

School of Agape love (volume 5)

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Lesson 201. The Church

There was a time when I understood the church to be a place where people could come to watch a service, listen to singing, and pray before icons. And a church absolutely had to have domes, preferably gilded ones. I associated the concept of the church with a religious building. I could not imagine anything else bearing this name. I regarded any religious gathering of people outside a church building as a sect, and the people in those gatherings as sectarians. But the Lord decided to reveal to me the true meaning of this term and establish me upon the foundation of His Church.

For the first time in my life, I crossed the threshold of a church when I was fifteen. When my classmates and I were skipping classes, they suggested that we go into the Alexander Nevsky Lavra and look at the believers. I thought that there were no such people in our country, but I went with them. I was very surprised that admission was free and that no one checked us or drove us out. I walked around the church and looked at the icons, trying to understand where God was depicted on them. I did not intend to believe in anything, but I began to treat this place with reverence. There was a theological seminary nearby, and its students wore clothing that was strange for that time, which made us laugh.

But the time came when my understanding of the church changed radically. I began studying the Bible and understood that the church is an assembly of people united by faith in Jesus Christ. This understanding was revolutionary for me. I suddenly realized that the church is not tied to a particular building, but exists wherever like-minded believers in Jesus Christ gather. Yet as I continued studying the Word of God, I saw that Christ had a plan to establish His worldwide Church, of which He Himself would be the Head. In His love for this people, the Church is even compared to the Bride of Christ, which speaks of a very close relationship with the Lord.

By virtue of having been baptized, I was an Orthodox Christian, but I did not understand what that meant. My mother told me

that she had baptized me in infancy and that from then on I was a believer. I found this amusing, and until the age of twenty-one I considered myself an atheist and was proud of it.

But a life of sin brought no peace, and I began to wonder whether God existed. Fortunately, I learned that He does and that He has a plan for me as well.

When I was starting a family, I decided to go through a church wedding ceremony. I was surprised by the minister's requirements, but I fulfilled all of them, and we were married in the church. I had never experienced a more boring and incomprehensible event, although I understood that it was better to have it than not to have it. In the movies, everything had been different.

While attending Orthodox churches, I did not even understand that the Church is a family and that it means very personal and spiritual relationships with fellow believers. I did not see this in the places I attended, and it never even occurred to me that I had brothers and sisters in the faith. No one tried to get acquainted with me, much less become my friend.

But the Lord sent me light. I received the book *The Great Controversy* as a gift and learned what the true Church is, as well as its history, its apostasy, and its reformation. I understood that God has a people who are very close-knit, have close relationships, and love one another. This was very strange for me to learn, because my stereotypes about the church were firmly established and I did not want to change anything. Nevertheless, I decided to find these people and see whether this was really so, and I began searching.

By that time, in 1993, I had come to believe in Christ as my Savior, and I rejoiced greatly in this, but I did not know what to do with it or how to live from then on. I began asking God to show me the community in which I could find like-minded believers. I met people who, like me, studied the Bible, although they did not obey everything written in it, despite being very close-knit. After three months of fellowship, I could no longer attend that gathering, because I saw that they did not

live according to the commandments and sometimes behaved as if possessed during their meetings. I could not share their teaching, which contradicted the Word of God, and I left them.

I wanted to find the community that keeps God's commandments and has faith in Jesus. I already knew where they gathered, but I was very cautious because I did not want to fall into another sect. During this period of searching, my wife and I moved to Germany, where we live to this day.

In search of my spiritual family, I visited every place of worship in my area. When I found those who showed an interest in us, I began attending their worship services. A year later, I decided to be baptized so that I could become a full member of the Body of Christ.

From Scripture, I already understood that the Church is the Body of Christ and that we are all its members, each having a particular duty and function. Every member does his or her part, building this temple and being a living stone in this structure. Even in conducting this School, together with my brothers and sisters, I am participating in our common work—fulfilling Christ's mission and preparing a people for His Second Coming. He will come for His Bride, who is all of us, friends, united by love for one another, faith in Jesus, and biblical truth, and forming the living Body of Christ.

And now we unite with our brothers and sisters in the faith for worship, fellowship, the study of the Word of God, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, service to all humanity, and the proclamation of the Good News throughout the world. This is the Church of Christ in all its varied functions and expressions. We understand in Whom we believe, Whom we serve, and Whom we worship. We are all different, but in Christ we are one. We have a common mission, but each person contributes according to his or her understanding and abilities. Some grow quickly, while others have stopped growing, but we are alive, and God accepts us when we come to Him.

The Church of Christ is the most stable unit of society. It has passed through every earthly crisis, regime, and trial and has

preserved its purity and its teaching. During this time, it experienced many divisions and apostasies, and the enemy of souls created many counterfeits that possess part of the truth and their own version of what is right, but mix these with errors. They have a form of godliness, but they do not have love.

The Church of God is the foundation of faith and the home for the soul of a follower of Christ who will meet the Lord at His triumphant return. It will stand before Him as a glorious Church that has remained faithful throughout all ages, redeemed by His blood, having neither spot nor blemish—holy and blameless.

I am very glad that God has placed me upon the foundation of this faith and established me in this understanding.

I also understand that love is the most beautiful adornment of the Church of Christ and the finest testimony about God to this world and to all Heaven.

Agape love for God and for one another is what binds us together into one living organism that lives, breathes, and acts in this world according to God's will and God's plan.

God did not intend for me to be alone in my spiritual growth and development. We are God's garden; we are branches on His vine and olive tree. We are all nourished by Him; in Him we live and exist. We have fellowship and relationships with our Lord and with one another. And this plan of God is at work.

Eternity has its own laws, and they are already at work in God's Church. When we come to Heaven, we will not be surprised by the new order, but will continue to love and know our Lord and one another, rejoicing in salvation on every eternal day, and God Himself will be our God. His love will be our eternal adornment.

Homework 201

1. Please read Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:3-7; Matthew 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19-20; Acts 2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Corinthians 1:2;

Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Colossians 1:17-18; and 1 Peter 2:9 in the light of this lesson.

2. What was revealed to you in this lesson?
3. How do you understand the term "Church"? What is it?
4. Why did God decide to unite His children? What is the Church needed for?
5. What does the Church give me?
6. Can I be saved on my own? After all, so much useful material can be found on the internet, and there is no need to go anywhere.
7. Why are believers called brothers and sisters?
8. God is our Heavenly Father. Does He have grandchildren?

Lesson 202. Does It Taste Good to You?

My friends opened a health-food café and decided to show the world dietary reform in practice. The cooks' imagination came to life; the variety of dishes stirred a healthy appetite, and a kind attitude toward customers, a spirit of respect, and a desire to serve people—all of this filled the air.

But despite all this, the entire business of this café operated at a loss and was built upon constant financial support, bringing in no profit.

I know how difficult it always is to start out and make a name for yourself. And gaining regular customers in the face of enormous competition is not a very simple task. But the purpose of establishing places like this is not to make a profit, but to show people the advantages of healthy eating, teach them to prepare wholesome food, help them understand which foods can be combined, and through this become their friends and reveal the beauty of God's love in practice.

Not long ago, I shared this joy with someone who knows about cooking, and I voiced my question that I did not understand why, with such an approach, this café was not making a profit. I was told, "Their food simply does not taste good." I was surprised. This answer made me think and apply it to the spiritual life as well. And I had even more questions for which I sought answers.

Taste is something God created in my body. It is located in my mouth in the form of taste receptors, which respond to food, send impulses to the brain, and create an overall picture of what I am eating. The sense of smell also plays an important role in this. Once I tried smelling an onion while chewing an apple, and it felt as though I were eating an onion. And if a dish looks beautiful, that already prepares my mind in advance to enjoy the meal. If my brain receives aesthetic pleasure through my eyes, while taste and smell convince me that everything is wonderful, and my reason tells me that it is healthy, then I conclude, "It tastes good."

But the problem is that we are made in such a way that we eat two or three times a day, seven days a week, throughout our entire lives. And what I eat does not always give me pleasure or delight my sense of taste. But I understand that my body needs nutrients that it can receive only through food, and therefore I eat it even when it does not taste good.

But I have also noticed that when I have a choice of what to eat, I always choose what will give me pleasure, taste good, and be healthy for my body. I have also noticed that when I am hungry, many foods that do not taste good become especially exquisite and desirable and have amazing qualities of taste. And what a pleasure it is to eat them on an empty stomach! Where is the logic?

Have you ever walked up to a refrigerator overflowing with food and, after examining its contents, sadly closed the door, grieving that there was nothing to eat? But after nine in the evening, all the unappealing food became so wonderful and so inviting that it was impossible to fall asleep. And how delicious it was to eat at night! And then to wake up with a heavy stomach and a guilty conscience.

But if food can still be figured out somehow, there is also spiritual food that feeds our minds and shapes our thinking. It too can be different—appetizing or unpalatable. And sometimes I notice that what I eagerly listened to or read at first becomes boring and uninteresting over time. Why does this happen? Have you ever become drowsy during a lecture or sermon? You were ashamed of it, but that was exactly how your brain reacted to the information it was receiving. Then someone else begins saying the very same things, and you eagerly catch every word, spend a very long time reconsidering what was said, and draw conclusions. Why such different reactions to the same words? I can give the answer: “It does not taste good to me.”

But taste is a very poor adviser. It changes, although it has its own patterns. If I am given the same tasty food every day, I will soon grow tired of it and begin to desire something else in order to add variety to my diet, although it was not like this at

the beginning of my life. I had only one mother, who gave me the same nourishment from herself, yet tenderly held me, pressed me close, caressed me, and spoke words of love. And this need has remained in my consciousness and sometimes reminds me of itself. And it tasted good to me.

When I first came to God, I had no books for self-education, and I eagerly searched for any information and read the Bible with great interest, comprehending the depth of its revelations. Now I notice that at times I have to make myself read something because it is necessary for a spiritual person, while my mind, having allowed this information to pass through it, remains hungry. What happened? I want to eat! But there is nothing. On my shelves are books that once inspired me, but I no longer read them. What happened?

There is a very good definition for this condition—surfeit. We were moving toward it, we desired it, I strove toward it as the meaning of life, and when I attained it, I realized that I had lost something very important. I am not thirsty, although I am hungry and exhausted. I have lost my appetite, although I have not eaten for a long time. Everything has simply become unpalatable to me. And I see that the great problem is not the abundance of everything, but what is in my head. My mind is damaged; the influence of the world has brought destruction into it. And what am I to do? I listen to the rebukes of the Faithful Witness and agree with them, but I cannot change anything. Darkness enters my life. I enter the dark night of the soul and do not know where I will arrive.

Let us read Ezekiel 16:49–50: “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.”

Is there a way out of this condition? Yes. God has a very tasty seasoning that gives flavor to everything—agape love, friendship, and happiness. Such small words, yet how they adorn life and bring into it something new, delicious, and

desirable. Dry bread and a handful of greens served with love are so delicious that you will lick your fingers. Love is a stream of fresh water flowing into my life and, through me, into the lives of my neighbors. It is the truest meaning of everything; it tastes so good at all times, and it is impossible to become surfeited with it.

Words of love, spoken with love and supported by deeds, can be listened to forever without ever growing tired of them, while desiring even more to hear them. “What happened, my friend? Today you told me that you loved me only eighty-seven times, but yesterday you said it 139 times. Did I do something wrong? What is the reason for your silence?”

The very meaning of Eternal Life is that there will be Eternal Love and eternal relationships in this fellowship. And it will be very good—always good.

And if it will be so wonderful there, then we need to begin creating this beauty here already. When the heart burns with love, life is so interesting. So much is written in the Bible about love, and it is so fascinating. Love does not always lie on the surface; it must be sought, dug for, and, when found, rejoiced over. It is there, and there is much of it. It brings happiness and makes everything taste so good. A person who loves never grows tired of it. It binds me to Jesus, and we love one another. And this is so joyful. And this love teaches me to love you too, my friend, and this tastes so good—at least to me.

Does life taste good to you? Do you need help?

Homework 202

1. Please read 1 Corinthians 16:13-14; Proverbs 15:17; 12:11; Ecclesiastes 5:11; 10:17; Luke 6:25; Matthew 20:6-7; Revelation 3:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; and 1 Corinthians 16:23-24.
2. Did you learn anything useful for yourself from this lesson?
3. What is the danger of spiritual surfeit and idleness?
4. Are you interested in learning the truth and making spiritual discoveries?

5. Do you believe that many fascinating treasures about love are hidden in the Bible? Is it worth searching for them?
6. Does life with you taste good to your friends and loved ones?
7. Do you like the food you are given in our School of Love?
8. Do you have any interesting recipes for satisfying the guests of the School?

Lesson 203. A Piece of Heaven

There is an earthly world, with its own rules, order, and laws; there is a spiritual world, with its own influence; and there is also the Heavenly world, where the Eternal law of love, joy, and happiness operates. And this Heaven greatly desires to prepare us to move into the Heavenly dwellings. So that this will not be something dreadful for us, preparation for Eternity is already taking place; God is already working in us to make us fit for this event.

And what will Eternity be like? What do I imagine? What will be there? What will I live in forever? All people dream of going there, and when someone dies, they say, "May the Kingdom of Heaven be his." And they do not think about what would happen if these people actually went there.

And let us briefly imagine sinners who go there by God's mercy. For example, God might decide to take all the inhabitants of the quietest and cleanest city here on Earth. But its inhabitants did not know God and were not interested in Him. They worshiped anyone and anything, and completely rejected the light that was sent to them. Yet they were very cultured, disciplined, and hardworking, and were admired by the whole world. And now they find themselves in Heaven.

The first thing they will realize and ask is, "Why were we brought here? Why were we not asked whether we wanted to live here?" But since they are there, they must live there. They will quickly appreciate the advantages and prospects of the new world. Only God's shining throne, and Those sitting upon it, will constantly make them uneasy. People are accustomed to believing what they were taught in childhood and at school, but here is an unfamiliar God to Whom everyone sings and bows. Yet betraying the faith of their ancestors will be impossible. In order not to trouble anyone and not to come under the influence of those saved from sin, many of them will decide to move farther away from the place of God's presence and live far from the New Jerusalem. The very awareness that they will live forever will give them the opportunity to reconsider all their

plans and build their lives so as to gain comfort from this new life. Other inhabitants of Heaven, dressed in white, will continually come and fly to them, become acquainted with them, and try to befriend them. Some will even succeed in establishing friendly relationships with someone and gaining some benefit from them. But sinful hearts are incapable of appreciating the purity of Heaven. And these people will continue to sin, taking pleasure in their relationships. Sin will be perpetuated. Although Satan will no longer exist, the carnal nature will remain and will constantly suggest new ways to satisfy the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

All the homes in Heaven will be open, and naive people will live in them who can be “led by the nose” in order to achieve one’s own purposes.

And how many beautiful people will tempt our eternal sinners by their outward appearance and the tenderness of their relationships.

But the saved will be steadfast in their purity; they know the danger of sin and have learned to recognize it instantly. And they will immediately have many questions for God: “What are these sinful people doing here? Why did they come here? Why only they? And how are we to understand Your justice, impartiality, and hatred of sin? Did Christ die in vain? Do You want us to come under the influence of evil again?”

I do not wish to continue this story, for it would end in the destruction of everything and everyone. What we are experiencing now is enough. A sinner will not live forever. Sin will have no chance of entering Heaven. The spirit of Satan will have no place in the holy place.

But it is possible to imagine a piece of Eternity already here on Earth. In His love and mercy, God has slightly opened the veil of Eternity to us and grants everyone who desires it the opportunity to experience this joy of Eternal Life. It begins here and now through the fact of being born of the Holy Spirit and through faith in Jesus Christ. And we are born again not for the

sinful world, but for God. We do not have the most ideal conditions for development, but God allows what will serve for our good and help us appreciate the advantages of a holy and blameless life with Christ already here. And in order to inscribe the laws of Eternity in our hearts, we are given the opportunity to know and study them here already, and to ask God to establish us in this and not abandon us to the mercy of this world.

And Heaven's greatest treasure, called Love, is given to us as the most delicious and choice piece of Heaven, so that already here, amid sin, it may reveal to us the beauty of Heavenly relationships.

By receiving love and living by it, I begin to know the law of Heaven, expressed in the most proper attitude toward my neighbor.

In 2018, friends invited me to come to Belarus and conduct a seminar about love, friendship, and happiness. During this meeting, we prepared our own food. It happened that some porridge was left over, and we decided to throw it away because the next day it would no longer be fresh or tasty. But one sister asked us to leave it and made a cream from this porridge, adding halva and something else to it. Everything was eaten with great pleasure.

So it is in life: there are truths that have grown old in my mind and have become ordinary and tasteless. I try to revive them, but they remain ordinary and familiar. Then I begin to put on a performance and play the part of a happy person who rejoices in everything, and I begin to believe that everything tastes good to me, because otherwise I risk losing Eternity. I come to worship services thirsting for the bread of life and leave without receiving it; but, thinking that something is wrong with me, I convince myself that it tasted good, because I have to eat something, and besides, what will others who admire what is happening think? Yet I am missing something.

But then someone appears from whom power proceeds; he shines with life, and it is so interesting to listen to this person

and learn the secret of his happiness. It turns out that he simply loves. Is that all? Is it that simple?

And so I make up my mind and ask for love for myself as well, so that I might at least somehow add variety to my everyday life. But nothing happens. I live as I lived, and nothing has changed. I continue asking. Again, nothing. But it is nothing only in my eyes; something was sown in my heart and began to take root and grow.

Love has the characteristic that it cannot be known instantly, just as a child cannot be born an adult. There is a process of conception, development, birth, growth, maturation, and bearing fruit. Therefore, if you decide to take this path, be patient and do not become disappointed because you expected rapid growth and victories. Someone quickly grasps this science; for someone it is difficult; and someone considers it unnecessary and goes away into darkness. But love exists.

In order for me to write what you are now reading, God had to work on me, preparing me through sixteen years of life with Christ to understand that I needed agape love and simply could not do without it, and then for another eleven years to reveal the laws of this love that we are studying together. And this is only the beginning. What will come next? It will become even more interesting, for love lives forever; it never ceases to amaze with its qualities and new revelations. It develops in my thoughts and changes my heart. Will God ever grow weary of being God? In the same way, love never grows weary. It is a piece of Heaven for us, making our journey delightful, living, and beautiful.

What could be more beautiful and delightful than love? Only greater love, which has not yet revealed itself but is already standing at the door, knocking and waiting to be discovered.

Homework 203

1. Please read Isaiah 26:10; Revelation 21:10, 27; Psalm 1:5; 5:6; 9:17; Matthew 13:44-46; 13:33; Hebrews 10:36; 11:6; John 12:24-25; 3:5-8; 1 John 5:18; John 17:3; Matthew 7:7-

11; John 7:38; Luke 18:7-8; and Revelation 21:6-8 in the light of our lesson.

2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Why can sinners not be taken to Heaven?
4. What will happen to a person who thinks that his good deeds are sufficient for salvation?
5. Do you believe that, as I comprehend and come to know love, I touch Heaven and live by its laws here on Earth?
6. What would Eternity be like without love?
7. Do you expect that, immediately after praying and asking for your heart to be endowed with love, your heart will become different and love will fill your feelings to overflowing?
8. Do you have the love about which we speak so much?

Lesson 204. The Remnant and Its Mission

The remnant church is a movement of those who desire to fulfill God's will concerning God's people, as foretold in the book of Revelation, and to prepare God's children for the closing events of Earth's history.

God has always had a remnant of people who were faithful to Him. The history of God's church shows how Satan tirelessly fought against God in the person of His people and destroyed the foundation of faith upon which the church was built.

In our day, this struggle continues, but God grants special advantages to those who heed the message to Laodicea and begin to seek and thirst for what is offered there.

And through the purchase of all the Heavenly goods, God's people receive a special faith and the power of love, through which they will be able to know God very deeply and closely, allow Him to write His law in their minds, and protect all of God's children during the time of trouble and trial.

And God will gather all His faithful children under His protection, establish them in truth and love, and entrust these people with a special mission for the last days.

We read in Revelation 12:17: "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." The remnant are those of God's people who have remained faithful and have decided to obey God's commandments despite the widespread deception and traditional apostasy.

There was a time when those who believed in Jesus as their Savior testified in word and deed about His love and God's grace, but at the end of time God will add to this testimony a special message for those living at the end of the ages. And this message is already sounding, but it can hardly be heard. Yet it was foretold by God, and it will be fulfilled in all the power intended by the Most High.

We read this message in Revelation 14:6–12. It is called the Three Angels' Messages and describes the characteristics of those who will proclaim it. Verse 12: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

Keeping God's commandments is one of the identifying marks of the remnant people. But the distinctive feature of this obedience is not merely to agree mentally with the truths of God's law, but to allow God to write this law in the mind and heart, and to be obedient not according to the letter, but according to the spirit.

As long as this law is written on tablets of stone, it will testify against me, and I will continually break it and repent of it, and my life will be like being tossed upon the waves. But if I allow God to write these words on the tablets of my heart, then I become a doer of the law and live in obedience of heart, under grace and not under the law. Grace is given to me not to cover sins, but as power to resist the dominion of sin.

And by keeping God's commandments, I become very dear to Jesus, for I believe in Him and have His faith.

What determines my faith? It is my ability, during a crisis, struggle, and trial, to rely upon God's sure word, trusting God completely that He will fulfill what He has promised, fulfill it in my life, and do what has come from His mouth as a promise. God is unchanging in His word, but He is seeking those who will believe Him and, with faith and faithfulness, hold fast to what has been promised, watch, and pray while awaiting the fulfillment of everything that was foretold.

Will the remnant keep the commandment of love? Yes. This is what has been foretold about God's people. God's message without God's messengers loving one another will sound like a verdict, without any opportunity for repentance. And this distinguishing feature of God's children—their love for one another and their love for God—will allow the Lord to use His Church in all its power to proclaim the final warning. And everyone who knows God and hears His voice will hear it.

We read in John 10:16: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." These words are in harmony with the message of Revelation 18:4: "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying,

Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." God will call His people and gather them.

A mission without love is not God's plan for the last days. Love without a mission is a distortion of truth. Love is God's convincing power that God exists, that He is at work, and that He will bring to fulfillment everything He has foretold. Faith which worketh by love is God's driving force for those who love God and obey Him in everything.

For example, how would you receive everything I write in this school if you learned that I break God's commandments and live in sin? I think that you would first try to discover the reason for my apostasy and the depth of my lawlessness, and then you would try to explain to me that it is not hearers and readers who please God, but doers of His will. And if I heeded these warnings and repented, you would joyfully continue studying my writings, for in them you would find a reflection of my obedience. But if I remained in sin, this would soon become known to everyone, and all my writings would be declared unlawful and contemptuously rejected as misleading. And being aware of all this, I carry out my ministry with fear and trembling. And your prayers and your responsiveness to my love for you support me greatly. By nature, I am a sinner who greatly needs the Savior, but I have allowed God to write His law in my heart, and this has become a power within me to resist my inborn inclinations to sin. And it is not I, but Christ in me and His power, Who gain the victory over the dominion of sin. And I have faith that if I am faithful to God unto death, I will receive the crown of life.

I look with sorrow upon those who speak of their faith in God but do not keep His commandments, or replace them with human commandments and traditions, referring in part to the

fact that someone among the early Christians decided to honor God in that way.

But it is written in Romans 13:10: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

God's law does not call me to legalism; it calls me to obedience. But obedience without love is the very legalism and fanaticism against which Jesus openly spoke and continues to speak to this day. Love without obedience is adultery, for if I love my wife but am unfaithful to her, then this is not love, but only a name. And I think there is truth in this definition, no matter how I may try to justify myself by the fact that some of the heroes of faith had several wives.

And very soon God's remnant will stand before the whole world in the most solemn proclamation of the third angel's message. The messages of the second and first angels are already sounding, and few heed this voice. But when the death sentence is pronounced upon the world and presented very clearly and loudly by those who love one another according to the commandment, then all of God's children will hear this voice of the Spirit and will leave their fallen churches, never again to support them by their presence, and they will be cast out and persecuted by the wicked and by the authorities of this world.

But God's people will receive God's seal and will be safe. Satan will receive full power over those who accept his image. And the remnant church will fulfill its mission and meet the One Whom they love, awaiting His Coming while loving one another.

Homework 204

1. Please read John 13:34-35; Daniel 7:9-14; Isaiah 1:9; 11:11; Jeremiah 23:3; Micah 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Revelation 12:17; 14:6-12; and 18:1-4 in the light of our lesson.
2. What new things did you learn from this lesson?
3. How do you understand the expression "the remnant"?
4. What do Paul's words in Romans 6:14 mean: "...for ye are not under the law, but under grace"? Then please read Romans 6:14-16 in its entirety and answer again.

5. By whom were the Ten Commandments given—God or Moses? And who can abolish or change them?
6. To whom was God's law given in the form of the Ten Commandments? Should we keep it? Does it belong only to the Old Testament?
7. Does God have any other messages for the salvation of the world after the Three Angels' Messages?
8. Whom does God desire to save when He speaks through the third angel's message? Why does He call people to attention in precisely this way? Could it not be said more gently?
9. Do you desire to take part in proclaiming this message together with the three angels?

Lesson 205. The Wine of Babylon

The book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John in symbolic language. And in order to understand correctly what is written, one must know the Scriptures well, have a personal relationship with Jesus, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning of what is written in the right light. It is also necessary to know history in order to see which biblical prophecies have already been fulfilled and how they were fulfilled.

In this lesson, we will examine a very important subject that may become a key to understanding the book of Revelation, what is happening in the world and in the church, and what influence all of this has upon me.

Many years ago, I decided to study this book with the help of the Bible. I took a concordance and used it to find in the Bible explanations of the symbols in which John enclosed the narrative of his book. And Holy Scripture very clearly reveals the meaning of many symbols that are not understood through a simple reading.

We read in Revelation 14:8: "And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." What do you understand from this account? And what does it mean? Without knowing the Bible, one can very easily attribute this warning to anything at all and build an entire teaching upon one's own understanding.

We are studying the science of Agape Love, while the wine of Babylon is that which is opposed to our school and surrounds us everywhere. And the enemy of souls opposes everything that comes from God, offering his counterfeit or poison in its pure form.

Let us turn to the explanation. We read in Jeremiah 51:7: "Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad." This prophecy was spoken both of the literal Babylon of Daniel's time and also has

a bearing upon our days. Who, then, were among the Babylonian king's counselors? We read in Daniel 2:2: "Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king."

Listed here are those people whom the Bible describes as very dangerous, having a direct connection with Satan and receiving power and revelations from the spirits of darkness. And these people had authority in Babylon and spread their teachings to all the nations that came under their influence. From the book of the prophet Daniel, we read that an educational system was established in Babylon which shaped the minds of the students and made them fit for service in that kingdom.

Jesus also sometimes spoke of wine as a teaching that should be poured into new wineskins.

In the Bible, fresh grape juice is called wine, as is what we consider to be alcoholic wine.

Wine, in the present understanding, is a light alcoholic beverage produced through the alcoholic fermentation of grape juice, causing dizziness in the one who drinks it.

The symbol of wine is very well suited to describe what is happening to all of us in our time.

