

School of Agape love (volume 2)

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Contents

Lesson 51. The Practical Application of Love

Lesson 52. The Killer of Love

Lesson 53. God Resisteth the Proud

Lesson 54. Love Does Not Take Offense

Lesson 55. Love Does Not Gossip

Lesson 56. Love Does Not Get Angry

Lesson 57. God's Wrath

Lesson 58. Love Does Not Boast

Lesson 59. Praise Is a Language of Love

Lesson 60. Love Does Not Show Off

Lesson 61. Love Does Not Grumble

Lesson 62. Love Is Not Jealous

Lesson 63. Love Is International

Lesson 64. Spiritual Pride

Lesson 65. Pride in Wealth

Lesson 66. Wealth Is God's Blessing

Lesson 67. Pride in Knowledge and Education

Lesson 68. Pride in Strength

Lesson 69. Love Does Not Find Fault

Lesson 70. Pride in Authority

Lesson 71. The Plan of Agape Love

Lesson 72. Love Does Not Compete

Lesson 73. Pride in Fashion

Lesson 74. Pride in Possessions

Lesson 75. The Pride of Life

Lesson 76. Love Conquers Sin

Lesson 77. Love Enriches

Lesson 78. Different Values

Lesson 79. Heavenly Commerce

Lesson 80. "But Go Ye Rather to Them That Sell, and Buy for Yourselves"

Lesson 81. Distinctive Features of Laodicea

Lesson 82. Jesus Loves Laodicea

Lesson 83. A Science for Laodicea

Lesson 84. The Laodicean Trap

Lesson 85. Gold Tried in the Fire

Lesson 86. White Raiment

Lesson 87. Eyesalve

Lesson 88. Come In, Jesus!

Lesson 89. May I Enter This Room?

Lesson 90. What Is on Your Plate?

Lesson 91. May I Look Inside Your Closet?

Lesson 92. I Knocked, but You Did Not Hear

Lesson 93. If You Open to Me, I Will Open to You

Lesson 94. See How Satan Has Deceived You

Lesson 95. Spiritual Warfare

Lesson 96. The Overcomer

Lesson 97. The Overcoming Laodicean

Lesson 98. My Enemy

Lesson 99. The Approaching Storm

Lesson 100. What Not to Do

Lesson 51. The Practical Application of Love

When I share with people the knowledge about love that God reveals to me, I often hear the statement that this is only theory and that without works my love is dead. Let us consider whether this is truly so and what the science of love actually is.

Let us take economics as an example. If you ever grow tired of poverty and constant debt and decide to become wealthy, you will have to find someone who has achieved a certain level of success in this area and has managed to build up capital. You will ask him to share the secret of his achievements with you. And if this person is knowledgeable, he will first test you. After that, he will explain that your problem lies in the mindset of a poor person who does not know how to be wealthy and is unable to handle money properly. And if you receive a large amount of money now without first learning how to use it, you will spend it very quickly and return to poverty. Therefore, you will first be offered the opportunity to master the theory of the laws governing money and capital. Then, when your way of thinking has changed, you will be asked to reinforce your skills through practice. Without a transformation of your thinking, no changes will take place in your life. Such knowledge costs money, and you will have to pay for it. As you learn the science of acquiring wealth, you will see your weaknesses and your superficial way of thinking, but you will also discover new opportunities that you did not notice before. Many stereotypes that robbed you and plunged you into poverty will be destroyed. You will understand the game played by the wise of this world, who instill empty values in you and sell you unnecessary things in order to keep you perpetually in debt.

But without special knowledge, your way of thinking will never change. Your habit of thinking according to commonly accepted ideas will force you to follow the slogans of the poor, such as: "If you are going to have fun, then have fun without restraint!" "You only live once," "Money is evil," "You should live for your own pleasure," and other similar sayings.

Every science involves a transformation of one's thinking and a new authority—the use of acquired knowledge to achieve established goals.

It is said that the word “sin,” when translated, means “missing the mark.”

If you have no goal in your life, you will not reach it; you will not hit the mark. If a goal has been set and your efforts are directed toward achieving it, then you will most likely attain it.

If you want to have one million in your bank account, you will have to learn to set aside a portion of your income continually in order to achieve this goal, even if you are in debt and are struggling to make ends meet.

Now let us compare this principle with the science of love. We discover the very same approach and the same principles in it. If you have the mind of a carnal person and are accustomed to thinking according to commonly accepted slogans, then even if you were given the full power of love in all its fullness, you simply would not be able to use it or accumulate anything, because your mind has not been transformed. You do not know the laws of love, and you do not understand how it works or what it is needed for. You will not be able to retain something that is invisible to the eye and cannot be touched with the hands. If you do not receive an answer to your prayers for love, this does not mean that there is no answer. It simply means that you are not yet ready to receive it. Love can be requested in different ways. If I ask for love so that I may love, that is good, but it is not always the right approach. But if I plead with God to teach me how to love, to reveal the laws of agape to me, and to reveal Himself through this gift, then God will begin to guide me and reveal Himself to me, giving me the love that will help me put theoretical knowledge into practice.

Of course, everything does not always happen exactly as I have just described it, for God acts according to His own discretion. Nevertheless, there are general rules and laws that work for all people, provided that they are observed.

For example, if we begin to pray for a sick person, entrusting his situation to God, we can expect different answers. What will God decide to do? He may heal the person instantly. He may restore him through the hands of doctors and through medicine. He may allow the forces of nature to heal the sick person naturally. He may help establish the cause of the illness and teach the person to live properly, in harmony with the laws of health, so that he may recover and remain healthy. The Lord may also allow the person to die. In all these cases, God answers the prayer, but He does so in the way that He considers right. Therefore, when asking the Lord for something, it is always wise to add: "Thy will be done."

God's will for us is already contained in the very act of acquiring love. Moreover, we have been given a commandment three times that clearly points to the necessity of learning how to love and living according to this science.

As I receive knowledge about love, I first become acquainted with the theory that is clearly presented in the Bible. As this theory influences my mind, it comes to life and begins to produce in me first the desire and then the action, according to God's good pleasure. My theoretical knowledge about love forms a corresponding way of thinking, creating the mindset of a righteous person. And the more deeply I study and understand this science, the stronger my confidence becomes that agape love rightfully belongs to me and that I have unrestricted access to it at all times.

I continually put love into practice whenever I leave the solitude of being alone and interact with people. This may take place face-to-face or virtually, but whenever social interaction occurs, love comes into action.

The members of my household are the most powerful practical aid for mastering the theory of love that I have received from the Bible or from other sources. And the more difficult my neighbor is, the more likely it is that he will teach me something and help me strengthen the theoretical knowledge that I am gaining in the school of love.

To put love into practice, there is no need to meet with the teachers or students of my school. It is enough to look around, and you will see those who are ready to give you an examination and to become “guinea pigs” in your experiments.

Your neighbor who is your enemy is that very teacher chosen by God—one who shows no partiality, accepts no bribes, and gives you no concessions. He will mercilessly point out all your mistakes and will not always politely demand that you reveal Jesus to him through your life and through your love for him. At the same time, he will respond to all your attempts to do this with reproaches, faultfinding, and ridicule. But God begins to perform miracles even in the lives of such people if you have the right goal and confidently move toward it. Love gives you victory even when your enemy or friend thinks that he has won the battle. Love does not suffer defeat. It does not know what defeat is. It takes possession of the situation and keeps it under control without depriving anyone of freedom of choice.

The more correct knowledge I have received and mastered, the more confidently I will wage war and overcome. My practical skills are always consistent with the theory that I am learning in the science of love. This helps me avoid serious mistakes and learn from the experiences of those who have already traveled this road and left behind their recommendations. Jesus was the first to open this narrow path. Then all the apostles and other disciples walked along it. They all shared their counsel with us. Now we are also walking along this path, supporting one another, sharing our experiences, and remembering the example of Jesus. Those who come after us will listen to us and learn from our mistakes. They will go ahead of us and bring the history of this world to its conclusion, becoming victorious in everything. And the name of God will be in their foreheads.

Homework 51

1. Please read Proverbs 2:1-6, 10-13; 14:8; Ecclesiastes 2:26; and Daniel 12:3, and consider these verses within the context of our lesson.
2. What did you understand while studying this subject?
3. What revelations did you receive?

4. Why does God sometimes give us difficult and ignorant people as “teachers”?
5. Why is it important to have the right way of thinking?
6. Is theory important in the science of love, or should we possess only practical skills?

Lesson 52. The Killer of Love

Have you ever tried to wage war against the ocean? Every attempt to destroy it in any way will come to nothing. It is immensely vast and capable of absorbing everything into itself. Any effort to harm the ocean would be regarded as yet another foolish act.

God's love is boundless. It cannot be measured or confined within any limits. It is as vast as the universe and as infinite as the Creator. And by God's mercy, love becomes my possession. It is difficult to imagine, but it is a fact. As I enter the waters of this boundless ocean of love, I understand that I have become a part of it, and it has become mine. All its limitless possibilities are available to me, but I do not understand this, being content in my mind with only a small portion.

This boundless ocean has a fierce enemy who dwells within me and is called the old man. He also bears another name—the flesh. By this is meant my sinful nature, which is characterized by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

God's love recognizes that, despite all its fullness and power, it encounters within me its worst enemy, who has the power to make it grow cold or to kill it. And the battlefield between these two sides is located in my mind.

The spiritual forces of wickedness in high places rule in the air of this world and seek allies for themselves in their struggle against God and His love.

God is great, and His love is immeasurably great. The enemy of the soul cannot change or destroy this, but he fights to blind people with sin so that they will choose the darkness of godlessness and suffering for themselves and perish in this miserable condition.

All the deceptive power of Satan is directed toward convincing me that true love does not exist and that God does not exist. The enemy seeks to suggest to me that it is impossible to love, that everyone around me is a hypocrite, and that I should live

only for myself, experiencing sinful pleasures and satisfying my human needs and desires. Under the influence of this deceptive power, deceived people turn into weak-willed and thoughtless beings who seek pleasure and enjoyment. They rebel against God without considering the consequences.

But a person has a mind capable of analyzing and choosing. However, if this mind has been damaged by sin, it will automatically incline toward evil. It is impossible to resist such an influence of sin by human strength.

In His love, God reached out to humanity, changing the course of the history of sin and the Fall and giving people the hope of receiving forgiveness and the power not to sin.

Jesus, the Son of God, revealed the character of the Father to us and demonstrated God's love for people through His life. He made my salvation from the power of sin and Satan possible. And by giving me His love, Jesus gives me Himself in order to fight against every evil in my heart and establish His Kingdom within it, so that He may become the King in this Kingdom of love.

His influence is very great. He draws millions of hearts by His love, offering all humanity life more abundantly. I accept this gift and receive forgiveness, God's mercy, and God's righteousness on the condition of my obedience to the law of the Creator and my complete dedication of myself to the Lord. My carnal nature cannot resist the power of love or fight against it. But the saddest truth is that my old nature will never die within me and will always seek to persuade me to choose the works of the flesh and act according to the old principles. The enemy of my soul is very cunning and treacherous. He waits for every opportunity to oppose God's love and offer his services. The saddest thing is that the old man is I myself. He is not a separate personality within me. He is my sinful nature, in which I was born and which will remain mine until death. And it is precisely my "self" that fights against God for possession of my will and freedom. I decide to whom I will belong, making this choice every morning. Thousands of temptations surround me, but I make my decision in favor of God and His love.

The flesh resists, waiting for the moment when it can take advantage of my weakness and seize my will in order to make love within me grow cold or to kill it. But as long as my will is the wife of Christ and remains obedient to His law, abiding in love and truth, the carnal nature has no chance of gaining possession of me. Nevertheless, it does not sleep. It tries to draw my attention to the enticements of this world and involve me in temptation through the flesh. But I have received from God the power of love so that, in its light, I may discern these temptations and resist them.

Love draws a very clear boundary between sin and righteousness. It has nothing in common with the works and lusts of the flesh. It is the light and power of truth.

By abiding in love and choosing it as my weapon for warfare, I remain in God and under His protection. My old man, the killer of love, is placed in the prison of circumstances, and all he can do is patiently wait for the moment when the guard becomes weak or falls asleep. Then he will be able to break free, destroy all the accomplishments of love in my life, disgrace my name, and ruin my life by plunging me into the abyss of sin and carnal pleasures.

And I understand the apostle Paul, who experienced this struggle and wrote about it in this way: Romans 7:23–24: “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

A loving person must pass through this struggle.

Only the coming of Christ will change my old nature. Then God will give me an incorruptible body that has no sinful inclinations or desires. But now there is a struggle—a great struggle. And my will decides whose wife it will be. There are two husbands who desire to possess it—Christ and my carnal nature called “self.” I choose Jesus. And my entire will dissolves in His love. We plan our future life, which began in this happy union and will never end.

Romans 7:25: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

Love knows its killer by sight and is not afraid of him, for by teaching me to love, it gains the power to keep my old man pinned down, immediately recognize all his temptations and claims, and skillfully overcome them through the Spirit of God.

Jesus won this war, and as long as I am in Him, and He and His love are in me, I too will be victorious. Love never loses.

Homework 52

1. Read James 1:12-16; 1 John 3:4; Romans 13:10; and 1 John 2:15-17, and consider these verses within the context of our lesson.
2. What did you understand while studying this subject?
3. What revelations did you receive?
4. How can you distinguish the voice of God from the voice of the flesh?
5. Read Matthew 24:12. What does "shall wax cold" mean? How should this be understood in practice?
6. How can my flesh tempt me? What methods does it use?

Lesson 53. God Resisteth the Proud

It is written in Proverbs 29:23: “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.”

What image comes to mind when I hear the word “pride”? What do I associate this quality with? Most likely, I imagine a person who holds his nose high and looks at me or those around him with arrogance or contempt. Such people do exist, but they are not encountered very often. But if a person is modest, quiet, speaks softly, and smiles, can he still be proud? How can this be determined?

It is not always worthwhile to analyze the character of other people. There is not much benefit in doing so, for the human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

In this lesson and the lessons that follow, we will understand what pride is and what forms it takes. We will look more deeply into our own hearts in order to determine whether pride is present within us.

Pride is the most vile and treacherous sin, for it has the remarkable ability to hide from my sight so that I do not regard it as something evil. I will find a thousand arguments and excuses for all my actions and motives. I will describe any of my feelings and thoughts from the perspective of a humble person, and therefore I will feel no need to repent, because I will see no necessity for it. Most likely, I will accuse everyone around me of the very things of which I myself am guilty, but I will not repent of my own sinfulness. This is the most serious problem of a proud person, because the condition of my heart does not lead me to deep repentance and the abandonment of my sin. And when God’s judgments fall upon me, I agree with God’s justice and bow before Him, acknowledging my guilt, but the proud “self” continues to rebel or justify the sin. And who will deliver me from this carnal mind?

But there is very good news! The blood of Christ is powerful enough to cleanse me from this sin as well, and God’s grace has the power to change my heart. When the Lord, in His great

mercy, calls me to repentance by sending me this gift, I should respond and do what He offers me.

Pride is the very first sin, and it arose where there were no grounds for it whatsoever. This is how the prophet Ezekiel describes this event, telling about the creation and fall of Satan by comparing him to the king of Tyrus. Ezekiel 28:12-19: "Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more."

The prophet Isaiah also describes this event, pointing to the cause of sin. Isaiah 14:12-14: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the

congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”

Pride is that very first sin for which there were no grounds, and for which there is and never will be any justification. It binds a person’s will with the iron chains of its grip and holds it in its nets.

One form of pride is haughtiness. Most often, this alone is considered pride. Haughtiness is very noticeable because it manifests itself in extreme arrogance, open revulsion toward one’s neighbor, contempt for someone, conceit, intolerance of correction, and self-confidence. Such people are usually very easy to recognize, and at times they themselves suffer because of who they are and because of their selfishness.

What can contribute to the development of haughtiness? Authority, beauty, wealth, strength, success, knowledge, attachment to possessions, and giftedness. All these attributes are neutral in themselves and contain no evil. Sometimes they are given as blessings from God, but a sinful heart perverts these blessings to its own destruction.

Haughtiness causes dislike and rejection in the people against whom it is directed. It is obvious to everyone. Such a spirit manifests itself very actively and openly.

Love is the complete opposite of haughtiness. It is humble, meek, sensitive, and obedient to God. Such is the nature of a converted person.

When God gives His grace to a sinful heart possessed by the spirit of haughtiness, and the soul responds to this divine call to repentance, the greatest miracle of personal transformation takes place. And all the heavenly powers rejoice over it.

I remember how my first employer, being precisely such a man possessed by immeasurable haughtiness, blew tobacco smoke into my face and laughed at my inability to oppose him in his arrogance. But I prayed for him and did good to him, doing everything from a pure heart. Time passed, and this man developed cancer. I visited him in the hospital. He was a pitiful

being with tears in his eyes. God showed mercy and healed this man. But haughtiness returned to him, and we had to part forever. When I attended my employer's funeral, I learned that his final days had been very difficult because his illness had grown worse, and that he had greatly desired to see me, but for some reason he had not contacted me. It is very sad when people close to us turn away from God and die without any hope of salvation. And sometimes it is haughtiness that hinders them or prevents them from hearing the message that God loves the sinner and saves him from sin. They are ready to listen to anything except God's quiet call to repentance and the beginning of a new and beautiful life with Christ.

"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." From pride to humility there is only one step, one effort of the will, and one short prayer, but haughtiness builds a high wall beyond which no light can be seen and nothing can be heard.

Love grieves for such people. It desires to save them and, dreaming of a miraculous repentance, is willing to endure them. One small decision to humble yourself and acknowledge the authority of God, and you are already on the other side. It is so simple and so accessible! But when a person passes the point of no return, it is no longer possible to correct anything. A person standing at the edge of the abyss of sin still has a chance to be saved, but once the leap has been made, there is no way back. The person is still alive, prospering, and has no intention of dying. But the point of no return has been crossed, and nothing can be changed. Satan and his angels are a clear example of this. They are still alive, but they will never repent.

But regarding people, we cannot see this point of no return, and therefore we always call them to a better life with hope.

Homework 53

1. Please read Psalm 101:5; Psalm 138:6; Proverbs 6:16-19; and Revelation 13:5, and consider these passages in the light of our lesson.
2. Did this lesson help you see anything? Please share it.
3. What did you understand from this lesson?

4. What other forms of pride are familiar to you?
5. How can I determine whether I am a proud person? And how can I fight the pride within me?
6. Why is pride the most dangerous sin?

Lesson 54. Love Does Not Take Offense

I once heard a story about a boy who grew up among brothers. One day, he was sent to stay for a while with relatives who had only girls. When the boy returned home, his parents decided to find out what new things he had discovered while being in their company. The boy replied, “When we boys do not like something, we start fighting, but when even the slightest thing goes wrong, girls take offense. Then it becomes impossible to continue playing with them.”

A daughter grew up in my home, and I remember her reaction to any “injustice.” She would swell up like a soap bubble. I understood that something had to be done about this, and I devised different ways to bring my daughter out of that condition. It seems that I always succeeded.

Taking offense is the most widespread and treacherous form of pride. Like a rusty lock, it locks a person’s heart, and sometimes even its own key cannot turn in the keyhole. Such a lock can hold its victim bound and imprisoned for years. But there is One Who knocks at this closed door and offers oil in the form of ointment to pour into the lock and open it—and to put the lamp in order at the same time.

Taking offense can assume different forms. In some people it proceeds very quietly and remains unnoticed, while something abnormal is taking place deep within the soul. The person understands that he has been hurt and prefers to close himself off from the offender and stop communicating with him or having heartfelt conversations rather than resolving the matter with the one who has acted so despicably. After all, such behavior is simply impossible to tolerate, so it is better to harbor resentment and never forgive. The relationship then becomes superficial or ends for as long as the resentment remains. It often happens that the “offending party” does not know or understand the reason for such behavior and, feeling no guilt, has no idea what to do. The tendency to take offense begins to develop in childhood. Years, and sometimes an entire lifetime, pass in this condition. If an offended person is asked

why he has closed himself off from someone, he may not even remember what happened. But at some point, he marked the offender in his heart as a person with whom he should not maintain a close and trusting friendship.

Sometimes taking offense is visible and is openly expressed through hostile, demonstrative silence, obvious irritation, grumbling, a scandal, or slamming a door. Everyone takes offense according to the measure of his own corruption.

Have you noticed how the atmosphere changes in any gathering when an offended person appears? Such a person becomes a killer of joy and happiness, and everyone breathes a sigh of relief when he leaves or changes to a friendly disposition.

Very often, without even noticing it, proud people bring their personal grievances into the company of those who have nothing to do with their problems. They unleash all their hostility upon innocent people, leaving them bewildered, simply because someone somewhere offended someone else. People say of such neighbors that they got up on the wrong side of the bed or that they are people whose behavior depends on their mood.

Jesus gave us very good counsel about how to fight resentment. He invites us to forgive, just as we have been forgiven.

It is written that love does not vaunt itself. It does not know how to take offense and very quickly finds another way to resolve any task or problem.

When love establishes its Kingdom in a person's heart, it sets before itself the task of cleansing the soul so thoroughly that no dark place and no impurity remains in any corner of it.

Love forgives everything, and it does so very easily. It finds the right words to resolve in a few minutes all the questions and problems that have remained unresolved for a long time.

No matter how I may try to justify my grievances, in the eyes of God they are pride—the very sin that separates us and destroys our fellowship. God resisteth the proud.

My friends, I ask you to understand the word “resisteth” very clearly. It means that a sorrowful entry has been made beside my name in the Book of Life—an entry that does not testify in my favor. I risk losing Eternity because I cherish in my heart something that is contrary to God and abhorrent in His sight. I will not be able to bring impurity into the company of holy beings, and I must approach the resolution of this issue very seriously, here and now. If I am an adversary of God, I will have serious problems that I cannot solve on my own.

But pride convinces me that I am right, that I was treated unjustly, cruelly offended, and deeply wounded. “I did this and that for him, and he...!!!” Sometimes my conviction that I am right goes so far that I want to put the words “I am right” on a T-shirt so that my heightened sense of justice becomes obvious to everyone. Is that not so?! With such an attitude, one can harbor resentment even against the whole world. Gossip and breaking news very often put me into a state of resentment over outrageous injustice, and I fight against this. I build the walls of my personal prison called “resentment.”

But God offers His grace to everyone, while only the humble in heart receive it. A humble soul is free from resentment, and pride is foreign to it. It finds a simple solution to every injustice in the form of forgiveness and love.

Love does not know how to take offense; it sees no point in doing so.

Sometimes friends or neighbors approach me with this statement: “Andrey, if something is wrong, please tell me. If I have offended you in some way, then please forgive me.” It gives the impression that they learned this speech at school and now recite it together like verses from a textbook, without thinking about its meaning and simply saying the phrases in the proper sequence. I usually answer jokingly: “Confess—what did you steal?” Or: “Come on, tell me how I offended you.” Without realizing it, people reveal their deeply rooted problems.

Touchiness is a very sensitive mechanism that reacts instantly to any difficult outward manifestation and closes the soul for a long time.

Love hates sin but loves the sinner.

But I can also become a person whose behavior wounds weak people and becomes a stumbling block or a source of offense to them. And this is a great evil.

I know what it means to take offense. I myself lived this way for many years, so I understand how resentment works from within, destroying happiness and life itself. God set me free from this sin, and now I do not even understand how I could have lived in it when there are so many other ways to resolve my questions and problems. When you love, you regard every attack against you as a test of whether you will respond with love or not. Why close yourself off? Why take offense at those who are teaching you to love genuinely?

Love bears all things with love, although trials sometimes bring much pain and suffering. Yet they do not kill me; they make me stronger and more steadfast in my trust in Jesus.

When Christ drank the bitter cup for all sinners, He had good reason to take offense at all of us, but He chose another path. He decided to save us because He loves us so deeply. Through His forgiveness and His message that we know not what we do, Jesus gave us hope and revealed the true character of love.

Love loves at all times, and it is very diverse in the way it manifests itself, although it has one source called agape.

Homework 54

1. Please read Matthew 6:14-15; Psalm 102:7; and Luke 7:47, and consider these passages in the light of our lesson.
2. Did you receive any revelations while studying this subject? Please share them.
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. Why is taking offense a sin?
5. How can I determine whether I harbor resentment toward my neighbors?

6. How should you behave toward those who are offended with you?

Lesson 55. Love Does Not Gossip

Throughout my life, I moved many times and, as a result, frequently changed jobs and places of worship. I remember that whenever I entered a new group after changing my place of residence or employment, I experienced strange feelings that I could not immediately explain or understand. I suddenly realized that people who did not know me personally already knew a great deal about me. It was difficult for me to explain the prejudice and cold attitude shown by those who had been given the commandment to love one another. At the same time, it was practically impossible to change the first impression of me and my behavior that had already formed in my neighbor's mind. We were not received coldly everywhere, and not everyone avoided us, but relationships with many brothers and sisters never developed. I did not understand the reason for such behavior until I came to know people more closely. With time, many things became clearer. I noticed that there were carriers of information who very quickly evaluated you according to their own ideas and shared their assessment with others. They had an amazing ability to notice the sins and mistakes of fellow believers and to describe the peculiarities of any person in every detail, telling you at length what you should beware of in your neighbor. And the saddest thing is that I liked it. I knew very well those who knew everything about everyone and who could characterize any person very quickly and concisely. I did not understand the true nature of what was taking place until the Lord revealed to me the truth that this is a sin that sows discord and kills friendship, doing much evil and destroying heartfelt relationships.

The most sought-after and desirable temptation of the pride of life is to gossip about one's neighbors. When you learn interesting details about someone, or better yet, the particulars of his "strange peculiarities," this enters your mind like a delicacy. And in order to justify such sinful pleasure and give it a respectable status, a believer who has accepted a reproach against his neighbor usually says, "We need to pray for him!" After this, he feels like a holy and dedicated person. In our own

eyes, and in the eyes of those with whom we are speaking, we thus become better than those whom we are discussing. What an exceedingly pleasant carnal pleasure! What delight! And the children of God drink this wine by the full cup.

From biblical history, I see what gossip led to in Heaven and how many souls were irretrievably lost. One of Satan's names means slanderer. He portrayed the character of God in an unfavorable light and interpreted all of His motives to suit his own ambitions. As a result of gossip, division took place in Heaven and war began.

The sons of God became God's enemies, turning into demons.

When a family falls apart, there are no winners on this battlefield. Only pain and suffering remain for both sides: one side experiences betrayal and the loss of the souls of loved ones, while the other is tormented by its own pride.

A proud heart exerts an enormous influence on those around it and is capable of convincing neighbors that they are better than all those with whom they live and associate. It always finds indisputable proof that someone else is ignorant and hypocritical and deserves to be exposed. The phrase, "Do you know what I found out...?" attracts thousands of people like a drug and provides a delicacy for their minds.

And in order to give a special status to this manifestation of pride, it was called news. How many Internet preachers of truth have now appeared, exposing the sins of fellow believers and displaying them before a wide audience, causing divisions in churches and the loss of many souls.

Love does not vaunt itself; talebearing is foreign to it. Love hates this sin. Love discerns the very fine line between objective information and gossip. It does not support those who go about as talebearers among their people, sowing hostility between brethren.

But proud people have a motto: "If you are not with us, then you are against us." Then watch out—we will not forgive you for

such betrayal. But if I accept these conditions, I hear, "Whom shall we unite against?"

How often am I interested in what people say and think about me? Love is far more concerned with learning what God thinks and says about me and whether my life meets His standards.

God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

When I seek ears into which I can pour a reproach against my neighbor, or when I listen to those who know many details about other people, I enter dangerous territory and risk becoming an adversary of God, losing many blessings of Heaven that I could have possessed.

Evil communications corrupt good manners. I have the right to choose the path that pleases me. But where will it lead me?

If someone considers pride to be something ordinary and attaches no importance to this sin, he should remember that the fall of one of God's most beautiful angels began precisely with pride. And how did it end? We live in a world full of violence, disease, fear, and death. We should not give the evil one the opportunity to use our minds, or we will become his instruments in destroying love and friendship.

How should we fight gossip? What should you do when you realize that this spirit is taking possession of your mind? Love sounds the alarm and begins to fight. If it cannot change the situation and the subject of the conversation, it either leaves or begins to pray for those who are falling into this sin. It asks for wisdom and begins to defend its neighbors, pointing out their better qualities and seeking to establish for them a good name and reputation. Such behavior also has influence.

Once, my friends and I formed a coalition in order to make the people close to us happy. We gathered good information about them, shared it with one another, and rejoiced over what wonderful friends we had. In this way, we filled their hearts with joy and happiness in return. Love esteems others better than itself and is ready to praise, uplift, and bless them. It thinks no evil, but considers the happiness of its neighbor and decides to treat him kindly.

Love does not gossip. It does not support such reproaches against a neighbor, even if he deserves such treatment. Love draws wisdom from a pure source and feeds thirsty souls with the true bread of life.

Love does not vaunt itself; it loves.

The spirit of pride says: I am right, I am better, and this makes me happy.

The spirit of humility says: You are better, and this makes me happy.

Homework 55

1. Please read Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 16:28; 18:8; 20:19; 26:20; and Revelation 12:10, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.
2. Did you receive any revelations while studying this subject? Please share them.
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. How can a statement of facts be distinguished from gossip?
5. How can I determine whether I have the gift of talebearing?
6. What should I do if I have witnessed or participated in gossip?

Lesson 56. Love Does Not Get Angry

Who among you has experienced beatings or threats of physical violence? These are not very pleasant experiences. As a result, bruises remain on the body, while scars and open wounds remain in the soul. How much violence takes place in our world every day! How many lives are shattered! God sees all of it, and a book of remembrance concerning the evil deeds of the people living on Earth is being written before Him. And the saddest thing is that both of these evils are presented to people as something normal and natural. They are treated as a way of life from which there is no escape. Every film is expected to contain elements of this sin, and if the main character is kind and attractive, his anger is considered righteous, and the viewer always justifies his behavior. But the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

It is sad to see God's people drinking the cup of Babylon's wine and then carrying its moral standards into their own circle of fellowship. People justify every expression of anger by referring to the rebukes that John the Baptist and Jesus directed at the Pharisees. And, of course, in such a case the Pharisees are to blame, while the angry person is establishing justice.

But let us examine what anger is. Anger is the expression of a person's negative reaction to something that irritates him. It is a combination of negative emotions toward someone or something that contradicts the standards of life and the views of the angry person, or toward something directed against him. Anger may find emotional expression, or it may be suppressed. In the latter case, it turns into resentment, withdrawal, revenge through the hands of others, evil speaking, curses, gossip, and other things. All this is a manifestation of pride that destroys a person's soul and ruins the happiness, friendship, and heartfelt affection of those who are close to this believer. But love does not vaunt itself.

In some religions, anger is considered one of the deadly sins, and by committing it a person risks losing the hope of salvation.

How do you imagine the face of an angry person? I think it would have furrowed brows and angry eyes. And this is advertised to us as the image of a strong personality. A state of intense emotional agitation is recognized in many countries as a mitigating circumstance when the law is broken. For example, in Germany, if someone strikes you, you may strike back within three seconds and be acquitted, but if more time passes, you will be punished. Yet there is a law of God that defines the behavior of an angry person differently.

Jesus gave a very clear explanation of all anger as a violation of the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Matthew 5:21-22: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." Please take into account the fact that the words "without a cause" are not present in the original text or in other translations. This is the definition Jesus gave to anger. Everyone who is angry is a murderer.

And what does anger kill? Anger exerts a mutually destructive influence. It destroys both the person from whom it proceeds and the one upon whom it is poured out. It kills joy, a good disposition, friendship, and trust. It destroys families and deprives them of peace. It takes away health and brings disease. Psychologists teach that anger needs an outlet, and the carnal mind likes such teaching, so an outlet for anger is found. Your neighbor receives what is overflowing from within you. You calm down, but the victim of your anger suffers and withers. It is even worse when anger progresses to violence and physical assault, as a result of which people are injured and maimed, and sometimes lose their lives. What can justify such behavior? It is comparable to a hurricane of stones or hail that passes through and leaves chaos, destruction, and death behind it.

Love does not vaunt itself. It does not defend itself in the manner described above and does not possess such feelings and emotions. Even righteous anger, if it may be called that, has an entirely different nature. The mind of a loving person controls the emotions and does not allow the flesh to persuade the will to permit irritation or anger. This is a manifestation of power from above that enables you to relate to people properly and to have peace and sound judgment in your heart, even when you encounter sudden irritants.

When I remember my life according to the flesh, I feel ashamed of the deeds that anger produced in my past. Profanity, irritation, a thirst for revenge, and physical violence were my friends, helping me solve problems in this way. But I met Jesus and was taught by Him to behave differently. He forgave my sins and showed me how to live without committing sin and where to seek strength when temptation comes. During all the time of our friendship, Jesus has never once called me names or insulted me in a fit of anger. He is a kind and very gentle Friend toward me. When I began asking Him for love, He began teaching me this science, showing me the advantages and power of meekness and humility. Then I noticed that the love of Jesus had produced amazing changes within me. Previously, there were irritants that made my blood boil in my veins, and I had to pour this negativity out of myself, but now there is not even a trace of anything like that. If some injustice or someone's anger falls upon me, I calmly accept what is happening. In the worst case, I may ask why I am being treated this way, but for the most part, I pray.

Sometimes I am entrusted with a ministry or a responsible assignment. In such a situation, I must maintain order and discipline and deal firmly with those who violate them. Yet I do this without anger, trying whenever possible to explain my actions. At work, it is necessary to be demanding and attentive to quality in order to avoid serious losses, but this too is done without irritation. Love permeates every area of my life and gladdens my heart at all times. It is especially pleasant to gain victories during trials. When the enemy of the soul attacks me with unjust or angry accusations, I do not consult with the flesh,

but ask for God's power to resist sin and walk according to the Spirit. I choose love. Even when I am struck, no desire for revenge arises. Of course, one experiences no particular joy from this, because one understands that the offender is perishing in his sins and does not need my assistance in doing so.

At times, I myself am amazed at how simply and quickly love resolves every conflict and problem while preserving peace and calm in my heart.

Love does not get angry. It has more effective methods in its arsenal than an explosion of emotion.

I am often behind the wheel, and sometimes I notice that many people do not like the way I drive, especially when they are in a hurry or when I am in a hurry. I see them wave their hands and hear their exclamations. But I have learned that when I humbly apologize, even if they are at fault, people calm down and sometimes smile in response. Love and meekness know how to establish order and resolve difficult problems in the best possible way.

How many times have words of apology resolved every conflict instantly. But sometimes situations arise in which people simply hate you and wish you evil and death. In such a case, it is difficult or impossible to reach any agreement with them. But love teaches us not to repay them in the same way, but to avoid sharp confrontations and keep our distance from them. In many families, such situations become unbearably painful, but Jesus teaches wisdom and gives special love when He is asked for it.

What should I do if I see pride within myself? Love will solve this problem as well.

Homework 56

1. Please read James 1:19-21; Psalm 4:4; Ephesians 4:26-27; and Proverbs 15:1, and consider these passages in the light of our lesson.
2. Did you receive any revelations while studying this subject? Please share them.

3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. Does God become angry? How is this different from human anger?
5. How can I determine whether my anger is evil or righteous?
6. How can I fight anger if it is present within me?

Lesson 57. God's Wrath

As a human being, I am inclined to justify all my actions and words when they correspond to my values and my understanding of decency and holiness. But sometimes I begin to attribute divine qualities of character to myself while humanizing God, so that later, believing that He is like me, I can justify many of my actions. Moreover, I take the liberty of finding biblical examples through which I justify my sins and mistakes without considering how wrong this is. When someone calls himself holy or righteous, it always causes concern, although this is precisely the condition of heart toward which the Lord draws us. Holiness and righteousness are our goal, for without the first we will not see the Kingdom of God, and without the righteousness of Christ we will not be able to enter it.

Anger is one of the most destructive manifestations of pride, having neither meaning nor justification. It is almost always directed toward those who are weaker than you, poorer than you, or lower than you in status. Anger is often poured out upon loved ones and upon those who are unattractive in body or face. Human anger is selective. It knows very well where it may not show its teeth and where it may bare them. This vice assumes my superiority over my neighbor and my indignation that he refuses to accept it.

I have even heard the definition that every sin is idolatry and that an angry person makes himself an idol to be worshiped. But the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

There are several examples from the life of Jesus in which He revealed His wrath and did something while in that state. I consider it important to understand the nature of God's wrath and see its distinctive characteristics.

Jesus is our Deliverer from the power of evil. If He had committed even one small sin, He could not have been our Lord and Savior. He would have borne the punishment for His own transgressions. But this did not happen, and therefore all the

words and deeds of Christ can serve as an infallible example for us to follow. They possess tremendous power to transform my character.

We read in John 2:14-16: "And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise."

Jesus cleansed the temple in this manner twice. In our time, several directors have attempted to portray vividly how this took place. They present the sad and pitiful picture of an enraged man running around the temple and overturning tables. This is how we imagine God's wrath.

But what actually happened? The divinity of Christ overcame His human nature and was revealed to those present in all its glory. Jesus stood before the priests and money changers as the Judge of the universe, and everyone understood this, not daring to oppose this manifestation of God's wrath. Silence fell. And when Christ said, "Take these things hence," no one contradicted Him. The scourge in His hand was like a flaming sword, and His voice was very authoritative. Everyone fled in fear and terror, while the Savior walked through the empty temple and overturned the tables of the money changers, thereby expressing His contempt for their love of money and their false motives concealed beneath divine requirements.

