LOVE ONE ANOTHER

1 John 4:11-13

Key Verse: 4:11

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Thank God for helping us to meditate on the love of God that God is love and this is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his one and only Son into the world as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is so that we may live through him. The atoning sacrifice, propitiation and the Lamb of God, are the exact expression of the very love of God, how much he hates sin and how much he loves us sinners to come to him. May we treasure this love of God and ponder it in our hearts and live accordingly. In today’s passage, 4:11-13, John give a practical command to love one another and leads us to the completion of God’s love. Let’s see how the love of God can be completed.

**First, love one another (11).** John says in verse 11, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” John began this part of God’s love described in 4:7-24, saying in verse 7, “Dear friends, let us love another.” Then after pondering the love of God, John comes back to the exhortation to love one other. “Dear friends since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” “God so loved us.” He loved us to the point of sacrificing his one and only Son. The sinless Son of God became the substitute for us to appease the wrath of God the Father so that his righteousness might be met and we be forgiven of our sins and saved forever. This love is truly so amazing and so divine. In this love, John exclaimed in 3:1, “How great is the love the Father lavished on us that we should be called children of God!” Here, John says, “since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” John does not merely say, “we ought to love one another.” Without the subordinate clause, “since God so loved us,” the statement, “we ought to love one another,” cannot work. “We ought to love one another” is not a complete Christian teaching. No. “Since God so loved us” should precede. It means that the love of God should be alive in me, here and now. Then I can obey the divine love command. This is of vital importance. We are to abide in this love of God each day.

Here John says, “we also ought to love one another.” He does not say, “Since God so loved us, we should love God,” instead he said, “We also ought to love one another.” We believe that loving one another includes loving God. Loving others is the expression of loving God. It is good to remember that in Genesis 3, when Adam’s love relationship with God was broken, his love relationship with his wife was broken, but when his love relationship with God was restored, his love relationship with his wife was also restored. Also, when Jacob’s sin problem remained unsolved, fear was there in his heart and he was only fearful at the thought of confronting his brother Esau. However, when he struggled with God and received God’s grace of forgiveness of his sin, he could encounter his brother without fear, even saying to Esau, “to see your face is like seeing the face of God” (Ge 33:10). Loving God in the right relationship with him always comes first, and it is to be followed by loving our brothers.

Loving God and loving one another cannot be separated; they are to go together. This is the consistent teaching of the Bible. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,” and Leviticus 19:18 says, “Love our neighbour as your self.” When an expert in the law tested Jesus with this question, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’” (Mt 22:37-38). These two together are the greatest commandment. And Jesus said in John 13:34, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

As we studied, the command of loving is written repeatedly: in 1 John: in 2:10, “Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble” (indirect command), in 3:11, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another”, in 3:16, “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 3:23, “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us,” in 4:7, “Dear friends, let us love one another” and here in 4:11, “we also ought to love one another”, and in 4:21, “And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother,” This command of love is written seven times. Some may wonder, “Those who are born of God will love one another. Why is John bothered to give this command again and again?” Yet, this command is needed. This command of love is not given to all people but to the children of God who have been born of God. They need this direction. This command of loving one another should be obeyed.

“Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” To love one another is divine imperative. To carry out this command is a spiritual battle. The word ‘ought” indicates that we should make ourselves love others when we do not feel like loving. We are engaged in Christian warfare. This battle starts with myself, because of my old self. Self-love, self-will, self-centredness, self-defence, self-righteousness, self-gratification, self-glorification, and self-other things are the first hindrances in loving other fellow believers. From time to time we want to cry like St. Paul, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death” (Ro 7:24) can be our cry: How can I get away from this wretched, ugly self I am always thinking about? We are again reminded of Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I longer live, but Christ lives in me.” Loving others includes self-denial and self-death. And Colossians 3:5 says, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” Put to death your affections, lusts, passion, pride, self-glory, and all like things. I must keep them down; I must mortify them; I must deal violently with them. In Ephesians 4:23- 25 it says, “…put off your old self…put on the new self.”