Babylon is the name of a city and the name of a kingdom that ruled the world in the sixth century before Christ and was conquered by the Medes and Persians in 539 BC.

Geographically, it is located in the territory of present-day Iraq, 90 kilometers from Baghdad.

Babylon in the biblical context is Satan's kingdom, with its laws and influence, and the complete opposite of God's principles and Love, meeting all the demands of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. In our time, the teaching of this Babylonian system has penetrated every sphere of public life and exerts its destructive influence upon the human mind, diverting one's gaze from Christ and the purity of biblical truths, and offering its temptations and false teachings.

The influence of the Babylonian system has penetrated every sphere of human activity and is present in the teachings of all kinds of religions, and it spreads its influence to all nations except God's remnant. The teaching of Babylon does not teach agape love, but it successfully uses the word "love" in its system, disguising debauchery, idolatry, and other abominations beneath it.

The second angel warns the world that Babylon is fallen, that it is a fallen system of false teachings which has made everyone drink of its deceptions, calling upon the thinking world to pay attention to this.

And the only deliverance from this influence can be found only in God and in His true teaching.

If my faith does not have God's true foundation, then in its place I will accept the doctrines of Babylon, which skillfully distort the purity of the Bible and deprive the soul of love. I am given an intoxicating drink that clouds my reason and makes me spiritually drunk. And in such a condition, I am unable to appreciate what God offers me and will take the position of His adversary.

The first angel reveals the problem concerning the worship of God and quotes verbatim God's words from the fourth commandment, making clear the essence of true worship, around which the closing events of our time will take place. The second angel pronounces judgment upon Satan's intoxicating system. And these two angels warn us against accepting the image and the number of the beast described shortly before, while the third angel pronounces judgment upon those who did not understand the messages of the first angels and accept the mark of the beast.

But God offers us salvation at this time, and its conditions are very clearly described in the symbols of the message to Laodicea, where He Himself, in all His fullness, gives Himself to everyone who responds to this counsel. It is so simple. But a drunken person hears this voice and does not respond, and of

him it is written in Proverbs 23:33: “Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.”

Strange women are fallen churches that have made the teaching of Babylon their dogmas and vigorously defend it despite the clear teaching of the Bible.

But the danger of the wine of Babylon lies in the fact that Babylon is a mixture of truth and falsehood in which truth predominates by percentage, and therefore it does not alarm many people. If someone teaches correctly and truthfully, then a lie in his mouth will not be noticed; and if it is covered with godliness, it will take on a very pleasing appearance. Babylon is founded upon this: God’s truth and a little poison—“delicious” poison for the mind and soul.

But God gives an antidote—Agape Love—which can very easily recognize falsehood and set the captives of false teachings free.

Adultery, for example, has already ceased to be considered a sin in the world, and the one who breaks this commandment will not be punished. But the enemy goes further: he presents it as the meaning of life and teaches everyone to live in this way. And there is no punishment, only pleasure.

Love firmly opposes such teachings and exposes them at their very root.

God has not changed, and even when armed conflict begins between nations, His commandments remain in force and call God’s children to obedience and worship in spirit and in truth.

God does not change His law to suit the times and prevailing ideas. Otherwise, there would have been no need to give His Son to die for our sins; it would have been enough to remove the commandment, offer something else, and call sin good. But God does not change, and He will judge the world precisely by His standard of righteousness.

John 5:24: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

And all of us today carry bottles of this wine in our pockets, but whether to drink it or not is something each person must decide and choose personally.

I choose love and desire to comprehend this science in everything.

Homework 205

1. Please read Proverbs 4:16-17; 9:1-7; 20:1; 23:29-35; Ecclesiastes 10:19; Song of Solomon 7:10; Isaiah 28:7; 55:1-3; Jeremiah 51:7; Daniel 5:1-4; Joel 1:5; Habakkuk 2:4-5; Matthew 9:17; Luke 5:37-39; Revelation 18:6; John 12:25; 14:24; Romans 13:8; 1 John 3:10, 14; 4:7; and Revelation 22:15 in the light of our lesson.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. How do you understand the expression “the wine of Babylon”? Do you have your own understanding of this?
4. Why can agape love not be part of Babylonian teaching?
5. Is it important to understand correctly the Three Angels’ Messages and heed the warnings loudly proclaimed in them?
6. Through what means does the Babylonian system make all nations drink of its wine? What means does it use for this?
7. How can one avoid the influence of Babylon and not become drunk with this wine of the wrath of fornication?
8. What should I do if I have tasted this deadly wine and become dependent upon it?
9. Is love powerful enough to destroy every deception of the last days?

Lesson 206. Love Available to Everyone

The Bible contains a great many mysteries, unexplained prophecies, various kinds of information, descriptions, narratives, and explanations, behind which stands God Himself.

Every reader of Holy Scripture will find much that is useful and interesting in this Book of books. How many times the Bible has been banned, and now it is available to every person in his native language, even in those countries where it is still prohibited. With the help of smartphones, God's Word can reach every home on our planet.

Whenever anyone takes a book into his hands, he begins reading it from the first page; the same thing happens with the Bible. Those who hold it for the first time begin to comprehend the truth from its first chapters.

I remember how I opened this Book for the first time, read through the seventh chapter of Genesis, and realized that I had understood nothing. I closed it and placed it on a shelf like a talisman so that it would protect our home. Sometimes I even expressed my reverence for God by taking this Book in my hands and kissing it, showing my devotion, even though I myself was living in sin. I understood this and found pleasure in such a life, although I knew that there would be a reckoning; but I did not know how to escape from this darkness.

And every time I took the Bible in my hands and began to read, I closed it again very quickly because I understood nothing. My mind had been damaged by sin, and this kept me from understanding the Word of God, even though I read a great deal of all kinds of rubbish, and read it quickly.

But light came into my life as well. I believed in Jesus, invited Him into my life as my Lord, and when He came, He opened my mind.

I remember that time when I read the Bible from morning until evening and marveled at how easy it was to understand and what interesting things were written in it.

My life began to be transformed, and in my superficial knowledge I felt like a professor of theology. I was very happy and greatly thirsted for new discoveries. The few books available at that time helped me very much, and my thirst for the Word of God was so great, and new revelations always brought me such joy, that I simply glowed within and waited for the moment when I could once again plunge into the depths of God's Word.

I sought the truth and found it. I wanted to join God's people, and I searched for those who lived according to the Bible. The Lord sent me different friends, and together with them I opened the Bible and went deeper into the knowledge of it. I wanted so much to find the right church, one that lived according to the Word. I knew its name, but for some reason I did not go there. Instead, I associated with those believers who were friendly toward me, and together we learned what was being revealed to us.

Ellen White's book *The Great Controversy* helped me greatly. Through the light from this book, I understood many very important truths, learned my true condition, saw the way out, discovered God's love, understood the time in which we live, heard the Savior's call, learned the future of our planet and the destiny of all believers and the wicked, discovered the events of the last days, learned the truth about the Second Coming of Christ, about who Satan is and how he destroys people, and discovered the new world of the future incorruptible life. And all these discoveries were in complete harmony with the Bible.

But I was searching for those who love God and live and walk in the truth. My expectations of believers were very high, and I did not want to unite with those who did not live according to the commandments. Even the first church in which I was baptized could not keep me—and did not try to—and I left it because I could not tolerate lawlessness or welcome the sin that I had already learned to distinguish clearly.

For a very long time I searched for God's people, and I continued doing so even in a foreign country where I had come to live. I wanted to have true friends who loved Jesus and lived

in obedience to God's commandments. But whenever I entered a new community of believers, I saw that no one there needed me, and I left. As a result, it all came down to my sitting at home and educating myself. I did not yet know that God's church is a hospital for sinners and that its members are patients, nurses, and doctors who find healing within its walls, help one another, and grow together.

But the Lord knew my time as well. We were found by people who had heard about my wife and me, and they invited us to join them because they wanted to become friends with us. We entered a small congregation that became our family in a foreign country.

The years passed, and with them came spiritual growth. I smile as I remember the mistakes and ideas with which I began my journey with God, and how I had to learn everything; therefore, I am now very patient with the mistakes and understanding of other people. I was also in opposition to the church and tasted that spirit as well, but I did not remain there, because I realized in time that it was the path to death. I learned much while living the Christian life and fellowshiping with brothers and sisters, but I always had a higher goal—to love truly. I read 1 Corinthians 13 closely and understood only that I was very far from this ideal and that these truths were, for me, merely an incomprehensible theory—understandable to the mind, but far from the heart.

I did not know how to experience this within myself. And I searched for someone who would teach me to love. But after many years, I understood that I was still very far from this condition and that it was some lofty ideal attainable only by the apostles.

Then a crisis came into my life. I understood that everything in this world around me was collapsing. I cried out to God and, for some reason, began to ask for the love that I did not possess and did not even know, though I knew that God had it. And He answered. I declared my faith that I had been heard. Then came the realization that I loved. I did not understand what it was, but I understood that it had happened. These were not feelings,

but something that convinced me that something new and unusual had happened in my life, although it was still very small and required care and gentle attention. With joy I began to discover it, delve into it, study it, try it, practice it, and experiment with it. And I saw that although it was something very small in my consciousness, it possessed tremendous power and never lost. I began to test it in my family and saw that it worked; I began trying it with other people, and it did not leave. Oh, how I longed for explanations of what it was and how to govern it! I moved forward blindly, like an explorer, falling and rising and continuing onward. No one told me what I am writing to you, but little by little I gathered these treasures in my heart, comparing them with the Bible and longing to understand the power of this love.

And I discovered that it was not some new feeling, but the Lord Himself within me, Who called Himself by this name. And everything became clear to me.

Love is the Spirit of God within me; it is that new heart which He so longs to give me and upon which He desires to write all His laws and ordinances. It is not a romantic experience, but a new consciousness that does not deprive me of my freedom of choice or the memory of my past mistakes. And I am at war, but not as a commander leading the whole planet, but as one who is in the Victor's camp. Even when a battle is raging all around, with a child's trust I press close to the Lord and ask Him to play with me in the sandbox, and He sits down beside me and plays. Through His stories He prepares me for the fire into which He sometimes places me. And I ask Him to be there with me as well, and He nods.

Homework 206

1. Please read Hebrews 12:2-3; Galatians 2:20; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 19; 5:10-11; Daniel 3:24-27; Malachi 3:3-4; Isaiah 1:25; Job 23:10; Jeremiah 29:12-13; 33:3; and Jude 24-25 in the light of our lesson.
2. Are you interested in hearing about other people's experiences of life with God?
3. Can you share your own experiences of spiritual growth?

4. Do you believe that God's love is available to you as well?
5. Should one ask God for greater love, or should it come on its own?
6. If this love is available, why does not everyone possess it, and why do those who receive it sometimes possess it only for a short time?
7. Why does God not begin my spiritual growth with agape love, but give it after I come to know the truth?
8. Why did Jesus give the commandment to love one another not at the beginning of His ministry, but only shortly before His death?

Lesson 207. Stages of Growth

The life of every person living in the developed world is divided into certain stages: birth, nursery, kindergarten, school, vocational school or technical college or university, military service, work, starting a family, raising children, career growth, advanced training or searching for a promising job, retirement, old age, and death. Something may be absent from one person's life, or something special may be present. And all of this is called a person's life. All these stages of life are tied to a certain age and pass from one into another. The first stage implies the inevitability of the last, and every sensible person living within this framework tries to fill his time well with something meaningful and interesting.

The life of a believer is also divided into stages that do not end with death but, passing from one into another, form spiritual maturity and receptiveness, raising the growing person to a higher level. Unlike the earthly stages, where the transition from one stage to another is inevitable, in spiritual growth a person can stop growing and remain at one level for life, or choose the wrong direction and, as a result, fall into heresy and deteriorate.

If in earthly life we consider a person's normal development to be his gradual transition from one stage to another, then for some reason this principle is distorted or neglected in spiritual life. And the person who has managed to grow becomes incomprehensible to many and spends his life in spiritual loneliness, dreaming that someone else will reach his level and be able to fellowship with him in spiritual unity and understanding.

What I am now trying to describe is not my invention or discovery, but God's plan for the short probationary period of a person's spiritual life. And God loves His children with everlasting love, regardless of the stage of spiritual development at which they are or have stopped. They are His children, born to live forever, who have faith in God and are learning the rules of heavenly life here on earth. You should not

be upset if you see that your spiritual growth has stopped; perhaps this is a springboard for moving to a new level. But everything depends on you. The more a person has grown in Jesus, the more fiercely the enemy of the human soul attacks him and the stronger the assaults of the world become, and not everyone is able or willing to endure this. The war does not cease for a single minute; all the forces of darkness concentrate on those who are growing spiritually. But God protects His children, and nothing can harm them. They are safe as long as they believe in God's power and in His promises to care for them and keep them from evil, and entrust all their cares and their very lives to the Most High.

Spiritual life includes the following stages: hearing, awareness, the new birth, knowing and accepting the truth, first love, searching for spiritual authorities, accepting the fundamentals of doctrine, missionary activity, serving one's neighbors, the dark night of the soul, reassessing values, spiritual friendship, searching for one's place in order to use one's abilities effectively, reassessing spiritual values, leaving behind what is unnecessary, the second dark night of the soul, and agape love. In essence, these are six stages of faith that anyone can master. I may have omitted something or formulated these stages incorrectly, and I ask for your mercy. In spiritual growth, it is impossible to leap from the initial stage to the later ones while bypassing the intermediate stages, just as it is impossible in the earthly cycle of growth. This is not because I decided it should be so, but because God's plan and the harmony of development are found in it. Another distinctive feature is that some people grow slowly or stop growing, while others pass through these stages very quickly and move upward with confidence. Those in the middle understand the condition of those at the beginning of the journey, but they do not always understand, or do not understand at all, the motives of those who have outgrown them.

Growth usually stops during the dark night of the soul. The soul does not want severe trials; it is frightened by darkness and the unknown, resists the fire through which it must pass, and stops developing, expanding the horizons of the place where it

stopped. The entire church reaches this level, but any movement beyond it takes place only on an individual basis.

The ultimate goal of development is agape love. When a believer reaches it, he does not stop growing, but discovers limitless opportunities for God's plans to be carried out through him. This is precisely the goal that Christ sets for each of His people, so that everyone will know what he should strive for without stopping at what he has achieved. And Jesus offers Himself as help, while respecting a person's desires and taking his choice into account. Amazing love.

Spiritual growth is impossible without Christ. Without a personal relationship with Jesus, all truth will be accepted only by the mind, without touching the heart. But this is the same as building a house on sand, without a foundation. It looks beautiful and sturdy as well, but only until the first trial or catastrophe, and then it collapses.

Agape love is also unique in that it is available at every stage of faith, but it is given as temporary help in order to show a person a better prospect for growth. Yet it does not take complete possession of the heart, because the person himself is not yet ready for this. He cannot make this gift the driving motive of his life, simply because he does not understand the obligations and responsibility. But in the process of growth, while striving toward this goal, he reaches it, becomes ready to accept it in all its fullness, and becomes part of this love. This can be compared to a child in a family. He sees the advantages of family life, lives in the love of his parents, benefits from their love and protection, and depends on their care, but he is not yet ready to start his own family because he has not yet grown up. Yet while still a child, he already begins to dream about the wonderful family he will have. I think each of you had similar thoughts in childhood and has observed them in your own children. But the time comes when a person matures enough to start a family and enters into marriage at the proper time.

In the same way, in our spiritual development we strive to attain the full stature of Christ. And at a certain stage of this growth, God Himself places a certain responsibility upon us,

gives us particular gifts and talents for service in the church, and endows us with special power and influence at His discretion.

When I am ready to receive something greater because the time has come, but I do not ask God for it and hide my hands behind my back, I risk stopping in my spiritual development for many years and treading water in one place, becoming an outside observer or a critic of various events.

The choice is mine, and God will give me exactly what I choose. I choose love and move toward receiving greater love, which is the more excellent way.

Homework 207

1. Please read Mark 4:26-32; 2 Peter 1:3-11; Hebrews 5:12-14; Ephesians 3:16-21; 6:10-18; Philippians 3:13-18; 4:6-7; Hebrews 13:20-21; Romans 5:1-5; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Revelation 22:17; and Ephesians 4:13-16 in the light of our lesson.
2. Did you learn anything useful for yourself from this lesson?
3. Do you understand what we are studying in our school of love?
4. Do you understand the expression “the dark night of the soul”?
5. Do you see spiritual growth in your life?
6. Do you have spiritual goals that you dream of achieving?
7. What role does love play in spiritual growth?
8. Do you believe that it is realistic for an ordinary person to attain the knowledge of agape love and live in this condition?
9. How can I determine the spiritual level at which I am?
10. What does God do in my spiritual growth?

Lesson 208. The Dark Night of the Soul

Something dark that a person has never experienced before happens in the life of everyone, and by nature we try in every possible way to avoid this event or drown it out with something good. But those who believe in Christ move confidently toward this event and will not be able to bypass it. Sooner or later, everyone who comes to know God and grows in Him approaches this condition. It is something like a dark forest through which I will have to pass. And the more light is poured into my life, the more likely it is that such trials of my faith will soon begin and knock me out of the rut of my usual experiences.

Perhaps what I call it can be called something else, but let us give it a provisional name—the dark night of the soul. I myself passed through this time and did not understand what was happening to me. I felt very melancholy and lonely, and I could only hold on to Christ by faith, rely on His assurances of love and faithfulness, and thus continue onward. I also know many brothers and sisters who have experienced something similar. And no one avoided it.

But this trial also has one particular feature. When this event enters my life, I can pass through it, or I can turn back and remain where everything is familiar and known, where it is light and everything is clear. The soul does not want to go into the fire; with every fiber of its being, it resists all trials.

But at the very least, I need to know that such a trial takes place. If I know this and ask God to be with me and lead me through it, then when it comes, it will be easier for me to endure everything. Oh, how I wish someone had told me about this earlier. Forewarned is forearmed. And in our school, we learn many good things before they draw near. And they will come. Although everyone's trials and experiences are different, and our perceptions differ, the path that all of us must travel is one, and it is very narrow. We have One Teacher, the curriculum is the same for everyone, and one textbook has been given to all of us for all ages.

When a tree is small, it is very easy to shape it and direct its growth. Unnecessary branches can be pruned, young twigs can be bent in the right direction, and excess shoots and fruit can be removed so that they do not deprive the tree of its vital strength. But when the tree has grown, it has already been formed, and what is unnecessary must simply be chopped down or sawed off.

God leads His children as a people, but at the same time He conducts individual lessons with each one, giving and revealing the distinctive qualities and gifts inherent in that person. And with the student's consent, the Lord develops these talents for service to other people and for His glory.

Not everything is within my reach, and I cannot become everything. But if I wish to master a particular field of knowledge and begin devoting time and mental effort to it, I will certainly learn something and discover something new for myself.

The dark night of the soul is the unusual condition into which I enter in the process of my spiritual growth. It may come for no apparent reason, or the Lord may create a crisis in my life: an illness, an injury, a fall, or something else may happen to me. But I begin to understand that darkness has entered my life. Spiritually, I feel very bad. I do not want to do anything; all earthly undertakings lose their meaning, but I continue doing them because I am accustomed to living this way, or simply because they must be done and there is no one to replace me. Fears, doubts, and disappointments come. I begin to reevaluate my entire life and everything I possess, weighing it and casting many things aside. It is difficult to describe exactly what is happening, but it is something like apathy and melancholy. And my friends, who do not understand what is happening to me, begin to comfort me in their own way, but it does not help.

It is possible to leave this condition by knowing many ways to occupy myself with something useful and familiar. And I can go back, as many people do. Or I can move forward, trusting in the Lord and relying on His wisdom and His promises that He will always be with me.

It is like a revolution of the soul, when I can no longer live in the old way but do not know how to live in the new way. My previous experience and knowledge have reached maturity and no longer delight me as they did at first, but have become familiar. I long to grow and to know the spiritual world. I long to enter the world of the Bible and immerse myself completely in new revelations.

And it is the Lord Who brings me to this time. The fire of trials is something I cannot avoid in my earthly life with God. It is the fire that brings spiritual pain and distress but does not kill. And if in earlier times God allowed something to happen without hastening events, now the events indicate that I should hurry, or I may be too late and miss something very important.

Why is the dark night of the soul necessary? I am made in such a way that when everything around me is rosy and sunny, I consider this the height of bliss, make myself comfortable in these circumstances, and do not plan for difficult trials. If water is told that it must flow uphill, it will not make such a decision; it will search for low places to fill. In order for it to rise uphill, it needs outside help and special equipment, because water has no power to accomplish this by itself. Therefore, my growth is not an innate property of mine, but a process directed by God, Who places the laws of this growth within me and sustains them when I begin to obey them.

As I experience the night of the soul, I allow my soul to pass through a process of purification and a rethinking of many things. Melancholy, anxiety, fears, and other things torment my soul, and I begin to understand that I desperately need the God in Whom I already believe. But now I need Him as the One to Whom I can cling and hold fast. Going back will bring me no prospect; I will habitually do what I know and know how to do, while the future lies in darkness. I do not know what awaits me ahead, but it is precisely there that the Lord draws me, and He does not forsake me. I sense Him; I believe that He is near. He is faithful to His promises, and they strengthen me, and I believe that I will not be left alone. Our relationship with Jesus becomes very personal, very close. For He alone understands

me and truly supports me. And He gives me confidence that there will be light ahead—bright light. There is something great and inaccessible there that I do not yet know.

I cry out day and night, and I believe that He hears me. My soul passes through the land of darkness.

The enemy of the soul tries to offer me his own solution to these experiences. He has doctors, pills, alcohol, entertainment, travel, the world of laughter and foolishness, every kind of show; or he simply speaks to me through those close to me: “Curse God, and die.” But this world does not interest me. God has laid a foundation in my heart, and I will build my house with God; I cannot do otherwise.

I remember the heroes of the Bible. They all experienced something similar, and their experience of victory strengthens me.

Time passes, and I am still alive. Ahead I see light—beautiful light, new and amazing. I enter a new class and understand that something new that I did not know is opening before me. I begin to seek depth. I seek it in truth and in relationships, and I find it. I have begun to look at the world more seriously and have sifted much that was unnecessary out of my soul. The purity of the revelations draws me, and it is so interesting. Suddenly, in my heart, I realize how greatly I lack love, and I ask for it. And I see the light, move toward it, and discover a new world.

Homework 208

1. Please read 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 2:4; Philippians 3:12-14; Deuteronomy 4:30-31; Psalm 22:11; 25:16-18; 34:19; 39:2-3; 50:15; Ecclesiastes 1:18; Matthew 24:21-22; John 16:33; Romans 5:3-5; 1 Peter 1:6-9; and Revelation 7:14 in the light of our lesson.
2. Did anything new open up to you in this lesson?
3. Do you understand the expression “the dark night of the soul”? Or do you have another definition for this condition?
4. Have you experienced something similar? If so, how did you come out of it, and where did it lead you?

5. Is it possible to avoid such trials?
6. Why is God not opposed to our having tribulation in the world and in our spiritual growth?
7. What should I do if I have not yet experienced anything like what is described in the lesson? Should I prepare for it?
8. Can I create a time of tribulation for myself through my own sins?
9. Are mature Christians ever happy? Or is tribulation the lot of every believer?

Lesson 209. Stages of Faith

It is a very great blessing for each of us if, at the very beginning or in the course of our spiritual growth, someone tells us what we will pass through and experience later. Then we will better understand what is happening and will be prepared for all the changes that we have already heard about and have now approached.

The faith of each of us passes through certain stages of development, and each subsequent stage proceeds from the preceding one and is based on what has already been experienced.

Wise people have studied this development and discovered that the path of every Christian passes through six stages, which I will describe in this and the following lessons. It is absolutely essential to understand this correctly, so that we will not be surprised by the trials, the changes, the darkness, and the disappointments in ourselves through which each of us will pass. When I know what awaits me ahead and what I need to attain, I see the goal and move toward it. My life is hidden in Christ, and I do not know how spiritual growth takes place within me, but by the outward appearance of a spiritual person, I can determine which stage that person is in.

When the Lord shows me an ear of grain, what it once was, and what it looks like before the harvest, it is very easy for me to determine where I am and how I should move forward.

But spiritual growth has its own laws. For example, the growth of wheat requires a certain time for sowing, ripening, and harvesting, and every farmer knows these seasons. In spiritual growth, however, growth can stop or cease, or a person can return to the place from which he came. These are not very good events, but if they take place within the body of Christ, there is Hope that such people will be healed, restored, and move forward. Growth can also proceed quickly if my heart is open to it, if I already know much, and if I continue learning new things. And if someone tells me what is happening, shows

me this path, and explains what I will encounter and what I should not fear, I can travel the marked trail very quickly, seeing the blood and reading about the experiences of the pioneers.

Some of you may read this sequence and say that none of it is true because you have not experienced anything like it. Such people can only be told with confidence that they have become stuck somewhere and that something is wrong with their growth.

But let us consider these six stages of faith in sequence.

I myself came to God from the world, and I know what a worldly person experiences when he begins to grow. It is difficult for me to understand what a person born into a family of believing parents experiences, but at some point that person is also born again and passes through the very same stages of growth, though in a different way.

1. Becoming Acquainted with God. First Love.

At some point, all of us came to know God personally, when He appeared in my life in a wonderful way. It is like a bright flash of light in the kingdom of darkness. I saw how beautiful the light is and how great God is; I heard His call, and my heart responded to it. My new experience of being born again is unique and unlike anyone else's, but it is part of my life, and I love to tell others about it, experiencing that joy again each time and recalling new details of what drew me to Jesus. I still know so little, but I know the One Who died for me, and I can tell about it with such power that those who listen to me will be filled with delight or even weep with emotion. I myself have heard many testimonies of how God saves, how He plucks a brand from the fire and makes it His Own. I recognize this voice of God, and the Lord gives me the ability to understand Him and hear the voice of the Spirit.

At this stage, I am overflowing with a storm of feelings and emotions, and I tell all those close to me about what has happened to me. If I have the gift of persuasion, I can help others come to know God and lead them to Jesus. I have a new

Friend—how wonderful He is, and how I love Him! I am ready to speak about Him for hours, to listen to things about Him, and to rejoice in Him. I am ready to go wherever He tells me to go, and in every brother or sister I see a teacher and mentor for myself.

My knowledge is extremely limited, but I have an experience, deep feelings, and a storm of emotions that simply overflow within me. I am alive; I have been born for God; I will live forever! God loves me, and I not only understand it, but I know it! Oh, if only I could always remain in this state, and if everyone were like this, the whole world could be notified very quickly and helped to find Jesus.

And I desperately need a spiritual mentor who will teach me good things, explain the church's order and teachings to me, and help me move into the next stage. If there are no such people, I may become stuck in the first stage, make my experience the foundation of my faith, and live by it, constantly recalling in my stories what I experienced and how I found God. Oh, how wonderful He is! I do not yet have any theology, but I have Jesus, and that seems sufficient to me.

Spiritual literature can also become my mentor, and with its help I can move into the next stage of faith.

