GOD IS LOVE; THIS IS LOVE

1 John 4:7-10

Key Verse: 4:10

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

In the last lesson, 4:1-6, we learned the significance of testing the spirits. Which spirit rules matters in life and in this world. How important it is to discern the Spirit of God and the spirit of this world! With that discernment, may we firmly believe that the one who is in God’s children is greater than the one who is in the world and really live a life led by the Spirit, which contains faithful and earnest prayer and holding to the truth of God’s word. In 4:7-21, the word “love” is written 27 times. In 3:11-24, the word “love” is written 7 times, containing the wonderful description, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” In 4:7-21, there is no new idea, but John goes deeper into the love of God the Father and so in his command of love. In this way, John enjoins God’s children to obey God’s command to love one another. Today, we want to focus on the love of God described in 4:7-10. In these four verses, this “love” is mentioned 9 times. May we grasp the love of God and go further in understanding the love of God the Father!

**First, God is love (7-8).** Verses 7 and 8 say, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” In 3:11, John exhorted the recipients of this epistle, saying, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” Now John exhorts this command of love again with a more friendly expression, “Dear friends, let us love one another.” Here “friends” is in Greek Agapétos. When he called, “dear friends”, it indicates that John showed the love of God to them.

Then John says, “Love comes from God.” The source of love is God. Love, true love, is the very thing human beings made in the image of God seek most. Fallen mankind are thirsty for love. They seek love from one another. When a Samaritan woman sought love from men, going through five husbands, she became thirstier and thirstier until she met Jesus, her true husband, who could give her living water to drink. Jesus said in John 4:13-14, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give hm will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” God said in Jeremiah 2:11, “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spiring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” Love comes from God. Without receiving this love from God, we cannot truly love even our spouses and raise our children. Our love for them can be just the extension of our self-love. In that human love, children become spoiled and parents become greatly disappointed. We need to humbly accept the love of God and be renewed in this love at each moment.

Then John continues, “Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God.” John had written in 2:29, “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of God” and in 3:10, “…Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God, nor is anyone who does not love his brother.” Love is one’s proof of his new birth and knowing God. Not loving means not knowing God. To love is to know God, which is different from knowing about God. The more I know God, the more I love. The more I love, the more I know God.

Then John says, “because God is love.” God is love. What a sensational definition of God! In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Apostle Paul defined love, saying, “Love is patient, love is kind…It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” He personified love. It is like upgrading and heightening love. But here when John says, “God is love,” it seems to degrade God, lowering him into an abstract concept. So who can dare to say, “God is love”? But John does so as the apostle of love. He repeats it, saying it again in 4:16.

God is love. God is essentially love; God’s nature is love; we cannot think of God without love. In this we can understand better of the triune God, God in three persons, who are in a perfect love relationship with one another. The Son obeyed God unto death and the Father exalted him to the highest place and let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11). In Revelation 22, we see that the throne of God and of the Lamb will be one and the same throne. And the Holy Spirit reveals the glory of Jesus the Son (Jn 16:14), and Jesus called the Holy Spirit another Counselor, the same Counselor as him (Jn 14:16).

Here John defined here that God is love. But the message of God’s love flows throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. God is the God of love; he is a loving God, abounding in love, which is in Hebrew “*hesed*” (Ex 34:6; Num 14:18; Ne 9:17; Ps 86:5, 15; 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). Each book of the Bible testifies God’s love. In Genesis, God created all things; especially he made man in his image, male and female, out of love. He chose Abraham and his descendants. Why? It is only because of his love. In Exodus, he brought them out of the land of slavery in Egypt because of his love, and forgave their sins in the wilderness again and again. In Leviticus, he wanted them to be holy as he is holy because he loved them. In Numbers, he disciplines them to be the army of God because he loved them. In Deuteronomy, he reiterated his commands to the 2nd gens out of love so that they might live by them and become outstanding people in the world for his glory. And the history of God with his chosen people Israel shows his faithful, unfailing love toward them, despite their terrible unfaithfulness to Him depicted as their husband God. In the Old Testament, even there is a book, Song of songs, which vividly portrays a love relationship between a man and a woman, which ultimately points to the intimate love relationship between Christ and his bride.