When God reveals His wrath, He directs it against sin in order to expose all of a person's vices. His action is like light that penetrates everything around it and reveals everything hidden.

The wrath of God and the anger of man are two forces of completely different natures that cannot be compared. It is like comparing light and darkness. They are absolute opposites.

When Jesus accused the priests and Pharisees of unrighteousness, He did not sin in His feelings, and He understood what He was doing. We do not know what His tone

and emotions were at that moment. I believe that Jesus pronounced the words of judgment with tears in His eyes, grieving over the hardness of their hearts. But what do I do? I use these words of divine pain as abuse and insults in order to humiliate people who were given a sacred trust and authority. Is this what God expects from me? If He considered it necessary to make me a judge, I believe He would endow me with the appropriate knowledge, love for these people, and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. But when I claim for myself what I cannot possess, I bring God's wrath down to the human level. I commit sin while justifying my actions by Christ's attitude toward sin.

If God begins to rebuke sinners, they will be terrified, and there will be no need to insult them. These people will simply die from fear or from the glory of God's presence.

Once, God destroyed the entire world with the waters of the Flood. This was a vivid example of God's wrath. Yet people were given a choice: they could be saved by entering the Ark, or they could choose death. By preferring the latter, they received what they desired.

People are now offered salvation in Jesus, while outside Him there is destruction. What will we choose?

Even now, God desires to clothe every person in His love and seal him in this garment of righteousness. This way is open and accessible. But what do people choose? Life and death are offered to us. We will receive whatever we desire. Is that fair? Absolutely.

I have chosen life and am developing in this direction. For continual growth, I need agape love, and it is given to me according to my need as a means of attaining Eternal life and a deeper knowledge of God. Am I to blame when someone chooses death? I do not believe that I can force good things upon people against their will.

But God warns that all people who prefer death and receive the mark of this world will receive what they have chosen. And

when the time of God's wrath comes, it will fall upon those who decided to receive death.

This is a very terrible picture and act of God. The One Who is accustomed to showing mercy, forgiving, and exalting will come to destroy. And the Lord will perform this strange work of His, which will be a most terrible event. It is terrible for me as well, because I realize that by nature I am a sinner. If even one stain of vice remains upon me, I will be destroyed with those who chose death, for God will destroy sin, and with it those who have clung to evil.

Can I have righteous anger? Yes, and it consists of absolute love for the sinner and hatred for sin. These two concepts must be clearly distinguished and separated without confusing them. It is also best to express such anger without unnecessary emotion. How? If I do not know how to do this, it is better not to take the risk, but to entrust everything to God, Who does not make mistakes.

And may all who are weak, poor, unattractive, hungry, thirsty, and under authority receive love, happiness, and friendship from me. In this way, I can make their lives more interesting and beautiful. Let those who do not wish to love or be loved remain angry. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

If we consider our rights and God's rights to express any feelings or judgments, it is important to remember that God is our Creator. He has the full right to give life and take it away without giving an account to anyone. Nevertheless, out of respect for us, God gives an account of all His actions and explains them. And the death of Jesus shows us all that great and marvelous are His works, and just and true are His ways. God is love.

Homework 57

1. Please read Genesis 1:1; Psalm 76:7; Isaiah 13:9-13; 26:20; 57:15-16; Mark 3:5; and John 3:36, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.

2. Did you receive any revelations while studying this subject?
Please share them.
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. How can the wrath of the One Who is Love be explained?
5. Is God's wrath general toward everyone, or is it selective?
6. In your understanding, what are the wrath of God and the anger of man? Provide comparisons.

Lesson 58. Love Does Not Boast

At the end of the 1990s, I decided to evaluate the capabilities of my body and began doing push-ups. I learned that the standard in the United States Army was sixty-four push-ups per minute. I set a goal of reaching that mark and began training. After some time, I reached that level, but I did not stop there and continued exercising. Excitement took hold of me. I felt the success of this undertaking and wanted to discover my limit. The longer I trained, the higher my results became. At the same time, I was studying to become a bricklayer, and the young men who were in my class did not have such records. But while training, I was also studying the Bible, so I knew that it contained an important verse for all ages.

Jeremiah 9:23-24: "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

I understood that displaying my strength was a violation of God's command, but I was bursting with pride over my success. Then came my "moment of glory in the anthill," when we were given a push-up test. It was very pleasant for me to show what I had achieved. Everyone present was amazed at my results, while I experienced a feeling of special importance, justifying myself by the requirements of the school program.

But then something unpleasant happened in my life. One morning, I decided to do push-ups without warming up my muscles. As I began, a sharp pain between my shoulder blades pierced my body, and I became frightened, thinking that I was having a heart attack. But it was muscle overstrain. The muscles pressed against my spine and displaced something there. I lay down on the sofa and could no longer get up. Every movement sent pain through my body and took my breath away. A doctor was called. He examined me and called an ambulance.

Because of the pain in my back, they could not move me onto a stretcher. But after an injection of morphine, the medical workers managed to do so, and I was taken to the hospital. There I was examined, but nothing was found. The doctor gave me many injections of pain medication in my back, seated me in a wheelchair, and sent me home.

After all these events, I stopped training, and all my records passed into history, remaining only in my memory. However, I learned something.

We all learn something and achieve something. From childhood, we seek to boast about something: "Dad, look...!!! Mom, look...!!!" Through these innocent things, we begin to display much that is unnoticed by those around us but brings us joy. We often passionately desire to share the joy connected with our successes and achievements and begin to derive special pleasure from doing so. Where is the line that separates joy from boasting? What may we boast about, and what should we not boast about?

Love does not vaunt itself over worldly success and does not boast about it. In ordinary human life, it does not hinder records and accomplishments, but it does not display them as something significant that can exalt me in the eyes of others. Yet there are talents and qualities that cannot be hidden. Everyone sees them. Beauty, virtue, musical ability, strength, intelligence, wisdom, social position, and similar things are not evil in themselves. But when I begin to boast about something, my soul is exposed to the danger of vanity.

The world has been trained to exalt and applaud those who have achieved or acquired something. This is the currency of our world, and it is in demand in every society. Everyone desires to acquire it.

Two of Christ's three temptations in the wilderness contained elements of this pride of life, but Jesus firmly resisted such temptations by recalling the warnings of Scripture.

There is a worldly sphere of influence and possession, and there is also a spiritual one. If I arrive among people in a shiny

automobile, they will see and determine my status in life, but when I open my mouth, they will evaluate me as well.

Humanly speaking, we are inclined to praise people for their achievements and talents. Sometimes we do this subconsciously, without even considering what we are doing. At times, a person performs a good deed without any evil thoughts, but the praise and admiration of those around him confuse him. He begins to grow in his own eyes, and his self-esteem goes beyond all limits. The person suddenly decides that he is...!!! But there is a loving Father Who teaches us that vanity brings no benefit and that we must be extremely careful not to become proud. God resisteth the proud, and sometimes He touches such people in order to show them who they truly are. The example of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, vividly expresses God's attitude toward the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

We read in Ecclesiastes 8:11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." When we do not see immediate retribution or God's condemnation, we sometimes relax and enter forbidden territory without realizing what we are doing until bitter retribution comes.

But what should be done if a person is beautiful and cannot hide it? Or if he is talented and serves people with his talent? Only love can show him how to use his gifts properly. God is not opposed to our glorying in the fact that we know Him and understand what He is doing in our lives. Love teaches us to exalt its Source of love in the best possible way. It can transform many different worldly successes and achievements into advantages for the glory of God. Love is modest regarding human achievements, but great in glorifying God's wisdom and power. It knows how to exalt the King of kings and always does so with joy, standing in open places so that everyone may see and hear it.

Everything is clear regarding the world, but what should be done with dedicated people who are in the public eye? Some people receive special advantages from God so that they may

share them with a wide audience. They need our prayers and support and our gratitude to God, not to them. It is good to thank a person, but we must be very careful not to exalt the creature instead of the Creator. From Whom come wisdom, influence, gifts, and miracles? From God. Therefore, He should be glorified.

Let us speak, for example, about our school of love. Is it a good educational institution? I believe it is. Do you thank God for this school? I hope that you do. It is obvious that this is His undertaking. But very often I hear words of gratitude directed toward me, and I feel uncomfortable. Who am I that I should be praised? If you knew me as I know myself, I believe God would be glorified with special power because He is able to use one so weak and unfit for His glory. Yes, I need human support in prayer, for the enemy of the soul hates me and desires to destroy me. But the best encouragement for me is seeing people's lives become better, seeing the name of Jesus glorified in this undertaking, and seeing the beauty and power of God's love become understandable to us through our revelations. The only thing of which I can boast is that I love. This truly is my achievement, which is very difficult for me to hide and which at the same time causes people to mock me. I am struck most of all because of love. But how can this gift be hidden? The entire meaning of Christianity is contained in love, and I long to speak about it with everyone. Love is so beautiful! It brings happiness to me and to my friends.

Homework 58

1. Please read Proverbs 27:2, 21; Matthew 25:21; Romans 2:29; 1 Corinthians 4:5; and Isaiah 53:11, and consider these passages in the light of our lesson.
2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. How can boasting be distinguished from joy?
5. How do gratitude, praise, admiration, and flattery differ from one another, and what are their benefits and dangers?
6. How can we glory in God?

7. What verses came to your mind while studying this subject?
Provide two of them.

Lesson 59. Praise Is a Language of Love

The lives of many people are like smoldering coals that are about to go out. Someone has been broken by life's problems and is ready to fall forever, shattering against the rocks of despair. Someone travels through life without any hope of something better, dragging out a miserable existence. We are surrounded by a world of unhappy people who pretend that everything is well with them. Living in sin, a person cannot be happy, for the very awareness that he will someday die forever oppresses a normal person, depriving him of the fullness of happiness and peace. And if premature death knocks at my door, fear and terror come. I become paralyzed by the nearness of the end.

How can such people be helped? How can the suffering of a tormented soul be eased? God gives hope. He has a beautiful plan for every person. He sees a wonderful future in the life of every soul who decides to give his life to Jesus. For such people, Eternity begins with all the prospects of its development.

One of the most inspiring ways to transform a soul is praise.

Praise is the ability to notice a person's hidden virtues and draw special attention to them. It is an expression of approval for certain actions or future undertakings. Praise reveals unnoticed qualities in a person that may enter an open phase of action and bring joy into the life of the one who possesses them.

For many people, praise is one of the languages of love that they understand very well. Subconsciously, they wait for someone to speak this language and help them solve life's problems.

In the Bible, we find confirmation that praise benefits those who hear it and is useful. We read in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

I once had a German shepherd that I trained. I noticed that words of admiration and praise are pleasant even to dogs. They do not understand the meaning of the words, but they perceive their spirit. I tried to communicate with my dog as with a person, believing that he should understand me, and I became indignant at my pet's lack of understanding. I raised my voice at him, and he became even more confused. But when, under the same conditions, I praised him, stroked his head, and spoke affectionate words, he was ready in his joy to do everything I expected and even tried with all his might to follow my commands. But at every rough or stern word, the dog lowered his ears and tail, trying to understand what he had done wrong.

How much we humans sometimes resemble such animals. Like creatures without speech, we wait for someone to speak words of approval and support to us, praise us for something good, and breathe something bright and joyful into us so that we may remember the "little tail" of a good disposition and wag it with joy.

I have noticed that there are people who simply say a kind word to you and light a lamp within you. Afterward, you go about rejoicing in everything and seeing the life around you as beautiful.

Kind words have amazing power. They are able to resurrect a person's spirit to a new and wonderful life. The Bible counsels believers continually to speak words that are "life-giving unto life."

Let us imagine the following scene. Jesus comes on the clouds of Heaven. Everything grows silent before Him. The trumpet sounds, and He commands the dead who believed in Him to arise. All the saved ascend into the presence of God and look intently at Jesus, waiting for His words. But He is silent. Everyone is filled with the joy of meeting. Friends recognize one another, mothers receive their children, and those who died in agony receive new bodies full of life, health, and energy. Then all the saved ascend to the heavenly Jerusalem.

They gather at the White Throne, waiting to hear what will be said to them. Then the words are heard: "Well then, you unprofitable servants, have you received what you wanted?" I cannot imagine such an address coming from the lips of a loving God.

I do not know exactly what Jesus and the Father will say to Their children, but I am certain that these will be very kind words of praise and encouragement. It will be the most beautiful address ever spoken to people. They will hear words of gratitude for their faith. The speech of Jesus and the Father will be filled with joy over their faithfulness, praise for their steadfastness and courage, and other compliments. An Eternal Covenant consisting of words of love and blessings will be made with us.

The eternal praise, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," will sound like the most beautiful song.

There will be no more anger or evil speaking, no insults or abusive words, and no mockery or humiliation. Pride and envy will be removed from our hearts forever. Praise and admiration will become our ordinary words of communication. I believe we should begin practicing them among those around us even now.

If I adopt fear, duty, and obligation as incentives for salvation and use them to inspire people to follow Christ, success will hardly accompany me. I believe all my attempts will be doomed to failure. But perhaps someone will desire to be saved out of fear. In that case, what will such people be able to do for a God Whom they imagine only as punishing and just? Fear and duty are poor incentives. Such motivation may work in an earthly army, but it does not work properly in the army of Christ.

If praise is absent from my vocabulary, I will become a cold and unfeeling person to all my acquaintances and neighbors—someone with whom they can conduct business but with whom friendship is uninteresting.

The mind of every man is designed in such a way that he needs recognition and admiration. Women who know and understand

this can very quickly win men's hearts. They can easily accomplish much by praising and admiring the men they have chosen as friends. It is a mistake to think that only something else draws men toward starting a family. Certain things attract and cause someone to notice another person, but later everything develops into a relationship, and families are formed. If praise and admiration, recognition and delight, are absent from the woman's side within the family, the husband begins to look for them elsewhere. He desires to understand his significance and seeks a place in life where he will be recognized and respected. But a wise wife knows this secret of a man's heart, and with her lips she builds her husband's reputation in his own eyes and in the eyes of their children, neighbors, and friends. Such wives have special value. Children are also very sensitive to praise.

Praise is a language of love that is in great demand. Everyone should learn it. In addition to bringing benefit and happy hearts, the language of praise can also bring special joy to the one who speaks it. Such a person is able to see good in people and notice it where everything appears dark. He prefers to pay special attention to the best aspects of people's lives.

Love delights in thinking about praise. This is its favorite occupation. It notices a great deal of good in the past, present, and future of every person with whom it has fellowship and friendship. Love does not always have money to give, but it always has support and encouragement that gladden hearts. On the lips of love, simple words of praise and gratitude have special power to encourage many souls toward a better life with Jesus and a succession of victories in the struggle against sin.

The motto, "Finally... if there be any praise, think on these things," is very familiar to love. It keeps this motto in its kind heart and joyfully shares this blessing.

Homework 59

1. Please read Philippians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; Matthew 26:9-11; Luke 19:9; and Luke 21:3-4, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.

2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. What is the difference between flattery and praise?
5. May a person praise himself if no one else praises him? Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.
6. How can I learn to praise others if I do not know how?
7. What verses came to your mind while studying this subject?

Lesson 60. Love Does Not Show Off

When Jesus revealed the essence of His mission to the disciples in Galilee and pointed out their sins, something very sad happened. We read in John 6:66: "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." How painful it must have been for Jesus to watch this! But He did not welcome serving Him and the world at the same time, so He gave people the opportunity to decide.

What do we imagine when we hear the expression "the fairer half of humanity"? I do not know why we men are called this, but apparently it is some kind of special compliment, because we were originally created in the image and likeness of God. And then the most wonderful masterpiece of God's creative work—a woman—was created so that through her special qualities she could bring joy to the fair half of humanity.

God creates everything beautiful. We are surrounded by the animal and plant world in all its perfection. If we add something of our own to it, the appearance of true, original beauty is lost, and something ugly results.

Sin has distorted the beauty of this world. It has distorted the beauty of people, placing its mark upon our bodies and faces and attempting to instill its own "values" in us.

One writer said, "Beauty will save the world!" I used to wonder: save it from what, save it for what purpose, and save whom? It seems rather meaningless, but the world liked this saying, so it created an entire beauty industry. From morning until evening, the world offers us its values and products, catching deceived people in its nets.

At present, a person's beauty is determined not by the wholeness of his personality, but by the standards of fashion, industry, and the society in which we live.

Some people inherited a harmonious appearance and body from birth. Being noticeable in our world, they attract special attention and become targets for many lustful people who

desire to partake of this beauty and make it part of their worldly pleasure. For this purpose, they devise various temptations and traps.

But what should those do who do not meet the high standards of our world yet desire recognition? Society offers its services to such people, and to others as well: bright cosmetics, jewelry, fashionable clothing, promiscuity, sexuality, tattoos, clubs and communities, prestigious employment, wealth and fame, and much more under the general name of “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” Choose whatever you want. There is enough for everyone.

Unfortunately, the influence of the surrounding world has also affected God’s people. Many of us lived in the world and, after turning from evil, accepting God’s truth, and believing in Christ, brought our old values into the new community, subconsciously imposing them upon the brothers and sisters with whom we associate. Every attempt to resist this stream of evil is described as fanaticism, monasticism, poor taste, and shortsightedness.

Nevertheless, true standards exist that are common to everyone and accessible to all. Our Creator is the supreme measure. When I imagine how I ought to appear before Him in order to please Him, I understand that all my tattoos, jewelry, and other such things are contrary and abhorrent to Him. I may make some impression upon the world with these things, but in God’s eyes I will appear proud and arrogant. Will God condemn me because I did not conform to the ideas of this world and appeared natural rather than as society prefers? God has His own standards. He gives us something far more beautiful and incorruptible than the glitter of this world. The best adornment for any person is a new heart given by God. It is the righteousness of Jesus, God’s agape love manifested in my character, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

From all my observations, I have concluded that the most beautiful people on the entire Earth are those who love their neighbors, are ready to serve and be friends, and have a personal relationship with Jesus while living according to the

laws of Heaven. One can admire such people without growing weary. This is the half of humanity that may be called the most beautiful.

Love is the best adornment of the face and body. It transforms a person so skillfully and harmoniously that when you discover a loving soul, everything else fades in the light of the inner beauty that reflects God's character.

But the enemy of the soul reminds us of worldly standards, attempting to add his own contribution to God's beauty. If a person swallows this bait and is caught on the hook of society's ideas, his entire life may be turned into one continual inferiority complex. He may reduce his self-esteem to an extremely low level and forget his true value in the eyes of God. Many people have fallen victim to such standards and isolated themselves from society and friends simply because they consider their appearance unsatisfactory. How they suffer as they look in the mirror and see age placing its mark upon their appearance, depriving them of youthful freshness and attractiveness! Every wrinkle is regarded as a wound to the heart, and biological age as an inevitable catastrophe. In order to fight this somehow, a person turns to the services of the beauty industry, attempting to prove to the whole world that he is not what he really is, but that he is normal. The world mockingly accepts him in order to squeeze every last bit of strength and money from him, leaving him photographs as reminders of the time when he once conformed to generally accepted standards. Along with fading beauty, a person loses the meaning of life and begins to hate those who look closely at him.

Social media has solved the problems of many people by allowing them to capture attractive angles of their outward appearance while hiding from the eyes of others what fills the person within.

Look at my photograph. Can you see my love in it, my friendliness, and my desire to make your life better and more beautiful? I believe that if you do not know me personally, you will see an ordinary person who does not like to comb his hair. But if you know me, then behind the photograph you already

see a different me—the real and special person I am in life. The same would be fair regarding any person.

I have never even seen many of you, but by communicating with you or reading your messages, I form a beautiful image of a person who is very much like Jesus. If I ever meet you personally, I will be able very quickly to combine your spiritual values with your outward appearance. I will have the opportunity to admire you in your fullness. Love teaches us to see the whole person and notice the qualities that correspond to God's requirements and standards. Love opens new paths for personal development and destroys many age-related and appearance-related insecurities within my soul. Even if I forgot to look in the mirror or shave, an unexpected meeting with you will not kill me. I know that I love, and this state of my mind serves as a special protection against the influence of this world.

But if I love, this does not mean that I should be untidy and look like a scarecrow. I should not use my outward appearance to demonstrate neglect and disrespect toward society. Neither should I display what ought to remain hidden beneath clothing. Sexuality will not increase my reputation, but will sow unnecessary temptations and destroy the protection of my soul.

In His wisdom, God gave us dress reform, teaching us to be diligent in this light and not to manifest fanaticism or poor taste. But the beauty of a meek and quiet spirit will always be incorruptible. Love does not vaunt itself.

Homework 60

1. Please read Genesis 1:27, 31; 6:2-5; Esther 1:10-12; Ezekiel 28:17; Mark 6:22, 25; 1 Samuel 9:2; 15:21-24; 16:7; Proverbs 31:25, 30; and 1 Peter 3:3-5, and consider these passages in the light of our lesson.
2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. When can a person's beauty become a sin against him? Does God love beautiful people?

5. What, in your opinion, adorns a person?
6. How can one be beautiful without considering oneself beautiful?
7. What verses came to your mind while studying this subject?
8. What did you feel when you read that men are the fairer half of humanity?)))

Lesson 61. Love Does Not Grumble

One of the most widespread forms of pride, and one that receives the least attention, is a quarrelsome spirit. Like a cancerous tumor, it begins with small complaints and expressions of justified dissatisfaction, eventually depriving a person of immunity against the influence of sin. If I do not understand the full danger of the spirit of grumbling and allow it into my heart, a special gift develops within me—the ability to see and notice the mistakes and shortcomings of my neighbors—and a special “wisdom” to express aloud what I have seen. A quarrelsome spirit takes such strong possession of me that I cease paying attention to the resistance people offer in response to my attacks. A sense of being right and important arises in my heart, through which I become exalted in my own eyes.

But my grumbling is selective. It behaves very cautiously toward those who are stronger than I am, who have authority over me, or upon whom I depend financially. I learn to express my dissatisfaction very carefully toward such people. At the same time, I tell them about all my acquaintances, including members of my family, explaining what they are doing wrong and how they ought to act. I understand life better than anyone else and am ready to give wise counsel for every situation. I enjoy instructing people, especially regarding events that have already taken place, and giving them valuable directions concerning situations that have long since passed away. It is so pleasant to feel that I am right about everything and to have my own point of view—the most correct one—on every subject. I have friends with the same spirit, and together we discuss every event, beginning with what has happened in the family circle and ending with news from America. Together, we become experts on every issue in the world. And if I manage to create my own YouTube channel, I will be able to realize all my talents there and acquire hundreds of subscribers.

But at the same time, something strange takes place. The members of my family try to avoid me. They do not enjoy

spending time with me. Often, they begin speaking rudely to me, fueling my desire to defend myself. My friends stop inviting me to visit and rarely come to my home. They do not even understand what they are losing by losing me.

The very terrible thing that my mind cannot comprehend takes place. My family falls apart. I am left alone.

A very long time ago, sin arose in Heaven. There was no reason for it to arise. A small dissatisfaction with God's government and the established order grew into rebellion and brought division between heavenly beings who were family and close friends. It became impossible to live together in such a condition, so an irreversible separation took place from those whom one loved and who were very dear. No one except God understood the nature of rebellion and sin, while the arguments and accusations made against the Ruler of the universe seemed substantial enough that they could not simply be ignored. A small dissatisfaction grew into a war that produced division. The heavenly family inevitably fell apart, never to be reunited. When this happens, there are no winners and no joy over battles won. There is no triumph of victory. When one's own children and people to whom one's feelings are closely bound, and to whom one is deeply attached, perish, there is no happiness because they have left.

But a proud heart never grows tired of finding justification for its ambitions and its own supposed correctness.

Nevertheless, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. To be an adversary of God means to be on the devil's side. This is a very dark prospect. There is no hope. But in order to silence somehow this oppressive feeling and the voice of conscience, I need to read the Bible and pray more, attend every spiritual gathering, and perform good deeds. Such behavior helps me greatly, because against the background of all my good deeds, my own sense of justice does not appear so bad. After all, I am completely immersed in the world of religion. And what convicting sermons are heard on YouTube channels! All the people for whom they were spoken must certainly listen to them. Then they will see their sins and

repent, not through my eyes but through the eyes of others. Yet there are questions I do not understand. If the members of my family please me in everything and show absolute respect and obedience, I still find a multitude of shortcomings in their behavior and attitude toward life, and this irritates me greatly. I try to fight it, but I cannot. An explosion of emotion takes place, followed by a brief truce. Then I put on "rose-colored glasses" and notice nothing, but in that case everyone "climbs onto my shoulders," lets their legs dangle, and calmly does whatever they want in my home. Therefore, I must once again take the reins of government into my own hands and show people their place in life. No one may be able to understand me, but without question I understand such matters better than others. I like this position very much and have no desire to surrender it.

Love does not vaunt itself. It respects another person's opinion, even when that opinion appears weak and mistaken in its eyes. Love knows how to speak modestly about itself and its advantages while leaving the other person the right to make independent decisions and exercise freedom of choice.

Love does not grumble. It sees no point in expressing disagreement with a neighbor's opinion in this way. When sin is not involved, love always finds a justification for any action, taking into account the person's spiritual and physical development.

Once, when an adulterous woman was brought to Jesus so that they might hear His judgment upon her, He did not justify the sin. He condemned all who were guilty and dissatisfied, while at the same time making it clear that even in such a hopeless situation there was an opportunity for a better life, repentance, and the abandonment of sin. Jesus left everyone freedom of choice. Even the sinful woman was told: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." What love for people who make mistakes, who are guilty, and who are sinful! This is exactly how agape acts. It gives an opportunity for something better and then steps aside to wait. Sometimes it must wait for a very long time, even an entire lifetime. At times, love never sees any changes or wise decisions. With pain in its heart, it

accompanies friends who have died on their final journey, deeply grieving over the opportunities they missed, which will never be offered again.

Love offers life. It always draws people toward good, for it is itself the root and source of every good deed. It touches hardened hearts, allowing them to experience the sweetness of unconditional love, and then steps aside to wait until it is noticed and accepted. It waits—long and attentively.

“But godliness with contentment is great gain.” 1 Timothy 6:6. Contentment is the state of mind of a loving person. He has the water of life, and this fountain supplies every need of the soul. The enemy seeks an opening in the heart where he may sow seeds of dissatisfaction that will produce an evil harvest, but a loving heart does not accept such solutions to problems. Love does not vaunt itself, and grumbling is foreign to its nature. Love responds differently to life’s trials and finds counsel in the Holy Scriptures. This counsel helps it stand firm and overcome every temptation.

Love can do all things “through Christ which strengtheneth me.” God delivers the deceived soul from the nets of grumbling and dissatisfaction. His grace is sufficient to eradicate this sin. It is a painful process. It costs much suffering, but victory over this vice is extremely valuable and brings good fruit in the spirit of humility and meekness. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” And love will gladly teach me this.

Homework 61

1. Please read James 5:9; Philippians 4:5; James 3:14, 16; Proverbs 19:13; 21:19; 25:24; 27:15; Titus 3:2; and 2 Timothy 2:24, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.
2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. How does grumbling affect the atmosphere within a family and a church?
5. How does the Lord respond to grumbling?

6. What remedy does Jesus have for this vice?
7. What does it mean to be content?

Lesson 62. Love Is Not Jealous

In order to understand what kind of jealousy is being discussed in this lesson, we need to consider several of its manifestations described in the Bible.

1. Jealousy is a characteristic of a relationship in which one party is distressed because he believes he is receiving less attention or love than an actual or imagined rival. Such a state of mind may turn into baseless and unjustified rage or envy.
2. Jealousy is also regarded as a reaction to marital or spiritual unfaithfulness that leads to action against the offenders: the one who committed adultery and the one with whom it was committed.
3. Zeal is also the desire to possess a heavenly gift or spiritual quality. It is purposeful action in the pursuit of knowing God better, regardless of the opinions of those around us.

We will now consider the first meaning of jealousy.

We were all created as free people who have the right to choose. God endowed us with this ability, and He watches to ensure that we do not violate the boundaries in the lives of other people, entering the private territory of the human soul because we consider ourselves the owner or manager of someone else's conscience.

Until a certain age, parents have authority over their children. They have the right and duty to control and direct a child's actions and raise him to be an upright and law-abiding citizen of the society in which they live. At the same time, children are not deprived of the opportunity to make decisions independently.

Certain boundaries are also established within marital relationships. They provide for the satisfaction of physical and spiritual needs within the bonds of the family. Violation of these boundaries is regarded as betrayal and unfaithfulness. As a result of such actions, the relationship between the spouses is destroyed, and the marriage may cease to exist.

There are also mutual agreements between God and those who desire a close relationship with the Lord and accept the plan of their salvation. Such believers agree to fulfill the conditions by entering into a covenant with God and giving Him authority to control their actions and to work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure. These people allow God to cultivate fruit within them and train them according to His law. At the same time, the Most High leaves each person freedom of action and choice. Violation of the terms of this covenant on my part deprives me of the right to Eternal life in the presence of God.

There is also such a thing as friendship between people. It places upon me certain obligations toward my friend. I am expected to love him at all times and treat him kindly during crises and trials in the relationship. The bonds of friendship involve a very strong emotional connection, but they do not deprive me or my friend of the freedom to make decisions or choose how to respond to my expectations.

In employment agreements, I am required to be faithful and precise in fulfilling my duties and providing services.

In all these cases, I deal with established boundaries and limits within which I am free to act but beyond which I may not go, even though I have freedom of choice.

In all these unions and agreements, I remain a free person. When someone encroaches upon my freedom out of jealousy, this provokes me and compels me to fight for and defend my rights. Otherwise, if I submit to someone else's will in order to avoid conflict, I may be controlled and manipulated according to that person's wishes.

The family is the most private unit of society. Within it, two people establish their own rules, traditions, and order, which the husband and wife later agree to carry out and observe together. But very often, one spouse decides that the other is his property and that he has an exclusive right to that person's time, conscience, and attention. All principles of freedom are violated, and conflicts arise as each person defends his rights. Such jealousy often has no grounds, and its actions are difficult

to explain. It is blind and deaf to another person's opinion and desires the fulfillment of its own demands and expectations. A jealous person becomes extremely suspicious and faultfinding toward his life companion, while scandals and endless confrontations become the sorrowful norm in the lives of jealous people. As a result of such relationships, a defensive wall of hostility is erected, behind which all the actions and deeds of the suffering party are carried out in deep secrecy and caution. The person walks through a minefield that periodically explodes for no visible present reason or on the basis of incidents and memories from the past.

Such jealousy blinds its victim. It is one of the manifestations of pride. When a jealous person encroaches upon someone's freedom, he enters the forbidden territory of another person's soul and becomes responsible for the destruction of the individual and of human rights.

One act of lawlessness allowed into the heart draws all other vices after it. Jealousy was one of the first sins in the world of holy beings. When the most perfect angel began paying attention to the fact that the Son of God had special privileges in His relationship with the Father and special authority in the universe, jealousy took possession of him. Lucifer saw that he was not receiving as much attention and respect, and this moved the angel to enter the forbidden territory of God's freedom and supreme authority. As a result, jealousy grew into envy and became the cause for the formation of a spirit of rebellion in Heaven.

The same spirit is brought into families, destroying peace, trust, and heartfelt affection.

The pride manifested in jealousy prevents its possessor from understanding the full abhorrence of the sin. Such a person becomes absolutely right in his own eyes. Beginning with accusations against his spouse regarding communication with members of the opposite sex, jealousy proceeds to accusations regarding friendship with people of the same sex. After all, these people are stealing the spouse away from the family and depriving the jealous person of more attention and time. Such

an atmosphere between spouses sometimes leads to separation and divorce.

Love is not jealous. It respects a person's freedom of choice and trusts him. It sees everything but believes the best, giving the person the right to choose his own path and determine how the relationship will develop. Love allows a person to make a mistake and does not judge him, even from the standpoint of its own righteousness. It binds its friend to itself with invisible threads of close relationship, guaranteeing faithfulness and devotion on its part under all circumstances.

Love believeth all things. Even when it sees deception, it seeks to excuse the person because of his frailty and weakness. Until the final moment, it retains hope that the situation will change for the better. Love can be blind to another person's mistakes and actions, but it zealously watches over its own spiritual purity. Love creates such a friendly atmosphere within relationships that everyone who enters it feels freedom and respect for himself. He can live and make choices in peace.

Love draws the soul that has been deceived and blinded by jealousy toward Christ, Who alone can deliver it from the power of this sin. But pride does not desire to acknowledge its weakness and holds its victims firmly. Love enters the struggle and tenderly helps a person break the chains of sin and begin a better life. It knows how to live in the same home with jealous people and does everything so that these unhappy people may have joy despite their sorrowful choice. Love understands with sadness that it will not be able to share with them the advantages of the true freedom in Christ Jesus that it itself possesses.

Homework 62

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 13:7; Numbers 16:2, 26, 32; Numbers 12:1-10; Psalm 37:1-11; and Proverbs 31:10-11, and consider these passages in the light of our lesson.
2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. What did you understand from this lesson?

4. From what source does jealousy come?
5. Which biblical characters were destroyed by jealousy?
6. How should I fight this vice if I see it within myself? And what should I do if I see it in a friend?
7. Is jealousy always evil?

Lesson 63. Love Is International

In the world created by a loving God, there was one people, one language, and one set of first parents from whom the human race descended. The earth was continually being filled with people who knew their roots, and every genealogy led back to Adam and Eve. Adam means humanity; Eve means life. You and I were also present in these first people. And if we trace the line of all our ancestors, we will all arrive at Noah and then at Adam, and between them we will meet all our forefathers whose names are recorded in the Bible.

Whether we want it or not, in reality all of us human beings are brothers and sisters, for we have one Father and the same Creators. Genesis 1:26: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."

Because of lawlessness, the whole world was destroyed by the Flood, but Noah and his family were saved from death. All those now living on earth descended from these people.

There was one nation and one language. God promised that He would never again bring a flood upon the whole earth. But the people decided to build themselves a refuge and began erecting a tower. They also sought to make a name for themselves by means of this structure. Genesis 11:4: "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." But God intervened in human affairs and brought about division. Genesis 11:7: "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

From that moment, all humanity was divided by languages. This is where all tribes, peoples, and races originated.

The enemy of the soul understood that under these circumstances he would not be able to unite all people once again in a common rebellion against God, so he began instilling in people the idea of their national exceptionalism. He sought to convince everyone of the superiority of his own people over

others. And since people believe they are better than everyone else, they consider themselves worthy of special honor. Others must serve them or even be their slaves. And the spirit of pride, envy, and love of money drove people into internal conflicts and wars.

Such a spirit was refined over the centuries and has reached us through the experience of past years. It suggests to us the thought of our exceptional status and leads us to regard ourselves as special and superior to others, using the achievements and successes of our ancestors as evidence. There were also those who invented the idea of a master race. And although they are no longer alive, their ideas still trouble many minds.

And where do the spirits of racism and nationalism lead? To a particular kind of pride that hinders spiritual growth and a proper understanding of God's character.

God once chose Abram in order to bring forth a people from him. Through this nation, the Lord desired to reveal to the world the beauty of God's law and character. From this nation, He sought to give the world the Savior, in Whom all people would once again become one family and one people.

And this plan of God went into effect and was fulfilled. The whole world received a clear testimony concerning God's requirements and laws. The true character of God was revealed in the life of Jesus. Those who believed in Christ became one multinational family, having God as their Father while retaining the distinctive features of their own people and race.

But the proud spirit of national exceptionalism does not die. It finds disciples through whom it convinces people that they are special, exceptional, and better than others, while the language barrier makes this task very easy.

But God resisteth the proud. He becomes the Enemy of all who exalt themselves above others in this way.

The language barrier creates certain difficulties in communicating with people. It takes a great deal of time to

learn a foreign language and acquire the ability to speak and understand it. Some people know several languages from childhood and can communicate freely in each of them. The enemy of the soul tries to persuade me that those who do not understand me are inferior to me.

The color of my skin may also cause me to regard myself as a representative of a special race. I may begin to take pride in being different from people of another skin color.

Where does national or racial exceptionalism lead me? By exalting myself above others, even without saying a single word, I may approve the destruction of people who are unlike me. We know many examples from history in which entire nations and peoples were eradicated because someone began to exalt himself above them and teach his compatriots to do the same. Unfortunately, this spirit still finds followers in our time.

Love does not boast, does not exalt itself, and does not behave itself unseemly. Its vocabulary contains no insulting words such as “churka,” “black,” “Moskal,” “katsap,” “khokhol,” “kike,” and others. Love respects every person regardless of his language, skin color, or nationality. God created us with these differences, and He saves each of us in our native language. God understands prayers in every tongue and knows how to speak each one. The angels also know all the languages of the world and can communicate in them. Love may encounter difficulties in expressing itself in words, but it possesses the spirit and deeds of love, which are understood in every language. Love is friendly toward all people, and it is ready to serve everyone who comes within its sphere of influence. It is ready to give itself to everyone who will receive it. It loves every person because that is its nature, and it cannot be otherwise.

Love is international, and among every people it reveals itself in accordance with God’s character and the requirements of His law. Its purposes are pure, and it builds no barriers in relationships.

Love has enemies that it hates: sin and carnal thinking, subjects of the kingdom of darkness. Love deals mercilessly with them

and destroys them wherever it comes to establish God's Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven.