Having seen ourselves, we then go on to look at others. We usually see what people are doing, not themselves. We know that God differentiates between the sinner and the sin. The love of God leads us to look at people genuinely, not just in terms of actions or in terms of what they are doing to us. We can think of a man with terrible sores. The sores do not represent the person. The terrible sores can be removed although it may take a long time. In view of God’s love, we are to see the soul at the back of it all.

As we thought of in the last lesson, those who believe the truth are a small part of the population of the world. The vast majority of the world is swept away in false teaching. Genuine believers are very precious. They are fellow Christians marching upward toward the kingdom of heaven. They are sharers in salvation, joint-heirs of the same glory. What a blessing it is to have fellow Christians in this world!

Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:9-10, “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” And apostle Peter said in 1 Peter said in 1 Peter 1:22, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart.” If a Christian has no one to love truly, claiming only to love God, what kind of life that is. Remaining as a single seed as a believer is not a blessed and happy life. In other words, a selfish Christian life is not a blessed life at all, even if he can be successful in the world. On the contrary, if I have at least one person to love truly even to the point of laying down my life for that person because of God’s love, we believe that such life is blessed and happy, regardless of his or her success in the world. That love capacity will surely grow.

Again, John says, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Obviously, this is the command of duty, yet at the same time it is the command of God’s vision. Think about John, the apostle of love. What kind of person was he? Jesus and his disciples were once heading for Jerusalem. When John saw that people in Samaria did not welcome Jesus, he and his brother James asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” John had such inner anger. Another time, John and his brother came to Jesus and asked him to let one of them to sit at his right and the other at his left in his glory (Mk 10:37), even supported by his mother (Mt 20:21). When the other disciples heard about this, they became indignant toward these ambitious sneaky guys. And John seemed to be very competitive with Peter. In John 20, when John and Peter heard the news of Jesus’ resurrection, both ran to the tomb. But John reached the tomb first, and Peter came later, yet Peter went into the tomb, while John was staying outside. This was a factual record, but we see the competition between the two. Most probably John, a thoughtful man, could not love Peter who had a big mouth with seemingly not much content. However, we see in Acts that they worked together. In Acts 3:1 they went together to the temple at Jerusalem to pray at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. And in Acts 8:14-17 when there was a work of God in Samaria, Peter and John were sent together by Jerusalem church to encourage and to further build up their faith. John became an apostle of love.

We can think more of how he grew to be an apostle of love. In Revelation, he specified his name, saying in 1:9, “I, John…was on the island of Patmos” and in 22:8, “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.” However, in John’s gospel he said of himself, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” in 13:23, “the disciple whom he loved” (19:26), “the other disciple, the one Jesus loved” (20:2) and “the disciples whom Jesus loved” (22:7). We believe that Jesus loved all his twelve disciples equally. Yet, John was sure that Jesus loved him and kept a love relationship with Jesus. Also, he must have kept in his heart Jesus’ command, “A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn 13:34) and struggle hard to obey this command, believing Jesus’ words, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.” That’s why he wrote this command of love seven times in this epistle of 1 John. We see that through obedience to this command in keeping a love relationship with Jesus he grew to be an apostle of love. Obedience is God’s wisdom. Sometimes we need understanding to obey. Other times, although we do not understand, we obey and understanding comes later (Jn 13:7). We can obey because we can trust in him and his love. Through obedience to this command, in keep love relationship with him, we can also grow to be men and women of love. We believe that this is God’s vision in the command of love, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Thank God for this imperative of our duty and God’s vision.

**Second, God’s love made complete (12).** Now John says in verse 12, “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” What a description that no one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us.” It is the statement that if we love one another, God—God who is love, God Almighty, God the eternal—dwells in us. It is really an amazing grace that the loving, almighty, eternal God lives in us. God showed himself in the realm of history, manifesting himself with love and power. But God dwells in us. God is spirit (Jn 4:24) and he is invisible. But God lives in us when we love one another. God becomes sensible and we can feel his presence. In this dwelling of God, we are assured of his being and his living and his salvation.