2. Discipleship.

The world of the Bible is so beautiful. I could not even have imagined how fascinating and instructive this book is. And what wonderful works have been written by those who studied the Word of God and then decided to write a book about their discoveries. I gladly learn from these people. I am ready to listen to each and every one. I am deeply interested in learning everything new. How grateful I am to God for this abundant light of new revelations, and how grateful I am to the people who came to know God and shared this knowledge in their works. Through these works, I become established in my faith. I understand that my church is the truest, that its teaching is the most correct, and that my mentors are the wisest people in the world. I have spiritual leaders and authorities whom I am ready

to heed and follow wherever they direct me. And what a joy it is to attend and listen to various seminars. How wonderful it is to learn everything new and useful. And I am learning.

The Bible has become my bread of life. I discover new facets for myself, come to know God even better, and marvel at how great and wonderful He is. I never grow tired of learning, and everything is so interesting to me. I know the One in Whom I have believed, and I believe that He is my Savior; I also already know how He saves.

And if, at this stage, I come across the materials of the School of Agape Love, I will gladly immerse myself in this field of study and gnaw away at this stone, joyfully awaiting new lessons and revelations. It is so wonderful to learn at the feet of Christ!

But stagnant water becomes foul. There is a danger of becoming stuck at this stage of faith through remaining a perpetual student, scrupulously analyzing every law and rule, and comparing all these discoveries with reality.

I risk becoming a Pharisee or a scribe. And that does not frighten me, for what could be better than learning the science of God? My entire life is devoted to this, and I take every kind of deviation from the right course very seriously. I am ready to defend my convictions to the end, and no one can persuade me otherwise, for I have built my faith upon the Rock, and here I stand!

And I do not care what others think. I am more concerned with how it is written, and no one will be able to convince me that I am wrong. I would so like to make a banner saying, "I am right, for I believe in God!" so that it might become the brightest testimony to the whole world and the entire church.

But God draws me farther, and He invites me to share all of this with others, and I move into the next stage.

Homework 209

1. Please read Mark 4:26-29; Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Isaiah 50:4; 2 Timothy 3:5-7; Matthew 10:24-25; and Proverbs 2:1-9.
2. What new and useful things did you learn from this lesson?

3. Why does knowing the path you must travel give you an advantage over not knowing it?
4. Do the stages of the spiritual growth of faith also apply to unbelievers?
5. What part does God play in my spiritual growth?
6. Why am I not given an understanding of the process of spiritual growth within myself? Why does it remain a mystery? If it were revealed to me, I could then cultivate it in other people.
7. What should I do if I see that I have become stuck at one stage and am not growing any further?
8. Why does God not give me the advantages of the final stages immediately, but instead lead me along the difficult path of growth?
9. If everything we are studying here is unfamiliar to me, does that mean that I am spiritually dead?
10. How can spiritual growth be accelerated?

Lesson 210. The Stage of Success

There is nothing more interesting and fascinating than growing in God's garden, in God's family, and watching others grow. It is so joyful to realize that you are a member of the Body of Christ, that you belong to the royal priesthood, that you are a branch on God's vine and a branch of the olive tree, and that you are God's child. And whatever stage of development you may be in, and wherever you may have become stuck in your growth, you are one who belongs to God and is the object of His special care and attention. If only we could see the tenderness with which God labors for us, the love with which He enters into every detail of our lives, and the patience He shows toward us, His beloved children, then our path would be much easier and more fascinating. But we have been given the eyes of faith to comprehend all this without seeing God, but trusting Him as little children trust their parents.

To enter the Kingdom of Heaven, it is necessary to become a child and, like a little one, entrust your life to God and accept with childlike trust what He gives. But infancy is necessary in order to enter the Kingdom, and God has no plan for us to remain that way afterward. He gives growth to everyone who has entered His garden and is in God's flower bed.

And at a certain point in my development, I move into the next stage of faith, where all my brothers and sisters await me and are actively engaged in God's work, helping one another and caring for new members of God's family. I enter a new, fascinating world of fellowship.

3. The Stage of Success.

All the knowledge I have accumulated finds application in every possible sphere of church life. If I previously needed teachers, mentors, spiritual leaders, and authorities, now I myself become such a person. Those who have only recently come out of the world greatly need my counsel, explanations of difficult passages of Scripture, prayerful support, and guidance. I already know what talents God has given me and what success

accompanies me in every work of God that I undertake. My experience of life in Christ is so unique and differs so much from the experience of other people that I gladly share it with others, inspiring those around me to labor for God.

I see how my words reach many hearts and convince those around me that life with God is better. My older brothers, observing my success, decide to entrust me with the leadership of a small group or even place an entire congregation in my care, ordaining me for this ministry. And I, understanding my full responsibility before God and people, take on all kinds of new duties and do what has been entrusted to me.

The enemy of souls constantly trips me so that I will fall and disappoint my brothers and sisters, but in their love they support me and help me rise and continue onward.

I comprehend the science of Salvation and can convince people that life with God is better, more beautiful, and more interesting. Everything I touch and undertake becomes blessed and successful, and I understand that every enterprise and work of God is destined for success. This truth inspires me to undertake everything and to see the abundant blessings that pour down upon me.

And if a trial comes or the struggle intensifies, I run to the One Who is always near and never grows weary.

My entire church reaches this age, and all together, as one complete organism, we fulfill God's mission in this world and confidently grow from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Looking to Christ in faith, we are transformed into the same image and likeness. And it is so joyful to realize this.

Our evangelistic campaigns have attained perfection in theology, and every truth about the plan of Salvation is revealed before the world in all its fullness and beauty. It cannot be disputed, but it can be accepted and mingled with faith, or rejected in order to depart into darkness.

At this stage of faith, I see many of my brothers and sisters become disappointed, discouraged, lose their enthusiasm, burn

out emotionally, and experience something I do not understand; some of them leave our ranks forever, causing us many questions and much astonishment. Disputes, gossip, and disagreements become spiritual bread for many of us, which some share with others with special enthusiasm. God's work grows and advances, while God's people become strange and unpredictable. It is not always easy to understand what is happening, but new church members bring new joy and compel me to labor tirelessly. And I grow. It seems that everything will always remain this way and that our whole family will always dwell together in the garden of God's love. But this is only the third stage, and at a time known to Him, God brings me to a dark wall and calls me to move forward.

And strange things begin to happen in my life. I realize that I am tired, emotionally drained, burned out, and losing strength. I go to the Source and drink, but I am not satisfied. My heart is surfeited and does not feel the taste of life. I understand that I must move forward, but where? Before me are darkness, the unknown, and black fire that burns and brings no joy. I look back and could return to where I grew so beautifully, but an unknown Power of God draws me into the darkness, into a dark forest that seems never to end. And no one is near to tell me what is happening; I must travel this path in complete solitude.

I have a great many questions for God. Sometimes I even shake my little fists at Heaven, crying out to the One Who remains silent, scolding myself, and uncovering very unpleasant things in my life.

I was told about love, that it turns out to exist, and I have even seen those who say that they love; but apart from darkness, I see nothing in my life and do not know what to do. Although outwardly I am still just as active and cheerful, and all my projects for God are moving forward and succeeding, inwardly very little brings me joy anymore, even though outwardly I continue to smile and give others inspiration and blessings. I read about Job and understand that a battle is being waged for my life and that God permits my trials. I read the sorrowful psalms and find myself in them. Darkness has covered me.

What should I do? Where should I go? Ahead are gloom and the unknown. And it seems that God does not hear me. Should I return to the world? But there is death there. Perhaps I am not in the right church? I look for something else. Even though they do not live according to the Bible there, at least there is variety. But this does not solve my problem either.

And I stand before this wall and wonder what I should do next. And who could help me? No one taught me about this or warned me.

Yet I want to grow. And somewhere deep within my soul, I understand that God is near, that He has not forsaken me, and that He has prepared something better and more interesting for me. Relying on Him by faith alone, I clench my teeth and take a step of faith. How dark it is, this dark night of the soul. How sorrowful it is to pass through it. How greatly I long for all this to end.

Various circumstances of life can bring me closer to such a state of soul, and God uses them and Himself leads me into this state. But I will learn about this later, when I have traveled this path. How lonely it is here!

And I move into the next stage of faith and become immersed in myself, in my thoughts and feelings, while remaining cheerful and active for those around me. What a performance. How shameful it is. But I move forward by faith.

Homework 210

1. In the light of this lesson, please read Jeremiah 6:16; Genesis 39:3; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 2 Chronicles 20:20; Joshua 1:7-8; Proverbs 2:3-11; Job 3:23-26; Ecclesiastes 3:1, 5, 12-14; Revelation 2:2-5; and 2 Corinthians 6:6-10.
2. What did you understand from this lesson? What Bible verses came to your mind?
3. Is the third stage truly only the midpoint of the path of spiritual growth? What, then, will come next?
4. Why does God plan a time of personal sorrow for each of His sons and daughters?

5. Why is the dark night of the soul necessary?
6. Are there Christians who develop through different stages of faith?
7. Why does the Lord grant success in spiritual growth and ministry, only afterward to lower a person into darkness?
8. How can I distinguish the dark night of the soul that comes from the Lord from sorrow caused by my sins?

Lesson 211. The Journey Within Yourself

Life with God brings me into a community of like-minded people who share my convictions, teach me, influence me, and come under my influence. Together we are called the Church of Christ; we are God's people, a movement founded by God, and He leads His people, preserves us, and blesses us.

If the Lord were to show me my entire path with Him, from beginning to end, I would be very surprised to discover that the darkest periods of my life, planned by God, were the greatest blessing for me.

The Church of Christ is at the third stage of faith and does not go any farther. But God calls each person who has reached a certain point in growth to continue moving higher individually.

A person moves from experience and knowledge to relationships and self-examination. God desires to have a closer personal relationship with each of us. He dreams of each of us as a friend, as someone who will seek not only blessings from Him but will desire to have a personal, deep relationship with Him, trying to understand Who the Lord is, how near He is, and how I can know Him personally.

When I am occupied with ministry, I simply have no time for this relationship. I must arrange everything, organize everything, and visit everyone; my daily planner is filled with plans and tasks. At the same time, I must earn a living, put my household in order, and take care of many other things. But God plunges me into darkness and says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

And I move into the next stage of faith.

4. The Journey Within Yourself.

How painful it was to pass through the darkness. But after coming out of it, I understood that during that time I had to reevaluate many things, reconsider my life, and discover that I have a heart I do not yet know. I am a person, a human being born for Eternal life with Christ; I am unique and unknown even

to myself. The Lord gives me so many talents and abilities, but I become lost in all of this and want first to understand myself.

I want to understand what kind of people surround me, how close they are to me, and whether I can have deeper relationships with them. I have a great many questions for God. I even have complaints about various situations, and I begin to express them directly in my prayers and simply in my fellowship with Him. Although I do not hear a literal answer, I receive these answers in another way, and at times I understand that I do not need an answer as much as I need the One Who answers. I thirst so greatly for this closeness with God, with my Savior; I feel so good when He is near. I consult Him about every little thing and can come to Him in prayer at any time.

I do not make my relationship a general rule for everyone. It is personal to me, and for each person at this stage it unfolds differently, not as it does for me; but the principle is one and the same—I thirst for a closer relationship.

The invisible God becomes even closer to me, and at the same time I seek human closeness. I would like to have a spiritual mentor on this path as well; I long to find explanations and interpretations for all my “whys” and “hows.” How joyful it is to listen to and read the writings of those who have traveled this path and share their experiences.

In the light of these new experiences, my view of ministry and fellowship with people begins to change. I see the depth and meaning of God’s providence for His people. I see that we are a family—all different, with different positions and understandings, yet brought together to influence, educate, support, and bless one another. Many of us like one another so much that we even establish families and have children who enlarge our community.

In all of this, I look for someone with whom I can have a very close and friendly relationship, so that I may freely share what I am experiencing and also learn from my friend what he is experiencing. Not everyone opens up to such fellowship, and at

times I remain completely alone among closed-off friends. I simply become incomprehensible to many. What do I need?

But in Jesus I find that closest Friend, Who will always understand and support me. And He conducts a dialogue with me very skillfully. I do not hear His voice, but my heart heeds His instruction and His Spirit. It is so fascinating. I comprehend the deep things of God and marvel at new discoveries.

I greatly enjoy being friendly, but in this friendship I long for a very close relationship. I am ready to trust a person so that I may hear wise instruction and reproof from him, but everyone is occupied with themselves—and, for that matter, so am I.

At times my questions disconcert many people, and I see that not everyone is yet ready for the kind of relationship I offer. But this does not trouble me, because I was once the same way, and I know how difficult it is to open up to a friend: what if he betrays or deceives me?

But I move forward in faith. I have heard that something is written in the Bible about love. How good it would be to comprehend this quality of the soul as well and apply it to our relationships. That would be wonderful. But for now, I am learning to understand my inner world, discovering new values and setting the right priorities. And life goes on. And we grow.

I see many of my friends approach the trials through which I have passed, and they are afraid to enter this darkness. How can I help them? I have not yet understood myself. And all of this is painful. But if it is put off until later, it will be even more painful—or it will never happen.

But no matter at what stage my friends and loved ones may have become stuck, as long as they remain in God's family and in the Body of Christ, they should not fear destruction. The Lord accepted them not to reject them, but to preserve them from evil and prepare them for Eternity.

I have friends whose child has a disability and very limited intellectual development. But they love him very much and care for him with great tenderness. They have no intention of killing

this little person; instead, they arrange their life so that this child will feel well and comfortable in his family. He remains their beloved son, with whom they plan to spend all Eternity, despite the fact that he is not like other people. How much better is the Lord in His love for us! And how often we distort His love, attributing to Him our human notions and ambitions.

But as I come to know God more closely, I understand that He is Love.

The Lord cooperates with me in my self-discovery and journey within myself. I discover so many new characteristics and learn how wonderfully I am made, and how beautiful the Lord is in my heart. As I study myself, I see everywhere God's Hand creating a new person. My new heart is also very unique; it is not made of stone but of flesh, and upon it are visible the traces of God's finger, which writes a new story of my life, crossing out everything old and unclean.

Sometimes it is very painful to discover filth within myself, but I rejoice that when I find this impurity, I remove it with God's help, and it is no longer there.

How greatly I need friends. But if I do not have them, I will make them my friends by giving myself to them. I must begin with what is in my hands and within my power.

I have also heard that God has some special love for me—a love that always exists and never ends. How wonderful it would be to possess it continually. How much good could be done in such a state of soul. I must study this question too, but first I will understand myself.

Yes, there is no way without love.

Homework 211

1. What did you understand from this lesson? Is what we are studying clear to you?
2. Are you ready for changes in your life? Are you frightened by what awaits you in the future?
3. If I decide to remain at the stage where I am now, will this be a denial of Christ and a manifestation of disobedience?

4. How can I determine where I am now among the stages of faith?
5. Why does God need such a long process for my spiritual development?
6. Do you have a different understanding of God's path for the development of a person? Please share it if you do.
7. How does God regard my cries, complaints, grievances, and accusations directed at Him? Do I come under a curse for behaving this way?
8. Does God continue to love me if I become stuck in my development or stubbornly refuse to go farther through darkness and fire?
9. What should I do to accelerate my spiritual growth?
10. In the light of our lesson, please read Psalm 46:10; Ephesians 4:13; 2 Peter 3:17-18; Job 38:25-27; Luke 1:80; 2:40; 2 Corinthians 10:15-18; Colossians 1:5-6; and 2 Thessalonians 1-3.

Lesson 212. The Journey Outward

The journey within myself brings no particular joy in life, either to me or to those around me. Nor do I find anything within myself that could be presented to the world as something amazing. But in this unusual state I found the One Who loves me very, very much, accepts me with joy, and reveals to me the depth and essence of very interesting things and facts. Yet I understand that it is not worth remaining within myself for too long and that this journey should come to an end.

My relationship with Jesus brought into my life a deeper understanding of God's will concerning me, concerning the Church, and concerning ministry.

I suddenly began to realize clearly that the ministry I performed at the third stage of faith was more like service to myself. As ashamed as I may be to admit it, I greatly enjoyed the way those around me regarded my ministry. Their delight and praise for my successes in God's work were a powerful driving force behind my enthusiasm, and applause gave me such a powerful incentive that I was ready to labor tirelessly day and night. But it was precisely this excessive enthusiasm that led me to inner burnout. I misjudged my strength and realized that I was very weak, and it was very difficult for me to admit this.

After spending time within myself, I understood a great deal, and I believe that I set my priorities correctly. But the Lord draws me farther; my spiritual growth is not finished. He brings me to the fifth stage of faith and invites me to enter it.

5. The Journey Outward.

I understand that I must return to my ordinary affairs, which I did not cease doing during all this time, or which I set aside for a period of rethinking; but I should return to them with a clearer understanding of what is taking place.

I am in God's service, and He evaluates everything I do differently from the way people do. It is very important for me to know what He thinks of me and how He sees what I do. The

opinions of those close to me are very valuable if they help me see my mistakes and missteps, but praise, admiration, and applause do not interest me, although I do not prevent others from expressing this joy.

I am in God's service, and everything I do, I do for Him.

My approach to things becomes more conscious and balanced. I understand that not every work called God's work is suitable for me or produces the expected effect. I have learned to weigh and analyze. I am more attracted to the depth of the relationships between brothers and sisters in all these activities, and if working together does not lead us to friendship and understanding, then we should find the cause and remove it.

God's approval is the chief incentive that moves me. Whether the work is great or small is not so important, for I am not the one who blesses it and grants success, but the One Who prompted me to perform this labor and to do it continually, from a pure heart. At the same time, I am not deprived of the right to choose, and I recognize my responsibility before Him.

I reconsider many kinds of ministry and look at which of them is closer to my heart, where I could put my talents to use and do something good.

I become incomprehensible to many of my friends, although I understand everyone who has remained at or is growing through the previous stages. But I also understand that my stage of faith is no better than the others; it is simply a continuation of my growth. Yet we are all in the one Body of Christ and cannot exalt ourselves above one another, but are called to help and serve one another more effectively.

What I do sometimes causes a great deal of bewilderment and many questions among those close to me. They begin to consider me strange and mysterious, but I cannot explain to them that I have become different because of the invisible trials I had to endure. God has done something within me that I cannot simply take and return to its former level. Knowing and possessing the depth of revelations and of a relationship with

Jesus, it is very difficult to float on the surface and be content with little. I always long greatly to be near Him and for Him to be with me. Our friendship has brought us so close that I cannot imagine life without this relationship. And all my further ministry and my entire life are dedicated to Him.

The family problems and difficulties that often put me out of action and threw me off balance are now perceived by me as ordinary trials over which one should not become especially anxious or stubbornly defend something. We do not live together in order to wage war over spheres of power and influence; but if my life companion cannot live without war, then I ask for strength and wisdom to endure and bear all of it.

But I move farther, and I understand very clearly that I greatly need love—that very agape love without which all my labors and ministries lose their meaning. I do not want merely to understand that I am doing something correctly; I also want to have the right motive in every deed. I see that love must be present in my heart, that a great deal is said about it, and I continue to ask for this gift of Heaven as well.

I believe that God hears me and that He answers, but not as I expect.

He plunges me into darkness. Once again I find myself in a dark forest, and I do not understand why I am treated in precisely this way. It hurts me that I am tormented in this manner, cast into fire and emotional anguish. But I have learned to trust Jesus, and this darkness does not frighten me. I can turn back; I can remain where I came from; but I decide to go on. Once again my values are reevaluated, and I ask God what will come next and what end I should expect. And God, in His love, shows me a beautiful future. I see a cross, I see a man crucified upon it, and I recognize myself. Such a reward astonishes me, but at the same time I begin to understand that the world is capable of nothing more, and this is what awaits me in return for my love, in return for that agape which never fails. And in the crowd around the cross I see familiar faces who joyfully pass sentence upon me. Then I look at the cross and now see the Savior there, Who takes this blow upon Himself. And I realize that I am no

better than Christ, and the world has not become better in its treatment of His disciples; but I must choose this in order to move farther. And I do so. I cannot imagine a way back. I do not fear the fire if Jesus is in it; I do not fear the cross if that is what is necessary. Figuratively speaking, I die to this world, although I continue to breathe.

I give my life to Christ and express my consent to everything God has planned for me. I have the choice to go forward, and I take this step of faith. For my soul thirsts for something greater, eternal, and real. I open the door of my heart, and the Lord enters. But He does not bring a hammer and nails; instead, He treats me to Heavenly bread that I have never tasted before. We sit down at the table and begin our meal. He speaks and I listen; then I ask and He answers. I ask what will happen next, and He assures me that He will not leave me in the future either, but will show me great and inaccessible things that I do not know but about which I have heard so much.

And together we enter a new stage of our relationship and experiences.

And I understand that my discoveries at this stage have not ended; they are only beginning. Before me stretches the boundless ocean of God's love, which I will have to accept and come to know, and I boldly enter its dark waters. Beside me is the One Who will never leave me, but will show and explain everything to me.

Homework 212

1. In the light of our lesson, please read 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; 5:4-5, 7; Philippians 1:9; 3:17; 2:12-14; 3:8-14; Ephesians 3:16-21; Hebrews 12:2-3; Isaiah 30:15; 2 Corinthians 10:17-18; and Revelation 3:8.
2. Is it clear to you what this lesson is about? What exactly did you understand?
3. Are you familiar with this subject of the stages of faith that we are studying?

4. Why did the Lord establish these stages of faith in precisely this way and in this sequence?
5. Do you know anyone who has reached the fifth stage? Can such people be identified by sight?
6. Do you believe that this stage is accessible to you as well?
7. Do pastors, elders, and church board members automatically reach the highest stage of faith by virtue of their position?
8. Why can the entire Church not go beyond the third stage of faith?
9. Is it difficult for you to answer these questions?
10. Please pray for our School of Love.

Lesson 213. The Stage of Love

Every fruit tree has its own value, which is determined by the presence of fruit. Each tree has a certain growing season, its own characteristics, its own time frames and purposes. By the taste and quality of the fruit, one can determine how useful the tree is and whether it is worth continuing to care for it.

In His parables, the Lord often uses this image to reveal His expectations to His children. It is good to be a tree planted by streams of water, but the requirements for such a plant are also very high. Anything may grow in a forest, but in God's garden only that which bears good fruit grows.

As much as one might wish to give everyone hope that the main thing is to get into God's garden and that somehow we will adapt once we are there, the Bible teaches that only good, fruit-bearing plants remain in this garden, although the Lord takes painstaking care of everyone planted there.

And what fruit does the Lord expect from His plantings? The very fruit that is beneficial to the soul and glorifies God. We read in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

But if a tree is called a pear tree, I do not expect apples from it. In my own life, however, I can diversify my fruits if I comprehend the science of salvation and try and practice what is relevant for the present time.

Serving God is the most beautiful state of the soul; it brings joy and satisfaction to the heart, although at times it takes place under very difficult conditions. And at some point I begin to understand very clearly that I need love, that for fullness and harmony I lack this quality in my life, and that my motives are good, yet at times they remain tasteless. I labor with all my heart, do God's work, and do it responsibly and joyfully, but my heart does not love those for whom I labor. At times I become aware of the terrible truth that I need no one and that, by and large, no one is interested in me either. And this language very

quickly gives itself away. I look like a hypocrite. Although I understand that everything in my life is right, that I have a close relationship with Christ, that there is ministry and there are results, nevertheless I do not have love. I cannot say that I have none at all; here and there it makes itself known, and I see how it sometimes acts and gladdens my heart, but I also understand that it must always be present.

And the good news for me is that God leads me from glory to glory, not in order to cast me aside at some moment of my despair or disappointment in myself, but to endow me with everything He has purposed and to make me what He desires to see. And as I passed from stage to stage, I simply came up against an ocean into which I must enter. Behind me are the wilderness, darkness, struggles, and the pursuit seeking to return me to slavery; ahead is a boundless sea that will drown me. But Jesus draws me into these waters. I understand what they mean; I thirst to have them within me and to be in them. Love is not merely another stage of my growth; it is the open heart of God, which desires to become my heart and to teach me to treat people as the Lord does. The special feature of receiving this gift is that God desires to give it to me, but He cannot do so without me. He often showed me that love exists; He took me in His arms and lowered me into these waters, and then set me back down, desiring that I should thirst for it with all my soul. And when I understand with my mind that I need it and strive with my heart to receive it, then a more excellent way opens before me. And I enter a new stage of faith.

6. Agape Love.

I knew that it existed, I knew that it was available, but theory is one thing and personal experience is another. How I longed to taste this goodness and discover its flavor. I tried to find it in the accounts of others; I desired to receive it from the experiences of others, but I only guessed what it was.

When I was a child, I saw how people formed families, how they lived together, and then how children were born to them. I decided that I too would have a family. I saw my wife in every girl, but I was shy about offering my hand and heart. At the age

of thirteen, I firmly decided to marry and even chose the classmate who was very well suited for that role, but I never proposed to her. The laws of the country restrained me from taking this step, but I learned that somewhere in India one could marry at that age, and I deeply regretted that I was not in India. I was not interested in where we would live, how we would support a family, or where children came from; I simply wanted a family relationship because that was how adults lived. I had a visible example, but no knowledge or understanding of what it was. Time passed, however, and at the age of twenty-two my dream came true. By then I already had understanding, responsibility, and permission for such an undertaking. I did not know what it looked like from within, but I moved confidently toward it, and when I entered this stage of life, I began to understand it better. During this time of life together, I have understood three important things: 1. What a family should not be. 2. What it can be if love is brought into it. 3. Family happiness is built by both spouses. In other cases, either it does not exist or it is one-sided. Of course, there are other discoveries as well, but in a relationship the participation of both sides is important.

Look at how God relates to us, to the world, and to me. Absolute love. And what does He receive in return?

But if I desire to respond in kind, then something very beautiful will result between us. When I was a babe in Christ, I viewed my relationship with God as a child, although I dreamed of something great and considered myself an adult. But children are not permitted to live an adult life; they must learn certain things, and this takes time. Yet if that time has come and I am still feeding from a bottle and very fond of wearing diapers, people already look at me with regret. God has appointed seasons of growth, and He does not hasten them, although exceptions may be made for prodigies. But when the time comes, He draws me farther.

And the stage of love is not something I may or may not want, but the place in my faith that I must reach. This step was created not for "favorites" or the especially gifted, but for

everyone—and for you, reader!!! This science is not theory for those who are bored and have nothing to do, but the narrow way that will lead you to the goal.

If you choose another way, you will miss the goal. In a literal translation, sin means to miss the mark. Is that what you want? What do you expect from your Christianity, dear friend? To drift quietly with the current? If you want to take off, remember that an airplane takes off against the wind.

If God has prepared love for you, desires to endow you with it, and accepts nothing else, would it not be better to meet Him and choose what is mine by right and in fact? Is that logical? Yet with all God's strictness and longsuffering, He allows me to make this choice myself, without outside pressure, after weighing everything and deciding. And what do I choose?

Eternal life is worth giving everything to obtain it.

If in life it is possible not to start a family rather than to create just anything, then in a relationship with Christ one must create what He offers, and in this relationship just anything will not do. What hinders you, friend? Love exists; it is available and worth attaining. It awaits you. The Spirit and the bride say, Come.

