

School of Agape love (volume 4)

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Lesson 151. Faithfulness to God in Love and Friendship

Have you ever seen a house being built without a foundation? It may be a trailer, a container, a tent, or some other kind of temporary dwelling. For a certain period of time or in an emergency, such structures can be very useful, but they are entirely unsuitable for times of trial or permanent residence.

If I begin building a house with the roof and only afterward proceed to lay the foundation, I think I will have serious problems during construction, and I find it difficult even to imagine what the final result might be.

Once I was asked, "What do you believe in?" I knew the answer and immediately said that I believed in Jesus. Then I was asked another question: "What is your faith in Jesus based on? How do you understand His teaching? How do you live while believing in God?" I began to think. Where, in fact, is the foundation of my faith? If it does not exist, then any teaching or false doctrine that appeals to me may become my foundation, and I will become established in it if I do not know God's will. In that case, my life will be built upon a false foundation.

Take love and friendship, for example. These two sisters exert a very strong influence upon the minds of other people. They know how to open the hearts of those around them and bring them joy. When I begin to live in this atmosphere of Heaven, I notice how many wonderful people appear in my life. If I were to compare some women with my wife, I would honestly say that my wife loses by every comparison. Yet I love her as well, and she is the person closest to me, holding the status of my wife. However, if, while loving my other half, I find a female friend whom I decide to love from a pure heart just as I love my wife, and secretly decide to be a faithful husband to her without society knowing, how does this appear in the eyes of Heaven? It is obvious adultery. But I do not consider it so, because I love this person, and she is a friend after my own heart. Moreover, this sister believes in God, loves Him, and loves me as well. She

is a very active missionary and sincerely does a great many good deeds. Besides, she is not even married!!! You understand nothing about love. You do not know my true motives! Everything between us is pure and for life, and only death will separate us!!! What does such love look like? I think one does not even need to be a believer to understand that love without faithfulness is not love, but the lust of the flesh.

Many of you receive everything I write to you as a message from God. You see how God works, using my abilities and talents to communicate this light, but your trust is based on the fact that I also live in harmony with the truths I present. You assume that I am pure before God and His law, that I share what fills my life, and that I possess what I teach you. And this is normal. Therefore, the message has a special influence, because God uses those who serve Him faithfully and ask Him for greater love.

But the enemy of my soul knows that one unfaithful step on my part could destroy all my labor in a single moment, and so he seeks an opportunity to ruin me. Yet by God's mercy I am alive; through your prayers and my own I am protected from evil; and through love from above I am developing and growing.

If I were suddenly to begin teaching you that all religions testify about the same God, only in different ways, I think all my writings would immediately become dangerous to you, because there would be a possibility that such a philosophy permeates them in every respect. In the Christian world there is a rule by which all the writings of an author, even those that are entirely correct, are declared dangerous, withdrawn from circulation, and destroyed if their author falls into heresy or returns to the world.

Martin Luther was once asked to renounce his writings and messages and acknowledge as true and correct the teaching of the church against which he had spoken. Martin replied that if anyone could refute his arguments on the basis of Holy Scripture, he would immediately renounce his convictions. But if no one could do so, this would testify that his messages were true and that there was no darkness in them. "Here I stand, and

I can do no other; may the Lord help me!" These famous words of Luther entered Christianity as a symbol of the firm foundation of biblical teaching.

What, then, am I building my faith upon? What are my love and friendship founded upon?

A tent is useful for spending the night in warm weather or sheltering from the rain. But living in it permanently brings much discomfort. A house with every convenience looks far more attractive than a tent. However, if a house has no foundation, one may live in it wonderfully without any problems until the first natural disaster. A small hurricane, flood, or earthquake can very quickly deprive a person of his home, leaving him standing before a heap of rubble. He will look at it and wonder what went wrong. Then he will remember all the advice he had heard about laying a foundation and all the appeals to be a wise builder. At the time, they filled him with disgust. And what will he think about then? What if members of my family—or I myself—are buried beneath that heap of rubble? What should be done then?

Something can still be done about a house, and a family can be formed again. But what will become of me when I look toward Heaven and see Christ coming from there with all His Angels, raising and taking away all the saved, while they rise one after another into the clouds, and He does not even look at me? And when I cry, "But what about me, Lord?!" He calmly answers, "I do not know you." What am I to do then? At that moment it will truly be far too late. I will stand there remembering all my teachers and pastors—those who persuaded me to accept the truth and those who, on the contrary, confirmed me in their errors, teaching me that it was right to act that way because everyone did the same. And I will understand that throughout my entire Christian life I had been building on sand. My little house collapsed directly upon me, and great was its fall. Then I will no longer be able to correct anything. All my achievements and talents will become nothing, my whole life will prove empty, and all my money will become rubbish. I will no longer

be able to continue living in my sins, but I will be destroyed as one of the wicked.

Perhaps it would be better to begin preparing for the coming event right now and lay a firm foundation for my faith. After all, there is still an opportunity; there is still time; God's grace still offers a chance. The fact that I am in the true church with true teaching does not make me right. What is "right" must be in my heart and in my mind, and I myself must allow it to enter there—with God's help, of course.

The Lord Himself has promised that with His own hand He will write His laws in my heart and teach me His statutes. What does this mean? For example, I once believed that a "civil marriage" (cohabitation outside of marriage) was a good thing and that there was no reason to spoil a page in one's passport. But after coming to believe in God, I allowed Him to teach me the truth that the marriage bond is holy and must be legally recognized by the state, because only then will it receive God's blessing and approval. I believed this, and God wrote this law concerning the family in my mind and in my heart. I now live according to this statute, while I regard everything else as sin and transgression of the law. I have no intention of living as I did before, and I do not approve of it in the lives of those around me, because sin is lawlessness. In this way, God brings order into every area of my life.

And my love and friendship dwell very joyfully in a strong house upon a firm foundation. This is what I stand upon and what I build upon.

Homework 151

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. What is the foundation of faith?
3. What do you build your convictions upon, and what are they based on?
4. Why is it important to have a foundation for your religious beliefs?
5. Did Christ's teaching have a foundation of faith?

6. What process does becoming established in the truth involve?
7. Please read Psalm 89:14; Psalm 119:160; Isaiah 26:18; Luke 1:3-4; Luke 6:48; and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 in the light of this lesson.

Lesson 152. Love Has a Biblical Foundation of Faith

There was a time when I did not know that the Bible existed and had never even heard of it. I could not imagine that this Book would one day radically change my life. I remember that when I was still in the first grade, Young Pioneer leaders came to my school and hung up a poster that read, "There is no God, but there is science." They told us how, during the Middle Ages, representatives of Christianity deceived the people by selling indulgences and displaying false miracles in order to rob them and lure them into their church. The leaders showed us how blood appeared when two transparent liquids were mixed, making it clear that this was how priests had fooled the unenlightened people. I do not remember what else they told us, but I understood that there was a God Who did not exist and that there was a Bible that deceived people; I was not to believe it, but was to read scientific articles and rely upon them.

And I grew up with these ideas, without thinking that there was One Who had created me and loved me very much.

The first time I saw a Bible was at the home of my Orthodox grandmother. I was about ten years old. This book was written in Old Church Slavonic, but I was able to read something from it and understood that it told about the lives of various people who went somewhere and did something. At that point, my acquaintance with the Bible came to an end.

When perestroika began, one of my classmates told me that the Bible had predicted that the marked Mikhail would come and that this would be the end of the world. And I understood that Holy Scripture was a prophetic Book and that everything written in it came to pass.

When I turned twenty-one, I went to an Orthodox church because I wanted to buy myself this Bible, but it was not available, so I bought a New Testament and decided to read it. From the very first lines, I saw that I understood nothing. When I reached the passage saying that one must turn the left cheek also, I closed the Book, strongly disagreeing with such an

approach to life. Nevertheless, I decided to keep it as a talisman, because for some reason I believed that it should protect me from something evil. Later, when I met my wife, she showed me a complete Bible, and I immediately decided to read it. But when I reached the story of the Flood, I closed the Book, realizing that I understood nothing in it. Still, I sometimes picked it up and read passages from it. Even then, I saw that the Bible gave answers to every question, but I did not know how to understand the difficult passages.

The time came when the Iron Curtain fell, and God began drawing me to Himself. He brought me to the understanding that I needed to believe in something, and I remembered the Bible and began reading it more, though as a historical work.

At that time, my friends gave me the book *The Great Controversy*, which revealed to me all the beauty and meaning of the Bible, showed me the true character of God, and pointed me to Jesus as my Savior from the power of sin, explaining in simple language what was happening and what was to take place. After this, the Bible came alive in my hands, and with amazement I began making astonishing discoveries for myself in this Book of books. I learned that God is Love and that He loves all sinners and desires to save them. I believed in such a Merciful and Just God and decided to give Him my life.

From the moment when I dedicated myself to Christ in a prayer of repentance, my understanding of the Bible changed radically. I began reading this Book from morning until evening, underlining everything I liked, and I marveled that I had not seen these truths before.

I studied the history of how the Bible was written and compiled, how those who read it were persecuted, and how those who possessed it were killed. I was amazed that its forty-two authors wrote in one spirit about one God from the different circumstances of their lives, and that their testimonies about the Creator and the plan of Salvation for humanity are in complete agreement.

The Bible is the Book of books, Holy Scripture, the Word of God. It is the only true testimony about the living God. Having passed through centuries of persecution and darkness, wars and revolutions, oppression and attacks, it has preserved its beauty and integrity and has reached our day unchanged. All those who fought against the Bible died long ago without achieving their goal, but the Bible is alive and, like Noah's Ark, majestically survives every global catastrophe, continuing to testify about God's love, the coming judgments, how to be saved through faith in Jesus, and what awaits us in the future.

All biblical prophecies have been fulfilled precisely and continue to be fulfilled. To this day, it is the most widely published book in the world, translated into all known languages, and among many peoples it becomes the beginning of cultural transformation.

Holy Scripture also tells us about love—where it comes from, how important it is, Who its Author is, and how to receive it. No other religious book tells us that God is Love, and only the Bible reveals to us the One True God and Jesus Christ, Whom He sent, in the true light of love.

Without understanding that God is Love, that He hates sin, and that all His motives and laws are based on love for truth and for humanity, one can find much seemingly inexplicable cruelty and dictatorship of power in the Bible. But it is precisely the knowledge of the depth of God's agape that reveals all of God's actions to me in the proper light. Where some stumble and distort the meaning of Scripture, I see God's wisdom and love, truth and beauty.

The Bible is the foundation of my faith and of the faith of every person who believes in God. This foundation has endured many attacks and, despite everything, has not cracked. Not one word in God's law has been changed to please the sinful world. The teaching of Holy Scripture remains firm and unchanging. It reveals to us God, with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Every teaching can be tested by this Book, and every heresy and false science can be exposed. The Bible does not contradict scientific discoveries that are necessary for humanity, but is in harmony with them, revealing their great depths to us.

The Bible teaches that a person does not need very much in this world and that, no matter what he achieves, it will not satisfy the soul as the simplicity and depth of the Bible and its teaching do. The one who lives in harmony with the Word of God is truly happy.

The Bible develops the intellect of every person, ennobles his character, calms the soul, and teaches wisdom and love for God and people. God Himself speaks through its pages, and the reader who seeks the truth hears this voice of God, although he cannot understand its nature. Nevertheless, he heeds the revelations given.

Our School of Agape Love is also founded upon the Bible, and this foundation is the firm foundation upon which everything good and useful can be built. It is the Bible that gives us new revelations about God's love and explains the special importance of possessing this love in our last days.

The uniqueness of the Bible also consists in the fact that It has a True Interpreter—the Holy Spirit, Who reveals and explains to me precisely what I need to know, understand, accept, and believe, and what I should leave behind. At the same time, He gives me freedom and endows me with power for transformation and change.

And the entire teaching of the Bible moves me to love God and my neighbors. Is there any book in this world like the Book of books, which so clearly reveals the science of love? I do not know of one.

Homework 152

1. Did this lesson reveal anything new to you?
2. How does the Bible differ from other books?
3. Why is the Bible the true standard by which every teaching is measured?

4. Can Holy Scripture be trusted when we see that the world lives by different laws and ideas?
5. What is the Bible to you?
6. Have you ever read the Bible? How often do you turn to it for counsel?
7. Is the Word of God an unquestionable authority for you?
8. Please read Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 30:5-6; Isaiah 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; and 2 Peter 1:20-21 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 153. Do Not Give That Which Is Holy unto the Dogs

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives a most mysterious warning and command, which is not explained any further. We read in Matthew 7:6: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

This appeal is worth examining in order to avoid the sad consequences that Christ also describes.

Love and friendship imply beautiful qualities of the soul which are pleasant for a converted person to possess and to manifest toward those around him. Meekness, innocence, trust, simplicity, kindness, and generosity—all these proceed from a loving heart and bring joy to the soul when there is an opportunity to share these fruits.

Jesus went through many things, and, having the life experience of observing people, He gives us this interesting warning.

“Give not” means that, having something, you should keep it to yourself.

That which is holy is something consecrated to God and rightfully belonging to Him. It must not be used for other purposes. In endowing me with Divine qualities of the soul, the Lord also gives me wisdom so that I may control this weapon and use it for its intended purpose. He gives understanding and leads us through life experience in order to teach each one of us intuitively to distinguish different types of people and to understand where we should speak and act, and where it is better to remain silent and leave.

A pearl is the most precious and very rare Heavenly treasure in the world; upon finding it, it is worth selling everything in order to obtain it. I think that in the message to Laodicea we are offered precisely that which may be called such a pearl.

Dogs and swine are animals which, in the time of Christ and to some extent in our own time, when they have no owners, gather in packs, live near populated areas, and feed on human waste. There are times when they attack people as well.

In our time, the concept of a dog has changed and is associated with a kind domestic animal that loves its owner and brings joy through its faithfulness and unconditional love. Their devotion and friendship are very often astonishing, and many representatives of humanity would do well to learn from them. "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee..." (Job 12:7).

But in ancient times these animals evoked fear and disgust, being very dangerous.

In the context of Scripture, this comparison points to a particular type of people among whom we are compelled to live.

One day, the counsel of Jesus that we are studying became completely clear to me when I plainly encountered such people.

There was a period in my life when, in 1999, I changed jobs and joined a construction company where two crews worked. In the simplicity of my heart, I was open and gladly shared my spiritual revelations and blessings with the new people. But over time, incomprehensible things began to happen.

One of the foremen very much enjoyed talking with me and asked many questions about spiritual and everyday matters. I gladly shared my knowledge and did everything required for the job. Other colleagues warned me to be careful in communicating with this man, but I did not understand what the problem was. In time, however, I began to notice that all my words, stories, and actions were being passed on in a distorted form. At first, the owner of the company was friendly toward me, but as time passed, he began making many accusations against me and saying very strange things to my face about me and my work. I was surprised and could not understand what was happening. But when I began hearing my own words about myself from my foreman with a distorted meaning, I realized that this man liked to roll everything in the filth of his

worldview and present any information to other people in that form. And he did this very convincingly, without evil intentions, but simply because he did not know how to act otherwise.

At first, the second foreman was friendly and not very talkative, but in time he began taking out his indignation on me and finding fault with me for every possible reason. At times, the relationship became so tense that I felt as though I were on a battlefield. As a result, the situation came to physical violence, and I had to strike back, which I greatly regretted afterward. It was very painful for me to understand that I had allowed an evil spirit to take control of me and do me the service of solving all problems by a quick method. But I loved Jesus, and I wanted to be an exemplary Christian. I could not act according to the flesh, for I understood that this would bring me great suffering and pangs of conscience.

Working in such a society, I came to understand for myself who dogs and swine are and how careful one must be in communicating with them.

I take no pleasure in calling those around me by such names, but among them there are people with such a character, and we are unable to change this ourselves. I myself was like that when I did not know Christ, and now I never tell what I did in my godless life. When one possesses love, so many useful subjects and interesting revelations appear that there is no reason to return to filth and to the dog's vomit (2 Peter 2:22).

Whom, then, did Jesus have in mind when giving us His counsel? Scripture provides a description of such people. We read in Psalm 22:16: "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet."

The prophetic events that Christ was to experience are then described. And we know who was at Calvary that day and who shouted out the sentence upon the Son of God.

And who are these animals today? How can they be identified? They may be the people closest and dearest to me; they may be members of my family; and I may be the same. The Lord's task

is to cleanse me and then teach me to distinguish the clean from the unclean, so that I may see the contrast between darkness and light and choose that which is better.

Then the question arises: How can I love when such restrictions exist? How can I be a friend when such people are all around me? A little earlier, Jesus gave an answer to this question as well. We read in Matthew 5:44: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Do you see the manifestation of love in this command? I see it and experience the same.

Not giving that which is holy and not casting pearls means to me that it is necessary to be very careful in communication, to control every word, to avoid controversial subjects, and to remain silent concerning the area that will provoke rage or evil speaking. At the same time, it is important to be a loving friend and to speak the language of good deeds and courteous expressions. Love teaches this.

I will not change the world, but I can show it God's love and my friendliness in response to attacks. And the Lord gives strength for this.

The Lord teaches us that we are His witnesses. How interesting it is to be a witness of God's love! I allow the Holy Spirit to live in me and form God's traits of character. I become one through whom He can reveal the Lord's goodness and power to the world. I come to know that which was great and inaccessible to me, and I go into battle, allowing God to go before me and gain the victory.

And I begin to understand with my heart that there is a Divine Family, Who have become my Family and opened Their arms to me in order to make me Their son forever and live with me eternally.

And love is the presence of God in my heart, which brings joy, happiness, and peace.

"Give not." It is worth heeding this as well.

Homework 153

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. How do you understand the meaning of the symbols of the dog and the swine? Who are they?
3. Why should that which is holy not be given unto the dogs? What is it?
4. How can we preserve love for people and remain obedient to Jesus' warning?
5. What will happen if I nevertheless give that which is holy unto the dogs and swine?
6. Where is the boundary between friendliness and caution in relation to dangerous people?
7. Please read Psalm 22:18; Proverbs 20:19; 22:24; 24:21; Isaiah 56:10-12; Revelation 22:15; Proverbs 26:11; and 2 Peter 2:22 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 154. The Divine Union of Love

What kind of God do I believe in? Why do I accept this particular teaching and not another? Can I prove to myself and to others that I have true faith with a firm foundation? Upon what is my love founded, and from what source is it given to me? Why do I think that this way is right and not another?

Such questions require answers, and I myself, as well as each of you personally, friends, must find them. I cannot decide for you what is right and what it is best for you to believe. Each one of you must do this for yourself. We all individually bear personal responsibility before God for our hope. And the approaching trials will reveal what we have built upon. The faith of each one of us will be tested.

Matthew 4:1 says: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." The Lord Himself led Christ into the wilderness so that His faith might be tested. There was a risk that Jesus could fall under the pressure of these temptations, but He resisted with the firm foundation of His faith, which rested upon Holy Scripture. And by doing so, the Saviour gave us an example to follow.

Truth is not opposed to being tested. It will not suffer if it is examined and taken through fire or darkness. It will not become falsehood if I decide to test it. And it is consistent with itself. The only question is what I consider to be truth. If, for example, I take the Soviet Encyclopaedia as the foundation of faith, I will find in it many contradictions and facts based on human opinion, which for that reason are very easy to refute. The Soviet Encyclopaedia denies God. And such a foundation is extremely poor for my faith. What does such a hope give me? The theory of evolution, which no one has yet proved.

And Who is God? How many Divine Persons are there? Whom do I consider and call God? I often hear representatives of other religions mock me because of my confession of faith. They claim that I am an idolater because I believe in many gods. I do not

enter into such disputes, but I decided to study this question for myself and become established in what the Bible says about it.

And I found it interesting that God is Love. He was not Love in the past, He did not become Love, and He is not becoming Love out of necessity; He is Love, and He is always Love. And this is the most important distinction between my God and all other gods who are called by that name. My Lord is interested in my salvation; He loves me and every person. He desires to save us all from the power of sin and eternal destruction, and He does everything possible so that all people may come to repentance. Love cannot be otherwise and is incapable of thinking differently. And God desires us to have love among ourselves.

A little earlier, we already considered the fact that love cannot exist alone; it needs someone like itself who also loves. It must be directed toward someone. The sun always shines, and the night sky is pierced by the rays of this luminary, but they are invisible to the eye until they find something from which to be reflected or until my gaze is directed toward the source of light. Surrounded by an abundance of light, I see utter darkness when I look at the night sky.

God cannot be Love if He is alone by His very nature and has no One equal to Himself. How can He be Love if His Love is not experienced by Someone like Him and is not manifested toward One equal to Himself?

But the Bible teaches that there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and that this is the Divine unity of Three Divine Persons. It does not explain the history of the existence or the nature of the Godhead and does not try to prove to me that He exists, but simply points out that God is God, that He is the Creator, that He is immortal, omnipresent, eternal, almighty, above all, and that there is no other like Him. The Bible does not attempt to prove Who the Godhead is, but simply tells of the Three Persons of the Divine Family, Each of Whom has His own purpose in the plan of creation and the salvation of humanity.

I am not expected to explain how the Divine Union of the Three Persons of the Godhead is constituted; this is beyond my understanding. Yet I can learn this from God's revelation of Himself, and He does this through nature, through His Word recorded in the Bible, and through the Person of Jesus Christ. And the Bible teaches that God alone is worthy of the worship, service, and honour of all His creation. I can accept this and build my faith upon it, developing endlessly in this true understanding of Holy Scripture, or I can devise my own personal interpretation and believe in it, limiting myself by my own imagination.

Concerning the creation of man, Genesis 1:26-27 says: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Genesis 3:22 records what God said after the Fall: "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil..." These passages at the very beginning of the Bible show very clearly that God was not alone when He created the Earth and man.

The unity of the Three Divine Persons presents God to us as True, Righteous, and One in His plans and purposes. We should neither add our own conjectures to this nor diminish this truth.

God promises every sinner—everyone who receives Him and believes in Jesus Christ, Whom He sent—Eternal life in His personal presence. And this is already taking place. Through faith in Jesus, a person is born again and receives the gift of Eternal life, being called a son or daughter of God.

The Lord is not opposed to our studying His character and greatness within the boundaries He has established. The Bible comprehensively reveals to us the beauty and fullness of the Godhead, and God Himself teaches us the knowledge of Himself, establishing my faith in Him upon the firm foundation of Biblical teaching on which I build our relationship. This is His plan for me; He devised and is carrying out my salvation from the power of sin and darkness. But I may refuse to believe and reject it, choosing something else, and as a result perish in the

darkness of error. I may also accept, believe, and develop endlessly.

Why is it so important to believe in the Godhead—in the Divinity of the Three eternal Persons presented on the pages of the Bible? Because this creates a true image of God and a complete picture of the entire plan of our Salvation.

God is Love. The Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Son loves the Father and the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit loves the Father and the Son. And the Lord desires to see me within this love.

It is difficult for me to understand what relationships the Godhead has within Their Family, but I have been given the commandment to love my friend so that, through this example of interaction with my neighbours—people like me—I may come to know the harmony of Divine relationships. And by loving them and being loved by them, I begin to develop fully; we become one family created in the likeness of the Heavenly pattern. And our love for one another brings joy to Heaven.

God is interested in the salvation of man, and all Three Persons of the Godhead are involved in this process, which is accomplished by the Creator's Love for His creation. And this cannot be said of any other god.

The Bible calls us to worship God, the Only One worthy of it. And as I give glory to the Father, being led by the Holy Spirit, Who brought me to this, I am accepted by Him in the name of Jesus.

It is a great mystery, but it is revealed to God's children who desire to know the true Creator and Saviour.

Homework 154

1. Please read Genesis 1:26; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 6:8; Matthew 28:19; John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 13:14; Ephesians 4:4–6; 1 Peter 1:2; and 1 John 5:7 in the light of our lesson.
2. What did you understand from this lesson? Was anything new revealed to you?

3. How do you picture God? Upon what is your understanding based?
4. Is the Divine Family interested in your personal salvation? What is being done for this purpose?
5. Have you been forgotten by God?
6. Why can love not exist alone?
7. How can I understand that God loves me?

Lesson 155. In the Nets of Love and Friendship

I ask God for love and friendliness, and He gives them to me, and along with them He sends trials. Then, after these trials and victories, He grants revelations about what I have experienced, what I have learned, and what I have understood. And I draw a conclusion.

Jesus promised that He would make us fishers of men. And I see the fulfilment of this promise in my life.

He taught me to catch you in my nets of love and make you my friends, never releasing you from this trap.

What is interesting is that I do not bind anyone to myself or violate anyone's will by forcing them to be friends with me. I simply love, think about the happiness of these people, help according to my strength and abilities, rejoice in them, pray for them, and am very happy that I have them. I simply set the nets and wait for another friend to be caught in them. But I leave them the opportunity to go. And for some reason, they do not want to run away and even respond in kind.

To be a fisher of men is a special gift from God, and it is available to everyone who thirsts for love and friendship.

The truth about God is revealed in the Word of God and also in our attitude toward people. If they see Jesus in you, then through you He will surely show them the beauty of His Love. Then He will work miracles of friendship and love for their good.

But not everyone wants this, and not everyone is able to do it.

There are fishers who go out to catch people with dynamite, clubs, spears, and false teachings. They stun, maim, and kill, and then boast about their trophies. But when healing takes place, the 'trophies' run away forever, and it becomes very difficult to catch them.

Love and friendship are a very delicate yet strong net. It catches its prey so skilfully that the person who is caught finds

happiness and experiences revival and transformation, and no longer wants to go anywhere. He sees that he has come under the influence of your love; he feels good and at peace in it. This person may be on the other side of the Earth, yet still remain in your net and have no plans to leave.

But Jesus has the most beautiful and strongest net, and all who have been caught in it are in one common space, come to know one another, draw closer, and become dear and close to one another.

It is said of Jesus' disciples that they left their nets and followed Him. That is, He caught them in His own—the best net—from which they did not want to leave.

How wonderful it is to see the fruits of your fishing, to communicate with them, to rejoice in them, and to cherish them tenderly in your heart!

Considering the fact that every loving person may find himself in a situation where he and what is in his heart are treated with complete misunderstanding, it is necessary always to remember the experiences of Jesus. Studying the life and teachings of Christ helps greatly in making right decisions in difficult situations. It gives a correct understanding of what is happening in my life and why it is happening.

For example, having love for my neighbours in my heart, I can share with you, from my perspective, what I hear, see, and experience.

I love—this is my decision, this is my position, this is my answer to many difficult questions that are sometimes very hard to answer, this is the direction of my life and my daily choice to follow this principle. And all of this takes place in my mind. Somewhere there, in the depths of the heart, the mind makes this decision and declares it in morning prayer, asking for support from above. The will agrees with this choice and begins to act in the given direction; the intellect brings all thoughts together so that I may live, think, and develop within these very boundaries. And in its essence, this is something very personal between God and me. But the decision has been made, and I

take a step in this direction. Yet I am not Love; I am learning it, and especially at the beginning of the journey, I see how many mistakes take place in my life and how many difficult situations I encounter along the way. But I seek a solution within the boundaries of love, and I find it. In addition, I try to write down some of my observations and share them, desiring that if someone steps onto this path and encounters what I have encountered, it will be easier for him to endure the trial, see its essence, and find the best solution.

And I do not try to show my love to someone or prove it to someone. There is no truth in that. Love exists, and it knows, sees, and senses its time to act and overcome. And it is evident to everyone to whom God reveals it. But it is difficult for a blind person to behold the beauty of love; in his eyes it remains darkness, no matter how hard you try to present it to him. And yet, it is always better and more right to love. By doing so, you will never lose; but without love, you will never become an overcomer or receive what has been promised to the overcomers.

Love, and it shall be given you; love, and ye shall find; love, and it shall be opened unto you; love, and ye shall see more than you can imagine. For everyone who loves receives from above; everyone who loves finds; and to everyone who loves it shall be opened, and great shall be your reward in Heaven. And you shall be sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. What could be better?

I have also realised that love can be shown and seen only through deep personal interaction with a person, when it sees a problem and begins actively helping to solve it. It is as though you take this weapon out of your arsenal and begin to use it when there is a need and necessity. And it works. Love very carefully, tenderly, and delicately studies the soul of one's neighbour, and he is offered what will be for his good. However, he himself must make the decision to open up to your love.

Some see the actions of my love and open their hearts to its influence; some remain indifferent; and some rise up against

me and begin to despise me. All kinds of situations occur. Some see more than you show, some see nothing at all, and others see everything differently. But I always look to Jesus and try to understand how He evaluates the situation and how He understands it. And Christ gives His approval or instructs me how it would be better to act if something similar happens again. And I learn. God's support on the path of love is the best encouragement. You do not always receive this from people, but God will never leave me without His evaluation of my actions. And this helps greatly.

Our world is enveloped in a net of another kind, which binds the will and the mind and makes those caught in it slaves of sin. But God's Love tears these bonds apart and invites us to cast ourselves into its nets of love and friendship, which are stretched over the abyss of sin so that we will not fall and be dashed to death.

Into what should I fall? And with what should I catch my friends? I must decide this for myself now and live and act according to this decision.

I choose the nets of friendship and love. How joyful it is to become entangled in them forever and to have no possibility of escaping from them into this world! How pleasant it is to fall into someone's love and experience happiness and joy in it! How wonderful it is for all of us together to spread our nets of love and become caught in them, dreaming of remaining in such a state forever.

Can you imagine the joy of Jesus when, having cast His net into the world, He draws in a rich catch that looks upon its Fisher and no longer desires to go anywhere? And Jesus takes us out of the aquarium of sin and releases us into His ocean of Love, where we can be God's true little fish. And He does not plan to eat us, but begins to care for each one individually in a special way.

Homework 155

1. What new truth was revealed to you in this lesson?
2. To whom is the gift of being a fisher of men given?

3. What miracles do love and friendship work in your life?
4. What helps you make right decisions in difficult situations?
5. What is the secret of love?
6. How should one proceed when studying another person's soul?
7. Have you been caught in the net of Jesus Christ? What is it?
8. Please read Luke 5:5-10; Matthew 7:12; Proverbs 12:12; Matthew 13:47-48; Luke 11:13; Galatians 5:16; Romans 14:12-13; and Romans 15:1-3.

Lesson 156. God the Father—God of Love

When I hear someone say, 'I am a believer,' I think that the person standing before me is someone who believes in God. But when I ask such people what their God is like and why they believe in Him, I often hear the answer, 'My God is in my soul. I have my own faith.' And when I try to learn in greater detail what this God of the soul is like, I encounter a wall of alienation.

If we look more deeply into our hearts and are honest with ourselves, I think that many people will find it very difficult to say anything personal about God or about their personal relationship with Him. But it should not be so. Yes, our Lord is great; He is shrouded in mystery, and only the knowledge revealed on the pages of the biblical narratives and in the revelations of His prophets is available to us about Him. But even this is enough for us to marvel at the greatness and power of the Ruler of the Universe. The entire world around us testifies to the wise creative power of its Creator.

Once, scientists invented a clock that had an error of three seconds in a million years. And when they were asked how they had managed to determine this error, they replied that they had done so by the stars and the movement of the planets. This means that there is a more precise mechanism against which we can safely check our earthly inventions.

And my faith in God must have a firm foundation, laid not upon human traditions or emotional experiences, but upon sure knowledge, so that I may always be able to give an account of my hope.

And this knowledge is based upon the Bible, while the one who studies God's Word begins to believe that God exists and rewards those who seek Him with revelations about Himself. Our Lord reveals Himself to every person who decides to seek Him.

The Divinity of God the Father is disputed nowhere. Although there are people who try to convince themselves that God does

not exist, we are surrounded by so much evidence of the Creator that even such atheists acknowledge the existence of forces beyond their understanding. And in difficult situations in life, these unbelievers begin to cry out, 'God, if You exist, please help me!' And He, in His mercy, answers.

Our Lord God the Father is the Creator of all things. He is the Source of all beginnings and the Giver of every good thing. Eternal, Independent, Omnipresent, the Most High Ruler of all, True and Almighty, He possesses all the power inherent in Divinity and has the fullness of authority. The Father has no beginning, and He Himself, Who alone has immortality, gives life to everything that exists.

God is Love. The Love of God the Father is manifested in the union of His mercy and justice. Once, in response to Moses' request that He show Himself, He revealed His Character to us. We read in Exodus 34:6-7: 'And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.'

No one has ever seen God the Father. For it is impossible for a sinful person to see His face and not die. Iniquity brought separation between man and God the Father, and so that sinful man would not perish from the Glory of the Holy One, the Most High concealed Himself until the moment of complete redemption, which will take place at the Second Coming of Christ. But so that sinful people would not remain alone and in darkness without the knowledge of God and His character, the Son of God stood as the Mediator between the Father and man. From the fall of Adam until our day, it is Christ Who has been the direct Representative of the Father. Through Jesus, His true character and true Love for man have been revealed to us.

Jesus Himself taught that he who had seen Him had seen the Father, and that He and the Father are one.

It is in the teachings of Christ that we clearly learn the details about the Godhead in Three Eternal Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And based upon the teaching of Jesus, the true character of God the Father is revealed to us: He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And in this sacrifice, the true depth of God's Love for me becomes evident. For it was for my sake that He made the sacrifice; for my sake He lived and suffered. He sought me and found me; He dreamed of me and received me. How could I not rejoice in such a God?!

But the history of sin is not yet over; we are still living in this world, and the enemy is still at work. And because iniquity has multiplied, God's grace has abounded all the more. But the end of all things is drawing near. A little while longer, and iniquity will be brought to an end; then God's justice will be required. We shall see the righteous judgment upon those who rejected their salvation and chose the right to die. At that moment, a person's choice will be accepted and fulfilled.

But in all His greatness, God the Father is a tender and loving Parent to every person who believes in Jesus and is born of the Holy Spirit. He lovingly receives everyone who believes in His Son and has a personal friendship with Jesus.

If someone desires to approach God the Father while bypassing Jesus Christ, then He does not accept or listen to such people. For a very high price was paid to save man from the power of sin; therefore, whoever rejects the Son thereby rejects the Father also. An exception may be those who still know nothing about the plan of salvation but hear the voice of the Spirit appealing to their conscience.

God is merciful, and in His Love He judges not according to the letter, but by weighing all a person's motives and opportunities in accordance with the light that person has received.

Agape Love contains a deep knowledge of God the Father through Jesus, for it is the Father Who is the Source of true Love for every person. Without God as its foundation, love

becomes one of the sciences of sentimentalism, in which feelings exist but there is no firm foundation or deep principle. But in God it is genuine: it intertwines with my thoughts and feelings, shaping my character into the likeness of the character of Christ and making me an entirely different person who lives not for himself, but for the Glory of God.

But this knowledge of Love does not come in one day; it must be learned daily, entrusting oneself into God's hands every morning and thirsting for a deeper knowledge of the truth in Christ Jesus.

And it is in agape Love that I comprehend the character of God the Father. Through it, I learn that God is constant in His plans, faithful to His promises, firm in His hatred of sin, tender in His Love for the sinner, open to those who seek Him, and great; yet He is inaccessible to those who, while worshipping Him, disregard the Son and do not regard as sacred the blood shed for the redemption of sins.

Do you believe in such a God? Do you know Him personally? God desires to have this relationship and reveals Himself in it to everyone who wishes to communicate with Him through Jesus Christ.

God is Love, and the presence of Love in the heart testifies to the presence of the Creator there and also to such a person's abiding in God.

Does it make you glad that we have such a Great and Wonderful Heavenly Father? The very name 'Father' speaks to us of God's special closeness as Someone dear to us. And He truly is Father. 'Abba, Father' is an expression very close in meaning to 'Heavenly Daddy.'

And faith in Him is a firm foundation for building any relationship or undertaking.

Homework 156

1. Please read Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 4:35; Psalm 110:1, 4; John 3:16; 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:28; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1

Timothy 1:17; 1 John 4:8; and Revelation 4:11 in the light of our lesson.

2. How do you picture God the Father?
3. How do you understand the expression, 'God is Love'?
4. In what do you see the difference between the Son and the Father?
5. Has Jesus, through His life and example, revealed the character of God the Father to you?
6. What does the expression 'a believer' mean to you?
7. Why does faith without Love not save?

Lesson 157. God the Son—Representative of Love

Who is Jesus? Who was He before His birth in a human body? Is He God? These and similar questions have lately been stirring the church and the minds of many of God's children, causing them to reconsider the foundations of their faith, examine the questions mentioned, and find answers to them.

Truth will not cease to be truth if we test it. The Bible will not suffer if I begin to dig into it and seek a firm foundation for my faith and, having found it, build my life upon it.

While no one denies the Divinity of the Father, and there are not even any particular attacks directed against Him, matters are different with Jesus. It was precisely He and His Divine status that aroused the envy of the anointed cherub Lucifer, who raised a rebellion in Heaven and led a third of the angels astray. And now the entire conflict has moved to our planet. Unfortunately, the first people supported Satan by breaking God's prohibition, and sin entered the world.

The Bible describes this event in Revelation 12:7-9: '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.'

Jesus, the Son of God, is the Eternal God, having no beginning. He Himself is the Beginning of everything that exists in the Universe. Jesus, being equal with the Father, created our world in six days. He is the Fullness of Knowledge and the True Image of the Father. Before our Lord was born on Earth, He was not called the Son, nor was He called Jesus Christ. He received these earthly names when He was born into our world, and He became the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as we know Him.

The great mystery of the incarnation of the Eternal God as man still remains a mystery to most people. From history we know

that many people wanted to become gods, but that God should desire to become man—this is an incomprehensible mystery that can be discovered only through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a fact that is comprehended by faith and accepted by those who seek God and desire to know His Wisdom and Power.

So that I may be understood, I will call the Savior by the name familiar to us. Being equal with God, our Lord Jesus occupied in Heaven the place of Representative of the Divine plans before the entire Universe. Through Him it was created. We read in John 1:1-3: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.'

When Adam sinned, sin separated humanity from God, but the plan of Salvation, which had been adopted in the Heavenly council and approved by the Father, came into effect, and from that moment Christ became the Mediator between God and the sinner. Through Jesus the way was opened to repentance, forgiveness, and freedom from the power of sin and Satan. It was the Lord Who came to Adam with the question, 'Where art thou?' It was He Who spoke with Abraham and Moses. Through Him the law was given, and from Him the prophets received messages for the people.

The plan of Salvation was gradually revealed to the world in symbols, and step by step the culmination of its fulfillment drew nearer. All the sacrificial animals pointed to the better, true Sacrifice, and it was precisely to this Sacrifice that the attention of all God's people was directed. But many were blinded by the temptations of the world and did not recognize their Redeemer.