In the New Testament, God in his love finally sent the promised Messiah Jesus, who began to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, saying, “The time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15). God’s universal love is described this way, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt 5:45) and “He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked” (Lk 6:35). In the New Testament, God’s love is also well displayed in the love of a father for his prodigal son. The father waited for his renegade son day and night since the day he left home. When the son, who totally ruined his life because of the wrong concept of love, was coming back in sincere repentance, the father ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him and elevated him to his original position as a son (Lk 15:20). The father confessed, “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (15:24). And God’s love for mankind is consummated in the relationship between the Lamb and his bride in the New Jerusalem depicted in Revelation (Rev 19:7). So Bible begins with his love story of creation and ends with his love story of the completion of his love relationship with his people in Christ Jesus. The Bible is indeed God’s exhaustive love story for mankind. God is love. All things that happen in our lives are out of his love. So Romans 8:28 says, “And we knot that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” In any situation, God wants us to keep a love relationship with him.

And we should know the nature of God’s love. Those who accept God’s love have eternal life, but those who reject God’s love have eternal punishment, inviting God’s wrath upon them. God’s love and his wrath are two sides of the same coin. Thus God’s love is absolute.

**Second, this is love (9-10).** Then now let’s see what John says after saying, “God is love.” In verse 9 and 10 it says, “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” John mentions the very essence of God’s love. John writes here the core of God’s love. Let’s carefully examine this wonderful description.

In verse 9 it says, “He sent his one and only Son.” Have you ever seen this expression in the Bible? This exact description is uniquely written here. The word “sent” indicates that the Son existed in another world, in his heavenly kingdom, but God sent him into the world, while you and I were born into this world from non-existence. It is the same expression as “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” meaning “He came from another world.” He was before the creation of the world. “He sent”, this expression is used three times in 1 John, in 4:10, “he…sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice” and in 4:14, “…the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world…”

“He sent his one and only Son…” Also, John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son…” The expression “one and only son” reveals how precious the Son was to God the Father and how intimate the relationship was! John 1:18 says, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him know.” In KJV, “…the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father…” Jesus in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one.” All these show how difficult it was for God the Father to send his Son. We know how much each parent loves his or her child. Separation anxiety is great between the two. Then how about God’s love for his Son? God is infinite. How can we describe God the Father’s love for his Son? One servant of God expressed it this way: “multiply your love for your son or daughter by infinity. That’s God’s love for his Son.” Then how can we fathom God’s sending his one and only Son?

“He sent his one and only Son into the world.” The phrase “into the world” also indicates another difficulty in God sending his Son. It was the world of hostility, the world of hating God, the world under the rule of the evil one, Satan. We remember that at the very moment of the birth of Christ Jesus his life was in great danger to be murdered at the massacre of the innocents by Herod. Even his own hometown people attempted to kill him by throwing him down the cliff on which the town was built (Lk 4:29). His life in the world was full of danger and peril.

Then why did he send his Son into the world? It is so that we might live through him. We were dead in sin. But God made such an effort so that we might be quickened from the dead and live through him. Definitely, God’s love had such a hope for us to be moved from death to life. It is as written in 2:14, “We know that we have passed from death to life.”

Then verse 10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” “Not that we loved God” indicates that we were not loving and lovable at all. Rather, we were enemies of God and so the object of his wrath. But God sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. When we think of numerous sacrifices in the Old Testament, all the sacrifices were made by men to be offered to God. Yet, all those sacrifices could not appease God’s righteous anger upon sinners. Such offering of sacrifices was of no use. Then God himself prepared this offering of the sacrifice of atonement, the offering of his one and own Son. What an unusual offering! What an uncommon sacrifice! Actually this sacrifice was previewed in the Old Testament, in the story of Abraham in Genesis. God commanded Abraham to offer his only Son, Isaac, as a burnt offering. When Abraham indeed obeyed this command and was about to slay his son, God stopped him, saying, “Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Then Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place ‘The LORD Will Provide’ (Ge 22:12-14).