Homework 213

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Psalm 1:3; Isaiah 58:11; Jeremiah 17:8; Matthew 3:12; 25:29-46; Mark 11:13; John 15:5-9, 13, 16, 17, 21, 27; Galatians 5:22-23; James 3:12-18; John 12:24-26; Isaiah 66:19-20; 2 Corinthians 3:3-4, 6; and Mark 9:49.
2. What new things did you learn in this lesson?
3. How does God address His children? Can He do this through our lessons?
4. Why does the Apostle Paul call the stage of love "a more excellent way"? 1 Corinthians 12:31.
5. Is life good for those who love and make this love the joy and meaning of life?
6. Why, despite love being available to all, is it neither popular nor sought after even among God's children?

7. Is there truly no love at the previous stages of faith? Explain how you understand its presence in a person's life.
8. Why do those who have reached the higher stages of faith become less understandable to those who do not strive for further growth?
9. Can a person who is at the second or third stage be a counselor or mentor to those who have surpassed him in faith and are at the following stages, but are younger in physical age?

Lesson 214. Is That All?

In the previous lessons, friends, we examined six stages of faith, and through this we saw what happens to a believer on the way to God and in life with God. And as I look back on my life with Christ and recall the entire journey, I can say that those very unpleasant moments in my spiritual growth and those difficult experiences that I had to go through and endure were the greatest blessing for my soul. During that time, the Lord was removing from me all filth and all my carnal character traits, without injuring my individuality. And now, when I sense or see another trial approaching, I am not afraid to enter it, although from a human perspective I do not always want to. And every time I look to Jesus and quietly ask Him, "You will not leave me today, will You?" and immediately answer myself, "No, He will not," remembering His promises that He will allow no one to pluck me out of His hand.

At school I was taught that if something is limited by a certain number, then upon reaching the last digit, I receive the fullness, and that is the end. But what comes next? Does this rule apply to the stages of faith? As I strive for love and exert all my effort and desire to attain, comprehend, receive, and discover it, where do I arrive? Do I reach a dead end where everything has been attained and there is nothing more for which to strive? And will there be another stage of development? After all, "Peter's ladder" also ends with love. Is that truly all?

Such thoughts may arise when I am at an early stage and try to apply human understanding to spiritual things. But my mind is accustomed to living within a framework and defining everything by conventional boundaries. And once it has established them, it calms down and feels secure in its complete understanding of what is happening. But agape love is an exception to every rule; it is not the end of a stage of faith, but the beginning of a new and perfect life in Christ Jesus. It is precisely now that I begin to understand the meaning of life; it is precisely in love that the potential of unlimited possibilities,

which I can continually realize and discover, opens before me. I begin to understand many of God's actions that He performed in the past and that I viewed in the poor light of my perception. I am continually pursued by discoveries of the beauty and depth of God's character, and I cannot stop in this knowledge, for there is nothing more fascinating than discovering the heart of God. And it is love that presents these discoveries in the right light.

My education did not end at the last stage of faith; it only began there. A whole ocean of new opportunities and wonderful prospects opened before me. I am comprehending this science of love, and I understand that this ocean cannot be fully comprehended or allow me to say that I have reached the limit and that there is no path beyond it.

There is also a seventh stage, but it is no longer a stage of faith; it is a personal meeting with the One Who will come for us to take us with Himself forever, for all Eternity. Then my faith in the invisible God will receive an absolute reward for all time: Eternity, with all its riches and glory, will be given to me, and love will be within it the eternal meaning of Eternal life, which will dissolve all fears and apprehensions and make eternal development possible.

My eyes will see God. The One Whom I knew by faith will be revealed to my sight, and without fear I will look upon the faces of the Father and the Son and be transformed into the same image, from glory to glory.

But for now, faith is still in effect. I have eyes of faith that see God in His word, in His promises, in my life, and in the lives of those close to me. I see this image in the faces of my believing friends and admire Christ as I observe those who are led by Him. In their words, I very often hear the voice of God, Who encourages me, comforts me, strengthens me, points out errors, reproves me, gladdens me, and does that which brings benefit and works for good.

I live by faith, and it leads me through severe trials.

Love is not the end of the war, but the beginning of the fiercest battles. For the enemy of the soul has not died, but has flown into indescribable rage, knowing that he has lost me forever and that I will lead many more people after me into Eternity and, with God's help, tear them from the chains of delusion, unbelief, despair, and distorted stereotypes. But this war does not frighten me; I have long been in the ranks. What is frightening is not to be wounded or to fall under the burden, but to fall and not rise again, to lose God's hand, to become conceited, and to exalt myself in my own eyes.

Love is given for this very purpose: to lead me through every trial and give me victory in everything.

And being an overcomer is love's most beautiful advantage. When you have several million in your pocket and need to buy a small bread roll, you do not worry about whether you have enough money for it. In the same way, Love gives me enormous potential and wealth, yet at the same time makes me poor in spirit. I know that I have it, but I constantly need it; I am afraid of being left without it, although I am immersed in it over my head. It fills me within and without. But my heart is a weak, leaky vessel that God is compelled to fill continually with His oil, for if this ceases, I will simply be emptied and will be unable to satisfy this need anywhere. And I place my new heart beneath the waterfall of God's love and allow these waters to pass through me and pour into the lives of my friends, blessing them with little streams of endless love.

The distinctive feature of Eternal love is that it places me in eternal dependence upon God, and apart from Him it cannot exist; it simply is not present where God is absent. And if God stops this river, where can I go? Who will give me this water of life? I know no one, and I simply do not have it within myself. I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Where will I go without Christ? What am I capable of without His love? This is where true fear and horror lie! But for some reason many choose precisely this path. Where is the logic?

A drunken person is incapable of appreciating eternal values. He does not need heavenly treasures. But I can give these

people hope, and God gives the words needed for this, while each person must decide for himself.

The stage of love is the beginning of the study of the longest-lasting science, which cannot be comprehended in this life. It is for this reason that God gives me Eternal life: so that during this period I may comprehend at least a little of the depth of this quality of the soul and experience in practice its influence in the lives of my friends. And only there, after billions of trillions of years, will I suddenly understand that love is something very good and very beneficial for my soul, and that there is simply no way to do without it, and I will admit with shame to my friends that at last I truly love them, while all that time I had only been striving toward it. And after trillions of decarions of years, I will suddenly understand how far I was from that true love when I confessed it to my friends, but now I have begun to understand something better, and now I have a very wonderful opportunity to go deeper into this science and to comprehend that great and inaccessible thing which I do not know.

And I am not troubled by the fact that I still know so little about love. It has been given to me so that I may comprehend it, study it, try it, and apply it. And the Mentor given to me is not a human being, but the Lord Himself, Who will teach me everything I need to know, reveal everything I did not understand, and remind me of what I forgot or failed to take into account.

Homework 214

1. In the light of our lesson, please read 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Colossians 2:8, 10; Philippians 3:14-15; 2:13-15; Ephesians 4:13, 15; 3:16-21; 1 Corinthians 13:11-13; Hebrews 5:8; 1 John 3:2-3; 3:18-20; John 17:26; and Jeremiah 1:9, 11-12.
2. Did you gain anything useful for yourself from this lesson? What did you understand?
3. What do you think: is love the end of the journey or the beginning of new discoveries?
4. Will our education and spiritual growth continue after the Second Coming?

5. How do people at the sixth stage of faith differ from everyone else?
6. What does the Lord expect from those who receive God's love?
7. Are special obligations placed upon a loving person?
8. Is it difficult to love?

Lesson 215. Open Your Heart

In Italy, an experiment was conducted using a hidden camera. A little girl, five or six years old, named Valentina, was seated at a small table in a waiting room at some institution. The girl was asked to begin communicating with the people who would be in that room with her. She may have been warned that, if necessary, someone would come to her aid. Then they began filming what took place.

The first visitor entered. From his appearance, one could immediately tell that he was the leader or a member of some criminal group. He was covered in tattoos and had a defiant appearance. He sat down on a chair and began to wait with an indignant expression. Meanwhile, Valentina was quietly playing at the table and solving her little puzzles. Then, in an unobtrusive way, she began getting acquainted with this man and talking with him, and afterward invited him to join her.

With her sincere requests, she drew the visitor into the process of preparing imaginary food, while continuing to talk with him. It ended with Valentina's new friend breaking into a broad smile and continuing to play with that expression on his face. Then the girl was called, and before leaving, she wrapped her little arms tightly around the neck of her new friend, pressed her cheek against him, and then ran away. Left alone, the man covered his face with his hands and began to cry. I do not know what he was experiencing or thinking about, but tears ran down his face, and he made no attempt to stop them.

After this, Valentina was invited back into the waiting room, where she waited for the next visitor while playing her games. A muscular man of about forty entered. He was covered in tattoos, wore glasses, and had many chains around his neck. From his appearance, it was clear that he feared no one and recognized no authority. He sat down with a detached expression and began to wait.

Valentina introduced herself and began a conversation with him, inviting him to take part in her games.

Very quickly, the visitor changed his demeanor and could not stop smiling. And when the time came to part, after they embraced, he took off one of his chains and gave it to his little friend. When Valentina left, he continued smiling as he stared thoughtfully at the wall.

The third visitor was about one and a half times larger than the previous ones and, judging by the expression on his face, belonged to the same kind of company. But Valentina was able to win his heart as well, and after their farewell embrace, she left him alone to weep in his heart over his difficult life.

I was amazed at how quickly a small, fragile girl was able to open the hearts of these rough men, become their friend, and cause them sincerely to rejoice and weep. She did not know the laws of psychology; she had not yet attended school; perhaps she had never even gone to church. Yet in some astonishing way, she was able to reach the deepest parts of their hearts and touch those strings of the soul that had been hopelessly buried beneath the burden of sin, but were waiting for "their musician." These men had a choice. They could have spoken harshly to the girl and waited for their turn; they could have hurt her; they could simply have ignored her. Although Valentina knew that someone would come to her aid in case of danger, she behaved so naturally that perhaps she did not even think anything could threaten her. She simply decided, with a childlike heart, to love these people and become their friend, without thinking about the consequences.

Every day when I leave home, I meet different people who have souls and who, somewhere deep within, are waiting for "their musician" so that they may open their hearts and perform the most beautiful song, called "friendship." But sin has closed the windows of the soul, and iniquity has placed its seal upon this song, and people have to drag out their wretched existence in this world, sometimes not understanding what they want, yet subconsciously waiting for someone who will accept them and help them open up, or someone who will simply need them.

Love knows these needs of the human soul and tirelessly seeks ways to win new hearts.

It is written that unless we become like children, we shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And sometimes I understand how much I lack that childlike simplicity and openness in communicating with people, so that I may simply become their friend. At times I have no desire to do this, but love draws me to new people, urging me toward friendship, while also reminding me that there are old friends who must not be forgotten.

And how joyful it is to see a closed heart begin to open under the influence of your friendliness and warmth of soul, allowing your love and friendship into its heart. Here effort must be made in order to enter and remain a friend. Strength from above is needed; something more than what I possess is needed. And I run to Jesus in prayer and ask Him to give me love, and I receive it so that I may always love and do so from a pure heart. And having received what I asked for, I become a friend for life.

Imagine what would have happened if one of the men about whom I wrote above had simply struck this girl and shouted at her. I think she would simply have stopped taking part in the experiment and perhaps would have lost something very precious and carried that pain through the rest of her life.

But in my life, and in the life of every loving person, this is exactly what happens: you are struck because of your love and kindness; people respond rudely; they strike deliberately, knowing where it will hurt the most; and those dearest and closest to you strike you. But they cannot extinguish this fire in the heart, and these trials do not weaken love, but establish it in the soul, making you stronger. Without God's help, it is impossible to keep this source of friendliness pure and sincere, and therefore, during trials, there is a constant need for God Himself to produce all these desires, actions, and thoughts within me. And He begins to act. But how tenderly He does it! How carefully He touches the soul of my neighbor; how unobtrusively He offers me, and Himself together with me, in the form of love and friendship. And He waits. During rejection, how understandable Christ's experiences become to me, when He offers Himself and is refused.

Our neighbors always have a large arsenal of sticks ready with which to strike back, bearing such names as indifference, mockery, rudeness, malice, sarcasm, arrogance, pride, and foolishness. But God's "armor of righteousness" protects your soul from blows and bruises, and the fire of love draws you toward victory without frightening you with the consequences.

And the only beautiful place where a loving soul finds rest is in the Lord Jesus and in the heart of that friend who opens his soul, accepts you as his brother and friend, and allows you to touch the strings of his soul, so that together you may study and sing that new song of victory, whose words are written by your own life, lived in victories with Christ.

And the loving heart gives endless thanks to God, glorifying His name in all its deeds.

How great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty!
Who shall not fear Thee and glorify Thee, Thou King of saints?

The life of love teaches me this wonderful song. Recently, someone even set it to music.

And in this song of love lies the foundation of my love, upon which I build my life and my friendship.

And all of this leads us to unity in the body of Christ. We become one whole organism, because we love one another.

Homework 215

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Isaiah 50:4-8; 51:7-8; 61:10, 7; Proverbs 24:16; Jeremiah 1:19; 15:21; 24:7; Revelation 15:3-4; John 17:21-23; 18:37; 2 Corinthians 6:4-10; Romans 8:36-37; Ephesians 6:10-18; Isaiah 12:2-6; Exodus 15:3; Psalm 46:10, 12; and Ephesians 4:15-16.
2. What interesting things were revealed to you in this lesson?
3. Who do you think these musicians are who open people's hearts?
4. What is vitally necessary for us in order to become a friend forever?
5. Why does the Lord permit us to receive blows from those close to us?

6. What helps a warrior of Christ during battle?
7. What advantages do those who love have?
8. Does love lead to unity in Christ?

Lesson 216. We Need to Ask

There are things that belong to me by right and are always available at any time—air, water, sunlight, and warmth. I do not need to beg for them. These are things that belong to me by right of creation and sustain my life.

There are things that I choose for myself according to my taste—food, clothing, a place to live, and a place to work. There are exceptions when I may be given something I do not want, but sometimes there is simply no other choice, and I have against my will something other than what I want.

There are also things that I may have, but I can live without them—a life companion, children, a means of transportation, things for a comfortable life, surplus finances, and means of communication. I can choose and regulate my attitude toward them.

All of this fills my physical life, and I become accustomed to it and arrange my comfort.

But I am not only a physical being; I have a soul and a spirit that need spiritual nourishment and satisfaction. They are not satisfied by the possession of things and comforts; they need spiritual bread that satisfies spiritual needs. Some replace this need with poison for the body—coffee, black tea, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, pornography, and other things—defiling their minds and souls and killing themselves. Some seek comfort in music, entertainment, tourism, travel, philosophy, hobbies, and religion, and find what satisfies them.

Not every religion benefits a person, but nevertheless, it contains elements of truth and goodness, comfort, and the satisfaction of spiritual needs.

The soul seeks God; it cannot live without Him. It was created for fellowship with the Creator, and until it finds this way, it will long, wander restlessly, and ache. It needs God—the true God, not a counterfeit.

And God gives us the opportunity to know Him, and He reveals Himself to everyone who finds Him, filling life with meaning. But even in this knowledge there are things that belong to me by right and are added automatically, while there are also things that are not available to me just like that, but that must be requested and received under certain conditions. And there are also things for which one must plead, applying one's whole human being and having a genuine thirst to know and receive them. There are gifts and talents that God gives at His discretion for service in the church. And there is also something for which one must convince God that one truly needs it and does not intend to go on living without it.

Not everything is given so easily to a believer, although there are no limits to God's goodness.

Love is something familiar to every person, and everyone has at some time experienced its influence, but at the same time does not possess enough of it to give it continually or to live in it without encountering resistance.

Agape love is probably what God most wants to give His people, but what they least want to possess or receive.

When I set out on the path of life with God, I am given God's protection, God's blessing for each day, God's safeguarding from evil, gifts for service, revelations and wisdom for knowing the truth, and a great deal more, freely, because God loves me very much. But there is something I must ask for. These are special blessings, special revelations, special miracles in my life and in the lives of my neighbors, special wisdom, and special strength. And He gives these things to me only in answer to prayer and because of His love for me.

But God's greatest dream is to give Himself and a special relationship with Himself. And He clothed this dream in agape and offers it in the form of symbols. Never before in the history of Christianity has God been as near and accessible as He is in our days, during the Laodicean period. He knows that no one will stand without Him, yet He modestly waits for thirsty souls who are genuinely interested in Him and in a special

relationship with His Son Jesus. God waits for those who thirst for fellowship and upon whom He can pour out His Spirit. God is alive, and He wants to be my Friend and to have a deep relationship with me, but this also requires my participation. And not merely my invitation, but my sincere interest in Him.

Jesus comes to everyone and responds to every invitation. Then, after spending time in fellowship, He rises and leaves. Not because He wants to leave me, but because He cannot remain where He is not needed. And in order for Him to stay, He must be convinced of it. This may sound funny, but God understands us very well and respects our freedom. He is not offended when He sees that He is not needed, but He waits for the next invitation so that He may enter again and spend time in fellowship. Then He rises and leaves again, and He does so reluctantly. But there is no other way.

Agape is what reveals to me the beauty of God's character and binds me so closely to Him that I cannot live without Him. I need Him always—not as a Guest, but as a Friend, as Lord, as the One Who has become part of my life, as my Spouse. This is a special relationship, but it is also conditional. And it is conditioned by my daily choice. But love binds us together so firmly that I simply cannot imagine life without it. And it draws me into a special relationship with my neighbors. Sometimes I fall so deeply in love with those who are near and visible that I become afraid that perhaps I have lost God in this and have begun to love Him even less. But He dispels my fears and convinces me that it is not I, but He within me Who loves my friends and teaches me the right relationship with them and toward them. And I rejoice and give thanks. But even in my relationship with those whom I love, I cannot be intrusive. I rise and leave, longing very much to stay, but respecting the freedom and choice of my friends. Although, in a human way, I always make it clear that I am available and not very far away.

But I am human; I may be busy, or I may be only with my wife and not go or travel anywhere. And I hope for understanding. But God is always available. He is never so busy that He cannot spend time with me. Although at times He must be convinced

that I need His special love and desire to possess it, even this is His will for me. He does not give the most precious things just like that, but He joyfully gives them freely and in immense abundance to those who seek, ask, and thirst.

I began asking for love simply so that I would not perish in the bustle of life and could survive, but He gave it to me so that I might always overcome and win every battle. I thought that with this gift I would only be able to endure my neighbors, but I began to admire and delight in them. I thought I would remain unnoticed, but the Lord places me on the top of a mountain to be a light. He sends me to Nineveh, but I run to Tarshish; then He sends a storm and swallows me into darkness. I repent and go where I must go.

Miracles of grace are taking place all around me, but I become accustomed to them and no longer know any other life.

How interesting and wonderful it is to live in love, to possess it, and to have access to the unlimited arsenal of this power of God. I am friends with the One Who is above all. And this is the very best thing one could wish for everyone.

To love is to live with meaning. It is a connection to the Heavenly source of energy that begins to act when I press the “Start” button.

Dear friend, fill your life with meaning as well. Jesus is alive, and He is near to adorn your life also with something beautiful and joyful. And He loves you very much, respects your choice, and waits—He has already been waiting for a very long time.

Homework 216

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Luke 11:9; Hebrews 4:15-16; Luke 10:2-3; John 16:24, 26-27; James 4:2-3; Jeremiah 29:12-13; 2 Chronicles 7:14; John 7:37-38; Luke 26:16; 2 Chronicles 15:15; and Romans 12:11.
2. Why does the human soul need God?
3. What does life with God give you?
4. What gift has the Lord prepared for you?
5. What does the Lord expect from you?

6. Name the advantages of those who are friends with God.
7. Why does God not want to share His love within us with anyone?

Lesson 217 . Unity in the Body of Christ

I used to notice a very bad character trait in myself. While in the church, among God's people, somewhere in my corrupt heart I would assess each person's chances of salvation and decide who would be saved and who would not. It looked very foolish. Fortunately, I did not share my conclusions with anyone, although I very much wanted to. And many times the Lord showed me that I was wrong in making such judgments, for I judged everyone by myself, relying on what I saw and heard, whereas He looks at the heart. How shameful it is to receive such rebukes. But the truth that we are all parts of the body of Christ and constitute one organism—in which each of us has his own talent, his own gift for service, and his own function—helped me greatly to correct this way of thinking. And it is Christ Who determines a person's salvation, which is what He is now doing in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

Let us compare this body of Christ with the human body. Which organ in this body is unnecessary? None. But what if something is cut off? If it is not a vital organ, the body will live, but the person will become disabled.

The Word of God says a great deal about professed Christians. Yes, they exist in this world and are present in every denomination, but this does not mean that the church has ceased to be the body of Christ.

Faith in Jesus unites all God's children into one family. It is Jesus Who makes us all relatives, brothers and sisters, regardless of race, sex, nationality, age, language, culture, mentality, profession, education, spiritual stage of faith, social status, or financial standing. We are all equal in Christ, Who, through the one Spirit, has made us kin to one another and drawn us to Himself.

But when this organism begins to work, so much friction and disagreement arise that one wonders how this structure is still alive and accomplishing anything.

The Lord taught that the tares would always grow together with the wheat until the harvest, and even among His disciples there was Judas; the other followers were not particularly united either. But for three and a half years these disciples were taught by the best Teacher in the world, and this united them. For example, there was Simon the Zealot, and he was one of those who hated publicans. There was Matthew the publican, who before his calling had collected taxes from his own people for the Roman treasury. And John and his brother were sons of thunder. Jesus united all of them in Himself, while they continually divided positions among themselves, unwilling to yield to one another.

And what could unite them into one whole? Jesus, the truth, and agape love, through the Holy Spirit.

At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus pronounced His new commandment to love one another three times. And the prophetic distinction of the last-day church is that it will keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus Christ. The commandment to love one another is also included in this definition, along with the other Ten Commandments. Another distinction is that these commandments will be written not only on stone or in the Bible, but God Himself, with His own hand, will write them in my heart and put them into my mind. And I will obey not according to the letter, but according to the Spirit. And this very Spirit of God unites all of us into one whole organism.

But in every body, each organ has its own function. There are people who, like the heart, bring life and joy into every society; there are hands that do good. There are simply kind members who appear very unassuming, but who work tirelessly. And what should be done with the part of the body located just below the back? It simply embarrasses all of us, and the opening in this part sometimes poisons the atmosphere so much that it is impossible to breathe. But this too is part of the body! And if it becomes ill or is removed, the whole body will suffer and will realize that we all needed one another.

And how does Jesus look upon all of us? With love and tenderness. Each one of us is very dear to Him. There are no unnecessary organs in His body. And Christ's final prayer in Gethsemane was for our unity and love.

What does our unity consist of? In faith in and knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom He sent; in biblical teaching and obedience; in service to the world and to one another; and in love and friendship among ourselves.

Willful interpretation of Holy Scripture and the desire to rule over one another divided God's children into different movements, and the movements themselves divided into different denominations. Today there is no difficulty in opening one's own church, with one's own teaching and bylaws, and calling it Christian. And the world is filled with such organizations, each claiming its own exclusivity and purity. But Jesus looks upon this division with pain. He desires not division, but unity. Yet there will be no unity in falsehood and error, except perhaps for a short time in a war against the truth. Something vile, abominable, and unclean will never become part of the body of Christ and, like a cancerous tumor, will be mercilessly removed from the organism.

Faith, truth, and love—all of this binds us together into one whole, and we recognize one another. And this unity will form the character of Christ in us and prepare us for the time of sealing. Very soon the time will come when all God's people will be sifted and purified. God Himself will gather His people into one body from all the ends of the earth.

We read: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

And this understanding of unity in the body of Christ is a foundation of my faith, and God's love makes this unity possible in my life.

And our School of Agape Love has this purpose: to reveal the beauty of God's character; to prepare people's hearts for the

restoration of this character and the image of God in the life of each one of us; to bring us all to unity in faith, truth, and love; and to make us fit to receive God's seal and for Eternal life among holy beings. And all of this is not something separate, but part of God's common work, which is being carried out by all God's children throughout the world.

Each of us has different gifts and talents, but we are all children of one Father; we are a family in Jesus; we are kin.

And God's love binds all of us together into one organism, while the righteousness of Christ, like skin, gathers us into one body and covers us, giving us the proper contours and curves. And the Holy Spirit gives everything the breath of life, love, and harmonious cooperation in labor and service. And all of this is to the glory of God.

But soon the time will come when the Lord will come to resurrect all those who constitute His body, transform those who glorify Him in their lives, and take us all to Heaven in order to present us to the Father as His Bride. And there will be a feast, a celebration, and great joy for all.

And now the Lord greatly desires that we all have this spiritual unity and strive for it in the spirit of love and truth. Falsehood and error will never unite people into a family, except perhaps for a short time to fight against the truth. And this time is approaching. And who will be able to stand?

And what should be done about disagreements in the church? Love resolves all these matters very quickly and without complications.

Homework 217

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Psalm 133:1; Matthew 28:19-20; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26-27; Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; 2 Corinthians 5:16-17; Galatians 3:27-29; Ephesians 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; and Colossians 3:10-15.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. What truth will help change our distorted thinking?

4. Is it truly possible to get rid of disagreements?
5. What is important for us to seek in order to be united?
6. Do you think the prophetic message for the last days includes the commandment to love one another?
7. What is distinctive about unity, and how does God produce it in our lives?
8. Why is there no other foundation for the unity of the Church except unity in the knowledge of the only true God?
9. Why can compromise with evil not bring peace?
10. Why will God sift His people?
11. Do you think the School of Agape Love helps build up the Body of Christ?
12. What plans does God have for us?
13. Why is it important to remember our place before God and not judge who will be saved?

Lesson 218 . And They Worshipped the Beast

There was a time when God's people warned everyone living on earth that the end of all things was approaching and that the history of our Earth was coming to an end. We were regarded as fanatics and sectarians, and people mocked us.

The events of recent months have changed people's attitude toward reality. And very many thoughtful people have begun to feel anxious and ask questions to which it is impossible to give exhaustive answers.

Satan has his own army. It includes all the fallen angel-deceivers and those people who, knowingly or unknowingly, have devoted their lives to serving the enemy of the human soul. And Satan is alive, and he is a very active entrepreneur. His task is to convince people that he does not exist, that everything happening is accidental, and that there is nothing to fear, while at the same time he sets traps and nets into which all who live on Earth fall.

We read the most dreadful warning for the world in Revelation 13:3-4: "...and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" This speaks of worshipping the dragon and the beast. The dragon is Satan, who is invisible to us, the spirit of the prince of this world who rules in the air. The beast is a religious-political structure—the representatives of Satan—who are under the direct influence of spiritual wickedness in high places and who bring into the life of this world all the plans of the evil one that God permits and allows to be carried out.

I in no way wish to defame the Name of God by making Him an accomplice in evil, but I want to make it clear that God, in His love and respect for human freedom of choice, allows people to do what they have chosen and to establish the regimes and authorities that they devise in their political and religious activity. At the same time, however, the Lord offers a better

alternative and has His own people and His own nation through whom He carries out His plans.

But it is written that everyone will worship the beast and the dragon. Could God's children be included in this number —“everyone”?