And then a miracle took place! The Eternal God, having no Beginning, the Creator of all things, became man; He became the Seed promised even to Adam. He passed from conception to birth according to all known laws. After He was born, He was named Jesus. He became a man like us, developing according to all the laws of nature. From His very birth, the Savior depended

upon His parents. He learned about life while sitting on His mother's lap and listened to the truths and ordinances that He Himself had given to Israel and the prophets. Jesus became a perfect man, experiencing the same difficulties that are inherent in human beings. He experienced the same feelings that we have and, as a man, solved many of the problems that also confront us. Therefore, He understands us perfectly now. But unlike other people, He was the Son of God. He was not born in iniquity and had no sin. Having inherited our flesh weakened by sin, He committed no evil in the human body, although He had the possibility of falling at any time. Temptations surrounded Christ, but He boldly resisted them and endured every trial; otherwise, He could not have been the Savior of the world. In that case, He would have had to die for His Own sins.

In giving His Son, God the Father risked losing Him forever. And Satan knew this; therefore, throughout Jesus' earthly life, he fiercely attacked Him, trying to lead the Savior into even one sin. But the Lord stood firm.

From childhood, Jesus studied the Scriptures and had truth as the foundation of His character, by which He successfully resisted the devil and this world. The Holy Spirit Himself revealed to Christ the true meaning of what was written in the law. When Christ attended the Passover feast at the age of twelve, He encountered the type of the symbolic sacrifice that pointed to Him, and the true Sacrifice that He was to become was revealed to Him.

Jesus could have refused this trial and left this path at any time. He could have returned to the Father and become the same God He had always been, leaving our world to perish under Satan's power. But He chose the path of Sacrifice and followed it to the end, becoming our Savior forever.

As a man, the Lord revealed to us the true character of God. Through His life, He showed the genuine Love of God for people and how it is possible to love in every situation. And having become the Savior, He restores the image of God in

those who have believed in Him and decided to live in obedience and truth.

Faith in Jesus as the Son of God, as one's personal Savior, and as the Messiah Who came is the firm foundation of faith upon which one may build, to the Glory of God, that which meets God's requirements and expectations.

The Cross opened to the whole world the way of salvation and the fullness of God's Agape Love. It was precisely there that the entire Universe saw that God is Love—Love that loves the sinner but hates sin. Mercy and justice met at the Cross and showed what Love is in the completeness of perfection. Sin was punished, the guilty One died, mercy opened the way for forgiveness, and the repentant sinner could be justified. The payment for the iniquities of all people was made in full, the law's demand for the death of the sinner was satisfied, truth triumphed, the way of salvation became available to everyone who desires it, the door of God's grace and mercy opened, and all who believe in Jesus receive power to become the children of God. The plan of Salvation acquired its redeeming power because of the Sacrifice that was offered.

God became man so that by His death He might deliver people from the power of the grave. This must be accepted, and then one must live by this truth, testifying to the whole world about how God's grace changes the character into God's likeness in human flesh.

The Eternal God became man forever. The Divine and the human were united into one whole. But although the war has been won, it is not yet over. It remains to teach those who are still in the world the laws of Heaven and to inscribe these laws upon the hearts of believers, so that through them God's Love may be revealed to other people. We have been given the power to love one another! What trust!

Homework 157

1. Please read Isaiah 53:4-6; Daniel 9:25-27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17-19; Philippians

2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-19; Hebrews 2:9-18; and 8:1-2 in the light of our lesson.

2. What new things have you learned from this lesson? What has been revealed to you in a new way?
3. Is Jesus your personal Savior?
4. Why did Christ take this step for my salvation?
5. Does God have other religions for the salvation of people?
6. Do you believe in the Divinity of Christ?

Lesson 158. Ignorance in Love

We live in an age of enlightenment. Freedom of speech and freedom of religion give everyone the opportunity to study and learn what he considers necessary. We have an abundance of all kinds of information, and if we desire, we can learn anything. Our historical era is called the information age. Information technologies amaze us with their achievements. Each of us has a smartphone with which we can find, learn, hear, and see almost anything the soul desires. Some use information to enrich themselves, some to improve their professional skills, and some for spiritual growth. Others reject these opportunities, consider all these inventions empty, and regard the abundance of light and knowledge as unnecessary. Such a person may be called ignorant.

Ignorance is defined as a lack of knowledge and upbringing, a lack of culture and hygiene—that is, a deficiency in something possessed by civilized society. And, as a rule, ignorance leads a person to envy, aggression, evil speaking, vandalism, contempt, and physical violence toward those who possess knowledge and walk in the light.

Everything must be learned. Superficial knowledge may be acquired simply by being in a certain social environment, but a deep understanding of any science requires a person to study that field personally, to accept all its discoveries into his life, and to compare and seriously analyze what is being studied. Such people are commonly called scholars, professionals, or theologians.

We, as God's people, have been given the science of Salvation—the salvation of the soul, salvation from the power of sin and from the torments of eternal death. As I comprehend it, I understand that there is Someone by the Name of Jesus. In His Love for me, He made my salvation possible because He literally exchanged places with me and, in my place, accepted all the horrors of the death He did not deserve, in order to give me the right to the beautiful eternal life I did not deserve.

The science of Salvation implies my faith in the One Who became my Substitute and, as a sign of this, my acceptance of water baptism. It presupposes my obedience to God's law and the keeping of His commandments and ordinances, my love for my neighbors, and my walking in the light. And it is impossible to learn all this without my personal diligence and desire. At the initial stage, I need teachers, mentors, and textbooks that, by presenting subjective experience, will help me quickly and correctly comprehend the foundations of the teaching and enable me to understand and do what I cannot do on my own without their help. After that, lifelong independent efforts are expected of me in knowing God and Jesus Christ, Whom He sent.

Through the prophet Hosea, God warns me: 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no Priest to Me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.' Hosea 4:6.

This is a rather severe warning for me, and I understand that God expects some effort and action on my part in the matter of education in the science of Salvation. He has given me enough light so that, having it, I may walk in it. And for the last days, the Lord has sent me a special truth that warns me about the dangers of our age and brings knowledge about how not to fall or enter into darkness. What should I do with it? I must decide. I consider it foolish to justify myself by the ignorance or indifference of my friends and loved ones. If I am hungry when food is available, no one else can solve this problem properly for me. I myself must do something.

As for food, I will find ways to obtain it and eat it, but for some reason I do not always have enough time for spiritual food for my personal development. What ignorance! How can I starve my spirit and still think that it will always remain alert because I read something a week or a month ago? It sounds foolish, but this is exactly what sometimes happens.

I will never complain that the same porridge, salad, or bread is before me every day and that it also has to be chewed. I will not

say that I am terribly tired of all this. Yet when it comes to the Bible and other spiritual books, I begin to doubt that I can find anything else in them that is convincing and wise for me. At the same time, I turn on YouTube or a social network and find so many things that interest me that there simply is not enough time to learn everything. Yet I remember that there is a time for breakfast, lunch, and supper, which it is best not to miss.

But God's science of the salvation of my soul is neglected.

Yet even while studying the Bible and other spiritual books, I may decide that I have reached a certain level of knowledge and need greater light. Then I begin to ask God and seek. For such people, He has a special gift—the Science of Love. It is the science of how a saved person should relate properly to people, especially to those with whom he lives under one roof and who share his religious convictions. Love opens limitless possibilities for comprehending this science and creates conditions for applying the knowledge gained in life. If I only read about love and about the experiences and discoveries of others, this will help me learn more quickly and understand something. But when I myself begin to practice it and apply the knowledge of love in my life, then I am learning within myself, and Christ Himself becomes my Teacher. He knows me very well, He knows all my particular qualities, and He teaches me how best to apply in life the knowledge He gives me.

For example, whose words are you reading now? If these are lessons from Brother Andrey, they will be of little benefit to you. But if you understand that through Brother Andrey God Himself is addressing you, desiring to communicate something very important to you, then the same Spirit Who prompts me to write these lines will also communicate to you the meaning contained in them. In that case, my discoveries will become yours.

In order to draw people's minds to Himself, God almost always works through a human being. And when a person hears the call and turns directly to God, the Lord begins to teach that soul personally, to write His laws in his heart, and to endow that person with the mind of a righteous man.

The Science of Love brings love, happiness, joy, friendliness, blessing, and wisdom into life. Ignorance in the study of this discipline is fraught with the danger that a person may lose his salvation and, while possessing knowledge about it, perish forever.

Woe unto me if I think that I do not need to grow and develop spiritually and that the knowledge I possess is enough to keep me from falling. Life with God is not a job in which it is enough to know one's work well and perform it; it is spiritual growth and development from glory to glory. And if at the beginning of this path milk was enough for me, then with time I must move on to solid food.

Love is very solid and nourishing food, so strong teeth are needed to chew it. And these teeth are called thirst—the desire to taste, to know, and to possess.

And God gives me exactly what I strive to receive. He very modestly offers Himself, saying that without love I am nothing and gain no benefit from anything.

Those who are ignorant in love will lose everything they have.

Homework 158

1. What useful things have you gained for yourself from this lesson?
2. Does God expect diligence from me in spiritual matters?
3. What will happen to me if I am not interested in what God offers me in these last days?
4. How can I distinguish truth from a counterfeit? How can I determine whether I am receiving pure information from a pure source?
5. What should I do if spiritual things do not interest me? With my mind I understand that they must be studied, but my heart resists. What should I do?
6. If I have understood that I am ignorant in the knowledge of love, how can I come out of this condition?
7. Please read Proverbs 1:22; Ecclesiastes 10:6; Hosea 4:14; Ephesians 4:18; 2 Timothy 2:23; 1 Peter 2:15; Matthew 5:3;

John 7:37; Hosea 6:3; 2 Peter 1:19; and Philippians 3:13 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 159. What Is Love Like?

He who loves fulfills God's law and allows God to write in his heart and put into his mind God's commandment: 'That ye love one another.' And he does not merely give the Most High his gracious permission to do this, but asks Him for it day and night and thirsts to abide in this gift, praying and imploring the Heavenly Father to grant this power and by no means take it away.

At the same time, however, a loving heart trembles at the thought of its own imperfection and by faith takes hold of Jesus, not letting Him go.

If I love but do not know Christ personally and tell no one about Him, if I am not interested in reading, thinking, or speaking about Him, then something is wrong with my love. Perhaps it is a well-developed fleshly quality of my mind. I see the advantage of such a condition in society and adapt myself to its demand. God has given each of us a set of good natural qualities of the soul, such as kindness, friendliness, cordiality, conscience, concern, heartache, a sense of justice, conditional love, conditional joy, comfort, and much more. All people possess these qualities and can develop them. But inborn good qualities of the soul and spiritual fruit differ from one another in this: a person who lives according to the flesh tries to bring all his good character traits to perfection by his own strength, training his will, disciplining himself, and keeping his soul in an 'iron grip,' forcing it to do what it sometimes does not want to do. A spiritual person, however, understands his own weakness and imperfection and relies by faith solely on the merits of Jesus Christ. He asks for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and does everything as God directs, trusting in His power and help in every good gift. If such a person is accused of some sin, even in a biased and false way, he will not argue or contradict you, but will press close to Jesus with all his heart and ask: 'Is this so, Lord? Please forgive and cleanse me. Show me how You see me in this situation.'

A loving heart trembles at the very thought that some sin may be found in the soul and defile it. And such a person works out his salvation with fear and trembling, fearing that he may be found unclean. He finds his only comfort and assurance of salvation in trusting in Jesus, believing in Him, communicating with Him, beholding Him, and becoming one with Him in one Spirit. And the Lord does not leave me alone with my anxieties, but assures me of His Love through His promises, through the assurance that I am God's son and have been accepted by the Father through faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives His testimony that I am a member of God's family and have nothing to fear. As a pledge of my salvation, I find rest in my heart and peace with God. This is a wonderful state of the soul. I realize my imperfection, I see my corruption, and memories of past mistakes and sins plunge me into shame and horror, but my heart reaches out to Jesus, Who has forgiven and forgotten all of it and will never reproach me for my past. And I believe that with Him I will overcome everything. And the peace of God, which surpasses my understanding, fills my mind. I cannot even describe what it is, but I can affirm one thing: it is a very pleasant state. I have found the One Who helps me whenever I turn to Him, answers all my prayers, and assures me that He is my Friend, Helper, and Wonderful Counselor.

And yet, when I read the book about the acts of the Apostles and see clear signs and manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit, I understand that I have not yet experienced such an encounter and such a baptism. And I greatly thirst to experience it.

Reflecting on the time of the Apostles, I come to the conclusion that the people of that age did not yet have sufficient light, and God had to accomplish visibly, through apparent miracles and signs, all that we read about. Now a time of abundant light has come, and herein lies our advantage over the Christians of that period. God no longer acts so visibly; He works differently, teaching us consciously to live and walk in the light, in obedience and knowledge, and thereby to keep ourselves from all evil. And I think that the absence of vivid, visible manifestations of God's power helps me look more deeply into

God's providence and analyze each situation, comparing God's will, law, and light with what is taking place in my life, as I trust by faith that God participates in all my movements and undertakings. And then the Lord Himself decides whether to manifest His visible power and perform miracles, whether to give me visible answers in this way or not.

I receive all my discoveries and revelations from God through the Holy Spirit within me. No one sends me visions, no one speaks into my ears, yet I hear God's voice and see Him in my life. And the nearer He is, the more my heart trembles because of its unworthiness. And the only justification I can offer for myself is expressed in these words: 'Ask Jesus about me, and whatever He considers me to be, that is what I am. I can add nothing more to this. Only the Lord is able to evaluate me correctly and worthily, and He will not be mistaken.'

However, I have noticed that while showing me all my imperfection, Jesus also reveals to me the virtues of those with whom I am friends, whom I love, and with whom I associate. He shows me the whole person with all his particular qualities, but asks me to pay attention to the best aspects of his soul and life and to build my relationship with him upon them. And this is so interesting! You know much about a person, yet you see only what is beautiful. And with such an approach, love helps you receive him into your heart as a friend and love him always.

I am especially glad that the number of my friends keeps growing, and at times I am physically unable to embrace them all and maintain constant relationships with them, because I must attend to other matters as well. Yet I can carefully preserve them in my heart. My love for them does not die, but at the first opportunity makes itself known and, when necessary, begins to act, caring for a friend's happiness and blessing. And how wonderful it is when an opportunity arises to talk, to meet, to spend time together, simply to be near and see a friend with your own eyes. The heart rejoices even when he passes by or stands nearby, and you see and love him, while he sometimes does not even realize what a source of inspiration and joy he may be to you—his word or sincere smile. And how I

sometimes love to watch my friends and delight in seeing and hearing them, knowing that they are mine, my own. Some people love to count their treasures, but my treasure is those whom I love and whom I have brought into my heart as friends.

But when an urgent need arises, I must draw these blessings out of many of my modest friends for myself as well. Then I stir up their minds. What else can I do? We must learn to love one another, must we not?

And in such relationships of friendship and love there is a special reward from the Lord that we receive in this bustling life.

Friendship does not save me, but it makes me fit for Eternal life.

The joy of relationships makes me happy, but it does not add holiness to me. Yet I have Jesus, in Whom I receive both salvation and holiness, and possessing these, I can calmly be a friend and rejoice in life in love and friendship. And this is a gift from the Lord.

Homework 159

1. What interesting things did you note for yourself in this lesson?
2. What is the difference between a good fleshly person and a spiritual person?
3. What must be done in order to receive spiritual power?
4. How can I determine whether I am a fleshly or a spiritual person?
5. How do you receive revelations from God?
6. Seeing what is beautiful in people—how does this ability help in friendship?
7. Please read Romans 6:22; Psalm 62:1-2, 11; 1 Chronicles 16:11; Amos 5:4; Jeremiah 24:7; 31:34; 29:13; Proverbs 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Ephesians 5:18; and Philippians 2:12-13 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 160. Love Exists

What is love like? Can it be defined? How can I know whether I have it?

If we say that it is beautiful, that will be a rather relative description, because every person has his own idea of what is beautiful. To assert that love does not exist is the same as trying to convince people of a deception that few will believe, because all people have felt the touch of love.

I can describe how I understand it, how I see it in my life, and how it works in my heart, but you must decide for yourselves whether to believe me and whether the power of love will manifest itself in your heart as it does in mine.

I can say with confidence that agape love exists, and it is so real that it is simply impossible to confuse it with anything else. There are many counterfeits offered by the world, but God's Love surpasses them in its depth, power, and beauty. It may come unexpectedly to give brief support in a certain situation and then leave. It is also able to enter my life in answer to prayer and remain forever if I desire and thirst to have it.

Love is not only a feeling or a principle; it is God Himself in me, Who has a special plan and intentions for me—for good and not for evil—to give me a future and a hope. Love is a new heart, a heart of flesh, which beats according to God's will and does what is pleasing to Him.

I understand that love is in me and that it acts at the first need. I see how it penetrates every sphere of my life, dissolves into all my thoughts, keeps my feelings under control, and gives everything its meaning. I can speak openly about this. To say that I do not have it after I ask for it, receive it, and manifest it in my life would be to misrepresent God and deeply offend Him. It would be like a man who has a lawful wife claiming that he is not married. The relationship with God described here is very close and trusting, although I have never heard His actual voice. Yet He knows how to address me and speak to me in His own ways. And I hear God's instructions, though at times I may

fail to discern His words when He speaks very quietly to me about some small matters, leaving me the right to choose.

I manifest love toward my neighbors equally, although it is selective because it has and seeks an individual approach to every person. But when supernatural help and the full power of love are needed in order to gain the victory and not respond to the enemy according to the flesh, then I cry out to my Lord in a simple prayer and ask Him to give me this Heavenly gift, which I then receive. Sometimes it sounds like this: 'Lord, I choose love, and this is precisely how I want to respond to this challenge. Bless me in this decision. Thank You.' And love comes to give victory in the trial that has arisen. In God's eyes, an overcomer is one who, in every situation and under every temptation, chooses God's methods and principles for solving problems—that is, overcomes everything with love, prayer, and faith in the will of the Most High. And help comes from Heaven. God acts, although outwardly it may look like defeat because I kept silent, apologized, walked away, yielded, did not strike back, and did not continue or escalate the situation. But sometimes one must go all the way, plant the banner of truth, and entrust all the consequences to God.

I have noticed that Jesus never apologized to anyone. When love moves your entire being, all your motives are permeated with this very attitude, and there is no reason to be ashamed of it. And if I love someone, I am not ashamed of it. It is wrong to apologize for love.

Agape love cannot be confused with anything else. If it is present, I know that this is exactly what it is. It is that which never fails. It continually abides where Christ lives, and it manifests itself in a special way while always taking my choice into account and respecting my freedom. It seems to ask, 'May I manifest myself here? May I put this right?' And then it waits for my decision. But I may decide nothing.

For example, I am standing in line at a checkout, and in front of me is someone to whom love prompts me to say something pleasant, but I simply remain silent. God does not force me to do good, but He gives me many opportunities to manifest His

Love without any reason or explanation. And sometimes I respond to these suggestions of love and cannot even understand why I acted exactly as I did. But the Lord knows.

When I am alone and occupied with my own affairs, love may not manifest itself visibly through me in any way, but when a neighbor appears, it is ready to act and only waits for my decision. Yet neighbors are all different. If a person is closed to me, I respect his freedom and do not plan to force my way into his life in order to fill it with something beautiful. I simply wait for someone whom I can help and to whom I can give something.

Love knows how to give. It also knows how to receive in order to give even more.

In my view, to love is the most beautiful attitude toward one's neighbor and the best solution to many problems. It brings a special joy because I act in precisely this way. I speak much about love, perhaps even more than necessary. And I see that it does not affect some people at all, while it irritates others; then I become silent and simply live, placing love into the motive of one action or another. And if I see clear opposition to all my actions or plans, I do not climb onto the barricades to defend the truth, but quietly pray and rejoice that there are other people who need me and for whom I can do something.

Love sees everything. It understands people very well and recognizes the spirit that moves them, yet it chooses to love them too and to treat them with respect. But love also recognizes itself in other hearts, and it rejoices in this encounter and reaches toward it, although at the same time it gives me the right to choose whether to enter into a relationship.

Relationships of love develop very well with those who speak a language that I understand or that is native to me. It is very difficult for me to communicate with those who do not speak a language I know. And even with all my love for such a person, he remains a foreigner to me, and all my expressions of love have no meaning for him. Therefore, I have to limit myself to

communicating with those who understand me, although deeds of love and loving care are understood by all people and even by animals.

The manifestation of agape in my life toward my neighbors is an answer to my prayers for the gift of love. If I ask for it, believe that I will receive an answer, and then see how God's Love works in me and brings me joy, how can I say that it is not in me? It is there. And if someone does not see it, perhaps he expects a different manifestation of it and does not see my motives. Love is a spirit, and only spiritual eyes can see it in others in all its fullness. Therefore, do not be troubled if someone says that you have no love. If you ask for it and receive it, then you have this testimony within yourselves, while the opinion of an outside observer can only confuse you and is not so important, especially if he does not know you personally and has never seen you.

But woe is me if I claim to have love while acting according to the flesh, or if I use this holy name to cover personal or selfish interests. It is impossible to devise a worse representation of God's character. God calls this hypocrisy and sin.

And ultimately, God Himself, Who is Love, knows exactly whether I have His Love. And He judges all my intentions.

Homework 160

1. What new things did you learn in this lesson?
2. When inviting love into your life, would you like it to be a guest or the mistress of your soul?
3. What effect does love produce when it takes up residence in your heart?
4. Have you had experiences when you did not know how to act correctly, but as you prayed to God, He changed your thinking? Please share.
5. Who is an overcomer in God's eyes?
6. How should we respond properly to those who do not believe in love?
7. Please read Jeremiah 29:11-13; John 3:8; Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Song of Solomon 2:4; Galatians 2:19-20;

Psalm 98:1; 1 Corinthians 15:57; and Romans 8:36-37;
12:21 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 161. Freedom in Friendship

Let me tell you a short illustration.

At last I have a friend! And what a friend he is!!! And he loves me. I simply adore him. And perhaps there is nothing more wonderful than spending time with your friend, talking about any subject, doing things together, and simply loving. And when there are also common interests and spiritual values, it is like an earthly paradise.

And I begin to live for this fellowship and dream that our friendship will never end.

And the more time we spend together, the more firmly convinced I become that my friend is my property. He is mine. Forever. And he must understand this and behave in accordance with these demands and expectations.

The newness of our relationship quickly passes, and we are already friends on the basis of my deep inner attraction and strong emotional attachment. And I understand that, having such a friend, I do not need other people or new acquaintances, because my dear friend meets all my spiritual needs and satisfies all my emotional needs. Why look for another? We are comfortable in our little private circle.

And so days, weeks, and years pass, and we rejoice in each other's company and understand that we need no one else.

Seeing our friendship, many people seek to intrude into our relationship, but we do not want to share with others the intimate feelings that we experience.

But then a misfortune occurred. My friend met a young woman who began to take up all his time and turned his attention away from me and toward herself. And all our rare conversations come down to my having to listen to how wonderful this woman is.

She really is good, but she is taking my property away from me and claims the place that I occupy in my friend's heart. And he

does not object to this, as he constantly tells me. What should I do?

I do not want to destroy their relationship, but I see that something must be done. I understand that I am losing something very dear to me and that my friend has gone very far in this new relationship. Therefore, if I interfere with its development, he will prefer to remain with this young woman and push me aside. But it should not be this way, because we are friends, and friendship is sacred and eternal.

I try to preserve our fellowship and constantly remind him of myself, making it clear that I also exist, that I also need attention, that I still want to talk, and that I have things to tell him. And we try to maintain our relationship. But this new female friend immediately discerned my intentions and makes it clear to my friend that she wants to be the one to whom he will devote his life, or else she will step aside and will not interfere with our continuing friendship. And, of course, my friend chose her. And tension appeared in our relationship.

And a wedding is approaching. I am invited to be one of the witnesses. This is pleasant for me, but also painful. For I am losing something very close to me forever. How unfair it is!

And my relatives and good acquaintances constantly tell me so many details from the lives of my friend and his young woman that I never cease to be amazed at how blind I was in my love and did not see what they see. But now I have become wiser, and I will no longer allow other friends to 'lead me by the nose.'

And now my friend has a family and children, and we communicate, but no longer as before; now we do so cautiously.

I have embellished this situation a little in order to highlight certain aspects of this relationship. I can assure you that the friendship of people who do not know Christ differs from the friendship of Christians or from the friendship of a believer with people who do not have Eternal Life.

Although friendship remains itself in every situation, it has different motives and is based on different laws. And the most

important principle of true friendship is that it respects a person's choice and gives one's friend complete freedom to choose the relationships and the degree of closeness that he wishes to have.

We live in a world that has its own concepts and laws of friendship. They are very similar to spiritual ones. Both have much in common, and as a result, when I become a believer, I want to bring my old ideas into my new life. This creates problems in relationships, and I do not understand why everything goes wrong.

The best example of friendship is Christ's attitude toward me. He loves to be a Friend, He knows how to be a Friend, He knows how to be My Friend, and He is the truest Friend. And His attitude toward me sometimes bewilders me. I judge Him by myself, but He is not like that; He is special. I think that since I have done this or that, Jesus will now behave in a certain way because that is what is customary in the world. But He does not act according to my ideas; He has His own understanding. Christ often surprises me with His attitude. He will embrace someone and hold that person close, comforting him in this way. To another of His friends He will speak tender words and look into his eyes, but He will pass by me without even looking at me or comforting me, leaving me to resolve everything alone. Yet Jesus will not abandon me forever; He will stand nearby and watch with interest as I flounder in my cares and find a way out. And I so want Him to embrace me too and resolve everything with His gentle touch. And in despair I cry out, 'Lord, dost Thou not care that I perish and suffer?!' But He watches me attentively and waits for something. Yet when I finally cry, 'Save me!!! I am perishing!!!' then He is instantly beside me and saves me. How am I to understand Him?

But in His Love for me, Jesus makes me understand that I will cope with many of my problems myself, because His Grace is sufficient for me, while He treats those who are weak in faith with greater tenderness. And I watch as He embraces them after my stories, how tenderly He speaks to them using my speech, while He does not even look at me. And it becomes so

joyful that at least it happens in this way. How I would like always to be such an infant, lying in His arms and receiving His affection. But Jesus sends me out into the world alone and teaches me to become independent, while always watching me and keeping me within His field of vision, allowing me to make mistakes, fall, rise, acquire bumps and bruises, and choose my path.

And He respects my freedom, preserving me in it, and forbids others to violate my personal space without my consent. He Himself does not enter where I do not allow Him to enter.

We were all created for one another, but we cannot make one another our property, even if we are members of the same family. To become another person's conscience is a gross violation of personal freedom and forbidden territory that must not be entered.

In every society there is order, there are laws of conduct and morality, and there are rules that must be taken into account and observed. But there is also something very personal, and this I must decide for myself. The personal consists of what I myself must understand, what I am to believe, whom I am to love, with whom and how I am to be friends, how I am to behave, and what kind of person I am to be. And God respects my choice and does not force my will, but He always offers the best way, promising to be with me if I choose Him. And this is so interesting! I am free to choose life or death, blessing or curse, friendship or enmity, love or selfishness. And He takes my choice into account and acts according to what I choose. When I respond to His counsel by saying that I have no time to study it and delve into its essence and meaning, He accepts even this and waits.

Homework 161

1. What new things did you learn?
2. How does Christian friendship differ from friendship in the world?
3. Can a dependent person give freedom to another person?

4. Please share your experience of how Christ relates to your freedom.
5. Why is it so important to respect another person's boundaries?
6. Which commandment is violated when a person tries to become another person's conscience?
7. Please read Deuteronomy 27:16; Micah 6:8; Zephaniah 2:3; Philippians 2:3; Matthew 23:8-11; Matthew 23:8-11; Mark 16:9; John 13:1; Luke 17:17-19; Exodus 20:3-5; Romans 6:16; John 4:23; Luke 9:54-55; and 1 John 4:1 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 162. The Holy Spirit—The Embodiment of Love

The most mysterious Person in the entire Bible is the Holy Spirit, the Eternal God, the Creator and Maker of the Universe, the One Who brings all God's utterances and Words into being, equal to the Father and the Son, and at the same time the most Humble and Unobtrusive.

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us about the acts of the Holy Spirit, and it could be called precisely that: The Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus revealed to us the teaching that the Lord Holy Spirit would draw everyone to Christ, comfort, bring things to remembrance, teach, speak, be poured out, exalt, explain, reveal the meaning of God's words and actions, and make us fit for Eternal Life. And this continues to take place to this day in the life of every believer.

It is also interesting that the Holy Spirit does not draw attention to Himself, and the Bible does not make it a special aim to direct our eyes toward this Person of the Godhead; rather, the entire mission of the Holy Spirit is to bring a person into a personal relationship with Christ, reveal the beauty of the character of Jesus and God the Father, restore the image of the Most High in the person, and explain the meaning of Scripture in the light of Love. The Holy Spirit seeks to teach us to love one another.

From Scripture we see what miracles God's people performed when the Holy Spirit descended upon them and baptized them in a special way. And we know that at the end of time the Lord will pour His Spirit upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground, and we believe that this will happen in our days. We wait for this and ask for it continually, and it will happen.

The Holy Spirit is represented to us in symbols as fire, wind, water, oil, eyesalve, and Agape Love. He manifests Himself in

the actions of God's Angels, who are also ministering spirits for us and actively participate in our protection and salvation.

The Spirit of God, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient, is the Beginning of all that exists and reveals to us all of God's plans, intentions, and mysteries that are accessible to us, making them clear and understandable. It is He Who is the true Interpreter of Holy Scripture and conveys the genuine meaning and essence of all revelations concerning the character of God, His plans, and our prospects for spiritual development and growth.

The Lord Holy Spirit is equal to the Father and the Son, but nowhere does He teach that we should worship Him. He directs our eyes to the Son, through Whom we come to the Father. And when our eyes are fixed upon Jesus, the Holy Spirit presents Christ to our minds, being precisely the One Who connects me with my Savior in constant fellowship and interaction. God accepts no worship of Himself that bypasses the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And where there is no living Jesus, there is no acceptance by God. Yet despite apostasy and universal unbelief, God loves His creation and continues tenderly to care for the people who have rebelled against Him, giving them food, warmth, light, and everything necessary for life at all times, even without their asking.

Place your hand upon your chest and feel your heart beating. It gives life to the whole body. But Who gives life to it? Even the most hardened criminal does not realize how indebted he is to God for the gift of life, which he has so perverted that he has become worthy of death.

The Holy Spirit is a Person of the Godhead, and He possesses all the qualities of an intelligent person. He experiences disregard from people (see Genesis 6:3). He teaches (Luke 12:12), reproves (see John 16:8), directs the affairs of the Church (see Acts 13:2), helps and makes intercession (see Romans 8:26), inspires (see 2 Peter 1:21), sanctifies (see 1 Peter 1:2), is grieved, speaks, gives birth, and does many things that require consciousness and creative power.

Faith in the Holy Spirit as the True Eternal God creates in me a firm foundation for all subsequent blessings and brings me to spiritual birth from above through faith in Jesus Christ. I am born for Eternal Life through the direct participation of the Holy Spirit, and from the moment of my spiritual birth I become God's son and enter into a covenant with God, having every right to God's promised blessings and promises, and at the end of time, to the eternal inheritance of the Earth, my Eternal Homeland, where God Himself will be my God.

It is precisely the birth from above by the Holy Spirit that reveals to me all the power and beauty of the plan of my Salvation. I receive power to become a son of God and have all the privileges of such a relationship, because I am now led by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14).

We read in Romans 5:5: '... the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.' That very Agape Love about which we reflect so much in our lessons is the visible and tangible presence of the Holy Spirit in our relationships with one another. The Holy Spirit is God's Love within us, wisdom from above, meekness and humility, and all the good qualities of character that Jesus possessed.

When I decide to love, by doing so I allow the Holy Spirit to produce within me such an attitude toward my neighbor as my own personal conduct. And He does this with joy. This is the greatest miracle, which I sometimes fail to notice. At times I think that I myself am so good, and I accept kind words and gratitude addressed to me. But without God my love will end very quickly and, in the fire of trials, will evaporate together with all my desires; yet God's Love, given by the Holy Spirit, cannot be quenched.

How Jesus longed for the time when He would go to the Father so that He could send us the Comforter! How He taught that this would be better for all of us. It is precisely because of the Holy Spirit that I can have fellowship with Jesus at any time, in any place, under any circumstances and trials.

So much takes place around me and within me because of the influence of the Holy Spirit, yet I do not even think about it. I simply live.

When I ask for the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon me, do I understand what this means? I am inviting an ocean of Love into my life—and what am I to do with it? In asking for baptism, I ask for a trial, for fire that will refine me, for water that will cleanse me, for wind that will bring changes to my character, and for oil that will give light to my lamp of faith. Am I ready for this? Will this not be violence by my will against my own will?

Jesus gave us the most serious warning that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And one must be very careful in one's decisions so as not to cross this point of no return. This is a Holy influence that must be taken into account.

God is a consuming fire—will I endure it? It is very painful, but it is necessary to pass through it. When my carnal nature burns up, it pulls part of me with it into this fire, and I understand that I must part with it forever. But am I ready for this? Do I want such changes? 'Yes, Lord, I thirst for this; cleanse me and make me the way Thou desirest to see me!'

With what joy Jesus gave us His commandment of Love, anticipating how we would be filled with the Holy Spirit and tenderly love one another with a pure heart, gladdening hearts at all times. And this became possible because the Great Sacrifice for my sins was offered, and this revealed the truth about God's Love to the entire Universe and to sinful people, and gave God the right to save all who desire it. And Love will rest upon God's children as a seal and a distinguishing mark, declaring to the entire visible and invisible world that I am God's possession by right of creation and redemption. And His banner over me is Love.

Homework 162

1. Please read Genesis 1:1-2; 2 Samuel 23:2; Psalm 51:10; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 1:35; 4:18; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-13; Acts 1:8; 5:3; 10:38; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11;

2 Corinthians 3:18; and 2 Peter 1:21 in the light of our lesson.

2. What is the purpose of the Holy Spirit on earth?
3. What precedes the outpouring of the Spirit at the end of time?
4. How is the Holy Spirit represented in Scripture?
5. Who is the true Interpreter of the Bible?
6. What qualities does this Person of the Godhead possess?
7. Who is the earnest of our salvation? 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14.
8. Do you desire the miracle that the Lord wants to perform for you?

Lesson 163. The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love...

When I first began speaking about Love and about what God had begun to reveal to me, I had no idea where all this would lead. Even now I do not fully understand what will happen next. But I see amazing changes, first of all, in my own heart. I tell you this honestly. It is impossible to partake of Love in its pure form and remain the person one has always been. Through this gift, through God's revelations, I have drawn closer to the Lord, and I can say this because I feel the inner changes that God is producing in me. Interestingly, this deep process also transforms my entire visible life: my attitude toward people, toward the truth, toward the Bible, and toward every undertaking.

When you do something, beginning it with Love, it is perceived in a different way. God lays that very Eternal foundation upon which He desires to build a house for His dwelling. I share these truths with you not because I seek to boast, but because I desire to convince you that if it was possible for God to produce such changes in me, then it will not be difficult for Him to do the same in any of you. This is truly so. This is the Gospel that Christ revealed to us. Love is Christ living and working in me.

In Galatians 5:22-23 we read: 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.' I have read these verses many times and reflected on them both by myself and in a group, trying to grasp their meaning, and I noticed that the word 'fruit' is singular. I could not understand how there could be so many qualities, characteristics, or, let us say, gifts—as I imagined them—and yet all of them were in one, all of them singular. It was difficult for me to comprehend this until I paid attention to a bunch of grapes. It hangs from one small branch; it is one fruit, but the individual grapes are separated from one another and grow individually. Each grape has the same kind of taste, but they are all different, and they may ripen at different rates. Then I understood that the fruit is one, but it contains all the beauty and fullness, and other

qualities of Love may be added to this list, yet in one way or another they are all one.

What is interesting is that when the Holy Spirit produces fruit in me, it contains all these qualities listed here. I singled out Love not as something separate, but as one of the qualities. I will not speak of Love as though it were the only thing, because everything else is included as a matter of course. It is the Holy Spirit Who performs such a work in us. We cannot love without believing in God. We cannot believe in God without rejoicing or showing longsuffering. One flows from another. Everything is interconnected, as in one whole organism. Just as all the organs work for one another, so all these qualities of the fruit of the Holy Spirit abide in us as one whole. I share with you the revelations of my heart because you cannot look inside it. As I analyze what is taking place in my soul, I compare the present with my past life. I remember well how I thought when I lived in the world, what I was like when I came to believe, when I began to grow, and what guided me. And this fruit of the Spirit changed me.

Love is a miracle that God has produced in my character, and I would like you to rejoice in how wonderful our Lord is.

Reflecting on the changes that the Lord produced in my heart, I noticed that I had spoken much about Love, thought much about it, experimented much in this direction, observed, and studied, and then I suddenly realized that it was not merely some separate quality of my character. Love is its foundation. When I began to pray for the gift of Love, I did not fully understand what it was, but as I studied this subject, I turned to the biblical truths that speak about the Holy Spirit. I saw that the Holy Spirit cultivates fruit, and the first quality of this fruit is Love. I looked within myself and discovered that, independently of me, the Lord had produced the other qualities of the fruit in me as well. I asked Him for Love, and He gave me everything else. Moreover, this amazed me so much that I deeply desire to speak about how simple, accessible, and easy it is. Remove Love from the fruit, and what will remain? Joy

without Love is gloating; faith without Love is fanaticism; peace without Love is self-deception, and so forth—that is, sin.

When I read the Bible now, I see how much it says about Love, Whose Author is God. He desires us to learn to love one another, and this is very important for our salvation. God longs for us to learn to love with unconditional Love, that very agape which does not depend on whether it is accepted or not and continues to act even when it is rejected.

Love is not a noun; it is a verb, it is action. It is not merely some character trait that can somehow be described. It is a power that works.

It is impossible to give a complete description of Love, but it is possible to tell how it acts and manifests itself through a person. I long for all of us, even now, to bear this fruit continually, bringing joy to one another and to God. And this is possible with God's help. Heaven awaits my decision and will answer.

All people in this world are, to one degree or another, endowed with the gift of Love, but they do not understand its nature or the essence of God's character; they do not know how to use Love and do not develop it. Among those who believe in God, this takes place more consciously. Believing, they bear fruit, but the ripening does not occur in the same way for everyone.

For example, there is a grapevine on which only one single cluster grows each year. It blossoms, grows, and ripens, and the same thing happens every year—only one fruit a year. There is some problem; something is wrong with this grapevine. What do we usually see on a normal grapevine when it is well cared for? Each year it bears more and more fruit. It is a tree. A tree has the ability to grow; it does not stop developing but continues to grow and grow when it is cared for. The tree becomes larger and larger.