The kingdom of love is an everlasting kingdom. In this country lives a special people, born again in order to love. These people speak different languages of agape, but they do not divide anyone into better and worse. They regard everyone as worthy of love, and everyone will receive it if he so desires.

And love seeks new friends in order to make them part of its people and gladden their hearts throughout their lives and all Eternity. No one has ever died from love in all the days of human history. And love has always been the effective solution to every conflict and war, through which everything ended peacefully.

Where there is love, there are joy, happiness, and friendship. Where God is, there are life and love, for He is Love.

But where nationalism and racism are, there is death. And pride gives me the right to death, which will become my reward for all my works of the flesh.

Each time, I can choose which path I will follow today and whom I will serve. I choose love.

Homework 63

1. Please read Genesis 11:1-9; Romans 2:28-29; Romans 8:14; and Galatians 3:26-29, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.
2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. From what source do nationalism and racism come?
5. Why did God command Israel to drive out or destroy certain peoples? See Numbers 33:55.
6. How should I fight this vice if I see it within myself? And what should I do if I see it in a friend?
7. Are racism and nationalism always evil?

Lesson 64. Spiritual Pride

When a person is born into this world, his mind is like a blank sheet of paper upon which all knowledge, life experience, discoveries, revelations, and opinions are recorded. And the first information that a person comprehends logically and accepts as corresponding to reality becomes his personal possession, a part of his worldview. He carries this store of knowledge with him throughout his life.

If my mother taught me in childhood to wash my hands before eating, I will follow this knowledge all my life, receiving abundant evidence from every direction that it is right. Later, I will teach my children to do the same.

Religious knowledge is based on the same principles. The truth and teaching that I discovered, that convinced me of their reliability, and that I accepted into my heart at the very beginning of my journey to God shaped my consciousness. They laid a firm foundation within it, convincing me that this particular teaching is true and that all other knowledge should also be built upon it. Fellowship with fellow believers, along with their experiences and opinions, unites us into one community in which we are all of one accord amid our diversity.

The enemy of the soul knows these characteristics of the human mind and actively works to introduce all kinds of heresies and godless false teachings into humanity. He tries to convince people of them and make these teachings a person's first opinion on a particular issue. Therefore, it is often easier to teach an uninformed and uneducated person than to retrain someone who already knows something and is convinced of it.

The distinctive feature of God's truth is that it is clearly presented in Holy Scripture. It is logical and consistent, has abundant biblical, prophetic, and historical confirmation, and does not contradict scientific discoveries or common sense. The Holy Spirit accompanies the messengers of truth, convincing and correcting through them those who seek truth and meaning, and inscribing in the minds of the students the beauty

of the plan of salvation and the logical sequence of revelations. All this shapes my worldview so firmly that I am ready to remain faithful to it even in the face of death.

The enemy of the soul cannot withstand the truth or prevent God from spreading it, but he is able to send temptations that lead people astray and offer empty, confusing information. Satan also tries to drive every truth to the point of fanaticism.

For example, washing one's hands before eating is right, and it is truth. But if I begin controlling people in this matter, asking them every time whether they washed their hands, how long they washed them, how many times, and what kind of soap they used, and then also demand that they show me their palms and the dirt on the towel, I will eventually be asked to leave them alone. I will see that people are avoiding me. And they will be right, not because they rejected the truth, but because they rejected my fanaticism. Along with it, they also rejected me and my teaching.

Truth without love is fanaticism and one of the enemy of the human soul's favorite ways of presenting information.

Heresy and false teachings offered with friendliness and a semblance of love will never become truth and will not lead deceived souls into God's quiet harbor.

Knowledge of the truth does not always make a person arrogant, but we will now consider precisely such a situation.

When I comprehend a religious teaching or spiritual discipline, I become an expert in that field and can answer any question very quickly, comparing everything and making decisions on the basis of my knowledge and experience. And I feel superior to those who know nothing or know less than I do. This state of affairs begins to make me arrogant. I suddenly decide that I am someone of importance. Awareness of my enlightenment exalts me in my own eyes.

And, of course, I am absolutely certain that my religion, whose teaching I follow, is the most correct one.

Such an approach gives me strength and courage to win new souls and plan various missionary projects.

When I see success and blessing in my work, I become more firmly established in my ambitions.

Then I meet a representative of another teaching who, like me, is firmly established in his truth and his religion. A dialogue begins between us. We determine which denomination our opponent belongs to, begin probing for weak points, and look for opportunities to present our teaching logically and in all its beauty. In response, however, I encounter outright rejection and counterarguments. The dialogue has failed. I hand over a book and continue my search.

The fullness of truth and membership in the correct denomination are good in themselves, but if I do not have love, what kind of truth am I carrying into the world? To those who listen, it sounds approximately like this: "I am better than you, so come join us." Perhaps I am exaggerating a little, for a person's choice must also be taken into account. Not everyone responds even to an appeal made with perfect love. Nevertheless, the following should be understood: if I have not love, then my faith and religion profit me nothing.

Who began the rebellion in Heaven? It was the wisest angel, who surpassed all other heavenly beings in his knowledge of God. But because of the spirit of vanity and pride, he fell and drew many of God's sons with him into destruction. They also knew the truth, but they believed a lie and became proud, accepting the imaginary freedom offered by Satan. As a result, they all fell and were cast out of Heaven.

Who were the scribes and Pharisees in the days of Jesus? They were highly educated elders and spiritual leaders of their nation who exerted enormous influence upon people's minds by instructing them in the Word of God and educating their people. But when Jesus came and showed them the truth with love, not all of them received Him and believed Him; afterward, many even decided to kill Christ. In the Bible, we read of the constant confrontation between truth in love and fanaticism.

And where is the line that distinguishes these two similar concepts? Love separates them into darkness and light.

Spiritual pride is a clear understanding of biblical teaching and its acceptance into one's life, but without the oil of love. For love does not boast. It is a correct understanding of church doctrines without the transformation of the carnal heart into a loving one. But God resisteth the proud. And I will be surprised to learn that, though I have all faith, understand all mysteries, and possess all knowledge, if I do not have love, I am nothing in God's sight and in the light of the Bible.

It is very dangerous to be God's adversary. I risk losing Eternity. And God resisteth proud and arrogant people. My knowledge of the truth does not give me a right to Eternal life if that truth is not mingled with God's love.

But love without truth will also lead to my being declared a worker of iniquity, one who is not known by God. For example, I love my wife, but I also love my mistress. Will such love justify me? Or if I love God but break His commandment, do I thereby show Him my love? Sin is the transgression of the law, and love is the fulfilling of the law.

The best formula is the combination of love, law, faithfulness, and faith in Jesus. If anything is removed, the foundation will be unstable, and the house built upon it will collapse.

But what about the followers of another religion who believe a lie? They will perish! Love will help me find an approach to the hearts of these people as well, revealing to them the truth that flows from my kind attitude. If these souls remain closed, perhaps no one will ever be able to help them. But I do not know whether this is so; therefore, I take love with me and go in search of new friends in order to lead them to Jesus.

Homework 64

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 8:1-3; Luke 18:10-14; Revelation 13:5; Romans 10:3; and Ecclesiastes 1:18, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.

2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. What prevents "Laodicea" from receiving the message from God? See Revelation 3:17.
5. Why were the Jews in the days of Christ unable to attain righteousness?
6. Can church membership and knowledge of the truth save me?
7. At the end of time, will Satan use religious pride to gain control over the world and people's minds?

Lesson 65. Pride in Wealth

Money is the magnet of our time, drawing the eyes of all humanity toward itself. It is a mysterious idol that one must constantly pursue, spending all one's time trying to acquire this treasure. And when you manage to earn money, you see its stream rushing toward you, passing through your pockets, and filling your storehouses. Then you realize that you have entered the ranks of a specially chosen group of people. Not everyone fulfills this dream, but very many people aim for it and do everything they can to make it a reality.

The enemy of the human soul instills in the people of this world the idea that attaining the golden crown called "wealth, fame, and power" is the meaning of life and that this treasure can easily be possessed by walking the broad way. People deceived by Satan believe these suggestions and begin a lifelong struggle for the golden crown. They strive toward their cherished goal with all their strength and understanding. They are ready to sweep everything from their path, destroying competitors and climbing over the heads and dead bodies of their neighbors. Having attained their cherished goal, they cling to it greedily, receiving praise and applause from those already at the top and those still on the way. Meanwhile, the owner of the golden crown delights in watching the struggle of his disciples. He gives some the opportunity to fulfill their dream quickly through crime or a chance windfall. He permits others to touch it for a moment and then lose everything. He instructs still others to use their intellect and wisdom to make their way toward the cherished crown and to teach others to do the same. And there are those to whom he gives nothing, but whose achievements he destroys and whose savings he scatters to the wind, while keeping all his worshipers in constant tension and thirst for wealth. And Satan has succeeded in this world. Unfortunately, his deceptions have power. People believe in the magic of money and live with dreams of it. All the media keep this fire of human passions burning by offering new advice and recommendations and displaying the luxurious lives of those who have already reached the top.

But there is another crown, offered to all people and held in the hand of God Himself. It is called "Eternal life." It shines with everlasting light, and the darkness cannot comprehend it. A very narrow way leads to it, and everyone who chooses this way and walks upon it receives the incorruptible crown. God gives help, protection, and strength to all travelers who are heading toward this cherished dream. They are given special knowledge of God's will and His laws; they receive the testimony of God's approval, and their minds are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. At first, many who walk the narrow way gaze longingly at the golden crown, regretting that they were unable to attain it. Some return to this dream and try to carry it with them on the road to Heaven, but they continually fall and pull others into the abyss. From the abyss come the enticing sounds of merriment, music, laughter, enjoyment, and every kind of pleasure. But God draws the eyes of those who are going toward Christ and reveals the beauty of His character to all who seek, drawing their hearts into friendship with His Son.

And between the owners of these two crowns, there is a continual battle for human souls.

Satan offers earthly wealth and, along with it, gives its possessors pride from the awareness that they are better than others—people especially favored by fate, who have surpassed their neighbors through achievements that allow them to be independent and free, living as they please and doing whatever their souls desire.

When I have an abundance of material resources available and freely accessible, I feel that I am on top and can even engage in charity for my own pleasure, receiving gratitude and words of blessing in return from those whom I have helped. I can buy beautiful things and live in magnificent houses. My transportation reflects my wealth. I can hire people to serve me and protect my life, giving them material compensation in return. I can buy pleasures and enjoyments. It is within my power to acquire many things and become a very famous person. And the more resources I have at my disposal, the more opportunities open before me. I suddenly realize that I am able

to influence politics and arrange wars and revolutions. This idea feeds my pride, for I can write history, and my name will be immortalized on its pages. The whole world can become mine. But there is one “but” that spoils everything. Death is drawing inexorably near, and the grave offers no prospects. Who will receive everything I have acquired? And what will happen to me afterward, after death? They say that death is not the end, but a just continuation in which every debt is repaid. How terrifying! What should I do? My pride will not save me from this inevitable reckoning, and all my money will not be enough to buy even one hour of Eternal life.

Now is the time to prepare for what will inevitably come. The end of the history of sin is approaching. In what light will my name be presented in this record?

Along with the incorruptible crown, I am offered love, happiness, and friendship in fellowship with my neighbors and in knowing the Eternal God. By choosing this way, I discover an ocean of God’s blessings and a universe of amazing possibilities. The entire universe, with all its future development, becomes accessible to me, and from this moment I am given the incorruptible treasures of God’s grace. I become the possessor of peace, joy, patience, meekness, temperance, and other blessings for spiritual growth. God Himself, in Jesus Christ, appears to me in all the beauty of His character. I come to know His love and understand that it is boundless and deep, that it is available and given to every thirsty heart. It cannot be bought for any amount of money, but it is freely poured into the lives of those who have believed in Jesus, repented of their sins, and accepted the gift of God’s grace for their cleansing. Love is unique in that it is a gift, but in order to receive it, everything must be surrendered. This “everything” includes all my sins, all my time, all my pride and the filth that has clung to me, as well as all my thoughts and feelings. Such an offering is accepted as payment for that cherished “free” agape love. But for this transaction to be possible today, it was secured about two thousand years ago at an unimaginable price. Jesus Himself paid for my redemption with His life, thereby opening for me the way to salvation and to receiving love into my heart. The

golden crown with all its prospects grows dim in the light of this Great Sacrifice. Love makes me truly rich in good works, but God resisteth the proud. Being rich does not necessarily mean being proud, but the risk of contracting the leprosy of this sin increases as wealth increases. How can I avoid this snare? I dedicate everything to God and ask for wisdom in managing the resources. It is no longer I who own this world of money that belongs to me, but Christ. To be rich and loving is a special privilege and blessing. With God this is possible, but not with men. But to be proud and loving is like trying to unite light with darkness. This is impossible; therefore, one of the two must die forever.

Can a person take pride in wealth without possessing it? Yes. Pride is a sin that also infects poor people. It is equally dangerous in its manifestations, for it carries death and the fruits of rebellion against God's law. Only unconditional love can deliver me from this power of sin.

Homework 65

1. Please read Matthew 6:24; Psalm 73; Revelation 3:17; Proverbs 10:15; Proverbs 11:4, 28; Proverbs 18:11; Ecclesiastes 5:18; Mark 10:23-27; and 1 Timothy 6:17-19, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.
2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. Why is it impossible to serve both God and mammon?
4. Is it a sin to be wealthy? Are all wealthy people proud?
5. When—at what point—do my wealth and possessions become a curse to me?
6. What should I do with the wealth I possess in order to be saved unto Eternal life?
7. Is it permissible for a person who has love to accumulate wealth?
8. Do you know wealthy righteous people in the Bible whose hearts were not corrupted by riches?

Lesson 66. Wealth Is God's Blessing

When God created the world, He placed all kinds of blessings within our planet and its natural resources. He filled the earth with a variety of good things and riches and gave all of it to humanity as a gift.

The first people on earth were very wealthy. The whole world, in all its fullness and beauty, belonged to them. But possession of this treasure was conditional. It was entrusted to people for use in good purposes and for serving those around them.

The enemy of the soul led the first man into sin and thereby gained power over his mind and the minds of his descendants. Man became selfish. All the material blessings given by God for serving other people began to be appropriated as personal property.

In order to regulate and organize human life, the concept of material valuables was introduced, and later money came into use. At first, these consisted of precious metals such as gold, copper, and silver, as well as rare precious stones. All of these circulated among the nations.

Although wealth is neutral in itself, its value is determined by the degree to which those who consider it wealth desire it. Money has value when it is backed by purchasing power and accepted in circulation by the government and society as payment for services. It is then legal tender within the territory designated by governments.

In our day, society has arrived at the concept of electronic money, and we accept it as payment for services and goods without considering what it actually is.

In the past, wealth was measured by the possession of gold, goods, land, and other visible valuables that could be exchanged for something of equal worth. Today, it is measured by the numbers in a bank account. These numbers make it possible to buy land, gold, various goods, and services.

Who is a wealthy person? It would be better to ask whom we consider wealthy. Everything is relative. If you possess more of something than I do, then you are wealthy in my eyes. At the same time, both of us are poor in the eyes of those who have more than we do.

I would define wealth not so much by the possession of money or material goods as by a person's ability to acquire, accumulate, preserve, and use them wisely.

I know people who earn a great deal and live in luxury, yet are deeply in debt. I also know those who, despite a small income, manage to accumulate capital and be content with little. Which of them is wealthy?

In the Bible, wealth is presented as a special blessing from God, and the ability to acquire it as evidence of wisdom from God. But a person's ability to manage the resources entrusted to him also plays a major role. It is good when you can earn money, but the interesting question is what you will do with it.

The enemy of the soul offers his goods, temptations, and services, while God reveals His plans and opportunities.

To save money means to set aside part of one's income in expectation of reaching a particular goal. For example, savings can be very useful in a time of crisis. There are other purposes as well. But money can also be set aside simply so that it will be there and there will be a great deal of it. Modern money, however, is not gold, which is always valuable. It consists of conventional symbols and numbers that may suddenly disappear or lose their value. Therefore, people look for opportunities to invest their money in something worthwhile simply to preserve it and protect it from inflation and devaluation.

I remember people who sold a house in the 1990s and deposited the proceeds in a savings account, only to buy a single stick of sausage with that money a couple of years later. I also remember those who bought foreign currency and became owners of substantial capital a few years later. In general, the

question of how to preserve wealth has been relevant in every age.

But this subject has been raised now so that we may understand an important thought: it is not wealth itself that is evil and a curse, but my attitude toward it.

We live in a world whose motto is, "Time is money." This is true of the lives of many people. When you are paid by the hour, you begin to value time by the minute and understand how best to invest it. Some things are unpaid: your sleep, your morning reflections upon God and your prayers, your meals, your leisure, your private life, and your fellowship with people and friends. No one pays you for rest or self-education. But all of these things can be sacrificed in order to become wealthier. Money is the goal, and it must be attained. This is like chasing a rainbow. You see it and estimate the distance approximately, but as you draw near, you cannot take possession of it. The rainbow remains just as distant and enticingly beautiful.

Some good works require continual material support and financing. When I perform them, I lose my savings and see no possibility of getting them back. Yet I experience tremendous satisfaction from having done something meaningful by helping or supporting someone. Sometimes, in order to do this, I must borrow from a bank with the expectation of repaying the money from my next income. But what joy and happiness come from knowing that someone's burden has become lighter and that someone's work is moving forward!

Heavenly wealth is something especially beautiful. It proceeds from my heart and is gathered in Heaven. I think that the wealthiest woman in Heaven will be the poor widow whose name and age are unknown to us. But she opened a special heavenly account into which enormous sums have been deposited throughout the ages by poor and wealthy people alike. To this day, the example of her self-sacrifice stirs people's hearts, opens their pockets, and inspires them to support God's work in all its forms.

Love teaches us how to relate properly to wealth and how to earn it honestly, rendering unto God the things that are God's and unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. It prompts us to set aside what is necessary and to give even what does not exist, to invest with discernment, and to give as inspired. Love hears the voice of the Holy Spirit, Who reveals new opportunities to earn money and shows where it is best invested and how it should be spent.

God knows what we need to pay, to whom, and how much, in order to survive and to take part in something. He does not welcome the spirit of covetousness, and the spirit of empty extravagance is also foreign to Him.

Money is our life, which we give in order to acquire it. It represents our strength and intellect, which we expend in earning it, and it should not be treated lightly. Yet we must not serve it either, regarding the pursuit and acquisition of money as the meaning of life.

True wealth is what I will be able to take with me to Heaven, what will remain mine when I die. Everything else may be regarded as temporary and unrighteous, having value only in this world. What will gold be on the New Earth? Paving stones. What will happen to my houses and cars at Christ's Coming? They will burn. All these things are necessary now for the convenience of life, but they will not bring salvation to the soul.

True wealth is love, happiness, and friendship from God. Such valuables are in demand here and now, and throughout all Eternity they will remain significant and will be accepted among holy beings as payment for services and goods that are vital to life.

God blesses His children with wisdom to acquire wealth in this world and for Eternal life. Everything is given by Him for good, and He keeps an account of it all. Each of us will have to give an account of what we received, what we could have received, how we spent it, and how we could have spent it.

Homework 66

1. Please read Psalm 62:10; Proverbs 11:16; Proverbs 12:8, 11; 1 Kings 4:21-24, 29-30; 1 Kings 9:10-11; 1 Chronicles 22:1-4; Job 1:1-3; Job 31:16-22; John 19:39; Hebrews 11:26; Proverbs 8:17-19; Proverbs 23:4-5; and Ecclesiastes 6:2, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.
2. What revelations did you receive while studying this subject?
3. How can wealth become a blessing?
4. For what purpose did God create the poor and the wealthy?
5. Recall who helped Christ's disciples advance the work of God during the establishment of the Church.
6. What should I do so that wealth does not become a curse to me?
7. Is it permissible for a loving person to be materially wealthy?
8. How should we relate to those who are wealthy but do not have love?
9. How can a person become rich while believing in God? See 1 Timothy 6:9-11.

Lesson 67. Pride in Knowledge and Education

Knowledge of a particular science makes a person literate and well informed in that field, as well as in many other matters. Every sphere of human activity and livelihood requires specialized professional knowledge and skills. When applied in practice, these shape the structure of society and raise its standard of living. We commonly call such developed nations civilized. An abundance of wealth makes it possible to purchase the knowledge and technologies of other countries and invest them in the development of one's own. During the past fifty years, our world has made astonishing discoveries in science and technology.

The development of education has made people literate and knowledgeable in many matters. And the whole world, like a single living organism, functions harmoniously in the realms of trade and knowledge while pursuing discoveries and inventions.

Education has elevated people and taught many of them to think constructively and make logically sound decisions on every issue, employing knowledge, intellect, and intuition in the process.

Yet it is also interesting that all this knowledge and education has not been able to solve the problem of sin. Wickedness has become far more sophisticated and concealed, but it has not lost its deadly, destructive power. Sin has been given the status of something natural and, in certain areas, has been placed within the framework of law, with wickedness regarded as something inevitable in human behavior. Such laws protect a person's freedom to sin and encourage him to act accordingly.

Although knowledge and education often elevate a person by giving him the opportunity to apply his skills in practice and bring them to life, without interaction with Divine power such knowledge leads people to pride and makes them arrogant.

If we examine media statistics and analyze which programs are most popular and in greatest demand, we can see that everything which exalts and glorifies human intelligence is

especially sought after by viewers. Producers are willing to pay large sums for intelligence and knowledge, promoting the most advanced people in this field as examples to imitate.

In most cases, knowledge and education contain no evil in themselves when they are directed toward improving well-being and developing society. But they bring spiritual pride into the lives of many people. A person begins to consider himself better than others or even better than everyone. The consequences of such conclusions are not long in coming.

Who plans wars? Who controls political processes? Who possesses the world's money? The answer is simple: educated people who have specialized knowledge within their sphere of influence. The very structure of society is arranged in such a way that kind and God-fearing people have no place at the helm of power. There are exceptions, however. They occur when people who have attained power begin to believe in God and obey His laws.

Reading such a conclusion about knowledge and education, one might think that they are a great evil and that all educated people are bad. I am not claiming this. When we trace the path of humanity's development, we can see that the model of ruling people's minds includes the idea that simple and uneducated people are easier to control and to indoctrinate through the media with particular values and views of life. If the people are given bread and entertainment, there is no need to worry that they will become dissatisfied. But educated people pose an enormous problem for such politicians, because they are able to foresee and calculate the future and articulate its sorrowful consequences and prospects.

Only the Bible has survived every kind of regime and social structure, reaching our day unchanged and carrying within it true information about sin, God, and the meaning of life. It tells us about reliable knowledge and gives the most correct education to everyone who begins to study it humbly, seeking to understand God's character and the plan of salvation.

Let us turn our attention to the beginning of existence, when there was no sin in the universe and peace and love reigned everywhere. God stood at the head of this order of the universe, giving power and influence to whomever He desired. God had an assistant, an anointed cherub who was the crown of beauty and wisdom. But because of the abundance of his knowledge and education, this being's heart became proud. He decided that he surpassed the other created beings and, under a mask of godliness, began sowing the seeds of rebellion. He was the first revolutionary, and he found supporters who trusted his wisdom and knowledge. These angels supported Satan in his rebellion against God and the Son of God. As a result, war and division occurred. The temptations of this rebellion spread to earth, where they were accepted by our first parents and became part of human society.

But God did not leave fallen humanity in ignorance. He established His order and gave humanity His education through the study of the science of salvation, which reveals the beauty of God's character and teaches love.

Only in the light of agape love do I begin to see our world through God's eyes and understand what is happening in it. Love gives me proper orientation in every science and every field of knowledge. And I understand that God knows everything in every sphere of human activity. He understands every science better than anyone else. And the Lord gives special wisdom to His loving children—the wisdom to see what is necessary for the salvation of a human soul and what brings it harm and death.

The science of love is the highest knowledge. It gives life to those who possess it and opens unlimited opportunities for personal development without making a person arrogant. Love does not boast of knowledge and education, but uses them for the good of others, seeking to understand how it can best serve people with this knowledge and make their lives more beautiful and interesting.

Love does not exalt itself and does not boast. In all its perfection, fullness, and power, it harms no one but is directed

toward helping and building up. When love enters any science or field of knowledge, it gives it true meaning and makes it suitable for the good of humanity. But everything destructive and dangerous to life, love drives from its presence or else leaves it behind.

The Bible contains the true science of love. It never ceases to amaze minds that seek knowledge by the simplicity and depth of its presentation. On its pages, the Creator Himself, the Lord God, is revealed to us. The Bible teaches us the meaning of life and the truth described and presented in the Word of God.

To this day, the Bible is the most widely read and sought-after book. For many people, it serves as a source of life and inspiration.

Love gives genuine knowledge of God, revealing the true motives behind the actions of the Creator and Owner of the universe. Love elevates a person and, in the best sense of the expression, makes him better than everyone else in God's eyes. And the more perfect a person becomes in love, the more diligently he serves his neighbors and the more he thinks and acts for the happiness of those around him.

Love leads a person to the highest knowledge: it reveals God's character and makes that character the possession of the loving person. As I love, I begin to reflect within myself the image of the One Who is Love. This unique education brings life into every cell of my being and allows Jesus to abide in me and me in Him. In this union of our hearts, we plan many good things and accomplish them, sowing success in everything.

Knowledge of love is knowledge of God. It is life within a person. It is preparation for Eternal life.

Homework 67

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 1:25-28; Proverbs 18:2; Ezekiel 28:2-8, 16-19; Acts 22:3-4; Proverbs 19:2-3; 1 Corinthians 13:8; and Ecclesiastes 1:16-18 in the light of the subject we are studying.
2. What was revealed to you in this lesson?

3. Do human beings need knowledge?
4. Why does God permit falls in the lives of intelligent and knowledgeable people?
5. How can we avoid the snares of this world in the pursuit of knowledge?
6. Is there a remedy for the affliction of being “too clever for one’s own good”?
7. Can education and knowledge without a relationship with God be a blessing to a person?
8. Does knowledge of the Bible save me?

Lesson 68. Pride in Strength

From childhood, we have heard the proverb, "If you have strength, you don't need brains." And the reality of life has shown that this is often so. Strong people are not always just, they are not always wise, and they are not always distinguished by politeness and tact.

Strength is given to us by God to protect the weak and infirm and to support those who are exhausted and weary. Strength is also needed so that we may labor in this world, carrying out the various activities expected of us.

In physics, force is defined as a mechanical action exerted upon something.

There are various kinds of strength inherent in a person: physical strength, strength of spirit, willpower, strength of thought, strength of faith, strength of mind, and strength of life. In all these manifestations, we either surpass someone or prove weaker than others.

Social power is the power of weapons. In this sense, we speak of armed and political forces and the power of authority.

God also has power, the supreme power over all His creation in every sphere of influence. Psalm 24:8, 10: "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle... Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory."

Strength is given to everyone as a blessing from God for fulfilling particular purposes and tasks and for sustaining the life of human society. But sin introduced its own changes into the concept of strength and established laws of its own, according to which the strong receive a certain authority over the weak and begin to dominate them, dictating their own terms and ideas to satisfy their ambitions. This sometimes occurs on a subconscious level. We do not understand why it is so, but we submit to this state of affairs as though it were inevitable.

But what matters more now is to determine whether I have this attitude in my heart and whether I am sinning against God in my actions or thoughts. A strong person is always right in his own eyes, and if anyone opposes this order, he prefers to demonstrate his strength without further explanation.

I remember an occasion when I tried to punish my daughter for something, and she told me that I was acting that way not because I was right, but because she was weaker than I was. I began to think, and I felt ashamed.

How many broken bodies and shattered lives surround us! How much injustice and violence!

Any of us can easily recall occasions in life when strong people subjected us to physical or spiritual violence, causing pain and inflicting wounds. We have all gone through such experiences and may still be living with them. But if I begin recalling how much violence I have inflicted or continue to inflict upon others because I am stronger than they are, pride will probably prevent me from seeing all my sins in this matter clearly, because I was right. Besides, I am better than everyone else.

The use of force and domination over those who are physically or spiritually weaker than I am for the sake of satisfying my ambitions is one form of pride. It is deeply rooted in my mind and controls my thoughts and actions.

I can very quickly discern my neighbor's spiritual and physical superiority or weakness and act toward him accordingly.

Love is the most powerful force in the entire universe, making the person who possesses it the mightiest being in love. It has a heavenly nature and proceeds from the Father. Therefore, it can be difficult to recognize with our human eyes, but it can be discerned and heard with the heart.

When the One through Whom our world was created came into it, we did not recognize Him. But the power of love accompanied Christ throughout His earthly life. When sinful people received power over His body, they treated Him cruelly and crucified Christ upon the cross. Jesus had the power to

prevent this. He could have spoken only one word, and all His offenders would have perished. He could also have killed Satan and his demons, but He did not do so, allowing evil to show everyone its true essence and nature. The Lord of hosts permitted violence to be inflicted upon Him, showing everyone how the world treats infinite love and what awaits those who decide to love.

The example of Calvary is precisely what, in many cases, gives a person strength to endure a trial when he sees the rulers of this world acting violently toward him and is unable to stop them. Though one possesses the most powerful force of love in the universe and has the mightiest God as one's Father, at times one must endure humiliation, violence, and insults from those who have another spirit and consider themselves stronger, while they themselves are slaves of sin. And God permits this in order to humble me and teach me not to act in the same way toward those who are weaker than I am.

Children are the weakest people, for they have not been taught how to defend themselves. How much unjust violence they suffer in childhood, and then carry that heavy wound in their hearts throughout life and take it with them to the grave.

But love has the power to forgive everything and begin a new life. It cleanses the heart from resentment and pain, filling it with light and joy. Love brings life-giving streams of happiness in Jesus into my life and gives me the ability to defend myself against attack. Love knows how to fight and never loses. Have you ever fought the ocean? Did it surrender its position in that battle? The very idea sounds foolish. It is just as foolish to fight against love. But unlike the ocean, love is intelligent and respects human freedom.

The power of goodness, whatever form it takes, proceeds from God and is given to me for good works. It is intended to make life easier for those who are weaker than I am, who need help, or who lack the strength to change something. And I joyfully help and serve these people.

There is a concept of the stronger and weaker halves of humanity, and we understand whom it refers to. We are drawn to one another so that we may receive what we lack. A strong man senses his significance when a weaker woman is beside him. Weak does not mean helpless. And if he is a well-balanced person, he uses his strength to make up for his wife's weakness, serving her with love and joy and finding in her emotional nature a powerful source of inspiration and happiness.

What should I do if I see within myself a spirit of domination and violence toward those who are weaker than I am? Perhaps it is not very obvious and manifests itself only in words, but an evil word can kill and maim souls. I cannot rid myself of this on my own. I was born with this vice, and it lives in my blood. I need Someone strong enough to save me. And His name is Jesus. I urgently need a blood transfusion so that His blood may wash away my sins and give my body new life. Without Him, I can do nothing and know nothing.

God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. It is better to be friends with God and have His blessings than to be His adversary and live under a curse. Forgiveness has tremendous power to heal wounds and restore souls. When I forgive those who have offended me, I am freed from the burden of problems. When I ask forgiveness, God frees me from pride and gives me strength not to sin in the future.

What awaits me in this trial of strength? The side I choose depends entirely upon me.

The Bible counsels me to be a servant if I desire to be above everyone. This is difficult, but Jesus was precisely such a Man. He gave me a very good example, and if I follow His way, I will not go wrong.

Love is strong in serving others. It does not exalt itself and does not boast.

Homework 68

1. Please read 1 Samuel 17:1-8, 45-47; 2 Chronicles 32:9-14, 17, 21; Zechariah 4:6; Amos 6:13-14; Psalm 62:11; Isaiah 30:3; Isaiah 31:1; and Jeremiah 17:5-7 in the light of the subject we are studying.
2. What was revealed to you in this lesson?
3. Is it wrong to be a strong person?
4. What destroyed the strong people in the assigned passages?
5. Why is it sometimes difficult for strong people to accept the Gospel?
6. How can we learn to trust not in our own strength, but in the Lord?
7. What should I do if I see pride in my strength within myself? See Romans 15:1.
8. How should we understand 2 Corinthians 12:10: "for when I am weak, then am I strong"?

Lesson 69. Love Does Not Find Fault

Pride is one of those sins that blinds a person's mind so thoroughly that he ceases to understand the essence of what is happening and begins to justify his actions. He believes that he stands on the side of justice while placing his personal interests and ambitions above everything else.

Through faultfinding, pride reveals itself especially clearly toward those who are under your authority, who love you tenderly, who depend upon you, who are weaker than you, who receive a salary from you, or whom you teach or raise. My true character is revealed precisely in how I treat such people. Pride will not hide out of modesty. Its manifestation requires no strength from God. It does not pray for God's grace and is a very close friend of my carnal nature. It knows how to destroy human happiness instantly and deprive those close to me of the joy of life and every pleasant prospect. Pride successfully destroys the desire to study and work and "clips the wings" of creative people.

The statistics concerning broken families in our time testify to a catastrophe, which is very sad. Even if a family does not fall apart, under the influence of pride and the faultfinding present within it, the family may become a hell on earth.

How many churches have fallen into a sorrowful state of stagnation simply because among their members appeared people with a special gift: the ability to see the sins and mistakes of others and boldly tell them to their faces, forgetting tact, the distinctive way each person perceives things, and the fact that every brother and sister who makes a mistake has a tender soul that longs for love rather than condemnation.

Today, this so-called gift has acquired a special status. Gifted bloggers on YouTube channels boldly and mercilessly strike everyone who has stumbled or ceased to grow in the Lord. And God's people drink this wine without understanding the source from which it comes.

My pride is very skillful at using feelings of guilt, obligation, and fear when I seek to instruct other people in an understanding of truth exactly as I understand it.

Sometimes a person realizes that the path of faultfinding and expressed dissatisfaction is quite harmful and bears no good fruit. But the spoken word has fulfilled its purpose, while pride is far from repentance and the acknowledgment of its mistakes. As a rule, when I express my attitude toward someone, I am prepared for objections, war, and my neighbor's attempts to defend himself. Any justification he offers inflames my passions even more, and I am ready to go all the way in the struggle for truth, whatever it may cost me.

But the most interesting thing is that my faultfinding is quite selective and partial. It has "favorites" whom it does not touch. It remains entirely calm, does not express itself aloud, and does not even enter my mind when I communicate with those who are stronger than I am, who have authority over me, or who pay my salary. After all, if I find fault with the behavior of these people, I may face serious problems, and my position before those upon whom I depend may become far more difficult.

Fortunately, God does not leave me in such a wretched condition. He seeks to lead me out of it by offering a better way and instructing me through the example of Jesus' life. How many disputes and expressions of discontent Christ heard among His disciples! And with what tenderness He taught them! He gave us all an unsurpassed example of how we should treat people and help them overcome their shortcomings. Jesus showed us what can drive out the destructive spirit of faultfinding.

Those who love me suffer most from my faultfinding. I understand that my family will forgive and endure everything, yet I feel unable to control myself. How many children's hearts have received wounds that will remind them of themselves throughout life. Gratitude, praise, and admiration are very effective at resolving every difficulty in relationships and destroying faultfinding and irritation.

Let us try to imagine a faultfinding God. He sees and notices everything, even at the level of thought. Then He begins to reproach, nag, scold, and intimidate me. It is frightening to imagine, but I simply have no chance against God. If He were only to reveal His justice, I would be crushed by guilt and fear. To whom could I go then? If anyone has a right to find fault, it is certainly God. Yet He does not treat me that way. He teaches and raises me differently. God is patient with my mistakes and forgives my sins. He sees wonderful prospects in me and praises me for small successes and victories. It is so good and peaceful with Him. He will understand everything; He will not condemn me or shout at me. Despite all His hatred of sin, He loves me and constantly cares for me.

Love does not boast. There is no place for faultfinding in the Father's love. If love desires to point out people's mistakes, it does so very tactfully and tenderly, so as not to quench the smoldering flame or wound a person's soul. Love delights in praising success. Love is thoughtful, and when it sees a problem in a neighbor, it immediately begins seeking the best solution and planning the best response.

Love finds a suitable alternative to every wrong action. It has a great many kind and proper phrases in its arsenal. Love can turn any mistake into an advantage, desiring to teach the person something and give him another chance. It is ready to pay another person's debts and does so with joy.

Love knows who will strike it and when, and it does not avoid the encounter. But it does not respond in kind or in the same spirit. It continues to love even those who hurt it and find fault with it. It tenderly endures all things, believing that everything will pass and that something will change.

But if a person is not ready to repent and has no intention of changing, love simply waits patiently. It knows what reward people receive even in this earthly life, and it rejoices greatly when people seek and find it and live by it while abiding in fellowship with Christ.

Jesus gives His love to everyone who desires to live by it. He begins to teach and instruct everyone who enters this path, taking into account the student's abilities and receptiveness. You will not hear a single reproach or instance of faultfinding from Jesus. He is a very wise Teacher. He gives Heavenly wisdom and knowledge to everyone who has enrolled in His school and continues studying there. His school has a starting point and begins with the first grade, but it never ends. It extends into Eternity, where we will continually explore the depths of love and the beauty of God's wisdom.

God resisteth the proud, and He is unable to teach them anything. He loves such people as well, but while they remain on the other side of the barricades, there is little He can do for them. All that remains is to send them light and reproof through His servants and helpful books, and to wait—to wait a long time.