And when God lives in us, we do not need to be afraid of anything and anyone. Who can be against us, when God lives in us and so certainly for us, since God is the mighty fortress? We see that love is power. The power of the two in God’s love, who can estimate the power? The more loving people, the better and the more powerful. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” This is also what Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” We remember that Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were tied up and thrown into the blazing furnace when they refused to fall down and worship the image King Nebuchadnezzar. Then the king was amazed to see that there were four men walking around the fire, unbound and unharmed. He could not praise the God of Shadrach, Messhach and Abednego (Da 3:24-25). Apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:27-28, “I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.” We believe that when God’s people love one another, whether few or many, they can stand firm in one spirit and contend for the faith of the gospel boldly. When we think of the Christian community in John’s time, in number they were not many compared to the number of unbelievers of the world. Even a certain number of so-called believers went out from the community. Yet, John exhorts those who remain to love one another so that God can live in them. Then the vessel of love can surely overcome the power of the world. John said in 4:4, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” We believe that this is true individually and also collectively. Christian community is none other than the community of loving one another, with God living in us. .

And then it says, “and his love is made complete in us.” We know that God’s love is sacrificial and complete. Yet, the completion of God’s love is done through our love for our fellow believers. God’s love and our love for one another together make the completion of love. “God abides/dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us.” This is a glorious statement. Here we see the ultimate objective of God sending His Son into this world to an atoning sacrifice for our sins. The objective is that God may make of us such people that we should love one another even as He has loved us. In this way, the body of Christ is truly formed. The Word became flesh The Incarnate God is the embodiment of God, revealing God. The body of Christ manifests Christ. How precious the body of Christ is in this world, formed through loving one another and so the completion of God’s love.

**Third, we living in God; He living in us (13).** Now verse 13 says, “We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” John also wrote in 3:24, “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us…” It is also written in 4:15, “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God”, and in 4:16, “Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him.” This is the description of Christian fellowship with God the Father and the Son and with one another. John wrote in 1:3, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

Here we are reminded anew of the nature of the Christian life. Living as a Christian does not just mean moral living, nor just being good and decent. Or there are those who think of it in terms of high ideals. Then there are those who think of Christianity just as a matter of religious conformity. It is to miss the splendour and the glory and the wonder of this great thing that is expounded in the New Testament. “We know that we live in him and he in us”: Again this is the nature of Christian life. This is an amazing, mystical relationship with God into which we have been brought by the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. It means that we are in a living relationship with God, contrasted with believing certain things about God. We are in a vital relationship with God, being aware of the fact that somehow are participating in the life of God and that God is in our life.

Look at verse 13 again. “We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” John wrote in 3:24, “…And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.” The Christian life of “we living in God and God in us” is actually the life by the Spirit. The people of the world do not know this wonderful life in us (1 Cor 2:8), but we know it by the Spirit God has given us. Apostle Paul said in Romans 5:5, ‘…God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” It is God’s lavishing love in giving up his Son to make us children of God (1 John 3:1). We are again reminded of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:12, “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” Our Christian life begins by the Spirit, by whom we confess, “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3). It is the life led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18). It is to live by the Spirit (Gal 5:16) and keep in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:25). Here we are to be aware of what is written in Galatians 5:17, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other.” So the life to be led by the Spirit is a spiritual fight against one’s sinful nature/flesh. It is the same expression as fighting against our old self as we thought of in the first part about how we ought to love one another. In Galatians 5:22-23, love comes first in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. As we strive to live by the Spirit to obey the command of love in the love of God, the Spirit enables us to bear the fruit of love.

In our spiritual battle, our weapons are God’s word and prayer. The more we fight this battle relying on the words of God and engaging in prayer, the more we can be led by the Spirit until God’s love fills our hearts.

Thank God for his precious word, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one anther.” May we obey this command very personally in the love of God with God’s vision to raise us as men and women of love.