Thus, God desires us to bear much fruit, and Jesus speaks about this: 'I am the vine, ye are the branches.' We cannot consciously love independently of God. Forget about it.

There are many songs about love in the world. People understand something about it, even wait for it, and even love in some sense. But the Love of which the Bible speaks is the heavenly fruit of the Holy Spirit; it is a quality of character of Divine origin. It is not human. People cannot produce it within themselves independently of God. This fruit of Love in all its beauty will never appear in a person who does not follow Christ. People may be gifted in some special way or even be extremely sensitive; they may even show mercy to others, but that Divine Love, Whose Author is the Most High, comes only from Him. This does not mean that all people in the world are deprived of Love. No. God sends rain upon the just and upon the unjust. And we know that rain is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and He also touches the hearts of unbelieving people because He loves them, because they are His creation. But the fruit of the Spirit rightfully belongs only to spiritual people by virtue of their birth of water and of the Spirit—to those who are called children.

Homework 163

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. What role does Love play in the fruit of the Spirit?
3. How do you understand the growth of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your heart?
4. Can this fruit grow without the Vine?
5. Have you met people who possess the fruit of the Spirit but do not believe in Christ?
6. Do you believe that God is cultivating this fruit in your heart?
7. Is it possible to enter Heaven without having the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Give examples.
8. What Bible verses came to your mind while studying this lesson?
9. Please read Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:8-9; John 14:26; 15:1-8; 2 Corinthians 9:10-11; and James 3:17-18 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 164. Love in the Holy Spirit

Jesus, having become a Man, gave us an example of the perfection that each of us can attain if we unite our life with God and devote ourselves completely to service, as Christ Himself did. He is God in human flesh, but He consciously did not use His Divinity to accomplish His purposes in the plan of our salvation. Everything that was available to Jesus is now available to us as well. The same power of the Holy Spirit has not ceased to be power and is waiting for those who will devote themselves to serving people.

Jesus is the Creator of this world, and nature recognized His voice and obeyed Him. At the word of Christ, tempests and storms became still, and in this lay a special plan of God for us, so that we would understand that a word spoken by holy lips has power to subdue the forces of nature and human passions when Divine power stands behind that word. The difference between the action of Christ's words and ours is that He did everything in His Own Name, while we can do it in the Name of Jesus.

As we observe Christ's trials, we see that the enemy of souls tried to lead the Son of Man into sin, which would have happened if He had allowed Himself to manifest His Divine power in order to accomplish His plans quickly by solving every problem supernaturally. And if Jesus had yielded to these temptations, He would have violated the plan of Salvation by doing what is unavailable to us. In that case, Christ would have left our world without completing this plan, or He would have remained in the world forever to perish for His sin of presumption. The risk of Jesus falling was very great. But He relied completely on the Father's care and allowed Him to do everything that had to take place.

Before Christ's baptism in the Jordan, we know almost nothing about the life of Jesus, except that He grew up in Nazareth, worked as a carpenter, and had brothers and sisters. And we read in Luke 2:52: 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.'

He was the purest and holiest Man, Who from birth did not commit a single sin, did not speak a single evil word, and did not entertain a single impure thought. He was the embodiment of goodness and Love, flawless honesty and diligence, carefulness and holiness. In fellowship with Christ, every person saw in Him a friendly Conversational Partner, Who gladly took part in every human need and Who was ready to respond to any call and leave everything in order to render help. But His time had not yet come, and Jesus patiently waited for the moment appointed in prophecy, when He would be anointed by the Holy Spirit for a special ministry and His life would enter another stage of the plan of Salvation. Christ was ready to set out on this path and humbly awaited His hour. And when the time came, Jesus left everything, never to return, but to accomplish what had been foretold about Him.

We see that the Gospel describes the moment of Christ's baptism in water, after which He also received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A new page opened in the ministry of the Saviour.

The plan of Salvation provided that the Father, through Jesus and by means of the Holy Spirit, would heal all the sick who would manifest their faith in Christ's Divine power or turn to Him for help. And we read that Jesus healed everyone. He is the true Physician, treating not only bodies but also human souls. He performed no miracles to satisfy someone's curiosity or to prove something, but when Jesus saw a need or heard a request, He could not pass by.

I often hear the question of why we do not have such miracles now. They do exist and are performed according to the same laws as in the days of Christ; only we are not the same. We have received more light in every sphere of life, and this gives us an advantage over those who lived before us. Every disease has a cause. If I am miraculously healed but the cause remains, I will become ill again. But if I observe the laws of health, I will not become ill. Is this not a miracle? It is the natural miracle of health.

Jesus taught the people everything that He Himself had experienced and discovered during His thirty years. He saw the operation of God's laws concerning life and health and understood their influence and the consequences of violating them. His life was the embodiment of the teaching of Scripture.

Through His life, Jesus revealed to us the true character of God the Father, His compassion for fallen humanity, His unconditional Love for people, His desire to serve the perishing and save them, His joy in people's happiness, and His participation in every human need. And if the Father Himself had become a Man, He would have lived this life just as Jesus lived it. The Image of God was revealed to us.

But God's plan also includes restoring this Image of God in our relationships with one another and in our characters. And it can confidently be called by one word—Agape.

The one who seeks this gift and desires to have it in his heart is on the surest and right path, which is called narrow. Not many step onto this road. But many who do enter it do not withstand the trials and leave the path at the very beginning, without ever understanding what it is. And it is the life and experience of Christ in the events of my life.

If the whole life of Jesus were characterized by a short phrase, it could be called this: Love, happiness, friendship, trust in God, and obedience to His will. And all these qualities of the soul are available to us as well. And the same power of the Holy Spirit awaits those who will earnestly ask for it, who will allow God to manifest it through them; those who will allow themselves to be baptized with this Spirit. Perhaps the problem is not the absence of miracles, but me?

The Word of God has not lost Its power, and It accomplishes that for which It was spoken. God is not dead; He is alive and awaits those who will receive Him.

Love exists, and it is great in its authority and available in its power. Everyone who thirsts for it will receive it. Everyone who seeks it will find it.

The Holy Spirit is still the same God, desiring to be poured out upon this world in abundant streams. But there must be a person who will ask for this and thirst for it.

Without Him I can do nothing, and without me He will not do anything. God's desire is not to water weeds and tares, but for the good seed to spring up and bear much fruit. And the fruit of the Spirit is Love. And the Father will be glorified if I bear much fruit.

And Love has a characteristic inherent in plants. It must grow. This is a process that takes place before the harvest. Therefore, it is so important now to devote oneself to this work and allow the early rain of the Holy Spirit to give life to this seed, while the latter rain will strengthen what has grown. It would be very wrong to diminish Divine participation in this undertaking called Love. It is His personal presence in life; it is the power that moves the human soul; it is the motive placed into every deed. And how can this be done without God?

At the end, this truth will become available not only to the wise virgins but also to the foolish ones, and they will run to buy, and they will buy, but they will not have time to grow it. At the end of time, God desires to gather a ready harvest, not sweep away seed. Now is the time to love; now is the time to thirst for it.

Homework 164

1. Did you learn anything useful for your soul in this lesson?
2. By what power did Jesus perform His miracles?
3. Do you believe that this Same Power, Which accompanied Jesus, is available to us today as well?
4. Is Love able to heal sick people?
5. What kinds of diseases do you know?
6. Can God use you to perform miracles?
7. What do you think, or what do you see: does our School perform miracles in your heart? If so, what kind?
8. In what ways was Jesus like us, and in what ways is He different from us?

9. Please read John 14:12; Hebrews 4:15; John 4:34; 6:36-40; John 5:19-23, 30; Luke 10:18-20; Mark 16:17-18; Acts 3:6-8; 5:15-16; and 2 Timothy 3:17 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 165. Love Created Our World

Have you ever wondered why our world, our planet Earth, was created? After all, God does nothing without a purpose; He has a special meaning and plan in everything.

But God is Love, and Love has a very good need to share Itself, to speak about Itself, to reveal Itself, and to testify through deeds that It exists and how beautiful It is.

And so, overflowing with this Love, our Creator decided to create a masterpiece of His Love. He desired to create a planet on which intelligent beings would live, all kinds of plants would grow, and an amazing animal world would dwell. On this planet, Love would fill everyone, and all creatures, though different, would serve one another. All creation would bring aesthetic delight, pleasing the eye with its perfection. Everyone would gladden one another's hearts by their presence in this world.

God gathered all His sons and announced to them what He was going to do.

It must be taken into account that a rebellion had taken place in Heaven, and the slanderer, together with his supporters, had been removed from the Heavenly dwellings, from the presence of God, but had not been destroyed or deprived of his power.

And knowing all this and understanding that among the morning stars who had remained faithful to God there were still some who sympathized with Satan—for although the Heavenly family had been divided, emotional ties remained—God decided to take this step.

There had not yet been death in the universe, and no one had yet died from sin, but iniquity had already arisen and was very slowly but surely gaining strength. The seeds of wickedness had been sown, the Name of God had been dishonored, and this evil could at any moment cause those seeds of doubt, discontent, and envy that had entered the minds of intelligent beings to sprout. The Word of God briefly tells of this rebellion, but it was

the most tragic event in the Heavenly dwellings. God's family was divided, never to be reunited, and the rebellious morning stars were doomed to inevitable death because of the sin that had afflicted their minds.

And in such a tense situation, the Lord decided to create our world, a small planet in the boundless universe.

And then that day came. The minds of all the angels were occupied with the incident that had taken place, and no one could imagine what it would lead to. And God gathered them all together.

And then the Lord spoke a word, and in empty space, out of nothing, a new planet suddenly appeared, entirely covered with water. The sons of God were astonished beyond measure; they shouted for joy and could not understand how anyone could live on such a strange planet or what the Lord had planned.

And all this took place in total darkness, and only the Light coming from the Father and the Son illuminated this creation. But the Lord spoke a word again, and there was light. And the whole Earth was illuminated by the glory of God. Light was everywhere.

And so the first day passed. In anticipation of how events would unfold, the angels discussed and speculated about what could possibly come from this planet. They were very interested in what the Lord intended to do next. Their minds turned to the new creation, and there was no limit to their astonishment and admiration.

And then the second day came. The Son spoke a word, and the water covering the Earth was divided. Part of it rose upward, creating a covering around the planet, while part of it covered the surface of the Earth, and an expanse of air was formed between them. But it was still unclear what would happen next. Another day ended. The angels enthusiastically discussed what they had seen and shared their guesses about what would happen afterward.

On the third day, the Son spoke a word, and part of the water went into the depths of the Earth. And the Earth took on an entirely different appearance: dry land appeared. Seas, rivers, lakes, and springs of water remained; all of this was harmoniously distributed throughout the Earth. And the Lord spoke a word again, declaring that the Earth would bring forth all kinds of grasses, flowers, and trees. The world would be filled with fragrance and become even more beautiful. The angels' delight knew no bounds as they realized what it would look like. Amazing plants began appearing everywhere.

It was a masterpiece of Love, and the angels shouted for joy and amazement. What would happen next?

On the fourth day, God spoke a word, and the Sun and the Moon appeared. Sunlight gave warmth, and in its rays the whole world was transformed with extraordinary colors. The night sky was amazingly beautiful. The Moon reflected the light of the Sun, and all the stars of the boundless universe appeared before their eyes in their magnificence.

How wonderfully God's Love and Its perfection were revealed in every leaf, in every object, and in every little stone that filled the Earth.

Everyone waited enthusiastically for the events that would follow.

On the fifth day, the Son spoke a word concerning the water, and it received the power to bring forth animal life that had the ability to reproduce independently after its kind. Amazing creatures began to come forth from the seas and lakes, and the Earth was filled with sounds, movement, and joy. All creation praised its Creator. The angels looked with admiration at every bird, fish, and little animal, upon which these words were written in a perfect language: God is Love. The earthly and Heavenly families joined together in joyful delight, glorifying their Creator.

The fifth day came to an end, but the delight of the sons of God did not end.

And then, on the sixth day, the Lord announced that They would create man in Their Image and after Their Likeness, and that he would be given dominion over the Earth. Everyone began to watch in amazement to see what would happen next.

The Father and the Son took the dust of the ground and formed from it the likeness of a man. And there lay a body, resembling the Creator in its proportions, but without life. Then the Lord took this body and breathed His breath into it, and man became a living soul. The imprint of profound reason and intelligence was reflected on his face, and it shone with joy and Love. All the angels stood motionless in amazement.

Man received his first instructions about life and assurances of God's Love, and the whole Earth, prepared for him to inhabit, was presented to him.

The sixth day came to an end. And what would happen next?

God spent the seventh day at rest, enjoying the work of His hands, communing with His creation, and blessing everyone with His personal presence. For Adam, this was the second day of his life, and he joyfully listened to all the instructions and words that proceeded from the mouth of God.

And the Lord blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. He especially set apart this day in time, making the first man understand that it was a unique day that would always remind him of Who is the Creator and true Ruler of the Earth.

To sanctify means to set apart for a special purpose.

But the man was alone, and among the animals he found no one equal to him. And the angels wondered where the man and the woman, who had been spoken of at the beginning, were. But when Adam realized that he needed a friend equal to him, the Lord put him to sleep, took one of his ribs, and from it formed a being opposite to the man, yet equal to him in intellect and more perfect in her inner qualities. All the sons of God shouted for joy. Two new beings appeared in the world. They were different, yet they were the Image and Likeness of God. They

could reveal the beauty of God's Love even more fully and visibly represent It in their relationship.

We were created by Love for Love. We are all children of those first human beings, and we carry within ourselves a part of their first Love for each other, placed there by the Creator.

God is Love, and we are the masterpiece of His Love, His creation.

Homework 165

1. What new things did you learn in this lesson?
2. What is the meaning of the creation of our planet?
3. Do you believe that God created our world in six literal days?
4. Why did the Lord create our planet at the time of the crisis in Heaven?
5. How is God's Love revealed in nature?
6. Why did the Lord sanctify the seventh day in particular?
7. Please read Genesis 1:1-31; 2:1-7, 18-23; Psalm 19:1-8; Job 12:7-10; 38:6-7; Psalm 8:5-9; Proverbs 8:23-31; Isaiah 45:12, 18; Revelation 12:7-10; Romans 1:20; Exodus 20:8-11; Psalms 33:6, 9; 104; Acts 17:24; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2; 11:3; Revelation 10:6; and 14:7 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 166. Masterpieces of Love

In creating man, God did not simply create someone so that this being would exist and somehow live; rather, He embodied His Likeness and Image. Every detail of every cell was carefully thought out, calculated, and created. The Creator united spirit, soul, and body in one being, giving him the ability to reproduce after his own kind. He made this harmonious and natural, in combination with love, friendliness, and happiness.

All the depth and wisdom of God's creative thought were embodied in man. A masterpiece of Divine craftsmanship came forth from the hands of the Creator. Adam was endowed with a potential for love and friendship that needed to be developed. But according to the Creator's plan, this had to be attained and had to become something deeply desired.

Adam was the crowning work of creation. Being made a little lower than the angels, he possessed amazing powers of reason, will, and intellect, which developed harmoniously, filling his mind with discoveries and life experience.

The Lord brought to Adam all the animals, fish, and birds that lived at that time, and the man gave a name to every creature and remembered those names. He studied the lives and habits of these creatures. And Adam noticed that all the animals had mates and spent time together in such unions, rejoicing before the man. But Adam did not find anyone equal to himself.

Some of the angels probably also had the opportunity to communicate with the first man, and this delighted God's son, but they were superior to him, and they had been given the duty of caring for man and serving him. Although the angels were intelligent beings, they could not satisfy man's need to give love, for love seeks one who is equal to itself so that it may be exchanged harmoniously. Nor did Adam find a friend among the animals to whom he could give the fullness of his love. And he did not even understand this or ask for anything, being a little child before God's face, rejoicing in life and exploring this

world with interest, gaining life experience and developing his reason and intellect.

Adam's body had been designed down to the smallest detail and bore the imprint of beauty and perfection. But flesh without the breath of life was dead and had no energy within it, and the human soul did not yet exist, though it was already in the Creator's plan.

God took the lifeless body and breathed His Spirit, His breath, into it, and in this union a living soul appeared. The spirit gave energy to the body and brought to life the higher powers of the human soul: reason, will, and intellect. And in this totality Adam became a living soul, capable of thinking, choosing, making decisions, feeling, and loving. Instincts were placed within human nature; they were subject to the higher powers of the soul and prompted and pointed out to him the important needs that arose in the course of life.

It is interesting that the human body was originally designed so that it would itself understand what to do within, how to respond to different situations, and how to manage its internal processes.

And so Adam realized that he was alone, but he did not know that this was not good; he simply rejoiced in his new life. Communing with his Creator, he learned how to live, taking his first steps and abiding in God's Love. And one day the Lord said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.' Adam rejoiced, but he did not find this helper among the animals. He kept wondering what this meant, and with these thoughts he fell asleep.

And an event amazing to everyone took place. The Lord opened Adam's body, took a rib from it, and from this rib created a girl, calling her woman. Then, anticipating Adam's joy, He awakened him and introduced him to his new companion in life, telling him where she had come from. Adam was delighted. He certainly had not expected such a gift. He looked at this miracle, and the miracle looked at him, and they were very happy to be with each other. Their acquaintance began. I think

each of them found it very interesting to study their other half, discover this world, and uncover new mysteries for themselves.

And Adam called his helper wife and cleaved to her with all his soul, and they became one flesh. Man became male and female, just as he had been designed.

Love found an outlet and poured forth in gentle streams from these friendly hearts, bringing joy to them both and multiplying with each passing day. Adam and his wife loved each other and could not relate to one another in any other way, for Love had created them, given them life, and now led them through it. And they were both naked and were not ashamed. And God's righteousness covered their bodies with garments of God's glory.

Our first parents were warned about what they could do and what they should refrain from doing. They were informed that their life was conditional and depended on their obedience to God. They were told the story of the Heavenly conflict, and they knew that the fallen angels could make contact with them near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and try to tempt them and persuade them to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. And then they would die. There was no fence or any kind of guard around the forbidden tree. It grew peacefully among the trees of the Garden of Eden and was no different from the other trees, but it was specially designated as the only prohibition that limited man's choice.

Adam and his wife were perfect creations reflecting the Image of God, but they were still little children who learned something new every day and, as they discovered this world given to them by God, shared their discoveries with each other. They gained life experience. All humanity was contained within them.

A special event took place in the Garden of Eden that delighted the first people—the seventh day, when, according to the Lord's blessing, they ceased from all their work and cares and awaited a meeting with the One Who had created them, so that they could commune with Him, tell Him about their needs, ask Him questions, and listen to His instructions and stories. And He

came to them in the cool of the day, and they knew this time and always awaited Him with joy.

The people's freedom consisted in learning to live an independent life, setting tasks and solving them, and then pausing in this stream of activity in order to commune with their Creator, receive answers from Him to their many questions, and learn something new and interesting. And the people grew in love with God and with each other, maturing in mind and body with each passing day and acquiring practical life skills.

The tree of life grew in the midst of Paradise, and access to its fruit was open around the clock. Everything was beautiful and bore the imprint of perfection. Heaven and Earth were united and dwelt in absolute harmony.

We are not told how many years the first people lived before their obedience was tested, but we can be certain that they were informed and repeatedly warned by everyone that they must not eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. This was part of their upbringing.

And the day came when they could make their choice without external supervision and show how obedient they were to God. The wife entered the forbidden territory and immediately fell under the spell of the wicked one, who in an astonishing way managed to convince her to accept his views on life. She ate the forbidden fruit and gave it to her husband, and he ate. Sin became known and became part of humanity.

The Plan of Salvation, which had been provided for this event, came into effect. Man was to receive the punishment immediately and die. But Love offered Himself, and this offer was accepted.

Homework 166

1. Please read Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Psalm 8:5-9; 51:6, 11; 58:3; Jeremiah 17:9; Acts 17:24-28; Romans 5:12-17; 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; Ephesians 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7-8, 11, 20 in the light of our lesson.

2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. When did Adam begin to call his wife Eve? Who gave her this name?
4. Do you believe that you are a direct descendant of this couple?
5. Did the people originally created by God possess practical knowledge and experience, or did they have to acquire these themselves?
6. Why did God not create the wife immediately, but only after Adam understood that he did not have a friend equal to himself?
7. Do you believe that woman was created in the Image of God, including her emotions and femininity?
8. What is the difference between a man and a woman?
9. How can a woman be understood?)))

Lesson 167. Sorrow in Love

Love has one very interesting quality: it greatly loves to give itself away, and, moreover, it longs to do so. And this is love's greatest problem. At times it brings those who possess it to bitter tears and suffering because there is so much of it, yet no one needs it.

For example, the good angels, who have never fallen and spend all their time caring for us, turn away all kinds of dangers and illnesses from us, dispel darkness, fill us with light and joy, serve us, rejoice in our victories, and suffer when they see our falls. They always direct our thoughts toward that which is heavenly, true, and bright. They know us completely; they know all our attachments and habits. Perhaps they can even read our thoughts in order to coordinate them. In short, we are always in their sight. And in spite of all this, they love us very much—so much that words cannot express it. But we do not even know their names, do not think about them, do not communicate with them, and do not thank them. Yet they love us. They love me.

And there is more. The Second Coming. The righteous are resurrected, receive new bodies, and ascend to Heaven to Jesus. He so completely absorbs everyone's attention that we see no one but Him. The Heavenly City. The sea of glass. The Millennial Kingdom. We are occupied with spiritual growth. And the angels stand to the side, ready to serve us in any way. There are many of them—possibly millions—and every one of them has perfect love, perfect wisdom, and perfect knowledge and is ready to share all of this. Perhaps somewhere in his heart each one dreams of becoming my close friend so that he can give himself and teach me everything he knows. But the angels respect my choice and modestly stand to the side, meekly awaiting my decision, waiting for years until I notice them. I think each one dreams that someday his turn will come and he will be noticed. Yet there are millions of them, and they all love and rejoice that we are with Jesus. And the heart longs to give; it is overflowing with love and is ready to leap with happiness at even one glance in its direction.

Now let us look at a loving person. This is a special being, yet he lives according to the same laws as all the inhabitants of Heaven. He receives God's Love and greatly desires to give it away. And he searches. Yet there is more and more love, while there are not many who wish to receive it. You simply desire to give it to anyone, but you see that your neighbors' freedom of choice closes the doors before you, and you yourself have no right to open them. You want to speak, help, serve, and give, and you do so, yet no one needs you. You would like to give up, but you cannot and do not want to, because you love, yet this love is not accepted. And after another knock on the stone door of the human will, you go sorrowfully to Jesus and complain. And He shows you His hands and comforts you with the fact that He experiences the same thing and irretrievably loses those whom He loves.

But this is a special sorrow. It does not destroy the heart but draws it closer to God, Who understands you and loves you very much. And the more love there is, and the more wisdom there is in love, the more sorrow there is.

Love is the most proper attitude toward people; it is the truest relationship between people. And if this exists, then it is forever. And this is wonderful. God is glorified when we love one another. He gives this love, and He blesses such relationships.

What is the enemy of the human soul doing at this time? He prowls around like a roaring lion and looks for every opportunity to steal, kill, and destroy, to ruin things and convince people that true love does not exist and that we will never be able to love as God expects us to. And satan constantly agitates the minds of our neighbors so that they will convince the one who loves them that he is a hypocrite. Yet you simply love—that is all. Love never fails and never ceases. It brings many experiences and trials into your life, and after passing through them, it becomes stronger and more confident.

Love is not a land of pink hearts. It is a path of special trials, experiences, and victories that add gray hairs, temper firm

principles in a person's character, and make you tender, sensitive, friendly, and cheerful.

And you live with this and cannot hide it.

As long as there is no personal, close contact with your neighbor, love may not manifest itself visibly; it will not be noticeable, and you will be like everyone else, having no form or comeliness. But when you become acquainted with a person, when you can touch his inner world and open your own heart, then love begins to act and manifest itself. It studies the situation, studies the person, respects the neighbor's freedom, and at the same time seeks paths to his heart, gently offering itself and its services. How this is expressed depends on many factors, and every person is a special science of relationships requiring a special approach. What works with some does not work with others, and vice versa. There are general laws governing love's influence, but there are different characters and destinies of people, who have different love languages in their hearts or are simply closed to everyone forever.

For example, if I decide to love satan, where will this love lead me? I cannot expect love in return. But I will learn something. I will learn to respect him as a person while hating his deeds. I am not suggesting that you befriend demons, but treating these spiritual forces of wickedness in high places with respect will be the right position. They have authority from God to influence and tempt those who accept them, and they surpass us in many respects. My insults and mockery directed at them may complicate my life, which is already full of trials. Through my ignorance, I may attract them to myself and be subjected to a special attack.

But my respect for their freedom and my understanding of their status will protect me from their attacks.

We know that we must treat every earthly authority with respect and be law-abiding citizens as long as those laws do not violate God's commands. And God expects our obedience and respect for secular laws. The same conduct also applies in the spiritual world.

Our neighbors may be possessed by unclean spirits and led by them. They may be so closely connected with the powers of darkness that they will never again be able to escape the influence of this power—not because it is impossible, but because they have chosen this life and have established themselves on this path forever. This must be remembered and taken into account. Jesus counsels us not to give pearls and holy things to those who will neither appreciate nor accept them, yet at the same time He does not teach us to turn away from these people and become their enemies, giving them a reason for evil thoughts. But even if all Heaven were to pour all its blessings into the lives of these unfortunate people, they would not repent, and this must be taken into account. Nevertheless, such people will teach us much. They will teach us unconditional love, which never fails. And you will have to carry the pain of being rejected with you throughout your life, but this is those people's choice, and it must be respected.

But love goes farther, and it sees new prospects for future victories. It looks boldly ahead and believes that every place upon which its foot steps will belong to it. And, of course, love feels wonderful where it is accepted, valued, and awaited. It lives by itself, having an inexhaustible Source, and sorrows greatly as it waits to be accepted.

Homework 167

1. What interesting things did you learn in this lesson?
2. What wonderful quality does love possess?
3. What do the angels do?
4. Why does greater love bring greater sorrow?
5. What kinds of sorrow are familiar to you?
6. What determines how love is manifested?
7. How should we treat people who are possessed by unclean spirits?
8. Please read Psalm 91:11; 34:8-9; Jeremiah 29:10-13; Matthew 5:44-48; 7:6; 12:19-20; John 1:11; Hebrews 5:2, 7-8; Ezekiel 22:30 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 168. The Great Controversy Between Love and Sin

Let us consider such concepts as darkness, cold, and evil. In essence, they do not exist; rather, there is the natural state of the world, matter, and the mind in the absence of a source of light, heat, and morality.

The presence of light and its source destroys darkness. But if the light goes out or is switched off, darkness comes. And this does not even require proof.

–273°C is absolute zero, the state in which matter exists without a source of heat. If the Sun were suddenly to go out, our world would cool very quickly and reach this temperature. The concept of cold exists only where a source of heat is present.

No human behavior or state of the soul can be bad in itself if there are no statutes and moral standards in society. Evil is defined only by the existence of the highest legislative authority, which is the Godhead, and God Himself establishes the concept of good, while evil comes from violating God's law. Without God, all goodness and all morality lose their meaning; everything descends into spiritual chaos, in which everyone does what he considers right. And where there is no God, there is no evil; there is nothing there—only emptiness, darkness, and the absence of life.

For the entire Universe, our world is the arena in which the events of the great controversy between good and evil are unfolding. All intelligent living beings are involved in the present conflict. And in this struggle there are only two sides, and every participant in the confrontation chooses on which side he will fight. If I believe in nothing, if I reject the existence of God the Creator, if I do not care what is happening, then through this ignorance, without realizing or understanding it, I take the side of the forces of evil and become their instrument for accomplishing their plans and purposes.

If there is no God in my life and no knowledge of His will, then I cannot be good, for goodness consists in knowing God personally, being acquainted with His law, and having this law in my heart to guide my mind.

God is Love, and love is the freedom to choose between good and evil. God did not create evil, but He created free beings who could think, analyze, and choose.

And then, at some point in time, one of the highest angels, the anointed cherub, became proud because of his beauty and wisdom. He envied God and decided to become like the Most High—not in love, but in power and greatness. The name of this angel was Light-bearer, which is rendered as Lucifer.

As a result, in the Heavenly dwellings, in the place of God's presence, a spirit of discontent arose, which influenced intelligent beings and led them into open opposition.

The Bible briefly tells us about the conflict that occurred, in which satan did not prevail and was cast out of the place of God's presence. We are not told where God's adversary and his angels were before Adam's fall. But in some way he had access to the Earth and could display his charms and power near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God's character in Heaven was stained by satan's lies and slander, and only a judgment concerning God could vindicate the Ruler of the Universe or bring a charge against Him. Therefore, God allowed His creation to examine God's character and His principles from every side and render a verdict. Satan was the chief accuser in this process.

When creating our planet, God did not create it for satan, but He gave the first people freedom of choice, and they had to make a decision.

Unfortunately, the enemy succeeded in deceiving the woman and, through her, the man. As a result, God's adversary, the devil, gained power over the minds of people and became the prince of this world. The universal struggle and confrontation moved to the Earth.

Satan and his angels established themselves on our planet and began their destructive activity.

God used the situation that had arisen with humanity to show the entire visible and invisible world His love, its power, its authority, and its influence through their example. But this required time, which God appointed in order to allow good and evil to manifest themselves fully.

Satan was permitted to have power over those who consciously or through deception heeded his temptations, but God promised thinking and seeking people that He would give them inner strength to resist evil and live righteously. The Creator granted fallen people His grace so that through this power they could withstand evil and preserve their faithfulness to God and His law.

The world was promised a Savior, Who would be God the Son Himself, Who would give His life and shed His blood for the redemption of repentant sinners. According to their faith, He would grant them life and strength to fight against sin.

And so that people would always remember this promise, they were commanded to make offerings from among clean animals, which were a type and pointed to the true Sacrifice. In time, this law of sacrifices was put in order and retained its meaning and influence until the crucifixion of the Son of God. The type met the reality. From that moment, all rites and ceremonial laws lost their force, for they were fulfilled in Christ.

The first world rebelled against God and His love and was destroyed by the waters of the Flood, from which only eight people were saved. They became the ancestors of everyone living today. After the Flood, people once again united against God and began building the Tower of Babel, but God confused their languages and scattered all people throughout the Earth.

God was always looking for those who would accept Him as their Savior and Friend and through whom He could reveal His love and the beauty of His character to this world. And His choice fell upon Abram, who believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. The Lord tested Abram's

faithfulness and gave him the name Abraham. God promised to bring forth a nation from this man, and He fulfilled this promise. And within this covenant, all believing people are considered Abraham's descendants by faith.

At the time appointed by God, the Son of God was born into the world. By becoming the Son of Man, He showed all people the beauty of God's character and revealed to them and to the entire Universe the Father's love and care for humanity. But fallen people did not accept this testimony and delivered Christ to death, which had also been foretold and to which all the sacrifices pointed. Jesus died, having loved our world unto the end. Through Him, the way to salvation and justification was opened. God's enemy suffered final defeat. The entire Universe saw satan's true plans and the purpose of his rebellion. All the accusations of the wicked one were removed, God was vindicated in the eyes of Heaven, and satan was sentenced to death and destruction. But people were still living on the Earth, and God's plan needed to be revealed to them, the beauty of God's love needed to be shown to them, and the image and likeness of the Most High needed to be restored in them. And for the sake of these people, time was granted for the accomplishment of these tasks.

The struggle is not yet over. In our days it has reached its climax, and the long-awaited outcome is drawing near. The clash between the forces of good and evil is inevitable, and we are all involved in this conflict against our will, with no possibility of remaining neutral. We need to choose on whose side we will fight. There are only two camps—the victors, led by Christ and moved by the Holy Spirit of love, or the defeated, possessed by the unclean spirit of lies, sin, and death. I need to make this choice myself. If I do not make it, satan will make it for me, and I will join his ranks. Accidental salvation is impossible. I choose God.

Homework 168

1. Please read Genesis 3; 6–8; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7; Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:12–18; Romans 1:19–32; 3:4; 5:12–21; 8:19–22; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 6:11–18; Hebrews 1:14; 1

Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Revelation 12:4-9 in the light of our lesson.

2. Did you learn anything new from this lesson? What was revealed to you?
3. Do you believe that in the world invisible to us, a struggle is taking place between God and satan for our souls and for possession of our minds?
4. Why did God not immediately destroy satan and his supporters?
5. Why is there no neutrality in this great controversy?
6. Do you believe that ignorance in the spiritual life will lead the soul to destruction?
7. How can I understand whose side I am on?
8. How will this universal conflict end?

Lesson 169. The Power of Words

My words are an expression of my inner world; they are my character clothed in the sound of my heart, my identification and my pass to the blessings or curses of the spiritual world. Everything I write or say is subjected to very careful spiritual analysis in the invisible world, and depending on the meaning and motive placed in my words, I am given the gift of influence for good or for evil.

People often say, "They are only words." And the impression is created that words are merely the sound of one's mood and that it does not matter what I say. But there are also such statements as, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned," which help me understand that everything I say is subject to strict, unalterable control. My words have an influence both on those to whom they are addressed and on me personally.

I often hear people, while arguing with one another, insert cutting words into their statements, not merely to express their opinion, but to put a label on the other person. And that person begins to prove that he is not like that. Very often Jesus or John the Baptist is cited as an example, with the claim that they spoke this way. Yes, these expressions are in the Bible, and they were spoken under particular circumstances to particular people. But we take them as a model for communication and strike our friends and neighbors with them.

I decided for myself to exclude such expressions from my vocabulary in relation to any person, because my love for people thinks no evil and does not exalt itself above their mistakes.

There are coarse words, abusive words, and negative words that damage the reputations of other people and of those who speak them. As believers, we avoid using them. But there are certain phrases with which we very often like to strike one another, without understanding the harm and influence we

cause by doing so. And as a justification for this, we use the example of Jesus. But He loved people, served them, and died for them.

I identified for myself many biblical name-calling words that I decided to remove from my speech. If someone needs to be rebuked, it should not be done with these words. For example: Pharisee, generation of vipers. These are biblical expressions, but in my mouth they are an insult to my neighbors and to God, Whom I desire to represent correctly.

Love does not accuse, but seeks justification for those who are mistaken or think differently.

I have heard such words addressed to me as well, and I know how they sound and what meaning they carry. Therefore, I have excluded them from my life, and I rejoice in this.

I am not the one who now decides the eternal destiny of others; the Lord does. And if He should desire to call someone something, it is not for me to judge. I am no better than other people, because I myself came from among them.

And it is possible to oppose all kinds of movements and teachings without unnecessary, excessive words.

Please love and respect one another, and warn one another tenderly and respectfully.

Underestimating the power of words can also be very dangerous. When I say something unkind, I sometimes do not consider what destructive power my statements can have in the lives of my neighbors. If my neighbor hears these bad words, they will destroy our love, friendship, and tenderness, and afterward our relationship will never become what it could have been. It may even become hostile and cold.

If I say something unkind about my neighbor in his absence, I should remember that the spiritual forces of wickedness in high places listen very attentively to everything I say and bring it to pass, invading and destroying the happiness of those of whom I have a bad opinion. And woe to me if discussing my neighbors has become my usual pastime.

God created our world by His word, and we human beings were created in the image and likeness of God. Our speech is capable of accomplishing much that we do not even consider. And the authority of our words lies in the fact that invisible forces of good and evil stand behind them, waiting for a command to act.

We read in Isaiah 44:26: "That confirmeth the word of His servant, and performeth the counsel of His messengers..." If I always remembered and understood Who stands behind all my utterances, how many mistakes could be avoided, and how many blessings my words of greeting, good wishes, and support would bring. God fulfills in the lives of my neighbors all those blessings that proceed from my mouth. He takes part in every little detail.

I have often noticed that the simple expression, "Do not be sad," spoken with love, brought peace and joy into the lives of those who were feeling very bad. I did nothing; I simply spoke words of compassion.

A word is a weapon of attack and defense. The Word of God in my mouth is a spiritual sword with which I can gain great victories. And I should learn how to wield this weapon. The spontaneous use even of words of love, without prior training, will show me how much stronger and more skillful the enemy is than I am. But understanding the power of words and the mighty authority of God that stands behind my statements, and knowing how to wield it, will bring me many victories and much joy.

No matter how unpleasant my voice may seem to me, I should also remember that my neighbors listen with their hearts to what my soul tells them. People begin to like what stirs their minds and brings peace and joy. They are filled with love for you and are no longer listening to the person, but to the power that speaks through him.

The words of the wise are like firmly driven nails. A word has the power to convince. And if I am the first person to establish my neighbor in the truth, it will later be difficult for others to persuade him to change his opinion. This is why the process of

upbringing and instruction in the truth is so important. For if it is written on the blank page of a person's soul, it will be his constant guide for the rest of his life. And it is often much more difficult to persuade people to change their minds than to teach those who know nothing. But God's Word can also work miracles in transforming one's way of thinking.

The essence of the great controversy is to create in the human mind the way of thinking of a righteous person, while the enemy of souls offers his own way of thinking, which is opposed to righteousness. And the power that triumphs in my mind will rule in my life.

And my words testify as to who my master is and by whose power I am waging the struggle. The will chooses between two masters and gives a signal to the mind, and the mind begins to heed the source of nourishment for my soul that I have allowed into my heart.

Love helps us choose the better side in the struggle. It knows the voice of God and is His herald in this world. The words spoken and written by love have authority from God to convince others that it speaks the truth and should be heeded. The influence of love, though unobtrusive, is very great. It tears down strongholds of error; it restores ruins; it knows how to create masterpieces out of emptiness; it speaks tenderly and firmly; it gives life and meaning to everything it touches. Love kindles light in the kingdom of darkness. And it is able to speak with the tongues of angels and of men. It hears the voice of God and obeys Him.

Words of love are life and happiness for the one who speaks and for those who listen. Kind words are a source of light, life, and inspiration.

Bind your neighbors to yourself with your tender words; do not be ashamed to speak what is good, and this will bring abundant fruit unto eternal life.

Homework 169

1. What interesting things did you learn in this lesson?

2. Based on your own experience, have you realized the power that words have upon a person?
3. What reveals the condition of the heart?
4. Why is it so important not to speak badly about a person, especially when that person is absent?
5. What is God's Word in your mouth?
6. What is the essence of the great controversy in the light of this lesson?
7. What advantages do we have when we choose love?
8. Please read Luke 6:45; Colossians 3:12-13, 17; Ephesians 5:1; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 6:9; Romans 12:10, 14, 19; James 3:10-12; 1:26; Matthew 12:37; Ephesians 4:25, 29-32; Psalm 15:3; Isaiah 6:5-7; Proverbs 17:4 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 170. The Life of Love

God does nothing without a purpose. Every work of His has special significance and contains a profound meaning. The structure of our body is the best testimony to these words. There is nothing superfluous in it, and all the organs are harmoniously arranged, depend on one another, and serve one another. And if some illness enters the body, the whole body begins to fight it. God did not create me for infirmities, but they invade life like uninvited guests or as a consequence of my improper way of life.