But a seeking soul does not wish to languish in the chains of its pride and begins to cry out for salvation. Then salvation comes. God acts and sets the deceived heart free, healing the damaged mind. The Lord gives something new, pure, and holy. And the love of Christ finds a dwelling place in the new heart and makes it a meeting place for the human soul and Jesus. There, united together, they become one and in this union continue to live and labor for the glory of God.

Homework 69

1. Please read Matthew 7:1-5; John 8:3-11; John 12:4-8; Matthew 23:24, 33-34; Luke 9:53-56; Genesis 37:11, 19-20; Romans 2:1-3; and Matthew 5:7 in the light of our lesson.
2. What was revealed to you in this lesson? What revelations did you receive?
3. From what source do faultfinding and condemnation come? What are they?
4. Why was Jesus grieved when He saw this spirit manifested in His disciples?
5. How can we avoid falling into the snare of this vice?

6. What should I do if I am irritated by the way my neighbor peels bananas from the wrong end? How should I correct him properly?
7. Are there people in your life who do many things incorrectly and provoke your indignation?
8. What should I do if I see this spirit within myself?

Lesson 70. Pride in Authority

Authority is the special power to govern and direct another person or society, imposing one's will or interests upon them. It is the ability to control people's actions and suppress violations of established laws and order by applying administrative or criminal penalties.

Authority can exist wherever two or more people have a conditional agreement concerning particular forms of interaction.

Every authority is established by God as a form of organizational order in the governance of a state and society. The subject of authority is the people or an individual, who ultimately decide who may govern them and who may not.

Absolute authority belongs to God by right as the Creator of the universe. He is the supreme Ruler, Whose status does not depend upon the will or decision of created beings.

Our human society is divided into all kinds of states, parties, movements, agencies, cells, and unions. We are all under someone's authority or are ourselves representatives of authority. Authority itself is defined by the territory and group of people upon which it can exert influence.

For example, a man has the authority of a husband and father, while a woman has the authority of a wife, mother, and homemaker, all within the bounds of her family and home. In the church, authority belongs to the church board, pastor, deacons, teachers, and preachers within the scope of their responsibilities and the church's sphere of influence. The same principle applies in every society.

Authority opens before me the prospect of influencing or imposing my will upon those who are within my territory and acknowledge my authority. If my mind is guided by pure motives, my influence will also be pure. If pride reigns in my heart, it will certainly reveal itself. Even if all my actions and motives were righteous and met God's requirements when my

authority began, this does not mean they will remain so throughout my life. Temptations may come, or situations may arise in which I change my behavior. The very possession of authority gives the enemy of the soul an opportunity to incline my flesh toward violating God's standards of conduct. Satan may urge me to make my own ideas and ambitions the rule for everyone.

The very possession of authority places me above others. Being elevated above people and their minds may become a temptation to me. Human nature often falls before such temptations, and then pride is placed upon me like a necklace. As a result, democracy gives way to authoritarianism, totalitarianism, dictatorship, arrogance, despotism, and other manifestations of my carnal nature.

Let us look into the past. In a world without sin, there was a being called the "covering cherub," whom God had anointed to possess certain authority. He was placed over all the angels as a representative of the highest Heavenly authority and revealed God's plans to all the heavenly beings. But lawlessness arose in the heart of this cherub. He became proud of his authority and began using this blessing to his own harm, drawing other angels of God to his side. Forgetting that he had been created by God, Lucifer rebelled against the Creator, using his influence and authority over the minds of other heavenly beings. Authority given by God for the good of all became a curse to everyone as a result of pride.

If, while possessing authority, I begin in my own eyes to exalt myself above someone and regard myself as very important and supreme, I fall under the curse of sin. Sin imposes its will upon me, and I will no longer be able to free myself from it by my own strength. At times, I may not even desire such deliverance.

Pride very successfully convinces me that I am right and better than others. It places barriers before God's Spirit, Who seeks to persuade me to abandon this false understanding. I begin using the authority given to me by God for my own vanity.

If I am in a subordinate position before someone, pride pushes me to begin a struggle for power and attain that cherished place so that I myself may become the leader. In modern society, such relationships and behavior have become the norm. Those who are above others successfully impose their will upon those who are subordinate to them or under their authority.

Consider a family or a school, for example. It would not even occur to us that the little people in this society would govern us. Yet this is exactly what they try to do, regarding themselves as the center of the universe. Wise mentors teach children to set their priorities correctly and show obedience and submission to those who have authority over them. Children begin dreaming of the moment when they will become adults, when they too will be able to become teachers and parents and their authority will be entirely different. For the present, they must submit. But as a person grows, priorities also change. He decides which path to choose: obedience or rebellion. We have all made this choice. And what governs me from within will be reflected in my conduct in the external world.

If I become a teacher, I will be able to instruct others in what I myself know. Pride or meekness will inevitably reveal itself.

God resisteth the proud, regardless of who these arrogant people may be.

Love is a representative of God's highest authority and has unlimited power over all creation. It offers its will but imposes it upon no one.

Love possesses not only authority but also the power to put all its knowledge and proposals into effect. It is able to transform any person's mind and thinking. It knows how to correct damaged functions of the consciousness and restore the ruins of my shattered thoughts and feelings.

Love experiences tremendous delight when it receives authority in the heart of a person who possesses authority in this world. It begins governing every process of interaction, revealing itself in every manifestation of mercy and justice, wisdom and beauty of character, tact and kindness. A loving person who has

authority from God can do much good among those around him and sow many good seeds, persuading people to place their wills under the authority of God's love so that they may become truly free.

Love gives freedom to its people. It drives out sin and deprives it of authority over the sinner's mind. It heals wounds and inspires people to live. As the most powerful governing structure, love fills every space into which it is admitted, like water, preserving the forms of character while washing away its dirt and vice.

Pride tries to convince me that I have every right to be domineering within the limits of my authority. It teaches me faultfinding, arrogance, jealousy, evil speaking, haughtiness, grumbling, criticism, and other manifestations of the carnal nature. My high position helps me use this arsenal of the works of the flesh with impunity. Although many people dislike it, the structure of society causes such treatment of others to become a normal way of life. And when love comes to replace the standards just mentioned, people refuse to receive it and begin to wage war against it, declaring Caesar to be king. Love retreats, but it does not leave and does not lose; it waits. It waits a long time and makes its waiting heard. It stands and knocks at the door of the proud heart, offering itself. Will anyone hear this voice?

Homework 70

1. Please read Matthew 28:18; Romans 13:1-8; Daniel 2:37; Ecclesiastes 5:18; John 19:10-11, 16; Revelation 13:2-7; Revelation 17:12; and Daniel 7:22, 27.
2. By whom are earthly authorities established?
3. Why does pride permit the abuse of authority?
4. How can we help those who hold authority but violate the heavenly constitution?
5. What end will earthly authorities come to in the last days?
6. What authority has God given us? See 1 John 3:1 and Luke 10:19.
7. What did you understand from this lesson?

8. If I see pride manifested in the way I exercise authority, how should I fight it?

Lesson 71. The Plan of Agape Love

Before His ascension, Jesus spoke very interesting and important words to His disciples. We read in Matthew 28:18: "...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

The work Jesus accomplished on earth also had tremendous significance for Heaven. In the light of Calvary, the true love of God was revealed to the entire universe. Before Christ's sacrifice, some heavenly beings may have had questions and doubts concerning God's character, the methods of His government, and Satan's claims regarding God's supreme authority. But after the death of Jesus, the correct answer to every question was found, and all doubts and misunderstandings were dispelled.

Calvary showed the entire visible and invisible world very clearly that God is love. At the cross, God's absolute mercy toward sinful and fallen humanity and His absolute justice toward lawlessness were revealed. The Great Sacrifice was offered, confirming the significance of all the symbolic sacrifices offered in faith before Calvary and revealing the way of salvation to everyone who would receive Christ after Calvary. A new door of salvation was opened for all humanity—a door named Jesus Christ. A death sentence was pronounced upon sin and its associates.

But in God's providence, humanity was given more time so that everyone who desired might have an opportunity to hear the message of salvation, the message of a better life and of God's loving character. Not all the prophecies pointing to the struggle of the last days and the time when the judgment would begin had yet been fulfilled. The enemy of humanity received special power to destroy and deceive all who dwell upon the earth, though he did not receive complete authority over God's children.

God foretold every period in the development of Christianity, gave special revelations through the apostle John, and established the times and seasons in His own authority.

And now, in our time, all the appointed periods have been fulfilled, and every sign points to the approaching culmination of the final events of history. Something vitally important must take place upon our earth.

Jesus possesses special authority to act at this time, accomplishing something very important in our world and in our souls. Light has already been poured out in its fullness upon every inhabitant of the earth. Knowledge and discoveries in every sphere of human life have surpassed human capabilities; sin has fully revealed its repulsive essence; Satan's deceptions have become irresistibly powerful and skillful. The whole world lieth in wickedness, and the Lord has not yet come. Jesus desires to have a special people whose lives will reveal to the world, in all its fullness, the genuine character of God and His beauty. How is this possible? The Lord has a plan.

The parable of the ten virgins tells us what will happen and how it will occur. It makes clear how important it is to prepare for the coming events. And Christ's message to Laodicea points God's people to what they must understand, receive, and do in these last days. This is not my plan but God's plan, and God longs to carry it out in your life and mine.

I have the following options for putting this plan into practice:

1. I stop to consider, begin to study, discover the meaning of God's symbols, and follow the instructions given to me. I begin receiving everything that God desires to give and sell to me.
2. I stop to consider and begin studying the matter, but I allow pressing cares to absorb my attention and postpone carrying out God's plans until an indefinite future. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that I must devote time to this matter, study it, and put it into practice in my life. For now, however, there are more important things to do.
3. I heard, believed, and rejoiced, but did not attach special importance to this message, so I did not devote time to it. I do not intend to address it in the near future.

4. I regard all these messages as merely one of many streams of information. They will change nothing in my life, so they are not even worth examining.

In our school of love, we have decided to follow the first path. We seek to understand what God offers us, penetrate the meaning of the symbols and prophecies, accept God's plan, buy the true Heavenly valuables, and await the further fulfillment of God's blessings and promises in our lives. Very little time remains. World events on every side loudly call us to understand that the end of all things is very near and that it is time to awaken.

And Jesus teaches us His love very calmly and tenderly. In this matter, He neither rushes nor delays. He is preparing a people, desiring to present them pure and blameless before the entire universe and to show the whole visible and invisible world what the authority of Love can accomplish in those who seek, find, and receive it.

God will not abolish His prophecies or change His plans in order to reach people who are not interested. But at the appointed time, everything will be fulfilled. God's love will find trembling and seeking hearts and establish itself within them forever, forming from these people a special people for the final events.

Everything taking place in my mind now has eternal consequences for me. At this very time, each of us is choosing the path along which we will continue. God has pointed out the narrow way and has done everything on His part so that everyone may walk upon it and grow. The Lord will not change His plans, but He will seek and draw those through whom He can accomplish them. And this plan leads me to the complete acceptance of the love of the One Who is its embodiment. Every symbol and appeal points to this.

The authority of love is unlimited. It is greater, stronger, and wiser than everything else. It is accessible to all, but it is given to the chosen. It is obtained by those who seek it, understand it, and desire to possess it.

It is amazing that God's plans are, on the one hand, so simple and accessible, yet on the other hand, filled with mysteries and depths that cannot be penetrated through superficial study.

We await the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But what will He change in the indifferent heart of one who heard the appeals but did not respond to them? I think that nothing special will happen in such a soul. Once a seed has been sown, the rain merely causes it to grow and fills it with strength so that fruit may appear; it does not change the seed's composition or nature. Of course, if I have not yet obtained good seed, I may still buy it if I know where, but there may no longer be enough time to grow it.

Love cannot be learned in a moment. It is a process with its own duration and laws. It begins in this world, and the learning will continue in Eternity, but I must enter this process now by learning the foundations and principles of God's love. Then this gift will become mine and bear much fruit. And the early rain of the Holy Spirit will strengthen this seed, cause it to grow, and prepare it for the harvest.

God loves us. He will not leave a single seeking soul in ignorance. He gave His plan not to tease us and hide it in an inaccessible place, but to reveal it and carry it out in you and me.

Christ has sufficient authority to establish God's will in my life and accomplish everything He has purposed. By my "yes" and my continuing desire, I allow my will and God's will to unite in one purpose. Then God's plan begins to be fulfilled in my life. And having begun this good work in me, God will continue it until the day of His glorious Coming.

The love of Christ will become my life, God's character will transform my heart, and my will will rest upon God's principles. Unity of thought and feeling with Christ will bind us together with eternal bonds of love.

Homework 71

1. Please read Amos 3:7; Hosea 4:6; Deuteronomy 29:29; Revelation 22:18-19; and Daniel 12:4 in the light of our lesson.
2. What was revealed to you in this lesson?
3. Do you desire to study God's plan as presented in the message to Laodicea?
4. Do you have time for classes in this school?
5. Are you interested in studying the lessons and comparing them with your life?
6. Is God's plan for your future being revealed to you in this school? Do you see God's Hand in our lessons?
7. Do you understand exactly what kind of love will be given to you in the process of learning?

Lesson 72. Love Does Not Compete

Elite sports have always attracted humanity's attention. In recent times, they have been elevated to the highest political level, creating the impression that the well-being of nations depends upon the number of gold medals and other awards their representatives receive at international games.

It is evident that soccer in Europe has become a kind of religion. Its active supporters call themselves fans.

According to statistics, Germany, where I live, has the largest national soccer club in the world. Every village has its own stadium and soccer team. When international championships take place, the whole country holds its breath in anticipation of the battle. Every conversation is about soccer, and everything around is covered with soccer symbols and national flags. The people live in expectation of their favorite national team's victory, and if it happens, public celebrations begin. Everywhere, the shouts of drunken fans, gunfire, and the honking of cars can be heard until late at night. I think this phenomenon exists in more than this country alone.

Some sports possess a magical attraction that draws the attention of millions of people. These include soccer, hockey, boxing, Formula One racing, basketball, and automobile rallies. It seems that the fans of these sports fall under mass hypnosis and live only with the dream of their fellow citizens' victory.

The fastest way to become famous, respected, and widely recognized is to achieve success in sports. Your records, victories, and gold medals will attract the attention of the whole country, while recognition and applause will raise you to a pedestal of honor. Pride in your success will become the possession of all the citizens and give them a reason to speak about you throughout the media.

But what does the athlete himself feel? He understands that he has truly achieved something. And the higher the status of the competition, the greater his awareness of his own importance. The essence of every contest comes down to one thing: to be

better, to be stronger, to be the winner. Once such a goal is set, long periods of training begin. Every outstanding athlete has his own army of supporters who exalt his achievements and “carry him upon the hands” of their applause.

The athlete understands that he is someone of importance. The longer he remains upon the pedestal, the more attention he attracts and the more valuable he becomes. People are ready to pay him large sums to appear on programs, attend parties, give interviews, and have his picture displayed on advertising posters. Almost everyone who meets and recognizes him wants his autograph and personal photograph. Yet not every athlete reaches such heights. On the way to the pedestal, many are injured, die, suffer breakdowns, become alcoholics, fall ill, or simply cannot withstand the enormous strain. We do not know their names because they dropped out of the race.

Sport has one distinctive feature. You may be one of the best, but the strongest wins. And all your training loses its meaning if you do not win the competition. People lose interest in you. You are a failure, even though you physically surpass many others. And if you become disabled, you are filed away in the archives and very quickly forgotten as people search for other winners.

What is the meaning of all this? And what spirit drives the athletes and their fans? Clearly, it is not God’s Spirit.

Physical activity is one of the factors and components of health. Without it, the body becomes weak, blood flows slowly through the vessels, and the body loses its immunity to disease; then illness may be expected. There is life in movement. But sport carries another philosophy within it—the philosophy of competition. When a net is stretched between us or we are divided into teams, the spirit of rivalry comes into force. According to biblical principles, you should give the victory to your opponent and help him reach his goal. You should rejoice in his success. But in reality, your neighbor changes from a brother into an opponent who must be defeated. Even if it is a small victory, it is yours, and it suggests that you are better.

When I was a believer studying to become a bricklayer, we had physical education classes in which we were often divided into teams. No one wanted me on his team because I brought victory to no one. I simply ran for the sake of movement, knowing how to do nothing and making no effort to learn, although I was ten to fifteen years older than the other young men. The teacher gave me good grades for my activity, while the students laughed at me. At the company, however, no one was particularly interested in my physical education grades. What mattered there was how quickly and well I performed my work.

Love does not boast. Competition and the spirit of rivalry are foreign to it. It is ready to occupy any place within society, wait for its time, and take possession of everyone who needs it at the most suitable moment. Love never competes with anyone, yet it never loses. Its victories have a different spirit and meaning. It is powerful in itself, strong as death. Its influence cannot be resisted, but a person may hide from it, conceal himself, retreat into the "shell" of everyday cares, and immerse himself in darkness. But when an open confrontation and battle take place, love calmly wins and overcomes the trial while continuing to love. Even the victor's death does not mean his defeat. He allowed the spirit of love to act until his final breath, did not accept the services of the flesh, and did not yield to Satan's suggestions. The enemy lost. He failed to persuade God's servant to accept dark power and trust the spirit of wickedness in high places. But Satan does not rest; he invents the next trial and prepares another temptation.

Is God interested in my victories in sports? He knows the human heart and helps His children achieve things when they ask Him. It would be foolish to claim that all sport comes from Satan. Sport is neutral, like money and any kind of work. But the philosophy with which I approach these things can be deadly to the soul. There are sports and kinds of work that are cursed from the beginning and proceed from Satan, but by and large, what matters is the spirit with which I approach the issue. Love teaches me how to orient myself properly in such trials and turn every situation toward the manifestation of love,

friendship, and happiness. It leads me away from places where my soul is in danger, and I simply do not desire to do what brings no benefit.

Life is given to prepare my heart for Eternity. Sport will not make me fit for Eternal life, but love is Eternal life already today. By believing in Jesus, I learn to be like Him. I find it difficult to imagine Him wearing the uniform of a soccer forward, but I see Him beside the bed of a sick soccer player whom everyone has forgotten. Christ is revealed in tender care and in efforts to save the soul of this man who has also been deceived by the world.

Friendship and love are needed everywhere, but they are not valued in every situation, especially when the goal is to seize something, defeat someone, or achieve something. When you stand upon the pedestal of fame, it seems that everyone wants to be your friend. But why? So they can boast that they have such a famous friend. And if you become disabled, which of these friends will remain faithful to you? Such is our world: “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”

So does this mean that we must no longer watch sports or play any games? I did not say that. You must decide this for yourself with Jesus. If He is not opposed, neither am I.

Love respects your choice.

Homework 72

1. Please read Proverbs 16:4; Proverbs 21:31; Ecclesiastes 9:11; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Micah 6:8; Zephaniah 2:3; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 3:8; Proverbs 15:33; Romans 12:16; and Proverbs 3:34–35 in the light of our subject.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Do you participate in sports? If so, what success have you achieved?
4. What motivates people to organize athletic competitions?
5. Do you think Jesus approves of rivalry?
6. What should I do if I cannot control my competitive excitement in sports?
7. Are sport and love compatible?

Lesson 73. Pride in Fashion

Fashion is the establishment of an ideology in clothing, transportation, culture, architecture, recreation, art, cooking, entertainment, and lifestyle. It is the imposition upon the public of cultural and spiritual values accepted in certain circles that exert special influence upon the mass consciousness. Fashion is temporary and constantly changing, and it requires continual spending in accordance with established standards. A person who does not keep pace with fashion trends is called “old-fashioned” and is subjected to ridicule, criticism, contempt, and exclusion from certain circles of society that have their own style and requirements.

There is even a saying: “People greet you according to your clothes...” Fortunately, at least they see you off according to your intelligence.

Fashion is one of the industries of the enemy of human souls that society has accepted. Within it, particular styles and standards of taste, values, and views are established. All of this is imposed upon civilized society through the media.

The innovations offered are not always dangerous to the soul. Not all of them carry Satan’s ideology. Many things make life easier and more beautiful, bringing comfort and convenience. If something is decent, safe, and does not contradict God’s principles and views, there is no sin in owning and using it, even if it is fashionable.

But the ideology of fashion dictates its requirements to society and calls for strict conformity to them.

If a person has accepted the standards of this world in his mind and follows them, he decides to be fashionable. At this point, separation from biblical requirements begins, and the human soul falls into Satan’s snare, from which it can no longer free itself on its own. Even a lack of money to purchase new services, goods, or clothing will not hinder a mind infected by fashion.

The influence of fashion is enormous, and this must be recognized. It is the culture and worldview of many people. Even when they become followers of Christ, they carry these values with them into their new faith and adapt them to their life with God.

Pride becomes an inseparable attribute of the fashionable person. When he meets the requirements of fashion in every sphere of life or in some of them, he displays this with tremendous satisfaction, making it clear that "he is in the know." Money, time, health, souls, and lives are sacrificed to the idol of fashion.

But God resisteth the proud. The problem with people obsessed with fashion is that they do not see the danger to their souls and therefore do not feel any need for repentance. The Bible counsels us not to love the world or the things that are in the world.

At the same time, wisdom is needed so that, in becoming an opponent of fashion, I do not turn into the embodiment of foolishness and absurdity. If I dress in a way that makes me look like a scarecrow, or if, for example, I eat poorly, such a condition will not draw souls to Christ.

When I approach a person and begin telling him about my faith, my happiness, and the joy of life with God, he hears something like this: "I want you to become like me." Whatever meaning I place in my words, my appearance and lifestyle are visible to those with whom I speak and to those around me, and they make their own impression. If my clothing causes people to feel aversion, I should reconsider this approach to winning souls and change something in my thinking.

God gives grace to humble people and fills their hearts with peace and wisdom. When my mind rests in God, the Most High gives me understanding of how to live, how to be appropriate to my time and society's requirements, and at the same time remain faithful to eternal principles and laws.

Love draws my heart nearer to God. I unite with Him as one and allow Him to become part of me. Love points out my

problems and shortcomings, exposing all the filth of my soul, and waits for me to permit it to cleanse me and inscribe God's thoughts and laws upon my heart. The ridicule of this world will become my lot, but I know Whom I have believed and what I carry in my soul. I am not troubled by the contempt and insults of those who have not known God. I simply love these people. And God makes them aware that I possess something able to answer their questions and meet their needs.

Love does not boast. It is modest and at the same time beautiful in its conformity to God's standards. We human beings were created for love, to love one another, and when we return to this purpose of God, peace reigns in our souls. Then we understand that we have attained something right.

Chasing dust has never satisfied the soul's thirst. The pace at which fashions change is very rapid and demands great investment and effort. People fall in this race, give up, and sink into despair. Old photographs may become a temporary comfort to these deceived souls, who long for truth without understanding it. Only the love of Christ can give the heart what it needs most. But when this love knocks at the door of the heart, pride darkens the mind and prevents it from opening the door and letting love in. Who is to blame?

How often we lose blessings because we feel ashamed or uncomfortable about ourselves, our old-fashioned views of life, and our failure to conform to the modern age. How many people pass their lives in miserable loneliness simply because they have grown tired of chasing the wind, exhausted their strength, burned out emotionally, lost their means of support, and ceased to conform to fashion, yet are afraid to admit it because of pride. Love knows how to help such people—and everyone else as well.

Look at cats and dogs, and indeed at any animals. They testify to us that it is possible to be beautiful and look natural without pursuing fashion trends. And when these creatures give us their unconditional love, we see that in this world of values there is something greatly needed and enduring, something that does

not disappear with a new season or with the passing years but rests upon eternal foundations. Its name is love.

What kind of families have become fashionable today? It is a foolish question, but biblical love and faithfulness are not honored in our time. The statistics concerning common-law marriages indicate that the traditional family has become old-fashioned in our day. Preserving purity in relationships before marriage is no longer fashionable either. Marriage itself has receded into the history of the past. In some cultures, traditional family values are still maintained, but such people are regarded as little more than savages. And the children suffer, not knowing where or who their father is. A father looks at his child and wonders, "Is this child mine?" And God looks upon all of this and stretches out His hands, inviting people to come and find rest and comfort in Him.

Where is it fashionable to spend a vacation today? The world can offer a great deal of advice and many recommendations on this matter—anything except what corresponds to the will of God.

Fashion costs money, and that money must be obtained somewhere. Therefore, one must work a great deal to satisfy this monster's thirst. No money? Take out a loan. Cannot get a loan? Borrow from someone. But conform to what is being offered to you.

Is it fashionable to love in our time? What is love anyway? Does it still exist? Show me this miracle; I have never seen anything like it. At least it will give me something to laugh at. To love for no reason? Without receiving anything in return? Are you from another planet?

But love exists, and it waits.

Homework 73

1. Please read Genesis 3:6-7; 1 Peter 3:3-5; Isaiah 64:6; Revelation 19:7-8; Revelation 18:10-17; and 1 Timothy 2:9-10 in the light of our lesson.
2. What was revealed to you in this lesson?

3. Do you follow fashion in your life? Is it sinful to be fashionable?
4. Why do you think a person desires to adorn himself with fashionable clothing?
5. How does Jesus view fashion? See Revelation 13:18.
6. What will happen to the fashion industry at the end of time?
7. Do old-fashioned people provoke ridicule or aversion in you?
8. What adorns a person? See Proverbs 31:10-31.

Lesson 74. Pride in Possessions

I possess what you do not have, and this makes my heart so glad. I am better than you. I also have many fashionable and useful things that I bought at half price during sales; otherwise, I would never have purchased them. But now I own them, and this gladdens my heart. What satisfaction I receive from looking over my possessions, sorting through my material treasures, and counting my money. I feel like saying, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." They tell me, "Thou fool, what will become of all this if you die tonight?" But I understand that they speak out of envy, for the rich are always envied. And so many more shopping trips await me, so many useful purchases, so many opportunities to become rich and accumulate wealth, that I want to work, work, and work.

All modern industry is focused on producing goods for every occasion in life. Advertising for these things does its work, convincing me that my happiness and well-being depend on what I acquire for myself and what I use to fill my home. And I make this the meaning of my life. I am ready to work and earn money in order to buy, obtain, and accumulate. Some things are made merely to collect dust, while others are truly expensive. Antiques may be old, but they are worth a great deal of money and always retain their value. And paintings by famous artists cannot be bought at any price—but I have them! And I will not sell them to anyone.

To preserve my possessions, I need steel doors, bars on the windows, a modern alarm system, security guards, and insurance for every possible situation. A warehouse would also be useful. And so it turns out that I live in my own private prison, paid for with my own money, and think that I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, yet I do not understand that I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

Sometimes insight comes to me, but when I look at this mountain range called "my possessions," I cannot imagine how

I could part with it all. So much money has been invested in it, so much strength expended, so much time given—indeed, my whole life and all its meaning are contained in it.

I read the Bible and see the wealthy Abraham, Joseph, and Job there. I calm down. Then I read Jesus' rebuke of the rich businessman, and I become afraid. Yet I am reassured by the fact that it was spoken to a farmer, not to me. I do not have an abundant harvest, only useful things, many of which were purchased below cost.

But my heart trembles, and there is no peace. Somewhere deep within my soul, I feel that something is wrong with me, but I cannot give it up. It is mine. Dear to me. My own. Do I lack love? But love will not increase my possessions; I cannot put it in my pocket or spread it on bread. The awareness that I have so many things warms my soul, although it brings no peace to my heart. Where can peace be bought? At the pharmacy. I will go to a psychologist or psychiatrist, and they will prescribe something that will help me. I have private insurance that gives me access to the very best doctors and medical specialists. Yes, I have accomplished something in this world. And my car is a masterpiece of science and technology—so shiny, safe, and comfortable. My second car is for shopping, and the third is for work. Houses, apartments, vacation homes—how all of this delights me! I am simply rich, and I know how to earn and acquire. Only one thing troubles me. Old age is approaching, and they say that when people die, they take nothing with them into the grave. How terrible! And who will inherit all my wealth? My children. Yes, my children. They are worth living for. But am I truly living? Will my children appreciate how much labor and money were invested in my possessions? How many advertisements I had to watch in order to understand why I needed all these things!

Yet there is no happiness, because so many things are still beyond my reach. But I have a goal—to buy those things, and I will certainly become their owner. I have heard that Jesus also sells something: gold, clothing, and ointment. Apparently, He also understands commerce. Someday I will get around to Him

as well. If only I could understand why I need these things. It is strange that He does not run an advertising campaign; His goods would sell much faster.

My neighbor bought himself such an impressive car—now there is a man! He is no fool.

What is love? I think that if I decorated my home with pink hearts, everyone would know that I understand something about love. People often send cards with pictures about love and various promises to my new iPhone, and I forward them to my friends who have old phones. By the way, I managed to get the iPhone as a special offer, so it did not cost me very much.

But suddenly illness came. I was confined to bed. My life became torment. The walls of the hospital room bring me no joy. Will I ever leave this place? How much does life cost? For what price can health be bought? Where is it sold? Here I lie on an institutional bed, in institutional linens, eating simple food. Will I ever leave this place? No one comes to visit me; no one is interested in me, and everything hurts. Day follows night. I cannot sleep, so I have to think. To think a great deal. God, can You hear me? What is happening to me? Please help me!!! Insight comes. My entire life resembles a squirrel running in a wheel. What did I live for? What meaning did I discover? It turns out that I do not need very much after all. Lord, help me escape from this endless cycle. But Who are You, God? Why do I not know You? I have read about You, heard about You, and sometimes prayed to You, but I have never truly known You. Perhaps You Yourself will tell me about Yourself now. They say that You love everyone. But do You love me, God? Do You love someone who is sick and forgotten by everyone? Do You need me—someone whom no one else needs? You love me? Honestly? Why, God? I have done nothing for You. I am a complete egoist!!! You love me anyway? Honestly? For no reason? No one has ever told me this before. How wonderful it is to understand this. How wonderful it is to be with You, God. Please do not go; stay near me. Thank You. But what happened to Your hands? Were You killed? Who dared to do this? I did? Are You serious? When? Is this true? Am I Your murderer? Then why do You not

avenge Yourself? You love me? Why? This cannot be!!! I do not believe it; this is impossible!!! What is Your Name? Jesus? I have heard so much about You. I thought these were stories for old women. Please forgive me. You have forgiven me? Long ago? You knew me before? You were waiting for me? Seriously? From the moment I was born? Was it You Who saved my life so many times? This is amazing!!!

Lord, what can I do for You? Nothing? What can I give You? Nothing? Then what do You want from me? My heart? Is that all? How can this be? May I think about it? Do not go! Please do not go. Take everything; take me!!! Take my heart!!! I want You always to be near me!!! Please. Yes, I believe, I believe!!! You are my Savior. How blind I was! Why did I not meet You earlier? I know—I simply did not notice You. Jesus, do You love me? Honestly? Tell me once more! How wonderful! Please say it again. Thank You. Do You still love me now? And what about the fact that I was such an egoist? That is in the past? I will become different? You will help me? How wonderful! What will happen to me next? All right, do not tell me. But from now on, I want to be only with You, Jesus. You will not leave me? And if I die? You will resurrect me? How wonderful! How amazing You are! But why did You decide to treat me this way? I am a sinner worthy of death. You love me? These wounds were for me, and You died in my place? So that I might live? It is difficult for me to understand this. But I believe. Will You teach me to love? Yes? How wonderful! Shall we begin right now? I am ready...

Homework 74

1. Please read Luke 12:15-21; Proverbs 11:28; Exodus 20:3; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Galatians 5:20, 26; 1 Peter 4:3-4; and 1 John 5:21 in the light of our lesson.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. What motivates modern people toward materialism?
4. Is it right to buy necessary things?
5. How does Jesus view my desire to possess many things?
6. What should I do if I see symptoms of this disease in my life?
7. How does God humble the pride of materialism?

Lesson 75. The Pride of Life

The pride of life is something very firmly woven into every sphere of my activity, into my heart, and into my thoughts. It is not some universal mind, but something within me—and it is me myself. This term can describe everything that makes me especially important and significant in my own eyes. I believe that I am superior to other people, and I am so certain of this that I begin to build my life around this understanding. And if someone better or stronger than I am suddenly appears, I assume that his condition is only temporary. I immediately find many faults and shortcomings in that person, bring him down in my own estimation, and can confidently discuss him with a small circle of friends around my kitchen table.

I also have my own opinion about how the world should be arranged. I am convinced that everyone should understand me at once, serve me, respect me, take me into account, do everything the way I want, refrain from arguing with me, and treat me in a way that makes me feel good and comfortable. With this worldview, I arrange my daily life, start a family, find a job, make friends, and simply live. If everyone understood what a wonderful heart beats within my chest and learned more about me, I think I would become very famous and could present my views to a wide audience.

There is nothing shameful about my pride. It is a fairly respectable condition of my heart, and it protects me from outside enemies. Various means of assistance become available to help me achieve my goals, and weak people cannot withstand my ambitions. Evil speaking, cunning, violence, treachery, revenge, resentment, arrogance, indignation, bribery, deceit, and much more—all these things help me reach my goals and solve various problems very quickly.

The only group of people whom I find very difficult to deal with are believers in Christ. They are so fanatical and proud in matters of religion, and exalt their God so highly, that they consider Him the most important Being in this world. They do not understand that they have been blinded and deceived by

their pastors, who think only about money and seek merely to take everything from them. Yet among these believers are some whom I cannot understand at all. Although these people irritate me, their faithfulness and tact surpass those of many people I know. Still, they are very strange.

It is very difficult to give pride a full and precise definition; it is extremely broad and varied. One thing can be stated plainly about it: it is sin. It is impossible to overcome pride through my own strength, nor is there any point in trying. Just as the leopard cannot change its spots, so I cannot do good when I am accustomed to doing evil. Something greater than this sin is needed. And only love is greater than it.

For example, if I am in a dark room and have a large shovel, how long will it take me to throw all the darkness out the window? I think even an entire lifetime would not be enough. But if I turn on the light, it deals with this task very quickly, without any great effort.

God is Light—the true Light. By His presence, He dispels every kind of darkness. He grants freedom from the power of sin and replaces it in the best possible way. But God is great and inaccessible. He hates sin. And I was born in sin and live in it. How can I know the great God when I am so small? This is why Jesus was sent into our world: so that in a human body He might reveal to us the true beauty of God's character. In Jesus, God and His nature were revealed to us.

If I can give a complete definition of sin, organize every aspect of it, and explain its structure and principles of influence, what will that change within me? It will increase my knowledge, but it will not solve the problem of sin. Yet when I begin to study God's love, it illuminates my mind like a lamp and cleanses my heart. We can speak about sin or pride for a long time, but wickedness will not disappear or diminish because of this. But when I turn my eyes toward love and begin to explore it, I am transformed into its likeness.

The plan of salvation has one important feature. When we behold God, study His character, and come to know His love,

we are transformed. I simply read about Jesus, and my life changes. I study the science of love, and the Spirit of God transforms me from glory to glory. It may seem that I see no obvious changes within myself, but they are taking place. It is like the growth of a tree. The process begins with a tiny sprout that is very tender and weak, yet it has strength from God and a purpose. Then the roots become stronger, the trunk grows firmer, and the plant reaches upward. The changing seasons renew its foliage. The moment comes when the first blossoms appear on the tree—the forerunners of fruit. At last, the long-awaited harvest ripens. With what interest a person tastes the first fruit! What does it taste like? How nourishing is it? After the fruit has been tasted, the tree is declared suitable or unsuitable for food. If I plant a sweet cherry tree, I do not expect apples or cacti from it; I expect sweet cherries of a particular variety and flavor. When God places the seed of love within me, He knows what the fruit will be. I do not need to surprise Him by showing that I am not a pear tree or that I am not what I wanted to be. Love makes me into what God desires. If I do not like myself, this does not mean that the Lord sees me in the same way. He knows how to care for His trees and what fruit to expect from them.

But unlike a tree, I have the right to choose. I can stop my growth and destroy myself. I can accelerate my development and achieve excellent results. I can trample the neighboring sprouts and mix them with the mud. I can do much that is evil and much that is good. But if I behold the Sun of Righteousness, I grow and am transformed.

The law of beholding states: I am transformed into that which I behold. If I behold sin, I will become part of it; if I behold Christ, I will become like Him. I cannot change the influence and power of this law, but I can use its power either for my benefit or to my harm. The choice is mine. There is no need to search for darkness. It is everywhere that has no source of light. Sin does not need to be learned; it lives wherever there is no love, wherever there is no God. Turn off love in your heart, and the pride of life will fill it to overflowing without any effort on your part.

To love, I need the power of love. I must have access to the Source of this blessing, and I need knowledge and understanding of how love works and how great and mighty it is. But pride and selfishness require no special knowledge. They come by themselves and give the heart bitter experience, revealing themselves in every thought and in every understanding, although they know how to give the outward facade of my nature a respectable appearance.

Love is God's light; it is life for the soul, eternal joy, and purity in relationships. It is the complete absence of pride and the absolute opposite of selfishness. Where love is, there is God; and where God is, there is perfect love. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God. The science of love is learned not amid the uncleanness of sin, but in God's atmosphere, where He tenderly takes me into His arms, covers me with His righteousness, and keeps me from evil. I live amid the corrupting influence of the world, but within me is an entirely different life, governed by different laws—the laws of Eternity, love, and happiness. And with His Own hand, God writes in my heart a new life story entitled "Love."

