a little out of harmony with the context, because John has appealed all along to hard facts that they have been taught from the beginning. In addition, it would invite the false teachers to counter that their own inner, subjective experience was just as valid. Plus, this interpretation does not explain the tremendous disagreement that exists among professing Christians regarding what is true and what is not true. If the anointing is inner guidance from the Holy Spirit, would he not guide us to be a little more united in this matter?

Other Bible teachers suggest that this anointing refers to the Bible, or a body of teaching passed down to the church leaders. This has the advantage of correcting the problem in the first option, eliminating the danger of spiritual subjectivism. Plus, the Word of God can be understood to “remain in you.” It has the disadvantage that the Word of God is not usually understood to be an anointing. Perhaps it is a subtle combination of the two ideas. The anointing could be understood as God’s Word, “not as preached externally in the community, but as it is received by faith into men’s hearts and remains active, thanks to the work of the Spirit” (I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], p. 155). If so, the antidote to false teaching is the Word of God, administered and confirmed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

No tidy answer presents itself. I prefer this latter explanation, cumbersome as it is, because of the problems created if it is understood to be the Holy Spirit. As Stephen Smalley concludes:

John is deliberately using the idea of *chrisma* [anointing, consecration] to signify both the Spirit and the word of God. The faithful, that is to say, are those who have (inwardly) received the gospel of truth, and made it their own through the activity of the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5–6); thereby they possess the antidote to heresy. It is possible that some of the heretical and schismatic members of John’s church had appealed directly to the teaching of the Gospel on the Paraclete [John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13], as the Spirit of truth, precisely in order to support their own claims to possess the right knowledge of Jesus and his gospel. If so, John is indicating that the objective word of God’s truth cannot be detached from the interior testimony of the Holy Spirit, present in the believer (WBC 51, 107).

When we as believers have received this anointing, then all of you know the truth. This phrase strengthens the option that the anointing is the Word of God. If we have a mature knowledge of the Bible, it can be said that we know the truth. Admittedly, there is plenty of disagreement about things in the Bible, but there is also much more agreement. The truth is not available only to a select few, as the Gnostics taught, but to everyone. This is not a promise of total knowledge. Anointed believers do not know all the truth there is to know. Rather, they know the truth about the inaccurate information the false teachers were spreading. They know the truth regarding the disputed issues. They need no further insight, as the Gnostics claimed.

This reinforces the truth that truly anointed Christians already believe. The false teachers (antichrists) are liars because they deny that Jesus is the Christ, that is, they deny that Jesus is the divine Son of God. This denial also constitutes a denial of the Father. Their claim to be in fellowship with the Father cannot be true since they are not in fellowship with his Son. A person cannot have the Father without having the Son, nor can he or she have the Son without having the Father. To accept or reject one is to accept or reject the other.

2:24–25. The false teachers have brought forth radically new teaching based on their “secret” knowledge. That is unnecessary. John’s word is nothing new but what they have heard from the beginning. He challenges us to hold fast to the tried and true Word of God delivered once and for all to the saints. If we do, we will remain, or abide (in the sense of fellowship) in the Son and in the Father. Only then can we rest in the promise of eternal life.

The issue here is not a concern about losing our salvation. We can be certain that we possess eternal life (2:1–6; 5:9–13, 20). The issue is reassurance in face of the false teaching they were receiving. False teaching brings questions about our salvation; true teaching based on God’s Word from the beginning reassures us of our salvation.

2:26–27. I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray: Apparently, the false teachers denied that the readers of John’s letter were actually saved. Such false teachers can be disregarded. Believers gain reassurance and confidence of salvation through the anointing received from God. It remains in us and is sufficient to confirm us in the truth.

They do not need anyone to teach is not suggesting that they had no teachers, or that they knew everything and didn’t need to be taught. Rather, it means that, as a congregation, they did not need anyone to teach them again the essentials of the faith that the false teachers were denying. They already had the truth (the anointing) and did not need anyone else (Gnostics, who claimed special inner knowledge) to tell them what was true.

The Bible includes two more verses (28–29) in this chapter, but most Bible teachers include these verses at the beginning of chapter 3.