Sin also came into our world as an uninvited guest and began to destroy the Divine harmony of the universe and defile the purity of the soul. Man entered into an alliance with Satan in this rebellion. This state of affairs had to be changed somehow. And He through Whom our entire world came into being offered His life for the sin of man. He decided to drink the cup of punishment of God's wrath and become a sacrifice for sin. This is a great mystery into which the angels desire to look. God's plan for the Salvation of humanity from the power of sin was announced to the entire Universe. The whole world was shaken by such love of the Creator for His creation.

The Son of God declared His intention to become a man, and not such a man as Adam was when he was created. Jesus was to be born into this world as a child and pass through the entire course of life that a human being lives, depending completely on the Father's mercy and struggling against the influence of sin in the same way that is available to any of us. We know many examples of people who tried to make themselves gods, but there is something amazing and incomprehensible in the fact that God became man.

For example, I will share a thought. Why should Jesus not have become a grown man immediately, declared Himself the Messiah, and quickly died at the next Passover feast? In fact, the exchange would have taken place, and the law would have been satisfied. And if this event had also been recorded on video and shown to the entire population of the planet,

everyone could have been informed very quickly. And why was it necessary to give people 4,000 years before coming into this world, which was extremely corrupted by sin? Why was it necessary to wait another 2,000 years after the redemption and allow Satan to mock God's children? There are many questions that are difficult to answer. And when you comprehend God's love and see how confidently it changes your heart, yet how gradually this takes place, you understand that there are things that cannot be hastened.

In Adam's time, sin already existed, but there was no death yet. All the heavenly sinners were alive; Satan himself did not understand the full depth of his rebellion and what it would lead to. If his present condition had then been revealed to him, he and the entire Universe would have been horrified and perhaps would have desired to solve the problems immediately by putting an end to sin forever. But step by step, sin raised its ugly head and testified to all the heavenly beings what would have happened to them if Satan had been allowed to remain in Heaven and reign according to his own will. Our Earth, like a textbook, showed everyone what sin does and how dangerous it is.

And God's love was able to reveal itself in all its power and beauty.

By becoming man, the Son of God revealed to the whole world the true character of God and what love is really like. He was the embodiment of the Creator's love, which was manifested in limitless mercy and compassion for fallen people. It gave them hope for change for the better and strength for the struggle against sin.

Although the life of Jesus is described very briefly, and we know almost nothing about His life before His baptism in the Jordan, what has been revealed to us contains such depth that the whole world would not be large enough to contain all the books that will be written about it. And how much more will become known to us! All Eternity will constantly testify to us of new discoveries in the life of Jesus, Who was born into our world. God was manifest in the flesh! This is the miracle of miracles.

For us, it has become a normal part of life, and we are not even amazed by it, but this event is beyond our understanding. And we will understand it only when we see God face to Face in all His glory. Our amazement will know no bounds. To allow Himself to be so humiliated! To risk His Eternal life in order to save even someone from the power of sin?! What kind of love is this?!

But Jesus was born. He became a man Who depended on His parents, on their care, and on their means. And He chose for His birth a stable where it smelled unpleasant and was dirty, and then He grew up in a poor family where there was no abundance and where everything obtained by the work of their own hands was valued. Jesus was trained in the carpenter's trade, and by His labor He earned a living to support Himself and His widowed mother. We know nothing about the ministry in which He was engaged, but when the time came and the prophecies of Daniel pointed to it, the Lord left everything and everyone and went to fulfill God's plan for the salvation of humanity from the power of sin.

And how unobtrusively He carried out God's will! He came, was baptized, and went into the wilderness to be tested. He announced nothing to anyone. Returning after His victory over the devil, He quietly waited until people noticed Him and desired to learn what He had prepared for this world. A couple of people responded to His waiting. And He took them on distant journeys and was content with fellowship with them, leaving everyone else to wonder what mission would be carried out by the long-awaited Messiah. The attention of the whole world was focused on Christ, but He was in no hurry to change anything in politics or traditions and had absolutely no intention of declaring Himself to be Someone.

The miracles that Jesus performed confused everyone. It was evident that He performed them because of the great need and the inability of people to change anything, yet He did not seek glory for Himself, but avoided large gatherings and constantly changed the place where He stayed.

The Samaritans accepted Jesus as the Messiah through the testimony of the woman at the well and rejoiced in the truths that He proclaimed to them, while God's chosen people awaited a king who would overthrow Roman rule and exalt the Jews above the whole world. The conduct and life of Jesus did not fit their ambitious plans at all, and they kept waiting for Him to declare Himself to be Who He was supposed to be and to lead a popular movement in order to fulfill their ambitious expectations. But Christ silently departed, and no one knew where He was, where He would appear next, or what He would do afterward.

But He was born to die. And that time was relentlessly approaching. This troubled the human nature of Jesus; His soul shuddered at the trials ahead, but His love for people was stronger than all fears and apprehensions. He relied on the Father's will and fulfilled everything that had been foretold and planned concerning Him.

The love of God was revealed in all its fullness and beauty. In the person of Jesus, God showed His true attitude and forbearance toward the sinner, as well as His hatred of sin. The world lived differently, loving sin and hating the sinner.

But the death of Christ was to reveal the full depth of God's love for people and His hatred of sin. Mercy and justice met at the cross. And by this event a very clear answer was given as to what love is. This quality of God's soul should not be understood one-sidedly. The very same power and authority of love have been given to us. We cannot add anything to it, nor can we diminish it. Love exists even if it is not in me, and it awaits my consent to be born in my heart and lead me to perfection. This power is available to everyone because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Homework 170

1. What new things did you learn from this lesson?
2. What did Jesus have to do in order to redeem humanity?
3. How does God the Father reveal His love to us?
4. Why did Jesus need to be born as a child?

5. Why did Jesus not begin His ministry earlier?
6. How was God's love revealed at the cross?
7. What does Love expect from us?
8. Why was the cross specifically chosen by God as the place of Christ's death?
9. Please read Genesis 3:15; John 3:16; Isaiah 9:6; 50:6; 53; Psalm 22:1-2, 17-19; Daniel 9:26-27; John 1:18; 14:23; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 2:15; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Isaiah 42:3-4 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 171. The Spirit of War

Love has many enemies, and one of them is called the “spirit of war.”

This spirit first appeared in Heaven, where purity, holiness, and peace had always reigned. There arose one in whom sin was conceived, which grew into a universal rebellion and led to war in Heaven. “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.” Revelation 12:7. This war was spiritual, and the blood of living beings was not shed; all its participants used immaterial weapons against one another in the conflict. God acted in truth and with Love, which is the union of mercy and justice, while the enemy used lies, slander, malice, deceit, envy, pride, and other things. As a result, Satan and his supporters were defeated and expelled from God’s presence, but their lives were preserved, and their supernatural abilities were not taken away from them.

Now these spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places, having gained power over the minds of Adam’s descendants through his fall, continue the same spiritual war against Heavenly authority here on Earth, using the same methods.

And the goal of the evil spirits is complete dominion over the minds of all people. Their arsenal contains many means and methods for accomplishing their plans.

God, for His part, is also waging the struggle and opposing the influence of evil. He has already won the victory in this war. First He did so in Heaven, and then in the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Son of God made the decision to take upon Himself the sins of the world and pay for them with His life. As a result, Jesus was seized by Satan’s representatives; they beat Him and crucified Him, and because of the torments of eternal death and separation from God, Christ was killed by sin in order to become the Victor over it and over death. With His life He paid the debts of fallen humanity, thereby satisfying the requirements of the law, which declares that the wages of

sin is death. The law was fulfilled. Jesus also triumphed in this war. He died, rose again on the third day, ascended to God's throne, and received all power in Heaven and on Earth.

The death of Christ revealed to the entire Universe the true character and motive of Satan, which until then had been concealed beneath a mask of lies and hypocrisy. At the same time, the death of the Son of God revealed the true character of God to the entire Universe, exposing the devil and his plans.

The victory has been won, but the war is not over. Now God desires to reveal His character to man and restore His image in him. God is Love, and the goal toward which He is moving is the rebirth of His Love in the mind of fallen man and constant communication, at the level of consciousness and thought, with those who have chosen the path of trusting in God and continually place their confidence in His providence, who learn from Christ and come to know the Heavenly laws by living according to them.

The spiritual war has engulfed the whole Earth, and it is being waged everywhere people live. And a person's choice determines which power will be given to him for action in this conflict.

God and the spirits of wickedness carefully observe a person's decision so that, according to his choice, they may either take a place in his heart and be united with his will, or become his adversary and oppose him in this war. There can be no neutrality here. Indifference is a passive acceptance of the devil's side and gives the spirits of wickedness an opportunity to influence a person's mind and impose their values upon him.

At present we have an acceptable time in which to choose one side or the other and surrender ourselves to God's authority, becoming possessors of His character and His power of Love. In the last days of our world's history, this war has entered its final stage and brought all humanity to the final battle, which is called Armageddon. This is a battle of spirits in which God and truth will triumph, and God's Name will be glorified throughout the Earth. The culmination of this victory will be the glorious

Coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of all the righteous of all ages and their ascension to Heaven, the complete destruction of God's wicked adversaries, and the binding of Satan for a period of 1,000 years until the end of the investigative judgment. As a result, all the wicked will be resurrected for punishment, will receive retribution for their sins, and together with Satan and his angels will be cast into the lake of fire, where, after suffering, they will perish forever. Not a trace of them will remain.

And now, as a weapon for waging the final struggle, God gives Himself and all His Love. He opens the human mind to the knowledge of truth and God's law so that a person may understand the spirit of the law and the strategy of the war and be victorious at all times, overcoming sin through love for God and his neighbors and revealing God's true character to the world.

The one who knows the truth but does not have Love will be defeated, will take the side of God's enemy, and will become an instrument of the devil. In the end, he too will perish.

God offers Himself, and He has made it possible for a person, without any coercion, to decide whom to serve and under whose authority to place his will. And everyone makes his own choice, in which freedom of decision plays a special role. God can give Himself only to the one who understands what he wants, who desires it and asks for it, declaring his decision to be with God and cooperate with Him, and who invites Him into his heart through a request expressed in prayer. And God begins to work in a person both to will and to do of His good pleasure. He inscribes His thoughts and His character upon the person's mind and commands His Angels to guard him on every side and in every sphere.

Such a decision by a person to be with God and love his neighbors arouses Satan's particular fury, but he has no power over the minds of those in whom Love dwells, and only one thing remains for him—to devise a cunning temptation and, if possible, deceive even the elect.

Now is a peaceful and quiet time for making decisions. God gives protection to His children, and everyone can make a choice. But it will not always be so. When the four winds of the Earth are released, great tribulation, wars, catastrophes, and persecutions will arise everywhere. And in such circumstances it will be very difficult to make a choice and remain in it forever. Therefore, it is now that God calls us to seek Him, ask Him for Love, and learn to use this gift in every situation. He waits to give; He knocks, desiring to be heard; He enters where the door is opened to Him and gives the soul peace, Love, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

The Lord allows Himself to be known, and when I love, I am His true witness and exert an enormous influence on those around me, because it is not I, but He Himself Who wages the struggle and triumphs; it is not I and my eloquence, but His wisdom that speaks through me; it is not I who live, but Christ lives in me. And God loves the one in whom His Son lives and blesses such a person.

But everything that opposes God bears the spirit of war within itself and will be destroyed together with those who began this rebellion and continue it now.

Choose which side is right for you. There will be no neutrality.

The entire essence of this struggle consists in whom I will give authority over my mind, for I will worship the one who is my lord, who is the husband of my will.

I choose Jesus; I choose His will; I learn at His feet; I come to know His Love. And He gives me the power to discern good and resist evil. He is the Spirit of Love. And it is better to love than to fight and hate.

Homework 171

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Can the spirit of war be part of a person's character?
3. How can I determine whether I have the fruits of this rebellion within me?

4. What should I do if I realize that I am infected with this spirit? How can I get rid of it?
5. What role does Love play in this struggle with the world and with myself?
6. Please read Psalm 120:7; Matthew 5:9; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 John 4:20-21; Revelation 12:11-12; 15:3-4; Ephesians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Matthew 4:1-11; James 4:7, 10; Revelation 17:14; Ephesians 3:16-20 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 172. The Death of Love

To fully understand the price of our salvation, we need to realize what it cost God. It is the cross that reveals to us the great mystery of God's Love. My value is determined not by what I think of myself, but by the price that was paid for me. No matter how much I may feel like a speck of dust in the boundless Universe, and no matter how little I may value myself, a very high price was set for my life.

The law declares that the price of sin is death. That is how much my salvation costs. And to satisfy the requirements of the law, this exact price must be paid. Nothing else is accepted. The smallest sin, the most insignificant thought that violates God's commandment, is evidence against me, and then the law takes effect. And there is nothing in my life with which I could replace my punishment. All my good deeds cannot justify me before the requirements of the law, for without shedding of blood there is no remission.

The essence is this: in order to live forever, I must keep the entire law from my earliest childhood and constantly obey its requirements. Not a single dark stain of even the most secret thought must defile my mind and character. Only in this case am I declared righteous and able to live forever. But if I have committed even one sin, then I must die that very death of the soul which is called the second death. (Revelation 20:14; 21:8)

The Bible distinguishes between the first and the second death. Everyone dies the first death—both the righteous and the wicked who lived before us and those who are now leaving this world for the "land of silence." We will all cross this boundary. The only exceptions in the past were Enoch and the prophet Elijah, and in the future they will be those who are alive when they meet Jesus at the Second Coming.

We read in Revelation 20:6: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

The first death is the final result of every person's life of probation. This condition is sometimes called sleep. And the price that was paid at Calvary does not free us from the power of the first death. We will all die. But there is one exception. 1 Corinthians 15:51: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."

And so the life of our Savior approached the moment to which all the prophecies, all the religious festivals and traditions, and all the sacrifices pointed. The time was fulfilled. The Son of God had to make the decision to take upon Himself the sins of all humanity and bear the corresponding punishment. This guilt had already been partially laid upon Him, and His human nature shuddered at the thought of the coming trial. Jesus said to the disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." He was dying the death of the soul and enduring the torments that, in justice, the sinner should endure. When He came to Gethsemane, Christ asked the disciples to support Him in prayer, but they fell asleep, and He was left alone to make the most important decision. The "mysterious cup" that the Son of God was to drink trembled in His hand. Three times He pleaded with the Father to remove this trial, as though asking whether there might be another way of salvation. Could another religion be created in which such a price would not have to be paid, or could the law be changed so that He would not have to die such a death? But He knew that there was and would be no other way, and if He refused to drink this cup, humanity would be doomed, Satan would gain absolute power over fallen people, and no one would ever be able to save the sinner. And Christ had to choose. Three times He pleaded with the Father to change His plans, but He knew that there was only one way, that only Christ could walk it, and that unconditional Love for fallen people helped Him make the final decision—the Son of God would bear the punishment for the sins of humanity, He would drink this cup and satisfy the requirements of the law. With words of submission, Jesus fell exhausted to the ground, and His sweat was like drops of blood. An Angel was sent from Heaven to strengthen Christ in His decision.

Then came the betrayal, the flight of the disciples, Christ's arrest, trial, humiliation, scourging, spitting, mockery, humiliation, interrogations, accusations, and sentence. The Innocent One must die the cruelest death as the worst criminal.

And now the hands that had done so much good are nailed to the cross, and the feet that had hastened to save people are pierced with nails. The heavy cross is raised and forcefully dropped into a hole in the ground. Unimaginable pain pierces the body of the Son of God. And the Innocent One is condemned by this world to an agonizing death. People showed the entire Universe how they regard unconditional Love, how they treat those who love, who desire to save and heal. But without realizing it, people lifted Christ above themselves in order to show everyone the One Who had overcome. And He pleads with the Father to forgive His murderers, for they do not understand what they are doing. What amazing Love!

The "mysterious cup" is brought to Jesus' lips, and He begins to drink it. Christ is dying!!! All Heaven stood still in expectation. Every sound ceased. Would His human nature endure this trial?

In a frenzy, the enemy of souls calls upon Christ to doubt His decision and leave the cross. And the Lord could have done this. He could have come down from the cross, and then all the wicked would have believed that He was the Messiah, but that was not why He came. He came not to prove His power to Satan, but to save the fallen race from the power of Satan and sin.

But while hanging in agony, Jesus sees His mother and asks John to take care of her. What infinite Love!

No support, no hope—only darkness and suffering. And amid these taunts and reproaches, Jesus suddenly hears an amazing request: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Who is this? The thief on the neighboring cross? What support! What a blessing! Here he is, the first sheaf of the great harvest! An affirmative answer is given immediately.

Minute after minute, hour after hour, Christ drank the cup of human sins, becoming sin itself, and God's curse was upon Him.

The words of Deuteronomy 21:23, "...he that is hanged is accursed of God," were literally fulfilled.

Darkness descended into Christ's soul. The light faded from His eyes. He saw nothing and could envision no prospects. The only thing the Lord understood at that time was that the price of sin is death, and His soul was slowly and painfully dying that same mysterious second death, in which there is no hope, no knowledge, no light, but only suffering and darkness. At that moment Christ saw nothing and did not envision for Himself the glorious triumph and celebration of victory. The only thing He felt was that He was forever separated from the Father and that there was no hope of receiving forgiveness from Him.

The sun refused to shine; darkness descended upon the Earth. It seemed that all nature was dying together with its Creator. Every sound ceased. The Son of Man drank the cup of all human abominations and iniquities.

Darkness enveloped Christ's consciousness. He bore the payment for my sins, and when He had drunk the last drop of this cup, He cried out very loudly, "It is finished!!!" And having committed His spirit into the hands of the Father, Christ died, satisfying the requirements of the law that had sentenced me to eternal death. I am justified; the price for my sin has been paid. A new way has been opened to me, and I have been given hope for a better life. What great Love!

Homework 172

1. What interesting things did you learn in this lesson?
2. Where was the great mystery of God's Love revealed?
3. Why is there no remission without the shedding of blood?
4. What would have happened if the Son of God had refused to drink the cup of God's wrath on the cross?
5. How did the world treat unconditional Love?
6. What has Christ's death personally brought you?
7. Please read John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Romans 6:23; 3:21-26; Galatians 3:13-14; Hebrews 9:22; Leviticus 17:11; John 5:29; Galatians 4:4-5; Luke 22:37, 42-43; Ephesians 2:8-9 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 173. Righteousness by Faith

My dear Lord Jesus is hanging on the cross. He became a curse; He became sin. The Love of God the Father was poured out upon the Son in all His justice, without any mercy. All hatred of sin was brought down upon Christ because He chose to pay the price for humanity's sin. Jesus experienced what every sinner who rejects God's Love, manifested in mercy and in the gift of repentance, will experience. And the sufferings of soul that Christ endured were as much greater than ours as He was more perfect than we are. The sins of all repentant righteous people were laid upon Him, and He bore the just punishment for that of which He was innocent in order to give people what they did not deserve. Jesus accepted the death that I should die in order to give me the life of which He was worthy. What an amazing exchange! And people refuse to believe this? How then will they be saved? And who will tell them about such amazing Love?

Being forsaken by God is the most terrible condition of soul a person can ever experience. It is darkness without any hope of salvation; it is the hopeless expectation of eternal death; it is the great suffering that broke Christ's heart. No matter how severe the physical pain tearing His body, which was nailed to the tree, the agony of the death of the soul surpassed everything. Christ is dying!!! He is dying so that I may live. He sheds His pure blood so that I may live forever. He loved me and died for me while I was still sinful and did not understand what I was doing, and at a certain point in my fall He drew my gaze to Himself, crucified for my sins. A great mystery which the angels desire to look into!

The best sermon on righteousness by faith that I have ever heard was delivered by a man who had been sentenced to the highest penalty. Before the sentence was carried out, when the criminal was given the final word, he was very brief, but in his short address he expressed the entire essence of his faith. The journalists who were present at the execution did not even consider it necessary to write down this sermon-confession, but

passed it on orally to the public, after which another person recorded it and presented it to the public. This is probably the shortest of all the sermons I know, yet it has turned more people to God than any other. It produced, and continues to produce, a “mind-blowing effect” in the criminal world, bringing the most hardened criminals to repentance. This sermon consists of eight words, but it contains every aspect of righteousness by faith. The speaker put all his faith into it, and perhaps more tears of repentance and tender emotion have been shed after hearing it than after any other sermon. Whenever I reread these words and this story, tears come to my eyes as I realize how good the Lord is and how deep His Love is for me, a sinner.

I think that you also know it by heart and have heard it more than once. It reads as follows: “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!”

This sermon was spoken to Christ during the saddest hours of His life, when He was dying the death of the soul and drinking the bitterest cup of my sins. He did not see the light and did not know what awaited Him beyond this moment. The only thing Jesus understood at that time was that the payment for my sin was death—eternal separation from God without any hope of resurrection. The whole world, with all its malice, came crashing down upon Christ. The nails tore His body, His soul was fainting unto death, and darkness reigned all around; there was not a single ray of light. The disciples stood nearby in bewilderment and simply remained silent, waiting to see how events would unfold. And suddenly Jesus heard from the lips of a criminal words that became the greatest support and comfort to Him. They gave Christ confidence that His sacrifice for my sins and for the sins of humanity was not in vain, and that there was already one sinful soul who had accepted Him as his Savior before He became his Savior. The thief’s faith surpassed everything and everyone; it strengthened Jesus, and to this day it continues to raise thousands of souls longing for salvation from the power of darkness out of sinful darkness.

I do not even know the name of this great preacher, but everyone calls him the Thief on the Cross.

What, then, did he say?

He declared that he believed in Christ's mission and proclaimed Him to be God. While to many Christ was a Teacher, a Mentor, and a good Man, to the thief He became the One Whom he called Lord. This was the very first sermon about the resurrection from the dead, when no one had yet died. The thief made the boldest declaration that the power of death would be defeated by Christ's Resurrection from the dead. By faith, the criminal proclaimed Jesus to be his High Priest and delivered the very first sermon about the Heavenly Sanctuary, which Christ was preparing to enter with His blood as the Intercessor for my sins and his. The sinner placed all his faith in Jesus as his personal Savior, and he asked the Lord to become his Advocate as well when He presented his case in the investigative judgment, which would begin at the time appointed by God and foretold in the prophecies of Daniel. The thief declared his faith in the existence of the Heavenly Kingdom, in which Jesus is King. In essence, he proclaimed Christ to be the King of the Universe and the Head of the invisible Heavenly Kingdom while He was still a curse for sin, rejected by God the Father.

By faith, the sinner sees himself redeemed in this Kingdom solely by God's grace and by the mercy of Jesus risen from the dead, and his faith is counted to him for righteousness. The thief on the cross comforts Christ, and Jesus accepts this comfort. In the person of this nameless man, who had not yet done anything good, who had even been condemned by the world to a just punishment, who had not yet been baptized and had not become a member of any denomination, Jesus accepts me and everyone who comes to Him with similar faith and asks for mercy.

The thief could only trust in the merits of Christ, believing that only through Him could he be saved. He directs all his faith toward the unseen and receives assurance that his prayer has been heard, his faith has been accepted, and before the entire

Universe he is declared the first righteous person to whom righteousness was imputed by faith in Jesus, in the words: "Verily I say unto thee to day, shalt thou be with Me in paradise!" Some time later, the thief receives the seal of God's approval with the words: "It is finished!!!"

How grateful I am to this nameless messenger for such a simple and understandable sermon, which is so deep, pure, and candid that it penetrates to the very depths of my corrupt heart and awakens my entire being to faith, pointing out the true way of salvation through Jesus Christ—a salvation that takes place through faith in Jesus as my personal Savior.

In this travail of His soul, all His Love for me is revealed—a Love that awaits my acceptance and desires to work in me and through me.

But this mercy of Christ is shown not only to me, but to everyone who reads these lines.

On the cross, true Godly Love, which is the union of mercy and justice, was revealed to the entire Universe. If anyone thinks that God is lenient toward sin, then look at the crucified Christ, and you will see God's true attitude toward lawlessness.

If you believe that every sinner should die in this way, then look at the thief on the cross, who was justified not by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus.

Homework 173

1. What new things did you learn from this lesson?
2. What hope for sinners is found at the cross?
3. Why do you think that only a perfect sacrifice could satisfy the requirements of the Law?
4. In what condition does Jesus invite us to come to Him: holy or sinful?
5. What prevents a person from accepting the message of salvation?
6. How can one obtain righteousness by faith?
7. Please read 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 11:27-28; 1 John 2:2; Isaiah 59:16-18; 1 John 5:12; Luke 23:33-

47; Hebrews 10:19-21; 9:14; 4:16; Romans 5:6-10; 3:24-26
in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 174. Imparted Righteousness

The best example in which we can see the acceptance of all humanity and the imputation of righteousness by faith is the thief on the cross. This man accepted Jesus as his personal Savior; he confessed his sins, repented of his sinful past, and asked Jesus to show him God's mercy when He entered the Heavenly Sanctuary with His blood and appeared before the Father as his Advocate. In response, the thief was given assurance that his faith had been accepted. As a result, the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him, and he received the promise that, according to his faith, he would be accepted by God and would be in paradise. The criminal receives forgiveness by God's grace, and the peace of God fills his sinful heart. The thief's faith begins to grow and become stronger.

We then read that before the Sabbath began, the thief's legs were broken to hasten his death. As a result, he died. This is where the story of the first righteous man by faith ends. I am left to wonder what he would have become if the Roman authorities had decided to pardon him and take him down from the cross. Would he have retained his faith in Jesus? Would he have accepted baptism? Would he have remained faithful to God in his hope until old age and death? Would he have become one of Christ's disciples and later a teacher of righteousness?

It is difficult to give a simple "yes" to all these questions because we understand that a free person has the right to choose his future path and may make a wrong decision. Then all imputed righteousness will lose its power, and the saint will become a sinner and will be declared wicked in that same Heavenly judgment, rejected as a transgressor of the Law, and sentenced to eternal death for his sins.

God's Love is the union of mercy and justice. It loves and accepts the sinner without any conditions because it understands all the weakness of human nature and grieves over humanity's fall; at the same time, however, it hates sin and demands just punishment under the Law for the crimes committed. The wages of sin is death—the second, eternal

death without any possibility of resurrection. To solve this problem and reveal all the power and beauty of God's Love, God the Creator Himself decided to bear the punishment of death in place of fallen humanity, giving the sinner a chance to receive salvation from the power of sin, become righteous by faith in Jesus, begin a new life, receive power from above for a pure life, and fight temptations and sin through God's grace.

The transgressor is given the gift of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of his salvation, and throughout the remainder of his life this person grows spiritually and receives imparted righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.

We can find an example of such a person in the Bible in Saul of Tarsus, who, through his faith in Jesus and having been called to a special ministry, received the title of Apostle and became known as Paul. From the biblical account and Paul's own testimony in his epistles to his fellow believers, we can see his spiritual formation and growth in Christ. As this spiritual development progressed, he was being endowed with God's righteousness, which was now becoming part of his character as a result of his obedience to God's light and will and his trust in Jesus Christ. Through this faith, as Paul beheld the glory of God, he was transformed from glory to glory throughout his earthly life. In this process of spiritual growth, he made mistakes, to which he indirectly referred when he described himself as a wretched man longing for deliverance; but he also had firm confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ, through Whom he received power to overcome sin and live a new, righteous life. As a result of his spiritual development, at a certain stage of his spiritual growth Paul received the gift of agape love, through which he drew even closer to Christ. In his letters he wrote to us that without love we are nothing and that nothing profits us if we do not have this gift.

If I believe that my first step of faith, repentance, and baptism is sufficient for me to remain justified throughout the rest of my life, I will have serious problems with God. Calvary is only the beginning; we must go further.

It is like believing that, for a strong marriage, it is enough to go to the registry office, take part in a wedding ceremony, spend the first wedding night together, and then live happily in perfect harmony for the rest of one's life. If we take the thief on the cross, this is approximately what it looks like. But the point is that this criminal believed, was justified, and died. We, however, continue to live. After the "honeymoon," the working days begin. Temptations, heresies, trials, and enticements come crashing down upon us. All the power of spiritual wickedness in high places longs to break us, steal from us, kill us, and destroy us. We need constant power from above for continual victories. But this power is given on the condition of unwavering obedience to God's will and a life in accordance with the light we have received.

God does not save me in sin, but He saves me from sin and from its power in my life. He will not cover up my crimes or become my accomplice in lawlessness. He is holy, and He expects righteousness from me as well. To enable me to attain such a condition, every morning I am given power from above to fight sin, to have right relationships with those around me, and to gain a deeper knowledge of God and His Love for me and within me.

The Holy Spirit, by Whom I am sealed, produces in me the fruit of righteousness, which is manifested in my character and testifies to the whole world that God is righteous, powerful, and holy, and that He is merciful, compassionate, and just.

Love is God's seal upon imputed righteousness, and it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit through imparted righteousness. God is not preparing His children for Eternal Life so that they will commit sin at the end of the journey and perish forever. He keeps them from evil; He teaches them always to be holy and to go from victory to victory, from glory to glory; and His grace accompanies those who possess God's Love, seek God's righteousness, and thirst for God's Spirit while remaining in constant fellowship with Christ.

Throughout his sanctified life, righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ is imputed to the person who has been saved.

Absolute purity of thoughts, feelings, and words is expected of him.

Love helps a righteous person make right decisions and have pure motives in every matter. It forms the righteous person's way of thinking and draws the human soul closer to the heart of God, joining them together as one.

And everyone who loves can boldly say, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," and he will be right.

And woe is me if, having come to Calvary and repented, I do not go further. It is as though, after realizing my sin, I brought a sacrifice to the altar but did not allow its blood to be taken into the sanctuary.

Faith in Jesus is continual growth, and even in Eternity my development will not cease. We will be transformed from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Homework 174

1. What new things did you learn from this lesson?
2. What does it mean to believe in Jesus as your personal Savior?
3. How was the problem of sin resolved by God?
4. What has the Lord promised in His Word so that we may walk in newness of life?
5. How is God's character formed and rooted in a person?
6. Why is spiritual growth necessary for us?
7. Please read Hebrews 7:26-27; 10:19-23; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Philippians 1:29; 4:5-7; Revelation 20:5-6, 13-15; Zechariah 3:3-7; Genesis 3:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 25; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 2:19-20; Ephesians 3:16-19; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 1 Peter 1:15-16; Philippians 2:13-15 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 175. The Spirit of Love

Very often we hear that it is necessary to have a spirit of love in our relationships and to manifest it constantly. Such appeals are often made. The following pattern exists: when a large group of like-minded people gathers, disagreements, confrontations, and discontent begin to arise among them. In order to establish order, those in positions of responsibility introduce rules and set standards of conduct, requiring everyone to observe them. This is where the most interesting part begins.

We are studying the science of love, and our task is to understand correctly what love is and how it manifests itself in one situation or another. A merely human approach to this matter is not enough.

We are all different, with different perceptions, having grown up in different cultures and circumstances. Each of us experienced childhood in our own way, and our parents, if they were present, behaved according to what they understood and considered right. Our upbringing at home laid the foundations of our worldview. When I come to Christ with this baggage of ideas, I involuntarily try to live as I am accustomed to living or as I consider right. And if I encounter something that contradicts my ideas, I begin to resist inwardly and seek to understand the situation.

I very much want a spirit of love to be shown toward me, especially if the community in which I find myself is Christian. But the spirit of love has its own requirements and expectations, and this is worth taking into account. For example, I associate with people who are rebels by nature, and if something happens contrary to their ideas and I am to blame, they immediately explode and may tell me without any hesitation exactly who I am, calling me interesting names. Of course, God expects me to show a spirit of love toward these people. With God's help, this is possible, and in the end everything concludes peacefully. But when these people encounter similar treatment toward themselves in a spirit of

war, they keenly feel the crying injustice of it, especially if they are unable to prevail in the situation. No one likes to be insulted and humiliated, yet when such a spirit comes from them, they believe they need to “let off steam” in order to feel better. Judge for yourselves, then, how such a person will perceive love.

A true understanding of the Spirit of Love is based on a deep knowledge of God and His character. God is Love; this must be accepted as the foundation, and all God’s works, commands, and laws must be viewed in this light. They have all been established and proclaimed in the spirit of true Love because they come from the One Who makes no mistakes. When such a foundation exists, I establish myself upon it, consider every action of God, and agree that it is right, even if I do not understand something.

There are many difficult passages in the Bible that are very hard for the mind to comprehend without knowing the overall picture and the true reason why something was written exactly as it was and why people acted in one way rather than another. Much has to be filled in by our own imagination. If I do not agree that God is always Love, I will begin to attribute to Him qualities of character that are not inherent in Him. It is also very important to understand the concept of love correctly.

Love is the union of mercy and justice; it is the fullness and harmony of these two perfections in their fullest interaction and mutual interweaving. By removing either one, I distort the truth and the proper understanding of love. A mistaken perception of this union can lead me to an extreme. Either I fall into liberalism and look mercifully upon every sin, or I become harsh and demanding toward everyone on the basis of justice. All extremes are dangerous and bring only harm and irreparable loss. Souls perish under the influence of such believers.

Every act of God proceeds from the Spirit of His Love. When He decided to give His Son to our world, He did not do so without a struggle, but Love could not act otherwise. As we study God’s

Plan of Salvation, we see that there is and can be no other way. Only in this way, and no other, can we be saved.

When God destroyed our world with the waters of the Flood, He revealed that aspect of Love which is also inherent in Him but is rather something unusual, for the Most High delights in showing mercy, and He bears for a very long time with those who disregard His grace. But one day a person reaches the limit at which God begins to manifest justice out of Love for the sake of those who have responded to His mercy and accepted His plans and laws.

The mistake of those awaiting the Messiah in the time of Christ was that they reversed the prophecies of His Second Coming and the predictions of His First Coming. As a result, these people did not recognize their King and killed Him. The mistake of believers in our time is that they expect an Infant Who will come into this world to reveal the beauty of liberalism and accept all people regardless of how sinful and corrupt they are. But the King of Kings will come and destroy everything with fire. This will be the most terrible day for the disobedient and wicked and the best day for those who are preparing and waiting. For some, God's Love will become a death sentence; for others, it will be the beginning of Eternity. Why is this so? Where is the justice? This is precisely how God's justice will be revealed, because everyone will receive what he freely chose.

Disagreements may arise in our fellowship, and wise people who are led by the Spirit of God and have experience in establishing order will do everything possible to neutralize the influence of evil by introducing rules and standards of conduct. Such measures are necessary in every group. And what will these people become in the eyes of rebels? Tyrants and dictators. And what will they become in the eyes of Heaven? God's fellow workers in establishing Heavenly order.

Consider, for example, Satan's rebellion. None of the angels understood what spirit it possessed, and Satan gained many supporters and sympathizers. This gave him strength to continue the struggle. If he had been alone from the beginning,

perhaps he would have reflected and reconsidered his views. But he was supported.

In every rebellion and conflict here on Earth, supporters and sympathizers will always be found, and therefore the evil spirit succeeds. God's people have been taught to recognize such a spirit and know how to oppose it. It is a blessing if they have the wisdom to act correctly and know how to explain their actions to others. But casualties cannot be avoided. Evil exerts its influence and, hiding behind the mask of an angel of light, very quickly finds allies. Sometimes they are the majority. But Love recognizes this spirit and begins to oppose it; as a result, in the eyes of the rebels and their supporters, the loving person becomes the embodiment of evil. Misunderstanding arises. Walls and barricades are built in relationships, and instead of friendship and love, a struggle over opinions and ideas takes place. There is nothing new in such a confrontation.

If in childhood I encountered—or if now I encounter—rudeness and cruelty, then, upon entering a Christian environment, I expect kind treatment, and this is right. But when a conflict of ideas arises, I may consider any rule to be dictatorship and close myself off from that order, not regarding it as the spirit of love. Here it is very important to understand what Love is. At Calvary true Love was revealed to me: it manifested itself in boundless mercy toward me and in the forgiveness of my sins. That same Love was poured out in great wrath upon the One Who took my sin upon Himself. This is what true mercy and justice are.

Homework 175

1. Did you learn anything useful for yourself from this lesson?
2. Are rules of conduct necessary in a community of believers?
3. What happens when there is no order and everyone does what he considers right?
4. Can loving people make mistakes and exceed their authority when establishing order?
5. How do you understand the spirit of love among believing friends? In your opinion, what should it look like?

6. Is there order in Heaven? Are there rules of conduct and protocols for meetings and gatherings there?
7. As a good shepherd, what should I do if I see wolves entering the flock and beginning their destructive work? How should I conduct myself in such a case?
8. Please read 1 Corinthians 14:33; Exodus 23:13; Leviticus 18:4; Proverbs 13:23-24; 2 Corinthians 12:20-21; Galatians 1:8-9; John 10:11-14; Revelation 3:19 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 176. The Resurrection of Love

Isaiah 55:11 says: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." While He was still living on Earth, Jesus taught that He was to die for the sins of the world and rise again on the third day. The Word had been spoken, and all Heaven awaited its fulfillment.

The death of Christ revealed to all the inhabitants of Heaven Satan's true character and what would have happened to the Universe if God's adversary had received the power of which he dreamed and had been allowed to remain in the Heavenly courts. The evolution of sin reached its culmination at Calvary, and when the Son of God died on the cross, the mask beneath which Satan had concealed his true plans was torn away. If any of the faithful angels had sympathized with the great deceiver or had not understood his intentions, everything was now revealed, and the final sentence of death was pronounced upon Satan. But the enemy of souls did not know how much time he had left and continued to fight desperately, which he still does to this day in great fury.

The great Sacrifice had been offered. The Roman centurion acknowledged Christ as the Son of God and boldly declared his faith in Him. The whole Earth trembled and sank into the darkness of unbelief and despair. Something astonishing took place at Calvary. Something important "was finished." Thousands of hearts were shaken by the events that had occurred, and many began to study the prophecies about the Messiah and how He was to suffer. And these people found answers. Everything pointed to this Sacrifice; everything led to this day. And now, before everyone's eyes, all the predictions concerning Christ and all the feasts pointing to true deliverance from sin were fulfilled. Type met antitype. God's Love was revealed to the entire Universe.

It is difficult for me to say whether this Sacrifice affected the inhabitants of Heaven in any way or whether it had any

significance in cleansing them from the consequences of Satan's rebellion, but I know that the blood of Christ cleanses from every sin on Earth.