Homework 75

1. Please read 1 John 2:15-17; Jeremiah 13:23; Galatians 6:7-9; Acts 2:38; Acts 5:31-32; Romans 8:6-9; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. What does repentance mean? See Revelation 3:19.
4. Why do we need to have the mind of Christ?
5. What happens when a person beholds the glory of the Lord?
6. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Is it necessary?
7. How do you understand the expression "the pride of life"?

Lesson 76. Love Conquers Sin

Human beings were designed and born into this world to be free. Freedom gives us the ability to make decisions and follow the path we have chosen. The right to choose means either consenting to take the side of good and make it the meaning and purpose of life, or consenting to take the side of evil, live in it, and teach it to others. But if I have no freedom, I will follow the course dictated to me by the one who has deprived me of the right to choose. In that case, I become a slave to that power and carry out the desires and will of the person who possesses me.

Freedom in goodness gives me the right to choose any good path, offering various opportunities to do good. An endless horizon of good deeds that I am able to perform opens before me. I can freely plan and carry out projects for the happiness of others. I have the right, without fear of punishment, to think about whose life I can make even more beautiful and interesting, and how best to fill the minds of those near me with joy so that they may find my presence even more pleasant. Love for the people around me shares many suggestions about how I can make their lives better, more beautiful, and more interesting without violating anyone's freedom of choice. I can only offer my good ideas and give others the opportunity to accept or reject them. My love respects the freedom of choice of everyone who enters my heart as a friend. Such a person is assured of kind treatment from me.

Sin introduced its own changes into the laws of love. It takes possession of my will and begins dictating how my life should be governed. The power of sin changes my mind and begins to control my desires, convincing me that sin is inevitable and that it is better not to resist it.

Sin has an originator named Satan, through whom our first parents fell. Now this sorrowful inheritance of wickedness is passed down from generation to generation. Sin is very destructive by nature. It mercilessly attacks the human mind and will, making a person its slave. Satan cannot force people

to sin, but he has the power to send his temptations and enticements. Within every person is a center that offers its services and way of life, called "the flesh." This center arose as a result of the fall and is passed by birth to everyone who enters this world. Satan has access to our "flesh." He can place his thoughts within it and suggest that a person put them into practice. If I accept the enemy's suggestions and begin to carry them out, temptation breaks down every barrier of freedom of choice and enslaves my will, bringing it under its power. The weakened will is then no longer able to resist the power of sin. Having become dependent, it begins to fulfill the desires of its flesh.

As a result of sin, the entire world lost its freedom and chose the path to destruction.

But God has a plan of deliverance from the power of evil. He sent His Son into the world so that through Him He might reveal to humanity the way of salvation from the power of sin. Wicked people killed the Son with their own hands. Yet the plan of redemption was contained in Christ's death. Dying in agony upon the cross, Jesus took upon Himself the guilt of all humanity and drank this cup to the very bottom. All our iniquities were laid upon Him, and He bore them Himself in order to free us from their power. Christ's death pronounced the final sentence upon sin and its originator. A complete victory was won, and Jesus became the Savior from the power of sin and the Victor in the struggle against the forces of evil. He offers this victory of His to fallen humanity, desiring to save people from slavery to harmful habits and the lusts of the flesh. And Christ truly sets us free.

I will share an example from my life that revealed a great deal to me. In the late 1990s, I was addicted to milk chocolate. The problem was not the chocolate itself, but the nature of my attachment to it. I knew no moderation. I liked this product very much. I could eat it at any time, as many as ten times a day, enjoying the taste and increasing the amount. God sent me light concerning health reform and helped me understand that I was destroying my health through my lack of self-control. I decided

to give up this habit, but I could not. I exerted all my willpower and could go for weeks without eating it, but then I would relapse and, as though possessed, surrender to my craving, eating chocolate without restraint. Whenever I was having tea as a guest in someone's home, I constantly struggled with temptation if I saw chocolate treats. I understood that this was not normal. I made every effort and promised not to live this way, but I did not resist temptation for long. My mind would disconnect from reality; I would go and buy another chocolate bar and eat it. Then the pangs of conscience would begin. I think many people may find this amusing to read, but I had a problem that was destroying me. I could not pray normally because I knew that I was a hypocrite who had betrayed God's trust, broken my promises, and deserved death. I asked believing friends for help, but no one understood my struggle. They told me simply not to eat chocolate, and that was all. But I kept falling. This condition deprived me of peace and kept me from finding joy in my life with God. I lived under a sense of God's curse, which Satan impressed upon my mind, and I believed that this was truly my condition.

But one day God sent me light showing that my struggle against sin was doomed to fail. Only Christ within me could win this victory. I knelt down, acknowledged my helplessness, and asked Jesus to set me free. And He answered. While I was still praying, I suddenly understood that His power had broken the dominion of this sin in my life. I rose from my knees joyful and free. But I did not know what would happen next or how I would behave when confronted with temptation. I was pleasantly surprised that when I had an opportunity to taste chocolate, I was now able to choose what to do. I chose to refuse it. What joy it was to realize that I was no longer dependent on my habit! Jesus had truly made me free, and His power within me gave me the ability to resist temptation. I understood how this works. Later, this understanding helped me resist evil and gain victory in other trials. Whenever a sin was exposed in my life, I immediately brought it to Jesus and asked Him to cleanse me. He did so then, and He continues to do so to this day.

However, although I received freedom from the addiction, I did not break with the habit of eating chocolate. Whenever someone offered it to me, I could choose whether or not to eat it, and I felt free. But over time, I noticed that the addiction was beginning to return, and I became afraid. I then made the decision never to eat this product again for the rest of my life. Yet, recognizing the weakness of my will, I asked Jesus to give me strength in this decision and to help me. He answered. From that moment until today, I have not eaten chocolate. Now it does not tempt me at all. I do not even understand how I could have eaten it. But I do not claim that other people must not eat it. Everyone has his own understanding of this matter. I have simply shared my sorrowful experience and Christ's victories within me.

In Jesus, I found complete freedom from the power of wickedness and from every other sinful addiction. At the same time, I understand that I am a sinner in great need of a Savior. What joy it is to live in freedom and praise God!

The love of God accomplishes this victory in each of us. It destroys within my mind every power that is foreign to it and gives me the opportunity to make a free choice.

Love conquers sin, and it does so with ease and joy.

Homework 76

1. Please read Romans 3:21-23; Genesis 3:15; John 8:34-36; Jeremiah 29:12-13; Psalm 91:14-15; Matthew 1:21, 23; Galatians 2:19-20; and Revelation 21:7 in the light of our lesson.
2. Did you receive any new insights while studying this subject? If so, what were they?
3. Have you experienced a similar deliverance from the power of sin?
4. Why did Jesus have to die on the cross? Would it have been easier to establish a new religion?
5. What prevents a person from becoming free? See Romans 7:24.

6. How can we help those who have not been set free from their sins and do not know how to become free?
7. What is sinful addiction?

Lesson 77. Love Enriches

This lesson is very important to understand. Please examine it carefully and, if possible, read it several times until you understand why it is so significant.

In the message to Laodicea, our Lord addresses His church and describes the true condition of His children during this period. There is no church after Laodicea. Jesus calls my condition by its proper name. He declares that I am lukewarm and that I do not even realize what I am like in His sight. Revelation 3:17 says: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." This is indeed my condition. Yet merely acknowledging this truth does not solve the problem of my lukewarm state. What does this mean? I am rich, but Jesus says that I am poor. He cannot be mistaken.

The Spirit of God draws me to the events at Calvary, and in their light I see myself as a great sinner in need of a Savior. I have an immeasurable debt. I repent and receive forgiveness. My debt is paid; I am free. According to the riches of His mercy and His love for me, the Lord paid my debt and brought me out of slavery to sin. I have truly become free.

Let us try to picture this through an illustration. Suppose that throughout my life I took out loans to pay for the services of this world. In order to pay the interest and partially repay my old debts, I took out new loans at higher interest rates. If the amount at first was only a small million, it doubled with every passing year and eventually exceeded a billion. Even if, with a good job, I might somehow repay a million over the course of my lifetime, repaying a billion would be out of the question. Then I learn that there is a very rich Man Who is willing to pay off my loan. I become acquainted with Him, and because of His love, He pays all my debts on the condition that I also forgive everyone who owes me. I agree. The bank sends me a notice stating that my debt has been paid, that I owe nothing, and that the balance in my account is zero. What joy!!! I am free!!! I am

forgiven!!! My debt has been paid! Now I can live freely. In my joy, I invite guests and go to the store to buy food for a celebration, only to discover at the checkout that I have no money to pay for my purchase. The zero in my account is not enough to pay the bill. I call the bank and ask them to extend me a loan of one thousand. They gladly agree. Surely I can earn enough to repay a thousand. The bill is paid. The celebration takes place. The guests go home, and I go out to tell everyone about my new Friend Who paid such an enormous debt for me.

Life continues, and new purchases must be made and new services paid for. I work like an ox at two jobs, yet this is not enough for me to become rich. I am accustomed to living in debt and spending money as I see fit, taking everything I can from life. I decide to turn to my Friend for help again, and He assures me that He will cover all my debts and that He has sufficient means to help me. This reassures me, and I continue living without thinking about my spending. My lamp is always burning, although I can see that it contains enough oil for only a short time. I constantly have to borrow money in order to repair my lamp. Yet this does not trouble me, for with such a rich Friend, I have nothing to worry about. I have become wiser than others. My life is filled with much useful knowledge; I have gained many different experiences; and with such an abundance of blessings, I look very rich compared with other people. No new purchase troubles me. I know the One Who will pay all my debts, so I move forward boldly, telling everyone about my rich Friend, Who is very generous to all poor people. But when I look at my possessions, I no longer consider myself poor. A luxurious house, a new car, the shield of faith, the shoes of readiness—all these things delight my heart. From early morning until late evening, I praise my Friend and thank Him for everything.

Sometimes I wonder how I will repair my lamp if my Friend stops paying for me and the bank refuses to lend me money. Then I will be unable to buy or sell. My lamp will go out, and my whole house will be plunged into darkness at night. I begin to think more seriously, and I become afraid. I remember other people who died believing in my Friend. They never became

rich, but neither did they have any debts. All their bills had been paid and their debts settled. Yet I am troubled by the approaching crisis. I understand that things will not continue as they did before, and the future holds uncertainty. Moreover, my Friend has sent me a warning that I must have oil in my lamp and a reserve of oil for the time of crisis. But oil cannot be obtained on credit. My Friend offers to sell me certain treasures so that I may become rich, possess means of my own, and no longer live in debt. Unfortunately, I simply do not have time to examine and understand what He wishes to sell me or what I could use to pay for it. My Friend also makes it unmistakably clear that there are serious flaws in my thinking and that I need to change something in my life. He has also taken to coming to my house and knocking at the door, not understanding that I am busy and cannot let Him in every time. Still, I sometimes open the door to Him. We have supper together, and He tells me how I can become truly rich. How weary I am of His instruction and advice! Although some of it is not entirely bad. But I cannot send Him away. What if He becomes offended? I have so many prospects for growth, so much more to accomplish, and someone must pay for all of it. Only one thing discourages me: although I am rich, the largest number in my bank account is zero.

I go to my friends, and they are sleeping peacefully amid their wealth. Yet many of their lamps are still burning, and they seem to have reserves of oil for the crisis. I think that a little sleep would not hurt me either. Then the knocking at the bedroom door begins again. Once again, I hear advice to buy something so that I may become richer, be clothed, and receive my sight. No one has ever insulted me like this before! But perhaps I really should try it. I look for advisers. Some say that nothing serious is happening, while others urge me to heed my Friend's counsel. But the price set for these goods is very high. Why not simply give them away? Yet somewhere in my heart, I understand that this message is very important for me. My Friend says that I am very lukewarm and that I need to come out of this condition.

My friends tell me about the gold that made them rich and how wonderful it is to be truly wealthy. I begin to think that this really is the easier way. There is no need to live in debt. One always has the means to pay for any service. And this wealth comes from the same Friend Who pays off my debts. But the prospect of true treasure and clean clothing brings many trials with it. The world and the people among whom I live simply will not understand me. They already laugh at me, and in this case they will hate me altogether. But my Friend assures me that He will be near and support me, and that I will have oil. I must think carefully. But I will certainly make a decision.

The world attracts me with its goods and services, but it has become foreign to me. I am now not of this world. The crisis is approaching; it is inevitable. There is hope that I will die before this time of trouble and will not have to worry too much. But what if I do not die? Oh, if only someone would show me the future. Then I would know what to do. As it is, I can only believe, relying on the words of my Friend and His promises.

Homework 77

1. Please read this lesson once more in the light of Revelation 3:14-22.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. What condition are you in?
4. Do you consider yourself part of Laodicea? How do you understand this symbol?
5. Is Jesus' message addressed personally to me?
6. What constitutes true wealth?
7. What should I do about this?

Lesson 78. Different Values

I once heard a story about a store in an American city that was broken into. When the police arrived, they tried to determine what was missing and what had been stolen. To everyone's surprise, however, they discovered that everything was still in place. When the next business day began, astonished customers approached the salespeople, asking why expensive goods were being sold at low prices while, conversely, items that had been inexpensive had become very costly. The investigation revealed that the intruders had switched all the price tags, making the cheapest items many times more expensive and reducing the most valuable goods to the lowest prices.

This illustration clearly shows how completely everything in our world has been turned upside down. Sin has been exalted and placed upon a pedestal of honor, while true values have been reduced to the level of indecency, and people ridicule those who seek to obtain them.

What is valuable in this world? What currency is in circulation?

1. Look at what I have. 2. Look at what I can do. 3. Look at what I know. 4. Look at what I am like. 5. Look at where I have been. 6. Look at how strong I am.

All of this has been elevated into life's cherished goal—something worth striving for and holding on to, so that after attaining it, one may receive the world's applause and acclaim. All humanity is engaged in the pursuit of such values. In doing so, people sacrifice their health, their time, their personal needs, and even their lives. This way of living may be described briefly as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Possessing the values mentioned above is considered highly honorable.

If I publicly announce that I am a millionaire in dollars who wishes to share the secrets of my achievements, I will interest some people. But if I say that I am a billionaire, the whole world will pay attention to me, and many will become intensely

interested in how I achieved such success and what its secret is.

What is a billion? Suppose I am able to deposit \$1,000 into a savings account every month. To accumulate one billion dollars, I would need one million months, or 83,333 years. A million is a little easier. If I could save one million dollars every year, I would need only one thousand years to accumulate a billion. Can you picture it? All of this is a pursuit of the wind.

Around 2002, the grand jackpot in Germany's Toto-Lotto reached €32,000,000. Within one week, 42 million lottery tickets were sold at €12 each. The media spoke of nothing else. I also came under the influence of this deception, discussing with my coworkers how we would spend the money we were going to win. Naturally, everyone became very generous in their dreams and, out of the largeness of their hearts, gave me apartments and cars. Even I decided to imagine that sum in my own pocket. I immediately saw that I had lost my peace and calm while trying to preserve and spend money that I did not have. Yet I had no intention of buying a ticket, because I regard gambling as a satanic deception and do not participate in such games. Nevertheless, God's peace left me. It took a long time before I was able to remove this infection from my mind and simply stop thinking about it. God's peace became mine again, and I worked calmly, earning my bread with my own hands.

But the world has not stopped in its pursuit of the wind. It has a goal and a purpose toward which it desires to lead every person.

What is valuable in the sight of Heaven, and what currency is exchanged among holy beings now and throughout all Eternity?

1. Look at how I love you! 2. Look at how much I know about God—how Loving, Wise, True, Merciful, and Just He is—and this is still only the beginning. 3. What can I do for your happiness?

These heavenly values are already in demand today. But the world has reduced them to the level of passions and base lusts. Yet God has a plan to restore His true values at the end of time

and to show the entire visible and invisible world what is truly vital and what blessings these values bring to everyone, giving meaning and life to all things. God is confidently carrying out His plan in the souls of those whose hearts are open and thirst to receive love, friendship, and happiness.

Jesus calls my achievements, wealth, and knowledge poverty, destitution, and nakedness. What I consider great is rubbish and filthy clothing in His sight. Christ offers something truly valuable, clean, and white. I think that I see and know everything, but He calls me blind and offers me the opportunity to buy His vision and knowledge.

He desires me to be zealous in acquiring heavenly values and, through the gift of repentance, to change my thinking.

What does Jesus counsel Laodicea to buy? Why does He give counsel? Usually, He commands or offers, but in this case He counsels us to buy.

Counsel is a recommendation or guidance concerning what, from the counselor's point of view, may be right and beneficial. It does not deprive a person of freedom of choice or of the ability to decide to follow his own path. What love and respect God shows! He offers me values that are vital, without which I will not be able to stand in the last days. He gives me the opportunity to choose for myself what I consider necessary. This counsel is offered so modestly that it has simply become lost as something insignificant and unimportant among the hundreds of laws and instructions on the pages of the Bible. When I hear the word Laodicea, I associate it with a lukewarm condition. I agree that Jesus is right, while hoping that I am still at least a little hot. Yet what He counsels there remains entirely unclear. Because of my corruption and damaged mind, even biblical values have acquired their particular significance and priority in my thinking. But the Lord will leave no one ignorant concerning the true values of the last days. He draws people's attention to what will help them and make them rich.

What does a man offer his beloved when he gives her a small ring in a box? Is he offering merely a ring, or something

greater? I think that through this gift he presents his whole self—his time, his freedom and love, his possessions, and his authority. After making this proposal, the man watches closely, observing her reaction to his gift. He is very attentive to the behavior and response of the woman he has chosen. At this special moment, the most important decisions are made. Afterward, either the process of separation begins or preparations for the wedding celebration commence.

Jesus loves me very much. When He counsels me to buy various goods from Him, He is not offering a heavenly assortment from which I may choose; He is offering Himself. Although these goods have different names, in essence they form a single whole. They are contained in one package that cannot be divided. The heart of Jesus is placed within this package, and He desires to give it to everyone who wishes to receive it.

Yet how modestly He presents it. He quietly gives counsel, clothing Himself in symbols, and nowhere else mentions it. Such an offer is like a small key to a great city, entrusted under certain conditions to the victor as an eternal possession in which to reign.

Thus, Jesus gives counsel and offers an advantageous transaction. What should I do with it? He awaits my decision and watches very carefully to see how I will respond, what I will imagine, whether I will hear this counsel, and what I will ultimately decide.

What matters to Him is not what I say, but how I proceed afterward.

Homework 78

1. Please read John 17:2-3; 1 John 5:11-12; Galatians 5:6; Job 23:10; Malachi 3:2-4; Isaiah 1:25; Matthew 22:11; Galatians 3:27; Matthew 6:22; and James 1:23-25, and consider these verses in the light of our lesson.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. What prevents Laodicea from accepting the message from God?

4. Why are the symbols called “gold tried in the fire,” “white raiment,” and “eyesalve”?
5. What is your response to Jesus’ counsel?
6. What can I use to pay for this purchase?

Lesson 79. Heavenly Commerce

Commerce is the exchange of goods or their purchase at a stated or negotiated price. This sphere of activity serves as an intermediate link between the producer and the final consumer. Commerce may take the form of exchanging one product for another of equal value—barter—or exchanging a product for an established monetary equivalent—a purchase.

The Faithful and True Witness counsels me to buy certain goods from Him. First, however, He convinces me that everything valuable and right in my own eyes is actually my problem—one that causes Him disgust. Furthermore, I am unable to solve this problem by myself.

The Lord not only defines my values but also offers what has true value in His sight. Even if I do not fully understand what Jesus is offering me, it will be better for me to buy it than to understand my true condition and decide to remain in it. The warning that I will be spewed out of Christ's mouth will one day be fulfilled. The Lord will do exactly what He says. Until now, His word has accomplished everything for which it was spoken. This is important to consider.

Although I am merely counseled to make a purchase, this does not mean that there will be no consequences if I buy nothing. We are not being offered trinkets that merely collect dust, but something extremely valuable for our salvation. Without it, we cannot be justified by God.

Now, interested in the offer, I decide to heed the counsel. I approach the counter—and what do I see there?

When I heard the names of the goods, I expected to see a small bar of pure gold, a white robe, and a tube of ointment lying on the counter. But what I saw captivated and amazed me. Instead of a bar of gold, a boundless ocean of pure gold appeared before my eyes, with its infinite riches and possibilities. Instead of a small white robe, I saw incomparably radiant garments of light made of heavenly holiness, proceeding from the Throne of Grace. These garments shimmered with every color of the

rainbow, dazzling my eyes with their astonishing purity and whiteness. Not a single dark spot was upon them. Jesus Himself was clothed in such a garment, and it reflected all the beauty of His character and holiness.

The eyesalve was like a pure river, ready to pour upon my mind in life-giving streams of heavy rain, washing my eyes with its transparent waters, restoring my damaged mind, and lifting me above the vanity of this world so that I might see all these matters from the height of God's providence.

I stand at the counter, captivated by the goods of Heaven, and my tongue is unable to utter a word. But I dare to ask, "How much does this cost? What price have You set for these goods, Lord?"

He looks into my eyes and makes me understand that what is precious in Heaven can be purchased only with what is most precious in my heart. I begin to "search through my pockets" and take out the lust of my flesh, the lust of my eyes, and my pride of life. Oh, how ashamed I am to show these things! Where can I hide my eyes in shame? I feel as though I am about to die in the presence of a pure God. But He joyfully declares, "This is exactly what I would very much like to receive from you! Your stained garment would also make an excellent addition to your valuables. And if you give Me all your time as well, I think the transaction can be completed."

But I thought that I would set my own prices, grab something from the counter, and run away. I did not expect such a blow—straight to the heart. He wants to make me completely poor, naked, and defenseless, shamelessly stripping me of everything. Still, the heavenly goods are very attractive. I ask, "May I keep something of my own, at least a little, as a remembrance?" Jesus looks at me sadly, and I understand everything. I stand there making my decision. Two paths lie before me: the world or Heaven. I must choose.

Through this offer and counsel, the Lord appeals to my will, addressing her reason and heart and making it clear that He desires to become her Husband. If she refuses, she will become

the wife of another husband, one who is closer to her according to the flesh.

I am in despair. My choice determines everything. Any delay or hesitation will sound like “no.” Will I ever hear such counsel again?

I understand that my connection with the world will be severed forever, although its temptations will continue to attack me. I realize that Heaven will supply all my needs.

I choose Jesus and give Him everything He desires to receive.

A joyful smile appears on His face. He is so happy that He cannot conceal it. Jesus says that if I remain faithful to Him while I live in this world, He will also share His throne with me. I do not fully understand what this means, but I think it must be something good, since He offers it with such joy.

To be stripped in the presence of the whole world and Heaven was very painful for me. I burned with shame. Everyone saw my nakedness. But the choice had been made, and I had to pass through this. My pride, my lust, and my time—all became Christ’s property. My filthy garment adorned His collection, which He plans to burn.

Now I belong to Jesus. My will is under His authority. I sold everything in order to buy what I had been counseled to purchase. How wonderful it proved to be! I had never expected such a life.

The world furiously attacks me with its temptations, while I pay for its services with heavenly values. My carnal nature lies pinned to the ground beneath the weight of my daily choice in favor of Heaven. My old self tries to raise its repulsive head, but I give it no chance.

Jesus has become even nearer to me. I understand that all these new goods remain very unusual to me and that I must learn how to use them. But teaching me brings joy to my Lord. He assures me that everything I have acquired is my property and that I always have access to it. Yet because I am accustomed to

living differently, I still need time to become familiar with these new values and learn to use them for the glory of God.

The trading is over. The transaction has been completed. My thoughts are filled with delight. I enter my home, close the door, sit down on the sofa, and begin to reflect. What has happened? Where am I? What should I do next? Is this like a dream? My eyes see everything just as before. Reality is still the same. The cares of life have not changed at all. But inwardly I have become different. A heavenly fire has been kindled within me, and it gives me no right to remain silent. I pray for wisdom to speak, and it comes. I begin to testify, but in response I hear ridicule and insults. I did not expect such opposition. Yet I cannot and do not want to turn back. I ask for power from above to love, and it comes.

As I travel through life, I become very weary from the constant struggle, but the Lord strengthens me and gives me power.

What joy! I bought Heaven; I acquired Christ. What awaits me next? The Lord points me to Calvary and makes me understand that I must still look upon the world from its summit—from the height of the cross. How fascinating! And I am no longer afraid. Yet understanding that this is a great reward for the chosen, I continue preparing to move, seeking to leave everything behind in this world.

Jesus gently embraces me. How pleasant it is to experience these moments of happiness in His arms of love! But He releases me and assures me of His tender care, saying that He is with me always, even unto the end of the world.

Homework 79

1. Describe what was revealed to you in this lesson. What new insights did you receive?
2. How relevant is this counsel to buy heavenly goods for me personally?
3. What can I use to pay for this purchase, and how should I understand this in my life?
4. Is my direct participation in this transaction important, or is this the responsibility of pastors?

5. What do I acquire as a result of this purchase?
6. Does this lesson have anything in common with Matthew 25:9?
7. What Bible verses came to your mind while studying this lesson?

Lesson 80. “But Go Ye Rather to Them That Sell, and Buy for Yourselves”

As we read the parable of the ten virgins, we see the counsel of the wise virgins, who knew where oil for the lamp could be obtained. Together, they told their foolish friends that they should finally go and buy it. But from the rest of the story, we see that it was already too late.

The foolish young women knew where they needed to go, but they were in no hurry and postponed this matter until the future. Then, by a strange coincidence, all the virgins fell asleep. What kind of sleep was this? Apparently, something was not entirely right—and this happened to everyone. Even the wise virgins entered this state. But the wise proved more farsighted and prepared a reserve that soon became extremely useful to them. Everyone had the opportunity to buy oil, but some neglected it, considering it neither very important nor necessary. The call sounded continually, and this suggested to the virgins that it would always continue, that there was no need to hurry, and that there was still time. Yet the parable shows that not everyone managed to do it in time. It is a very sad story.

I will honestly admit that I never associated myself with the foolish virgins, even when I was one of them. Even now, I do not particularly like their company. But wisdom is determined not by how I evaluate my own condition, but by the presence of oil in my lamp and the amount of it that I have in reserve.

I know where oil is sold. I know what it is. I understand Who counsels me to buy it and what varieties of this oil exist. Many times, I have heard the Seller knocking at the closed doors of my heart. Yet it always seemed to me that there was no need to hurry and that this was not the most important thing. After all, there are so many interesting and necessary things, so many different teachings, ministries, experiences with God, revelations, and blessings. I am in the true church, and I clearly understand this. I am even proud of it, considering other people

deceived. It sounded approximately like this: “Forgive me, Lord, but I have so much to do for You that I simply have no time for You.” He would sadly reply that He understood me perfectly and would always ask when He might come. I remember His sorrowful eyes and sad smile very well. The time will come when I will finally understand that I missed something precious in my life.

But life continues. From every direction come wonderful suggestions about how to improve ministry, how to buy oil, how to become better acquainted with the Seller, how not to fall asleep, how to... All of this pours upon me in such abundance that I do not know what to do. The Seller Himself also keeps coming and knocking. Sometimes I let Him into the entryway of my house, and He always hints that He would not mind eating with me. I will say it plainly: His oil is wonderful. From time to time, I buy a little so that my lamp will not go out, but I consider it wrong to accumulate a reserve. This small amount costs nothing. By His mercy, I receive the oil as a gift. But a reserve of oil is very expensive. I must pay a very high price for it by giving up all the treasures of my heart, which are stored in the dark rooms of the house of my soul—rooms into which the Seller is always so eager to look. I know that everything there is not in order, but I postpone the transaction until later.

I know where those who sell are. I know where the store is. I do not fully understand what goods are being offered to me, but I have memorized their names and the entire transaction process. The world in which I labor is so beautiful. It contains so many prospects, so many teachings about the Seller, and so many opportunities for ministry that sometimes I do not understand why oil for the lamp is needed at all when everything is already clear and understandable. Any definition can be found on Wikipedia. Any Bible verse can be read in different translations and in every language. There are countless sermons on YouTube about every subject. All of these things are like filling stations for me. And I would not say that I am sleeping. I have no time to sleep. There is not even enough time for sleep.

The wise sisters tell me about their fellowship with the Seller and what they bought from Him. They tell how He continually comes to supper with them and how they dine together. I understand that they know Him very closely, and this acquaintance is reflected in their characters. But the sisters' stories are enough for me; through them, I become better acquainted with the Seller. I know every detail about His qualities, and nothing is hidden from me. Although the Seller Himself knows me and my address, I would not say that He knows me closely. There is simply no time to open myself to Him. If you give Him your little finger, He will take your whole hand—and with it, your entire being. I understand that He wants to possess all my property, giving His goods in exchange. But I will deal with this exchange later. Right now, something important and special must be done. I still have so much time to go and buy. Besides, these wise virgins have enough oil in reserve and can always share it if a need suddenly arises. We often spend time together and share our experiences. But these clever women constantly talk about gold tried in the fire, boast about their new white garments and eyesalve, as though there were no other subjects to discuss. Sometimes it even begins to irritate me. They consult the Seller about every matter, as though they were incapable of deciding anything for themselves. These virgins have only three things on their minds: gold, clothing, and ointment. It is difficult to argue with them because you understand that you yourself lack the very things they are talking about. The Seller calls these wise virgins His regular customers and gives them good discounts. It seems that He knows them all very well—so closely that they appear to be one family. Yet I also find it interesting to be with them. They sincerely love me and continually tell me so. I think there is something special in this oil. Yes, I will definitely buy it—but a little later. And I will probably become better acquainted with the Seller as well, since I have heard so many good things about Him.

For now, I will go to sleep. It seems that everyone is already asleep. I need time to rest as well. The sleep of a laboring man is sweet. Good night, dear friends.

How I love the silence. I sink into the world of dreams.

What is that cry? What is that noise? The Bridegroom is coming? Why so late? Yes, of course—He said that He would come as a thief in the night. Well, at last! Now we will trim our lamps and go out to meet Him. Wait—there is very little oil. More precisely, there is none at all. “Friends, please share a little oil with me!!!”

“What do you mean, there will not be enough for you and for us? You should have thought about me too!”

“All right, I will run and buy some quickly. Tell the Bridegroom to wait for us!”

If only I can make it in time. As always, there are so many things to do. Why did I not buy this oil earlier? I had the opportunity. Well, never mind, I will manage somehow. I have solved harder problems than this. Besides, the Bridegroom is One of us—kind and patient. He will wait. Where could He go without us? After all, we bear His Name, serve Him, and belong to Him.

The shop is closed. The Seller is not here. I will try to beg something from the workers. Three times the price? Highway robbery!!! Well, there is nothing else I can do. I must reach the celebration in time, because no one will be admitted without a lamp and a wedding garment. How beautiful this oil is! Why did I not take it earlier? Then I would not be running around frantically now.

All right, I have a reserve. I am running to meet the Bridegroom.

There—I can see the beginning of the celebration. How fascinating it is! I feel sorry for this world because it did not believe that this event would take place. But it has come. How beautiful! For me it is joy, but for the world it is terror.

The doors are closing! “Stop!!! Wait!!!”

I do not understand why they closed them. Open the door!!! It is I! You do not know me? Lord, it is me!!!

How terrifying! I did not expect events to unfold this way. What can I do? It is already too late. How can this be?

Homework 80

1. Please read this lesson and, in its light, read Zechariah 1:3-4; Matthew 7:22-23; Acts 19:2; and Jeremiah 25:4.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Who are the virgins? In which group of virgins am I? What should I do about this?
4. Do I understand the importance of preparing now?
5. What awaits me if I fail to prepare in time?
6. What does the oil in the lamp represent, and why can those who possess it not give it to me?

Lesson 81. Distinctive Features of Laodicea

The second and third chapters of the book of Revelation tell us what awaits God's people during particular periods of history. If we look at a map showing the locations of the cities described, we see that they lie one after another. For example, you cannot travel from the first to the fourth while bypassing the second and third, and so on. The nature of their geographic arrangement points to a sequence of periods that replace one another. Laodicea is at the very end, and no other city appears after it in the prophecy. Therefore, this message deserves very careful consideration, for it has distinctive features relating to the last days in which we live. This message is addressed personally to me and to all of God's people in order to point out matters that must be understood correctly.

From all Christ's previous messages to His disciples during different periods of history, we can take examples and distinctive features of those eras and apply them to ourselves, improving our understanding of God's love and the Creator's care for His children. But the message to Laodicea contains information that was not present in the other messages. This is important to consider.

The salvation of those who believe in Jesus has always been under His authority, and He alone decides who will be delivered and how, according to God's mercy. But as iniquity increased, grace abounded all the more. During every era of its development, God's people received increasing light. Accordingly, God's expectations and requirements grew along with it. What was sufficient for salvation in the past may be far too little today. If God has explained to me a truth with which my predecessors were not acquainted, He will hold me accountable for obeying it, but He will not hold them accountable, because it had not yet been revealed to them. My ancestors will be judged according to the light they possessed. Yet ignorance will not excuse the many people who had an opportunity to learn a special truth but deliberately refused to

study it, considering it unnecessary, unimportant, or personally uninteresting.

In the days of the apostles, faith in Jesus alone was sufficient for salvation, and believers received as a pledge the special power of the Holy Spirit, Who guided them, performed miracles and signs through their hands, and taught them everything that had been revealed for their time. Today, that same Spirit directs us and explains what He has revealed to us in our day. He teaches believers to obey the truths for the last days that have come through His revelations and God's messengers.

When a person first comes to Jesus, he is like a child who does not yet know or know how to do anything. It is wrong to expect from him what has not yet been revealed to him and what he has not yet learned. Yet even while he is still a sinner, by God's grace such a person is declared righteous. This righteousness is conditionally imputed to him through faith in Jesus. When a person of God begins to grow, he learns the truth, and conscious obedience according to the light received is then expected of him. The believer is now conditionally endowed with God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Why conditionally? Because he remains free to choose and can always change his choice. But as long as a person believes in Jesus and obeys the revealed light, this contributes to his salvation by God's grace.

Laodicea has a special message that possesses power and authority particularly in our time, and God expects me to take an interest in this truth. Only then will He be able to reveal it to me.

During all the other periods, the Lord declared that He was coming soon. He addressed five churches with similar words. But in the message to Laodicea, the Lord declares that He is already standing at the door. It is evident that He has already come and has something extremely important that He desires to share with me. He expects me to respond to this event. We are not discussing the Second Coming of Jesus to the whole world. The message teaches us that the Lord has come to His people in order to prepare believers in a special way for the

Second Coming and for the events preceding it. All the previous instruction will be insufficient to endure the coming trials. Ignorance of this present counsel will neither excuse nor protect me on the day of judgment. If Jesus gives me something, He is deeply interested in my taking and receiving it. When I take such a step of faith, all God's commands, commandments, and promises come into effect at that moment, and I am declared a doer of the law. Everything promised and provided for me in this case is given to me. Through faith in Jesus, on condition of obedience to the light received, I become the possessor of all the qualities and blessings listed by the Lord in the message to Laodicea. If I disagree with or ignorantly reject this message, Jesus will spew me out of His mouth, just as He warned. God's love will be revealed in special mercy toward the obedient and in justice toward the negligent. Whether I want it or not, I am confronted with a choice: to accept the message and allow God to work in my life, or to reject it and close my heart to Christ forever.

The fact that Jesus offers without pressure, counsels gently, knocks quietly, and calls calmly does not mean that His message can be neglected while other blessings are still received for overcoming temptations and resisting Satan's power. The great power for victory is contained precisely in Christ's humility. He gives an example of how to behave and how to proclaim His message. It will be loud, yet very humble. Jesus will leave every person the right to choose.

Imagine the following scene. A man gives his beloved a box containing a ring and asks her to become his wife. The bride understands that behind the ring lies the prospect of a life together as his wife, with all the rights and responsibilities that follow. But she does not immediately decide how to answer and begins to think, weighing all the advantages and disadvantages. Then the bridegroom says, "If you refuse me, I will kill you—or arrange for others to kill you. So make your decision, my dear. I think my offer is very attractive." What does such an approach look like? This is sometimes exactly how I attempt to present Jesus to the world through the message to Laodicea. But in reality, the offer sounds like this: "This world is very dangerous,

and you are at risk of perishing in it. But I offer you My hand and heart. If you say yes to Me, I will do everything to protect you and shelter you from temptations, not allowing death to touch you. But you must choose this yourself. I respect your decision.” And the Lord waits for an answer.

The message to Laodicea contains many offers described in symbolic language. We must examine them in order to understand the meaning of the images and decide how they apply to my life and to the life of my church. The Lord reveals to those who seek everything they need to know, while leaving symbols and parables to those who are accustomed to evaluating God’s truth superficially and have no interest in it.

I do not claim that our studies are exclusive. I simply invite you to study what the Lord has already revealed to His people—what He desires to give so that we may meet the coming events worthily and fully armed. The whole world is already saying that something must happen, but people are mostly expecting economic and political upheavals. We are waiting for the Second Coming of the One Who is Love, Who stands at the door and knocks, Who offers us the opportunity to buy heavenly treasures and to become our Husband.

Homework 81

1. What was revealed to you in this lesson?
2. How does the message to Laodicea relate to our School of Agape Love?
3. Is this message an expression of God’s love for His people in the last days?
4. Are you prepared to continue studying the message to Laodicea in order to understand its depth personally?
5. How can understanding this message help me in the coming trials?
6. Where in the message to Laodicea is Agape love mentioned?
7. Please read Revelation 1:3; Psalm 92:6-7; Proverbs 1:20-33; Proverbs 12:1; and Revelation 22:18-21 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 82. Jesus Loves Laodicea

In His messages to six of the churches in the book of Revelation, Jesus expresses His approval and praise while also pointing out what must be corrected. In the message to His church of the last days, He finds nothing deserving His approval. At the same time, the Lord reveals the church's problems very clearly and provides a solution, counseling her to correct the situation in a particular way.