The first angel in the prophecy of Revelation 14:7 calls people to worship Him Who made Heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. People will also respond to this command, but not many—not everyone. Everyone will worship the beast and the dragon.

And this prophecy identifies the reason why very many of God's children will fall into the trap: “...and all the world wondered after the beast.”

Whom are you watching, friends? Are you interested in observing, listening to, and analyzing what the beast and the dragon are doing?

Interesting events are now taking place in the world, and one way or another we learn about them, but is it worth devoting to their study the precious time that Jesus desires to receive in exchange for His blessings? Every day Satan reports in the news what he has done and what he plans to do. And while in the past very much was done in secret, now many of the evil one's plans are already presented to us openly, without fear of resistance or outrage. And the world is expiring from fear and says, “We shall all soon die!!!” And the interesting thing is that this is exactly what will happen.

When the Titanic set out on its maiden voyage, no one knew that it was doomed to destruction; no one prophesied about it. But disaster struck, and the ship sank. Not everyone died, but many learned a lesson from this story.

Now, however, there is a clear warning that all those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will perish without any hope.

Our planet is doomed to destruction, and all who live on it will die at the Second Coming of Christ, and this will happen. But

those who receive the seal of God and those whose names are written in the Book of Life and are not blotted out of it will be saved. And I believe that this event is worth devoting all my time to, so that I may be ready, understand where I am and with Whom I stand, and receive from God what will help me to stand.

What should God's children be watching? I watch to make sure that not a single dirty or defiling spot remains in my heart and that my mind is clean from sin. I am very interested in studying the character of Jesus and discovering new qualities of His kind heart. I want to know where my Saviour is now, what He is doing, and how this affects me. I am very interested in discovering new facets of God's love and sharing these discoveries with other people. I find the journey into the world of the Bible and God's revelations about everything that is happening to me and everything that must come to pass very fascinating. I greatly enjoy beholding Christ, and as I behold Him, I very much desire to be like Him. I want to be just as loving and kind a friend, but this must be learned—learned from Him—and I am learning and sharing with others what I have learned, and it is so interesting.

I am ashamed to admit it, but I am completely unaware of everything happening in the world. From what I hear, I have a general idea, but I have no time to watch the beast and wonder after it. I so enjoy sitting at the feet of Jesus and heeding everything He reveals. Although I live in the world, I am not of this world, and my dream is that these would not be mere words, but the reality of my life.

Unfortunately, I sometimes read headlines about current events, and with sorrow I see that the world is very rapidly sinking into darkness from which no one will escape without God's help.

Wars and rumours of wars do not frighten me. I have decided to be a peaceful person and to love my friends and enemies, and I ask God to teach me this art now so that I may be ready in the hour of trial.

But the saddest thing I see in all of this is that I am a sinner who very, very much needs the Saviour. And the more God reveals to me and reveals Himself to me, the more clearly I understand how unclean I am and how much more God must do in me so that I may stand in the last day. I am so grateful to Jesus for His righteousness, which He first imputes to me and then imparts to me, according to His love and mercy.

I see that the end of all things is approaching, and I understand that I greatly need agape love so that in this spirit I may face every trial and treat people exactly as the Heavenly Father desires and as Jesus does.

I see my helplessness in being unable to stop Satan's destructive machine from destroying this world, and my attempts to save even someone are very small. Having so much light and so much love, I long to share them, but all around there are only obstacles, indifference, and mockery.

And it is strange when you offer people life in its pure form and love in all its fullness, yet they turn toward the cup of the wine of Babylon and drink it with pleasure, showing you their backs. What can be done for these people? Pray for them? Yes, that is all that remains. But I want not only to pray, but to rejoice with them over salvation, share revelations about love, speak of my love, think about their happiness, and purposefully plan it. And where can one find someone who will be interested in a person like you?

I know, friends, that many of you are open to me and to my words, and I greatly value this, rejoice in it, and accept it. But I am also interested in those who stand with their backs to Jesus, desire to have salvation but do nothing for it, and worship the beast in their ignorance. How can they be helped?

I hope that they will awaken and turn to God. But I love.

Homework 218

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Ephesians 6:10-18; Titus 3:5-7; 1 Peter 4:7-8; 5:8-11; Luke 18:7-8; Matthew 5:44, 48; Revelation 12:9, 12-13; Matthew 24:4, 6-14;

Revelation 13:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:15; Malachi 4:1-2, 5-6;
Revelation 17:1-2, 4-5, 8; and Ezekiel 9:4.

2. What new things did you learn in this lesson?
3. How do you understand the warning written in Revelation 13:3-4?
4. Who are the dragon and the beast?
5. Why does God allow the beast to carry out its plans?
6. How can God's people avoid falling into the dragon's trap by watching the beast?
7. What work must be accomplished by each of us?
8. What does God expect to give us in answer to the prayer of faith?
9. What role does love play in these last days?

Lesson 219 . The Mark of the Beast

The most mysterious, malicious, and terrifying prophecy recorded in Revelation chapters 13 and 14 speaks of the mark of the beast. Everything is hidden in symbols and shrouded in mystery. And the only thing that is clear there is that the beast will have the number of a man—666. Yet even this number remains a mystery. I have heard many interpretations and assumptions about what this number means. These digits can be seen on many official documents. There are even some people who openly serve the system of the beast and, without being ashamed before anyone, display three sixes on their clothing or even get tattoos in order to perpetuate this mark.

I feel very sorry for these deceived souls, but if they have chosen this path, then they will also have to bear the consequences of this choice, about which the Word of God unequivocally warns all people.

What is the mark of the beast? According to the Biblical account, it is a special sign or mark that will be imposed by the second beast, which comes up out of the earth, upon the right hand or the forehead of all who live on Earth.

If I do not know who the first and second beasts are, I can make them out to be anyone at all. But in this lesson we will not give names to these systems. I will say only that they are direct instruments and means of Satan, which he actively uses to deceive all who live on Earth. They are religious and political powers. The religious power claims worship, while the political system will persuade and compel all who live on Earth to worship the first beast. And the great conflict will flare up around true and false worship. The world financial system will also be actively involved in this struggle.

When gold, silver, and copper coins were in circulation, it was not entirely clear how they could be prohibited. And when the first paper money appeared, our predecessors in the faith saw the mark of the beast in it and sounded the alarm. This money became firmly established in the world economy and to this day

remains the means that is continuously printed, day and night, in order to use it to purchase earthly and human resources. Then barcodes appeared, containing three double bars—at the edges and in the center—signifying the number 6. This was immediately seized upon as the mark of the beast, and panic arose around this phenomenon. But it too became firmly established in everyday use and is very convenient when buying and selling goods. Not long ago, electronic money and magnetic cards appeared. And someone saw the mark of the beast in them as well. Now microchips have been invented that are intended to be inserted into the human body, into the right hand or the forehead, while someone else has invented a barcode invisible to the eye that can be secretly applied to the body and read by special equipment. All of this exists, and it is foolish to deny that these systems make it possible to control financial flows. But all of this, as well as anything else that may yet be invented, cannot be and will not be the mark of the beast. It may be a means of control and manipulation of the mind, but it is not the mark. Yet many of God's children have fallen into the trap of this deception and spread this error as truth. And this has its influence in the world and sets people on a false path.

But the truth is that the mark of the beast will be received by everyone who does not receive the seal of God. And if you want to understand what the mark of the beast is, first gain an understanding of what the Seal of God is and upon what it is placed. If this is correctly understood and received from God, then it will no longer matter what Satan's mark will be. If this seal is not placed upon my forehead, then the enemy of the soul will seal me with his mark and gain absolute power over me. And this must be understood correctly; an error in this understanding may be fatal.

We read in Deuteronomy 6:6-8: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall

be as frontlets between thine eyes.” Moses calls us to teach our children God’s words, to place these words into their minds and our own, and to make them our deeds. The Pharisees understood this literally and tied small boxes containing writings to their foreheads and right hands, which they continue to do to this day. And this is very similar to the interpreters of the mark of the beast. Satan is a cunning enemy, but he is not foolish. He inspires these incorrect understandings and supports them even in the Christian world. For if I do not know what the truth is, I will believe an error.

But the Bible teaches that God’s law must be in the heart and in the mind, which is symbolized by the forehead, and as a result it will be manifested in all my deeds, which are symbolized by the hand. And the Seal of God is placed only upon the forehead, the frontal area, which represents my mind, and it must always be ready for this event.

The Seal of God is an intellectual and spiritual settling into the truth. And my acceptance of God’s agape love helps me to become firmly settled in the fullness of the truth. Love is God in me, manifesting Himself in all Three Persons and preserving me from evil; it is I in God, covered by His righteousness and led by His Spirit.

If one takes a single commandment from God’s law and says that it will be the Seal of God, this will be a distortion of the truth. I will be tested by the fullness of God’s law, by all the commandments. For it is enough for the enemy of the soul if I break just one, and then I become guilty of all. But when God’s law is written in my heart by the Hand of God Himself, I am no longer under the law, but under grace, and no one will be able to make me sin.

The question of worshipping God or the beast will be the key factor clearly showing the visible and invisible worlds who belongs to God and who belongs to the world. And one of God’s commandments clearly indicates Who God is and what kind of worship He expects. It is around this question that the final conflict will take place, for the violation of the other commandments clearly indicates apostasy from God, but one of

them directly points to what God expects of me and what He desires to teach me.

Will I be able to obey God's law without love? The Pharisees tried to do this, but Jesus showed them how the law must be kept, how beautiful it is, and how it was given for the benefit of man, to preserve him from corruption—and for this He was crucified.

I once did not know God and broke everything, and I understood that I was a sinner. But Jesus drew me to Himself, accepted me, forgave me, cleansed me, taught me to keep the commandments, and revealed to me the Spirit of the law. I allowed God to write His commandments in my thoughts, and they are in my heart. I live by them not because the law requires it, but because I want to live this way and cannot live otherwise. This has become my character. And this is God's Plan of Salvation realized in me. It is upon such a condition of thoughts and feelings that God will place His confirmation.

The Seal of God is not placed upon a sinner's fleeting decision to be obedient, but upon the acceptance of truth in the heart and its establishment in the life.

And when God places His sign upon the foreheads of His servants, only then will the enemy of the soul receive the right to seal all the others with his mark, and no one among them will escape this fate. Therefore, it is better to study the original truth than its counterfeit.

Love has and plays a key role in this sealing process.

Homework 219

1. In the light of our lesson, please read 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; Revelation 7:3; 13:16; 14:9; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4; Deuteronomy 6:4-8; Exodus 31:12-17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20; Revelation 13:15-18; 14:13; Jeremiah 31:33-34; James 2:10; Romans 13:10; and Revelation 13:8.
2. What new things did you learn in this lesson?
3. Into what trap have many of God's children fallen while trying to understand the meaning of the mark of the beast?

4. What does the Seal of God mean?
5. How do you understand the mark of the beast? What is it?
6. What question will become the key issue at the end of time?
7. Why will the fourth commandment become the moment of truth?
8. Is it possible to be obedient without love?
9. When will the enemy receive the right to seal his worshippers?

Lesson 220 . The Seal of God

No matter how thoroughly I study the meaning of the mark of the beast, it will still become mine if the Seal of God is not upon me. Therefore, I think it is worth studying this symbol and understanding whether I will be worthy to have this Divine sign placed upon me.

And the best definition of the Seal of God can be found in the words of Jesus in John 6:27: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto Everlasting Life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed."

Jesus had the Seal of God and clearly declared this. And that which came from Christ He Himself calls meat that endures unto Everlasting Life. And in His prayer for you and me, He gives the definition of Eternal Life in John 17:3: "And this is Life Eternal, that they might know Thee the only True God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent." The Bread that Jesus gives us is Himself, the teaching about Him, and the revelation of all the beauty of God's character. And what is God's character? God is Love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.

The study of the character of God, revealed to us in the Three Persons of the Godhead, the study of the science of Salvation, and the study of the science of Love—this is that very Bread of Life, that food which gives the right to Eternal Life, for comprehending these truths changes my consciousness, my thoughts, and my feelings. My character is formed by the food that I receive from God, and His love is the very best science, which one can study throughout one's entire earthly life without ever fully comprehending it, constantly making discoveries and endlessly drawing nearer to it as to a rainbow—closer and closer, yet never catching it entirely in one's hands. And there will always be something else delicious left for the next meal.

But another distinctive feature of Jesus was that He was not merely a good and kind Man Who knew the Scriptures well,

loved spending time in nature, and loved to pray, but that He began to share His knowledge with the world and pass the Bread of Life on to other people. He is the Source of Living Water; He is the True Bread of Life, Who to this day satisfies everyone who comes to Him. And if Jesus had simply remained silent, what would we have learned about Him, about the Father, and about the Plan of Salvation? Nothing. But He is the Channel of blessings through Whom we receive Eternal Life and the right to receive the Seal of God for ourselves.

We read in Job 37:7: "He sealet up the hand of every man; that all men may know His work."

The Seal of God is a spiritual and intellectual settling into love and truth. It is my establishment in good works with right motives. It is God's approval of all my thoughts and feelings, which have become accustomed to beholding Heavenly things and being transformed from glory to glory. It is the sealing that makes me unshakable in the truth.

A seal is a special object bearing the attributes of its owner: his name, his office, and his sphere of influence. When a seal is applied to paper or a soft material, it leaves an impression which testifies that everything under the seal is not subject to alteration.

It is interesting that one of God's commandments contains all these attributes of God that are necessary for sealing and points to a special time in human life, established by the Creator Himself for worship and rest. And it is located at the very center of God's law. When we study Revelation, we see that the final conflict will take place between true and false worship, and through the second beast the enemy will impose his counterfeit, calling it God's institution and calling everyone to worship the beast according to its rules. And in Revelation 12:17 we read: "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her Seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." We then find an account of the power of the dragon and the beast, which ends with the mark of the beast. And in Revelation 14:1 we read: "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb

stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's Name written in their foreheads."

The Name of God is the expression of His character in relation to His creation, expressed in love. Then we read the call of the three angels to true worship, the proclamation of the beginning of the judgment, and the pronouncement of a death sentence upon those who receive the mark of the beast and support this power by their deeds or thoughts. And the account of this conflict ends with Revelation 14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Once again we see a reference to the commandments.

I consider all these accounts and warnings serious enough to devote time to them and understand what they are speaking about, so that I do not accidentally find myself among the wicked, without God's sign.

It is worth devoting one's time to understanding the essence of these prophecies.

And then to obey what they reveal.

For example, suppose I now tell you everything, explain it in detail, and arrange neatly before you all the signs and symbols of these chapters of Revelation. What will change in your life? You will gain new knowledge. But knowledge does not save; it brings me to a decision and to further actions according to the knowledge I have received. Then I will benefit from what I have heard. And it is very important to have the correct interpretation of all these symbols; otherwise, I may believe a lie and understand everything differently from the way God desires, which will lead me into the enemy's camp, and I will receive his mark.

The Seal of God is my settling into the truth, not into a lie. Is agape love truth? Yes, it is God's character revealed to man. Is obedience to God's commandments truth? Yes, they are the standard of righteousness and, like a mirror, show me my sins

when they are on stone, and teach me love for God and my neighbours when they are in my heart.

Should I remain silent about this, or should I become a source of Living Water and pass this Bread on? Jesus did not conceal His knowledge and blessings, but willingly shared them.

Is the material of our School food received from God unto Eternal Life? If it is consistent with the truth of God's Word, then, friends, I wish you a good appetite and God's blessing upon this Bread.

Jesus taught: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matthew 24:45-46).

And the essence of this food is to partake of it yourself and pass it on. If you want to comprehend the science of love, then begin sharing it with other people. And I see how much is revealed to me when I begin explaining to others what I myself do not yet fully understand. And how easy it is to love those to whom you have confessed this love and then ask God's blessing upon this decision! And God gives this to me according to His love and mercy. And if I was able to receive and comprehend this, then any one of you can as well. Only do not keep this gift to yourself for long; it must be shared, or it will spoil. Give, and it shall be given unto you. A good measure, pressed down, shall men give into your bosom.

And upon all of this God will gladly place His Seal of approval and permanence. And I will no longer be able to change anything, nor will I want to.

But this path to God begins with an important little step—water baptism—which we will discuss next.

Homework 220

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Song of Solomon 8:6; Ephesians 6:14-17; Romans 8:29-30; 10:15, 20; Ephesians 1:13; John 6:27; Isaiah 61:1-3; 60:22; 62:1-2, 10; Ezekiel 20:11-12, 20; Exodus 20:1-16; Daniel 12:1; Revelation 10:10

-11; 14:6; Isaiah 6:8; Jeremiah 15:19; Revelation 14:1, 7, 12; and 12:7.

2. What new things did you learn from this lesson?
3. Why will the Seal of God not be placed upon the hand?
4. Will the Seal of God be placed upon those who do not accept the image or the mark of the beast?
5. How do you envision the time of sealing? Has it already begun?
6. Who will place the Seal of God?
7. Read Ezekiel 9:4 and the verses that follow. When will this time come? What distinguishing characteristic will those who receive the mark have?
8. Do you want to have the Seal of God?
9. Who will not receive the Seal of God?
10. When will the time of grace end for the world and for God's children?

Lesson 221 . Baptism

If anyone has ever been acquainted with Christianity, he has surely noticed that the rite of baptism is present in this movement. Regardless of denomination, admission into church membership everywhere takes place through water baptism. But it is performed differently in different places. In some places there is sprinkling and anointing with water, in others pouring, and elsewhere complete immersion beneath the water.

What is baptism? Why is it necessary? What does it mean? Can one dispense with this rite and still have God's blessings?

Baptism is the rite of dedicating a person to a special relationship with God. This act has a Heavenly origin and is a symbolic covenant with God, giving the right to special Divine blessings and indicating that the person spiritually belongs to the Lord.

Immersion in water is a symbol of death to sin and to this world, while coming out of the water is a symbol of resurrection unto Eternal Life.

Baptism is not salvation and does not grant it automatically. Salvation comes from Jesus Christ. But through water baptism I receive the right to salvation by faith in Jesus. It is the condition that cannot be bypassed in order to enter into a personal relationship with God and become part of the New Covenant with Him.

Before the beginning of Christ's mission, the circumcision of a man's foreskin served as the symbol of the Covenant with God. Women became partakers of this Covenant only by faith. The death of Christ abolished this rite.

By His example of being baptized by John, Jesus showed His attitude toward this act and called it all righteousness that must be fulfilled. In this way He established the symbol of entering into a special relationship with God.

Baptism is like a marriage ceremony. There is something very similar in it that reveals its meaning more fully. Water baptism

is a marriage vow with Christ, in which I declare my desire to belong to God and to be His possession, while the Lord gives me the right to possess all the promised Heavenly blessings by virtue of my faith in Jesus Christ. It is a testimony to the entire visible and invisible world that our relationship is lawful and that God receives the full right to participate personally in my life—as a Spouse, as the Head of the Church, and as a Teacher. We enter into the closest relationship with God, and on the condition of faithfulness and obedience we develop our relationship, coming to know one another.

Without baptism I may also have a relationship with God, but not as with a lawful Spouse and Father, but as with the Creator Who loves and cares for all His creation, yet does not give it the right to Eternal Life.

Jesus said in John 3:5: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”

Every other way of establishing a relationship with God is unlawful and is not accepted from above, whatever people may call it. Christ Himself gave the example. He did not need the washing away of uncleanness, but He performed this rite, showing its necessity and fulfilling it on behalf of those who, because of various circumstances, would not be able to undergo it—for example, the thief on the cross or infants killed for the Name of Christ.

Baptism is considered acceptable at a conscious age, when a person understands what he is doing and assumes the obligations of faithfulness to God and His law. A child cannot understand this.

Just as there are certain age limits for entering into marriage, so a person’s age is also taken into account when admitting him to baptism.

Baptism is a symbol of death to sin and the world and the beginning of a new life for God. It has enormous significance in the spiritual world. Without this rite, God does not have the authority to intervene in a person’s life and form his character

after His likeness. The forces of evil also watch to ensure that God does not violate a person's freedom of choice and hinder people in every way from taking this step, suggesting to them that it is not so important and that God loves everyone. Yes, God loves everyone, but He can produce changes not in every heart, but only in the one who enters into a covenant with Him.

The new birth from the Spirit may take place before water baptism, and God begins to teach a person and lead him toward a decision about a serious relationship. It is like a man and a woman who, upon meeting each other, understand that they were created for a mutual relationship and are drawn to fellowship, through which they come to know each other better, and then decide to create a family so that they may always be together and never part. They declare their decision to the representatives of the local authorities and receive the right to become a family. Then they make a vow of faithfulness before God and receive His blessing upon their family life. They are pronounced husband and wife and receive full rights to one another before society and before Heaven. And God regards them as one whole, joining them in this union. All relationships outside marriage are recognized as fornication and rejected by Heaven as sinful.

Jesus desires to have a lawful relationship with His people.

Does it matter in which denomination I receive baptism? By entering this path, I acknowledge God as my Spouse, but the teaching of the church in which I will be baptized must meet God's requirements and not contradict the Bible. I become part of this denomination, and God begins to act within this framework and cause me to grow. But when He calls me to Biblical obedience so that I may continue my growth and develop further, I am restricted by the teaching of the church of which I am a member and cannot step beyond these boundaries or leave this framework; otherwise, I risk being expelled and rejected from this community. Yet I am bound there by traditions, family and friendly ties, and the many experiences of spiritual formation that I have seen and lived through. My

growth stops, and I begin to become established in what I have chosen.

And if my church's teaching is based upon false doctrine, I begin to regard this lie as truth and defend it with human arguments. And who will help me break free from this circle of life?

Jesus taught: "And ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." The Lord truly sets us free.

In the time of Christ, baptism took place where there was much water, so that a person could enter it and be completely immersed. Sprinkling or pouring does not correspond to the spirit of the Bible and cannot be accepted as the fulfillment of all righteousness, although someone may call it baptism.

This step of faith through complete immersion must be taken with an understanding of what and into Whom I am being baptized.

I was baptized three times. The first time I was a little over one year old, and I did not consent to it. The second time I was baptized by faith in Jesus, understanding what I was doing, and I was very happy about this event and consider it to have been the right step. But when I began to learn the truth, I realized that the movement in which I was did not live according to the Truth and covered its sins with supernatural powers that manifested themselves in its ministry. I left that congregation and began to educate myself. God showed me that He has a people whose teaching is consistent with the entire Bible, and after lengthy study I decided to become part of this people by receiving baptism again, joining my life with those who base their faith upon Scripture rather than feelings or tradition. And God is leading me further and revealing a more excellent way.

Love is the reward for faithfulness that all who desire to know the truth and live in it will receive.

Homework 221

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Matthew 3:13-15; 21:25; 28:19-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16;

Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 3:27; 5:6; Colossians 2:12-13; 1 Peter 3:20-21; and Ephesians 4:5.

2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Why is the rite of water baptism so important for salvation?
4. Is it possible to be a member of several denominations at the same time through baptism in those churches? Is this consistent with Scripture?
5. Does baptism save me? If so, from what?
6. If I do not understand the meaning of baptism, will performing this act from a wrong motive bring me under condemnation?
7. Are you personally acquainted with this rite in your own life? Into what were you baptized?
8. Must baptism always be understood? Matthew 3:14-15.
9. What should I do if I love Jesus but believe that baptism is unnecessary for me?
10. Is it possible to enter the Kingdom of Heaven while bypassing this rule? Give examples.

Lesson 222 . My Time of Trouble

We are rapidly approaching the final events at the end of our world's history. The prophecies concerning this time are being fulfilled before our eyes. The world is steadily hurtling toward its destruction. But what am I experiencing amid this entire whirlwind of events? How does my heart respond to what is happening?

When precautionary measures concerning the coronavirus began to be introduced in March 2020, I had a premonition that something bad was coming. And in order to counter these events in some way, the decision was made to open the School of Agape Love. I had personal experience and personal observations in this sphere of life with God, but the time had come to systematize this knowledge and present it to you in the form of lessons. Only the Lord knows what will come of this, but even now it is possible to see that something very good has emerged—something that is influencing and changing the lives of many people.

And the time of the end is drawing near. Sin is multiplying, and events are developing very rapidly. If someone thinks that everything will end now, that everything will return to its former course, and that we will once again begin to live as before, then I feel sorry for you. The enemy of souls planned his evil designs for a very long time, and now, when he is succeeding in carrying them out, he will only move forward, accomplishing through his subjects what God permits him to do. And humanly speaking, it is impossible to resist this influence of evil. The world will not become better even if all wars are stopped.

And what awaits me? What should I prepare for? Scripture teaches that there will be a time of trouble such as never was. If the Lord Himself warns us about it, then it will come; but how I meet it and how I enter these events depends only on me. Fire itself is neutral. But the reaction of the material that enters the fire is not always the same. Some things burn, some melt, some become deformed and useless, while others are tempered and

become purer and stronger; and someone enters it with Christ and suffers no harm. What do you wish to be in this fire, and Whom do you plan to meet there? No one will escape this trial.

I will present several kinds of the body's defenses against difficult challenges, and you can decide what suits you from this arsenal.

Depression, bitterness, insanity, physical and spiritual illnesses—or love, happiness, and friendship? I think the contrast is obvious, and every sensible person will choose the latter items on this list. But here a little problem arises. The first defense mechanisms activate on their own, and nothing needs to be done for this to happen. You will not find a school of depression or bitterness anywhere in the world. But in order to enter into love and happiness, it is necessary to take the narrow path of struggle and effort. These words themselves sound beautiful and gentle, but attaining this condition requires effort on your part. You will have to keep rowing against the current constantly and never stop. You especially should not relax at the very edge of the waterfall.

Jesus taught that the time of trouble would come, but He did not say that we would all perish. In His mercy, He will shorten that time, but He will not abolish it. Everything will be sifted and passed through the fire.

Friends, we will not escape these trials, but we can prepare for them.

I am accustomed to facing various problems in my life. Sometimes I foresee them, and they do not always gladden my heart, but I understand that they should not be avoided; they must be solved, and solved correctly.

The first thing characteristic of the soul, and something very important to understand, is that I should not look for someone to blame and place everything upon him. At times, my own laziness or carelessness may be to blame. Acknowledging that there is a problem leads to the next step: how can it be solved? There may be losses and unforeseen expenditures of strength and resources.

If a small stone gets into my boot and causes me discomfort or pain, then simply ignoring it or looking for someone to blame is the worst method of solving the problem. I decide to settle the matter and begin looking for ways to solve it. I can buy a drill, make a hole in the boot, and wait for the stone to fall out; I can buy new shoes without a stone in them; I can invent a special vacuum cleaner for sucking stones out of boots; I can hire specialists in removing stones; or I can take off the boot myself and shake out its contents. The final result will be the same, but the effort will differ.

In the message to Laodicea, God offers us the means to enter the time of trouble, and He also gives us Himself as an Instructor. But the trouble has not yet come, and the saying about preparing a sleigh in summer and a cart in winter does not appear entirely wise. Yet now is precisely the time to do this. If I do not now receive the oil of knowledge and experience and fill my vessel with it, I may find that I am too late when the time of trouble comes. It is very frightening to stand before an open door without wishing to enter it, and then to watch it close right in front of you when you no longer have the strength to enter or to stop it in any way.