The lifeless body of Jesus was taken down from the cross, wrapped in linen cloths, and laid in a tomb. The entrance was closed with a stone, and they went home to rest according to the commandment.

Having completed creation in six days, the Son of God rested from all His works. Having accomplished our Salvation, the Son of Man rested from this grievous labor and spent the seventh day in the silence of a new tomb.

Even if the disciples had doubts and disappointment, and even if they had forgotten the Teacher's words about His resurrection, the priests remembered them well and believed that they would be fulfilled. Therefore, they asked Pilate to place a guard at the tomb, secured the entrance to the tomb with a stone, and set a seal upon it.

But the third day after Christ's death was approaching, and God's Word brought the declaration of Jesus to fulfillment: He arose. While awaiting His release from the prison, He carefully folded the linen cloths and the napkin in which He had been wrapped, knowing that John would see them and believe. The One Who created the entire Universe was very attentive to details and even put the tomb in order when He was released from it.

And then an Angel from Heaven, in all his splendor, descended to Earth, rolled away the stone from the entrance, and set Jesus free so that He could come forth and go to the Father. And the One Who said of Himself in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," left the tomb in all His glory; and for fear of Him, the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. Where was the strength of the brave soldiers, and where was their courage? Before God everything grows silent and trembles. And in terror the guards abandoned their post. All the soldiers fled.

If we consider all the founders of the world's religions, we can learn where their graves are and where they are buried. But Christ's tomb is empty. He arose from the dead! He is alive for evermore.

In the resurrection of Christ, the power of God's Word was revealed, bringing the prophecies concerning this event to fulfillment. The One Who died in the agony of the second death became the Firstborn from the dead and the last One to cross this boundary. No one else has yet endured this agony, and no one will ever rise again after God's judgment upon the wicked has been carried out. Jesus truly is the First and the Last.

Because of this event, I have hope and confidence that I too will be raised by the same power of God's Word if I die before that time. What a glorious hope! Death is only a short sleep, and upon awakening from it, Eternity and everlasting life begin. This life already abides in us, and it will continue, never to end again.

If Jesus had not risen, Christianity would have become one of the religions that worship the dead. Faith in Christ would then have been in vain, and there would have been nothing for which to hope. In that case, our world would have sunk into the darkness of despair and unbelief, inventing its own ways of salvation and having no idea what would happen after death. Indeed, this is what happens wherever Christ is absent.

But our Lord Jesus died, paying the price for our sins, and rose again, giving us hope and faith in our resurrection. And we live in the glorious hope and expectation of this event. How joyful it will be to meet again those whom we loved and who left us, leaving behind all their labors; those whose messages sustained us in difficult times; those who believed in Jesus and were ready to die rather than sin; and those who gave their lives for the faith and were faithful unto death. How much joy and delight we will experience on that beautiful day of Christ's Second Coming! And it is drawing near. Very soon it will come to pass, though certain events must still take place. And the prophecies are already beginning to be fulfilled.

And that very agape love which we are learning in our school will be sought by everyone. It will find its application, and we will be amazed at how rich we are in this gold refined in the fire of trials and how vast this ocean of love is which never runs dry. We already understand that such Love never fails and will remain the same throughout all the remaining days of unending Eternity. Why should we be given what is perishable or be taught what is temporary? God has a better plan. We are studying the eternal science of Love so that we may never stop growing in this knowledge and development. And practical skills and visual aids surround us everywhere.

The life, death, and resurrection of Christ are the foundation of my faith, upon which I can confidently build all my views and base my assumptions, knowing that it will withstand every trial. Everything that corresponds to the truth has God's blessing, approval, and support. Such a foundation will bear any load and will not crack. It is a very strong ship for long and safe journeys.

God's eternal Love has a very firm and solid foundation. It proceeds from Christ in order to exert its influence, glorify Him, and draw to Him new souls who are weary of deception and vanity. Glory to God!

Christ is risen! What power there is in these words, and how often they are spoken by those who do not personally know the One of Whom they speak. For many, they have become an incantation that has entered tradition and lost its meaning, but it was not so before. This was how the first disciples of the early Church greeted and comforted one another. And how do we greet one another today?

Homework 176

1. Did you learn anything new from this lesson?
2. Do you believe in the resurrection of Christ? What does it mean to you?
3. Why was the resurrection from the dead included in the Plan of Salvation?

4. Why is Jesus called the Firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5), even though He Himself raised the dead during His earthly life?
5. Where does the Bible say on exactly which day Christ arose? Name the verse that speaks of this event and this day.
6. Why did Jesus not rise immediately, but remain in the tomb for several days?
7. What would have happened if Jesus had not risen?
8. Does the fact of Christ's resurrection give you hope for your own resurrection if you die believing in the Lord?
9. Please read Matthew 16:21; 20:19; 27:52-53; 28:6; John 5:28-29; Romans 6:4-5, 9; 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:12-26 in the light of our lesson.

Jesus is risen; He is alive; He loves you!

Lesson 177. Cleansing the Heart Through Fellowship

We are all different—from different regions, different cultures, and different families—and the Lord decided to unite such different people into one body, of which He is the Head. And then the most interesting part begins: we adjust to one another.

For some, this process is easy and peaceful, while others experience stress, sleepless nights, days of struggling with themselves, and much more. Some people simply leave and rejoice that they have escaped the problems. But the Lord stands above everything and directs these processes. His hand supports me in difficult times. His Love is poured into my life, smoothing my sharp edges and polishing those facets of my character that can cause pain to others and become a curse to me. And this very Love desires to become fully mine so that, flowing into me, it may abide in my heart, live a full life there, and bring joy to all those around me through its attitude toward them.

Love loves to communicate and reveal its power through human speech. It knows human nature perfectly, yet it also looks closely into every detail of a person's life and makes new discoveries in that person's heart, without closing its own soul.

Try choosing one person and begin speaking to that person about your love. Even if at first your feelings are weak and your desires uncertain, over time, as you communicate, love will begin to take shape. It will become more and more firmly established in the heart, revealing new words and expressions with which you can embrace a person, convince that person of the truth of the words being spoken, and bring joy to that person's heart. You may receive a similar response in return, and it is quite possible that my love will awaken mutual love in the heart of the person whom I have decided to love.

We must always remember that supernatural powers of goodness stand behind my decision and my act of love. They are interested in my victory, and they do more for me than I could

ever dream of. Nevertheless, the first step toward a relationship, or the response to someone else's attempt to begin one, must come from me.

We read in 1 John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." As I read this verse, I see a key to solving many problems. And that key is fellowship. Fellowship may take different forms, but without it, resolving something can sometimes be very difficult. Good deeds are good in themselves, but without accompanying words, a wrong motive may be attributed to them.

For example, I decide to help someone financially, and I do it freely, from a pure heart, without unnecessary words. Is it a good deed? It all depends on how it is viewed. If someone decides to comment on my actions, that person can give them whatever meaning he wishes. And people will believe him, because words have the power to persuade. If he says that I am seeking to become well known, or that I am doing it to boast before others, or that I want to gain someone's favor and draw him into some sect, or that I give in order to demand repayment later, or that I intend to make everyone my slave, then those words will have an effect, and all my unselfish motives will be distorted and misunderstood. But if the same well-wisher begins praising me for my kindness and describing me as an angel, people will begin to think of me as someone special and try to find wings on me; but when they realize that I am an ordinary person, they will be disappointed.

Fellowship helps us understand much about those around us and see them in the proper light. I hear the voice and intonation, sense the heart, and can understand the motive and disposition. In writing, every phrase sounds neutral, and I can give it my own meaning if I wish. But when I hear speech and a voice, I also understand the meaning of what was said.

I have noticed the following: when my friends read my letters, it is as though they hear my voice, and because they know me, they understand the meaning of what I write. And the same can be said of any of you.

God's purpose is to gather us all into one family, teach us to love, understand, and accept one another, become friends, and be happy in these relationships.

Where people gather and unite, problems also arise. If there are no rules or established standards of conduct, people begin searching for the boundaries within which they can act and express themselves. As a result, opinions and ambitions collide. Many people seek good relationships and, upon entering a new community, hope to find faithful friends there. They themselves are also willing to become friends. But the conflicts and disagreements that usually arise frighten many of them, and they leave after realizing that the people in this community are just like people everywhere else.

But things are not equally bad everywhere. Where God's Spirit is present and Love reigns, and where friendship has been chosen as the direction, the picture changes. God brings about many transformations and discoveries in the hearts of His children, and through fellowship with one another we come to shared views and principles. We have the ability to persuade one another that even though we are all different, if we love one another, each person can do what he enjoys most and do it together with others, contributing his part to the common work. And the purpose of every common work is to enter Eternity and continue there to increase in favor with God and man, growing in love, knowing the Father and the Son face to Face, and knowing one another, while abiding in the Holy Spirit.

Whenever we have fellowship in the Spirit of Truth here in this spiritual community, a process of cleansing our hearts takes place. We learn to love and, in this light, seek points of contact. We have problems with one another and try to resolve them through dialogue. And the Blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

Have you noticed that when there was a burden on your heart and you decided to speak with a friend, everything was settled, and you saw both the problem and the way out of it in a new light?

Love resolves any conflict in a couple of minutes if the heart is open to Christ's influence. The Blood of Jesus cleanses my heart from all evil if I allow His Love to pass through my lips and hear this Love from the lips of my neighbor.

The family is the best battlefield for two selfish people who have decided to create something shared and beautiful. It is a miniature of the church and of social relationships across a broad range of influence, yet within the small space of relationships. The family develops many good qualities of the soul, which later also help in serving others around us. Families are different. But in any case, even without reciprocation, I can love my life companion if she does not share my goals.

But it is also important to understand that for fellowship to have cleansing power, we must walk and live in the light, have a firm biblical foundation for our faith and convictions, and know God personally. For if I am merely a good person and seek peace with everyone, but have not given my heart to Christ, then I have no higher purpose, and I will not enter Eternity merely by keeping company with others. Salvation has a Plan and conditions that must be observed, and they are effective. One must be born again in order to become an heir. I need faith in Jesus; I need to have a relationship with Him; and when I do, His Blood has cleansing power for me, covering my sin and removing it from me, making room for love, friendship, and happiness.

And where Love comes first, it is very good to live, to be, to fellowship, and to be friends. Everything is right there. And Eternity will be like that.

Homework 177

1. Are you familiar in your personal life with the persuasive power of your words?
2. Did you learn anything new from this lesson? If not, share your experience of how gracious words work in your life.
3. Do you believe that through fellowship with friends in the faith, the Blood of Christ also washes away your sins?
4. How do you understand the expression "walk in the light"?

5. Have you experienced reconciliation after speaking with those who caused you hurt and harm?
6. Do you believe in the power of words to influence?
7. How do you evaluate your words? Do they influence those around you toward good or toward evil?
8. Are you susceptible to the influence of other people's words?
9. Please read Romans 12:10, 14, 16; Proverbs 15:26; 18:4; 23:9, 12; James 1:19-27; 1 John 1:7 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 178. Tenderness

What comes to mind when I hear this word? What is tenderness? Is it something from a woman's repertoire? Or advice on caring for an infant? I feel prompted, together with you, friends, to consider this quality of the soul in the light of love and biblical principles.

Of course, first of all, I picture a mother tenderly holding her child, looking at the child with a smile, and thinking about what kind of person will grow out of this tiny bundle and what difficulties the child will face in this life. Meanwhile, the baby sleeps peacefully and worries about nothing.

I was present at the birth of my daughter and took photographs of all the details as keepsakes. The nurse received the baby and went to wash her. I asked if I could do it myself. I was shown how to hold this creation of God properly. Very carefully, I took her in my arms and began washing away everything in which my daughter had been born, while she quietly enjoyed being in her father's hands. Then I dressed her in something and continued carrying her very carefully in my arms, talking about everything. My daughter stared into nowhere but remained very quiet. Meanwhile, my wife was recovering from childbirth and was in no condition to concern herself with anything. An hour later, the baby fell asleep, and we were taken to the ward. I was exceedingly tender in all my movements and in my speech, understanding that this little being could not endure rough handling.

The next day, when I came to the hospital, our baby was brought to us, and the first thing we were shown was how to pick her up properly and tenderly, how to hold her while bathing her, and how to change her clothes carefully. Our attention was drawn to her head, and we were told that something there still needed to grow together and that we should be extremely vigilant to prevent any injury during that time. We heeded this advice and began doing everything as we had been taught.

A process of learning began in my life. A born egoist had appeared in our family, teaching us tenderness, tact, attentiveness, affection, patience, keeping watch at night, prayer, joy, family happiness, and many other things.

My daughter is now twenty-six years old, and she already has a daughter of her own, who brings us all much joy and reminds us of the lessons in child-rearing that we learned in the past. This little girl requires the utmost tenderness and tact from us.

And I tried to picture what tenderness toward a small child means in my life. When I take this little person in my arms, I hold the child in such a way that the child is very comfortable in my arms and nothing causes discomfort. I distribute the child's weight between both of my arms and hold the child very carefully, rocking gently. Yet my embrace is very firm. If I move and change the position of my body, all my attention is focused on ensuring that this person in my arms feels no discomfort. If I see any danger, I hold the child very firmly, making sure the child is comfortable in my arms and that nothing can cause harm. At such a moment, I am ready to shield the child with my own body and take off everything I am wearing to shelter the child from a cold wind or rain. And if someone tries to snatch this little bundle from my arms, I will not allow it and will defend the child with all my strength, forgetting about myself. Yet this little person does not even think about what is happening in my life. The child understands that it feels good and safe with me and remains calm, paying no attention to my concerns.

When, on the basis of this example, I analyze my communication with adults and my past life, I see how little I thought about tenderness toward my neighbors. I caused them pain, showed roughness and tactlessness, inflicted wounds, and became a source of suffering and problems, while also causing myself physical, emotional, and spiritual harm. And for some reason, all this is considered a normal part of life, and we grow accustomed to it.

But I met Christ, and He helped me understand that there is another life, that there are better relationships, and that there

is another way of approaching people. And He Himself showed me His tender touch. He took me into His loving arms and began carrying me, tenderly holding me close to Himself. At times the Lord entrusted me to His Angels, and they continued to care for me.

Yet I live without even realizing what is happening around me. If my eyes were opened and I became a witness to the struggle being waged for my soul, I would see a dragon roaring like a lion, together with all his demons. He desires to tear me to pieces and destroy everything in my life, but God's Angels encamp around me and give the enemy no opening, although they do not forbid him to send his temptations from afar. They watch to see how I will respond to them. Jesus is ready to shield me with Himself, placing His own body in the path of blows from without and taking upon Himself the fiery darts of temptation from the wicked one.

But I do not see this conflict over my life and feel comfortable, without thinking about what is happening around me. I sit down at Christ's feet and begin making little sand cakes, awaiting praise and admiration for the fruits of my creativity and considering myself very important and great because of my achievements. But the Lord tenderly takes me in His arms, kisses me, embraces me, holds me close to Himself, and assures me that He loves me very much. Having received His affection, I hurry to climb back down to the ground so that I may continue my activities and do something for Jesus.

But then another neighbor just like me appears, whom the Lord carries just as tenderly in His arms and protects from evil. Jesus places him beside me and watches to see how I will behave. My new friend, just like me, begins making little sand cakes. At first, I do this together with him, and everything turns out well for us. We rejoice in our success, embrace each other tightly, and thank Jesus for one another. But then I suddenly notice that my friend's sand cakes are more beautiful and sturdier than mine, and this troubles me. I begin finding fault with him, looking for shortcomings in his behavior and showing roughness for every reason, and in response he destroys my

masterpieces. We strike one another, and then ask for blessings upon our labors and continue fighting among ourselves, or we go our separate ways so that we do not meet. I feel that I am becoming poorer in such conflict and have neither the joy nor the strength to go on living this way. Wherever I go, it is always the same—the same people and the same problems—yet being alone is still dreary.

And Jesus watches us with sadness and offers us Heavenly gold, which will enrich us and teach us to enrich others. I begin to wonder whether perhaps I really should accept this Heavenly treasure. What if it helps?

I begin to think. I reflect on what I will gain if I respond to this offer, and for this reason I become a thinking person, and this pleases God. After all, everyone around us is building, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, and not thinking.

How much tenderness the Lord has placed in His gifts, and how affectionately He offers them to me, together with His own heart. How could I not accept this gift of Heaven?! Even though I must give something in return, it is worth it.

And as I receive this Heavenly gold called Love, I learn from Jesus the same tenderness in relationships. I take this water of life into my hands and carefully carry it to my neighbors, afraid of spilling its precious drops onto the ground. I tenderly offer them a taste of this treasure from my hands. Some accept it, some laugh, and some strike my hands, and it all pours out onto the sand. But I return to the ocean of Love, draw from it again, and carry it to my friends, tenderly offering them this treasure.

Homework 178

1. What blessings did you receive while studying this lesson?
2. How do you understand the word “tenderness”?
3. How is tenderness manifested in communication with people? How is it expressed?
4. Is tenderness a part of character, or is it the expression of a temporary feeling when needed?
5. Are tenderness and love compatible in the same heart?
6. Do you know of tender people in the Bible? Give an example.

7. Please read Isaiah 46:3-4; Romans 12:19; Isaiah 49:15; Psalm 91:11-12; Hosea 11:3; Isaiah 58:4; 1 Peter 1:22 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 179. The Experience of Love's Offensive

A little earlier, I described my experience of gaining friends at the dining table during the camp meeting in Novi Obikhody, Ukraine. Encouraged by the success of that victory, I ventured to take another step. I decided to return the following year, 2012, for the next gathering and, this time, to give my love to strangers instead of friendship. I was no longer worried about failure, but I decided to pray about this new experience throughout the year. All kinds of thoughts came to me during the time of preparation, and the most persistent one sounded like this: 'Why do you need this?' But I desired to have this experience. It was also interesting to understand that words about friendship differ greatly from words about love. When you tell someone directly that you are his friend, it produces one kind of feeling; but when you tell him that you love him, it is an entirely different experience. Yet I wanted to have such an experience, and I approached it very responsibly. I am now writing that there is no defense against love and that the one who loves is victorious in everything, and I have repeatedly become convinced of this through my small experiences and observations. Therefore, I now speak about it with confidence, knowing that this is truly so. And if we also take into account that this is a commandment and the fulfillment of God's will for the last days, then success is guaranteed from above to a loving heart. However, I must decide how necessary this is for me. Am I ready to be the person God desires me to be? Will I allow Him to pour this wonderful power into our world through me?

And then the long-awaited day arrived, and I was at the meeting place. I chose the emptiest table and rejoiced over the new friends whom I did not yet know. It was Friday, lunchtime, and there were still nine days of getting acquainted ahead. Then the people whom I had decided to love arrived. I had already been carrying them in my heart even before meeting them, knowing what I would do with them, while at that moment they suspected nothing.

I sat down, prayed for a blessing upon the food, and began our acquaintance with these words: 'My name is Andrey, and you are the answer to my prayer. You are the people whom I have decided to love, and now there is no getting away from me. I will do this throughout the entire camp meeting and all my life.' Then I began explaining to my new friends how I loved them and what that meant. Considering that our meals lasted about forty minutes and that we stayed even longer, until we were asked to leave, we had a very interesting seminar on love during that time.

At first, however, I saw very astonished faces, and everyone made it clear to me that I was very strange and that nothing would come of this. I agreed that I did not have the strength to continue this war—but God did. I took Christ as my Helper and confidently moved toward the goal, toward hearts buried deep beneath layers of stereotypes, hearts that had grown weary of living without love and did not even know what it was. I looked at these impregnable cliffs and wondered why the Lord had sent me these particular people, for all around there were such pleasant men and women who simply radiated happiness, while sitting with me were little hedgehogs who had curled themselves into balls and were even trying to prick me. One friend, Volodya, did not know Russian at all, yet somehow understood me perfectly well and answered in Ukrainian.

But the choice had been made, and I did not plan to retreat. Day after day, I spoke about my love for these people and became more and more firmly established in my decision. I noticed that during our fellowship, the Lord gave so many revelations about what love is like, how it acts, where it comes from, and how it never ends. I was learning together with my new beloved friends. On the third day, they began to understand what I was talking about, and on the fourth day, they began to open up. Then the most interesting part began. I started discovering the inner world of these new people. It turned out that they were beautiful in their souls, but because of sorrowful experiences in life, they had decided to remain closed. Love, however, convinced them to open up, and they themselves were amazed at how wonderful it was to love

without expecting anything in return. We simply enjoyed fellowship with one another throughout all the remaining days.

Unfortunately, the number of places at our table was limited, and I could reach only those who were fortunate enough to find a seat there. Some of my friends from the previous gathering sat at another table this time, and I was able to fellowship with them only during breaks and walks.

Try to imagine a stranger who sees you for the first time and confidently declares that he loves you, that he has prayed about it for an entire year, that he has no intention of treating you any differently or leaving you alone, and that he actually behaves accordingly, confidently assuring you that he loves you and has no intention of changing his attitude. You do not often meet such 'peculiar' people. This was approximately how my friends saw their new friend.

At the same time, I understood that I was dealing with free people who could reject me and had the right to do so. But they did not do this. Instead, they decided to open up and accept what was being offered to them, and they did not regret it. Love enters the heart and settles there very tenderly, seeking to live within the boundaries established for it; at the same time, it permeates everything around it and makes plans for further cooperation and advancement. Most interesting of all, through this love God is revealed very clearly—His true beauty, His involvement, and His attitude toward people, expressed through human words and actions. This is a very great responsibility. If I decide to play at love, without understanding the power of its influence and its consequences, in order to achieve my personal aims and whims, and then refuse to continue in the same spirit, I dishonor God and His holy Name by using His power for selfish interests. This is precisely what people encounter most often. Afterward, they close themselves off and no longer believe that genuine relationships, genuine love, or genuine friendship exist.

As we study in the School of Love, we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit. Yet it is possible that we may never encounter this love among those around us, and no one may ever give us his

heart as a friend or as a loving person. But the purpose of the school is not to seek love in people; it is to learn to love people ourselves and to learn to give them what we receive abundantly from God. If you have other expectations, they are mistaken. Love is an action directed toward the happiness and spiritual comfort of one's neighbor, and as I perform this action, I have greater joy, because through it I glorify God, and He reveals Himself in me and works miracles and victories through me. Even if no one loves me in response to my love, despite how painful this is to endure, I am a victor because I allowed the Holy Spirit to use me in this conflict, and I acted not according to the rules of the flesh but by applying God's power. But since people have chosen evil, their choice should be respected.

Yet I want to assure you, friends, that love kindles a fire in the hearts of other people. It sows good seed that springs up and bears good fruit. Do not be afraid to love. In the world and in the church, there are very many people who are waiting to open up in the light of your love and to blossom in all the beauty of their inner world, delighting you and others with the depth of their attitude and the beauty of feelings that have gone unappreciated, yet are wonderful—feelings that have been given to everyone but are buried beneath the debris of fear and unbelief.

Love, and you will receive.

Homework 179

1. What did you discover for yourself in this lesson?
2. What do you expect from God as you learn His love? Do you have any plans and goals?
3. Have you ever had an experience in which you tried to make someone happy? What came of it?
4. Is it worth spending your time learning to love those who do not know you or are indifferent toward you?
5. Does Jesus seek new friends for Himself, or does He wait for them to come to Him on their own?
6. What should you do with people who love you and constantly tell you so, but whom you cannot love in the same way?

7. What new things have you discovered for yourself while studying in this school?
8. Please pray for our School of Love, for those who are studying in it, and for those who will soon enroll.
9. Please read Matthew 7:7-8; Romans 5:5-10; Luke 15:4, 8, 20, 24; Luke 16:9-12; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 180. Come, Let Us Show Them Jesus

Some Greeks came to Jerusalem and began looking for Jesus. They wanted to see the One about Whom they had heard so much and for Whose sake they had traveled such a long way. They desired to see Christ with their own eyes. I want this too. And I would gladly sit at His feet.

The Greeks were Hellenes, inhabitants of Hellas, as they called themselves and their country. At that time, Greek culture had a very strong influence on the entire civilized world. Not long before this, all the countries of that time had been under the rule of Greece, which was succeeded by Rome, and the Greek language was widely used in that world as the language of culture and international communication.

The books of the Old Testament were first translated into Greek, and this translation was called the Septuagint, which means 'the Translation of the Seventy.' Children were given Greek names. And now representatives of this country came to Judea. They walked around Jerusalem and asked everyone where they could find Jesus. Their inquiries led them to the temple. Apparently, they were devout people, because they were interested in Jesus not merely as a Man, but as the Savior, as the Christ; and, drawn by the Holy Spirit, they came to the place where they could see the One to Whom their hearts were drawn. All the faith of these Greeks was expressed in the words they spoke to Philip: 'Sir, we would see Jesus.' The Greeks were in the outer court of the temple, while Jesus was in the inner court, which Gentiles were forbidden to enter under penalty of death. Philip was confused and did not know what to do. Perhaps these guests were converts to Judaism, but to many they remained Gentiles, and people tried to avoid them. Yet their request sounded very compelling and intriguing. However, Philip did not go to Jesus but turned to Andrew. Fortunately, Andrew was more discerning and immediately told Jesus about this remarkable visit, and he was greatly surprised by Christ's joy and response: 'The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified... Father, glorify Thy name' (John 12:23-28), to

which a voice came from Heaven from the Father Himself. Something very significant happened at this meeting, so significant that even the Heavenly Father decided to express in words His plans for what would follow.

But I would like to point out that Philip did not come directly to Jesus, but chose a mediator in this matter. I have often noticed that when I tell people something spiritual, revealing to them the beauty of the truth in Christ and pointing to Him as their personal Savior, for some reason they begin looking for mediators and advisers from whom they can learn what to do with the truths they have heard. I am very sorry, but many of these people stumble over the opinions of their pastors and lose sight of Jesus, Who very much desires to meet with them and fellowship with them personally.

The disciple Andrew could have told Philip to forget about these foreigners, and we would have learned nothing about the Lord's joy over these representatives of the world. But Andrew showed them Jesus. Together with Philip, he brought his Teacher to these thirsty and seeking souls, and in doing so greatly delighted his Lord.

But the request of the Greeks described here contains a very deep meaning that I would now very much like, together with you, friends, to find, understand, apply to ourselves, and decide what to do with next. This is not merely a question from curious people, but the request of the entire world, addressed through its representatives to me and to you.

We live in a time of abundance and superabundance of information. Any truth and any field of knowledge is available to us in a fraction of a second. What once took years to research is now publicly available and opens at the first request. The world speaks much and listens much. And when I go to its representatives to tell them something, I often merely add to the database and supply additional information about what has been revealed to me. And, sad as it is to say, I become someone who knows something new that others do not know. But my words do not quench the thirst of the heart. The world is tired of listening, and I understand this, but I do not know what to

do. My heart burns, and I want to tell everyone about God, but no one takes me seriously; and even if people listen, it is only to satisfy their curiosity. I am not speaking about everyone, but about the majority. And what a joy it is when even one person shows a deeper interest and even asks questions. It is difficult to give anything more to people who are already satiated. But if we discover the world's need and understand what is still valued and in demand, and if we give this to people, then perhaps a great interest will arise in spiritual things that are presented and offered properly.

We must take into account the characteristics of our time. What was relevant many years ago and bore fruit has now closed and no longer works as it once did. And if I try to live in the old way, my attempts are doomed to failure. Ask any businessman how best to develop his business, and he will answer: 'Find out what people need and sell it to them.'

And what can I give people? Only what I myself possess, or an idea that they will like. And what do I have? God has given me much, and I have accepted and valued it. I go into the world with it, but there people laugh at me and mock me: 'What God?! Look at the smartphones, bombs and rockets, and entertainment we have!' And what can I add to this frivolity?

But there is very good news: the world is in need and is experiencing an enormous shortage and a colossal thirst for very precious things that I possess in abundance. The world desires to receive them and searches for them in everything, but it receives only beautiful packaging with nothing inside. People are afraid of deception, but they thirst; they thirst intensely, and they cry out: 'Sir, we would see Jesus!' Do you hear this request, friends? Do you hear this thirst in your spouse's humiliating shouts? Do you hear it in the rebukes of your unbelieving children? Do you hear it from your half-dead brothers and sisters in your beloved church? This request is heard everywhere.

People are tired of hearing about God; now they desire to see Him. They want to see Him in us, in His representatives, in His children. They have hearts buried beneath the darkness of

deception and unbelief that God exists, that He is alive, and that He can be touched. And when I hear this request, for some reason I 'run to Andrew'; after all, he knows what must be done. He surely has it.

The world desires to see love, to see it in me, and to experience how unconditional it is. People do not know what it is. They need the embrace of this love; they want to hear it and immerse themselves in it; they thirst to befriend it, while still possessing freedom, and they desire to see a kind attitude and care directed toward them. Everything that love can give is in demand in the world. We are surrounded by thirsty souls who have not been loved enough, embraced enough, or understood enough, and who are still waiting.

Shall we go and show them Jesus? We have something to show this world. The world thirsts for love, so let us give it love.

Jesus is alive, and He does not object to my being the one through whom He will be revealed to people. And He awaits those whom I will bring to Him, so that He may embrace them with my hands, comfort them with my words, and become their unconditional Friend through my heart. I am not enough for this, but Christ will be enough for everyone. My love is in demand, and the world asks me to show it in response to its malice and hostility. People desire to see Jesus—His love, tenderness, kindness, and friendliness—so let us go and show them these things.

Homework 180

1. What interesting things were revealed to you in this lesson?
2. Why do you think Philip did not approach Jesus directly?
3. Whom do you see yourself as—Philip or Andrew?
4. Who can quench the thirst of modern people?
5. What does the Lord expect from you?
6. Do the people around me need love, attention, care, and kindness?
7. Please read John 12:21-31; Isaiah 6:8; 53:1; 55:1, 5-6; 1 John 3:1; 1:3; 4:15-16; Romans 8:29; 10:14-15, 20; Matthew 28:18-20; Isaiah 61:1, 6, 10-11 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 181. Show Me a Denarius!

One day, cunning people decided to catch Jesus in something He said so that they could deliver Him to the authorities as a criminal. 'And they asked Him, saying, Master, we know that Thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest Thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?' (Luke 20:21-22). Jesus answered them and all entrepreneurs until the end of time, and He also revealed to us certain details of God's judgment, which will be carried out upon us in the last days.

In ancient times, when conquerors occupied new territories, they collected gold, silver, and copper and minted coins from these metals bearing the image of their emperor. This money had a nominal value, and with its help people could calculate their income and their wealth. These coins circulated among the population and were used to pay wages and taxes.

In giving His answer, Jesus understood the craftiness of those who asked and said, 'Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's.'

In Matthew 20:1-16, there is an account of the Kingdom of Heaven that tells of a householder who hired laborers for his vineyard. The payment of wages became the most interesting and instructive event. Some people can watch wages being paid as tirelessly as they can watch a burning fire or flowing water. But a flagrant injustice occurred. The owner made everyone equal, although the laborers had worked differently. He decided to give everyone the same pay regardless of the number of hours they had worked. I do not think this parable should be adopted as a rule for conducting business, but a spiritual lesson can be drawn from it.

Jesus did not explain the meaning of these symbols to us, leaving it to the Holy Spirit to reveal the true meaning and significance of what was said to those who seek.

What does the denarius mean?

It can be understood as approximately the average wage of that time. In today's Europe, that would be about one hundred euros. But the issue is not the money; it is the meaning.

Why did the Owner of the Kingdom give everyone the same pay? Perhaps there are things that cannot be divided or multiplied. But let us consider these symbols in a spiritual sense.

God has children who were born for Eternal life, and each of them, according to his strength and opportunities, performs a ministry in this world, which we shall call the vineyard.

In every Christian community, there are experienced people, those who are learning, and those who have only just been born and know and can do almost nothing. For example, the thief on the cross performed no visible work, yet his short sermon still moves people to tears and turns thousands of hearts to Christ. However, the thief himself never lived a righteous life, was never baptized, and never studied at a theological seminary, but the highest reward was promised to him: he will be in Paradise.

Paradise is the payment for faith in God that all laborers will receive, regardless of how long they worked.

I do not think we will envy those who labored less than we did and received the same thing.

Jesus is the Reward awaiting all people whose feet cross the threshold of the Heavenly Kingdom. As children of the Heavenly King, they have forever joined their lives with the One Who died for them so that they might live. The same payment is given to everyone for his labor. And God will have a special personal relationship with each of the redeemed. This reward cannot be increased or reduced. The Heavenly Denarius is indivisible.

Love and faith are Heavenly gold refined in the fire of trials. Such payment will be given to all who labor for the salvation of their neighbors and desire to have this Spirit.

This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Who is given not by measure, but according to the need of everyone who needs Him and

thirsts for great victories. With regard to love, one might suppose that someone has more of it and someone else has less, but in essence it is an indivisible gift: either it is present or it is not. Perhaps there is a temporary, short-lived human nature that closely resembles the Heavenly one. Love has varying experience and periods of development, but it cannot be divided into portions and distributed by giving one person more and another less.

And all these rewards can be called the denarius of the Heavenly Kingdom.

And the images of these symbols must be reflected on the coin.

A denarius is also my character. It is what I receive for my labor for God's glory or for my own prosperity in this world. The way I labor, understand God's will, and fulfill it leaves its imprint upon my life. And God is very interested in whose image is depicted on the denarius that He will ask to be brought and shown to Him.

The influence of God's Spirit, like a seal, makes an impression upon my mind, habits, and thinking. Under such influence, a spiritual and emotional establishment in the truth is formed, along with my true character, which bears God's seal. As I live in this world and labor in God's vineyard, I allow the Holy Spirit to make me into what pleases God. And God's seal will be visible to all the inhabitants of Heaven. They will have no doubt that I will not repeat the rebellion or become an enemy of God.

Christ's command in Luke 20:24, 'Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it?' will one day be spoken to me as well. Yes, the Lord knows who I am and what is within me, but the formality of accepting me into the Heavenly Kingdom will be observed. And Christ will ask whose image is visible in my character. The answer will then follow immediately. There are only two possible answers. Both will be heard at this judgment: Caesar's and God's. And Jesus will say, 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.'

Someday, this event will take place in the life of each one of us. This brief question will be asked of all people. And the answer will be honest. No one will call black white or white black.

Love is the science that prepares my heart for the solemn sealing with God's seal. The world will not be able to place its image, mark, or number upon what comes from God and belongs to Him. This war has its own rules and laws, which are observed by both sides.

And if I allow the world to place its imprint upon my consciousness or my deeds, God's Love will not share its throne with anything unclean. It will either destroy it or depart, allowing another spirit to take its place in my heart.

I do not decide who will be in the Heavenly Kingdom and who will not, and I cannot even say this with certainty about myself. I have hope, but I also know that if I fall and do not rise again, I will be lost forever. But love is given to me so that I will not fall; and if this does happen, it is ready to help me find a quick way out and teach me to avoid such mistakes. Stepping on a rake is always painful, but stepping on the same rake repeatedly is foolish, and love teaches us to be wise in this world.

Someday it will also be said about me, 'Show Me Andrey!' And what will Jesus see? What image will appear before Him? Then I will no longer have anything to say in my defense or justification. Therefore, now, in this school, together with you, friends, I work out my salvation with fear and trembling, and I am very grateful to all of you for your participation and support.

I greatly desire that it may be said of all of us, 'Render unto God the things which be God's!' And it will happen that we will no longer be able to change anything, nor will we desire to, for loving is more interesting.

Homework 181

1. What new things were revealed to you in this lesson?
2. How were elements of God's judgment revealed to you in the situation involving the image on the denarius? Luke 20:21-22.

3. Why did the owner of the vineyard in the parable in Matthew 20:1-16 pay the laborers the same wage?
4. To whom will the payment be given in our time?
5. Who is working on your character? Who places the seal upon it?
6. What rules and laws exist in this war of sealing?
7. Please read John 16:7; 14:26; James 3:17-18; Matthew 20:1-16; Luke 20:20-25; Daniel 12:1, 3; Malachi 3:3-4, 16-18; Revelation 7:3; 13:8; 22:14; James 1:5-6 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 182. The Testing of Faith

New York. September 11, 2001. Wicked people carried out their evil plans and destroyed the buildings of the World Trade Center. This catastrophe attracted the attention of the entire world. People saw the true face of Satan and what those who are led by demonic spirits do. Yet few blamed the enemy of the human soul. Everyone was interested in learning which people were involved in this event and where they were hiding.

The fire departments began doing their work. Fire engines came from all around, and everyone joined together to extinguish the fire caused by this tragedy. A short time passed, and one piece of firefighting equipment after another began to fail. Engines and water pumps could not withstand continuous operation and broke down at the most inopportune moments. But two German vehicles remained and continued performing the assigned tasks without interruption. The broken equipment was hastily repaired and put back into service, only to fail again, while the German vehicles continued extinguishing the fire without interruption and withstood every strain. New equipment arrived from distant places, but it too lasted only a couple of days, while the two previously unknown vehicles withstood the testing without particular difficulty and extinguished the sources of the fire one by one. After this event, many fire departments throughout the world reviewed their equipment and turned to the German company Metz to purchase new equipment. Until then, this manufacturer had been unknown to anyone and had merely supplied equipment modestly to fire departments in its local region. From the very beginning, the company's specialists had responsibly approached the development of every component and unit of the complex design, thinking not about profit but about ensuring that what they produced would be able to operate in any situation and withstand any strain. And when the testing came, the whole world learned that there was a small company that made very good products upon which people could rely in a critical situation.

In summer, it is very difficult to determine which trees are evergreen and which are not. But when cold weather and frost come, the difference between them immediately becomes visible.

Tests of our faith and love periodically come in our day as well. It is naïve to suppose that Satan has died or that, amid the turmoil of everything taking place, he has no concern for us. I want to assure you, friends, that we who believe in Jesus and love one another are the cherished target of the spiritual forces of wickedness in high places. They watch us very closely, looking for openings in our words or deeds through which they can exert their influence and destroy us. The fact that we live, move, and have our being in peace, and that all is well with us, is only thanks to God and the entire Heavenly army of God's angels, who continually attend to our safety and protect us.

In peacetime, it is very difficult to understand why an army, military aviation, and a navy are needed. So much effort and money are spent maintaining them that this money could be used to benefit the whole world. But when military conflicts arise or someone attacks your country, it becomes obvious to everyone that if you do not want to maintain your own army, you will maintain someone else's.