It is astonishing that with such an abundance of light, knowledge, education, and economic and technological development, we have not become better spiritually. On the contrary, we have lost the foundation that is pleasing to God. Of course, this condition is created by the overall picture of spiritual decline in Christ's church. But when we speak of individual children of God, Jesus has always had people who followed the truth and lived faithfully according to the light they had received. Yet despite Laodicea's miserable condition, the Faithful Witness declares His love for her. He says that He rebukes and chastens those whom He loves. Moreover, as a reward for obedience, Jesus gives His people promises unlike any ever given before. In order to help believers leave their lukewarm condition, the Lord has personally come. He offers fellowship with Himself without intermediaries so that everyone who responds may personally learn to live according to the truth. Christ's love for His people so completely fills His heart that He is ready to minister to His chosen vessels day and night, leading them out of their deplorable condition.

But Laodicea's problem is pride and spiritual blindness, which prevent God from fully revealing His power in His children. As He counsels them to reconsider their attitude toward the truth, God opens new opportunities for spiritual growth and development, offering Himself as their Teacher, Friend, and Counselor. He no longer promises to come soon. He has already come and is standing at the door.

How precious we are to Jesus! With what tenderness He expresses concern about our true condition! What an amazing

solution He has chosen for our salvation! How many blessings of Heaven Jesus has prepared for us!

By offering us the opportunity to buy gold tried in the fire, the Lord desires to see us possess this heavenly treasure. How much does a kilogram of His gold cost? I think all the money in the world would not be enough to purchase it. But the thirsty soul receives this treasure in unlimited measure. Heavenly gold is Heaven's most precious wealth. It is the very currency used among all heavenly beings. And now, at last, it becomes the possession of sinners who believed but stopped growing.

The love and faith of God's children have always received the approval of the Most High. They continually testified to the close relationship between the redeemed and the Lord. Throughout all ages, this gift was strengthened and developed. But in the last days, because iniquity has abounded, the love of many has grown cold. Love has not disappeared or lost its name, but it has ceased to be the motivating power and has become cold and calculating. Fear, duty, and guilt have taken its place. Guided by such motives, I try to serve and please God. When I succeed at something, I begin to regard myself as rich and spiritually advanced, and in my own eyes my righteousness goes completely off the scale. If I am surrounded by equally advanced friends, together we are a powerful force. We have certain achievements of which we can boast. For the sake of His Name and because of His love for us, God blesses our efforts to earn salvation, giving us protection and success in some of our undertakings. Yet how sadly He watches us. Though I have an ocean of God's love available to me, I content myself with dry crackers in an attractive package.

But in order to receive God's blessings, I need faith that they exist, that they are mine, and that I will receive them.

Jesus asks His disciples in Luke 18:8: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" This is precisely the faith that He offers us the opportunity to buy from Him—the faith and love that will truly make us rich. Through them, God's character will be revealed and restored in my heart. The Lord will teach me to apply these qualities of the

soul in my life, and I will come under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, Who will reveal to me the full depth and beauty of God's plan of salvation for my time.

God's Agape love now belongs to me, and amid the elements and temptations of this world, I become a truly rich person with unlimited access to heavenly treasures. To comprehend this love, I need this very love and the very One Who will teach me how to use it.

But Jesus' plan is not only to endow me with heavenly blessings, but also to teach me how to use them.

The exchange does not happen all at once. There are many things within me that I have hidden very deeply, and the Lord begins the process of cleansing me. It may be quick, or it may take a long time. Everything depends on me—on my desire to grow and on my faith. As the Lord exposes the dirty and weak places within me, He asks what I will do about them. He has already asked me to be zealous and repent, but each time He waits for my decision. Absolute love and complete respect for my freedom. How pleasant this is! And if I choose sin and the works of the flesh, I will continue developing in that direction.

Grace has one interesting characteristic. It is like the principle connected with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If I am faithful to God's principles, I may eat the fruits of His blessings, and no one prevents me. I have unlimited access to the tree of life, but no one guards the other tree either. Yet if I eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, I immediately deprive myself of the fruit of the tree of life. A guard takes its place beside it and blocks access to its fruit.

But Jesus loves me so much that He paid for my sins with His Own life, opening access to the life-giving fountain. The Lord is ready to forgive and give drink to everyone who now thirsts and seeks. Whoever thirsts, come and drink.

With what compassion Jesus calls me by name and tells me that I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. He does not leave me in this condition, but offers me Heaven's solution to my problems. It is the surest and best solution.

He is ready to give me everything most precious and costly that Heaven possesses—everything most right and most good. When I receive this gift, I will not be disappointed because I was given something bad and imperfect while the best was saved for later. The beautiful love that I am learning now under battle conditions will remain just as wonderful throughout all Eternity. In Christ's school, I am learning to love those who do not deserve it, those who hate me, and those who kill me. There will be no such people in Eternity, but my earthly experience will remain with me so that I may testify to the entire Universe about the depth of God's love and exalt Jesus for this gift. The friendship with Jesus that began here through faith in the unseen and under the most difficult circumstances will also be taken to Heaven, where it will continue to develop amid open love and unrestricted opportunities.

For now, I am learning acceptance and trust. I am discovering the power of love, uncovering its depth and beauty, and experiencing its victories. Jesus Himself instructs and corrects me.

I do not know how love was given to God's children during the Middle Ages, but I see the power it possesses within me in our time. I understand that this is only the beginning of the great discoveries and works of love—a love that has put an end to sin in my life and is mercilessly destroying it, showing me a more excellent way.

Homework 82

1. What was revealed to you in this lesson?
2. Is Christ's message to Laodicea addressed to the entire church, or also to me personally?
3. What will happen if I do not study this message or take an interest in it?
4. Why does Jesus call me wretched when everything is going well in my life?
5. Why does the Lord chasten those whom He loves? Is this fair?
6. What does God's chastening look like?

7. Please read Revelation 3:19; Psalm 141:5; Proverbs 3:12; Proverbs 13:24; 1 John 4:17; and Galatians 5:6 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 83. A Science for Laodicea

Imagine the following situation. I send you a letter stating that if your back hurts and you come to me, I can give you a therapeutic or preventive massage. Do I need to prove anything to you?

Suppose I give you an advertisement saying that if you order a vegetarian meal from me, it will be delivered to your home within thirty minutes. What will you do? I think you will make a note of these services and use them when needed.

You will believe that I am capable of doing what I know how to do and of selling you what I offer.

Our dear Lord addresses us with a similar statement, desiring to draw our attention to what He possesses.

He also declares that we do not know ourselves and that everything we say about ourselves is untrue. The Savior personally told me that I am poor, unhappy, and utterly wretched—and also blind and naked. I had never considered myself that way. I thought He was speaking about you, my friends. But Jesus looked into my heart and said that I was the one in this condition. To be honest, I had no idea. Yet it all proved to be true. In addition, I was called lukewarm. The most difficult thing for me was to acknowledge that this was indeed my condition. But to acknowledge it means consenting to find a way out of such a condition and to make some decisions.

Laodicea's problem is that she hears the rebuke, partially agrees with it, but takes no action. She follows none of Jesus' counsel, although He longs for her to do so. Merely acknowledging that I am wretched and lukewarm is not what the Lord expects. He desires me to become rich, clothed, wise, able to see, hospitable, faithful, pure, and open in fellowship with Him. He wants me to learn how to possess and use His gifts. He longs to fill my life with what will enrich me in every respect. The Savior offers me precisely what He possesses in infinite abundance. The essence of the message is that I should not only receive information about its meaning, but also

understand what each symbol and every word means, how all of this applies to me, how I can acquire it, and how, after purchasing these treasures, I can use them.

Our world frequently holds promotions and sales in which very expensive items are offered at substantial discounts. The sellers have already completed their sales cycle and made their profit. They need to clear their warehouses and fill them with new merchandise, so they reduce prices on everything. Happy crowds run to buy these things. I think we have all experienced something similar. It is good to buy something you have dreamed about and saved for. But if you spend money only because an item is cheap, and afterward it merely collects dust, you understand that something is wrong. You have been deceived.

But imagine this situation. You are offered the opportunity to own a pearl the size of a tennis ball, and the price is everything you possess. No matter how costly your property may be, the value of the pearl offered exceeds what you can give by countless hundreds of times. No comparable treasure exists anywhere in the world. What might I think? Perhaps I will decide that someone is merely teasing me or that the Seller is mentally deficient because He is offering such a treasure in exchange for my worthless belongings. Yet He does not look foolish. At the same time, the Seller declares that I am very poor. He asks for everything I possess and everything that is dear to me. He makes me understand that this price is acceptable to Him and that He is offering me far more in return. He is genuinely determined to sell it to me. I agree. I give everything. I say yes. As a result, the exchange takes place and the sale is completed. I become the owner of the pearl.

Now I stand there with this treasure, looking at it and rejoicing. But I do not know what to do with it next. I am hungry, I am cold, night is approaching, and I have nowhere to sleep. What should I do? I am left alone—but with the pearl. I have special protection from the Seller that will not allow anyone to rob me. This pearl is valued at one thousand trillion dollars, but no one has enough money to buy it from me. Yet I possess it, and I

must somehow continue living with it. I enter a hotel and ask for a room. They name the price, and I show them what I possess. They are amazed that such a rich person has visited them and offer all their services to me free of charge, rejoicing that I chose them. I reflect and continue on my way. My new treasure opens doors for me to places of which I had never dreamed. The powerful of this world, members of the nobility, and representatives of government and business are ready to receive me. Every social circle desires to have me among them. Of course, there are also evil and envious people among them, but I pay no attention to them. I notice that I exert a tremendous influence upon people's minds, and because of this, I begin to realize the full extent of my responsibility. I learn to speak wise and useful things. News of my treasure goes ahead of me, and many people desire me to visit them and allow them to admire my pearl. They are happy that such a rich person as I has been their guest.

I settle in a spacious house, where I begin receiving people and conducting seminars about how to become truly rich.

One day, I hear a knock and a gentle voice. It is the Seller of the pearl. I open the door and invite Him inside. I ask Him to join me for supper, and we begin to talk. He tells me about the enormous influence of my treasure, its characteristics, how this wealth can be used correctly, and much more. I watch Him and learn. How kind He is! How tactful and polite! He asks no unnecessary questions, forces nothing upon me, gently avoids sensitive subjects, rejoices in everything, praises me, and instructs me for every circumstance in life. How wonderful it is to be with Him! I had already understood much of what He told me. But through fellowship with the Seller, I was able to organize all these processes and begin acting consciously, using my wealth while understanding its power and possibilities. Wherever I turn with Him, I become sought after, needed, and welcome. Possessing this treasure cleansed my soul from petty concerns and enlightened my mind. I became rich in my thoughts and feelings. Now I am able to communicate with dignity even with kings. My past astonished many people, but it has passed into oblivion. I live in the present and look

cheerfully toward the future. When I meet poor people, I comfort them and bring them joy. I tell them about the Seller and direct everyone to Him, assuring them that He will receive and enrich everyone who comes to Him and that He casts no one out. His treasures are sufficient for all. But He has one condition for every person: He exchanges His riches for all your property—for everything that is precious to you. He does not bargain. He Himself evaluates your condition and offers to give you in exchange everything He possesses.

I see that many people entered into this transaction. But after becoming owners of the treasure, they hid with it in their new homes and enjoyed their new wealth alone. When the Seller came to visit, they were even afraid to let Him into the house and spoke with Him through the intercom. Then strange things began to happen to them: their new wealth became unusable and began to decay, provoking ridicule and disgust. They did not know what to do with the new treasure, yet they had no desire to learn how to use it.

Then I understood that the Seller does not merely desire to make us rich; His plan also includes teaching us how to use this treasure. I will continue learning.

Homework 83

1. What was revealed to you in this lesson?
2. What is more important: to understand the message to Laodicea, accept it, live in it, or use its advantages?
3. Why is it important to know how to use the treasure we have purchased?
4. What does the Lord expect from those who have agreed to enter into the “commercial transaction” with Him?
5. How do you imagine the process of learning to possess and use heavenly goods?
6. How do the goods presented by Jesus make me rich, able to see, and clothed?
7. Please read Matthew 13:45–46; Luke 12:21, 32; and James 5:1–6 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 84. The Laodicean Trap

The book of Revelation presents us with a picture of the final events in our world. Chapter 18 tells us that a great judgment will be executed upon sin and those who produce it. Never before in Earth's history has there been a time when a particular group of people could influence the entire earth and impose its standards upon the whole world, increasing its treasures at the expense of other countries and enabling all who desire it to become rich. This seductive influence is called Babylon.

In the light of our lesson and the subject we are studying, I would like to draw attention to Revelation 18:23: "And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived." Do you see familiar words that we mentioned earlier? Let us recall the parable of the ten virgins. We encounter many symbols from that account here as well.

The word translated "sorceries" appears in the original as φαρμακεία. I do not think it is even necessary to know Greek, because this word is very easy to recognize. It is translated as sorcery, witchcraft, or deception.

The word pharmacology itself is familiar to us as the science of medicinal substances. In the light of the Bible, however, it deceives all the people living in the world. Pharmacology involves influencing the human mind by medicinal and chemical means. We also read, "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Revelation 18:3; see also Revelation 14:8).

We live in an age of great deceptions. The enemy of souls has built an entire industry of entertainment and enticement, and through these means of mass hypnosis he spreads his influence. None of us has escaped this deception. Christ describes such a condition with the words, "they all slumbered and slept"; yet

there is a reassuring verse that says, “but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” We declare, “Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well,” but Jesus says, “Lazarus is dead.” Then we hear Christ’s command, “Lazarus, come forth.” And in Revelation 18:4 we read: “And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” Come out of the sleep of death! Elsewhere this call sounds like this: “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him.”

Laodicea represents a church in which Jesus finds nothing good, yet this is the very church He has come to awaken. And He has come not merely to awaken her, but to endow her with imperishable riches. The sleep of death is not a very promising condition. While asleep, one can only see what is shown to him and cannot control what is happening around him. Therefore Christ has come to give that very oil for the lamp of the soul. Then this fire will warm me until I am hot.

What an astonishing time! A fullness of light, vast spiritual opportunities, and a great sorcerous deception under which everyone has fallen. How can one live amid all this and not die? I do not know, but the Lord has the answer. Most interestingly, He counsels me to awaken and fill my lamp with oil, which is His merchandise.

Gold tried in the fire, white raiment, and eyesalve—these are what will serve for my salvation in this difficult time.

God Himself desires to dwell in me in order to withstand every deception and the full force of sorcery. I cannot do this by myself. The supply of oil I possess is enough only to keep me out of debt, but I need true riches with which I can trim my lamp and pay for all the services of the world while upholding the hands of those who are very weary.

The world in which we are now all sleeping is very dangerous, but Jesus has come to awaken us—to awaken us before it becomes too late. The Lord desires to awaken us for battle. Satan’s fury knows no limit. To him, we are a thorn in the flesh that prevents him from carrying out his treacherous plans. And

the presence of love among us makes all his efforts fruitless. Satan cannot defeat love, for it is a quality of God; but he does everything possible to cool this love and make it lukewarm by mixing the coldness of iniquity with burning truths. The enemy of souls is ready to support any good deed if it has carnal roots or proceeds from an unconverted heart. But when an action is founded upon love flowing from righteous motives, the enemy has no chance of victory. He pours out all his fury through those who are under his control.

A great controversy is underway, and it is drawing to a close. Without Christ it is impossible to gain the victory. Without His goods, I am doomed to a tragic defeat and an absolute loss in the final battle. There has never been a time like this in our history, yet we are living in it.

Our entire life and way of living are tied to money. We have become dependent upon having it. The wine of Babylon has created conditions that cause me to live within this system of values and spend all my best time earning the means for food and basic needs, so that I regard property and wealth as my achievement and my stronghold. But Jesus has come to pull me out of this mousetrap before I finally die in it.

How much effort and time must Jesus devote to saving even one deceived soul? My whole life. Yet He desires to save everyone. People are asleep and do not wish to awaken. But Jesus awakens me, knocking at the door of my heart, and His voice can be heard. If anyone hears this voice and opens the door, He will enter with His supper, and we will sit down and partake of the bread of life.

How fascinating it is to sit with Christ at the same table, look into His eyes, hear His voice, feel His love, and understand that in this relationship something very important and vital is taking place for me. My heart is being changed; my soul clings to Jesus. My spirit unites with the Spirit of my Savior, and together we walk upon the waters of the ocean of love, so that after traveling this path, the two of us may plunge into the deep waters of God's grace and know from within that God is love.

As I abide in love, I dwell in the security whose name is God. His robe of righteousness, like the boundless waters of agape, covers me on every side, and every enticement of the soul is rejected with disgust. The rain of the Holy Spirit washes me from within, enabling me to recognize temptations and see the way of escape from them. God teaches me to help other friends who have fallen asleep, to awaken them, and to direct them to Jesus. Together with the Savior, we move toward the destination of our earthly journey called Eternity. It will soon begin everywhere for all good and righteous people. That time will come, but God's plans include certain events that must still take place. His people must completely overcome sin. Only the love of Christ in me will give me wisdom and strength to emerge victorious. And to the overcomer will be given all the best that God can devise. We will possess it throughout Eternity. And the Lord Himself will be our God.

Then we ourselves will personally see with our own eyes what the words "God is Love" mean.

For now, however, we must gather strength and oil to prepare for the trials that are approaching. Jesus Himself is leading us into this battle so that we may gain the final victory and enter the feast, where He will shut the door behind Him.

Homework 84

1. What new things were revealed to you in this lesson?
2. Why is it so important to understand the condition I am in?
3. Are you interested in studying this subject?
4. Do you see a way of escape for yourself personally?
5. Are you afraid of the events ahead?
6. Why did Jesus decide to address Laodicea's problem personally?
7. Please read Daniel 12:1-3; Revelation 16:13-16; and Revelation 13:14-15 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 85. Gold Tried in the Fire

Throughout the ages, gold as a metal has always attracted people's attention and captivated their minds with its beauty and value. It is a rather rare mineral resource that has historically been elevated to the status of a precious metal. In many cases, gold has become the unit by which the value of a nation's currency or other monetary assets is measured. Even in our time, the very word "gold" is associated with something costly and beautiful.

Gold jewelry and gold-covered architectural features always give aesthetic pleasure because of this metal's distinctive appearance and luster.

Gold is also considered the most malleable material, easy to shape and remelt. It possesses anticorrosive properties.

When we hear expressions such as "golden hands," "a golden mind," "a golden person," or "a heart of gold," we understand that they no longer refer to the metal, but to a person's valuable qualities and abilities—to his special attractiveness in the eyes of society or particular individuals.

And now Jesus offers us another kind of gold, one that has special value in the eyes of Heaven and makes everyone who acquires it truly rich and precious.

"Tried in the fire" means that it possesses exceptional purity. It is free from every kind of impurity, has been treated at a high temperature, and contains nothing but gold. During refining, gold expels all foreign substances, which are easily recognized and differ greatly from the precious metal.

Fire symbolizes the trials through which every child of God passes in order to be cleansed from various harmful habits and shortcomings, to see his true nature, and to discover the hidden qualities of the soul that may reveal themselves under particular circumstances and conditions. Fiery trials help expose the essence of a person's soul, revealing the sinfulness that still remains in his heart and strengthening him in the right

things God has taught him. No son or daughter of God will escape the fiery trials appointed by God.

Gold tried in the fire means that it has already passed through the process of cleansing and refining in fiery trials. It is now offered to me in this form so that it may become my possession and make me rich in the eyes of Jesus.

What, then, does this gold mean in the eyes of the Lord?

Heavenly gold is that which has eternal value. It is what has always been precious in the eyes of Heaven, is precious now, and will remain desirable throughout Eternity. Nothing material fits the meaning of this symbol. But our relationship with God and our relationships with one another are important to Him. These alone can be taken with us into the eternal world. And the value of these relationships is determined by the presence of love.

God is Love. God's love is of the highest value to us, for only by having it within myself can I truly love my neighbor and relate rightly to God.

Job 22:25 states: "Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver."

Love is not merely a principle or a feeling, but God Himself, Who is Love within me. This is easy to say, difficult to imagine, and even more difficult to explain.

None of us has seen God, and since we have not seen Him, we can comprehend and understand Him only by faith.

Galatians 5:6 states: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."

Faith and love are two inseparable sisters who live for one another; together with their brother, the Word of God, they form the fullness called Agape. It is impossible to tear one part out of this union and be content with it. The result would be an invalid leaning upon the crutches of personal judgments and errors.

The fire that refines gold consists of the trials through which love and faith pass and in which every right foundation is established. Fire melts everything, consuming what is secondary and separating what is precious from what is empty. We read in 1 Peter 4:12: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." And in 1 Peter 1:7: "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

When I shape objects from clay, they are soft and pliable in my hands. I make a vase, set it down, look at it from a distance, and then decide to turn it into a pitcher by attaching handles and changing its shape. If I do not like something, I can crush my work and remake it. But once I have created the masterpiece of my craftsmanship, I decide to preserve it in that form and place it in the sunlight, which dries my little masterpiece on every side and strengthens its structure. Yet if I wish, I can still mix it with water and remake it. Once the object has dried, I heat the kiln and place it in the fire, leaving it there for the required time. After the fiery trial, I check it for cracks. Now I have a strong vessel ready for daily use.

Heavenly gold was tested in the life of Jesus. That test exposed every foreign impurity of falsehood that people attempted to introduce into God's love by interpreting it in their own way. Christ's death revealed to the entire world and the whole Universe the purity of Agape love, its value, and its enduring influence. There is no evil in love. It has nothing in common with sin. It proved to everyone Who God is and how strong and unshakable His Love is for His creation. If anyone had doubted God's character when He was accused of dictatorship and selfishness and alien qualities were attributed to Him, the life and death of Christ brought an end to all these attacks. God's Agape Love appeared before the entire world in all its purity and splendor.

And now the Owner of this love desires to sell it to me, at the same time granting me faith and the knowledge of how to use

all of it. This means that, as the gold becomes united with my nature, it will lead me through the fire of trials in order to cleanse my soul and mind to Heavenly holiness, making me fit for Eternity and for the final conflict with the forces of evil in this world.

This process makes me truly rich in the eyes of Heaven and brings with it every accompanying blessing for life on this Earth. I receive unlimited access to the storehouses of God's love and may take as much of it as is necessary to overcome every kind of lust of the flesh and to pay for various services at any time. I may adorn myself, my life, and my dwelling with this gold and receive only God's approval and blessing.

But I will need it most of all in the last days, in the battle of Armageddon, where I will have to face the storm and gain the final victory in love, truth, and obedience to God's will and law.

Jesus is waiting for my decision. I am going to buy the Heavenly merchandise.

With a smile, the Seller hands me a certificate of my right to possess this treasure, placing upon my forehead a special mark of His approval. He tells me that He will come to supper and explain how to use it now. It turns out to be an entire science, and it must be learned. But the most important thing is that it is no longer somewhere in a prophecy; it is now in my heart and mind.

Homework 85

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. How did you previously understand the symbol of gold tried in the fire?
3. Why did the Lord designate love and faith specifically for the church of the last days?
4. How do you understand the expression "buy gold" in real life? What does it mean?
5. In what way do love and faith enrich me?
6. Why do I appear poor in God's eyes without these Heavenly goods, even though I live in obedience to the truth?

7. Please read Daniel 12:10; Isaiah 1:25; Job 23:10; Zechariah 13:9; and Malachi 3:2-3 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 86. White Raiment

Clothing is always a person's calling card. Whatever we may think and however we may view this subject, our appearance and facial expression create the first impression of us.

Sometimes a person's occupation can be identified by his clothing. Without saying a word, anyone's clothing tells us a great deal.

Among the Heavenly goods Jesus offers us is white raiment, which covers the shame of my nakedness. I understand that this clothing is not literal but symbolizes something very important in the spiritual world—something Heaven desires to see upon me. Anything else is simply unacceptable. I cannot imagine appearing unclothed before a Holy God. How could I claim any privileges in such a condition?

Many formal events have a dress code with which everyone present must comply. Any departure from this protocol is a serious breach of etiquette and an expression of disrespect toward the event's organizers. You may simply be denied entry or asked to leave the gathering. But although the world may make exceptions and the influence of fashion may change styles of clothing, Heaven has one established standard for everyone.

The Bible describes God clothed in a white garment (Daniel 7:9). We may also read about Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain, where He was clothed in raiment white as the light (Matthew 17:2), exceeding white as snow (Mark 9:3). The angels present at Christ's resurrection and ascension were also clothed in white garments (John 20:12; Acts 1:10).

In the message to Sardis, the Lord says that there are a few people there who have not defiled their garments and "shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy" (Revelation 3:4). He then gives the assurance that "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment" (verse 5).

After this, we read in the message to Laodicea that Jesus counsels us to buy this white raiment. John then describes a great multitude clothed in white robes and standing before the

throne (Revelation 7:9). One of the elders explains who these people are and why they wear white robes: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14).

What does the symbol of "white raiment" mean in the message to Laodicea? It has nothing to do with literal things, but represents God's special clothing for a person's character. We read the explanation in Revelation 19:7-8: "For the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

We first encounter the expression concerning righteousness in Genesis 15:6: "And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness."

In the law of Moses we find this definition in Deuteronomy 6:25: "And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He hath commanded us."

But the prophet Isaiah declares that, in the end, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

After Christ's death and resurrection, everything became clear, and the apostle Paul explains the garments of righteousness in his epistles. We read in 1 Corinthians 1:30: "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." And then in Philippians 3:8-9: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

This very "righteousness by faith," which is the "Righteousness of Christ" and which Jesus Himself calls white raiment, is what He offers me in exchange for my righteousness. In His eyes, my

righteousness leaves me naked; in the eyes of the prophet Isaiah, it is filthy.

What does this transaction mean for me? It means that in the eyes of Heaven I become righteous through Christ's merits and by faith in Him. His righteousness is imputed to me. It also becomes part of my character, producing a righteous person's new way of thinking and a new heart transformed by God Himself, according to my desire and through faith in Jesus.

Righteousness has always been imputed by faith, but in the last days the Lord has united it with His Agape love through the Holy Spirit so that, through these gifts, He may work in my heart and mind in all His fullness and carry out through me His plans for this perishing world.

Because of iniquity, I lost my understanding of righteousness by faith and decided to seek it in the law and in my good works. But God cannot accept such obedience, because any sin of mine cancels out all my good deeds and sentences me to death. Only by faith in Jesus, because of His shed Blood and the sacrifice He offered for me, can I receive justification. This is precisely how the Lord desires to see me when He offers His goods.

Righteousness by faith is imputed to me when I turn to Jesus as my Savior. Afterward, it is imparted to me as I grow spiritually in faith and in the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ, Whom He has sent.

White raiment is not something new; it is an essential quality of the soul for the people of the last days. I must not only possess it but also understand what it is and what advantage it gives me. If God Himself desires to see me wearing this raiment, I should not hinder Him.

This garment is not placed over my unclean clothing; it is given in exchange for my indecently filthy garments. This is so painful. My whole soul, all my understanding of holiness, all my ambitions, and all my achievements have been invested in this clothing. Must I remove it and give it to Christ? Yes, this is exactly what the Lord desires from me. I must also be washed, and the best means of cleansing is the Blood of Christ.

Humanly speaking, I do not particularly want to do this, but the new heart desires precisely that. It draws me to Jesus.

Together with the gold, the white raiment makes me one of Heaven's own. All that remains is for me to anoint my eyes so that I may understand and see this.

I am storing up all these Heavenly blessings for the future battle and for the conflicts of the present. I now look ahead boldly, knowing who I am and believing that I am special in God's eyes because I am in Him and He is in me. Christ Himself comes each day into the home of my heart to teach me how to represent His authority rightly in this world, how to preserve everything I have acquired by faith in Him, and how to multiply God's blessings and talents for His glory.

And I am learning. I put on Christ, clothe myself in His love, and go into the world in which I still live so that I may be tested and established in love.

Homework 86

1. What was revealed to you in this lesson?
2. What is the righteousness of Christ, and how do you envision it in your life?
3. Why does Jesus counsel Laodicea specifically to buy white raiment?
4. What does white raiment have to do with Agape love? Why are they offered together?
5. What is "the shame of thy nakedness"? How can I know whether I have it?
6. How can I determine whether I possess white raiment?
7. Please read Genesis 3:10; Matthew 22:10-14; Zechariah 3:1-5; Jeremiah 17:9; and Matthew 5:8 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 87. Eyesalve

What do I imagine when I hear the expression “eyesalve”? Most likely, it brings to mind some medicinal preparation in a tube, bottle, or jar that can be applied to the skin around the eyes or to the eyeballs themselves.

But what is symbolized by the eyesalve in the book of Revelation, which Christ counsels me to buy so that I may anoint my eyes with it?

We read in Revelation 3:18: “And anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.” Jesus offers me something from the Heavenly treasury with which to anoint my eyes, after which I will begin to see what I did not see before. Prior to this, the Lord declares that I am blind. He does not mean physical blindness, but spiritual blindness. The Savior assures me that His salve will heal this affliction. Jesus once healed a blind man by making clay from a mixture of His saliva and earth. After anointing the blind man’s eyes, Christ commanded him to wash. The man returned seeing.

What blinds a person? We read in Ecclesiastes 2:13-14: “Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness.”

Spiritual blindness means sin, which blinds a person and makes him foolish. When the serpent tempted our first parents, he declared that their eyes would be opened and they would become as gods. In reality, when Adam and Eve’s eyes were opened as a result of the Fall, they saw that they were naked.

The Laodicean’s problem is that, despite all the abundance of light and knowledge, he chooses darkness, which makes him foolish and blind. How else can I be described when, possessing the fullness of truth, an abundance of revelations, purity of doctrine, and deep knowledge of the Word, I turn toward the world, come under its influence, and try to mix burning truth with the coldness of spiritual Babylon? Only a foolish and blind person could do such a thing. Jesus calls me precisely that and

offers a way out of this situation. Merely acknowledging my blindness will not give me sight. I need the Divine anointing with the clay He offers me. The Lord counsels me to treat my eyes. My eyes symbolize my mind, which chooses either wisdom and light or foolishness and darkness. Proverbs 17:24 states: "Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."

Eyesalve is Heavenly wisdom given to me so that I may understand clearly what is happening to me, where I am, Whose I am, who I am, and how to escape the situation in which I find myself.

The Lord counsels me not only to buy the salve but also to apply it to my eyes. The very word "anointing" has profound meaning in the spiritual world. It signifies the consecration of the anointed person to a ministry appointed by God and to a special vision and understanding of what is taking place. Wisdom speaks of herself in Proverbs 8:22-23: "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." Wisdom possesses a special Divine anointing by which she makes wise those who receive her.

I had previously understood the symbol of eyesalve as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but I could not understand why I receive this gift in such a particular way. Yet it was precisely through the influence of the Holy Spirit that I saw my sins, repented, learned to fulfill the requirements of the law, clung to Jesus, and realized my true condition. The Holy Spirit is directing the writing of these words now, and afterward He reveals their true meaning to those who read them. Without the influence and blessing of the Holy Spirit, all wisdom will become foolishness, lead to pride and vanity, and plunge the soul into destruction and darkness. When Jesus counsels me to anoint my eyes with eyesalve so that I may see, He expects the Holy Spirit to transform my mind. This will happen when I consent to this work and begin taking steps in that direction. Divine wisdom opens my spiritual eyes so that I may see and understand what I did not know before.

I understand what it means to possess gold tried in the fire and what it means to have white raiment. I understand the advantage these gifts give me. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, wisdom teaches me to love, strengthens my faith, and reveals to me the depth of the knowledge of God and the power of His authority in me and through me.

The Heavenly anointing clothes me with Heavenly authority, which is my special identifying mark in the spiritual world. The enemy of souls also sees this anointing and furiously attacks me with all his temptations. He desires to plunge me into Laodicean darkness. He does not prevent me from studying the truth, but tries to keep my eyes closed so that I remain blind. If it were not for God's protection, what would become of all of us?

Eyesalve possesses healing properties for the human mind. The mind was damaged while under the influence of the world and the carnal nature, but God's Spirit gives the believer discernment and helps him notice all the previously hidden details in the plan of his salvation.

The Spirit of God uses a person to reveal through him to others the beauty of the plan of salvation, the beauty of God's character, the purity of God's holiness, and the power of God's love and wisdom. The Lord desires His faithful children to have sight. Through such believers, He can pour His light into the lives of other people who sit in darkness.

Where can a blind person lead other blind people? Into the pit of sin and error. Laodicea is a city of blind, naked, poor, unhappy, and wretched children of God who, despite possessing so many spiritual advantages over their predecessors, prefer to remain in the darkness, from which they watch those who are trying to come into the light. The Laodicean's greatest achievement is that he agrees with the description given to him by the Faithful and True Witness. He does not dispute that he is naked; he does not object to being called blind and poor. But what can a sleeping person do for himself?

Yet Jesus does not leave His people in this condition. He sends a message to Laodicea. The Lord comes to every son and daughter of God and knocks. He offers His goods and sends His messengers to those who are blind so that they may turn their gaze toward Him.

The Lord knows what storm of trials is approaching and what tribulation will soon come upon the whole world. And who will be able to stand? We must have the right answer to this question in order to be among those who endure the trials. Once our planet was sentenced to destruction by the waters of the Flood. Everyone was warned, but only the few who heeded God's counsel and entered the ark were saved. The doors of grace were open to all; everyone heard the call to salvation, but deliverance came to those whose eyes were anointed with eyesalve. These people had faith that God's prophecies concerning the Flood would be fulfilled, and their wisdom helped them make the right decisions at the right time. It saved them from death.

But as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be at the coming of the Son of Man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, and took no thought.

They took no thought! What are Laodiceans thinking about now? How to become richer and survive in this world of sin. But the wise among them took oil in their vessels.

All Heaven is now watching a world sleeping in sin. Vanity of vanities has swallowed everyone. Sin stands upon a pedestal, and the kings of the earth compel people to worship and serve it. But the Lord offers a remedy that gives life. And who will hear this voice?

Homework 87

1. What new things did you learn from this lesson?
2. How do you understand the expression "eyesalve"?
3. Why is it so important to possess this salve in the last days?
4. Why did Jesus call the sleeping virgins wise and foolish?
5. What do the words "anoint thine eyes" mean for me?

6. Please read Isaiah 61:1; Ezekiel 16:8-9; John 9:5-7; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 1 John 2:20; and Proverbs 8:1-21 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 88. Come In, Jesus!

Imagine the following scene. The president of your country has promised that he will visit you personally in order to meet you, talk with you, learn about your problems and needs, eat with you, and stay overnight so that your conversation can continue the next day. This is supposed to happen soon. At first, such a promise will fill you with delight. What will you begin to do? I think any homemaker would prepare an abundant meal and keep the house clean and orderly. I would do the same. I would also make a list of the questions and needs the president could resolve and meet. Time passes, but he does not come. I attend to my affairs and wait for the visit. Suddenly I hear a knock at the door and a voice calling me by name. How strange. Presidents do not arrive like that. And who am I that he should become my guest? He is knocking rather modestly too; presidents do not knock that way. And if it really is he, what could he possibly want with me? Perhaps I should open the door. But what would I show him? I am simply unprepared for this meeting. There is a mountain of unwashed dishes, the floors are dirty, there is no food, and I have not shaved. What would I tell the president? Perhaps it is not he at all. Out of so many millions of citizens, would the president choose to visit me? That simply cannot be. Exactly—it cannot be. I just do not believe it is he. Anyone could be out there! I would certainly recognize the president immediately. What should I do? In any case, my apartment is that part of the country which even the president himself cannot enter without my permission. And even if it is he and I let him in, no one will believe that such a thing is possible. Who has ever heard of a president visiting ordinary citizens in their homes? I would rather read about him online. It is definitely not he. But even if it is, what does he want? The knock is far too quiet, though the voice sounds familiar. Let us suppose it is the president. Very well, I open the door and let him in—then what changes? No, I have no desire to talk with anyone. I am so tired of everything!

The knocking stops. The voice can no longer be heard. At last, he has gone. Or perhaps I only imagined it all. What has

changed in my life? Nothing. I am still the same, everything remains in its place, and life continues as usual. There are no problems. My daily routine is established, and every issue can be resolved without the president. He has more important matters to attend to. It is good that I did not open the door. I know what to do next and how to live. I have enough money for everything, sufficient clothing, plenty of food, and I am happy. I need nothing. I thank the country's leaders for arranging everything so well. The main thing is that there is no war; we can survive the rest. I heard from my neighbor that the president visited him too, and they talked. To be sure, my neighbor has become rather strange, as though he were not of this world. He has probably become proud.

The saddest thing in this entire story is that it describes the reality of our time. This is approximately how the situation appears in the eyes of Heaven. I imagine the astonishment of the Heavenly beings as they rejoice over the prospect of many changes in the lives of God's children, while in reality nothing remarkable happens.