In Noah's day, the strange Ark was probably the most amusing spectacle, and many people could simply have entered it, but for some reason they did not. There were no guards or passes; everything was open to everyone. But when the doors were shut and the rain began, all those who remained outside saw the advantage of Noah's faith and realized that they had missed something. Noah could no longer change anything, and for some reason God no longer saved anyone.

And our days are somewhat like that time. Grace, peace, and safety. Everything is open, though no longer as it was before.

Many people are now sitting at home in fear of illness. But if you are so afraid, then sit actively. Use this time to know Christ, receive His love, and study His will.

We are now forbidden to shake hands, to go without masks, and to gather together. Everything is moving toward a time when

people will be forbidden to travel, to think differently, and to have their own opinions. The image of the beast is ready, and the servants of the devil are deliberately leading the world toward receiving this mark. And God will not hinder them in carrying out these plans. But He is now offering something better. He has an alternative. Love is the most reliable protection for the time of trouble. Knowledge of the Truth is the best protection in a time of trial.

Does it matter which church I am in and which movement I belong to? Love can be possessed everywhere, but Truth is found only in the Bible; yet, for some reason, everyone understands it differently. What does God have for us in this regard? Does He have a prophecy concerning His people? Will everyone be saved individually, or will God have a special people who will be marked in a special way? The Bible tells us about this, and it is worth studying and understanding correctly.

The time of trouble is at the door. It is coming toward me. The meeting is inevitable. And I decide what I will bring with me into that time. I know one thing: I need knowledge in understanding the Truth, faith in Jesus, love in my heart, and happiness in my spirit.

Once I looked at my possessions and wondered what I would be able to take from them to Heaven. And I realized that I could take nothing. Then I looked at my heart and wondered whether I would take this knowledge, these discoveries, achievements, revelations, and decisions with me to Heaven. Will my character be left with me for life among holy beings? And I saw that this is precisely the baggage I will be able to take, but first I must pass through customs control and leave behind everything unnecessary that is not permitted to be brought into holy territory.

Homework 222

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Matthew 24:21-22; Daniel 12:1; Matthew 25:13; Jeremiah 51:45; Isaiah 60:2; Revelation 7:14; 16:15; 3:21-22; and 21:7.

2. Did you learn anything useful for yourself from this lesson?
3. Does the coming crisis frighten you?
4. Do you believe that God's people will have God's special protection during this time of trouble?
5. Which method of protection will you choose for yourself?
6. Who can stand during this time?
7. Is it worth preparing for the time of trouble now? And how should this be done?
8. What from my baggage must and will have to be left in this world?
9. Are you ready for these events?
10. What must be done to receive the seal of God?

Lesson 223 . The Comfort Zone

Very often I hear calls for us to leave the “comfort zone” in which we find ourselves and begin doing something we have not done before. I understand what is meant and immediately apply this call to myself and to my situation, trying to understand how comfortably I live and where I should go from my comfort zone. I began to analyze this subject and came to the conclusion that this concept includes two different positions of a believer, and they should not be confused with each other.

There is a worldly, sinful “comfort zone” that we all should leave, and there is God’s comfort zone, into which we all should enter. This must be understood correctly, and these two concepts must not be interchanged, so that we do not create problems for ourselves by surrendering our will to the authority of the preacher without understanding the essence of things.

The worldly “comfort zone” for Christians consists in the fact that this world has adapted itself to our convictions and offers its imaginary security on its own territory. You are permitted to believe whatever you want, attend meetings, preach, openly express your religious opinion, and sow the seed, while all your rights are protected by the laws of the country in which you live. We are fortunate to live in a free country, and this is a blessing. But freedom implies not only religious freedom, but also freedom for the forces of evil, which use this opportunity to cultivate and impose their views and values, freely preaching a worldly and sinful view of things, presenting it as harmless and desirable, and calling everyone to pay for sinful pleasure. And the authorities protect the right of these forces to impose their convictions freely. But sin carries death within itself, and it is written that the soul that sins shall die. And woe to me if I have found a comfortable place for myself amid this sin, have adapted to the corruption around me, and allow this influence into my home and into my life, justifying myself by the fact that I go to church, read the Bible, pray, preach, and render to God the things that are God’s, while at the same time drinking the “wine of Babylon” because I do not know how to build my life in

any other way. And if my life is arranged so that I feel good and comfortable amid this evil, and this evil is in my home and in my mind, while I try to fight it in my own strength, then it is worth considering whether God has something better for me. And this is where the most interesting part begins: I come to myself and decide to leave my “comfort zone” because I have been called to do so. And I go where God’s work is being done. But the problem is that there is serious damage in my mind, and the world from which I am fleeing remains in my thinking; and with these concepts I begin to build my new life outside the zone of my former comfort. And what will I build? My way of thinking will be reflected in all my further ministry. The order and rules of the new place of service may help me live correctly and within strict boundaries, but they will not solve the problem of my corrupted heart. My healing and the changes in my thinking depend mainly on my desire for change and on my correct understanding of what truth is and why I need it.

But there is also God’s “comfort zone”—something devised for me by God Himself, a place where I feel safe and under His special protection. It is a place where laws and authorities guard me and also protect my property, where everything is well ordered and predictable. I have found such a place for myself in Jesus, with Him also dwelling in me. This is truly a very comfortable place. Jesus solves all my problems and takes all my cares upon Himself. He protects me and preserves me from evil. He gives me everything I need. And I understand that this is only because of His love.

I am in the very epicenter of the great controversy; the waves of sin rage around me, but Jesus brings me into a quiet harbor, teaches me to overcome, and Himself gains these victories within me.

I invite everyone here, into this wonderful zone of God’s comfort. Nothing better could be devised. It meets all of God’s standards, and there is no need to leave it. Death, darkness, and disease are all around, but here there are love, happiness, and friendship.

Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

And I carry this comfort zone with me in my heart. Wherever I am, it is there as well. For it is Jesus in me. He is always near. And it is so comforting to be with Him.

Laodicea is more an era than a character. And the Lord addresses those who live in this era with an offer to have business relations with Him and then close relations, and to pay attention to the condition of my heart, which He can tune according to His own manner.

A sanitarium or another place does not solve the problem of my lukewarm condition. In such places I am better protected from external temptations, but not from myself.

Ministry will not solve the problem of a lukewarm heart either. It may be a good mask before society, but not before Christ.

But Jesus solves these problems simply and quickly. He warms the heart so intensely that it begins to burn. And He has even stated His plans: gold, clothing, and eyesalve. With these qualities, any ministry will be a blessing, and any outpost will become a place where God's work is done.

We must leave the sinful "comfort zone," and do so as quickly as possible; but at the same time, we must enter God's rest, God's zone, or there will be no benefit. For when an evil spirit comes out of me, it walks through dry places and then decides to return home; and finding the house unoccupied, it calls its friends, more wicked than itself, and they occupy the empty territory. But the presence of Christ in my house will be a serious obstacle to the visit of evil powers.

When I recognize my sins and ask for forgiveness, I receive it. I become clean and free, but I need power to preserve this freedom so that I will not fall into sin again. And I do not have this power within myself.

It is as though a debt of one million has been forgiven me, but I have not become rich; I have merely returned to zero, with nothing on which to continue living, and so I go into debt again.

But God has a plan. He gives Himself as a gift, together with all His riches and His power. And He teaches me very good things. He makes me a millionaire of His righteousness, first imputing it to me and then imparting it to me as I grow spiritually. Jesus enriches my life according to His love for me and my desire to receive this wealth.

Love is the best means of fighting sin in my life, and it best transfers my thinking from the sinful “comfort zone” into God’s comfort zone. Love unites me so closely with Christ that I understand that without Him I can do nothing, but together with Him I can do all things, for He strengthens me. What happiness it is for me to be in Him and for Him to be in me. This is a real and happy life. It is the very best “comfort zone,” which begins here and will continue throughout Eternity.

And Jesus promised that He would in no wise cast out those who come to Him, and so it is. But His desire is to receive me, and then to enter me and dwell in me; only then will I be able to bear much fruit.

But the world, seeing this relationship with Christ, rages and does not want to let me go. It devises new traps for my soul and takes the form of an angel of light so that, if possible, it may win me back.

But I choose love, happiness, and friendship in Christ Jesus, and I receive what I have chosen. And this is so comforting to my soul.

Homework 223

1. In the light of our lesson, please read 1 John 2:15-17; 5:4; Revelation 3:14-17; Jeremiah 51:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:3-8; Matthew 11:27-28; Psalm 62:1-2, 11; John 14:23; 15:7-8; Philippians 4:13; Romans 8:35-37; Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Matthew 9:16-17; and Hebrews 12:2-3.
2. Did you learn anything useful for yourself?
3. What comfort zones do you know? Are they truly comfortable?
4. How can I understand whether I am in the right comfort zone?

5. What is the danger of remaining in worldly security?
6. How much does my comfort in this world cost?
7. Can I have God's comfort and worldly comfort at the same time?
8. How can a proper condition of the soul be distinguished from a dangerous one?
9. Which Bible verses or examples came to your mind while studying this lesson?

Lesson 224 . Help Me Discover Myself

A good man is sitting on the shore of a lake, lamenting his fate: "Everyone around me is utterly selfish. Everyone thinks only of himself, and no one thinks of me!" Does this sound familiar? Every morning he smiles at himself in the mirror, examines the new wrinkles on his face, and remains unaware of many things about himself that are hidden within his heart.

God created man for fellowship, as a social being, to live in society and to grow and develop under the influence of God's grace.

Each of us harbors an amazing potential of abilities that no one has sought and that quietly await their treasure hunter, so that they may reveal themselves in all their beauty and strength to anyone who begins to uncover them.

Within each of us lies an enormous potential for many good skills and talents that remain buried beneath the burden of sin and the indifference of those around us.

If society evaluates me according to my ability to fly, I will have to drag out my wretched existence all my life and consider myself a complete fool who could never live up to the expectations of those around me.

"I want you to become the kind of person who is convenient for me"—this is probably the most foolish proposition that we try to impose on one another, especially in families. And it is no wonder that families break apart, friendship disappears, and love grows cold. Of course, there are other causes of these tragedies, but strong relationships have a root that firmly holds them together in closeness, and it sounds like this: "You are very interesting and dear to me, and I want to discover something unique within you and make use of it for your benefit."

God designed us so that we would help one another discover the hidden treasures of our unique abilities and develop them as we need one another. Sometimes this happens by chance:

someone pays me a compliment, noticing something new or unique in my behavior; I think about it and begin to test myself in this area, and then I myself notice this new ability and begin to develop it. Wise parents usually study their children and uncover these talents, paying attention to what will benefit their child in the future and bring joy to those around him.

At any age, the heart waits for someone who will find the key to it and help me discover myself. Flattery will not solve this problem, but it may temporarily charm me in order to achieve its aims and then leave me with nothing. But love will show another person what it finds beautiful in me and give that person the wisdom to draw it properly out of my heart and develop it in the right direction. I do not object to such treatment, although out of modesty I may resist a little and pretend that I do not think of myself in this way.

Of course, if I am full of ambition, pride, and conceit, hardly anyone will be able to help me; but love can find an opening even in this labyrinth and uncover something good. A meek or searching heart, however, has more opportunities for discovery.

Loneliness does not develop my talents. If no one needs me, is interested in me, or has any use for me, then, by and large, I will not spend time discovering my talents. And even if I do find and develop something, but no one recognizes it and I cannot at least demonstrate it, I will decide that it is not so important and will bury this ability—or bury it forever.

Compliments, praise, delight, admiration, and sincere kind words from those around me help me see myself through different eyes. Are you drawn to people who behave this way? Personally, I find such company very pleasant. There, very interesting and good things are revealed that bring great joy to the heart. It is a natural magnet that draws my heart to these people with invisible threads. And this is so joyful.

I am now writing in the first person, focusing all attention on myself and describing my unspoken expectations; but I can also become the person who begins to find hidden treasure in those who come into contact with me. To some extent, our lessons

help us see ourselves through different eyes, but visual contact is still much more valuable and has a stronger influence, although the imagination can also reveal a great deal.

Do not be afraid to love one another, even if the relationship is one-sided. Love is a good seed. Being a loving person holds enormous promise, giving me the advantage of gaining friends, doing good, bringing love, happiness, and friendship into the lives of others, raising dead souls to life, and giving the water of life to those who are withered and thirsty. The world is moving toward its destruction, but few people want to perish. Although love has grown cold in many hearts, it is still in demand, it is valuable, and many are searching for it.

But sometimes people no longer want to hear anything about love; they want to see and feel it in the way they are treated. Until this happens, I will be nothing more than a smooth talker to them. On the other hand, not everyone wants to receive love in the pure form of purity and holiness, because it begins to convict them, offer a better prospect for life, and reveal the beauty of God—something to which not many will consent.

But the soul of a believer is more open to being discovered. It quietly cries out: “Help me discover myself! I want to know my calling and my place in the temple of God’s building. Uncover the hidden treasures within me so that I may give them to you through my ministry. Lord, give me as a gift to the one who needs me!!!”

There is another enemy of these discoveries. It introduces itself by name: “I have no time!” In reality, the time is there; the priorities are simply arranged incorrectly. When I say this phrase, the person beside me hears: “I am sorry, my friend. You do not interest me.” And the word “you” includes both me and my talents.

But in my heart I do not condemn such treatment, for I am the same way myself, although I have learned to do it with a smile.

Our fellowship is unique. I ask God for changes and new friends, while I myself destroy this at its very foundation with my own words, and then wonder why God does not answer. I

ask Him to give me a life partner, but I do nothing to find that person or, having found that person, to discover who they are both for their sake and for my own.

My lack of interest in people causes a corresponding lack of interest on their part. We sow these amazing seeds of indifference in one another, and then expect a wonderful harvest with good fruit; and if it does not come, we grieve and accuse others of selfishness.

I decide to change the course of time and take the path of love, happiness, and friendship. And I have noticed that these seeds also have power and bring forth exactly what I sowed, only many times more than I expected. One must be very foolish to expect something good from others without first giving them this goodness. And this law of sowing and reaping works beautifully in love.

Love opens many hearts, and in the light of love people learn many interesting things about themselves. Sometimes they do not even suspect what talents are hidden within their hearts or what mighty potential they possess, regardless of their outward appearance and physical weakness.

God has left no one without talents. And so I sit on the shore of the lake, dreaming of meeting my explorer or gold prospector, who will notice me and help me discover myself. But until he comes, I will learn this profession myself and go in search of hidden treasures. Oh, how many of them there are all around—and where can I find the time for all of this?

Homework 224

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Philippians 4:8; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Romans 12:16; Matthew 25:15; Proverbs 27:9; and Ecclesiastes 6:12.
2. Did you learn anything useful from this lesson?
3. Have any of your friends helped you make discoveries within yourself?
4. How can you help another person discover something new and amazing about himself?
5. Do you enjoy making others happy? How do you do this?

6. Are you familiar with your potential? What is needed to uncover it?
7. How limited are my limitless possibilities?
8. How can we correctly identify another person's hidden abilities?
9. Is it worthwhile to make new discoveries in the life partner with whom you have already lived for many years?

Lesson 225 . Infatuation and Love

Each of us has experienced infatuation or is experiencing it now. These are special feelings that overflow the heart and are a very powerful incentive for carrying out various tasks. A person who is infatuated becomes capable of doing things for the sake of the object of his affection that he would never do with a clear head. Infatuation sometimes intoxicates people, and at times so thoroughly that they cease to think rationally and are ready to do what Scripture calls sin, believing that everything they feel is genuine and right.

The enemy of souls knows this feature of the human mind and very successfully distorts it, presenting sin as something right and natural. This perception has become so firmly established in people's minds that the cultures of many nations welcome cohabitation and have placed it within a legal framework.

And the enemy of souls devises new temptations, persuading people that any perversion is not bad in itself if it brings enjoyment and gives pleasure, and what is unnatural becomes the norm. This sin damages people's minds so severely that they consider it necessary to impose their views and values on everyone, so that against the background of universal corruption they may appear to be benefactors. And the saddest thing is that children become the target of these aims—the young generation who do not yet have a proper orientation in life and believe everything they are told and shown. Depravity, corruption, and immorality have become the norm of life in civilized society, while a normal person who wishes to resist this evil becomes a criminal who offends the feelings of citizens by expressing his opinion and must be fined or isolated.

Unfortunately, I am not making this up; I am simply sharing what we see everywhere. And all of this was foretold to us as signs of the last days.

But let us consider the classic form of a relationship. He and she meet each other's eyes and smile warmly at one another. Then suddenly, sooner or later, something switches in the mind

of one of them, and all his thoughts begin to focus on the person who behaved so sweetly toward him and somehow smiles at him in a special way. My heart begins to suggest that this is the person of all my dreams and that perhaps this very person is the answer to my prayers. I begin to look more closely and discover the amazing world of this person, to whom I mean something and who has a genuine interest in every aspect of my life. Or perhaps I see no attention directed toward me and try carefully to hide my feelings, yet I understand that the person who caught my attention meets all my requirements and satisfies my emotional needs.

I become infatuated, sometimes without even realizing it or understanding what is happening to me. If I do not know God and am unaware of what He requires in relationships between the sexes and what He forbids, I will drift with the current of my feelings and try with all my might to attain what attracts me so strongly.

But when I know God personally and understand His will, I enter into a struggle with myself. If I am single, I am free to make my choice within the bounds of God's law and instructions. But if I am married, I cannot follow the lead of my feelings, for they are a very unreliable adviser, and I begin to resist actively.

Infatuation is not agape love, although it can grow into it if everything in the relationship proceeds properly and decently and has God's approval. Infatuation is an extremely complex mechanism placed within us by God—a combination of biochemistry, feelings, will, and consciousness—which sometimes cannot be controlled but simply crashes into your life, leaving you unsure what to do with it, and you plunge into it headfirst. Yet although this is a beautiful state of mind, it deprives me of logical thinking, and I may misjudge the situation and the object of my infatuation. If I allow the enemy of human souls to teach me during this time and control my feelings, he will successfully lead me to break God's law—first in my thoughts and feelings, and then, if I permit it, in my actions.

Nevertheless, infatuation is good in that it helps unite two individuals who are completely different in their inner makeup into one sound and strong structure called a family.

Infatuation helps me perform great deeds and strive toward personal growth that I would not otherwise pursue. And yet it is a temporary experience of my mind that passes very quickly once I have attained my goal. After that I become myself again and wonder how strangely I thought and what I have done. And where did that intensity of passion go, which seemed destined to be my eternal companion and ruler?

It may also happen that after I come to my senses, all my interests turn in the opposite direction and I begin to hate the one who had been so desirable to me.

Love is a firm and profound principle for building strong relationships. Unlike infatuation, it has a solid foundation and a mutual, constant connection with the Source of life and love. It can build where everything is collapsing and descending into chaos. Love knows how to restore ruins and mend what has been torn apart. It is not afraid of disappointments and turns everything to good.

Love does not prevent my heart from becoming infatuated, but it guides this process, warns me of danger or of breaking the rules, and provides a way out by replacing the flare-up of feelings and emotions with itself. It looks something like this. Someone has somehow entered my heart and begun to trouble it, while the flesh tries to convince me that this is the person of my dreams. And this is quite a pleasant experience. But my reason immediately reminds me of the words of God's law, which tell me that I am under the law of marriage and that there is no place in my heart for other people in the way the flesh suggests. Love, however, tells me not to develop this relationship in that direction but to transform it, accepting this person simply as a human being, as a sister who does not know about my feelings but sees me as a mentor and an example of obedience to the truth and needs simple respect and help in resolving difficult matters. I choose this path, ask God to

remove fleshly desires from me, and begin actively resisting every evil thought.

I honestly admit that sometimes I am deeply ashamed that such thoughts come into my mind. But I do not allow them to build a nest there.

Such a struggle is part of the very great spiritual conflict in which we are all engaged. Living as a recluse will not solve this problem properly, although it may protect me from acting. Victory consists in being among people whom you find pleasant while behaving in a friendly, tactful, and respectful way and remaining pure in thoughts and feelings before God and before people.

Establishing and stating boundaries in relationships is very appropriate in such cases. I usually say, "I love my wife, and I am willing to continue our relationship within these boundaries."

And the Lord gives the right understanding of how to conduct oneself further and what should be feared like fire, and He keeps those who are faithful to Him from evil.

Love does not draw my heart toward sin. It cleanses my thoughts from evil and presents everything in purity and joy. Love keeps me pure.

Homework 225

1. In the light of our lesson, please read 2 Samuel 13:1-2, 11-17; Proverbs 23:7; Psalm 51:10; Romans 13:8-10; 12:1-2; Luke 1:17; Romans 8:7-14; James 1:13-17; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, 7-8; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Matthew 5:8, 27-28; Exodus 20:4, 17; 1 John 4:1; and 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 22-24.
2. What did you understand and learn that was new from this lesson?
3. How do you understand infatuation? What is it?
4. Are you familiar with the expression "rose-colored glasses"? Does it have anything in common with the subject of our lesson?

5. Are people who are infatuated protected from fatal mistakes? Can confidence in one's feelings be a good adviser?
6. Can Satan use people's tendency to become infatuated for his own purposes?
7. If you love someone and are certain that it is forever, but this goes against God's counsel, is it worthwhile to remain faithful to God and deprive yourself of the joy of life?
8. Can Satan so thoroughly charm a person who is infatuated that the person loses his reason?
9. How does love differ from infatuation? Are there any differences?

Lesson 226 . The Love Feast

Just before His death, our Lord Jesus established one very important tradition that became a rule of the New Testament—the Lord’s Supper, which in some places is called Communion or the love feast.

A will is drawn up by its owner before his death. And while the owner is alive, he may make corrections and changes to this document. But upon his death, the will takes its final form and is not subject to change. And anyone who decides to alter the will of the deceased for his own interests is a fraud or a deceiver in the eyes of society and God.

The Gospel of John was the last message to believers to enter the canon. In it, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the apostle pointed out many details of the life of Jesus and those features of His teaching that we do not encounter in the other accounts. And if we did not have this Gospel, Christianity would be different. But when God sends light to His people, He does so not to increase our knowledge, but because He expects our obedience.

Jesus gathered His disciples for the last time to reveal to them very important truths that would strengthen them in the trials to come. The death of His soul was already breathing in His face, and He languished in anticipation of these torments; His entire human nature shuddered. He longed for the support and sympathy of His disciples, but they did not understand Jesus; the spirit of rivalry was seething within them. At the entrance stood a pitcher of water for washing feet, and a servant would usually perform this task for the guests, but this time there was no servant in the house. The disciples sat in proud silence, each considering himself superior, and they all waited for someone else to fulfill this role. Judas had already sold Christ and was waiting for his opportunity to play his part. And what could Jesus do for these unfortunate people? He rose from His place, took off His outer garment, took the pitcher of water, poured the water into a basin, and began to wash their dusty feet, one after another. The disciples were surprised and astonished by

such behavior from their future King. It did not fit within their understanding. But Jesus loved them unto the end. Peter, as usual, began to argue about it, hindering Jesus from doing what He intended. But the Lord, seeing his lack of understanding, said: John 13:7: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

Many people likewise do not understand why Jesus washed their feet, but the following words of Christ became a rule for all His followers: John 13:13-17: "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." This command entered into the New Testament, and it is stated clearly enough that it should not be understood symbolically. Washing one another's feet is a manifestation of obedience to God's command and humility before one another in a spirit of love and forgiveness. In other epistles we read that this ordinance is preceded by preparation and examination of one's heart. Repentance and acceptance of one's adversary are necessary so that every grievance or feeling of malice may be removed from the soul. And when this takes place in the heart, foot washing symbolizes the cleansing away of all the dirt that has clung to us in our worldly cares. A very deep meaning is embedded in this action.

Christ still desires to come to each of us and wash our feet. Will I allow Him to do this? What will I say in response to His desire? Do not touch me!!! For I am unclean!!! And He will quietly repeat what He said to Peter.

And obedience to this command became part of the foundation of faith in Christ. For these words of His command possess special power in those who obey them. "Happy are ye if ye do them." It is worthwhile to show obedience.

I am always surprised that many people simply ignore this rule for receiving Communion, as though it did not exist; but it does

exist, and it was given before the death of Christ, and it should not be abolished. Of course, turning it into a theatrical performance would also distort its meaning, but obedience is very important.

Next came the partaking of unleavened bread and wine as symbols of the body broken for us and the blood of Jesus shed for us. The sacrifice had not yet been offered, and the disciples wondered what this meant, but they accepted these symbols and later understood what their Teacher had meant.

The bread had to be unleavened as a symbol of the purity of Christ's character. The wine was not to be fermented and consisted of pure grape juice. In the Greek language, juice and wine were called by the same word, which meant a beverage made from grapes, but Jesus explained in Matthew 26:29 that He would not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine until the day when He would drink it new in His Father's kingdom. New wine is pure grape juice that has not undergone fermentation. An alcoholic beverage cannot be a symbol of the blood of Christ, for its use is condemned by Scripture. Moreover, fermented juice cannot be a symbol of pure blood. Isaiah writes about this in 65:8: "Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it."

The blessing of following the rules of the Supper and partaking of its symbols entered into the New Testament and is an integral part of the lives of God's children. And the Lord, through His Spirit, is present where this ordinance is performed exactly, to bless all those present with His love and grant them the blessings that He promised to His obedient followers.

The love feast and its observance are among the conditions of the life of a loving person. It is the recharging of our inner potential that greatly helps maintain the strength and proper functioning of the mechanism of love. Although this may sound strange in words, it is a condition that many find difficult to understand with their minds, yet it is worth observing, because in the unseen world all these ordinances and symbols have very

great meaning and an effect that has not yet been fully revealed to us.

The body of Christ is you and I, united by one spirit into one living organism, while still remaining different.

The blood of Christ is His soul within us; it is the life-giving power that cleanses us from sin, gives us victory over every unclean addiction, and makes us clean in the sight of Heaven. The blood of Jesus is what the spirits of wickedness in high places fear most. This is God's territory, which they do not enter.

If I distort these symbols through my understanding or inaccuracy in observing them, they lose their power and become a human tradition that has no meaning in God's eyes, and they bring me under condemnation.

My rebellious spirit, with which I partake of this Supper while unwilling to cleanse my heart from sin, as happened with Judas, may also bring me under condemnation. The very presence of the betrayer at this ordinance teaches me not to prevent other people from partaking of these symbols by judging them according to my own standard.

Love loves to take part in the Lord's Supper. This is its element, and it joyfully immerses itself in these symbols, drawing nourishment from Heavenly sources. Kind words, wishes of blessings, and tender embraces—all these are part of the love feast, bearing love and joy.

Homework 226

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Matthew 26:17-30; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-34; Revelation 3:20; Galatians 5:13; and Philippians 2:3-4.
2. What did you learn from this lesson that was new to you?
3. Why is the Lord's Supper part of the New Testament?
4. Do you observe this ordinance? How often? And how do you do it?
5. Why is it necessary to wash one another's feet?

6. What should I do if this ordinance is not conducted biblically in my church?
7. What happens in my life when I show obedience to this rule and do everything exactly as it is written?
8. What do those who avoid taking part in the love feast lose?
9. May sisters take part in the Lord's Supper? If so, why?