Love is not very noticeable in favorable times, and studying this science seems unnecessary and useless. There are so many movements, projects, missions, and tasks, and they can be carried out without possessing any special knowledge or making any special effort. Everything has been refined and developed for centuries. Many spiritual things have become traditions and holidays, and there seems to be no need even to think about the meaning of what I observe and what I believe. The main thing is to live like everyone else and do what others do, and then there will be no problems with anyone. But tests of faith come, and the entire structure of my life cannot withstand the excessive strain. My house loses its foundation and begins to collapse, and all my engines fail one after another. My life is shattered, my nerves are frayed and on the verge of breaking—or they have already broken—and I lie amid ruins and fears, not

knowing how to go on living. Yet I must live. But how? And why? There is no meaning!

But love and faith feel very well amid every trial and continue their work as usual, withstanding every strain and boldly facing every test of their strength. During cold and drought, darkness and despair, they confidently advance toward the Heavenly goal and bind me firmly to God, without worrying that something may not work out.

Love does not leave the soul at rest, but constantly reveals new faults and gives an understanding of how to correct them during favorable times. And small trials reveal the weak places that should be strengthened with God's help or removed by God's grace.

Satan, like a roaring lion, attacks everyone who enters his territory and spreads his enchantments over those who treat their salvation carelessly and do not build a relationship with Jesus. The influence of the enemy of the soul is like water surrounding a submarine immersed in it. The pressure from outside is steady and constant. Even if life inside the vessel proceeds peacefully, the water outside waits continually for a small or large opening through which it can flood the entire submarine cruiser. In the same way, the life of a loving Christian is under the constant surveillance of the forces of darkness, which seek to pour all their temptations through the open windows of the soul and destroy every good planting, or redirect every good ability into the service of the forces of darkness.

Love, faith, knowledge of the truth, and sound judgment in fellowship with God help us withstand every temptation and prepare the soul for coming trials. A continual battle is being waged for God's children, and God is interested in teaching His children the science of Salvation and Love. He does everything possible to bring the soul to the light. And if a person begins to cooperate with God in this work, he simply enters this battle and moves confidently from victory to victory.

As I have worked in the building trade, I have studied the technologies of constructing buildings, and I know how to build a house so that it can withstand any trial. The essence is as follows. Like a submarine, the building must be protected on every side from water and cold. At the same time, it must withstand the static loads borne by its supporting structures from its own weight and from external forces, while also being comfortable, practical, clean, and beautiful. I compare modern buildings with those erected in the past, and I can very quickly determine what will happen to these houses when a storm, flood, or earthquake comes. When hurricanes struck our area, I noticed afterward, while restoring roofs, that well-designed modern buildings suffered no damage from the natural disaster, while all the old and simple structures were very badly damaged.

A crisis in spiritual life does not solve problems; it only reveals how prepared I am for them.

Love teaches me very good things, and it protects me on every side from dampness, cold, disease, filth, and temptation. It calmly withstands every external and internal strain and works reliably during every trial. I love, and there is something very beautiful in this—something comfortable to live in and pleasant to invite friends and strangers into, so that their hearts may rejoice.

Homework 182

1. How do you understand the importance of having love in your heart?
2. Why does the Apostle Paul declare that without love I am nothing and gain no benefit from anything? 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.
3. How can I determine whether I have true love if there are no trials?
4. Should I create trials for myself without cause in order to determine whether I love?
5. What should I do if a storm comes and there is no love?
6. Am I ready to face the final crisis in a spirit of love and faith in God's support?

7. Does this school help you prepare for the events of the last days?
8. Do you believe that the end of everything will soon come and that everything will be destroyed, as the Bible teaches?
9. Please read Luke 8:13-15; Matthew 7:24-27; 1 Peter 2:4-6, 9; Psalm 118:10-24; Isaiah 9:2; Psalm 46:2; 1 Peter 4:12-14; Isaiah 59:19; Hosea 6:3; Isaiah 35:3-4, 10; 61:3-4, 11 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 183. Salvation in Christ

In the summer of 1991, I was courting my future wife and came to the decision that we should become a family. We wanted to be married in an Orthodox church. Somewhere deep in my soul, I understood that I needed to live on good terms with God and that God's blessing would not hurt us as we started a family. I went to a church and registered for the wedding ceremony. We were required to know the Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed by heart and to bring images of the Savior and the Mother of God. The shop at the church did not have these items, so I went to another church. On the way, I kept repeating the word "Savior" to myself, trying not to forget it, while wondering Who He was, what He saved people from, and why He had such a strange name. I was also curious about what He looked like. The other shop had the images, and I bought them, looking with interest at who was depicted on them. One showed a woman with a Child and a strange circle around her head, while the other showed a man with long hair and the same kind of circle. I realized that they depicted Mary and Jesus, but I still did not understand why Christ was called the Savior. That was how I first learned that there was a Savior Who saved people from something, but I was very far from understanding Who He was and what He had done for me. I was an ordinary Orthodox atheist.

In 1993, I began to know God, and the Holy Spirit worked upon my mind, drawing me to Jesus. Through God's providence, the book *The Great Controversy* came into my hands. From it, I learned in great detail about the history of Christianity, the existence of an invisible world, and the forces that surround us and contend with one another for our souls. I also understood what would happen at the end and what a glorious future awaited everyone who believed in God. I believed in the One Who died for my sins, and on July 10, 1993, I repented and, in a prayer of repentance, asked Jesus to forgive my sins and receive me as a lost son. I believed that my prayer had been heard, and from that moment a new and very interesting life began for me. A month later, I realized that I needed to receive

water baptism, and I underwent this rite in a charismatic church. But I could not remain in that movement for long because I saw a clear discrepancy between its teachings and the biblical account, so I decided to study on my own at home. In the autumn of that same year, my wife and I moved permanently to Germany, and I studied the Word of God and the spiritual literature available to me every day. Two years later, I was baptized again, but in another church. I knew that Christ was my Savior, but I did not understand what He was saving me from and never thought about it; I simply believed that it was so. Yet the truth about salvation is fundamental, and it must be understood correctly. It is upon this foundation that one can build a spiritual house of happiness and growth.

Approximately seventeen years after I became a believer, I told my coworkers during a conversation that Jesus wanted to save them, and they asked me what He was saving them from. I could not answer them, but the question made me think deeply. I realized that I did not understand this simple truth and therefore could not explain it to people who knew nothing about it. So I began studying the question, trying to grasp its essence.

As I studied this truth deeply, I began to understand that my salvation had begun in the distant past, when only two people lived on Earth; then it was accomplished on the cross, when I did not yet exist, and gained its power through the shed Blood of Christ. In the present, salvation is being accomplished as I become directly involved in this process and God's grace works in my heart, cleansing it from sin. A wonderful future awaits us, in which our salvation will be completed. Then sin, its originator, all the followers of evil, and the slaves of sin will be judged and completely destroyed.

The experience of my salvation includes the following stages: repentance, confession, forgiveness, justification, and sanctification. Every believer passes through them. Not one of these steps can be omitted. This is a process that God accomplishes in me.

I also understood that only Christ could be my Savior. For He alone took all my sins upon Himself, bore the punishment for

my transgressions, was killed for my iniquities, and thereby freed me from the power of sin and death, which were rightfully mine.

The power of sin is enormous. It holds its victims in an iron embrace, torments them, and kills them at the level of the soul.

People who reject their salvation do not even understand the terrible lifelong slavery into which they surrender themselves or what sin leads to. But through faith in Him, Christ saves the soul from this influence and gives it freedom. This freedom from sin implies my choice of righteousness, love, and the knowledge of the Holy God, as well as life and spiritual growth in all these qualities.

Jesus also saves me from myself. My heart has a quality that the Bible calls the carnal nature, the flesh, or the carnal man. All of this is my inborn selfishness, which dictates how I should act in any given situation. The carnal mind is in constant opposition to God, His love, and His law. Christ saves me from this influence by giving me agape love, which becomes my chief motivating force in everything I do.

Death for sins has power over those who commit sin and are under the power of sin. Without any mercy, it holds its subjects firmly, giving them no chance of justification through good works. No religion can save me from the death sentence for the lawlessness I have committed. No amount of money and no good deed can redeem me from the power of eternal death. For the wages of sin is death. Only Christ saves me from this power. He paid the price. And the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

If I think that I can commit sin and remain free, somehow escaping the punishment of the second death, then I am simply naïve and ignorant in my understanding of God's holiness. The Bible teaches that the soul that sins will die—and die forever, never to be raised to life again.

Jesus was the Firstborn from the dead. He was the first to die in my place for my sins, suffering the torments of the second death, and thereby satisfied the demands of the law. Christ was

the first and the last to rise after such a death. This is the great mystery of Salvation, but this is precisely how it was accomplished.

Jesus also saves me from God's righteous judgment and wrath, which will soon be poured out upon this corrupt world. I do not even have to appear at that judgment, because my personal Savior is there, justifying me and interceding for me. And when my name is spoken in the Heavenly judgment, Christ will show His pierced hands and His Blood, and by this mercy I will be justified. I am very grateful to Jesus for such a sacrifice, for He endured these torments in my place so that I might live forever.

My Lord also saves me from the corrupting influence of this world and from spiritual wickedness in high places. No one can force me to sin, but sin can be offered to me, and I can be persuaded to commit it. Yet the Lord protects me from this influence, giving me His love instead as power in the battle against temptation.

Love is the crown of my salvation in Jesus.

Homework 183

1. Please read Acts 4:10-12; Isaiah 45:22; 53; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 33:11; 36:25-27; Psalm 44:3, 11; John 3:3-8, 16; 4:42; 16:8; Romans 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 1:4; 3:13-14, 26; 4:4-7; Ephesians 2:4-10; Colossians 1:13-14; Titus 3:3-7; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21-22 in the light of our lesson.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. What else does Christ save us from?
4. Why is there no other Savior in the world besides Jesus?
5. Why do Christians sometimes die senseless deaths? Why does God not save them from a foolish death?
6. What does Christ not save us from?
7. Do you have assurance of your salvation?
8. What is the proper answer to the question, "Are you saved?"
9. May I call myself saved?

Lesson 184. What Is Right and What Is True

I have very often had occasion to observe disagreements between other people, in which the opposing sides confidently declared that they were right and looked for those who would agree with them and take their side. At times, it is very difficult to understand what the problem is when everyone is right. But when you look into the heart of the matter, you discover details that reveal the entire picture very clearly. Arguments, disagreements, hurt feelings, and hostility are not God's methods of resolving problems. Love teaches us to find our way through this dark forest and to see the root of everything.

It is written that love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. A heart in which love dwells experiences this exactly as it is written. Love frees the soul from the burden of sin, cleanses the heart from sinful habits, and cleanses the mind from evil thoughts. The eyes of a loving person begin to see everything, both bad and good, but they do not allow negativity into the heart. A pure mind resolves to stand firmly in the truth and to live a holy life. Righteousness of heart becomes the soul's normal condition, and it is said of such people that they shall see God. And that is exactly what happens. A loving person sees God in all his trials and experiences, in all his blessings, in all his gifts and victories, and even in chastisement. For God is Love—victorious agape—and love cannot fail to see itself. It notices every manifestation of itself in the lives of other people; it senses love directed toward itself, and although it does not seek it, when it encounters love in fellowship with others, it rejoices greatly. For love is truth.

Truth is the embodiment of the fullness of God in every respect, a many-sided examination of any teaching, an understanding of the presence of Light in a person's life, and a deep analysis of a situation that includes knowledge of both the action and its motive, the person's allegiance to God, and the source of the information. Truth never approaches the analysis of a situation from only one side. It sees the entire picture. This is God's advantage over all of us. But the Lord sends this ability to His

children in the gift of love, and they begin to see everything through God's eyes. From then on, the heart rejoices in the truth and does not rejoice in iniquity.

In this case, what a person regards as right is his actual view of a particular situation within the limits of his understanding of truth, his knowledge of God's character, his intellectual development, his spiritual growth, the information available to him, and his allegiance to God. Not everything that is right is the whole truth. When a person is right and makes this the basis of his claims, a proud heart very often prevents him from accepting the perspective of other people, and he becomes stubborn in his understanding of the situation.

For example, let us take a tube of toothpaste with a wide cap. If you look at it from the cap end, you can see something round. If I look at it from the side, I see a rectangle, but if I turn it ninety degrees, an uneven triangle appears before my eyes. Each assessment, taken separately from the others, is absolutely right. And if you look at the number 6 from above and then from below, you can see 9 and 6 respectively. Everyone is right. But if only one right view is taken into account, then as a whole it becomes untrue, and love cannot rejoice in such an understanding of things. Love takes every position into consideration and sees the entire picture.

And, of course, love receives all kinds of accusations from those who disagree with a comprehensive approach to the situation. It hears reproaches that its love is not genuine, that it does not love what is right, that it is pretended, and that it is worth nothing. A loving heart will never, under any circumstances, speak this way about love or about those who are learning to love. Love does not rejoice in iniquity or support it, but rejoices in the truth. To rejoice in the truth means to stand on its side.

Standing for the truth is not always easy, because at times you lose all human support, and even your friends leave you for a while because they do not know how to help you and do not understand how the entire situation appears in your eyes. But the eyes of love belong to God, Who anoints them with His eyesalve, and when you have washed yourself in His Blood, you

begin to see much and from every side. The eyesalve reveals the truth from different angles, and the heart rejoices in it. But a portion of the truth is untruth, and it is very difficult—and sometimes simply impossible—to rejoice in it. To give one-sided support to the position of a person who sees only the 6 but refuses to notice the 9 is not God's truth. God understands both, but He also knows what they look like from the other side.

There are things that are the same from every side, such as a sphere. Here there is unanimous agreement, although some people try to prove something different—for example, the theory of a flat Earth. Well, that is also one approach to truth.

Love respects people's choices and opinions and does not go into battle to prove the truth when there is no need to do so.

But sometimes Love decides to oppose untruth and boldly declares it. Love knows that not everyone sees and evaluates the situation as it does, so it expects a storm from a certain group of people, and the storm comes; a collision is inevitable. Yet God gives strength and an understanding of what to do in such a case and how to overcome. Love does not consult the sinful nature or accept its help in order to live according to the flesh or answer accusations. Love acts out of love, trying to help everyone. And sometimes it simply remains silent and waits. There is a special power in silence, and the Lord Jesus demonstrated this power on the day of His crucifixion. There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence.

But a creature as weak and feeble as a human being can make mistakes, take the wrong position, or simply fall. His enemies notice it immediately and do not forget it for a very long time, continually reminding him of it at every opportunity.

But God reveals the problem, grants the person repentance, and cleanses him. His enemies do not see this and do not want to understand it. To them, he remains what he was before. But God tenderly cultivates the good seed, and it grows into a tree that bears much fruit. Evil and proud people do not see this either, but they remember perfectly the mistakes they saw the person make with their own eyes. It can be very difficult for

them to understand that God changes those who study in the school of Christ, Who accepts everyone just as they are but does not leave them in that condition forever. We are living trees, and everything that lives grows.

Do not be afraid to hear the truth about yourself. It is not always pleasant, and that version of the truth is not always the whole truth, but sometimes it helps you look at your own perspective from another side.

Strange as it may seem, sometimes it is evil and hostile people who become our very best teachers and impartial, incorruptible examiners. At times, their faultfinding and accusations unite me so closely with God that afterward I only thank the Lord for these people and their unbiased attitude. But this does not mean that the company of such people makes the heart rejoice. Sometimes I want to stay far away from them, but that is not always possible. Then love comes into action, covers a multitude of sins, and works miracles.

Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.

Homework 184

1. What new understanding did this lesson give you?
2. What does love offer as a way to resolve conflicts?
3. What do you understand it to mean to rejoice in the truth?
4. How can we oppose untruth?
5. Why should we not consult the flesh in disputed situations?
What is the better way to conduct ourselves?
6. How should we treat evil people?
7. Please read Matthew 5:8; 6:22; Romans 12:17-21; James 1:5-6; Philippians 4:6-8; Romans 8:32; Isaiah 54:17; Proverbs 10:12; 13:3; 15:4, 18; James 1:19-20; Hebrews 12:14 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 185. The First Sin

Envy and pride are the very first sin that arose in the sinless Universe. One of the holy angels, who had been anointed by God and placed above all others, began to envy his Creator and dream of His throne. That angel was named Lucifer. He was the covering cherub and one of those who revealed God's plans to all the inhabitants of Heaven.

There was none like him in the entire Universe, but because of his mighty intellect and his perfect beauty, this angel became proud and began to dream of the higher position held by God's Son. And Lucifer did not want to be like God in love. He desired to have unlimited power and to reign over the entire Universe, deciding how everyone should live and what they should do.

And in order to accomplish his plans, this cherub began secretly spreading gossip about God among the holy beings. The spirit of discontent and envy spread to those who had been happy with God and had never considered a different relationship.

God understood what had happened and where it would lead, but He did not suppress this rebellion at its very beginning. He allowed all the angels to decide in their hearts whom they would worship.

The Lord chose love and truth as His strategy in this new conflict. Debates began, in which Satan presented his arguments, while God warned all the inhabitants of Heaven about where this rebellion would lead. But Lucifer's envy gave him no rest, for the goal he had set for himself was very precious to him, and he dreamed of occupying God's throne and proving to everyone that his rule would be better. He promised everyone bright prospects if they made such a choice.

All the plans of the evil one were very skillfully disguised, and many who supported or sympathized with him did not even suspect where this rebellion would lead.

In the spirit of truth and love, God, in His mercy, offered His sons repentance and forgiveness, explaining the grave

consequences of their sin. But they dreamed of an imaginary freedom apart from God and could not accept such an offer, considering it deeply humiliating to repent before everyone and acknowledge their mistakes, while sin drew them so enticingly toward itself. Its terrible consequences were unknown to them.

And there was war in Heaven. Michael, the Son of God, together with the angels faithful to Him, fought against the dragon and those who supported this rebellion. And the fallen inhabitants of Heaven were removed from God's presence, but they did not lose their power and remained alive.

Seeds of evil had been sown among the faithful angels, and they could spring up at any moment and neutralize God's influence. The Lord removed the source of evil from the Heavenly dwellings. Satan did not expect such a turn of events. It did not fit into his plans, but he could no longer change anything. Satan and his angels had gone very far.

But God's enemy was permitted to seek a place for his further habitation and to develop his ideas wherever he would be accepted.

If God had destroyed the devil and the fallen angels immediately or a little later, fear would have taken hold of all intelligent beings, for they did not yet know all the sorrowful consequences of sin, were concerned about their banished brother, and did not understand his true plans and purposes. And if Satan had been killed, many would have concluded that perhaps he had been right in accusing God of dictatorship and cruelty and offering in return freedom from God and the Heavenly law. Therefore, the enemy of souls was given more time, and he sought those who would support him.

When our beautiful world was created, Satan's envy gave him no rest, and he patiently waited for the moment when the innocent people would enter forbidden territory and violate God's command. Oh, if that happened, Lucifer could become the prince of this world and establish his own order in it! And the entire new planet would become his kingdom, and the

whole Universe would learn how wonderful it was possible to live far from God, doing whatever the sinful soul desired.

Unfortunately, the first people fell under Satan's spell, and the enemy of man became what he desired to be. But God did not abandon fallen humanity to the mercy of the evil one; He gave them a power called grace so that, through God's support, they could resist the influence of evil and withstand temptations.

But the enemy spread his influence over the descendants of Adam and Eve very skillfully, and few were able to resist these temptations.

God promised a Savior from the power of sin and death, and the sacrificial service was established as a reminder of this. But people chose sin and did not desire to follow God. And the Earth became so corrupt before the face of the Creator that He decided to destroy all who lived upon it, for He saw that they would never repent or turn from their evil ways.

But even in that troubled time, God had a faithful remnant. Noah and his family believed that the Lord would destroy the Earth with a flood, and according to God's plan they began to build an ark in which they would be able to survive the coming catastrophe. One hundred and twenty years passed, the ark was ready for its long voyage, the time of grace for that world ended, and Noah and his family entered the ark, inviting anyone who wished to join them, and the doors were shut. Humanity had made its choice. No one believed that anything terrible would happen.

Mist watered the ground, the climate was the same everywhere, and no one understood what rain from heaven meant.

But the day of the Lord's wrath came, and God's justice was revealed to all people. The Earth opened its deep, and the water within it burst forth. The windows of heaven were opened, and the water that had surrounded the Earth, creating a greenhouse effect, poured down upon this world as a deluge, covering and destroying everything in its torrents. The people's terror knew no bounds. The catastrophe was so terrible that

even Satan and his angels began to fear for their lives. But only fallen human beings perished.

The entire surface of the Earth was covered with water, and only the ark rocked peacefully upon the waves, awaiting what would happen to it.

God dried the Earth, gathering all the water into seas and oceans and concealing most of the land beneath them. He buried the floating trees in the depths of the Earth, making them sources of coal and oil for the last days. The saved people came out of the ark and continued life on this Earth.

We are all children of Adam and Noah, brothers and sisters according to the flesh, but God divided us into languages and nations and scattered us over the whole face of the Earth.

When the Savior was born into the world, Satan looked intently into the face of this Infant, Who had been born to bring an end to the kingdom of darkness and sin, and he could not understand this Love of God, Which gave His beloved Son to save fallen humanity. Such a Sacrifice was unknown to him, but it happened. The Son was born into the world; God became Man. Horror and fear gripped the hearts of the fallen angels, but their nature did not change; they continued to tempt and destroy.

Jesus grew up and accomplished that for which He had been born. He left us an example of love and revealed to us the true character of God the Father, tearing the mask from Satan. The enemy of souls became the murderer of God, and the entire Universe saw where this rebellion would have led if the enemies of the Creator had been permitted to remain in Heaven.

But we have been warned that in the last days it will be as it was in the days of Noah. People will go about their activities and will not think. And now that time has come. The world is coming to an end.

Sin brazenly holds up its ugly head and defiantly points its finger toward Heaven, seducing all people to its side.

God's Love is revealed to all people. And what will I choose?
Whom will I follow?

And God waits.

Homework 185

1. What new things did you learn in this lesson?
2. Where, when, and why did the first sin arise? Who originated it?
3. How does Lucifer differ from Jesus Christ?
4. Why was this angel permitted to develop his principles on Earth?
5. Could he not have been destroyed immediately?
6. What strategy does God use in this war? What was offered to the fallen angels?
7. What did God devise in order to save humanity from sin?
8. Whom will you choose? God waits.
9. Please read Revelation 12:7-10; Matthew 24:37-39; Genesis 3:15; 6:5-7; Ezekiel 28:12-18; Isaiah 7:14-15; 14:9-20; Daniel 7:25; 8:11-12; Revelation 13:15; Jude 24-25 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 186. Envy

Probably the most widespread sin in the world, and the most absurd and foolish of sins, is envy.

All of us have experienced this condition in one way or another and know from within what it is. And if there were no envy in us, God would not have given us the commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet...'

What does an envious person gain? What does he come to possess? Every sin is evil, and each one leads the soul to death. There is no justification for any evil. But sins differ from one another.

Some of them bring brief pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction of pride and ambition. But what does envy give? It spoils the lives even of sinful people. And it exists; it cannot be controlled by willpower.

Satan knows perfectly well what this is. He has lived in this state of soul for many thousands of years. And what has he gained as a result of this long period of time? Nothing. The only thing of which he can boast is the souls he has destroyed, which have passed forever into oblivion, without any hope of salvation.

Envy brings no profit; it cannot be a source of happiness or satisfy the needs of the soul. Like a cancerous tumor, it eats away at the soul, depriving it of the blessings and enjoyment of what it already has.

The enemy of the soul envies all of us because we will live forever and love one another, continually develop and be transformed, and one day attain the level of intellectual development that Lucifer possessed before his fall, and then continue to grow, surpassing everything and everyone who exists today. These thoughts drive Satan and his demons into a rage and give them no rest. In his envy of us, he is ready to take us all into the fire, where both we and he will perish together.

There is a parable. A King offered an envious servant a bargain and told him that he could ask for anything he wished, on the condition that his neighbor would receive the same thing, but twice as much. After long and exhausting deliberation, the servant asked to have one of his eyes put out.

Envy is the desire to have what others possess and resentment that I do not have something my neighbor has. Envy is even despair because I do not possess what another person has.

I cease to receive pleasure and joy from what I have if my eye is envious. No matter how greatly my gifts and possessions are multiplied, if my neighbor has the same thing or something good, my happiness comes to an end. The only thing that can satisfy my envy is the opportunity to possess what my neighbor enjoys. But this is unlikely to make me happy.

Of course, not everything is so bleak, and in many of us envy appears in a mild form or is entirely absent. But I can say of myself that I personally know how this sin destroys earthly happiness.

There have been times in my life when I myself gave something to people and then resented the fact that they had it and I did not. Nothing could be more foolish. But how can such an attitude be controlled? How can you fight something that, like a tsunami, has burst into your life and swept over your head? You may even understand that it is wrong, yet you cannot change anything. And how can it be identified? How can it be avoided? And how can it be fought?

While all the other commandments concern my outward behavior in one way or another, the commandment 'Thou shalt not covet' touches my inner world, my thoughts, and my feelings. But since God established this prohibition, there must also be power to keep it.

Can I force myself by my own willpower not to envy when this evil is present in my thoughts? I think there can be no more futile undertaking. Yet there are people who, by studying human psychology, discover new principles through which they replace this evil with something else, redirect their attention to

more important things, or teach people to have more and become wealthier. But this does not work.

If someone declares that he does not envy, we can be glad for that person and even believe that it is true. But perhaps such a statement would sound like this: 'Satan is dead, and my carnal nature died with him.' Unfortunately, however, the enemy of the soul is still alive, and his temptations are very subtle and secretly concealed. If by envy I understand only what is commonly called 'black envy,' then I do not see what it really is. It may even include joy over another person's happiness or gain, while at the same time there is a small feeling of resentment that I do not have it. Sin in its embryonic state does not look very frightening; it is very small and tender, but it gives growth to this seed of evil, and as it grows, it destroys all good fruit.

Do not think, friends, that I am accusing all of you of this sin. But I can say with confidence that love alone does not envy. This is the Biblical position, and this is how it truly is. The absence of envy in my life is determined not by my willpower or my ability to control my thoughts, but by the presence of love in my heart. Everything else simply does not work or helps only for a short time.

Does God envy His creation? A foolish question. And will that same God called 'Love' in my heart envy those whom He desires to make happy, those to whom He loves to give everything, those for whom He died? I think the answer is clear to everyone.

It is difficult to shovel darkness out of the heart, but if the light is turned on, the darkness disappears by itself. Where does it go? It simply ceases to exist.

But if I have settled this matter with God, I must remember that this world lives by its own rules, and envy is the engine of progress; it drives commerce, wars and revolutions, hostility and strife. There is no escaping this, but I do not have to take part in it.

God teaches us very simply not to envy. He fills the heart with love, and when this love through me comes into contact with sinful people, it covers all things and has a very good influence on their thoughts and feelings. Love opens eternal prospects for growth to the soul; it gives the water of life to parched hearts and satisfies in itself the true needs of a person. Envy dies wherever love comes. Love establishes its own laws and helps us emerge from any crisis.

Psalm 73 describes the feelings of an envious believer. It was impossible to fight this. But everything was resolved when this believer entered God's presence. He saw the true state of things and repented.

Love gives the soul everything necessary for life—for Eternal Life.

Imagine a sinner inheriting Eternity. It would be a constant nightmare for the soul. An unclean heart could not endure such glory and splendor, and he would die of envy over another person's crown and glory.

God has given us a commandment requiring the complete absence of envy from our lives, and it can be kept only by His power, the power of love. The flesh is incapable of obedience at the level of thought.

Every command of God in the law also has a spiritual dimension. For example, one can kill with words, commit adultery in the heart, and steal in the soul, while the tenth commandment reaches into the depths of my being, making me guilty before the law. For 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.'

Love is true freedom from envy, from the spirit of murder, from violence, and from other sins. And since this is so, why do we seek other sources that do not solve the problem? Why do we spend money for that which is not bread, and take that which does not satisfy?

Love is waiting for you, my friend.

Homework 186

1. What new things did you learn in this lesson?
2. Why is envy one of the foolish sins?
3. What reason does the enemy have to envy God's children?
4. Please give a definition of envy. How do you understand it?
5. What way out has the Lord prepared for sinners?
6. Why does what psychology offers not solve the problem?
7. Why does love resolve the problem of envy in the heart so simply?
8. Please read Proverbs 14:30; 23:6-8; Ecclesiastes 4:4; Genesis 4:6-10; Revelation 12:7; Exodus 20:17; 1 John 2:9-10; 3:4, 6, 8; Romans 6:14, 16, 23; 2 Corinthians 10:5; John 8:36, 44, 47; James 2:10; 3:14; Revelation 22:14 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 187. A Sober View of Love

There are many sciences, religions, teachings, and disciplines in the world, each of which gives knowledge. We are studying the science of agape love, considering comprehensively what it is and how it works in life.

Some people like it, some look at it with a smirk, while in others it arouses disgust and irritation. It will always be this way, and we should not be surprised at anything.

If we realistically consider what we are actually studying in our school and compare it by its degree of depth and complexity, then the teaching of agape love is probably the most difficult science of all those that can be comprehended in this world.

And to understand and fully perceive it, we must have the mind of Christ and the instructive ministry of the Holy Spirit. With the mind alone, it will be impossible to understand and remember what is being revealed to us. We must also engage our whole heart, all our thoughts, and all our feelings in this.

But in this lesson, let us consider what love gives us, what advantages we have, what we lose, and what we gain. Let us speak about a person who believes in Christ, for those who have chosen this world will be lost forever because they do not believe in Jesus.

First, let us consider life without agape love. I think that all of us once lived this way, while some are still in this condition and feel very comfortable in it.

What happens to those who do not have love? All people look approximately the same, and my facial expression will reflect my mood. I also breathe and need food, drink, warmth, and clothing. My enthusiasm and creative abilities help me perform various kinds of work and carry out ministry. My mind is capable of absorbing Biblical truths and helps me develop to a certain level. I acquire the knowledge necessary for serving in the church and can improve my qualifications by studying at an institution of higher education, where I learn the science of salvation and other useful disciplines in even greater detail. But

there is no subject there about love, friendship, and happiness. I will not be taught this in any school.

I see brief manifestations of love under certain circumstances, and that is enough for me to be like everyone else. And my entire church is at the level of development that I have reached.

But in the message to Laodicea, Christ offers Heavenly goods and personal relationships that are not dispensed to the whole church. They can be received only personally. And one of the prophetic goods is faith and love, which Jesus desires to sell to me in the very last time. Therefore, what was possible before will no longer pass in God's foreknowledge.

The events of the last days are developing very rapidly before my eyes, and I understand that the battle for my soul will be very unusual, and I need something that will protect me at this time and keep my lamp burning when I hear the midnight cry that the Bridegroom is coming.

If I do not have love, then at some point in my life, amid the trials that have come upon me, I will understand that I am sounding brass, making much noise but having no value; that all my knowledge and skills profit me nothing; that all my sacrifices and my entire life are nothing; and that everything I have been taught is meaningless. For some reason, none of this works during a crisis. Although outwardly I continue to put on a brave face, inside me there is a storm, darkness, and fear. What will happen to me? Will I make it through this storm? I notice that all my experiences and knowledge are not enough to overcome my inner darkness, and I need something supernatural to carry me through it.

Without love, I risk losing my salvation, for my feelings do not know how to recognize sin accurately, much less how to fight it. I will wage war with my spiritual intellect, asking God to win this battle. But my house remains unoccupied after another victory, and the evil spirit can calmly return there. Where there is no love, anything can take root, and my condition becomes even worse.

Without love, I will never be able to know the depth of God's love. For love attracts that which is like itself and reveals it in its own light. And God is Love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God. And how can I know the Creator without the Creator in my heart? It is like knowing everything about Him from books but not knowing Him personally. And a deep knowledge of God is very important.

Without love, in various trials I will most likely act according to the flesh, although I myself will not notice it, because I am a believer. The spirit of self-confidence can blind me, and I will confidently walk in darkness, knowing where everything is located in a familiar room. But any unfamiliar territory will bewilder me. I do not understand how much I need love for the final battle, but I am so accustomed to living without it that perhaps I will never feel a need for it. I am accustomed to doing everything without the Holy Spirit, and I think that I have enough knowledge to overcome everything. I believe in God's power, that He will protect me in the last time as well, and my faith is able to move mountains; love has nothing to do with it. Let weak sisters who have nothing to do acquire it, while we will break through. It is not the first time. But something is not going as it always has. Victory is in my eyes, but emptiness is inside. It should not be this way.

You can continue this list yourselves.

What will happen to me if I accept agape love, if I comprehend this science, if, having set out upon this path, I do not turn away from it, even if it is very difficult or there is very little time? I think this is worth considering.

Love is the personal presence of Christ in my life, in my heart, and in my fellowship with Him. It is an entire ocean of opportunities and prospects for the future. It is new trials of my faith and continual victories in the spirit of love and truth. It is rapid individual spiritual growth that gives new knowledge but does not exalt my heart above others. It opens many doors for serving my neighbors.

Love enlightens my eyes, and I can see even in the darkness, understanding where I am going and what I will encounter, how to avoid it, or how to overcome it. Love brings continual true happiness into my life. And although the trials of my love sometimes discourage me and lead me to review and reconsider many earthly and spiritual values, they are nevertheless quite easy to endure. And when everything has been resolved and left behind, I understand that I have risen still higher—not in my own eyes, but in the knowledge of God.

The works of the flesh do not attract my heart; this voice is repulsive to me, and I remember the bitter experiences of my former life with disgust. Love fills my entire being with meaning. Every deed and every action takes on special meaning in the spirit of love because it has the most correct motive, although it may not be very great or significant in the eyes of others.

I understand where I am going; I know that God is in me; I expect something new, and it happens. I am preparing for Eternity and have firm assurance of my salvation, for without Christ I can do nothing, but I always see Him before me.

With love, I become a coveted target for Satan, but the Lord is my protection, and He leads me to Calvary so that from its height I too may see, through His eyes, the entire conquered world for which He died, and love it with His heart.

And at the end of the path, I notice a blazing fire into which the Lord invites me, and He stands in that fire and waits to pass through this trial together with me.

Homework 187

1. Do you see the difference between those who have love and those who do not?
2. What must one have in order to comprehend the science of love, and what steps should be taken?
3. What advantages does a believer who has love in his heart possess?
4. What does the Lord desire to sell to you personally in this last time?

5. Why is it so important for the spiritual house of a believer to be occupied by Love?
6. What is needed for Love to gain the victory in your heart?
7. Is it worth seeking and setting aside time to learn the science of agape love?
8. Do you believe that our school is the only one in the world where we comprehend this science? What other methods does God have to reveal all these truths to thirsty and seeking souls?
9. Please read Psalm 91:14-15; Daniel 3:24-25; Psalms 23:4; 83:6-8; Isaiah 26:3-4; Joshua 1:7; Isaiah 63:9; 1 Peter 4:12-14; Hebrews 10:36; 12:2-3, 12-13 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 188. The Mind of Christ

The mind is the highest human ability to think, analyze, compare, and draw conclusions. Someone even coined the name *Homo sapiens* for people, which means 'wise man.' The mind distinguishes us from the animal and plant world. The highest sphere of the mind is the ability to express one's thoughts and feelings in words, giving them logical forms and determining the meaning of what is spoken or written in order to achieve intended goals.

And in the spiritual world, a fierce struggle is now taking place between good and evil for this human faculty, with the aim of persuading people to take one side or the other, to give them freedom in Christ or subject them to the power of sin.

Love is the mind of Christ.

Even before the birth of John the Baptist, a prophecy was given through an angel that the disobedient would be given the mindset of the righteous, in order to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The mind and will of a person are the goal that all invisible spiritual forces desire to attain. For whoever can subdue the mind and convince it that he is right will become the spiritual master of the person who possesses that mind. The mind is the battlefield between good and evil. Christ and His angels are on one side, while Satan and his angels are on the opposite side.

Whether I want it or not, my mind is the center of this spiritual war. I cannot simply leave the battlefield. I can only take someone's side and, consciously or not, choose my commander.

God acts openly, and if I take His side, then I understand in Whom I have believed and consciously submit to Him, living in harmony with the light I receive from Him. I cannot accidentally or unknowingly enter God's camp and take His side. I must understand Who my Commander is, know His will, carry out His orders, and meet His expectations. And at any time, if I wish, I can leave this camp and, consciously or not, go

over to the side of the enemy of the human soul. God has high requirements for His warriors, yet at the same time He grants absolute freedom in choosing obedience or resistance. The Lord declares His plans and strategy and waits for voluntary submission, taking into account the abilities and strength of each warrior.

The enemy of the soul, Satan, acts secretly. By cunning and deception, he entices thoughtless people onto his territory, where he enslaves them with various kinds of addictions and lusts. Concealing his true motives and plans from them, he takes their minds captive through his influence, persuading them that they are free in sin and may live as they please. Satan bewitches the consciousness of these souls and deceives them with all kinds of sciences, knowledge, and teachings. And the poor people do not even realize whom they serve or on whose side they are fighting. Nor are they troubled by the fact that God and His servants are their sworn enemies, whom they must destroy or remove from their field of vision.

Satan accepts the worship of some people without concealing his true nature. He gives them strength, power, and his influence. The enemy gains others through deception, clothing himself in garments of goodness and light.

And he does not care whether those who fight for him understand whom they actually serve. They are his vast army, and he is their general.

And I, an ordinary person, must make my choice and be faithful to what I choose.

Whether I want it or not, every science, every teaching, and every body of knowledge that I begin to comprehend or study irreversibly changes my consciousness. I receive wisdom and understanding to comprehend what I am investigating.

For example, if I begin purposefully studying a foreign language, then after some time I will be able to speak and understand it and, by and large, will never forget it. But there are sciences that destroy my mind, ruin my soul, and make me incapable of perceiving the depths of God's revelations. They

forever close my mind to understanding the Creator's will. Although I may voluntarily and consciously choose a destructive teaching, many good qualities of the soul that are lost in the process will be lost forever, like a severed hand or an extracted tooth.

When I stand at the edge of an abyss, I have a choice, and I can still walk away. But if I consciously jump down, then I have passed the point of no return and will no longer be able to change anything, even if after jumping I very much want to return.

For those who do not wish to study and comprehend destructive sciences, the enemy of the soul offers television, the Internet, and computer games with all kinds of entertainment, philosophies, and deceptions. A mind that becomes accustomed to indiscriminately passing all kinds of information through itself is defiled and becomes incapable of perceiving God's light and knowing God's will for the salvation of the soul. Christ's sacrifice appears foolish, and the price paid for my freedom appears insignificant.

But Christ offers everyone who desires it the most beautiful science for the soul—agape love—gently offering it as a counterbalance to all other teachings. The science of the soul's salvation from the power of sin and eternal death through Jesus Christ is God's most precious gift to humanity. Love is God's seal upon the forehead of those who become disciples of Christ and accept His agape love. Love is the most effective weapon for gaining victories in spiritual warfare, and it is the deepest knowledge of God through the experiences of one's life, through personal fellowship, through studying the Lord's will, and through obedience to His principles. None of Christ's disciples will escape examinations; all will pass through the fire, and this flame will not scorch but will purify the Heavenly gold from impurities, illuminate the soul with a bright radiance, and unite the human mind with the Divine.