Sometimes I wonder what would change in the life of the church if the Spirit of God were withdrawn from us. Would we notice? Would we run about in panic, searching for what we had lost? Would this loss shock us? Who is God's Spirit, and what does He do among us? How can we tell whether it is He or not? We seem to have the same prayers, the same activities, work, stores, meetings with friends, and worship services. What has changed? So many good deeds have accumulated, and there is desperately not enough time for all of them—not even enough time for sleep. My business and my work seem not to depend upon God at all. What would change in the lives of those near to me or far away? They did not want to hear anything about God before, and they still do not. They have merely become unusually irritable and aggressive.

What would actually change in your life, my friend? Please answer this question honestly.

Unfortunately, our world has been arranged so comfortably in every area of life that everything can operate by itself without

any special intervention from outside. Most frightening of all, it creates the impression that God does not exist. And if people do say that God exists, they often do so jokingly, gloating over someone's failure or accident and calling it just karma. How can these people be helped to understand that one cannot live this way? The Name of God has become so insignificant that people now write it with a lowercase letter and insert it into conversation merely to connect words or intensify profanity. Medicine, science, technology, discoveries, and inventions have all advanced in their development. Yet the Bible has not changed in the least, and God is still the Same. He has not even changed His raiment in all these thousands of years. It has become normal to think that faith in God is something for elderly women who have nothing else to do.

But the Lord is faithful to His word. He accomplishes what He has purposed, directing the destinies of individuals and entire nations. His plans will be fulfilled whether I believe them or not.

What is remarkable is that, amid all this bustle, Jesus comes personally to me and to each of you. He stands at the door of my heart and knocks. He desires to give me something I do not possess. What should I answer? I decided to say, "Come in, Lord!" It is difficult for me to understand everything that is supposed to happen, but I see that a very close and trusting relationship has developed between us. I have access to Jesus at any time and can seek His counsel. When trials come, I do not lose myself in speculation or fall into panic; I turn to Him for counsel and help. And help comes—not always in the form of deliverance, but as strength to resolve and endure every difficulty in the right way. The peace of God has become the barometer of my well-being. If I lose it, I begin to search for the reason, and I find it. God's Spirit has become so much a part of me that I cannot imagine life without Him. He does not perform astonishing things to impress those around me, but He amazes me with His miracles in my life and character. If I say that all these transformations took place through my own will and strength, I am certain I would thereby offend God, Who works so wonderfully in me. It is not I, but Christ in me, Who works in

me both to will and to do of His good pleasure. I am afraid even to imagine that He might leave me. I would understand it at once. And what then? Everything would collapse in a single second. Why live? For what purpose? Where should I go? But Jesus has promised that He will not forsake me, and no one will pluck me out of His hand.

Without love, I am nothing. I understand this clearly. If everything except love were taken from me, I would be the richest person on earth. I know how beautiful love is and what power dwells within it. This power transformed my life, and now it is changing the lives of those who believe in it and receive it. Through love, Jesus can best communicate to me the essence and meaning of His teaching and reveal the beauty of His character. Sometimes I think how wonderful it would be if God loved me as I love those near me. Yet I know that He loves me even more than I love anyone. This fills my heart with such joy.

Glory to God!

I would rather ask Jesus once more to enter my home, even if He already lives there. I will do this for my own sake, so that I may know for certain that Christ is within. I believe that Jesus has heard and answered and is at work. He is a fascinating Friend. The more closely I know Him, the more deeply I fall in love with Him. If there is anything a person truly needs in this world, personally knowing Jesus is the most important and fascinating pursuit of all. "Come in, Jesus!"

Homework 88

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Do you see the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?
3. How do you understand the expression "Let Jesus into my heart"? How does this happen in life?
4. To whom is Jesus speaking as He stands at the door and knocks in Revelation 3:20?
5. Do I have the Holy Spirit within me? How is this manifested?
6. What should I do so that God's power may work in me through love?

7. Please read John 10:27-29; Revelation 22:17; Isaiah 26:20; Acts 16:14-15; Deuteronomy 31:8; and 1 Chronicles 28:9 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 89. May I Enter This Room?

As I study the third chapter of Revelation, I come to understand that Jesus is standing at the door of my heart and knocking, desiring me to open it to Him. As I read these lines of Scripture, I realize that I must open the door to the Savior. I invite Jesus into my heart. I ask Him to enter my life. I pray that He will come through this door, and I believe that He has done so. This becomes a reality in my life because the Lord desires to answer such prayers. He waits for them. I rejoice. The Lord is in my home; we eat supper together, we fellowship, and we look into each other's eyes.

Then I decide that I have achieved something special and calmly go to sleep in my little bed, while my dear Guest remains alone at the dining table. The main thing is that He is already in my home and that I opened the door to Him.

I rejoice over this event. I tell all my friends what has happened, but few understand me. Every morning I invite Jesus to breakfast again. During the day we do various things together, and in the evening we sit down to supper once more and discuss everything I experienced. I am delighted with this new life!

But then strange things begin to happen. After several days, Jesus approaches a locked door leading to a private room where I cannot allow anyone to enter. This room is called "my phone." Christ stands beside it and begins to knock, saying, "May I enter this room?" I shrink back. I become very frightened. I understand that all my secret activities, all my messages, and my entire browsing history are about to be exposed. I try to distract Christ from this idea and reply, "Let us go to the prayer room; its door is always open to You." But He answers, "I need to enter the locked room and see what is happening there." A cold sweat breaks over me. I suddenly realize that my Friend will not like many things on my devices. Yet He continues knocking and calling. What should I do? I am resourceful, however, and decide to open the door. I let Christ in and begin showing Him various Bible versions, the Spirit of Prophecy app,

and Sabbath School lessons. I suggest that we sing Hymns of Hope together. But He does not appear very interested in any of this. He does not even pay attention to those apps. Jesus stands at the door of my social media page and begins knocking, saying, "May I enter this room?" I am speechless. "Lord, look at my prayer journal. What wonderful experiences and answers it contains!" But He asks me to show Him my photo albums and social media messages. Why this particular place? This is my private space; this is my spiritual world! Yet He stands and knocks. Once again, I use my resourcefulness: I open the door and show Him how I answer assignments in the School of Agape Love. But He moves toward a place none of my friends has ever entered. I am so ashamed. Jesus' presence fills this room with light. I see how dirty it is, lower my eyes, and burn with shame. Smiling, He asks, "May I put this place in order?" I consent, and He quickly vacuums everything before moving directly toward the photo album. This is too much! My heart sinks; I understand what is about to happen. He stands at the door and knocks, saying, "May I enter here too?" I open this door as well and begin showing Him photographs of nature, flowers, and the sky. But once again He looks into the place where everything is hidden from other people's eyes. It feels as though the ground has disappeared beneath me. Smiling, Jesus asks permission to put that place in order. I lower my eyes and consent, but now I begin cleaning it myself. Then insight comes, and I run ahead of Christ with a mop, trying to sweep out every dirty corner revealed in the light of the Savior's presence. He follows with a vacuum cleaner, cleansing those places after me and making them perfectly beautiful. I am no longer afraid. Jesus does not scold me for my mistakes and past sins; He gently offers to help me get rid of them. I consent.

Christ asks whether I would like to delete my favorite devices from my life forever. It hurts deeply to hear this, but I decide to consent.

Jesus then proceeds toward the most private part of my home. He approaches the door to my YouTube channel, stands before it, and begins knocking. I am speechless. Not this! Once again, I hear the familiar question. I consent. I had managed to delete

my viewing history and had even clicked on several useful videos. But suddenly I see that my entire history has been preserved, and in His light it appears in fiery letters testifying against me. He carefully examines what I watch, what I like, how much time I spend doing it, and what influence it has upon me. I fall to my knees and ask for forgiveness. I am so ashamed that I betrayed His sacred trust by feeding my mind in our enemy's dining hall. Sadly, Jesus tells me that we can delete these things from the phone's memory, but they will remain in my memory forever. The enemy of souls will continually revive them in my mind, trying to distort and damage it. All these films and videos have exerted their influence and opened my mind to the knowledge of sin. They have dulled my perception, and now evil can easily enter me without permission, destroying my life and happiness. But Jesus assures me that His grace will be sufficient to fight this filth if I remain in constant fellowship with Him. My heart is moved, and I ask Him to cleanse me and fill my mind with love. He agrees. I see that love has the power to think about what is pure and right. Love begins to create something very important, new, beautiful, and wonderful in my life.

I plunge into its pure waters and forget my entire sinful past. My dear Friend plunges in with me, and we swim. He does not remind me of my former mistakes. I see that when we reach the deepest point of the boundless sea, He takes out my sins and casts them into the water, tying to them the stones of His faithfulness to His promises. I feel ashamed and joyful. I understand that I am clean.

I return to my home. How pleasant it is to live in cleanliness. I walk through the tidy rooms and invite Jesus into them, while He laughs joyfully in reply and asks me not to relax my vigilance. Suddenly I realize that not every room in my home has yet been opened to the Lord. The thought makes me feel terrible. I tense up, but He gently asks, "Will you let Me into these chambers too?" How ashamed I am. Tears fill my eyes. Why am I so filthy? But I am no longer afraid. I know how Christ loves me, and this helps me consent. I nod and lose my peace at the thought of the disgrace ahead. Yet I understand

that I must pass through this fire as well. I look at Jesus and become calm. He will do me no harm. With Him I can do all things.

Homework 89

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Is it enough merely to let Christ into my life and then rest content?
3. Should I wait for Jesus to ask questions, or is it better to invite Him myself to put my heart in order?
4. Are there “locked rooms” in your life where you do not want to let anyone enter—not even Jesus?
5. What should I do if Jesus is knocking but I do not want to open the door?
6. May I knock on the locked doors of my friends?
7. Please read Hebrews 3:14-15; Matthew 9:13; Romans 2:3-6; Micah 7:18-19; and Isaiah 1:16-18 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 90. What Is on Your Plate?

Jesus is in my home. What a joy it is to have such a Guest. Because of His presence, changes have taken place in all my rooms. Everything connected in any way with evil has been removed, and the rooms shine with cleanliness. I walk through them, admiring the new order. I have asked my Friend to enter wherever He considers necessary and to do whatever He desires so that He may feel at home.

Supper time is approaching, and I go to the kitchen to prepare a great feast. My heart rejoices at the realization that the Lord Himself is sitting in my home right now, waiting to see what I will prepare. How skillfully my hands work, sorting through the ingredients and turning them into masterpieces of culinary art. I want not only to feed my dear Friend but also to surprise Him with the meal I prepare. I become completely absorbed in my work.

While I am working, I hear the familiar knock—this time on the refrigerator—and the question, “May I look inside?” This time I feel neither fear nor shame, but indignation fills my mind. Nevertheless, out of respect for my Guest, I consent. Jesus opens the door and quietly examines the contents, carefully reading the ingredients of the prepared foods and other products. I watch Him from the corner of my eye. A real storm begins in my thoughts. I want so much to tell Him not to intrude where He has not been invited, but remembering my shame during the previous inspection of my rooms, I decide to remain silent. When the Lord deliberately takes two attractive packages and throws them into the trash, I become indignant, yet try to ask calmly, “What are You doing, Jesus?” He smiles and indicates that He will answer later. Closing the refrigerator, He returns to the living room.

At last supper is ready, the table is set, and we sit opposite each other and begin to eat. I decide to impress my Guest with a prayer of thanksgiving for the food and solemnly ask for a blessing upon the meal we are about to partake of. I am surprised that Jesus does not say the customary “Amen” after

the prayer, though He sits down to eat with me. Our friendly conversation begins. When I place on my plate what my eyes have chosen, I hear a quiet knock on the table and the question, "What is on your plate?" This is too much! I simply explode with indignation. All my resentment pours out, and I express everything that has been filling me. He listens silently and smiles modestly. When I run out of words, I begin to wonder why Jesus asked me this question. I decide to answer and start listing the foods on my plate. I do not understand why He is so interested in what I eat. Is it not enough that cleanliness reigns in my rooms? As I name the foods, I watch Jesus, trying to understand what He wishes to communicate to me. I ask the question troubling me: "Lord, why did You not say 'Amen' at the end of the prayer?" He calmly replies that He cannot bless what the Word of God does not sanctify as fit for food. I feel uneasy. I quickly try to remember what the Bible says about diet, and the Lord prompts me to consider Leviticus chapter 11. Unable to restrain myself, I immediately open Acts 10:15: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." The Lord has been waiting for this answer and is not surprised in the least. But He says that Peter himself explained the meaning of the vision afterward in Acts 10:28: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." This verse appears in a new light to my mind. I look at the Bible, then at the table, and suddenly realize that before me lies what God has forbidden as food—and I want to feed it to Jesus. How ashamed I am. Nervously, I begin removing from the table everything the Word of God calls unclean. I ask Jesus, "But did not the New Testament cleanse everything? And is not the kingdom of God goodness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, rather than meat and drink?" He calmly replies that God does not change, and what He once designated as unclean and an abomination for food will remain so forever. I begin to understand and fall into thought.

But supper continues. I eat what remains on the table, and then we move on to tea. Our conversation proceeds as I think it

should. I have many questions and receive answers. I cut myself a large piece of cake and am just about to eat it when I hear a quiet knock on the table and the question, "What is on your plate?" This time I feel sick with the premonition that something is wrong again. I do not become indignant, though it is very unpleasant to realize that my Guest is examining the contents of my plate. He should look at His own. But I ask, "Lord, what is wrong this time?" He replies with another question: "Wilt thou be made whole?" What a familiar question; I have heard it before. What does He mean? I nod.

He points to a book on my shelf about the principles of healthful eating and indicates that everything is written there and that success awaits me if I observe all these principles.

I immediately remember those who tried to teach me these principles—their attitude toward me, their sense of superiority, and their dislike of people who lived differently. I shudder at the thought that I must become like them. The Lord smiles and says, "My grace is sufficient for thee. When you approach these questions with love, you will see all the beauty of health reform. As a reward, you will gain health and a clear mind. Temperance in all things will become your way of thinking, and you will look cheerfully upon life. Disease will be removed from you. Happiness will fill your heart, and you will be able to share it with others."

When I object that the Internet now contains so much information of this kind that one does not know what to believe, He says, "First study this message in its pure form. Then you will be able to distinguish the clean from the unclean even in the networks of the Internet."

I ponder this. Can these things truly be so important and interconnected? I understand that just as the hand is connected to the body, health reform is very important for me. If my mind is not overloaded by an abundance and excessive variety of food, but receives everything necessary, it will also handle spiritual matters excellently and evaluate everything in the right light.

I look at my plate and think about how ignorant I am in this matter. But I decide to study what the Lord counsels.

I ask Him to give me love so that it may be the motivating force in my study of God's message. I receive the assurance that love is now mine and that the Lord will teach me to perceive and share everything in its light. How fascinating and joyful this is!

In the spirit of love, I begin to see much more, and the understanding of how important proper nutrition is becomes a light in my home. Confidently, I open my refrigerator and am horrified by what fills it. Now I understand Jesus as He examined its contents and studied the ingredients of the products. He desires to give me the happiness of health, and this is so pleasant to understand. How good it is that Jesus sent me this light. I am beginning to understand that many illnesses come as a consequence of my ignorance, and I decide to change my habits.

Homework 90

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. What does Jesus see on my plate?
3. Why did God make a distinction between the clean and the unclean?
4. Do I need health reform? If so, for what purpose?
5. Will I be saved through knives and forks? Do I need righteousness through diet?
6. Do I glorify God by what I eat?
7. Please read Isaiah 66:15-17; 2 Chronicles 20:20; 1 Samuel 15:22; and Luke 21:34 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 91. May I Look Inside Your Closet?

Jesus is in my home! He is with me everywhere. I handed Him the keys to all my doors and asked Him to maintain order in our home of happiness and love. But He politely returned the keys, making me understand that only I can open the locked doors of my soul. He respects my choice and gives me freedom to make my own decisions.

I have understood that the Lord knows perfectly well which of my rooms He needs to enter. If I do not wish to let Him into a certain place, He sorrowfully withdraws while remaining the same loving Friend. But I have also noticed that if I say no to Jesus when He knocks on one of my locked doors, He stops knocking on the other locked doors as well. I know how this can be corrected, but I do not always want to do so. In my home there is a basement called “the pride of life.” I enjoy bringing people from the street, my neighbors, strangers, and sometimes friends into this place. But if Jesus desires to go down there, I find a thousand excuses to distract His attention.

I have noticed that whenever I am preparing to go somewhere and put on suitable clothing, the Lord stands at the door of my closet and knocks, asking, “May I look inside your closet?”

I dislike it when my friends rummage through my clothes, but I cannot refuse Jesus. He examines my wardrobe very carefully and divides the clothing into two categories, leaving both groups in the closet. Respectable garments hang on the right; all the others are placed elsewhere.

I have a question: “Lord, what difference does it make what I wear? Is not the main thing that I believe in You and love You?” Yet even as I ask, I understand that I am being hypocritical. I wait for an answer.

The Lord helps me understand that clothing is a calling card by which many people determine whether I belong to the world or to another community. I am a priest of the living God, and I must always remember this when I go out among people. This means that my clothing should be clean, not torn, respectable,

modest, appropriate to my sex, and suitable for the time in which I live. It should not advertise this world.

Jesus has placed the label “love of the world” on certain garments, but I cannot understand why He did so. After all, I paid an outrageous amount of money for them, and they represent the latest fashion. I simply do not want to accept my Friend’s taste because then I will feel like the odd one out.

But Jesus does not change His preferences, and His expectations correspond to high standards. When I agree with Him and accept dress reform, He asks what I will do with the garments He rejected. Of course I will keep them; let them remain in the closet in case I need them someday. But Jesus makes me understand that they may become a snare to me. I do not understand this approach and desire to examine the subject more carefully. I invite Christ to discuss it and present my counterarguments. He listens calmly and explains that diet and clothing are simple tests of faithfulness in my life by which the unseen world can easily determine the condition of my heart. Yet woe is me if I make these things a criterion of my salvation or a standard by which to judge the spirituality of those around me.

I realize that I do not fully understand what has been said, but Jesus assures me that changes first take place in the heart and then in outward conduct. A person must understand God’s requirements and expectations with his mind and live in obedience.

When I go to a store to buy clothing, Jesus greatly desires to be beside me and waits for my invitation. The Savior desires me to let Him into every area of my life so that He may have the opportunity to help me in everything.

When I choose clothing, I do not merely ask for something I can put on. I walk past racks and counters, paying attention to the items that appeal to me. I take them into the fitting room and look at myself in the mirror. I make sure the size fits. I see whether the color suits me and whether the garment coordinates with my other clothing. I imagine how I look to

others and whether I resemble my favorite movie actor. I wonder whether my friends will admire me. Then I decide to buy the item. At home I put it on and go out among people. My clothing did not end up on me by accident; I chose it.

The enemy of souls presents his latest fashions to the world and tells people how sensual these garments are. He assures them that everyone will desire them. Then he takes these same items and brings them to God's children, declaring that they are respectable and comfortable. When hot weather comes, Satan persuades me to wear so little that the air can freely reach every part of my body, insisting that it does not matter how this appears to others. Anyone who expresses disapproval of my appearance can confidently be called a fanatic or a Pharisee who understands nothing about life. I am not naked; I am merely lightly dressed.

The enemy of souls has created an even more sophisticated culture of exposed bodies and has made it seem so important and necessary to everyone that if I reject it, people begin to consider me insane and place me on a blacklist of strange individuals. Beaches and swimming pools have become customary places where the sight of my nearly naked body is considered perfectly respectable, because the body supposedly needs sunbathing. I even ask Jesus to be with me and bless me with rest and an even tan. My dear sisters possess such graceful bodies that it is very pleasant for the eyes to look at them. The small pieces of cloth with which they have lightly covered themselves do not prevent me from seeing what beautiful forms the Lord has given them. My thoughts are pure. I rest and disconnect from the whole world simply to lie in the sun, read the Bible, and think about nothing.

Then I hear a knock at the door of my heart and the question, "What are you doing here?" "I am sunbathing, Lord! Lie down beside me; I have time to fellowship with You!" In reply I hear, "Dost thou not know that thou art wretched and naked?" What strange words. "I am not naked; I am wearing swimming trunks. Do not classify me as a nudist—I have not fallen that far."

Then I begin to think. If the Lord describes me this way, it must be true. But I cannot remove the culture of vacationing from my mind. I grew up with it and do not know what could replace this way of spending time. Life loses all meaning if I cannot go to the sea or a lake for vacation. This is the whole point: you save all year for a vacation, spend the money on your pleasures in two weeks, and then post your photographs on social media to delight your friends with the natural scenery your eyes beheld. If this is removed from life, a person might even fall into depression.

But the Lord says, “Thou art naked, and I counsel thee to buy of Me white raiment, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.”

What should I do? Once again, I have received a blow to the head. I long so much for Eternity, yet I also want to sunbathe on the beach. How can I combine the two? A vacation spent on my balcony does not appeal to me at all. Why is my dear Jesus so particular? He probably understands nothing about my need for rest. But I will try to listen. How boring.

Lord, help me understand You! I am accustomed to living differently, and Your requirements are foreign to me!

I enter the sanctuary and come to myself. I need a new heart—right now, here. I will not let You go, except You bless me! Save me, Lord, from myself!

Homework 91

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Does it matter to God how I dress?
3. What constitutes immodest clothing? Where can a standard of modesty be found?
4. What does respectable and modest clothing look like?
5. What should I do if people wearing immodest clothing come to our gathering?
6. Please read Exodus 20:26; Isaiah 47:2-3; Deuteronomy 22:5; Leviticus 21:10; and Matthew 6:25 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 92. I Knocked, but You Did Not Hear

If I tried to stop any car on the street, I could say with certainty that music would be playing in almost every vehicle. It would differ in meaning and volume, but it would be there. For many people, listening to music and radio programs has become an artificial filler for the mind without which most can no longer imagine their existence in this world.

God, for His part, desires to fill my mind with His melody of love so that it may sound within my heart as beautiful music upon the strings of my soul, fill the whole realm of my perception, and spread its fragrance into the world around me.

Good and evil are engaged in a battle for the human mind, and the epicenter of this conflict lies between my right ear and my left.

God has made my salvation so simple and easy that if I merely show interest and begin seeking in this direction, I will find what brings peace to my soul.

Wherever on Earth I may find myself and whichever path I take, I will always eventually reach the ocean that surrounds the continents. In the same way, God's love surrounds us on every side. Whatever direction in life I choose, in the end I will always encounter it. The only question is: on which side of the barricades will I be at that moment?

Love is the union of mercy and justice. By choosing God's plan for my salvation, I come under His mercy. By choosing another path in life, I will encounter God's justice and taste the fruit of what I sowed throughout my life.

The Lord calls, knocks, seeks, and waits for those who will hear and open the door.

I learned from the pastor that Christ desires to enter the home of my heart as well. I prepared for this meeting. I washed all the rooms, bought delicacies for supper, hid everything improper in secret places, and swept the extra rubbish under the rug. I selected romantic music as a background for our

conversation and sat down to wait for my dear Friend. To pass the time, I turned on the television, selected my favorite channel, and while watching the events unfold on a talk show, began reflecting on the wonderful Eternity awaiting me in the near future. Minutes, hours, days, and weeks passed, but my Friend still did not come. How strange.

During this time, I realized that television imposes its programs upon me, while on the Internet I can choose what I want to see and hear. I quickly learned to find my favorite films and songs, and there was simply not enough of my life for all of them. I even began taking time away from sleep. Whenever I turned on computer games, I lost all sense of time and remained occupied with them from morning until morning.

I wonder how Jesus would evaluate this if He came while I was engaged in these activities. Somewhere deep in my soul I understand that something is wrong, but I will wait until the Lord Himself shows it to me.

It is strange that He has not come for so long. But I can read about Him.

I read, study carefully, discover many things for myself, and begin to see astonishing truths. I try to pray, and it works. Then in prayer I decide to ask Him why He has still not come to my home, although I am ready for His visit. In a dream the Lord answers me: "I knocked, but you did not hear. I called you by name, but your television was louder." I awaken in a cold sweat. What should I do? Jesus is never mistaken. But how can I live in silence? I decide to replace all my songs and films with Christian ones. From across the Internet I begin collecting everything filmed and sung about Christ. I listen, watch, and wait for Jesus, but He still does not come. I find Christian computer games, and now I play while learning the truth. Something begins to settle in my mind.

Yet Jesus still does not come to me.

What other good thing could I do so that He would consider it an honor to come to my home? I need to surprise Him somehow. I have an idea! I will take money and gifts to an

orphanage. Surely that will attract Heaven's attention to me. I do it. Silence again.

Most likely, I have misunderstood something.

But the message concerning Christ's desired visit gives me no peace. I want to understand the reason and discover what I am doing wrong. Perhaps something is wrong within me.

I decide to ask Christ personally why He has not come to visit me.

I begin to pray. I ask for the gift of repentance and understanding. Once again, the Lord gives me a revelation in a dream: "I knocked, but you did not hear."

Now I am completely confused. I decide to watch nothing and play no games. I sit and wait. I hear a quiet knock but pay no attention; God does not knock that way. The knock comes again. I will see who is there. I approach the door and hear a gentle voice calling me by name. I open the door, and Jesus Himself is standing there. I invite Him into the house and immediately to the table. I begin telling Him everything I watched and listened to during those days. Sadly, the Lord states that throughout all the time I was occupied with myself, He had been knocking and calling so that He might enter. My astonishment knows no bounds. How could this be? He explains that while my mind receives food from another source, God can give me nothing and do nothing for me. The Lord will not share His place with the world. But I do not go out into the world; I sit at home and observe what is happening. Is that wrong? Jesus helps me understand that my mind is like a vessel. Whatever is placed in it will remain there, and nothing else can fit into a pitcher that is already full. My vessel is filled with everything indiscriminately.

I decide to cleanse my heart from the filth of this world. I find training programs on this subject. I study and exert tremendous effort. I will prove to everyone that I too can do something to achieve my own purity.

But then I notice strange things. I try to forget everything I once watched and heard, yet it continually rises in my memory and entices me. I think about good things, but evil scenes from my favorite films return whenever I need to make the right decision, and I become confused about what is actually right. My favorite actors presented quick solutions to every problem so convincingly that at times I hesitate to choose God's way because it is so difficult and narrow, with so many dangers and pitfalls. Yet I long so much for Eternity. They say that heavenly music is always playing there.

Oh, music! It is a world of its own. I simply cannot live without it. Life loses its beauty. Music fascinates me with its notes and captivates my mind, immersing me in a world of sensual pleasure and memories. I have become so accustomed to living in it. Some people say that not all music is beneficial. They understand nothing. Still, I wonder what Christ likes. How can I understand His taste? I will ask Him.

Again I have a dream in which I see only two sources of music that are completely unlike one another. One is pure and melodious, draws the mind toward thoughts of Heaven, and sings of God's love for humanity. The other contains everything indiscriminately and even incorporates elements of Divine harmony in order to attract inexperienced minds and capture them in its snares. Who will deliver me from this web? I have entangled my mind so thoroughly that I can no longer do anything myself.

I call Jesus for help. I promise not to watch or listen to anything unclean, and I remove all this rubbish from my home. I weep because of my helplessness. I understand that by myself I can no longer change anything within me, but I believe in the One Who Is Love and can do far more than I can imagine. I surrender my will into His hands and begin learning melodies of love that are new to me. An unexplored world opens before me.

Homework 92

1. Was anything new revealed to you in this lesson?
2. What prevents Jesus from entering my life?

3. Why does the Lord respect my choice and refrain from imposing His blessings?
4. Does music affect my spiritual health? How can I distinguish bad music from good music?
5. Does Jesus knock at every heart?
6. Does Jesus enter the home of everyone who waits for Him in his heart?
7. Please read Revelation 3:20; Luke 23:8-9; Ecclesiastes 2:8, 11; and Philippians 4:8 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 93. If You Open to Me, I Will Open to You

The Word of God contains a great many promises from God. They can all be divided into conditional and unconditional promises.

Unconditional promises will be fulfilled at the time appointed by God. They do not depend on my faith in them, on my conduct, or on my new birth. Their fulfillment depends only on the dates and times established by God. Such promises include the beginning of the time of judgment, the Second Coming of Christ, the millennial kingdom, the pouring out of the seven last plagues, the judgment of the wicked, and the final destruction of sin.

God's conditional promises are intended to accomplish a particular work if I, or we, fulfill the conditions stated in the promise itself. For example, we read in Matthew 7:7-8: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

God's care for me is constant and unconditional. My heart beats regardless of my conduct, and my body knows what it must do and how to do it without consulting me. The air on Earth continues to contain the balanced mixture of gases necessary for my life.

But everything concerning my salvation from the power of sin depends on my choice and the decision of my will. God does not simply distribute the blessings of salvation, but waits until I see them, understand them, and desire to receive them. I must earnestly ask Christ for certain gifts. And there are some things I will never be able to receive, even if I plead for them. This happens when God sees that such a gift would harm my soul.

In the message to Laodicea, the Lord promises to grant His throne to those who overcome. I once thought that this promise rightfully belonged to me simply because I had been born again

during the Laodicean period. I could not even imagine anything else.

When I read 1 John 5:4–5—“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”—I understood that I was an overcomer. But when I began to study the message to Laodicea more deeply, I realized that my faith was not sufficient for me to be an overcomer in the last days. I need to understand and fulfill the conditions described and offered by Christ in this message. I cannot bypass them and claim the title of overcomer while using outdated weapons. The Lord will not bless me with His gifts against my will or in response to my ignorance and unwillingness to devote time to understanding this message. Either I study, accept, and fulfill everything He offers and become an overcomer, or I decide that I can conquer everything without His weapons and conditions and, as a result, lose the battle and forfeit all the promised blessings.

What, then, does it mean to be an “overcomer”?

This word must be understood correctly. If I remain only on the defensive, successfully repelling the enemy’s attacks, I will never become an overcomer; I will merely be defending my soul on my own territory. An overcomer is one who goes on the offensive, risks his life, seizes the enemy and takes him captive, conquering new territory. After the victory, he continues to control the situation by establishing his authority in the captured territories.

If I do not have the weapons necessary for victory, I may win a couple of battles, but in the end I will lose the war. For the enemy of souls is a highly skilled warrior, and his army possesses modern weapons beyond anything I can imagine.

The Lord knows whom we are fighting, and therefore He has provided in advance for every detail of this great controversy. He guarantees victory to everyone who accepts His full armor offered to Laodicea.

When Jesus asks me to open the door, He assures me that He will come in and sup with me, and I with Him.

What an interesting strategy. We eat supper and enjoy a friendly conversation, while at the same time great victories are taking place in my heart. My mind is cleansed, my heart is refined, my spirit is revived, my house is purified, and my will clings to my dear Friend.

And our friendship does not end there. The more time we spend together, the more interesting our conversations become. Then, at a certain point, my Lord leads me to an open door, opens it even wider for me, and invites me to enter. I look at His actions in amazement. Jesus once opened a door for Philadelphia, but it was buried beneath the clutter of busyness and indifference and was lost from sight. Yet the Lord assures me once again that He is the Door for His sheep and invites me to enter.

Amazing opportunities of infinite love open before me: a boundless ocean, endless light, joy, and peace. I ask, "Why is such mercy shown to me, a sinner?" and I see my own door standing open for Jesus. I begin to understand something. Our relationship has already progressed so far, and I have clung so closely to Jesus, that the Lord has decided to initiate me into the depths of His love, revealing the beauty and power of His character. How fascinating! I could never even have imagined such a thing. Christ Himself introduces me to the world of His soul, and I see a love so pure that I marvel at its perfection. Although this door had always been open to everyone, only the chosen could enter it—those who had opened their own doors.

I look upward and see the windows of Heaven, which are also open to pour out blessings upon God's obedient and faithful children.

And I understand that with such a Friend it is impossible to lose. He truly is the Victor. I saw many evil people try to strike the ocean of love. It yielded beneath their blows, then later came crashing down upon them from above, engulfing the victims of sin in its waters and offering them the opportunity to begin a new and pure life. But many fled in fear, frightened by

the crystal clarity of its vast expanses. I saw streams of water pouring through the windows of Heaven, carrying away the wicked and filling the homes of the righteous with joy. How harmoniously everything was arranged! What great victories love achieves!

Why is this beauty of love hidden from our eyes, so that only a few can see it? Yet this is the very essence of the great controversy: each person must decide for himself on whose side he will wage war. Love respects my freedom.

When I buy from Christ what is offered to me, I gain all Heaven with it. When I let the Lord into my house and open my doors to Him, I show the entire unseen world Who is the Master of my life and to Whom my soul belongs. We enter into a marriage relationship with Christ, and He has no secrets from me. He opens Himself to me completely. But what a wretched man I am! How can my limited mind comprehend and receive all this beauty and power? Only God can reveal and convey all this to me.

I enter the open door and want to remain there. But the Lord gently tells me that it is not yet time: not all souls have yet been taken from the enemy, and the banner of Love has not yet been established in every territory. There is still work to be done and the final victory to be won. I agree and put on love. My mind is immersed in its life-giving waters and absorbs its strength and authority.

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me!

I put on love. What an interesting weapon it is! I must learn to use its power and capabilities. It is an entire science that I have yet to comprehend.

Homework 93

1. Did you hear anything new for yourself in this lesson?
2. What does an "open door" mean in my house and in Jesus?
3. How can I become an overcomer?
4. Why does only the overcomer receive the reward, rather than everyone who took part in the spiritual war?

5. What does spiritual warfare look like in real life?
6. Who is the loser, or the one who is defeated, in this war?
Why is it better not to be one of them?
7. Please read Ephesians 6:10-13; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6;
Revelation 3:7-8; 21:7; and John 10:7-10 in the light of our
lesson.

Lesson 94. See How Satan Has Deceived You

The events of the last days have always aroused special interest in every generation. As that time draws nearer, more and more details about it are revealed. Let us read the following verses in Matthew 24: “And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (verse 3).

The Lord had been waiting for this question, and He had something to say. With prophetic vision, Jesus looked into the future and drew back the veil, shedding light on what would happen to Jerusalem and what would take place before His Second Coming. He did not separate these two predictions, thereby enabling the people of our time to understand that these events would resemble one another and would have special significance for us. The Savior began His account with what concerned His heart most of all.

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (verses 4-5).

The Lord warned that the deception of the last days would be extremely seductive and overpowering. After listing certain events, He speaks again of deception: “And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (verses 10-11).

The Lord warns us that the deceptions of the last days will be exceedingly destructive and that the trial will be impossible to withstand: “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (verse 22).

Very powerful temptations lie ahead of us, capable of shaking the faith even of God’s elect children: “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall

shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (verses 23–24).

The result of all these deceptions will be the spread of lawlessness among God’s believing children: “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (verse 12).

As a result of this condition, many who once believed and were fervent will abandon the foundational principles of their faith and begin to behave very strangely: “And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken” (verse 49). This verse closely echoes the final warning of Revelation 14:8: “And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

The general condition of everyone living on Earth in those days will be characterized by the words, “And knew not...” (verse 39).

I invite you to consider what is happening to us now. We live in an age of global enlightenment. Thanks to the development of the Internet, in a short time I can find information in text or video on any subject, even on the subject of salvation. For this reason, it is now very difficult, and sometimes physically impossible, to determine what is true and what is not. The danger of the fatal deception of our day lies in the fact that falsehood does not appear before us in its pure form; instead, it is mixed with truth in a very small concentration. But even if the poison of lawlessness is present at only 0.001 percent, it does not lose its deadly power. Like a little leaven, it leavens the whole lump.

And we are living in this time without even realizing the full power of the deception.

For example, I will now list a few names, and you may observe how you perceive them: Coca-Cola, Snickers, McDonald’s—or Mercedes, BMW, and Ferrari. We understand what these names refer to even if we have no direct contact with the products of these companies. Yet they surround us and are

familiar to us. This familiarity comes through advertising in the media and through the frequent repetition of these names all around us. The companies listed above, along with many others, do not kill us; rather, they introduce us to a world of quality, taste, and pleasure. Most of what surrounds us is not bad in itself and often makes our daily lives easier, but the number of these things has increased so greatly that we have simply become satiated with them. This satiation is also present in the spiritual realm. We who live in the civilized digital world have lost our thirst for the simple truths that bring simple happiness to the soul. The mind is overflowing with information.

Ecclesiastes 1:8 truly describes us: "All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."

No matter how much I look, it is never enough. The brain wants to learn something new and unusual; it craves sensations and explosions. It does not tire of watching and listening, but the spiritual person within me is starving to death, for love grows cold in this torrent of news and whirlpool of abundance. At times I deliberately disconnect from this world so that I can be alone with Jesus, discuss the details of my salvation with Him, and learn His will for me. Then I turn the world back on, and it pours its indiscriminate flood over me once again. Who can stand?

I take the Bible and begin to read: "Take heed that no man deceive you." How well said! I must guard myself. I read further and find a frightening declaration addressed to me: "Thou art neither cold nor hot." I examine the meaning of the accusation and read that I do not even know that I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. To me, it sounds approximately like this: "See how Satan has deceived you!" I do not want to agree with such words. From my experience, I can prove that they are not true. I am actually better than that. There is, however, one problem: I know what the wine of Babylon tastes like. In one way or another, I have tasted it, and it has exerted its destructive influence upon my mind. Yet God calls me to proclaim the message that Babylon, in which I live,

has fallen. If I do not want to fall with it, I must come out of it. But how? And what is Babylon? Who will help me?