Lesson 227 . The Opportunities Love Gives

I think that all of you, friends, have at some time asked God to give you love, happiness, friendship, patience, meekness, and other useful gifts for your soul. And what did you receive in answer to your requests? Let us recall the consequences of your prayers. I can share how God answered me.

When I asked for love, I did so because I realized that I did not have it, and I understood that I greatly needed it in order to respond correctly to the circumstances of life that had come crashing down upon me. I ask for love, and a storm begins all around me. It seemed that all the forces of spiritual wickedness in high places had come crashing down upon me. At first, I did not understand why God answered in precisely this way. I expected kind people with kind faces, whom I would love very much, but my neighbors came with distorted mouths and began to strike me with words and make my life miserable. But what I understood at that time was that I loved them, poor and unhappy as they were, yet I still had to make a choice about how to behave toward them. And I chose love. Then I understood something very important: when I ask for love, God gives it to me and at the same time gives me an opportunity to express it. And the conditions for testing this gift are not always to my liking. Sometimes I want to run away from all of it, but there is nowhere to go. And I begin to ask for greater love for a particular person and receive it, and I also receive wisdom about how to behave in one situation or another. Another opportunity opens up, followed by other opportunities to give away what I have received from God. And I give it away. And victory comes. The victory may be very small and almost unnoticeable, but it is mine. I won this battle, not by my own strength, but by the decision to allow God to endow me with His power for victory.

But it also happens that I ask for love toward those who love me, or those whom I have come to love begin to love me, and I rejoice at such a turn of events and thank God. For relationships like these glorify Him at all times.

When I ask for happiness, God blesses me in this matter as well, surrounding me with His blessings and various situations, and He waits to see what I will decide. He gives me opportunities to be happy in any trial and helps me achieve this by enabling me to view every situation positively and through the eyes of love. But I must choose whether I want to be happy or not.

Every problem will be resolved one way or another, but the attitude with which I resolve it depends solely on me. I choose happiness, and that is precisely how I make it through the next trial. Traditions and stereotypes greatly hinder me by imposing the general opinion that in one situation I must act one way and in another situation another way. But happiness teaches something entirely different and sometimes shows the most “insane” way out, which, as a rule, is the best one.

I am learning to ask God for happiness in every trial and then to live that way, and very many problems have simply stopped approaching me; apparently, they do not want to waste their time and strength on me.

And when I hear about my friends’ problems, I very carefully ask them whether they might like to learn happiness right now. For if you master this knowledge during a difficult time, it will then always be yours, because you know how it works when things are hard, while in easier matters it works very easily.

Being happy is a science that must be studied, mastered, and practiced. Otherwise, it will remain an empty wish offered on the next holiday, without an understanding of the foundations and laws of this state of soul and mind.

When I ask for the gift of friendship, it does not always concern pleasant people. When I first decided to try this with strangers, I saw only stony faces and impenetrable hearts. But God gave me an opportunity to prove to them that I was a true friend who loves at all times, and they believed me; God’s love and my persistence in being friendly convinced them of this. Many years have passed, and all my friends remain my friends, and I

simply love them. Although we are not always able to communicate, our relationships remain strong and right.

But despite all our friendship, I understand that each of my friends has freedom of choice and may at any time change his attitude toward me and test the strength of my love. This is very painful, but Jesus stands beside me, holds me by the hand, shows me His wounds, and helps me understand that they were inflicted by the dearest people, whom He never stopped loving. And I calm down and choose love.

When I ask God for joy, He gives me an opportunity to express it under very difficult conditions. And it happens that where, according to the custom of the world, one should complain and groan, I rejoice and give thanks. I cannot tell you about everything; I know that many would condemn me as a madman. Therefore, I reveal many of my experiences of joy only to God and thank Him for this gift and for the opportunities to express it in this way. The Bible verse "Rejoice evermore" has become my motto in life, and this is the best solution to every problem.

My sins, however, do not bring me any joy; they bring pain and suffering, and I do not wish to live with them, so I try to get rid of them as soon as I recognize them.

When I ask for love and peace, God gives me a spirit of meekness, which I do not always ask for directly, but I understand that it is a consequence of my love and friendship and of my unwillingness to live according to the flesh and act according to the customs of the world. The closer I am to Jesus, the more I understand that I do not need very much in this world, that there are spiritual treasures that cannot be bought even with all the riches of the world but may be received freely in response to one's thirst and desire to possess them.

Meekness is an opportunity to show the world whose side you are on and Who reigns within you. It is such happiness to be meek, especially since it is the meek who have been promised our Earth as an inheritance.

When I ask for patience, I do not need it in peaceful times, but God gives me an opportunity to express it during a storm by

allowing the storm to come crashing into my life. The enemy of souls offers his help and waits only for my choice so that I may silence all my opponents and put them in their place. But I choose love and friendship, and I understand that this is also expressed in patience toward those who can be very unbearable.

If I ask for a spirit of generosity, I am given an opportunity to express it even when there is no money, and all the more when money appears. God also gives me discernment about how to use God's resources properly without serving money or loving it, but giving with joy and willingness.

I am writing this to you, friends, so that, having set out on this path of love, friendship, and happiness, you will always remember that with every gift from God we are given both the gift itself and an opportunity to apply it and test its strength and faithfulness. This is so that you will not become disappointed when you encounter trials and problems, but will resolve them boldly. This is God's school of love, and its program is the same for all students, although the assignments and their difficulty are different for everyone, just as we are all different, with different understanding and perception.

But what brings joy is that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. With Him, we can plan and build everything, knowing that He will never fail us. Therefore, do not be afraid, do not fear, and do not be terrified if difficulties and trials come. Every crisis is not a loss or the end, but a new opportunity to learn something and gain something new for yourself. In every trial there is an opportunity to glorify God.

Homework 227

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Philippians 4:4, 13; Colossians 1:10-11; 3:12-15; Matthew 5:3-11; Psalm 119:2; 1 Peter 4:13-14; Romans 4:7-8; Revelation 22:14; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 13:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; and Acts 20:24.
2. Did you understand anything from this lesson?
3. Why are good things from God always tested?

4. Why is it necessary to ask and plead with our Heavenly Father for good things, and then, having received them, to face difficult trials?
5. Is it possible to travel the narrow way without struggle and problems? Give examples.
6. Where is God during my trials?
7. Why does the time of the end conclude with a global crisis? Could everything not be arranged more peacefully?
8. Does the prospect of trials frighten you? Would you like to travel the narrow way without any difficulties?
9. Where will loving people be surrounded by “soft and cuddly” friends with broad smiles and happy faces?

Lesson 228 . What Not to Do

What a wonderful school! What wonderful information! Where is that neighbor to whom I will tell about my decision to love him?! I simply feel like a hero of love and a victor! And I make the decision to love always and even pray about it, and, inspired by my decision, I choose the man or woman who will take a place in my heart, and I will delight this friend with my sincere attitude all my life.

I pray and wait. And now: the weather is beautiful, the sun is shining into my right eye, a warm breeze is stroking my freshly washed hair, I have eaten a delicious meal, and everything inclines me to love, while beside me is someone whom I do not yet know very well, and I open my mouth.

I begin to speak words of love, recalling the lessons I studied at the School of Agape Love, and I observe my listener's reaction. Everything happens just as I was taught. The person draws inward and watches me distrustfully. He feels very comfortable in his shell and has no intention whatsoever of coming out of it. But words of love have a special power and influence, of which I am aware, while "my victim" does not even suspect it. And again and again I speak about how genuine and sincere I am, assuring my new friend that this is from God. And the weather seems to ally itself with me, sending gentle rays of sunshine, wrapping us in warm nights, and we fly in the arms of a quiet breeze into the unknown called "love." I am so grateful for this school of love. I have learned so much in it, and now I am a victor. I become even more firmly established in my decision to love and understand that this is forever!

And then, on about the fifth day, I see a miracle: the soul of my beloved friend stands before me and opens its heart, cautiously inviting me to enter. I am at a loss because of such a victory and, at the same time, I rejoice. This is it!!! It works!!! Our teacher was right! And I try to remember what should be done next, and we begin to get to know each other more closely.

My new friend simply consumes me with his attention and amazes me with his attachment. I notice that all my vital juices are being rapidly sucked out by him. But I feel like a hero. I love. At the same time, I go to work and deal with other responsibilities.

A short time of friendship passes, and I suddenly understand that not everything is so simple. Love requires enormous inner potential, and I do not have it. Besides, my stomach has started hurting for some reason, and there is a crisis at work. But my friend thinks only about himself and wishes to hear new revelations about my love. Yet I do not want to say anything. I am simply tired. Fortunately, I am understood correctly and left alone. I immerse myself in my thoughts and begin to examine my feelings. Was I not too hasty with my love? It turns out that this is not one continuous celebration, but a sacrifice—now on my part—and I am not ready for that, nor do I know what to do next. It is one thing to read the lessons, in which everything is so clear and right, but in practice I feel as though I am in a juicer. I seem to be here, but inside there is emptiness. And the farther it goes, the worse I feel.

No, I must be honest. I have understood a terrible truth about myself: I am a hypocrite. And these clouds and this cold wind seem to confirm my thoughts. My friend does not understand what I am going through and quietly waits for my next actions. And the most frightening thing is that he lets me understand that he loves me too and is grateful that I found him in this way, opened him up, and caught him. But with fear I understand that I am burned out, that I am not the person I claimed to be, that I am a liar. And although I am ashamed to admit it, I do not love!!! This is very frightening, but I must be honest. I gather courage and decide to say these terrible words. I understand that something very bad will happen, but I am accustomed to being truthful and am proud of this trait of my character. This is probably the one thing to which I remain faithful.

And I invite my friend to have a candid conversation, and I reveal...

Stop!!! Do not say anything!!!

You cannot even imagine what will happen within you and in the heart of your neighbor. Never take this step, even if you are absolutely certain of it. This is the abyss of emptiness into which Satan wants to cast you. Do not let him do it. You have God, Who knows what is happening, and this condition of your soul is not something new, but the usual consequence of inner burnout. He did not design us to be independent in our decisions and to use only our inner potential, especially in love.

The mistake of the one who decides to love his neighbor most often consists in relying on his fleeting feelings, considering them a firm foundation, and, during favorable times, simply being certain that it will always be this way. It is especially sad to see families being formed on such a foundation. And when the reserve is exhausted and the inner potential has run dry, the foundation cannot withstand the static load and develops cracks, and the little house of love and happiness begins to collapse. And great will be the fall of it!

Is there a way out? Can this be corrected? Yes, there is; yes, it can!

The first thing you should not do is declare to your friend or spouse that you do not love him or her. These words can exert an irreversible influence for evil both upon you and upon the object of your love. And this is not the kind of truth that should be announced in this way. If good statements must be proven, bad ones are believed immediately, without proof, and no one tries to assure you that you are mistaken or deceiving yourself. And the spirits of wickedness strengthen these words of lovelessness and convince people of them. Sadly, people speak about this more than about what is good and right. And the worst thing is that, from your sad experience, the person concludes that all people are like this and closes himself off from everyone; and sometimes it is very difficult, or altogether impossible, to open this door. But God works miracles.

The decision not to love has no firm foundation within it, so you should not build the future upon it; there simply is no future there. Instead, you should understand what is happening. The reserves are exhausted, there is no strength—this is how it is

supposed to be! This is a law. But there are two external powers that offer themselves: darkness and light, Satan and God. Within them is enormous potential and power. Which will I choose?

I choose God. And I simply tell Him about what is happening within me. I tell Him about my emptiness, about my feelings, about the fact that I can no longer love in this way. And He listens and tenderly prepares a way out, but He does not immediately overwhelm me with His answers. Love is a lengthy process of learning and growth that should not be hurried, but neither should it be delayed. It is best to ask not for new feelings and experiences, but for the Lord to teach me to love truly, and He answers such requests.

You should not hurry to declare your love, even if it overflows within you; but neither should you say that you were hasty or mistaken when you spoke of love, if those words came out of you. Instead, you should understand that you must seek support and a way out in God and, together with Him, make such decisions or correct such mistakes. After all, the Source of Love is He Himself, and He desires only that I find Him and connect myself to Him, so that eternally, endlessly, always, at every moment and in every mood, I may come to Him and take as much as I need.

It is written that charity never faileth, and therefore, if mine has passed away, it was not love but feelings; and I should not despair, but should replace them with something genuine, eternal, and right. And this is possible.

If God has commanded this to us, then He will teach everyone to do it.

Homework 228

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Isaiah 40:29-31; 1 Corinthians 13:8; Matthew 7:7, 11-12; Psalm 62:11; John 7:38; 1 John 3:18-22; Hebrews 4:16; 2 Corinthians 4:6-7, 10; Philippians 2:3-5; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 3:16-21; and Philippians 4:19-20.
2. Do these lessons help you learn something useful?

3. What did you understand from this lesson?
4. Why should one not hurry to declare one's love?
5. If I told someone about my love and then understood that they were only feelings, what should I do in this case?
6. Is it necessary to speak about love at all?
7. Is it obligatory to love our neighbors? They can be happy without my love.
8. What should I do if I have a family but have no feelings of love toward my spouse? Must I be honest and tell the truth directly to his or her face?
9. What should I do if I want to love everyone but am very busy with other matters?
10. Is loving interesting?

Lesson 229 . It Is Worth Loving

Whatever I may think about love, whatever I may call it, however afraid I may be to have it, and whatever trials may come into my life, it is still worth loving. It is worth experiencing in my life the action of this heavenly weapon.

It is not frightening if something does not work out for me, if I confuse love with feelings, or if I make some mistakes. These are normal accompanying experiences and missteps through which everyone passes who has set out upon this path.

It is worth always remembering that we are living in the last time of the last days, and this means that the final events are unfolding before our eyes and God's power is being manifested in all its fullness. And what the True Witness offers me to buy from Him in the message to Laodicea must become mine. Otherwise, I simply risk remaining naked, poor, wretched, and miserable, and without any protection.

When a child takes his first steps, does it irritate you that he moves his legs so awkwardly and sways in every direction? No, this is the process of learning. But when I am learning to love and something does not go right, for some reason I begin to feel like an outcast whom everyone only wants to punish, and every mistake disheartens me.

Tell me, for whom is it easier to take steps of love: for those who know nothing but have heard that it is worth loving, or for those who have thoroughly studied this science, seen its action in another person's life, discovered its laws for themselves, understood the mechanism of its action, learned about every possible danger, and examined its different facets? I think that trained people have more advantages.

But if a person has learned this science of love and become convinced that love exists and acts, yet does not sit at its controls in order to try it, what benefit will this person receive? This can be compared to someone who studied the operation of a surface-to-air missile system and was sent with it into a combat zone, but chose an oak club for his attack tactics and

settled into a defensive position, observing what was happening. Does that sound foolish?

If you have not yet understood the purpose of our training, it is worth stating it clearly once again. We are studying the science of Agape Love so that, having received this love and mastered this art, we may draw even closer to Jesus and allow God to pour out upon me the full power of the Holy Spirit for active participation in and completion of all God's tasks for the last days. Having love, knowing how to wield it, and giving it the right to possess me, I become God's instrument, which He will use at this time to carry out His plans. Do not think that we have simply gathered here to learn something interesting and thereby add it to our store of knowledge. We are preparing for battles that no one will escape. And although we sometimes study this science with humor, it is too serious to ignore.

God gives us various gifts and kinds of ministry in the church. We have developed a great many strategies and programs for winning souls and keeping them in the church, and all of them are successful, while love covers all of this and makes me fit for Eternity. And if I do not live to see the Second Coming of Christ and happen to die, but with love in my heart, then I have very good prospects of taking part in the first resurrection. Eternity was created for loving beings.

I communicate with different people, and sometimes I ask them to share how they imagine Eternity. And everyone says that there will be no sin there and that all will love one another, and they begin to describe the lessons of our school, but not in our present life—in the beautiful future. Yet what will change there? Why should I wait for something distant when I can already comprehend these laws and live by them now? After all, for many of us Eternal life has already begun, and even if we die, we will live again.

When I allow a child to eat porridge by himself for the first time, I understand what will come of it and prepare myself for the fact that both he and everything around him will be covered in porridge, but I go through with it, knowing that otherwise he will never learn. Therefore, I also appeal to you, friends: Do not

be afraid to love. Take this step! It may be crooked or clumsy, but it is worth beginning; it is worth investing all the strength of your mind in this undertaking. And the Heavenly Father must be near us, Who will clean up all the mess we scatter in the process of comprehending this science. And with what love the Lord will wash our tear-stained faces and soiled mouths, take us into His arms, and comfort us in our mistakes.

When I imagine God as a stern Father with a belt in His hand, Who is only waiting for my missteps so that He can pour out all His wrath upon me, I will not be able to learn very much.

Once, during lunch, I was sitting in my car and watching a young mother teach her three-year-old son to ride a bicycle. How she shouted at him, called him names, and shook him back and forth, while he tried to fight her and shouted back. It was a sad sight. But the next day, this mother was gently holding her son by the hand and taking a walk with him without the bicycle, speaking sweetly with him. And how does this boy perceive his mother? It is difficult for him to understand what she will do the next time he makes a mistake. And this is approximately how I perceive God. This happens because I do not know Him personally and do not understand in my own life what it means that God is love.

But when I practice love and see its power and constancy within me, I sometimes think that if God loves me at least as much as I love my friends, then what happiness it is to have such a wonderful Father. It is such a joy to love and to be loved.

Eternity also attracts me because there I will be able, without fear of ridicule and rejection, to tell everyone about my love, put it into practice, invest it in every undertaking, and be understood by all. And sometimes I forget that I am still in this world and begin to behave this way, but I find myself in a labyrinth of high walls, fences, and closed doors. Then I come to my senses and sadly dream of at least one open little window through which I might tell deceived and weary people at least something about the fact that love exists, that it is alive, and that it is strong in those who love. And it is such happiness

when someone listens to you, even if only out of respect. But God desires to have in His army not listeners, but victors.

It is worth loving. This is a very good undertaking, and it is worth taking part in it.

And how it works can be seen from your own experience by taking this step of faith.

What does the person who begins to love lose? Try to make a table in which you write down everything that will happen to you if you continue living as usual, and what will happen if you decide to love. You may confidently include in it all the prospects of love. There will be difficulties, and there will be the fire of trials, but there will also be power from above and a reward for the victor.

It is a pity that there are fewer and fewer loving people, and it seems that I alone am left with God, but He assures me that He still has many people who have not bowed their knees to Baal. Oh, how joyful it would be to meet them and together walk to the end of this beautiful path of love for one another. The church helps such people find one another and unite around God. And this is part of God's plan—to love together—and this is also worth doing. And the most powerful Force in the entire Universe—the Lord God—is given to help these people.

Homework 229

1. In the light of our lesson, please read James 1:12; Revelation 2:5, 10, 17; 3:19, 21–22; 12:11; 14:12; 3:10; 21:6–7; 16:15; Isaiah 43:2, 4; 54:10, 17; 59:19; Proverbs 21:31; 22:3; John 12:25; and Song of Solomon 2:4.
2. What did you decide after this lesson?
3. Is it worth beginning to love right now, when everything around us is so unstable?
4. Is it really impossible to come up with anything other than love?
5. What should I do if I begin to love and people start using me for their own interests?
6. Does God love those who love more than He loves everyone else?

7. What will change in my life if I decide to set out upon the path of love?
8. What will happen if I never decide to begin loving and do not even try it?
9. I ask for love, but nothing happens. Why?
10. What Bible verses came to your mind as you read this lesson?

Lesson 230 . Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Ministry

By the fact of God's creation, each of us is an individual who is capable of living independently in this world and taking care of his own needs. For service and self-care, the Lord endowed us with special abilities, while our parents and society helped us develop these abilities and form certain skills so that we might be healthy, clean, hardworking, respectful, and useful to other people. Although each of us has his own individuality, we all live in a society of people like us and must develop the ability to communicate with one another.

The enemy of souls makes his own adjustments to these relationships, but God is not inactive either. One way or another, every person receives an opportunity to know God and to choose his further path in life—some to destruction, and others to new life in Christ.

When the Holy Spirit draws me to Christ, reveals to me the meaning of the sacrifice of Calvary, and I begin to believe that Jesus is my Savior, my life is transformed and I become a believer. In the process of this growth, I begin to seek fellow believers. But I may also come to this faith while already among a community of believers. This community has various spiritual gifts and various kinds of ministry to help me know God even better, grow in Christ, and reach full spiritual maturity. Believing in Christ and learning His will, I decide to receive water baptism and thereby become part of God's people by being accepted as a member of the church. I become part of the body of Christ. But in this body, every member has special gifts from God for serving the other members, building up the whole body, and carrying out the tasks of continuing to testify to the world that God has a plan to save every person from the power of sin and to bring earthly history to an end at the time of Jesus' Second Coming to this world.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit should not be confused with His fruit. While gifts and ministries differ, and we should not all possess the same gift for the same ministry, the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness,

faith, meekness, and temperance—must be in the heart of every church member, regardless of what gift he possesses and what ministry he performs. The fruit of the Spirit helps every ministry become proper by giving it the right motive and spirit. Is it possible to be a teacher or pastor without love? It is, but the absence of the fruit of the Spirit will also affect the other members and exert an unwholesome influence.

God gives each of His sons or daughters a gift different from another, as it pleases Him. At the same time, the Lord takes into account the abilities, desires, and interests of every church member. It is not always possible to understand immediately what gift I possess, and therefore observations from others help reveal and develop these abilities. People also have innate gifts, such as an ear for music, a voice, a good memory, and a particular temperament, which can be used in ministry; yet they are not the same as the bestowed gift of the Spirit that is given for a specific purpose in the life and growth of the church.

A spiritual gift may develop according to needs and expectations, or it may be buried and not used for its intended purpose.

If I desire to become a pastor or teacher, this does not mean that I possess that gift. It is quite possible that my proud heart desires power over people's minds so that I may reveal my own will to them. But those appointed to these kinds of ministry are people who are growing in the knowledge of the truth, have earned the trust of their fellow believers, and are approved by the church. Unfortunately, this principle is not observed everywhere among God's people, and it happens that a person sets himself the goal of attaining a leadership position and, having attained that office, becomes a master over others or "clings to his position," thereby grieving the Lord.

One of Christ's chosen disciples was Judas, who was a thief and became a traitor. Therefore, I should not be surprised if I hear that a similar spirit is present among God's people. I always ask, "Lord, are You still the Head of my church?" Then I

become convinced that He is, humbly perform my ministry, and strive to do it with a pure heart.

Love combines beautifully with every gift of God and manifests itself beautifully in every kind of ministry. It is compatible with everything, and through it all gifts become one whole organism in which every member and organ successfully performs its small tasks for the common good and growth. Love glues into one whole what cannot be united or made compatible in any other way.

Have you ever thought about Who governs my body? I can create favorable living conditions for my body, care for it, or destroy it, but my internal organs do not obey me. They receive commands and instructions directly from God and do what He has placed within them, performing their work regardless of my desires. Doctors can study the structure of the body and the patterns by which the organs work and make certain adjustments, but restoration and healing come from the Lord.

In the same way, the Church of Christ is governed from outside itself. The enemy of souls, in cooperation with fallen people, will try to bring disorder and sin into the ranks of God's people, but God governs this world, and He knows the time when the harvest will come and the wheat will forever be separated from the tares. But we should not take God's functions upon ourselves, lest we harm those who are genuine, though weak. It is better to do what promotes the growth of the church.

According to Scripture, spiritual gifts include faith, the gift of healing, the gift of prophecy, the gift of preaching, the gift of teaching, the gift of administration, the gift of reconciliation, the gift of compassion, the gift of mercy, and the gift of selfless service to one's neighbors in order to support and encourage them. Some gifts are for the common good of the church, while others are personal gifts for serving one's family and those who live nearby; they should not be confused or exchanged for one another.

I am not the distributor of God's gifts, but I can see what gift other church members possess, draw their attention to it, and

help them develop it. I cannot assign even one gift to myself, but if I set myself the goal of achieving something in serving people and study the truth in that area and apply it in my life, then it is quite possible that the Lord will bless my efforts and bless me with that gift.

I once dreamed of having the gift of healing so that, at my word, every illness would leave a sick person's body. I imagined how much good I could do and prayed for it. But the Lord did not give me this gift. When I began studying health reform, however, I saw that it contains the principles of success and the rules of healthy living. After all, instant healing is the most primitive thing that can be done for a person: he will rejoice, but he will not understand why he became ill and will become ill again. But if he is taught the rules of a healthy lifestyle, he will cease becoming ill, although there are exceptions. Yet in extreme cases, the Lord still answered my prayers and miraculously healed both me and those close to me.

Love is also a gift, but it is the fruit of the Spirit. Everyone who grows on the Vine and feeds upon Its sap will receive it.

Homework 230

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Acts 6:1-7; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 27-28; Ephesians 4:8, 11-16; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; Colossians 3:14, 17; 1 Corinthians 12:18-27; John 15:5-8; and 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 8.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Do you know what your gift is, and how do you use it?
4. How can the spiritual gift of a brother or sister in the church be identified?
5. What should I do if I occupy a place in ministry that is not mine and perform it out of duty or because of a salary, rather than from a desire to do it?
6. What spiritual gifts do you know?
7. If a church is small, does this mean that each of its members must have many gifts and perform various ministries?

8. If I have not been assigned any ministry, how can I understand what I should do?
9. How does love manifest itself in the diversity of ministry?
10. Are there spiritual gifts in traditional churches?

Lesson 231 . The Miracles of Love

Miracles are something that cannot be explained by a pattern or as the consequence of something. They defy definition and are accepted as fact without additional attempts to explain them. Miracles are the result of supernatural forces acting beyond the bounds of our imagination, and they are an integral part of Christian culture as exceptions to the rules, although they cannot be its foundation. God very often gives miraculous answers to prayers that cannot be explained by any law, and He does this according to His mercy and love for His children.

Every miracle should be approached with great caution, for Satan can also perform miracles, which he will actively do in the last days.

Christianity is not a religion of miracles, for miracles are performed solely according to the will of God, which may be contrary to my expectations.

We live in the most wonderful world, which has its own laws of nature, physics, chemistry, biology, anatomy, and psychology. And we have learned to explain all of this, seeing cause and effect. But sometimes it becomes impossible to explain the process itself. Why does it happen this way? Take even the growth of a seed. I know what it should look like at each stage. But why it grows in precisely this way and becomes something out of nothing, I do not know.

Would you like to see a miracle that science still cannot explain? Place your hand on the left side of your chest and feel your heart beating. This is an undeniable fact to which we have grown accustomed. But according to every law of logic, it cannot work on its own. It needs Someone Who will start it and keep it operating in this mode.

A bumblebee cannot fly, because its proportions do not correspond to the lifting force of its wings, but for some reason it does not know this and violates all the laws of physics. And a simple fly confounds those who study the laws of aerodynamics: physically, it simply cannot change its flight path so quickly.

But as I watch a fly, I see that it knows nothing at all about these laws and brazenly violates them.

Nature is filled with nothing but miracles and mysteries, but we have grown accustomed to them.

