GOD SO LOVED US

1 John 1:1-5:21

Key Verse: 4:10-11

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Thank God for guiding us to study 1 John. We studied this epistle into 18 lessons for the last 5 months. We learned many things through this study: in chapter 1, the proclamation of eternal life, fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ and with one another in the light, and confessing our sins; in chapter 2, an advocate with the Father, the atoning sacrifice, a new command of the true light shining, walking in the light and loving one’s brother, God’s grace of forgiveness of sins, having known the one who is from the beginning and overcoming the evil one, the command of “do not love the world”, the last hour and many antichrists’ coming and the anointing from the Holy One; in chapter 3, called to be children of God in God’s lavishing love, who the children of God and the children of the devil are, what love is: Jesus Christ laid own his life for us and we ought to lay for our brothers; in chapter 4, testing the spirits whether they are from God as many false prophets having gone out into the world, the spirit of the antichrist, the false prophets’ speaking from the viewpoint of the word, the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood, God is love that he sent his one and only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, in this love of God loving one another, the Father’s sending his Son as the Saviour of the world, perfect love and his loving us first; in chapter 5, overcoming the world by faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, his coming by water and blood and the Spirit’s testifying, God’s testimony that the eternal life he has given us is in the Son, and in the postscript, the purpose of writing that those who believe in the name of the Son of God being certain of having eternal life, the certainty of God’s answering our prayers, the certainty of divine protection, the certainty of our belonging to God and the world under the control of the evil one, the certainty of understanding to know him who is true, and keeping ourselves from idols. In this epistle, the word “love” is written 45 times, the second most after John’s gospel (in which 56 times) in both the New Testament and the Old Testament. This epistle can be a condensed book of love. In our overview of 1 John, it seems to be good for us to deeply know God’s love and, as a result, to obey his command of loving one another out of love for God.

**First, God’s love.** Who is God? According to 1 John, God is light, implying that he is holy and righteous, and the God of love. 1 Timothy 6:16 says that God lives in unapproachable light. In him there is no darkness at all. His holy and righteous anger burns against sin. So it was impossible for sinful human beings to approach God and have fellowship him. Sinful mankind were only the object of God’s wrath.

There have been many tragic and horrible things in the world. God’s chosen people the Israelites once suffered greatly as slaves under the bondage of Pharaoh. Another time, they also suffered unspeakably in Babylonian captivity. When King Herod was furious after being outwitted by the Magi, he ordered to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old or under. The massacre was certainly one of the most tragic events in human history. Who could understand the pain of the mothers whose babies were killed? It could be understood only in light of God’s word. Matthew described it this way, “then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” It is written in Jeremiah 31:15. The historical background is this: Centuries earlier, Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar’s army had gathered the captives from Judah in the town of Ramah before they were taken into exile to Babylon (Jer. 40:1-2). Ramah was the site of the deportation. Here, Rachel is a personification of the mothers of Israel. The children were carried away and removed from the land. Their mothers cried with weeping and great mourning in Ramah, refusing to be comforted, because they were no more. What a sorrowful and tragic event! In Revelation chapter 9, people were suffering under the torment of demonic locusts so much that they longed to die, but death eluded them. And in Revelation, the most terrible suffering is to suffer eternally in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. As the object of God’s wrath, all sinful human beings are destined to receive these sufferings. We were not exceptions. According Romans 1, God’s wrath has been already revealed through changing the truth of God for a lie, perverted sex, and a depraved mind.

In that situation of mankind, God did something truly amazing and unheard of. He sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (4:10). He is the atoning sacrifice (2:2). The Son was the most glorious and pure heavenly prince. He was the dearest one to the Father. But God sent him his one and only Son into this world. Nowadays, no parents want to send their children to Afghanistan or North Korea. But God sent his one and only Son into the world. It is so that he might be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. In John’s gospel, Jesus is depicted as the Lamb of God to be slain.

A lamb is an animal, a living thing. But a sacrifice is not a living thing, but an non-living thing, after being slaughtered. He is the sacrifice of atonement because of our sin. The most precious, most living and most glorious one became an atoning sacrifice for our sin. At this, the Son cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” but God was only silent. Psalm 22, in which these words of Jesus’ cry were written, continue, “I am a worm and not a man…I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd (sun-baked pot, a piece of pottery), and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth” (Ps 22:1, 6, 14-15). The most precious innocent Son of God was treated like that to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 3:5 says, “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” The atoning sacrifice is propitiation, which appeased God’s wrath fully satisfying God’s righteousness. What can be enough for God’s holiness and righteousness? Nothing but the sacrifice of God’s own Son. Surely the Son’s sacrifice is enough, more than enough for our salvation from our sins and from all the consequences of sin including the eternal punishment in the lake of fire. In our study of 1 John, we may never forget the word, “atoning sacrifice” which is written twice. This term is also written in Romans 3:25, “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith…” And it is written in Hebrews 2:17. “…he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that…he might make atonement for the sins of the people.” The atoning sacrifice is related to his coming by water and blood. He did not come by water only but by water and blood (5:6). One time of his suffering is enough. Hebrews 9:25-26 says, “Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Even two times of such suffering is unthinkable. The atoning sacrifice is a clear evidence of God’s love as the essence of God’s love. To be sure of God’s love, the expression “God sent his Son” is written three times. His love is perfect love that drives out fear. We really praise God for his love, the atoning sacrifice; God is truly love.

