

# SUMMER of LOVE

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1<sup>st</sup> John 4.13-5.4  
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Prepared by Curtis A. Bronzan  
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

## I. Connecting With One Another

When was the last time you were scared? What caused your fear?

How did you work through it?

## II. Introduction to this Study

With three weeks to go in our "Summer of Love" study of the Letter of First John, the author begins wrapping up his thoughts, offering some conclusions about the confidence we can have as followers of Jesus. It comes as no surprise, of course, that our assurance of salvation is a result of God's love: a love that we have received, a love that we have allowed to transform us, and a love that we have shared with others. As we have seen, and will see again in this study, this love is from start to finish *God's* love. And since we live in love, John writes, there is nothing to fear!

## III. Study the Text

- a. Read 1<sup>st</sup> John 4.13-5.4. Nearing the end of the letter as we are, John begins to bring together a number of different strands of his thought.

What words or phrases jump out at you that we have studied together this summer? Write them here and share them with others in your group:

Are there others who noted the same words or phrases?

- b. In verse 14, John writes, "we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." The phrase "the Savior of the world" may be fairly common to us, as that has been the bold proclamation of the Christian church throughout the last two millennia (note that John writes *the* Savior, not *a* Savior – more on that next week!).

In the first century, however, there was another Savior of the world: Caesar. Well, not really, but that's what he claimed! In fact, a few different phrases used by early Christians were reappropriated political slogans the Romans used for their highest leader.

What other "saviors" does our world proclaim? What do these "saviors" save us from? Think of as many as you can.

- c. Reread verse 16 aloud. The literal wording in this passage is rather awkward (which is why many translators have rephrased it): Instead of "we know and rely on the love God has for us," the Greek reads, "we know and rely on the love which God has *in* us."

How does that clarify the meaning of the verse? How does the literal Greek build upon the gift of God's Spirit engaged in verse 13? Which translation do you like better: "for us" or "in us"?

- d. Again in verse 16 we read, "God is love." How is that different than "love is God"?

C.H. Dodd once wrote: "The expression 'to remain in love' is suggestive rather than exact. It is not clear whether the meaning is 'to continue to live as objects of God's love,' or 'to continue to love God,' or 'to continue to love our brothers.' It is in fact impossible according to the teaching both of this epistle and of the Fourth Gospel, to make a clear separation between these three modes or manifestations of love. The energy of love discharges itself along lines which form a triangle, whose points are God, self and neighbour: but the source of all love is God, of whom alone it can be said the He *is* love. Whether we love God or our neighbour, it is God's love that is at work in us – assuming, that is, that our love is that authentic *agapé* which is exemplified in God's gift of His Son, and in Christ's sacrifice for us all."

How does that image of a triangle help you understand "remaining in love"?

- e. In the New International Version, verse 17 begins with "In this way." What transitioning phrase does your translation provide at the outset of the verse? What do you think that phrase points back to (that is, how is love made complete)?

Furthermore, John writes that we can "have confidence on the day of judgment." How can we have such eternal assurance, according to John?

- f. Reread verse 18. Recall our earlier note about the "Savior of the world" according to first century culture. Caesar, who demanded such allegiance, "earned it" by violently conquering lands and demanding loyalty. How does Jesus' Kingdom look entirely different (that is, how did Jesus "conquer")? What, then, do we have to fear?
- g. Through the remaining 7 verses (beginning in verse 19), John returns to his constant refrain, that we love one another. He concludes with a discussion of "victory" and "overcoming the world." What do you think he means by those phrases, especially in light of a political ruler who claimed to be "Savior of the world" and took the lives of Christians who wouldn't bow their knees to him?

#### IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Are there other "saviors" in your life that have taken the place of *the* Savior? Have you confessed your reliance upon these false saviors to God and/or other trusted spiritual mentors?
- b. How have you experienced the love God has *for* you? Have you experienced the love God has *in* you?
- c. What points of the triangle C.H. Dodd envisions above are most difficult for you to love? God? Yourself? Others?
- d. How can the good news of God's love drive out the fears you experience?
- e. What aspects of "the world" do you need to overcome through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?

#### V. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Pray for yourself and fellow members of our congregation, who live in fear, asking that the God who is love would cast out such fear,
- b. Lift up our church and its leaders, as we discern our relationship with the Presbytery of Los Ranchos and Presbyterian Church (USA),
- c. Ask that God's Spirit would enable us to continue fulfilling our mission to connect with God, grow in faith, and serve in love, reaching out to our surrounding community with the good news of the gospel.