Jesus offers a way out. He knew that love within me would grow cold, that none of it would remain, and that I would cover all the sins of my lawless heart with nothing more than a name. But the Lord does not permit me to remain forever in the snares of such deception. His kind heart still loves me and desires to save me from temptation; therefore, He offers me the only remedy capable of resisting all these temptations—Himself in all His fullness. Nothing else will help me.

Heaven marvels at the Lord's attention and love toward fallen human beings. It would have been easier simply to wipe us from the face of the Earth and forget us, but the Lord enters this filth to find me there, wash me, and save me. What love! How briefly and clearly He points out the true way. And how great are the temptations that surround me. I look at Jesus and begin to understand, begin to think, begin to try, and begin to receive what He has promised. I take my eyes off Him and fall into darkness, satiation, and idleness. How warm and comfortable it is there! If only I could drift along like this all the way to Eternity. But I hear a knock at the door and a familiar Voice. I come to myself, run to open the door, and let love in. Love comes to fill me and to pour out through me upon those around me. What a wonderful protection! How repulsive the temptations appear in its light! I repent and go wherever the Lord leads me.

I see the deceptions and avoid them. They also arise from within, but I choose love. How grateful I am to Jesus that He came to save me from temptation!

Homework 94

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Why did Jesus speak so much about the deceptions of the last days?
3. Can the sleep of the ten virgins in the parable of Matthew 25 be compared with the present deceptions of the world?

4. How can we avoid these insidious deceptions of the last days?
5. What means has the Lord chosen to enable us to stand amid temptation and not fall under its influence?
6. Deception and seduction—what are they?
7. Please read Ecclesiastes 2:3, 13; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Mark 13:33–37; Revelation 3:2–3; and 2 Timothy 3:1–5 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 95. Spiritual Warfare

We are all at war. Whether we want it or not, we take part in daily battles. In the spiritual world, a struggle is being waged for our souls, for possession of our minds and wills. This war has its own rules and laws. God and Satan are at war with one another, and God's angels and the fallen angels are in constant conflict. The final outcome of this war is already known: Satan and his angels will be completely destroyed, and with them will come the end of sin, disease, suffering, and death. God will cleanse the entire universe, leaving no trace of sin, and only the wounds on Christ's body will remind us of the great price that was paid for our salvation.

Now I need to understand where I am and what is happening around me. If I do not understand the laws and characteristics of spiritual warfare, I risk joining the ranks of God's enemies and supporting them through my ignorance and indifference. But the Lord desires me to be His ally, to understand what is taking place, to be an overcomer, and to receive the reward. In the second and third chapters of Revelation, I read that overcomers will be given wonderful rewards and spiritual privileges in Eternal life. God will fulfill these promises in the lives of all who fought on His side. Christ has already defeated His enemy, but the war for our souls continues, and the Savior is carrying on this struggle because He does not desire anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance.

What do I imagine when I hear the word "war"?

War is a conflict between opposing sides for the purpose of establishing their own laws, rules, and order and imposing their ideology. At its foundation lies the desire to force the enemy to surrender his freedom, rights, property, and territory and to submit his will to the victor.

I picture war as an armed confrontation involving military equipment and various means of destroying the enemy's forces. Spiritual warfare has different characteristics, although souls also perish in it.

In the universal conflict, questions arose concerning God's supreme authority, His right to be the sole Ruler of the universe, and Christ's right to be equal with God the Father and to receive the honor and worship of all intelligent beings inhabiting the world created by God. One being arose who opposed the established order of things. He desired to possess God's authority, not out of love for creation, but to satisfy his own ambitions and his desire to receive honor and worship from the inhabitants of Heaven. The name of this rebellious being was Lucifer, which means "shining one."

God could not allow His creature to take the place of the Creator of the entire universe, and He made it clear to His adversary that all supreme authority belongs to the Creator alone. In this conflict, our Lord used only His eternal principles—Truth, the Word, and Love—upon which God's throne is founded.

Satan, however, began to use methods that were unacceptable to God, thereby deceiving all who lived in the heavenly dwellings. Because Lucifer occupied the highest position in angelic society, it was easy for him to conceal his true plans and sow seeds of discontent and doubt. When the secret conflict grew into open confrontation, the decision was made to remove Satan and his followers from Heaven, away from the presence of God.

Revelation 12:7-9 states: "And there was war in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

But God's enemies were not destroyed immediately. They were given the opportunity to show everyone where sin leads and what its consequences are. Heavenly beings needed to understand what the universe would become if Lucifer were permitted to put his plans into action.

At that time death did not yet exist, and none of the inhabitants of Heaven understood where this rebellion would lead. Therefore, Satan had many supporters and sympathizers in the conflict that had erupted.

Adam fell through Satan's deceptions, thereby allowing him to exercise authority over all the descendants of the first human beings and to exert his destructive influence upon them. But at the very beginning of humanity's fall, God gave hope by granting people the power to resist sin if they chose God's side in this conflict.

Christ's death made Satan's true plans clear and tore away the mask behind which he had hidden his real intentions. Although this event ensured Satan's defeat in the spiritual war, it did not yet bring the conflict to an end. God's enemy decided simply to take revenge upon the Victor by destroying everything and everyone, while God determined to restore His image in fallen humanity despite the great deception under which deceived people had fallen.

In our day, spiritual warfare has reached its climax. God allowed human beings to develop all their abilities and revealed to them the secrets of the microcosm and digital technologies so that, within this invisible world, He might show His presence and the harmony of the laws by which the universe is ordered. But the enemy of humanity has taken all these discoveries as weapons in order to use them to destroy unfortunate, deceived souls.

This war is now in full force, and it is being waged in my head. The enemy of souls persuades his human allies to impose the fallen angel's ideology upon others, presenting it in an attractive light and making people dependent on harmful habits and the power of sin. God, however, seeks allies through whom He can destroy Satan's plans and temptations, bring deceived souls into His light, and grant them freedom from the power of sin and error.

Whichever of these opposing powers succeeds in persuading me—that is the side I will take in this war.

The final conflict called Armageddon is approaching, where love and truth on God's side will meet falsehood and sin on the devil's side face to face. We human beings will take part in this battle as representatives of one side or the other.

God now desires to clothe us in the whole armor of God so that He may wage this war within us. He longs to endow me with all the fullness and power of His love, for only when my spirit and soul abide in it can I be properly oriented and understand God's desires and plans for the final victory over sin.

The expression "without love, I am nothing and it profiteth me nothing" will one day become very clear to many who had the opportunity to receive love and learn to live by it, but were too busy to give it their attention and time.

Why must love be the source of victory? Love is the condition of my mind when it is in direct communion with God. In this state, I understand what to do, how to believe, what God desires, what is abhorrent to Him, where the enemy's traps have been set, and how to avoid them. Love gives answers to every question, for love itself is the answer. From God's side, the essence of the great controversy is to teach me to live in love. The enemy, however, seeks to deprive me of this power so that I will try to solve my problems myself and look for other paths to salvation.

Love and truth are the victor's banner; they are Christ living in the heart. They are God's triumph in my heart. They are an influence upon those around me and the eternal prospect of spiritual growth in God's presence. They are Eternity within me.

It was love that defeated the enemy at the cross, and now love is conquering within me.

Homework 95

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Where does spiritual warfare take place, and how should this be understood?
3. What is my part in this war, and what depends on me?

4. Why is it important to understand the rules of war and to have the whole armor of God?
5. Why do I need love in order to wage war?
6. How will the Lord gain the victory in the final battle?
7. Please read Ephesians 6:11-17; Revelation 12:7-9; Daniel 10:13; Jude 9; Psalm 46:10-12; Joshua 5:13-14; and Revelation 19:11-15 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 96. The Overcomer

Who is an overcomer? And whom does Heaven regard as an overcomer? Jesus uses this word many times to describe those who will receive a particular reward for their achievements in the war.

I always considered myself an overcomer simply because I believe in Christ. After all, 1 John 5:4-5 says: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" It was enough for me that the Bible called me this. I automatically regarded all the promises given to those who overcome as my own without even considering what or whom I was overcoming. But the Lord drew my attention to this concept when, through the power of Jesus, I actually began to gain victories in my heart.

If I bear the Lord's name but allow the carnal person to lead me into temptation and exert his influence through me, it is very difficult for me to call myself an overcomer in the light of the Bible. Resolving conflicts or problems through the flesh can be very quick and effective. For example, if a relative vexes me with constant faultfinding and insults, I will probably resolve the conflict immediately if I answer him sharply, shout at him, threaten him with physical violence, grab him by the collar, or even strike him. It will not happen again. My relative will lose all desire to trouble me with his complaints and may even begin to respect me. But if I begin to endure his attacks and respond with love, not allowing myself even an angry thought against him, his faultfinding may grow into constant ridicule and abuse directed at me. It may continue for years without any prospect of improvement.

Which path would you choose? Of course, I have painted the picture in darker colors, but unfortunately there are some very strange people who understand the language of harshness well. They can live peacefully under tyranny and dictatorship, going about their usual affairs and challenging no one's authority. But

if they are shown tenderness and love, they turn into monsters who will not rest as long as I am alive and continue to love them. It is a paradox. Yet this is often precisely what happens with those who are not open to the influence of the Holy Spirit. The enemy of human souls knows how to use such people and, through them, make life difficult for God's children. It is not uncommon for another carnal person, upon seeing an injustice committed against a loving Christian, to intervene and threaten physical violence against those who are ready to harm God's children. Then everything becomes quiet. I have often heard such experiences in my friends' stories from their military service.

Nevertheless, none of these examples constitutes a rule for a loving heart. There are situations in life that we may encounter, and then we need to know what to do.

If a mother punishes her child and strikes him with a belt for disobedience, is that good or bad? It is difficult to give an unequivocal answer. There is a great difference between a child who is three years old and one who is thirty-three. But it is also very important to understand the spirit in which the punishment is administered and how wisely it is carried out.

Who, then, is an overcomer in the light of the Bible? An overcomer is one who possesses the mind of an overcomer and conquers every temptation, every enticement, and every form of pride arising from without and within, while being guided by love and obedience to the truth. Only one who knows the Word of God, studies God's law, and has submitted to its requirements can be an overcomer. An overcomer sees the danger of violating the Lord's principles and does everything within his power to remain faithful to them. If he lacks wisdom and strength, he asks for them from above and receives them. An overcomer is one who has come to know Christ, has met Him personally, has given Him his life, and remains in constant communion with God, continuing to study His will, to know the character of Jesus more deeply, to ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time to live in love toward God and people.

Being an overcomer is a conscious state of mind that understands the war in which it is participating, the side to which it belongs, the rules and laws governing this war, the identity of its enemy, Satan's strategy, how to resist the forces of spiritual wickedness in high places, and how to tread on serpents and scorpions without exposing one's soul to mortal danger.

An overcomer has the mind of an overcomer. He cannot imagine defeat, although he recognizes the possibility of falling. But if he does fall, he immediately begins to seek a way out so that he may rise and move forward toward new victories. In his thoughts and feelings, such a person has become completely united with Jesus. He cannot understand how it is possible to lose.

In essence, Christ is the true Overcomer. I merely enter into His merits and follow Him in His footsteps, growing from glory to glory.

Without Him I can do nothing, for my enemy is stronger than I am and will quickly overcome me. But Jesus Himself, together with His angels, personally wages the war and teaches me to be an overcomer. Without my participation and consent, He will not fight the battles for my soul or credit His victories to me. I must desire this and ask Him for it. Everyone living on Earth benefits from God's general protection. It is called love and care for creation. Many people wage war unconsciously and overcome certain things by God's mercy. But they pose no danger to the enemy of souls, so he does not trouble them greatly. When a person consciously takes Christ's side and becomes God's warrior, however, Satan unleashes all his fury against him, trying to find a way to separate him from Jesus. The enemy understands that such people will themselves be saved and will then boldly invade his territory and draw their deceived neighbors to Jesus, persuading them to accept Christ as their personal Savior. They will have complete success in this, because Jesus Himself will fight for them and go wherever the saved can labor for the glory of God.

And what does an overcomer's victory look like? It rests upon faithfulness to God, an understanding of His will, and a constant connection with Him through prayer. My victory begins every morning at the moment when, in prayer, I place my life in God's hands and ask for His blessing and guidance for the new day. I plead with Him for love, protection, and wisdom to endure every trial. When temptation comes, my mind, trained by practice to identify temptations, recognizes it. Then I must decide what to do. Depending on the situation, I choose love, obedience, faithfulness, humility, purity, or tenderness. God immediately responds to my choice of His weapons and takes His place at my side, granting me His influence. At times the Lord allows me to make the decision and fight the battle myself so that I may see my weak places and learn complete trust in God's power.

To an observer, my victory may sometimes look like a modest smile, downcast eyes, an apology for causing inconvenience, a declaration of love, an assurance of friendship, an offer of help, prayerful support, kind and affectionate words of approval, a friendly attitude despite undeserved insults, leaving an argument, avoiding a disagreement, and much more depending on the situation. I cannot imagine acting according to the flesh when so much love and so many good opportunities are available to overcome Satan's evil designs. And God establishes me in this victory.

Homework 96

1. What new things did you learn for yourself from this lesson?
2. What does an overcomer overcome?
3. Can one be an overcomer while being an ordinary church member?
4. Why is it important to be an overcomer in the last days?
5. Do you know anyone among those close to you whom you could call an overcomer?
6. Do you desire to be an overcomer? Do you consider yourself one?

7. Please read Romans 12:21; 2 Peter 2:19; Revelation 21:7; 2 Corinthians 11:19-20; and Hebrews 11:32-34 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 97. The Overcoming Laodicean

God's people in the last days will have a special status and special guidance from God in their struggle against the forces of sin. The enemy of souls has centuries of experience in deceiving humanity and successfully applies his knowledge to tempt and destroy souls. It is simply impossible to withstand such temptations in our own strength.

At the same time, our generation of God's children possesses the fullness of the light and the knowledge of truth that was gathered over many years at the cost of blood, sleepless nights, and constant prayer, so that it might stand before us in all its depth, lacking nothing. This truth grants every seeker and every thirsty soul what the soul needs and the heart requires. The Lord Himself has come to teach each of us personally the knowledge that lies hidden in the earth like a concealed treasure, waiting to become the possession of all who seek it.

After Laodicea, there will be no further generation of believers whom the Lord has determined to endow even more generously with Heaven's special gifts. We are the final generation.

World events stir people's minds, and many think about how to preserve their wealth, how to survive these crises, and how to arrange life so that they will be comfortable. Only a few begin to ask what God desires to tell them.

An overcoming Laodicean is one who has accepted God's plan for the final conflict and has a very deep and personal relationship with Christ.

Let us examine the characteristics of the Laodicean overcomer, beginning with the conclusion of this message. It speaks of a person who has ears and hears what the Spirit says unto the churches. He listens attentively to all the blessings of previous generations. Such a Laodicean is also prepared to discern God's quiet voice amid the varied noise of this world and thousands of other voices. He knows how the Spirit speaks, and as a member of God's family, he recognizes his brothers and sisters by the Spirit among thousands of other people. God unites such

children of His into one team, binding them with ties of love and friendship. These believers will endure any trial and preserve their pure relationships forever. The hearing ear is given by God. Proverbs 20:12.

The Laodicean who overcomes receives a special blessing from God as his reward. He is granted the right to sit with Christ on His throne, just as Christ sat with the Father on His throne. It is now very difficult to understand what this means from Heaven's perspective, but I believe it refers to a special status that will exalt a person in God's sight before the entire universe.

It is written of Satan that he dreamed and planned to obtain this throne. Isaiah 14:13-14 says: "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High."

The enemy of humanity desired to become like God in authority and power, but not in love and character.

The Laodicean, however, does not crave what was Satan's cherished dream, but receives it as a reward for his desire to become like the Most High in love and character. The believer succeeds because Christ Himself desires to make him so. Jesus seeks to fill the lives of the saved with light and the special gifts of His love and to reveal within my heart the full depth of this Divine quality that human perception can comprehend.

I do not understand the meaning of the throne, but I understand what love is. It is interesting that the one who strives for power does not receive it and loses everything, while the one who thirsts for love receives from God love, authority, and everything else he did not even expect. Although I know of such a great reward, I do not understand what it is and do not seek to obtain it. For me, the greatest happiness is Christ: living with Him throughout all Eternity, seeing His face, and following Him wherever He goes. If He sits upon the throne and asks me to sit beside Him, I will gladly do so, simply to be near

Him. But without Jesus, I do not need even the most exalted throne.

In the conflict ahead and the approaching storm, I am more concerned not with the reward, but with how to prepare for these events so that I will not fall or lose hold of God's hand. It is important to me to remain faithful unto death.

I learned this because I spent much time with Jesus, inviting Him to supper and discussing all my plans and prospects with Him, communing with Him in purity of heart after allowing Him to put that heart in order. I became accustomed to supping with Him, and He with me.

An overcoming Laodicean is one who heard the quiet voice of Jesus, heard the knock at the door of his heart, and opened every area of his life to the Lord. He allowed God's love to put his soul in order and the blood of Jesus to wash his thoughts and feelings from every impurity and vice so that they might become absolutely pure. This knock at the door was desired and expected, for zeal for God's gifts and the gift of repentance had attuned my perception to hear and heed. All this took place because of the assurance of God's love and the chastening that Jesus, in His mercy, brought into my life. A fierce struggle was waged against my old man, who did not want to surrender or accept God's judgments and rebukes, but the Lord prevailed, for without Him I could do nothing. I simply chose life with Him and opened my heart to the truth, however difficult it might be for me.

Without God's wisdom, symbolized by the eyesalve, I probably would have seen nothing. But I bought this light and allowed its rays to illuminate my mind, and God granted me an understanding of what to do and how and where to go. I began to see the beauty of God's character and to behold it with the open eyes of my soul. This became possible through the merits of Christ and His righteousness, which was first imputed to me through faith in His merits and then became imparted righteousness within me through faith which worketh by love.

I see the advantage of the white raiment of God's light. When Jesus tore away all the filth of my ambitions, He clothed me in the purity of God's love and faith. This became possible through the purchase of heavenly riches symbolized by pure gold tried in the fire of Eternal love. I immersed myself in this boundless ocean of God's character in order to become a partaker of His nature. I allowed myself to be refined so that all the impurities of my nature and all my harmful habits might be burned away by heavenly fire and driven from my life, allowing the pure gold of God's character to shine. I began learning to become rich in true treasure, and now I can pay all my enemies, friends, and neighbors with God's love.

But I cannot imagine where I would have found all this if the Faithful and True Witness had not pointed out these heavenly goods to me and counseled me to purchase them.

If I had not learned of my true lukewarm condition and who I really am, I believe my mind would have continued sleeping and remaining satisfied with the achievements that, in my opinion, had clothed me, enriched me, and made me happy. What more did I need? The light shines, the Spirit is poured out, the work advances, and deeds are accomplished. But the Amen, the Beginning of the creation of God, came and began to demolish all my foundations. I saw that my true condition and my pride in my achievements and successes in spiritual growth made Him sick.

It is frightening to imagine what would have happened if I had stopped at any one of these stages of development and gone no further. I do not even want to describe the full horror of such a condition. Yet I also do not wish to credit myself with anything beyond what I have received, lest I become a hypocrite.

Search me, O Lord, and see whether I am on a dangerous path...

Homework 97

1. What was revealed to you in this lesson?
2. Who is an overcoming Laodicean? Describe the overcomer.

3. How do you understand what it means to sit upon the throne?
4. What motivates you toward Eternal life: the reward, or being with Christ?
5. Why is it important to learn to hear God's voice?
6. What reasons prevent you from becoming an overcomer, if any?
7. Please read 1 Samuel 3:7-10; Isaiah 50:4-5; Revelation 19:10; John 16:13; Psalm 46:11; Revelation 3:21; 21:7; Luke 10:20; Daniel 7:22; Matthew 5:8; and Ephesians 4:15, 21 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 98. My Enemy

Let us imagine the following situation. I live in a country whose minister of state security is a dictator. He introduces his own laws and regulations, which sometimes contradict common sense, but government officials make sure that everything is carried out exactly as their ruler desires. This chief has certain names and titles by which it is customary to address him. But the distinctive feature of this agency is that no one knows all of its employees by sight. They exist, yet they are absent from the visible realm. They possess a certain authority, but all their deeds are shrouded in secrecy. I know only the chief's name as it appears in official documents.

Then I summon my courage and begin discussing this chief with my friends. I decide to publish information about his activities in open sources. My imagination and the example of other activists suggest new details to me concerning the personality of the man in charge of state security and his subordinates. I attribute to them things I have invented myself. In my speeches, I allow myself to be insolent and rude toward these officials whom I have never seen. But democracy and freedom of speech in our country allow me to say whatever I want. Then I learn that this agency has heard all my speeches and has taken a special interest in me. What do you think awaits me? I suppose serious problems will begin—problems I will not be able to solve on my own. Many years later, if I am still alive, I will consider what my speeches and attacks against the country's secret services changed in society. Absolutely nothing; but enormous problems entered my own life.

We are at war, and we have a mysterious enemy whom we have never seen and whose strength and authority we cannot imagine. His name is Satan. This enemy commands an entire army that is constantly inventing new methods of temptation and attack and making sure that everything within its master's sphere of influence proceeds according to his laws and takes place according to his will. These warriors are called demons. Serving these forces are people who have consciously dedicated

themselves to Satan and sold their souls to him. They are prepared to obey all his commands.

The plans and objectives of this enemy army are described in the Bible and in certain prophetic books so that I may discover the nature of its influence and the characteristics of the conflict taking place. But nowhere is there even a suggestion that I should be rude and defiant toward these beings. Moreover, I am forbidden to use Satan's methods in the struggle against Satan himself. God does not approve of any slander, abuse, insults, or mockery directed at the rulers of the darkness of this world. Such conduct may even deprive me of His protection and permit the enemy of my soul to defend his honor and bring serious problems into my life.

How, then, should I conduct myself properly? I believe it would be wise to remain within the bounds of decency and to use information that is publicly available. I must also take into account that the forces of evil surpass me in every respect, just as I, for example, surpass an ant. We are speaking of angels whose nature I do not understand. Although they have fallen in God's sight, they remain angels possessing special strength and capabilities that we cannot even imagine. Their destructive influence is restricted because God protects His creation and does not allow demonic forces to display their supernatural power fully. God's law provides special protection for every soul that lives in obedience to its requirements, and the enemy of humanity can do nothing to such people. They are outside the sphere of his influence. But if, while seeing God's protection, I allow myself to be insolent and rude toward the enemy's army, I attract their special attention, and every careless word I speak may give them an opportunity to harm me and ruin my life.

Does God love Satan? I know that God is Love. If this were not so, Satan would have ceased to exist long ago. Lucifer was a being whom God distinguished in a special way among all the other inhabitants of Heaven. He had a close relationship with the Creator before any of us did, and all the fallen angels were sons of God. They brought joy to the Lord's heart until iniquity was found in them. We do not know how long such harmonious

life in Heaven continued, but I believe God remembers very well all the beauty that once existed and can never be restored. When a family breaks apart, there are no victors in the resulting conflict. There is no triumph or joy of victory; no one wins, and everyone suffers. But God respects the choice of His children. He gives them the opportunity to put their plans into action and reap the consequences of that choice.

From Scripture we know that one third of the angels supported Satan in his rebellion. These beings became God's adversaries. Who can understand the pain endured by our Heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus, and the good angels when the heavenly family was broken forever, never to be restored? A sentence of death hangs over the fallen beings and will be carried out. The demons believe in God; they know His power and tremble. But this does not give me the right to mock or insult them. Even God Himself does not bring a railing accusation, but acts respectfully toward everyone within the framework of His law and the rules of war.

At the very beginning of my life with God, I joined a denomination in which it was customary to berate Satan, call him vulgar names, trample him underfoot, and laugh at him. I did not understand how wrong this was. I saw that such preachers seemed to act with impunity, and I noticed manifestations of supernatural powers in their ministry that I could not explain. But I did not remain in that church long. I left because its members lived in disobedience to God's law and taught others to do the same. I could not agree with such teaching. Now I understand that the enemy of souls allows his servants to ridicule him, portray him as pathetic and comical, and distort his true image so that he may remain in the shadows and freely carry out his plans while deceiving people. He greatly favors those who do not believe in his existence—or in God's existence either. Such people are very easy prey, and Satan skillfully uses their influence to accomplish his plans. A secret enemy is always more dangerous than one about whom much is known, and this works to Satan's advantage. Nor does he object to being well known when he receives people's worship. Such people are also his instruments of temptation.

Satan once even proposed that Christ submit to his authority, and received the answer that worship belongs to God alone.

In the last days, the issue of worship will bring the entire conflict to its climax. The whole world will be divided into two parts: some people will submit to God, and others to Satan.

But the enemy of souls knows God and knows the strength and beauty of His character. He understands the influence the Creator's love has upon the hearts of deceived people and how greatly this power surpasses all his deceptions.

God is mightier than Satan, and every son of God receives Divine power to struggle against sin. The most powerful weapon of victory is the love of the Most High within my heart. Through its presence, my nature is united with the Eternal God, and nothing can separate us from one another. It is no longer I who live, but Christ liveth in me.

Homework 98

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Which of God's methods are acceptable for gaining victory and achieving goals, and which are not?
3. How can I determine what manner of spirit I am of?
4. How should I treat those who do not share my convictions?
5. Can someone who is a son of God be on the enemy's side?
6. What and Who is my protection?
7. Why is it dangerous to insult spiritual powers?
8. Please read 1 Peter 5:8-9; Revelation 12:7-9, 17; 13:7-8; John 4:23-24; Ephesians 6:12; Matthew 8:28-32; 1 John 4:1; John 16:1-4, 11; and Psalm 119:1, 34 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 99. The Approaching Storm

Does anyone know how events will unfold at the end of time? In what sequence will they follow one another? How will this affect me personally? What will I do with my knowledge, and how will it help me at that time? How prepared am I for what will come crashing down upon me? And will I be able to stand?

All these questions and others arise as that time draws nearer. I understand that I do not know how to answer myself. I can explain everything to other people who ask me similar questions. I am able to calm those who are overcome by fear, but I cannot say anything to myself, because I understand that I may be presumptuous and mistaken. And this is part of God's plan for me.

For example, I can call many of you holy, righteous, wise, strong, special, and gifted, and this would not be flattery. Such words would be true and honest. They would strengthen you, give you joy and hope, and bring happiness and blessing. But if I began to say such things about myself, I believe you would consider me a very presumptuous braggart who misunderstands something—and you would be right. Yet if you decided to say the same things about me, they would sound entirely different.

Any praise directed at me is good only when it comes from someone else's lips.

God has given us to one another so that we may influence, strengthen, correct, uphold one another's hands, help, inspire, praise, bring joy, comfort, and do many other things that draw us closer to God and to one another.

In His prophecies, God warned us in general terms about what would take place in the last days. We know the sequence in which events will develop. The fulfillment of these prophecies is taking place before our eyes. We can even imagine the actual details of certain future situations. But I have no clear understanding of precisely what I should do, how this time will affect me personally, what the persecutions will be like, or

where I should flee. I believe none of us has the answers to these questions. There are, however, people who take responsibility and teach in general terms how to prepare in order to stand. There are also those who observe political events and then tell us how they are developing. In addition, world news testifies to me that the storm is approaching and the collision is inevitable. All this information comes crashing down upon me, and I do not know what to do. Then I also read that all the virgins fell asleep, and I become completely discouraged. I do not much like the prospect of such a condition. Whatever else I may be, I do not want to be asleep.

But within all this there is also very good news. It tells me that Jesus loves me and that He Himself is personally preparing me for the events ahead, giving me now, today, precisely the knowledge and light I am capable of receiving and that will help me solve the problems of the present day. In addition, Jesus reveals prospects for my growth, but not for my entire life, keeping that knowledge within His own authority. He once answered His disciples in Acts 1:7: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power."

God has taken responsibility for our salvation, and He accomplishes it in the best possible way.

Let us imagine events unfolding in this way. The Hebrews were living in slavery. Then God chose Moses and said to him: "Go now to the people and tell them every detail of their deliverance. Go to Pharaoh and speak My words to him. He will not listen to you, and I will pour out ten specific plagues upon Egypt. Then you will leave and come to the sea, which I will divide for you. You will cross it as on dry land, and the entire Egyptian army will perish there on the bottom of the sea. After that you will rebel against Me, and I will destroy every one of you who is over twenty years old except Caleb and Joshua. Even you and Aaron will not enter the Promised Land. So go and tell them!" Did the Lord act in this way?

We know this story from beginning to end. Yet we see that God had a plan, and it was carried out in accordance with the

situation that existed at the time. God knows the future, but He does not use this knowledge as a program of action. He does with me today what I allow Him to do.

I desire to meet the storm with oil in my lamp and a reserve of oil in my vessel. I declare this to God and ask for wisdom from above so that I may prepare more fully. The Lord does not give me a precise answer such as, "The oil is this, and you need to do this in order to possess it." God begins to teach me according to the strength of my intellect, my abilities, my perception, and my willingness to study deeply, change, relinquish, and accept. This is not a one-day process. Yet the Lord does not hurry me, but walks at the pace I am capable of maintaining. He does not worry that I will fail to learn something in time or miss something important. God returns to the place where I stopped and begins explaining it to me until I understand.

If I belong to God, I should fear nothing. I need to learn to trust Him.

God has provided the special gift of love for His children in the last days, because love sharpens my perception, cleanses my soul, drives out sin, opens my eyes, and enriches my imagination and my influence. Love casts out fear of a dreadful future. It teaches me to rest upon God's promises and entrust my life to Him. When I hear frightening news or rumors that the powerful of this world desire to harm me, and I do not know how to resist or avoid the traps that have been set, I look to Jesus and ask Him, "What should I do, Lord?" He gives me no instructions, but shows me His hands, which are so large that it is impossible to fall from them. I decide to remain in His embrace. I believe that God is stronger than all my enemies, and as long as I am with Him, I have nothing to fear. But I did not learn this trust in a single day. I obtained this gift through various small trials and difficulties that I experienced, during which I asked for help and received answers. I can only tell you that God is too wise to make a mistake. He loves His children and constantly cares for them with tenderness.

The storm is approaching, the collision is inevitable, and I am playing in a sandbox, making sand cakes and boasting about my achievements. My Lord sits beside me, looks tenderly at me, and rejoices with me. Then He takes me by the hand and leads me where I need to go. He brings me into His house, closes the doors, washes me, changes my clothes, and feeds me. The storm rages all around. I am frightened by the crash of thunder and the roar of the wind, but He leads me to bed, tucks me in, tells me stories, and waits for me to fall asleep. When sleep comes, Jesus kisses me, turns off the light, closes the windows, and shuts the door as He leaves. The Lord remains near so that He can comfort me immediately if I suddenly awaken. I am in His house—or rather, in our house—so what should I fear?

Of course, the final events will not appear as peaceful as described above. Most likely, we will walk together beneath torrents of rain and amid the roar of the elements, but my soul will rest in God's love.

Love is the strong house in which nothing and no one can harm my soul. When a storm rages upon the surface of the ocean, it is not felt in its depths. Therefore, the deeper I immerse myself in God's love, the quieter the storm becomes.

Homework 99

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Do you know how God will use you in the last days?
3. Will my knowledge help me stand in the final battle?
4. How do you picture the very last events?
5. What awaits us in the last days?
6. What will play the decisive role in my life during the events preceding Christ's Second Coming?
7. Is it important to possess the fullness of love at that time?
8. Please read Acts 1:7-8; 1 Corinthians 8:2-3; 13:8-10; Proverbs 16:23; and Deuteronomy 29:29 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 100. What Not to Do

Having set out on the path of God's love, I become the object of God's special care and attract the close attention of all spiritual powers. I responded to the counsel of the Faithful Witness and became the owner of all Heaven's goods. The process of learning began. But along with the blessings came trials. The enemy of souls activates his full potential to discourage me or turn my eyes away from Jesus. His attacks upon me become stronger than before, and they do not weaken, but constantly change their form.

Yet the path of love surpasses every idea and expectation I have in its depth and simplicity. Love is God's original plan for my soul and my entire being. By uniting with eternal Agape love, I come into harmony with nature, with God, and with all of God's creation. When I unite with those who have tasted God's love and opened their hearts to change and to the influence of the Holy Spirit, then the heavenly harmony of unity is present in our relationships.

But there are things I should not do or try, no matter what happens, even if the trials are beyond my strength. Below I will share some counsel that I myself follow.

Do not expect quick results in the fulfillment of God's plans for my transformation. Through my prayers and faith, this process is set in motion, and my whole nature begins to change. The seed has been sown, and it needs time to spring up and begin bearing fruit.

Do not give up because you do not understand the nature of love. I have not lived in this condition of soul before and therefore do not know what I will encounter, but I believe that all things work together for good. Romans 8:28.

Do not ignore Christ's counsel to Laodicea. Everyone needs to heed it and do as the Lord says. It is better to err on God's side and make Him responsible for your life than to follow your own way, which seems right.

Do not expect others to return my love because of the way I treat them. Love seeketh not her own, but gives me strength to manifest this quality at all times toward every person whom I choose.

Do not be distressed when your love is rejected and you are ridiculed. Continue to love without expecting anything in return.

Do not neglect the study of God's Word or the acceptance of the counsel it contains. Love hears God's voice speaking to it from the pages of the Bible. Love reveals all of God's actions and declarations in their true light.

Do not think that love is only mercy and sentimentality. Love is the union of mercy and justice; it contains a combination of tender feelings and firm principles. It knows when and by what to be guided.

Do not judge anyone in any way. Do not judge people who are learning love and taking steps in that direction. A person may still be only at the beginning of the path and know very little. Show him your love and help him, if he allows you to do so.

Do not expect that, once you have set out on the path of love, you will be able to perform difficult tenth-grade tasks while you are still in the first grade. This is a figure of speech, but there are trials that are not yet within your strength. Do not bring them closer.

Do not expect everyone to understand you when you begin sharing love, or that people will joyfully accept everything from you. Most likely, you will encounter complete misunderstanding, unbelief, and rejection. But Jesus was treated in the same way.

Do not think that you are better than Christ and will be able to avoid many problems and trials as you grow spiritually in love. Everything Jesus encountered awaits you as well.

Do not be afraid if God decides to work miracles of grace or cast out evil spirits through your hands. The very presence of the love you have invited into your heart will exert an unseen

influence in any company. Pray for people, that when they see your good works, they may glorify the heavenly Father.

Do not be troubled if you remain completely alone with your love, which is from God, even among friends. While living on Earth, Jesus was the loneliest Person, for no one understood Him.

Do not expect the members of your family to accept your love and rejoice in its manifestation through you. Prepare for serious resistance, but continue to love. Perhaps you will be understood and appreciated only when you are no longer alive.

Do not use the services of the world and the flesh to reach your goal quickly. The path of love is very long and narrow. Sometimes, in order to accomplish something in love, it is worth spending an entire lifetime and seeing no visible result. But eternity will reveal the influence you exerted during your life and how much fruit it produced.

Do not concentrate your love upon one person. You are a member of God's large family, in which many people need to be loved and need their love to be accepted as well. The commandment to love is mutual; therefore, rejoice in the presence in your life of those who love you in response to your love.

Do not fantasize or think of yourself more highly than you ought. Modesty adorns a person.

Do not be afraid to make new friends, even if you understand that you will have no opportunity to communicate with them. Let them settle in your heart forever. You can never have too many friends. Even if you have very many, you will still be lonely among them. But you will not be lonely with Christ; He fills life with meaning.

Do not confuse loneliness with solitude. Sometimes you need to remain alone, to spend time in a solitary place, simply to rest and regain your strength.

Do not be afraid to love people and tell them so. Words of love contain light and work miracles in the lives of many. Do not

think that you are surrounded by people whom everyone loves. They are all waiting for you finally to notice them and help them believe that love exists, that it is alive, and that it is available through you.

Do not be ashamed of your love. Although it is modest, it is very powerful in its influence and strength. Remember that by loving your neighbor, you enter his territory to win his heart, and these victories will constantly accompany you.

Do not play at love. If you have decided to love someone, then love him always—for your whole life, in every situation, in every kind of weather, and through every trial. And the Lord will give you as much strength for this as you need.

Do not think that the enemy of the human soul is stronger than Jesus, Who is in you. Jesus defeated Satan, and by choosing Christ, I choose the path of love; by choosing love, I give Jesus authority to act in me and through me.

Do not be afraid to express your joy at the presence of love in your heart. It brings happiness and abundant light into your life.

Do not be afraid to be happy. Give love away; distribute it; empty your heart, which is overflowing with God; spread love everywhere; sing and speak about it, keeping nothing for yourself. The next morning you will have even more love than before. It will fill your vessel and flow over the rim of your lips. Give it freedom to act, and it will fulfill its purpose.

Do not think that without love you will achieve anything good or become somebody. Without love I am nothing, and nothing profits me. It is better to understand this now than when it is too late.

Do not give that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast it before swine. Sometimes you may also remain silent, but do so with love, while planning the next advance to conquer new territory in a place where the seed can be sown.

Homework 100

1. Did this lesson reveal anything new to you?

2. Do you see changes in your life over the past three months and more?
3. Can you see the seed of love growing in your heart?
4. Please share your victories in love.
5. Do you see how the lessons of this school benefit you?
6. What do you expect from this school in the future?
7. Do you have personal revelations about love that you would like to share?
8. Please pray for our school of love.
9. Please read 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 Corinthians 16:14, 24; Galatians 5:13; and Ephesians 4:1-2 in the light of our lesson.

Philippians 1:8-11: "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."