In this love of God, John exclaimed in 3:1, “How great is the love the Father lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” To any parents, who though are evil before God, their children are most precious. Then what a grace it is that we should be called the children of God in his lavishing love of sacrificing his one and only Son. We should never lose this identity. We are to keep this identity living in this world of dog-eat-dog, of the survival of the fittest, even the world that is under the control of the evil one. So John says also in the postscript 5:19, “We know that we are children of God, and the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” Children of God are absolutely protected in this world (5:18).

We should know that there are two kinds of people in the world, the children of God and the children of the devil. Nonetheless to say, children of God are born of God. They are to live with their clear identity which includes living with a discernment, So John says in 2:15-16, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the price of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” The children of God should discern the antichrist’s coming and many antichrists having already come and test the spirits to see whether they are from God. They are to be able to distinguish speaking from God’s viewpoint and viewpoint of the world and recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood (4:1-3) How important it is to have discernment in a time like ours. One prominent pastor advised young sincere Christians who were going to university: “You need two things to survive spiritually in the present college environment: you own conviction of faith and critical mind based on the words of the Bible: Do not follow the trend of the world.” That advice is quite understandable.

God’s children are to be victorious in the world. John wrote in 5:4-5, “everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” To believe that Jesus is the Son of God is certainly connected to believe that the Son of God is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. So, by faith in God’s love, the children of God are victors in the world. Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:37-39, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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 our Lord.”

Children of God have the privilege to pray. 5:14-15 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that ewe have what we asked of him.”

In the love of God, we have fellowship with the Father and with his Son and with one another. This fellowship includes walking in the light and the blood of Jesus his Son cleansing us from all our sins. John says in 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We are to know that the Son Christ Jesus is our advocate with the Father, who can speak to the Father in our defence (2:1). We can come to him with any problem.

In God’s love, we are to know that we have an anointing from the Holy One (2:20), while many antichrists have come in the world. John continues to say regarding the anointing in 2:26-27, “I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.” And he said 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: We know it by the Spirit he gave us” and in 4:13, “We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” 5:20 says, “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true.” As we studied, this understanding is through the Spirit as there is the Spirit of understanding (Isa. 11:2).

In his love, God has given us eternal life. It is written in 1:2, “…we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us”, in 2:25, “And this is what he promised us—even eternal life”, in 5:11, “…God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son”, in 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life”, and 5:20, “…He is the true God and eternal life.”

And because of God’s love we are to keep/guard ourselves from idols (5:21).

In this part, we thought of the atoning sacrifice, which is the essence of God’s love and all the blessings we have in God’s amazing lavishing love, being called children of God and living as God’s children with a clear identity and discernment and the spirit of victory and prayer, fellowship with the Father and his Son, the anointing of the Spirit, eternal life. Because of God’s matchless love we are warned to keep ourselves from idols.

**Second, love one another.** 3:11 says, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Here “friends” is in Greek Agapétos. When he called, “dear friends” or “beloved”, it indicates that John showed the love of God to them. So. they are those who received God’s love. The right response to God’s love, his so amazing and lavishing love, is to love one another.

This command is written all over this epistle. In 2:8-11 it says, “Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.” We should watch out for hatred to any of our brothers and sisters, whatever the reason.

3:10 says, “…Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.” It is written in 3:11-15, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” It says in 3:16-20, “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. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words of tongue, but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence. If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” And in 3:21-23, it says, “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.” To love one another is God’s command. When we obey his command, God is pleased and we can have confidence before God without our hearts’ condemning us.

Then 4:7-8 says, “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.” And here in 4:11 it says, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” It furthers in 4:16, “…God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.” And in 4:19-21, “We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

In 5:1-2 it says, “…everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his command. This is love for God: to obey his commands.” In his last chapter, John makes clear that loving God and loving others and obeying God’s command are to go together. And 5:16 “If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.”

Surely loving one another includes having fellowship with one another in the fellowship with the Father and his Son. It is to pray for one another and grow together in understanding through the Spirit. Remember that God’s command of “love one another” is God’s hope and vision for God’s children that we may grow as men and women of love in our time, becoming like his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

The words of God in John 4:10-11 be in our hearts, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”