The atoning sacrifice, which is propitiation, meant that God poured out his wrath upon his Son so that his righteousness be fully met and sinners could be forgiven and saved. The word “propitiate” means to appease. The atoning sacrifice appeased God, pleased him and fully satisfied him. That is enough for our salvation. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin/a sin offering for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” In the grace of a right relationship with God in Christ Jesus our salvation is sure and we are not to perish but to live through him in eternity. The atoning sacrifice indicates how much he hated sin and how lavishly he loved sinners. We thought of God the Father’s love for his Son which can be considered as multiplying our love for our children by infinity. When God made his Son an atoning sacrifice, the Son cried out in his unbearable pain and agony, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34) and God had to remain silent, sobbing quietly. It is as a hymn song says (239, ‘When I Survey the Wonderous Cross’), “See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did e’er such love and sorrow meet.” What a sorrow! What a love! God made his Son die a substitutionary death. I am the one to die, slain and slaughtered and perish eternally. But God let his Son, the Prince of Glory die in my place. He gave the best for the worst.

God said in Isaiah 49:15, “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” Why this comparison! God’s love is far beyond genuine best human love. Truly his love is highest, deepest, widest and longest as Paul said in Ephesians 3:7-18, “…I pray that you…may…grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” Although we forget everything, we should not forget this love but keep it in our hearts. Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:38-39, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.”

This love is to be remembered forever. In John 1:29, John the Baptist exclaimed when he saw Jesus’ coming toward him, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The atoning sacrifice is the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. While on earth Jesus had many titles, such as “the bread of life”, “the light of the world”, “the good shepherd”, “the vine”, etc. The Lamb was also one of the titles, a precious and meaningful title to be slain for man’s sin. Yet, in a sense it is a title of humiliation. As the Lamb of God he was slain and his mission work was completed on earth; “It is finished.” But it is really surprising that the Lamb appeared in heaven in Revelation. In Revelation 5, John saw in heaven a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain (5:6). We remember that the risen Jesus in his glorified resurrection body showed the nail marks in his hands and the wounds on his side to his doubting disciple Thomas. This Jesus is shown in heaven as a Lamb without the trace of the wounds being erased. It is striking that the Lamb is mentioned 30 times in Revelation (5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14 (2); 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3), while in the whole New Testament, 34 times. In Revelation, “Lamb” is mentioned most among all the titles of Jesus. In chapter 5, twenty-four elders sang a new song, “You are worthy…because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men…” (5:9), and a myriad of angels praised the Lamb and all creation as well (5:11-13). In chapter 6, the Lamb opened the seals of God’s judgment and those who reject the Lamb hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb (6:16), which was also another side of the same coin of God’s love. The robes of the redeemed ones were washed and made white by the blood of the Lamb (7:14). The Lamb was the shepherd of his people (7:17). The saints overcame the devil’s accusations by the blood of the Lamb (12:11). The book of life belongs to the Lamb (13:8). The Lamb was standing victoriously on Zion (14:1) and 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever he goes (14:4) Those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark will drink of the wine of the fury of God’s wrath and will be tormented with burning sulfur for ever and ever before the Lamb (14:9-11). The Lamb is the Lord of lords and King of kings (17:14). In heavenly “hallelujah”, the announcement of “the wedding of the Lamb has come” was heard, followed by “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” (19:7, 9). The wife of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem, is described as beautiful and glorious (21:2, 9). Again, the book of life is the Lamb’s book of life with the names of those redeemed and purchased by the Lamb (21:27). Finally, the throne of God and the throne of the Lamb are one in the city of the New Jerusalem in a new heaven and a new earth (21:1, 22:3). The Lamb is the very presentation of God’s love. God’s love flows in Revelation, the last book of the Bible. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. This implies love rules. Love won and rules, so the kingdom of God is the kingdom of love. Actually it is the constant message of the whole Bible that God’s love never fails. God is love and loves wins.

May we engrave in our hearts that “this is love, the atoning sacrifice, propitiation, the Lamb of God and live accordingly. It is as the hymn songs (239, ‘When I Survey the Wondrous Cross’) says, “Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”