To love is to have the mind of Christ and to treat people as Christ does. It is God in me, and I in Him.

Having a mind, I can decide and analyze what I need for life. By choosing this world and its temptations, I begin to deteriorate in the spiritual sphere, and my ability to distinguish good from evil grows weaker.

By preferring love and salvation in Christ, I enter the path of spiritual development and begin to grow in Jesus, being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Love is my soul's consent to the personal presence of Christ in my mind and the voluntary union of my will with God's will in order to accomplish God's plans for me in my life. And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

The mind of Christ in me is the union of the human and the Divine for comprehending the supernatural. Yet God takes into account my individual characteristics and abilities, my freedom of choice; He respects my decisions but always offers something better. The mind of Christ teaches me to fight and overcome in every situation and to do so as Jesus does. And in my obedience to God's will, I become so steadfast that nothing can shake me. And in order to make me sin, it is first necessary to kill Jesus within me and then persuade me to choose evil. Unfortunately, many temptations of this world accomplish this task very successfully. Like buried mines, they are invisible to the eye but are activated when stepped upon. However, the Lord teaches me to avoid dangerous territories and heals my wounds if I stumble.

God does not give Himself to me only to reject me at my very first mistake, but patiently teaches me to love and think as He desires.

To love is wonderful.

Homework 188

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Why is it so important to have the mind of Christ?
3. How do you understand the expression 'the mindset of the righteous'? Luke 1:17.

4. What kinds of minds and ways of thinking do you know?
5. Do you understand in your heart what it means to have the mind of Christ?
6. How can I determine what kind of mind I have?
7. What benefit will I receive from the mindset of the righteous?
8. Please compare how Satan acts and how God acts in this struggle for souls.
9. What is distinctive about God's treatment of His warriors?
10. Please read Luke 1:17; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 4:7; Colossians 2:1-3; 3:16; 1 John 5:20; Malachi 4:6; 3:16-18; Isaiah 55:8; Hebrews 8:10; Zechariah 4:6; Amos 3:7; John 10:10-14 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 189. A Declaration of Love

In 1 Corinthians 13:8 it is written: 'Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.'

In another translation we read: 'Love is eternal.'

We do not very often hear words of love addressed to us. Not all our friends can tell us that they love us, although from their deeds and their treatment of us we can determine that they are special and genuine. And how it gladdens the heart when someone expresses the state of his inner world in the beautiful words, 'I love you.' How the soul rejoices! How pleasant it is to hear! And you understand that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

And sometimes no one ever says this to you.

And then a moment comes in my life when I, too, decide to love a particular person and tell him about it. My entire human being is invested in this declaration. And I am happy that I love. It is not always easy to say this, because I understand that my words may prove empty. When the testing of my love comes, will I withstand it, and will I remain faithful to my words? And, thinking this way, I may decide not to tell anyone anything, but my heart is burning; it cannot remain silent. What should I do?

A struggle with myself begins. And I forget that there is God, Who can bless any statement I make and make it true and effective. We read in Isaiah 44:26: 'That confirmeth the word of His servant, and performeth the counsel of His messengers...'

God knows how fragile a human promise to love can be, and therefore He places His hand upon it and gives me His strength for this if I ask Him.

Before speaking words of love to your neighbor, try asking yourself this question: 'Will I love this person if he does not respond to me in the same way? Will I love him if I learn that he is breaking the seventh commandment? Will I always love him,

even if he becomes my enemy? Will I continue to love him if he changes his religious affiliation?' Sometimes the answers to these questions reveal that my love has no solid foundation and is merely my decision in response to the good feeling I experience in my friend's presence. Yet I read that love never fails, and I think that this is indeed so. But a test comes, and my decision changes.

Someone even said that there is only one step from love to hatred. This is how it happens in the world, and, unfortunately, it has become the norm.

I remember a stranger who wanted to gain my favor and sell me an unnecessary item at a high price. For this purpose, he was ready to call me his friend and speak of his love, but when I refused to make the purchase, his smile and love evaporated very quickly.

'I love you if...' How often do we hear this? And how often do we say it? But God desires to teach me to love always, eternally, and genuinely. And He even gave a commandment that teaches us to treat one another in precisely this way.

And He waits for our prayers so that He may give us this strength and teach us to love eternally.

And together with Him it is so simple, so natural, and so beautiful. When I understand that God's power is within me, working through love, and that I love, and this remains with me in every trial, then I feel such joy in my heart, such happiness in life, such delight! I understand that love is genuine, that it exists and never fails. And I am not frightened by the changing moods of those whom I love. My attitude toward them does not change because I am united with the One Who is Love, and I ask God for this gift toward my neighbors and my enemies. And He gives it abundantly, and I love.

I do not very often receive the same in response to what is genuine in me. Sometimes I receive the exact opposite. But I am ready for such a response as well, because I understand that love must be tested and established in me before God's seal is placed upon it. It is not always easy to endure this, and

the closer the friend, the more painful the trial if he becomes your adversary; but love bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things.

And so I decided to take this step; I decided to love. And sometimes I declared this to a friend before I prayed about it. The Lord puts my words into effect, and if afterward I ask Him to bless this decision of mine, the blessing will come. And Christ gives me strength to love at any time when I ask Him for it. It is extremely important to cooperate with God in this direction. For without Christ I can do nothing.

But I notice that, being a Christian, I treat all people with love and do so automatically. Such an attitude gladdens me; it is the norm of my life. Yet I do not pray for every person individually; I simply love. Could this really be less than genuine? Love places its imprint upon my heart and changes it, and my heart can no longer behave otherwise. I do not have to tell everyone about my feelings, nor do I have to speak to everyone about love. If it is in the heart, it will reveal itself in everything, and it does not need many words.

It is difficult to begin to love and to learn how to do so. But at some point this must be done. Many trials are very difficult and unpredictable. But in time one becomes established in love, and you are ready for any attack and calmly meet the adversary, knowing that you have already overcome because Jesus, Who never loses, is always beside you. You have already studied all the methods and arguments of the adversary, and his statements and accusations do not trouble you. 'I love'—this is my answer to every argument. And may the Lord help me to stand firm in this decision.

When God's love finds its place in my heart, then all my deeds become good, for they are moved by love. It is placed within every thought, every action, and every motive.

But the war is not yet over, and the enemy has not yet surrendered. And many battles still lie ahead—battles in which I do not want to fight but which cannot be avoided. And I must put on love, take up the shield of faith, the sword of God's

Word, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of readiness, and go on the offensive in the footsteps of Jesus. And ahead awaits the highest reward of those who love—the Cross, which lifts you above earthly things and shows you to everyone as an overcomer.

Revelation 14:13: ‘And I heard a voice from Heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.’

And many of us will meet Christ alive, while being dead to sin and to the world.

To love a friend is wonderful; to love one another is happiness; to love an enemy is a pleasure, although not always a joyful one. And all of this must be learned. And we have only One Teacher—Christ. And He is very kind and wise. He never makes a mistake.

Ephesians 3:18-19: ‘May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.’

I love—this is my character. I love you—this is my attitude. Do you love me?—this is my desire to help you discover a new Heavenly world that is very beautiful. Let us love one another! —this is an invitation to learn to live eternally and to prepare to move to Heaven. But in order to give this, one must possess it. Yet it is worth beginning.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Homework 189

1. What interesting things did you learn in this lesson?
2. What do you think prevents people from declaring their love to one another?
3. Why is it so important to reinforce the desire to love a person with God’s blessing?
4. What does God want to teach us?

5. What freedom does the Lord give when you decide to love unconditionally?
6. What awaits those who follow the path of love?
7. Is it worth telling people about love, or is it better to keep it to yourself as something personal?
8. Please read Isaiah 61:10; Jeremiah 31:3; Revelation 2:17, 26-28; Hebrews 10:24; Ephesians 4:2, 15-16; 3:9-10; Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Ephesians 6:11-18; Romans 12:14-15; 1 John 3:23-24; 4:10-12 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 190. Lack of Strength

I once heard a story about a man who brought his lunch from home to work, and every time he opened his bag, he complained very loudly about how tired he was of those sandwiches and wondered when this monotonous nightmare of such tasteless food would end. His coworkers suggested that he ask his wife to prepare something different, to which he replied that he had no wife and prepared his own food.

How often I resemble this strange man, thinking that I can do something carelessly and that it should somehow become something wonderful and beautiful on its own. But there are laws that operate according to the situation.

I was created and designed by God in such a way that I can live autonomously and independently make decisions about how I will live, what I will eat, what I will watch and listen to, whom I will befriend, and whom I will love. Until a certain age, my parents decide these things, teaching me good habits, but at some point I begin to choose my own path and bear responsibility for my actions. And I understand that life is very complex and holds many tasks and adventures that must be dealt with and experienced.

My outlook on life and the one with whom I travel my path very often determine what this life will be like.

I remember that I decided to become strong and to become a champion in something, but I did not have enough strength to carry out my desire, and I abandoned the idea. Then I began training on my own, constantly increasing the load. And I was surprised by the results I achieved. A very useful law was revealed to me, one that helps me to this day. It goes like this: 'The one who leaves the race will never win. The one who remains in it will never lose.' And this rule proved relevant in the spiritual life as well. It helped me greatly.

I decided to try myself in another field and saw the same principle at work.

Every sphere of life has its own laws, which are as old as this world and operate in the same way for everyone.

For example, if I want to become wealthy, a high salary will not help me; the laws of wealth, which I begin to study and observe, will help me. Knowledge of these laws and the ability to apply them form in me the mindset of a prosperous person. And whatever crisis I may experience, these laws will show me how I can emerge from it or use it to my advantage. Even if I am left with nothing, I know how to resolve this matter and acquire new wealth. I am surrounded by thieves and various plunderers who can rob me, but they cannot take away my knowledge and experience, and, if necessary, I will be able to correct many things. But the accumulation of capital does not save me or bring happiness, so I discover other laws for myself.

At some point in my life, I decided to become happy, but I did not understand what was needed for this, although I had always been interested in this question and sought an answer from God. And the Lord began to teach me this and revealed to me the wonderful laws of a happy life, which began to work in me as I learned and applied them. Later I will share them with you. This, too, is planned as part of our studies.

Happiness exists, and it follows definite laws. It is the result of obedience and the fulfillment of rules that I sometimes do not know. This is a very profound science that comes from Biblical teaching and is very important in the last days. And in addressing Laodicea, the Lord reproaches His people for being miserable and not even knowing it. But there is a way out, and God gives it to us by offering something very important and useful.

If I want to live eternally, I can attain this, but not by my own strength. I need knowledge of this science, and as I discover its laws, I can consciously apply them in my life, receiving the result of my discoveries by practicing this in my heart. But in this science I encounter the fact that Eternal life has a Source, Whom I must come to know personally, and this Source is three living Persons by the Name of God, Who desire to have a relationship with me, to teach me to live rightly, to obey what

will be revealed to me, to make an effort, and to study what is necessary for me. And while my own strength and decisions were sufficient for mastering other disciplines, in the science of Salvation I need strength from above. And it is given by God's mercy and begins to work in me. Its name is love. It unites my mind, will, and intellect and creates in me the mindset of a righteous person. Under the influence of love, I comprehend the laws of Eternal life and begin to live by them.

To do good, one must be good; to love one's neighbor, one must have love; to be friendly, one must understand the laws of friendship; and to become happy, one must know what happiness is and how it works. And all of this comes from the God of love, Who, by His mercy, gives it abundantly for eternal use.

God has enough strength to produce within me everything that pleases Him. But I must put the sandwiches into the bag myself. And here a dilemma arises. There is strength, and there is a will, but there is no willpower. What should I do? There are laws of priority that operate according to the positions assigned in accordance with them. First, I do what is my priority, then what is necessary, and finally what is greatly needed but is not as joyful and important. And this is a problem with my thinking. And very often my cleverness brings me much grief. My knowledge sometimes conflicts within itself and discourages me if I do not know how to put it into practice properly.

But there is a very useful rule: I make promises or enter into a covenant that obligates me to do what is necessary, even if at first I do not desire to do it. One such commitment is starting a family. I did not need this, although I understood that it was better. But after meeting the woman I loved, I decided to bind myself with a promise to care for her and asked for my parents' and God's blessing upon it. And I learned many good things that I would never have done alone.

Then I took upon myself the responsibility of being a father. At first it was unfamiliar, but later I became accustomed to it and live in this role. My daughter has grown up and has her own family, but I still remain her father.

I also decided to enter into a covenant with God and asked Him to become the Lord of my life. I bound myself with many promises and do not regret this covenant in the least. There were many things I did not desire and could not do, and I did not even know what needed to be done, but now I live in them and cannot imagine anything else.

Then I pleaded with God for love and began using it to bind myself to other people. I was afraid of the consequences, for I might not endure and might grow weak. But the Lord grants this strength and gives even more than is requested and needed.

And then I decided to share my knowledge about love, thereby binding myself even more. And even when the body grows tired and does not want to do anything, the mind and will prevail and carry out what is needed. And God sends strength from above and inspires the one who is walking. The Lord does not show me what will be at the end, but teaches me to rely on Him by faith, taking the next small step of trust while awaiting the next revelation in order to pass it on to other people.

With what other good thing could I bind myself? I need to promise something to someone and then ask for the wisdom, strength, and means to fulfill it. But it is better not to promise what I will not fulfill. Yet how can I fulfill what I have not promised? Only through love.

Homework 190

1. What did you like about this lesson?
2. How do you understand the expression 'willpower,' and how is it applicable in the Christian life?
3. Do you have days when you become discouraged and do not feel like doing anything? What do you do in such cases?
4. Is it worth binding yourself with commitments in advance? Might it be easier to live a quiet life while having faith in your heart?
5. Is there strength and meaning in a promise? Is it worth making promises?
6. What role does God play in my spiritual commitments?

7. Is it possible to follow Christ without taking upon yourself the burden of commitments?
8. Does God give us promises, binding Himself by them?
9. Please read Isaiah 40:29-31; Deuteronomy 8:17-18; 23:23; Psalm 46:2; 62:12; Ecclesiastes 5:3-4; 1 Peter 3:21; 1 John 2:25; Philippians 2:13-14; Romans 12:1-2; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:18; Hebrews 13:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 1 Peter 1:22; 2 Peter 1:3-10; Ephesians 3:10; James 1:17 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 191. Growing in Christ

When I hear accounts about God, about His love, about His mercy, and about His desire to save me from the power of sin and from death, a genuine interest arises within me, and something amazing begins to take place in my mind. An unknown power draws me to Jesus and reveals incomprehensible things about Him. I suddenly begin to understand that God exists, that He loves me, and that He has prepared something better for me—not what this world offers. My mind awakens, and the thought dawns on me that I can begin to live with God, believing in Him and learning His will. And I decide to take this step, and I do so.

When I had only begun to know Christ, and He convinced me that I needed to repent of my sins, I decided not to put it off, but turned to Him in a prayer of repentance and was accepted by Him without any particular objections. Jesus loves me and loves every person, without respect of persons. For He is our Creator, our Savior, our Heavenly Friend. Whoever we may be, the Lord receives into His embrace anyone who turns to Him in repentance and with a desire for deliverance.

Repentance is God's gift, which God gives to people as a special mercy so that they may leave the past behind and begin a new life without sin. God's grace descends upon a person and prompts him to acknowledge and confess his transgressions. He gives both the desire and the strength to do this. And this is a very important moment that takes place in the life of every person, and when it concerns the heart, it is extremely important to answer, 'Yes.'

I know many people who heard such a call but decided to wait a little longer, to sin a little longer, to settle all their affairs, or to have their fill of worldly pleasures; but later, when it seemed that they should have been ready to begin something new, they could change nothing. The mind understands, the soul trembles, but the heart remains silent. Other cases are also known. People resisted God's mercy for years, and then, leaving everything behind, turned to Him with all their heart. God once

said that His Spirit would not always strive with man, and this principle remains in effect to this day.

Love suffers long, but when God's mercy is completely rejected, another attribute of love—justice—then comes into its own. And how God does not desire that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

There is a very interesting factor in your salvation and mine. When we repent and come to Christ with our repentance, He accepts us and places us in His school called 'life with Jesus.' And the Lord begins to teach us this life. In His school study all those who have bound their existence to Christ, all who have believed in Him as their Savior and desire to know His will. God pours out His light upon these people, enters into a covenant with them, and receives them as His children, blessing them at all times.

All of us who have believed in Christ become one family, and in Him we are accepted by God the Father. The Lord desires to raise all of us and gives us spiritual growth, sends us strength to fight sin, grants us light, and teaches us to distinguish evil from good and sin from righteousness.

But unfortunately, the enemy of souls also has access to this school. He introduces his own adjustments into this process of learning, dividing God's children into denominations, movements, and groups, convincing them that they are right and endowing them with a spirit of religious intolerance and fanaticism.

From church history we know of cases when those who desired freedom in their religious beliefs were persecuted, imprisoned, and killed—and this was done by the very people who considered themselves followers of Christ and called their society by that name, while being led by an entirely different spirit.

But God always has had and always will have those who know how to distinguish darkness from light and who know the voice of their Shepherd. They do not follow a stranger, but follow Jesus wherever He goes. And Jesus does not merely lead His

flock; He gives His sheep the Bread of Life and cares for the spiritual growth of everyone who has entered into a covenant with Him. And the purpose of this school of Christ is to reveal to His children the fullness of Biblical truths in their true light, to teach us to love one another, to prepare us for life among holy beings, and to prepare us to testify of Him in the spirit of love and truth.

And this process of growth may be described as the revelation of God's true character to a person and the restoration of that character within him. God does not merely desire to reveal Himself to us as the God of love; He seeks to become love within us. And this does not happen instantly. It is a process lasting throughout Eternity, but it begins in the earthly school. And this is the foundation of my faith.

God needs obedient boys and girls with whom He will populate all the heavenly space prepared by Jesus for His friends. But where can these obedient children be found, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God? That is why the school is needed. God calls all the unfit boys and girls in order to begin raising them, teaching them the skills of Eternal life, and preparing us to move to Heaven. And a miracle of transformation takes place. From an unfit and dirty lump of clay, I am transformed into a masterpiece in God's hands. He molds me into what pleases Him and makes me what He Himself desires; and when the process of creation is complete, the Lord places me into a hot furnace in order to temper the soft qualities of my soul and make them firm and strong. After this, He fills this vessel with that for which it was designed and continues to teach me.

And I grow like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf does not wither and which brings forth good fruit in its season. And God expects much fruit and teaches me this art, dwelling forever in my heart.

Through studying the Bible, I learn God's will and His plans, see my sins, discover the depths of God's love, learn about God's promises, and grow in the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ, Whom He has sent.

I learn to fellowship with my Creator and Savior. As I read His Word, I hear Him speaking to me; and as I open my mouth in prayer, I begin to converse with Him. We have a daily dialogue: we exchange knowledge and experience, I seek counsel from my Teacher, and He answers my requests, needs, and questions. And I grow.

And in this school I have very many friends with whom we study the science of love together and learn to respect, understand, accept, and love one another. It is so interesting! We had never known one another, but in Christ we became dear and close, came to love one another with a pure heart, and dream of how, having ascended to Heaven, we will eternally bring joy to one another before God's face and remember how wonderfully the Lord gathered us all together and united us in friendship on this sinful Earth in His school of love.

And already here on Earth we become God's people, God's family, God's children, who have chosen love and friendship as our attitude toward one another; and this has brought us to happiness in Jesus and joy in the Holy Spirit. And we will live in this forever.

Can you imagine Eternity without love? It would be unceasing torment and suffering, constant war and never-ending conflict. But love casts this out and fills our hearts with itself in order to bring a little piece of Heaven into our busy life even now. We have only a little time left to study here. But what we are learning in this school here and now will be very useful to us in Eternity.

The science that God is Love can be comprehended only by having Eternal life, and we have begun this. And we are growing.

Homework 191

1. What interesting things did you learn in this lesson?
2. What leads a sinner to repentance?
3. What does it mean to repent?
4. Is there a limit to God's mercy? When does justice come into its own?

5. What does the school of Christ teach?
6. How does growth in Christ take place?
7. Are you growing in Christ? How can this be determined?
8. Is it possible to remain forever in the first grade in God's school?
9. Please read 1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalms 1:1-2; 23:4; 77:12-13; Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Philippians 3:7-14; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:6, 14-15; Hebrews 10:25; 1 John 4:4; Romans 8:38-39; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 5:19-20; 6:12-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 23; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 192. The Ocean of God's Love

Very often, in order to picture love in some way, I use the ocean as a comparison. And now I invite you to draw parallels and, while speaking about the ocean, to consider God's Agape Love. One can notice a great many interesting similarities and laws that vividly describe the hidden attributes of love, making it more understandable.

The Author of the ocean and of love is God Himself. But while the ocean has a specific geographical location and can be found by anyone who travels to it, love is something spiritual, invisible to the eye but discernible by the heart. It dwells wherever God is present, and He is Omnipresent.

The ocean is a single worldwide organism that unites within itself all the waters of our planet and all the seas and gulfs connected to it. The ocean's total area is about 360 million square kilometers and covers 71 percent of the Earth's surface.

Love is a single organism that unites within itself the entire infinite expanse of the Universe, together with all the galaxies, worlds, and heavenly beings connected to it. God's Love covers 100 percent of the Universe.

To me, the world ocean appears as a surface of water visible to my eye. This surface may be calm or wavy. If I put on a mask and dive into the waters of the ocean, I will see that there is life in it, that it has its own animal and plant life, its own laws, and that it holds many discoveries within itself. And the deeper I descend into it, the more diverse becomes the underwater world that exists and has always existed—a world governed by its own order and mysteries, its own features and patterns.

On the surface, love is understood as a pink heart. If I put on the garments of Christ's righteousness and dive into the ocean of God's Love, I will discover a new and amazing world of endless revelations, with its own laws, mysteries, and attributes. And the deeper I descend into God's Love, the closer I become to God. I unravel new mysteries of His character, which have always existed and still exist, and God's Soul opens

to me with Its own features and patterns. I comprehend great and inaccessible things.

The ocean is water that fills the place into which it was released by the Creator. The ocean has a foundation called the bottom, and the water fills the space that it is permitted to occupy, within its boundaries and territory. The water reaches the limits established for it and does not cross them. At times, cataclysms occur within the ocean's expanses, and then tsunami waves arise and crash upon the land, crushing every obstacle. Afterward, they calmly return to their place.

Love is God's Spirit, Who is the Essence and Foundation of Love and Who fills the entire expanse of the Universe with Himself. Love has a firm foundation—God's law—and it fills the place that it is permitted to occupy within the bounds of that territory. It does not go beyond the established boundaries and does not commit lawlessness. Love is limited by the lack of free access to closed hearts, but at times it crashes upon them with waves of God's blessings, sweeping away everything corruptible and proud, and then quietly returns within the bounds of its dwelling place and waits for new opportunities to reveal itself.

The waters of the ocean are accessible to people, and they can sail upon them and dive into them. They have the opportunity to obtain food and hidden treasures from the ocean's depths. People are also permitted to study freely the laws of life in the waters, to descend into their depths, to enrich themselves from the ocean's contents, and to do whatever they desire. But they are unable to subjugate the ocean, make it their subject, or tell it what to do and how to behave. It is subject to its Creator and lives by the laws written for it. People are permitted to study these laws and plan their activities within their bounds.

God's Love is accessible to all people, and they may freely sail upon its surface, compose songs about it, and call it by different names. They may descend into its depths and obtain from them nourishment for themselves and their neighbors, giving its waters to one another. They are given the opportunity to search out hidden treasures in the depths of Love and make them the

possession of their souls, enjoying them and sharing them with all who desire them. People are also permitted to study freely the laws of Love and of life within this expanse. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, every inhabitant of Earth may freely descend into the ocean of God's Love and be enriched by its contents, doing with it whatever the soul desires. But people cannot subjugate Love or tell it how it should behave. It submits to the One Who is this Love, yet it is presented to us in the form of written laws that it very much desires to inscribe upon human hearts so that it may plan its activity within their bounds.

The waters of the ocean are in motion. They can change form and, as vapor and rain, reach those parts of the Earth that are inaccessible to raging waves. Underwater and atmospheric currents evenly distribute the ocean's warmth and cold to their appointed regions of the planet, warming its surface and establishing a particular climate in the various zones of the Earth. They very skillfully bypass desert places and are constant in their movement and influence.

Love is in motion. It changes its form and, through good deeds, mercy, and grace, through kind words and the influence of loving hearts, distributes its warmth to places where the Word of God cannot enter. It creates a loving atmosphere, a kind climate, and friendly surroundings. And where waves of happiness cannot crash down, Love quietly brings peace to thirsty and seeking hearts, skillfully bypassing the proud and haughty, the envious and cruel. It is constant in its influence and very powerful in those who receive it.

There are entire regions of the planet where the waters of the world ocean have been transformed into vast expanses of ice. In these places there is practically no life; nothing grows there, except that certain species of animals live there and survive by eating one another. And the closer life is to the equator, the richer and more diverse the ocean world becomes. It is very friendly toward those who study it, but it fears those who pollute and destroy it. In the world ocean there are entire zones where the waste of human activity and industry floats. There,

tons of garbage and industrial waste deprive every living thing of life. Chaos and death reign in these regions of the ocean. The thirst for gain and human greed leave their repulsive traces upon the surface of the water in the form of garbage and oil waste. The ocean groans in pain and calls for retribution, and it will come upon those who destroy the Earth.

Because lawlessness abounds, the love of many grows cold. There are entire regions of the planet where God's Love has grown cold, and nothing good grows there. People begin to devour one another in their beautiful homes; they begin to seek sensual pleasures, destroying those like themselves, and through their influence they infect all who live on Earth, offering them the fierce wine of their fornication. The closer life is to God, the more diverse and interesting it becomes. God is very friendly toward those who study Love, but very strict with those who poison life. Love groans beneath the burden of sin and has appointed the time of its end.

Homework 192

1. Did you learn anything new from this lesson?
2. Is the comparison presented in this lesson a fitting one?
3. Do you have your own images and ideas of God's Love? Can you share them?
4. Why did God decide to make His Love boundless?
5. Why is law necessary if it places limits on absolute freedom? Can Love exist outside the law?
6. What does lawlessness lead to?
7. Is it possible to comprehend the depth of God's Love in this life?
8. Please read Genesis 1:2, 9-10; 6:17; 7:11-12, 17-19; Job 38:8-11; 1 Chronicles 16:32; Psalm 65:7; Ecclesiastes 1:7; Matthew 8:27; 15:25; Mark 4:39-41; Luke 21:25 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 193. Accessible Love

If you want to have long-lasting problems in life, then all you need to do is be born into our world. As long as we live, we cannot avoid difficulties, trials, and adventures; whether we want them or not, they will come. But I decide how I will meet them and go through them.

There are unavoidable trials and processes that shape my character and personality, which I must pass through in order to become an independent person who makes wise decisions. And there are things that I myself bring and invite into my life, sometimes at my own expense, which destroy me and ruin my health, reason, and intellect, making me a slave to things, habits, or a way of life.

Our time differs from previous centuries in that the civilized world has discovered so many new things and introduced them into our daily lives, overwhelming people with so much information and so many opportunities to learn and possess whatever they desire, yet it has been unable to solve the problem of sin, give people happiness, teach them Love, or reveal the true beauty of God's character.

Yet God is the true Owner of the Earth. And the first verse of the Bible speaks very clearly about this: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' If anyone understands our needs and problems, it is the Creator Himself. And knowing what would happen in the end, the Lord repeatedly warned that He would come, personally intervene in the course of human history, and put an end to sin, disease, grief, and suffering. And He fulfilled His promise.

We were given a Savior Who revealed to people the true character of God, gave them a correct understanding of God's Love, gave them power to resist the influence of sin, taught us to love one another, and gave us hope of Eternal Life through knowing Him.

Everyone who decides to enter upon the path of life with God will encounter special resistance, and trials of faith will be

inevitable, but God Himself will be that person's protection and support in this choice. Supernatural trials will fall upon the believer, but supernatural strength will also be given to him.

But the most interesting part of a Christian's life begins when he realizes that he has no Love and begins to thirst for it and plead with God for it. And the Lord answers this need, for it is God's will that I should have His Love, know how to use it, and give it to others.

God is Love, and when I have this Love, together with it I also receive God; apart from Him, I will learn nothing.

When I receive Love for my neighbors, I enter upon a path of special trials and adventures. Problems fall upon me from every side. Within me there is a war between the flesh and God, in which I must give authority to one of them and submit my will. I choose Love, and victory comes.

The life of a loving person is filled with trials, but they are of an entirely different kind. I risk being killed or lost to Eternal Life, and the enemy of souls is constantly trying to draw me into his temptation. And when he fails, he tries, as far as possible, to make my life difficult and sorrowful. But beside me is the One Who has already gone through all this and knows how to gain victories and be happy. And He protects me and guards me on every side.

Jesus knows how dangerous the time in which we live is, and therefore He has decided to come personally into my life, take part in my wars, and give me His victory. There has never been a time when the Lord was so near to those who call upon Him. He has never abandoned His children, but in the last days He declares, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock...' And it brings such joy to know that I can open this door to Him, accept His help in the struggle, and overcome.

The Lord declares that I am lukewarm, but at the same time He counsels me to buy from Him that which will make me hot. And His personal presence in my life will heat me to the necessary temperature.

Love brings me out of the lukewarm condition. It penetrates every area of my life and makes everything right. Why not have it? It cleanses my heart, gives meaning to everything, beautifies my life, teaches me to be happy at all times and under all circumstances, reveals to me the beauty of God's character, gives me many friends, makes every trial bearable, preserves me from evil, and unites my heart with Jesus.

Why are people so afraid of this Love? Why are they opposed to such a way of life? Why are they ready to suffer and die in their sins, yet refuse to accept this power? Probably because they simply do not believe that it exists, that it is possible, and that it can be obtained so simply.

Many people are interested in the subject of Love; many watch, and many even click 'Like' and say, 'Amen.' But not very many decide to live this way.

When I ask for Love, God listens and begins to answer and act.

Let us take an illustration. A bank offers me a loan to build a house at 1.9 percent annual interest. And I decide to accept it. I come to the bank and ask them to issue the promised loan. They are glad to hear this and grant my request, and they ask whether I have a plot of land for construction, whether I have a plan for what I will build, whether I have permission to build the house, whether there are builders who will construct the house according to all the rules, whether I have an income with which to repay the loan afterward, and other questions.

The bank employees try to determine how reliable and honest I am. The money is not given to me simply so that I may have it; it is given for a definite purpose and a specific use. All my documents and plans are examined, and then, when everything meets their requirements, I am allocated the amount needed for construction.

This was an example from life. And if one considers it carefully, everything is arranged wisely, consistently, and correctly. But when I come to God and begin asking Him for Love, I pay no attention to the details and conditions for receiving this power.

Do I have a plan? Do I have a need? Do I have a purpose? Do I have permission? Who am I in God's eyes? Am I trustworthy? Have I entered into a covenant with Him through water baptism? Have I been born again? For some reason, I do not ask these questions, but simply want to have something without fulfilling the conditions for receiving it or meeting God's requirements.

The right to receive Love is given to me when I need it most, understand that I do not have it, and ask in order to receive it and give it away. It is precisely my sincere need and thirst to live and act in this way that open the windows of the Heavenly Bank, and I receive what I need so much.

It is naive to suppose that Love will always be available to me whenever I want it, that I can neglect the offer to acquire it and then obtain it at any moment; that it is something I can take from a shelf at a time convenient for me and use at my own discretion. Yes, it is accessible; yes, it is boundless and almighty, but it is selective. Love is not given merely for the sake of possessing it. It can be sampled without understanding its power, but receiving it requires knowledge and the ability to handle it, and this is given only by God.

And it is not difficult to acquire.

Does this seem like a paradox? Accessible yet impossible, easy yet difficult; God desires to give it, yet does not give it without purpose. A person who is wise in his own eyes will not receive it, while a little child of God has unlimited access to the riches of Heaven. But it is worth giving everything for it.

Homework 193

1. What new things did you learn from this lesson?
2. Why does the Lord allow trials in our lives?
3. How accessible is God's Love? Why does not everyone receive it?
4. Why did Heaven give us a Savior?
5. Which prayers for Love does the Lord answer?
6. What advantages do those who love have?

7. Do I have obligations before God after receiving the long-awaited gift of Love?
8. Please read Isaiah 43:11-12, 15, 25; 45:2-3, 7-9; Psalm 91:14-16; Isaiah 44:3; Luke 11:33; 1 Corinthians 1:27-28; Psalm 51:16-17; John 8:32; 12:25-26; Matthew 7:7; James 4:7-8; Isaiah 58:4-11 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 194. Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

One of the most serious warnings ever given to humanity can be read in Matthew 12:31-32: 'Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.'

I think that each of us, when reading these lines before, examined himself and felt a certain fear, asking, 'What if I have blasphemed the Holy Spirit somewhere and am now under a curse?' But then the fears faded, and life went on.

And what is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Only God and satan know the correct answer to this question, and they are fighting each other for every person. And, in essence, many people will perish because, having reached the point of no return, they rejected all of God's warnings and chose darkness and the right to die, confidently stepping into the abyss, never to be saved.

God is very longsuffering and loving toward humanity, and He does everything possible to save each one of us, doing so confidently and at the same time gently. And there is something amazing in this respect for human freedom. We are speaking of the greatest quality of Eternal Love—its unobtrusiveness. Although sometimes God cries out very loudly to save a soul from death.

There was an occasion when I came to see my boss, and we were discussing various work matters while his granddaughter, who was two years old, ran between the cars in the parking lot and laughed. Suddenly, I saw a car traveling along the roadway, and its driver did not see the little girl who was running between the cars toward the road. I understood that something terrible was about to happen and wanted to do something, but the girl was very far away from me. Suddenly, I

heard my boss's piercing shout as he commanded his granddaughter with all his strength to stop. The girl was frightened, froze in place, and began to cry. The car sped past, its driver never realizing what could have happened, while we were in shock as we grasped what might have occurred. The girl did not understand the mortal danger from which she had been saved and considered herself unfairly hurt. She wept bitterly, while in our hearts we rejoiced.

God often cries out through the mouth of a victim into the ears of his executioner, pleading with him not to do evil. He cries out to the mind of the perpetrator of violence. He speaks very loudly through the mouth of a preacher to those who are listening. And sometimes the cry of His soul is like the breathing of a gentle wind, so as not to quench the smoking flax or break the bruised reed.

Cataclysms and natural disasters, as well as military conflicts, are also very clear warnings through which God desires to tell us something. And who hears the voice of the Holy Spirit in all this?

But most of all, God loves to address people in peaceful surroundings, gently revealing the advantages of the plan of Salvation and persuading me to take one step or another, to make a certain decision. And sometimes this persuasive Power speaks to me so clearly that I cannot resist and do what is pleasing to God. My inner ear responds very sensitively to God's call. But I am not yet able to discern every call.

For example, sometimes when I am preparing to do something, I hear a thought telling me to take something or pay attention to certain details, but I ignore it and afterward realize that a very good thought had come into my mind. I regret that I did not listen to it, and I have to return or spend more effort and time. But this is not so terrible; I have the right to make this kind of mistake.

But when I am going into sin and God very clearly reminds me of words from the Bible that condemn my intentions, because the Lord desires to save me from taking that step, and then, if I

have sinned, overwhelms me with pangs of conscience and calls me to repentance, yet I continue on my own way, what is He to do with me? But in His Love He does not abandon me immediately; rather, He desires to save and cleanse me and does everything possible to turn me to the eternal and true path. And God knows how to save. Whom should I blame if I stubbornly move toward my own destruction and reject every warning? Who is guilty of my death if I decide to leap into the abyss of sin and confidently take that step, paying no attention to any appeal to stop?

And how can I understand that I am violating something? Where is the standard of righteousness by which I can determine whether I am on a dangerous path? God has an answer to these questions as well. Once, with His Own lips, He proclaimed the moral law, which was later written by His hand on two tablets of stone. This law teaches me love and respect for God and humanity. God desires to write these rules not on stone, where they would testify against me, but on my heart, so that they may become part of me, of my mind and character. And then not only the requirements of God's law but also its wisdom and beauty will be revealed to me. For in it are revealed the character and Spirit of God and His attitude toward sin. The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and good.

But we are living in the last days, and God desires to prepare us for the final events so that I may be able to stand in the coming trials. And for this reason, He gives me additional light that will help me understand what will happen and what I must do. God chooses prophets and servants through whom He warns me and counsels me to accept something special, new, and beneficial. He wants me to grow and to see mortal danger from every direction for myself, to be careful and not wait for saving cries. For it may happen that no one will be nearby and my ears will be closed when danger comes and the fire draws near.

And the Holy Spirit takes upon Himself the duty of conveying to the mind that which will uplift me, benefit me, and glorify my Jesus. He does this wherever His people are found. It is through

His children that God saves this world. Both our School of Agape Love and many other schools are intended to prepare us for the time when probation closes, when the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from the wicked so that they may continue to defile themselves, and will be given to the holy people so that they may continue to sanctify themselves. This will be a terrible time of trial. There will no longer be a restraining power against sin, and everyone will see that they are now living without God. They will understand that they will suffer punishment in the form of terrible judgments and plagues falling upon this world.

Once a friend asked me what he should do if he did not feel like doing many good things or pursuing his self-education and salvation. His excuse was brief: 'I cannot. I have no strength.' And this was a perfectly healthy person. As a friend, I very much wanted to say that it would pass, that everything would be wonderful, and that there was no need to worry, but my heart was telling me that not everything was well and that I needed to warn this soul. But how? How could I persuade someone who understood the truth but did not want to make an effort for his salvation and growth? I cannot be another person's head and will, though sometimes I very much wish I could. And I had to say that there is such a word as 'must,' even when one has no desire at all. It is necessary to take this step of faith even against one's feelings and the desires of the flesh. And the blessing of the right choice will come and give support.

I, too, sometimes do not want to do beneficial things, but when I overcome myself and do them, when I move toward the goal, then I go through special experiences and joy, and this changes my attitude, and I overcome.

Homework 194

1. What new things were revealed to you in this lesson?
2. Which language of God do you understand best?
3. How does God deal with those who go their own way?
4. How do you understand the expression 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit'? What is it?
5. What goal does our School of Agape Love pursue? Is the Lord teaching you to hear His voice?

6. Why is it sometimes necessary to say the word 'must' and take a step of faith even when you do not feel like it?
7. Please read 1 Chronicles 28:9; Exodus 19:18-19; 1 Kings 19:11; Job 38:1; Isaiah 42:3-4; Exodus 34:6-7; Daniel 12:1, 3; Exodus 20:2-17; Jeremiah 32:37-41; Revelation 22:11; Matthew 24:21; John 14:26 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 195. Our World

Our world, like heavy waters, presses upon our submarine from every side and seeks every opportunity to penetrate inside. Even the smallest opening in the vessel's hull is enough for it to sink us. And everyone feels this pressure. No matter how well we may live here, as long as satan exists and his army has influence in this world, I cannot be in absolute safety. In the Lord I find protection and rest; in Him is the fortress of my soul. Yet He leads me through the fire and allows satan to test my strength. And this is God's plan for preparing us for Eternal life. The enemy of souls pushes us out of this world into Eternity. Through his attacks, he makes us more experienced and stronger and teaches us to rely completely upon Jesus. And the more terrifying the storm, the closer I become to God. The enemy hates us, and he understands his powerlessness in this war, yet he continues to persecute us, desiring that we at least die in Christ, if only to put an end to our influence. But our works follow us even after death.

Satan knows that he has no chance of victory in an open confrontation, and now he disguises his plans very skillfully. He comes as an angel of light and as a smiling, happy person. And through such deceptions he gains many worshipers. The great empire of satan, which has swallowed up the entire world, has appeared in our time in all its splendor. Its name is Babylon. And we live in it. We build our way of life under the influence of this city.

We read in Revelation 18:23: '... for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.'

In the original, the word 'sorceries' is written as follows: φαρμακεία. This term is now used in medicine, as in pharmacology—the medicinal effect upon the human body. And the enemy of souls, together with his subjects, is now engaged in enchanting the world in order to control it and carry out his plans. And this spirit reigns in the air. Until the Second Coming itself, we will be subject to such pressure from without.

But God has a plan. He did not give Satan absolute power. He established His Kingdom of Love called Agape. And it successfully withstands the enemy's onslaught, confidently defeating the forces of darkness. God Himself is the Head of this Kingdom. It is a part of Heaven in our world. The Lord knows the strength of evil's influence and the pressure it exerts upon a person; therefore, He does not expect human victories from me, but Himself wages war within me and overcomes.

The Love that Jesus counsels us to acquire is strong enough to overcome every obstacle. It is not subject to the power of enchantment and rejects everything unclean. Love is pure, like sunlight, like drops of dew. It created man for itself and knows what a person needs for happiness and for a full life.

Laodicea is presented to us as the final period of history. There is nothing after it. And it is worth concentrating all our thoughts in order to understand what God offers me at this time.

Friends, it is vitally important to understand what the Lord is saying as He addresses Laodicea. If I do not accept it, I will not be able to possess it, nor will I thirst for it and ask for it. But God offers Himself. He came personally for this purpose and stands waiting. The Holy Spirit reveals this truth very clearly. And if I do not hear His voice and reject His help and victory, then to whom shall I go? Satan already has a solution prepared. To him? Never! But if I reject God, or if I remain indifferent, then I cannot live on my own. Another power will take possession of me, and I will sup with it, and it with me, and we will be merry and happy, while ahead of us awaits a wonderful death without any hope. Is that what I should live for? Is that what the Lord desires to give me?

The history of Christianity teaches us how good the Lord is and how tenderly and carefully He led His people, sending them truth and prophets in His appointed time. But the light of a hundred years ago is not sufficient today. I may miss important details. The pioneers of Christianity gave us many discoveries and laid a solid foundation, but our growth did not end there. Now we have reached the finish line, and what do we have?

Disputes, hostility, disagreements, indifference, heresies, and so forth. Is this what God plans to take into Eternity? Is this what He will place His seal upon? Is this what the Holy Spirit is laboring for—to cover lawlessness with God’s righteousness?

We have studied the law, come to know it, learned it by heart, and speak about it to people; but have we dissolved it in God’s Love within our relationships so that it may become edible?

We are not guilty of having been born and living at this time. And God does not judge us because we live in Babylon, but He offers a solution and asks: ‘Come out of her, My people!’ But where am I to go? To Sodom? To Gomorrah? Where is this place? Where should I direct my steps?

Jesus gives the answer. He is that Door, and what He offers in the message to Laodicea will become my protection and weapon in the last days. And what does He counsel me to acquire? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God has no better Treasures than These for the soul. This is the Most Precious Gift He has reserved for the end. All Heaven has been emptied in order to become ours. And if the Lord Himself is already standing at the door and knocking, then who could be better after Him? And what am I doing? I justify myself by saying that I cannot crawl to the door and open it. Or perhaps I do not want to? Perhaps I am deceiving myself? Well, I have no strength!!! I do have strength, but not for what is needed.

I think a person looks very foolish when, having so much light, he chooses darkness; having so much delicious food, he prefers dry crackers; having Christ, he goes to satan.

And what can the Holy Spirit do for those who reject all His appeals, convictions, counsels, and requests? What can God give to people who turn their backs on Him? How else can He convince me of His Love if I reject it?

What bad thing will happen if I begin to ask for and receive Love? Changes will begin. My old views and stereotypes will collapse. I will have to forgive everyone, reconsider everything, and remove many things. All my sins will be mercilessly exposed and will appear in their most repulsive form. My carnal

thoughts and feelings will begin to leave me, and I will never again be able to make use of them. I will see how wonderful and wise God is and how greatly He respects my freedom. I will have new friends who will respond to my Love in the same way. Happiness will tug at my heart and deprive me of sadness and anxiety. My whole life will turn into a battlefield where I will be an absolute victor through God's strength. The peace of God will become my barometer. And this is only the beginning of those heavenly adventures that will fill my life with light and peace. And consider for yourselves whether all this is worth acquiring in exchange for the vanity and vainglory that feed pride and carnal pleasures.

How else can God convince me that Salvation in Christ is better than this entire sinking world? If He Himself has come and offers Himself, then perhaps it is still better to accept this Gift?

The end of all things is rapidly approaching. God is acting. His army of angels is in full combat readiness. Love is open and accessible to everyone. Whoever thirsts, come and drink. The doors of grace are still open. Jesus is asking to be your Friend, and together with Himself He will bring the Father and His Spirit. There has never been a time like this. All Heaven waits in suspense to see what I will choose. And I turn on social media and watch my friends' stories?

Homework 195

1. What interesting things were revealed to you in this lesson?
2. What is God's plan for preparing us for Eternity?
3. What strategy and power does satan have in these last days?
4. Will God send a New prophet with an explanation of a new way of Salvation or with a new message to the church?
5. What is the power and special quality of the Love that God counsels Laodicea to acquire in these last days?
6. What happens to me when I receive Love?
7. Is it worthwhile for me to study the symbols of the message to Laodicea?
8. Please read Revelation 3:18-22; Daniel 7:13-14; Hebrews 9:14; Romans 5:2-5; Revelation 18:4-5; James 2:3-6; 1 John

2:15; Revelation 12:17; 14:8; Isaiah 44:3; 45:8; 47:10-11;
John 16:11; Revelation 21:6 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 196. The Point of No Return

There is such a concept as the point of no return. It is the moment when it is no longer possible to change, correct, or prevent something. All that remains is to go all the way and see what will happen next.

Much has been said and written about Love. God calls everyone and waits for each person to make a decision so that the Lord may act according to that person's choice. When a man proposes marriage and starting a family to his beloved, his further actions are determined solely by the woman's decision. Yes or no. 'Yes' sounds brief and clear, while a refusal may be presented as a postponement for a long time or as a lengthy answer whose meaning is that she needs to think and decide. Of course, time is given for reflection and prayer, but if there is no decision, that too is an answer—a negative answer. But if the bride has chosen another man and started a family with him, then it is no longer possible to change anything.

What will happen to me if, after hearing the voice of Christ, Who desires to enter my life and have a special relationship with me, I delay my answer?

Let us consider how events may unfold.

By and large, nothing will change. I will continue to pray, study the Bible, and attend meetings. In time, my problems and difficulties will be resolved. God will not stop answering my prayers and protecting me. But day after day, I will see routine in every area of my life. I will develop a desire for something greater, but only for something that will allow me not to stand out from the crowd.

Stories of other people's experiences and victories will gladden and inspire me, but they too will become routine because they will change nothing in my life. I am so accustomed to this course of events. I know nothing else, I cannot change anything, and I do not want to.

But life goes on, different times come, and the prophecies about the end of earth's history are fulfilled. Yet I cannot understand where I am in all these events. But when I look at my fellow believers and see that they are the same as I am, I calm down and continue living. It is true that some reformers in the church are very annoying with their revelations. They are constantly calling people to something and pointing something out. They simply cannot live quietly. They also keep talking about some special Love that can be received. When I see their deeds, then I will listen. Yet even the actions of these people no longer impress me, because that is their experience, while things are not so simple for me. Meanwhile, time is flying swiftly.

And now the approach of the end is already very clearly visible; images and symbols have become reality. I now understand that the forces of evil have entered the final battle and will not turn back. I see what the image and mark of the beast are and how people receive them. I realize what God wants from me and cry out for help, but I experience nothing. With my mind I understand the need for change, but my heart is far from it. I have become accustomed to living and believing, and it has become a habit, and now it is difficult to correct anything. I am traveling along my own rails, and I cannot change anything. Whatever I attempt, everything returns to my usual habits. And there is no peace in my heart.

All those whom I considered fanatics have scattered and gone into the world or started their own movements, but some of them who remained in the church amaze me with the purity of their speech and lives and with their clarity of mind. They are different—true Christians—and in character they greatly remind me of Jesus. I turn to them with questions about what I should do, but they look at me sadly and say that they cannot help me in any way, that it is already very late, that I have missed something extremely important, and now it is irretrievably gone. I ask them to teach me Love—how to receive it and how to put it into practice—but they point to the Seller, being unable to give me anything themselves.

I cry out to Heaven, but there is no answer and no peace; anxiety and despair dwell in my heart. I pray to Jesus, but in response I get the impression that He does not know me. In search of a comforting word from God, I travel to every possible meeting and visit various channels on the internet, yet I do not find what I need so much. I fall into despair and begin to search earnestly for comfort, but there is none. I remember all the opportunities that were presented to me before and see that I missed something very important, but I do not know how to bring it back. I weep, fear, and pray, but the anxiety does not leave. What will happen next? I understand what lies ahead, and I tremble even more. I begin to look for those who are to blame, and I find them. And in my indignation against these people, I find temporary comfort. How could they, having so much light, keep it from me?! I see that I am beginning to lose control of myself because I so badly want to punish the guilty. I look around and understand that I am not the only one like this, that everything in the world has changed. Everyone seems to have gone mad. They look for the guilty and punish them. It is true that those special people from the church have disappeared somewhere; apparently, they have finally moved away from the cities. I heard that some of them were imprisoned for extremism. It serves them right. Death all around has become commonplace and is no longer frightening. Food is more difficult to obtain now, but for the time being I am surviving on my reserves. I made it through another day, and that is good enough. And God, in Whom I believed so firmly, has abandoned me, but that is all right; I can manage without Him. I have seen worse than this. Somehow we will break through. Emptiness. But anxiety can be numbed with alcohol or with something stronger. Why did I attend church for so long? What has it brought me to? It would have been better if I had known nothing and lived peacefully. Everyone around me is sick and dying. And some kind of sores have appeared on me as well.

And then something indescribable happened. I see Him—the One in Whom I believed, to Whom I prayed. He is approaching on the clouds, and so many angels are with Him. They are drawing closer and closer. What a glorious sight! Jesus did not

deceive us; He has come! My mind becomes clear. Suddenly I remember everything—everything I knew about Him. I remember His gentle voice, His offer to become my Friend, and His instructions. I cannot remain standing and fall to my knees, gazing upon the King of Kings. Our eyes meet, my mind is illuminated, and I understand that I am lost forever, for all Eternity, and that nothing can ever be restored. I made my choice, and I am lost forever. And I agree with this sentence. In the eyes of Jesus I find no condemnation, and that gaze makes me want to hide. Oh, if only a rock would fall upon me and crush me! I hear the Voice: ‘Awake, you who sleep in darkness!!!’

Cries of joy sound all around. The earth opens, and people in bright garments come out of it and fly upward. I recognize many of them and am astonished. They seemed so strange during their lives, but they proved to be overcomers. I look, and I can hardly believe it. I could have been with these people. I am terrified. What will happen to me? But I see the fiery gaze of Christ, lose consciousness, and see nothing more. I simply cease to live.

This is not the end the Lord desires to see. He longs to meet a joyful person who will cry out, ‘Hosanna!!! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord!!!’ And now He has come to prepare each of us personally for this event.

How His soul longs to take everyone to Himself, to grant us Eternity, and always to look upon us with delight.

Love is that bond of emotional and spiritual attachment which forever joins my heart to Jesus, giving Him the right to be my Husband. By choosing Agape Love, I give Christ my consent to His proposal to be my Lord forever. And nothing will ever separate us or separate me from the Love of God.

Love is an open door for God in the home of my heart. It is the free access of His Spirit to every area of my life. It is joy and peace in every situation.

Love also has a point of no return, and it is called: ‘I choose Love.’

Homework 196

1. Was anything important revealed to you in this lesson?
2. Do you believe that there are moments in people's lives when irreversible processes begin?
3. Is it possible to remain neutral while considering God's proposals?
4. What happens to those who do not give their consent to God's counsels and appeals?
5. Do you believe that Jesus addresses the world through His people as well?
6. Where does the path toward the point of no return begin? How can we choose the right direction?
7. Will a good God punish this world, for which He gave His Son, and especially those who bear His Name, even though they are disobedient? After all, He is Love!
8. Please read Hebrews 10:26-29; Hebrews 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Genesis 6:5; Isaiah 1:3-6, 16-20; Revelation 22:11-12 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 197. Rumors of Wars

War or military conflict is something we constantly hear about. Unfortunately, our world cannot live in peace and harmony. Armed clashes constantly take place in which souls perish and innocent people suffer. I believe that the instigator of all wars is satan and his army of fallen angels.

Throughout my life, I have witnessed many military conflicts in which I did not take part, but I listened to other people's opinions about them and expressed my own.

There is a common rule in every war. My compatriots are always right, my heart is always on their side, and it constantly justifies them, even if they commit vile and abhorrent deeds. This rule must be taken into account, and one must be very careful when expressing one's point of view.

When I hear about a war on another continent, it is so uninteresting to me that I regret spending my time learning the details. But the closer this conflict is to my Homeland, the more it begins to affect me as well. And when it happens in my country, I plunge into it completely and try to understand what the problem is. And, of course, the news announcer tells me all the truth I need to hear and forms in me the mindset I am supposed to have. The image of a very evil enemy, who must be hated and killed, is revealed to me in all its fullness. I am shown bloody scenes and told about the enemy's atrocities, his cruelty, and the violence he commits against my people. And this has its effect on my mind, and I begin to believe everything I am told, because I see and hear real things and facts.

There is a great deal of death, cruelty, robbery, and treachery in war. War is an official way to kill, rape, plunder, steal, deceive, and commit other abominations with impunity under the cover of good intentions.

Does God know about these earthly wars? Of course. He has lived through every battle and conflict that has taken place on Earth, and for Him this is not something new but another

opportunity to save people from death and calamity and to draw souls to the Savior.

When war begins, everyone tries to find the right answer to the question, 'What should I do?' And when they have had their fill of satan's reports about the work he has done, they go to God with their questions and find an answer and comfort in Jesus. How many wives and mothers at this time offer prayers for their husbands and sons, asking the Lord to preserve these souls from death and injury. And the Lord performs miracles. He manifests His supernatural power to save from death and sin.

But most of all at this time, God desires to give people peace. He tries to reach their hearts before they believe satan and follow him, inflamed by his lies and spirit.

Being a believer in God and living in peace during a war is very difficult and, at times, dangerous. For you may be regarded as a traitor, since if you are not with us, then you are against us. But a believer understands that his thoughts and feelings must be crystal clear; they cannot be defiled by the world. And this is worth fighting for. But there is war all around, and innocent blood is being shed. How can one remain calm when one's enemy plans to kill him and does so with particular brazenness and cruelty?

I have lived through military conflicts that were geographically very close to me, and I know what people say and think at such a time. And how painful it is to hear my God being asked why He allowed this. What can I say to these unfortunate people who have been deceived by satan and therefore accuse God of every evil? There is an answer to this question as well. Freedom implies not only the possibility of choosing the right path but also the possibility of choosing evil. And if a person prefers friendship with the world, then God respects his decision and allows the world to draw people into its wars and destroy them.

War provokes people to the basest thoughts and feelings, and this influence is enormous and destructive to the soul. After all, many who do not hold weapons in their hands become

accomplices to crimes simply by approving this evil in their souls. But evil must be resisted.

And the only way to resist it in wartime is to have unconditional Love and constantly live in such a state of mind. Love? Yes, Love! And nothing else will help, nor has anything else been provided. But how, and whom, can one love at a time when children are dying and blood is being shed?

In the life of Jesus, we see an example of the right attitude. He lived during the Roman occupation, when the Romans were not especially friendly but behaved as masters, regarding everyone as their slaves and doing whatever they wanted and considered right. But Jesus did not condemn their behavior even by a hint. He remained outside politics and taught the people the principles of His Kingdom, calling them to civil obedience until earthly laws came into conflict with God's laws.

Jesus assured us that we would likewise perish, as did the innocent victims, unless we repented of our sins. And this warning is worth heeding.

The time will soon come when everyone will be at war, and all nations will be drawn into this spirit of war. Speaking about Love at that time will become inappropriate, and living in Love will be mortally dangerous. I will be regarded as a traitor to my people if I love my enemies according to the commandment.

But it is worth loving. It is necessary. This is the most proper spirit at all times.

What will I resolve by my hatred and indignation while sitting on the couch in front of the television or in the kitchen with friends? Absolutely nothing. I did not start the war, and I will not end it. But will this spirit harm my soul? To the fullest extent. With such thoughts and feelings, I will lose the right to Eternal Life. I will become unfit for life among holy beings, although in this world I may be proclaimed a national hero and an outstanding public figure and thinker. But God has His own view of the deliverance of the soul. He saves me not in sin but from sin. Nothing unclean will enter Heaven.

Love knows how to behave at all times. It hears of rumors of wars but is not troubled. When I first encounter this, I may fall, seduced by the charms of the deceiver, accepting the spirit of war and hatred toward the enemy; but Love shows me a better way and raises me from this filth. It sets my feet upon the firm foundation of Love and friendliness and teaches me to act according to God's principles. And God preserves my soul from all evil.

And it is worth understanding correctly, even now, the expectations and requirements of God's law and God's Love. While I am alive, something can still be changed and brought into harmony with the standards of the Almighty. And while there is no war, I am learning to know Love and to introduce its principles into my life. But the test will come.

I came to believe in Christ while living in Yugoslavia, when there was a war between Serbia and Croatia. I saw the suffering of the Croatian people and understood their spirit, but the Lord placed me among loving people who told me about Christ and revealed His Love through their lives. These were people born in Serbia but living in Croatia. It was very difficult for them at that time, but they judged no one. They tried to reveal God's Love for people to me and pointed me to the Savior. And they succeeded. I was born again during a war. And now there is peace. But the war for my soul continues. I choose Love—this is my weapon and protection for all my remaining days. And this is a more excellent way.

Homework 197

1. Did you learn anything useful for your soul in this lesson?
2. Are you familiar with this spirit of war and hatred toward the enemy?
3. In what other ways can you preserve yourself from evil in an atmosphere of rumors of wars?
4. How can you help those who are possessed by hatred toward their enemies?
5. How did John the Baptist behave toward the Roman soldiers?
6. Will peace in our countries last forever?

7. Why does God restrain the winds of war?
8. Are there wars from God as punishment or deliverance?
9. Please read Luke 3:14; 13:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Revelation 7:1-3; 2 Chronicles 20:15; Psalm 27:3; Matthew 5:9, 44, 48; 24:6; Luke 21:9; Revelation 12:7; 1 Corinthians 6:10-12; Proverbs 20:18; 24:6; 21:31 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 198. A Time of Crisis

A crisis is approaching—the crisis of the last days. It will be a special period that, for some, will become a time when their hearts fail them for fear; for others, a time to become even more defiled; for some, the end of all plans and a complete collapse; for others, the anticipation of interesting events; and for the rest, the end of earthly suffering and the expectation of the Second Coming.

Absolutely everyone who understands that everything happening in the world is deliberately leading us toward a global catastrophe already believes in this event called the 'global crisis.' Nature responds to people's careless attitude toward its protection with cataclysms and natural disasters. The world of money has tied itself to the dollar, which is simply worth nothing but is artificially upheld by every country as something valuable, and it is printed nonstop around the clock to pay for all kinds of services and to buy the freedom of nations and people thirsting for enrichment.

Weapons capable of destroying the entire planet several times over are being produced in the world, and one day this military machine will be set in motion.

Diseases, epidemics, and viruses have adapted to the situation and no longer respond to medicines, carrying millions of lives to the grave.

Civilized humanity has become satiated with an abundance of varied information and is losing its taste for life and its sense of meaning.

And everyone understands that the world cannot last long this way. But no one knows what will happen.

But the most interesting thing is that God, through His messengers, also foretells the coming of the final crisis, which no one will escape; many people will perish in this troubled time, and only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will be saved. Encountering this time is inevitable. And

protection will be given only to those who now choose God as their Lord and obedience to God's law as their principle of life. The crisis will reveal all who have built their house of faith upon a firm foundation with strong materials.

When a house is built, engineers calculate every possible load on the structure of the building and provide instructions for the builders so that they understand which material to choose and how firmly to bind the parts of the structure together, so that everything will stand and withstand the external load during any natural disaster.

God is also preparing His people for the coming events of the last days. He offers all His thoughtful and thirsting children something special that will protect them during the crisis. And in all His gifts He offers Himself, desiring to have a special personal relationship with His children and to teach them to love one another with the true Love that they do not possess. He commanded that all His disciples have agape Love among themselves and believe in the power of God's promises, so that they would ask Him to fulfill those promises in each person's life.

God desires His people in the last days to possess agape Love, and Jesus counsels us to buy from Him special treasures that will make us rich, clothe us, and open our eyes. To tell Him that this is uninteresting or that there is no time for it is equivalent to spiritual suicide. For if God counsels something, it is worth listening first and then doing it. However, He does not simply give His gifts indiscriminately to everyone. He agrees only to an exchange of equal value. This testifies that I will not receive God's treasures automatically as an addition to my salvation. I must give something for them. And if I have no interest in this, the Lord will spew me out of His mouth—or, more precisely, vomit me out. Consequently, my entire holy life will be so repulsive to Him that He will want nothing to do with me, and then He will declare to me that He never knew me. Such words will truly be dreadful to hear and experience.

My salvation has been appointed for me by God, and He is the Author of my deliverance from the power of sin and death.

Jesus becomes my personal Teacher and Mentor. And He is more interested in saving me than I am. He has everything necessary for this, but without my consent God will do nothing, except that He will wait for me to understand this and show interest. God loves me and desires that I live—and live forever, live with Him in my heart. And He dreams of me: that when I learn the beauty of His character, I will love Him with all my soul, desire to learn still more about Him, and tell the whole world about Him. With what anticipation the Father awaits the opportunity to open His arms, take me into them, carry me, boast of me, and give me all the riches of Heaven so that I may possess them even in this life. How simple, how accessible, how near, and how interesting it all is!

Do I thirst for this relationship? Do I desire to have such a Friend? Do I need His precious goods?

For a time, I worked in trade, studied the market, and examined the interests and needs of buyers. And I noticed that if people do not need something, you cannot sell it to them for any amount of money; but if you present it as something good and useful and advertise it, they take your goods and willingly pay for them. And when a person needs something very much, he comes to you himself and asks you to bring the product and sell it to him. At times, a person is ready to pay even more than it costs.

Our love for one another and our conversations about it are the very best advertisement for God's goods, which He counsels us to buy from Him. And if a thirst to possess these treasures of Heaven arises in me, I will be ready to pay any price to acquire them. But if I am not interested in this, I do not need it even as a gift. I will not even want to spend my time understanding what these Heavenly treasures mean and why I need them, for I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing without them. Or do you think that my life with God has been in vain and that I have learned nothing? Are you not viewing me with excessive prejudice? Do you think that I suffered for the Name of Jesus in vain and learned nothing through these trials?

A peach tree grows in my garden. When it was small, I rejoiced over one peach a year, and then two. Afterward, for several years in a row, the tree produced such an abundant harvest that its branches even broke under the weight of the fruit. But lately the peach tree has stopped bearing fruit and, despite my care, produces only leaves. I am very sorry, but I have cut it down, and I will plant a new tree in its place. I remembered how delicious the peaches used to be, but the plant occupied space, was diseased, and infected other trees. The decision to remove it was made and carried out.

Friends, I am afraid to say this, but I have a sense that many of God's children will be spewed out of His mouth because of their ignorance and unwillingness to accept God's blessings and buy what He counsels.

And what will such people do during the crisis? They will simply fall and not rise again. They will be lost forever. You may be among them! My worth is determined not by who I was in the past, but by who I am now, who I will become as I continue to grow, and what fruit I have today. The Love that I receive and give today is the best testimony of my life with God. My holiness today speaks better than any words; my thoughts and feelings this day give me the right to life. And the experience of past years supports me in my choices today and helps me avoid many mistakes.

Please, friends, do not pass by the Merchant in the message to Laodicea.

Homework 198

1. What useful things did you gain from this lesson?
2. What is a crisis? Do you believe that it is coming?
3. How can one prepare for the time of crisis?
4. Will I be under God's special protection in the last days?
What does this depend on?
5. Who do I need to be, and what do I need to possess, during the testing of my faith?

6. What should I do if I currently have no interest in God's Laodicean plan, yet I want to be an overcomer during the time of trouble?
7. I love God, but will He truly spew me out simply because I was engaged in another ministry and had no time to learn about the message to Laodicea?
8. Will all my Christian experience be taken into account if I bear no fruit at the end of time?
9. Please read Ezekiel 18:20; Daniel 12:1; Psalm 9:9, 21; 139:23-24; Jeremiah 15:11; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Mark 11:13-14, 20; Luke 13:6-9; John 15:1-2 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 199. And You Still Talk About Love!

As I come to know God's Love and discover all its depth, power, and beauty, I fill my mind with new revelations about this amazing state of the human soul united with Divine influence. With my mind I understand that this science surpasses my conceptions, yet at the same time it opens itself to me and absorbs me with its tenderness and depth. I enter the dark waters of an unexplored ocean, and a bright light is kindled in my life, illuminating everything and everyone.

And as a result of coming to know the Divine character in my practical life, I begin to share with others what I receive from above. And this fire cannot be contained.

Love is an entirely new teaching for me, one that does not fit into my stereotypes and bursts the old wineskins of my ideas and understanding. Yet it is close to a person and can fully coexist with his mind, influencing his thoughts and feelings very naturally and skillfully.

I love. I do not come to this understanding at once. But as I see how God's power works within me and draws me toward good, bearing all things and enduring all things, I notice its constancy and immutability. And I gain the courage to tell my loved ones about it. And my calling leads me to see them begin to look at me with particular interest. In their view, I am some kind of abnormal person, because it is not customary to speak about love aloud.

After all, this is something personal, and it should be hidden from the eyes of strangers. No one should display it openly.

But I am simply bursting with it. And so I have told others what is happening to me and that I can no longer hold it back: I love, and it is so wonderful! It is better for me to be beaten for love than for my inborn selfishness. And I begin to speak about it wherever I consider it necessary and appropriate.

Love does not deprive me of reason, and it is obedient to my choice. It does not terrorize my thoughts. But it loves to act and

to permeate everything around it, cleansing hearts and souls. And it begins this transformation with me.

It is such a joy to love! I had never imagined myself in such a role. I study the Bible and see how much is written there about love—sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. And I understand that this is not my human invention, but God's profound plan, which has begun to unfold and be fulfilled in my life and, through me, has become known to other people as well. And since this is from God, it is also something important for my salvation. And I understand this too.

Nothing washes my sinful heart so quickly and thoroughly as God's Love, which proceeds from the One Who Is Love and Who shed His Blood so that I might live and love. In this sacrifice at Calvary I see unconditional Love for me, so that by coming to know it I may learn to love my loved ones and strangers unselfishly.

And I resolve to love; I gather courage and begin to speak about it aloud. And I understand that I have chosen a very interesting path and attitude toward people, and that now I will not be able to turn back and renounce what I have said, but must only move forward and continue to love. And at first I am afraid. For I know how my words will be received by those who know me very well. And that is exactly what happens. In response, I see smirks and crooked smiles, as if to say, 'Go on, go on; now we will put you in your place and show you what a hypocrite you are.'

But Love does not let me fall flat on my face and works miracles in my life. It goes ahead of my words and transforms the hearts of my loved ones. I watch and marvel. But though I am open to Love and even understand to some extent what it is, I cannot say that my friends understand everything in the same way. Therefore, I am ready for anything.

And now the first step has been taken. I have set out on a path that is new to me, and I resolve to walk along it. I ask God to bless me in Love and to be with me and in me. And the Lord answers. And I learn.

But I still have bad habits and a little train of old ambitions trailing behind me and greatly hindering me. I managed to disguise some of the cars and give them a respectable appearance, while others had to be uncoupled and left behind forever. And I travel through life with this load, not even suspecting that I have it. When I roll downhill, these little cars push me along, and I do not feel them; but when I have to go uphill, the whole load falls upon my shoulders, and the Lord decides to help me. He exposes my sins, and I fall into despair.

And my loved ones, as though they had only been waiting for this, sneer with delight: 'And you say that you love!!!' And I am ashamed and have nothing to say. But I truly do love and can no longer renounce it. I have become different, though outwardly I am the same, and to my friends I am still the same person. I go to Jesus, and He receives me, assures me of His Love, and asks me to keep going. And I go. Once again Love overflows within me, and once again I speak about it. My old sins have passed into the past; they are no longer in my life, but the memory of them remains.

And once again I assure my loved ones of my love for them.

But I have my own understanding of Love, and they have theirs. I base all my thoughts and feelings on the Bible, comparing my life with the life of Christ and with God's accounts; but I cannot know what my friends build upon until they tell me.

And then, once again, I am walking with my friend along the road of life, and we come to a crossroads where I see my path and my decision, while my friend holds different views. I continue onward, and in response I hear, 'And you still talk about Love!' It seems that my friend had only been waiting for the moment when he could say this to me. And if I had committed a sin, I would burn with shame; but I hear the reproach and try to understand how well-founded it is.

I see that this statement is based not on my failures, but on his incorrect understanding of what Love is. And I calmly continue on, asking Jesus, 'Is this so, Lord?' And He shows me His hands

and says that this is how the world treats Love, so I should not be surprised at anything.

And I resolve to continue loving—to love always, to love eternally—and I call upon all of God’s power to support this decision. The Lord does not expect me to produce this within myself. It simply is not in me. And God applies His authority to my decisions, and together we walk through my life. I am in Him, and He is in me. It is so joyful and interesting! I love and speak about it, and God works in me both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

And I am no longer ashamed to love. I speak about it openly and see this power within me, how it comes from God at the right time to overcome and establish me in this victory. I love. Does anyone want to have such a strange friend? But this is real, and I have no intention of parting with it.

If anyone offered all the treasures of the world for Love, he would be rejected. But I give it freely, just because. And if it is pure and from the heart, then it does not matter to me what others say or think. I look at Christ, and His approving smile is greater to me than every reward.

Love does not contradict truth and the law, but establishes me in them. Yet sometimes one must act not only mercifully, but justly as well. In that case, I expect the reproach: ‘And you still talk about Love!’ But what else can I talk about if my heart is burning and desires to love? It is only in Love that there is a way out and a solution to many questions and problems.

And I also want to teach this to others. I resolve to try this as well. I wonder what they will say in response. ‘And you even teach others to love!’

Homework 199

1. What did you understand from this lesson?
2. Should I be afraid of people’s opinions about my love?
3. How should we understand the words of Luke 6:26: ‘Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did

their fathers to the false prophets'? Does this apply to loving people?

4. Do you expect everyone to agree with you in response to your love and to glorify God because of you?
5. Have you heard reproaches directed at you in response to your love?
6. What should I do if these reproaches have thrown me off course?
7. What awaits those who choose the path of Love in spite of everything?
8. Please read Matthew 5:10-12, 14-16; 7:16-20; 9:17; Zechariah 13:6; Romans 8:28; 10:10; 1 Corinthians 2:9; James 1:25-26; Luke 12:4-5; 1 Peter 2:19-24; 3:14; 4:19; 5:7, 10-11 in the light of our lesson.

Lesson 200. The Mind of Love

If a poor person who has barely made ends meet all his life is given a million dollars, it is quite possible that after some time he will become poor again, although there are exceptions.

If a millionaire who has learned how to earn his millions is deprived of all his savings, it is highly likely that after some time he will once again become the owner of a new fortune. But there may be exceptions.

If a worldly person who is engrossed in corrupting his own flesh and the flesh of those close to him is placed among chaste people, it is quite possible that after some time he will not become purer, but that society, or some of the people with whom he associates, will become corrupted or encounter serious problems. But there may be exceptions.

If a spiritual person who builds his life upon fellowship with God and has devoted his whole life to it is placed among people who live according to the flesh, it is quite possible that he will preserve his faith in God, become even purer amid this trial, and turn the hearts of many to God, or at least help them to think. But there may be exceptions.

If a person whom God has taught to love and who receives strength from Him daily for love is placed among people whom he does not know at all, it is quite likely that after some time he will love them all and become their friend, and perhaps someone will begin to respond to him in the same way. But they may also reject him.

If we try to understand why a physician chose his profession, we will see that he acquired knowledge of how the human body is made, why a person becomes ill, and what can be done to help him. A physician has the mind of a physician. He has the right to treat people, and this work can be entrusted to him.

Let us speak about a police officer. He has been trained to be one and has the mind of a police officer. This work can be entrusted to him.

And a professional musician knows musical notes, can distinguish them, and can play them. He is able to teach others to do this. He can even give a concert because he has the mind of a musician.

An Olympic competitor has the mind of an athlete. A professional criminal has the mind of a criminal. The president of a country is endowed with the mind of a leader.

I have given these illustrations so that we may pay attention to the fact that a person's mind and consciousness determine how he will live, what he will do, who he will become, what he will possess, and what influence he will have upon those close to him.

There is a proverb that says existence determines consciousness. There may be some truth in this. But I would like to clarify this saying: consciousness and the mind determine existence.

The book of Proverbs contains this statement: 'As a man thinketh, so is he.'

My mind is the place and the prize for which heavenly and satanic forces contend with one another. Whoever gains possession of my mind will also possess my will; I will serve and worship him, and I will become like him.

The mind seeks knowledge. If a poor person is taught the law of multiplying capital, the laws of conducting business, and the way the world of money works, he will think like a wealthy person and may apply his knowledge in life and become wealthier.

If a carnal person decides to turn to God, repent, study God's law and the plan of Salvation, and takes steps in this direction, then God receives him, forgives him, cleanses him, and begins to teach him. And the former sinner receives the way of thinking of a righteous person, becoming submissive to God's will and obedient to His law.

The sinner becomes holy and righteous in his mind. He thinks about how to please God and make those close to him happier.

His mind is set upon good, and he no longer wants to live any other way. Although the paths back to his former life always remain open, he chooses life with God.

The teaching of a particular religious denomination shapes the consciousness of its members and makes them adherents of that denomination. These people are certain that they have the truth and possess the fullness of light. They very rarely change their convictions, but pass their knowledge from generation to generation.

But the mind seeks truth in God and discovers it in Jesus and in the Word of God. And the seeking soul finds the source of grace and truth.

Every good and true knowledge leads a person to Love. It is the summit of God's mountain of His revelations, visible to absolutely all believers; yet for many it becomes inaccessible because they believe that it is impossible to climb to such a height and that it is not even worth making an effort to reach this goal. At the same time, these people see some boldly ascending, conquering new expanses of Love, and calling everyone to join them. But the closer the ascending person comes to the summit of God's mountain, the more faintly his voice is heard by those at the foot who, in their ignorance, do not even attempt to climb the mountain. Nor do they want to. Their minds are set upon earthly goals. They achieve them and rejoice.

But the Lord offers: 'Come up into the mountain; love one another, and there, at the summit of this mountain, lay down your lives for one another, devote yourselves to service, and be faithful unto death.'

Love is also a mind; it is the way of thinking of a righteous person; it is submission and obedience to God's will and law. It is wisdom descending from above to raise to the summit of knowledge those who want, thirst, and seek it.

Love makes any person loving and causes him to think about loving those close to him. It takes such possession of the consciousness that it becomes the soul of a person, while being

the soul of God. The human and the Divine are united in the believer, and he now becomes a partaker of the Divine nature while remaining human.

Love changes everything in my heart, and it does not stop at what has already been achieved, but draws me forward toward new discoveries and victories. And after conquering another summit, I see that this was only an introduction to ascending other heights whose existence I had not even suspected. And who will understand me in my joy? Who will share my discoveries and victories with me? Only those who look to Jesus with faith and do not become content with small achievements, but climb upward, desiring to conquer new summits and acquire the mind of Christ. And they receive that for which they have striven.

We are all approaching the final battle, which is called Armageddon, where Love and every kind of deception and delusion will meet face to face. And Love will gain the victory, for it does not know how to lose and knows no defeat. Truth will triumph, although all its heralds will be sentenced to death by the world; but God will arise in defense of His people and bring this conflict to an end through His glorious Coming and the establishment of the Eternal Kingdom of Love.

And there all the saved will see new summits and opportunities that they will surely conquer, for God Himself will be their God.

Let us honestly answer these questions for ourselves. To whom does my mind belong? Whose am I? Do I love? Do I have the mind of Love? Can I say of myself that I have the mind of Christ?

Love is God's work in my consciousness, and God knows how to impress upon my heart that which will benefit me and bring glory to Him. He does this in response to my thirst for Love, to my desire to love.

Friendship with God forms the mind of God's friend, and Love establishes me in this condition forever. I will remain this way even if this world deprives me of everything. And God will feed me every morning. And I will love eternally.

Homework 200

1. What interesting things were revealed in this lesson?
2. Why is it so important to place your will in God's hands?
3. How does a sinner become holy?
4. What prevents many believers from attaining Love?
5. What changes does Love produce in a person's heart?

Do I have the mind of Christ?

1. What forms the mind of God within you?
2. Why is it important to understand to whom my mind belongs?
3. What will the final battle between good and evil be fought over?
4. Please read Psalm 119:97-105; Ezekiel 2:8; 3:3; Revelation 10:10-11; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 12, 15-16; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 3:17-18; Romans 8:5-10; 12:1-2; 11:32-36 in the light of our lesson.