In the Christian life, we also constantly encounter all kinds of miraculous manifestations that amaze us. But if they happen constantly, they cease to surprise us, and we simply grow accustomed to them. How can one explain when a person addicted to alcohol suddenly receives freedom from this addiction and begins a new life? At first this is amazing, but if it becomes commonplace, the amazement passes, and you simply expect it as the norm of life.

The behavior of the scribes and Pharisees, who followed Jesus, saw His miracles, yet asked for greater miracles that would convince them that He was the true Messiah, has always been a mystery to me. If I had seen that, I surely would have believed. And how can faith itself be explained? What is it?

The science of love belongs to the category of miracles that can be described as fact but cannot be explained so clearly as to make an ironclad rule out of it. It is similar to how we try to describe God, fit Him within the boundaries of our understanding, and not let Him go beyond the limits of our imagination. But He is greater than all of this. If love could be explained and arranged neatly into categories, I think it would become available to everyone, and even Satan would use it for his own purposes.

But it exists. It is invisible, yet we see it and feel it with our hearts. We cannot describe it in words, but when it enters our lives, we understand that it is love.

It has no mouth, yet it knows how to speak to everyone in a language he understands. It has no ears, yet it hears not only our voices but also our thoughts and knows beforehand what we will ask of it.

It has no eyes, yet it looks into our souls and reads people's hearts like open books. It sees the hidden treasures in the soul

of every person and knows how to bring them forth and reveal them.

Love has no hands, yet it embraces us so tenderly and firmly and carries us in its arms of faith and love that we do not want to leave them. It places its nonexistent hand on my shoulder and supports me in my trials.

It has no feet, yet it walks ahead of me and never falls behind me, preparing the way for me and calling me to follow in its steps.

It puts the shoes of readiness on me and teaches me to walk in them.

It has no outward appearance, yet it is so beautiful that I continually admire it, try to delight in its beauty, and share descriptions of its image and likeness with others. There is nothing in the world more beautiful than love, and it becomes the most beautiful adornment of everything it touches.

A blind person cannot appreciate the magnificent expanses and wonderful landscapes that love paints. But if there are eyes in my head, I try to satisfy my eye with the sight of love as I contemplate it, and I understand that it is impossible to have too much of it.

Does love have a soul? I cannot answer this unequivocally. But when our souls unite into one whole, I understand that Someone lives within me Who is higher than my understanding and imagination.

And yet, for all its inexplicable and mysterious nature, love has special patterns that can be identified and explained. It never acts contrary to God's law, briefly expressed in the Ten Commandments, and it always points out my mistakes if my conduct contradicts or goes against God's commandments. In essence, God's law is the verbal expression of God's character and is the foundation of the happy life of all God's creation.

Try changing even one commandment to suit your desires and making that change part of your life, and love will immediately

point it out, call such behavior sin, and be right; it will not retreat from its principles.

Love is firm as a rock, and no power can break this fortress. If I fall upon it, I am broken, but I do not die physically; rather, all my stereotypes, fears, doubts, unbelief, temptations, envy, malice, and the rest of the rubbish that I carefully collected in my heart are broken. And there is no softer bed for my weary soul in which it could luxuriate with such pleasure.

In this account, I am trying to explain the inexplicable, contradicting myself with my own definitions, but in the end everything is described in an inexplicably correct way that cannot be proven, yet can be understood to be exactly so.

For me, the greatest miracle is myself. Every time I analyze my life and what the Lord has done with me, I never cease to be amazed, and my joy knows no bounds. I know and remember myself as someone different, not the person I am now. And I cannot understand how I became what I am today. This is not I; it is something beyond description; it is some kind of miracle of God. But I accept it and live in it, and sometimes I simply grow accustomed to the new me.

When I began asking for love for myself, I did not even imagine what it would do with me. And now I cannot imagine what I can do without it or how I could undertake anything without it. For me, there is nothing worse in the world than living without love; that can truly be called horror and a nightmare. Love has permeated everything, although I have grown accustomed even to this and sometimes do not think about it, and outwardly it is not especially evident. Nothing but miracles. Yet to someone else, all of this is simply strange.

Homework 231

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Exodus 3:20; 34:10; Joshua 3:5; Psalm 72:18; 78:9-16; Matthew 7:22-23; 24:24; John 4:48; Acts 5:12; 19:11; Revelation 13:14; 15:3; and 19:20.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?

3. Have you experienced miracles in your life? Tell us about them.
4. Do you believe that God still performs His wondrous works?
5. Have you seen the miracle of grace in your own mirror?
6. Why should you not build your faith on miracles?
7. Can Satan perform miracles? Through whom does he do this?
8. Do you believe that your hands and words of love perform miracles?
9. Has God's love performed miracles of grace in your life through the lessons of our school?
10. Are you ready to become a channel of God's love, in whose existence many people no longer believe?

Lesson 232 . The Mirror of Love

I think that each of you has a mirror in your home. It is unique in that it always tells us the truth to our face, but not everyone is pleased by this truth. The mirror itself has neither the power nor the purpose to change my appearance; it can only show me what is there.

God's law is also a mirror of the soul. It was spoken by God Himself and, to this day, has not been changed by Him. But the law does not change my life; it only tells me what in my life meets its requirements and where there are violations. Jesus revealed to me the spirit of the law, making it clear that all these commands apply not only to my deeds but also to my thoughts, and He desires to write it in my heart.

God's law is good and holy for those who are good and holy, but it mercilessly exposes and judges its transgressors. The mirror of the law cannot lie. It tells my heart the truth, but it does not resolve the problem of sin in my life.

But I have Jesus, Who reveals His will to me through His law and offers me His help and strength to correct what is wrong in my life.

What is the mirror of love? What does it reflect and show me? In what can I see my love and understand how genuine it is? Your loving hearts, my friends, are my mirror of love, in which I see what I have in my heart. And this is the special feature of our relationship: you are a reflection of what is within me, and this mirror tells me the truth, which is sometimes very bitter and painful.

I look at my reflection in your love and see how sincere and genuine I am. And what do you see in me and in my love for you? You see yourselves and your love for me. I reflect to you who you are, and you tell me about myself.

If I begin to evaluate myself by myself, I will most likely become a self-absorbed person; and if I am also proud, nothing good will come of it. But if I want to learn the real truth about my

love, I bring it to you, for it is you who will show me everything you have seen and how it has affected you. And through your evaluation, given in the spirit of love and friendship, I learn about myself—how sincere, valuable, and truthful I am. And my love for you helps you understand how filled with love you are and what else should be changed in your heart.

Let us consider an example. You engage in self-examination and come to the conclusion that you are a failure. That is a very bold self-assessment. And it instills in you the confidence that this is indeed so. Then I appear, so greatly loved, and begin to convince you of the opposite, telling you how wonderful you are, what marvelous potential has been placed within you—so much that there was even enough of it for me—what great wings you have on your back, and how your love has changed my life. And you soar with joy because of such an assessment. For I have revealed to you the whole truth about yourself through what has been revealed in me and through the changes in my life. I have become your mirror of love.

The Bible teaches us 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.” In deliberate isolation there is no love; it is simply neither needed nor visible if it cannot be reflected from someone.

Look at the night sky. Do you see the sunlight that permeates space from every direction? No. You see pitch darkness. Light has visible power only when it is reflected from something, showing you the spectrum of all colors and shades. The same thing happens with love. It needs someone.

In evil or deceitful people, it is difficult to see your love immediately. Like “black holes,” they absorb all the light and reflect nothing. But love heals even these hearts if they respond to its influence.

But in fellowship with those who love or strive toward this goal, God brings about amazing mutual discoveries. For example, when one person lies in a cold bed, it is very difficult for him to warm himself. He must cover himself tightly in order to retain

his warmth or heat the room. But if another person is beside him under the blanket, then, by giving each other our warmth, we warm up very quickly.

During my military service, I was put in the guardhouse. It was winter, and I was placed in a solitary cell without a window or a bed. I was cold throughout the first night and could not sleep. Then I was transferred to a common cell, where it was also cold. At night we lay close together, covered ourselves with our greatcoats, warmed one another, and slept that way. I do not remember those soldiers, but I remember how warm I was with them in that cold cell.

You should not deprive yourself of fellowship with fellow believers. This is God's plan for our spiritual development and purification.

A mirror helps me see myself, examine my features, see my shortcomings, admire the beauty of God's creation, and make a decision.

The most sincere mirrors of love are our spouses. But if one's spouse does not walk with God, that person may become a distorting mirror and misrepresent the truth. Ideally, however, two hearts that love each other—a husband and wife who believe in the one God—are the best reflection of God's love, first for each other and then for those around them.

It is very difficult for me to understand what I am truly like until I see the reflection of my love for you in the way my love has helped you, and the reflection of your love in the way it has helped me. Such a relationship works miracles in our lives.

This quality is not easy to explain, and it is even more difficult to understand. But we have been given and presented to one another for a reason: to nurture mutual love in others. People who love me very quickly reveal to me my own value in God's eyes, in my own eyes, and in theirs as well. I see myself in a loving heart. And this value is determined not by how wonderful I am, but by how my love has helped others feel wonderful, make amazing discoveries within themselves, change for the better, and accomplish something remarkable. If my love has

helped you love yourself, discover the person within you, and understand your value in God's eyes, then in this I can see a very good reflection of who I am. And the same applies to me. Your love brings changes into my life and shows you who you are.

The commandment that we love one another is very deep. We will comprehend it throughout all Eternity without ever reaching the bottom of its revelations. And this prospect brings me great joy.

The development of any child clearly demonstrates the power and influence of love. Begin scolding him for every mistake and calling him hurtful names, and a complex will form within him for life. But if this little person is treated with love and helped to make new discoveries within himself as a creative individual and as a person, his development will be very rapid and well-rounded. For we were created by love for love, and only love can uncover the limitless potential within me and desires to do so from early childhood. But everyone's childhood was different. Even now, however, love can set everything right. It is powerful; it tears down strongholds.

If I have only one friend, that is better than nothing, but it is still not quite enough. If many mirrors show me the same image from every side, they will convince me more fully of the truth about myself than if there were only one source.

Whoever desires to have many friends must himself be friendly.

Homework 232

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Proverbs 4:7-12; 17:17; Genesis 2:18; John 13:34; Ephesians 5:28, 33; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 1:7; 4:8, 11; James 1:23-25; and Matthew 18:20.
2. Is this lesson clear to you? What did you understand from it?
3. Did God create human beings for a life of solitude?
4. Why is it precisely through fellowship and contact with others that my love develops?
5. Is it important for love to be reflected from the hearts of those around us?

6. Why is it precisely in fellowship that the blood of Christ cleanses us from sin?
7. What influence does society have on my love? Should I avoid the company of other people?
8. Why is love able to live only where there are two or more people?
9. Why have we not been given a commandment to love ourselves?
10. Should I come out of isolation? After all, in this state I can be very close to Jesus.

Lesson 233 . Love Does Not Torment Souls Forever

Two teenagers decided to furnish a basement for themselves in one of the houses in the city. But rats lived in this basement. They came to visit, spoiled things and food, and caused disgust. So it was decided to catch these rats with a trap. Every day a new rat with a broken spine lay in this device. These dead rats were piled outside like trophies, as food for stray animals. Then one day, only one of a rat's legs was broken, and it was still alive, sitting in the trap. The teenagers decided to punish it for being a rat. They devised an execution. They made a fire in the courtyard, found an iron bucket of tar, put the rat into it, covered the bucket with broken glass, and began roasting their victim over a low fire, delighting in the suffering and squeals of the poor rat. It ran around the bucket and squealed in pain, which gave the teenagers savage joy. The rat could not endure such torture and quickly died, much to the disappointment of its tormentors.

What would you say about these people? What would you call them? Sadists. What would you do with these teenagers if you saw this with your own eyes? You would turn them over to the police so that they could be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

I think that reading this story brought some very unpleasant thoughts to your mind. But what if a human being were put in the rat's place? What feelings would then overwhelm you?

And if people did this, we would call them maniacs, sadists, executioners, and murderers, and we would be right.

Now let us leave everything as it is, but imagine a sinner in place of the rat, and put God the Father and the Son in place of the teenagers. During this execution, They can exercise Their Divine power, not allowing the flames of the fire to go out and not allowing the victim to die, endowing him with the gift of eternal life for eternal torment in the fire, while watching with interest how much this sinner suffers and listening to his endless curses and groans as heavenly music, and receiving the

smell of burning flesh as a pleasant aroma. And the saved stand nearby and sing a song of praise to Him Who is Love, thanking God that He saved them from such an eternal nightmare, and looking upon the sinner with contempt as they remember how he rejected God's mercy. How foolish this sounds.

I have simply tried to describe in human terms what people attempt to prove to us doctrinally. Perhaps I have embellished something, but the essence remains the same, except that there is not just one sinner in the fire, but all of humanity.

Simple questions immediately arise:

What is the purpose of eternal torment?

Could these people not be justly punished according to their deeds and then simply deprived of life, so that they would no longer exist anywhere?

Can Love act so savagely toward deceived people?

Will I be eternally happy knowing that somewhere my unbelieving relatives are being tormented forever?

And there are also many questions addressed personally to God. Yet if He is like that, it would be better not to ask anything, but to remain quietly silent and work out one's salvation in fear and horror, afraid of making a misstep. On what would such faith be based? On fear.

The Bible speaks of the lake of fire. It tells of the punishment and torments of sinners. We are given certain accounts of the final judgment upon the wicked and Satan, and of the second death. All of this is in the Bible. But where did the teaching of the immortality of the soul come from? Who is the author of this doctrine?

Mathematics is an exact science, and if a small error is made at the very beginning of a calculation, then no matter how correctly the problem is solved afterward, the answer will be wrong.

God is Love. And this is the most correct answer, which helps us understand all difficult questions precisely in this light.

It is written that the soul is mortal and that the soul that sins will die. It is very important to understand this question correctly at the very beginning. If I make a mistake in this understanding, all my subsequent theology will be wrong.

We read in Genesis 2:17: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Ezekiel 18:4 states: “Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” And verse 20 says: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son...”

But Satan says in Genesis 3:4: “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.”

Whom will you believe—God or Satan?

Your answer lays the foundation for all your subsequent theology. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the soul is immortal. The book of Revelation says that the souls of those who were slain cry out from under the altar. We read God’s answer in Genesis 4:10: “And He said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto Me from the ground.”

The life of a person is in the blood, and this shed blood has a special voice that only God hears; He remembers all the righteous and their premature death for the faith.

The soul is mortal—this is a biblical foundation, and it is logical, humane, just, understandable, and a manifestation of love toward a sinful being.

A sinner will not be able to inherit Eternity, but neither will he be tormented forever. There is simply no purpose in that. Nothing distorts the character of God as much as the teaching of eternal torment. And if eternal torment exists, then God is not Love; He is then more like a merciless sadist. And it deeply grieves Him when people portray Him this way and teach others to do the same.

If I believe in the immortality of the soul, then I must put these sinful souls somewhere. And the more realistically I try to describe hell, the more unreal God's love appears in this realm of evil, violence, and eternal life in eternal torment.

Today there are many testimonies from people who claim to have seen hell and heard these groans. One cannot argue with their experience. But visions can be tested by the Word of God. Isaiah 8:20 states: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Satan performs many miracles. But if I have witnessed a false miracle, it does not become truth in the light of the Bible, even if my eyes saw something.

God is Love, and this Love does not torment souls forever.

Once I met a man who was striking a mouse against the pavement while holding it by the tail. I asked him why he was doing this. He said that a bicycle had injured it and it was lying on the road in painful agony, so out of love for it he hastened its death so that it would no longer suffer. I immediately imagined how our Lord will deal justly with all sinners. Each one will be resurrected, receive punishment according to his deeds, and then die the second death. Forever. No trace or memory of them will remain. And Eternity will not be torn apart by the cries of miserable souls who, for ten to seventy years of sin, would otherwise have to pay forever through cruel torment.

God is Love. In His just treatment of those who rejected the gift of life, Love will perform His unusual work and destroy sin, sinners, and every memory of it. Everything throughout the Universe will be clean, and God will be eternal Love through all the endless ages of Eternity.

In the light of the Bible and God's love, the truth about the death of the soul reveals God's most just and humane treatment of those whom He created for His glory, while giving people freedom of choice and inviting them to choose Him.

Would you want to unite your life with a person who proposes marriage but threatens to subject you to eternal torture if you refuse? Does that sound foolish? We should not attribute to God

titles that are foreign to Him. We should not distort love to please Satan. Love casts out fear; there is no torment in love.

Homework 233

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:4, 20, 23, 32; Isaiah 53:11; Matthew 26:38; Ecclesiastes 9:4-6, 10; Revelation 6:9-10; Leviticus 17:11, 14; Genesis 4:10; and Revelation 20:4-5, 12-15.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Who benefits from the teaching of the immortality of the soul?
4. Do you believe that God created an immortal soul? Do you have proof for this claim?
5. What happens to the soul after a person dies?
6. Why did Satan begin his first sermon with the words, "Ye shall not surely die"?
7. Why did Adam not die immediately after breaking God's law? Who took Adam's sins upon Himself?
8. What do people do after they die?
9. Can belief in the immortality of the soul lead me to believe in spiritualism?
10. If, for example, a soul were to live in hell forever, who would have to give and sustain that life?
11. What is "hell" in the light of the Bible?

Lesson 234 . Why I Write

We read in Romans 10:17: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

In another translation, it reads as follows:

"So then faith comes from the message that is heard, and the message is heard where the word of Christ is proclaimed."

God is continually doing good deeds for our world and for me personally. My heart beats according to His will, and He sustains the lives of even the most evil people and beings who have rebelled against Him. And if anyone does good deeds, it is our Creator. And He shows no partiality.

Does God's creation believe in its Creator as One Who loves and saves? Does this world believe that God is Love? Do God's people believe that this unconditional love is available to everyone? Do I believe that I will be able to love as Jesus loves?

If we answer honestly, it would sound like this: not everyone and not always.

We very quickly grow accustomed to the goodness of God's deeds toward us and cease to notice it; later, we may even think that God owes us something. Does this increase our faith in God and our knowledge of the beauty of His character?

Now imagine that God the Father began every morning by speaking from Heaven about His love in a loud voice so that everyone could hear it. And He has much to tell us. Then He would explain the principles of His law and afterward point to Jesus. I think everyone would become a believer. After all, faith comes by hearing. The world would then change greatly. It would be easier for everyone to serve and worship such a God together. No one would perish, and almost everyone would be saved.

But God chose another way. He decided to give His word to His people and to work through people, while remaining the invisible and mysterious Ruler of the Universe.

He chooses the weak in order to reveal His power through them and put to shame those who are esteemed. He reveals His will to those who seek Him, while leaving the ignorant with nothing.

In the last days, God deemed it necessary to give His personal presence in the human heart in order to show the world the perfection of God's character in His children and, through them, to bring the history of this world to an end. Yet despite all His authority, He stands at the door of my heart and knocks, desiring to enter, but He does not enter until I give Him the right to do so. I open my door, and the Lord enters and occupies the place that I offer Him. Even if I give Him full authority in my life, He still makes it clear to me that I am the master of my own house and can change my views and the state of things at any time. What freedom! What respect!

But Jesus not only reigns within me; He also wants me to be His witness. He desires that I tell others not only through my deeds but also through my words about His love, about what He has done for me, and about what He has given me. After all, faith comes by hearing.

I would like to share an observation.

There are those who, upon hearing me speak—either personally or in writing—about how we can love one another and even love our enemies, begin to believe that this is also possible in their lives, since it has become possible in mine. And God moves me to speak and write to these people about His love, about how it works in my life, and about how I understand it. I think this will be very useful to those who decide to take this path and will help them avoid many of the mistakes that I made. And it brings me great joy that my personal experience also helps other people.

There are also those who do not know me personally, yet accept my words about love by faith, try to begin living this way themselves, receive power from above to love, and see their lives become different. It is such a joy that many turn to the truth, begin independently to seek the depth of a relationship with Jesus, and find it in love.

And there are those who are initially interested in what I write and say, but later dismiss it as something of little importance and go their own way. It brings me joy that the Lord may show and teach them the same thing through their personal experience. Having walked this path with God, they will come to know His love through personal trials, and somewhere in the distant future we will meet again to share experiences of God's love, which works abundantly within us and brings us to unity in faith and love.

There are also those who know me personally but have no interest at all in what I do. They do not even try to understand what spirit is speaking through me or why they need this work. I am glad for them as well, because they have their own relationship with God, and He will open other channels to reveal His will and the knowledge of God's love to them. They will have to go through all that I have experienced and overcome all the difficulties that God permits in the lives of His children.

And, of course, there are always those who oppose everything I say or write and who, depending on the situation, actively express this position. I am so grateful to God for these people as well, because through them I undergo the most interesting tests of love and see how genuine I am in what I continually profess. I choose to love these people and listen to their opinions too, because they often express their views frankly and can boldly rebuke and correct me concerning some of my mistakes. And I am learning.

And there will always be those who simply hate me, regardless of what I do or say. Unfortunately, such people exist in this world, but I cannot respond to them in the same way, and I choose to love them unilaterally. And God gives me the strength to love them too.

I often wonder why I write all of this to you, my friends. What drives me? I often write at night, when I receive another revelation and can calmly record it. I do not see you, and I do not know what influence my reflections have on those who read what I write. But I believe that God has a special plan for this

work as well and that He uses this modest ministry of mine for your good. After all, I write about love, happiness, and friendship, which became available to me under difficult circumstances, and I believe that everyone who begins to seek and thirst can attain this condition of the soul. And my experience will help many people take this path more quickly.

The Bible was written by ordinary people who were moved by the Spirit of God, and their revelations, once recorded, have reached us and helped many people enter quickly into what those writers had spent years comprehending. Very little time remains for us now, and the Lord desires to have a special people who possess unconditional love. God dreams that we will love one another, but without Christ this is impossible.

And I believe that I am moved by the same Spirit and the same Author Who prompted other people to write words of encouragement and support. I am not ashamed to say this, but you may judge for yourselves whether I am right.

Love is worth giving up everything for: all our sins, all our harmful habits, and all our sinful attachments. Eternity is worth fighting for. Living with God forever is wonderful, and many already live this way, but without love it is impossible.

Someday, everyone who has rejected God's love will understand that without love everything has become nothing, and they themselves have become nobody. This too will be a revelation for many of God's children. It is better to experience this crisis now, while something can still be changed and while the doors of grace remain open.

Dear friends, I wish for all of you to pass through this crisis of love as soon as possible, and I will be very glad to learn that my experience of emerging from this crisis has helped you as well. And it will give me great pleasure to know that the One from Whom all of this proceeds receives the gratitude for my work.

Homework 234

1. In the light of our lesson, please read 1 John 1:3; Acts 5:31-32; 1 Corinthians 1:27; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Revelation 1:3;

19:10; 10:10-11; James 1:22; Romans 10:10-11; Isaiah 60:1; 62:10; 43:10; 52:7; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; and 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

2. What does studying at this school give you?
3. Have any changes taken place in your life during your studies at the School of Agape Love?
4. Do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through our lessons?
5. What do you expect from your further studies?
6. Have you learned anything more about agape love?
7. Do you share the materials of our school with other people?
8. Do you have a desire to continue studying?
9. If you have never sent in answers to the homework, would you be able to answer at least this one?
10. Would you like us to consider any quality or characteristic of love that we have not yet studied here?
11. Have you drawn closer to Jesus during the time of our studies?
12. Do you love those who are near you or who are in close fellowship with you?
13. Has your love become more conscious and stronger during your studies?
14. Do you find the materials of our studies beneficial for your soul?
15. Do you thank God for bringing you into His school?
16. Do you have a desire to teach other people to love?
17. Do you face problems, obstacles, or attacks that seek to separate you from studying at this school?
18. Is God glorified in your life through the influence of studying at the School of Love?
19. Do you desire to meet the One Who is Love and Who shed His blood to save you from the power of sin?
20. What is Agape Love?

Lesson 235 . Respect for Freedom

Love respects every person's freedom of choice. Respect does not always mean agreeing that a person is right, but it does mean treating even those who deliberately persist in error with kindness.

The other side of respect is that I, too, am a free person, and I do not want anyone to manipulate me or impose the rules of their life on me, convincing me that I must act in one way or another.

Usually, violating these boundaries brings us to a crossroads of opinions, where a relationship may be destroyed or develop a crack. But knowing that this will happen, I can prepare for this trial in advance and calmly explain to the person that my love for him remains unchanged, even if he wants nothing more to do with me. The motto at any such crossroads sounds something like this: "I am right, and you are mistaken." With slogans like these, it is difficult to maintain friendship and mutual love.

But love is different in that it does not merely desire to love one's neighbor; it also wants to help that person become himself—to become an individual who will respect himself and understand his value in God's eyes and in his own as well.

When I give love to a friend, I do not try to bind him to myself or become his conscience. I am interested in his happiness, in his finding the Source of happiness and being able to live independently in that state.

A person who heeds the lessons of love and begins to live this way finds true freedom and begins to value it. He also develops his own circle of fellowship and sphere of influence. He does not have to live up to my expectations of him or become my shadow. Even if I taught him something or was his spiritual mentor, that does not give me the right to tell him how to live or instill in him the idea that without me and my instructions he will become spiritually disabled.

I have met people who said of themselves that they needed to be led and needed a leader. They truly become attached to their mentor very quickly, and this even flatters human vanity; but wisdom is needed here to teach these people to stand on their own and to attach them to Jesus.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:16: "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me." In the process of teaching, there is a time when it is worthwhile simply to teach a person to imitate you in order to help him discover and strengthen certain useful skills within himself. I often use this method when training those who are unfamiliar with German production and construction processes, so that after learning, these people can work independently and be self-reliant without making serious mistakes.

In the spiritual realm, it is also sometimes necessary to set a personal example and ask someone to repeat your actions so that he can feel how this works within him. But if by doing this I bind another person's will to myself, Heaven does not approve. It is written in Jeremiah 17:5: "Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." And verse 7 says: "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is."

Even the School of Love has a goal: to attach your hearts to the Source of love and teach you to find inspiration in personal fellowship with Jesus, although in this process it is very often necessary to give personal examples and ask you to try doing what worked for me.

And yet, no matter how one teaches, there will always be those who understand love as a loving friend's service to them. At times they even issue an ultimatum: "If you love me, then..." What will a loving heart answer? "I love you not because you expect it, but because I choose to."

Love will certainly reveal itself in deeds. But those deeds may not agree with my expectations. For example, I ask God to teach me love and expect that beautiful feelings will now

overflow within me, that I will suddenly experience a poignant love for my neighbor and be unable to contain this fire in my heart, and that I will let him know about it and he will be astonished. But what do I actually receive? I simply hate the one who is ruining my life, and the only thing I want is for him to disappear from my sight. Yet the Lord asks me whether I am willing to love my enemy exactly as he is, and I will be given power from above if I decide to take the path of love. I ask for love. And love begins to work within me; I allow God to teach me and endow me with this feeling and attitude. Meanwhile, my enemy mocks me, but I can no longer respond in kind and simply love him.

Manipulating another person's will may occur not only in a bad and repulsive spirit but also through a kind attitude. I can bind a person to myself by making it clear that I cannot live without him, that I feel sad and lonely, that I am losing my mind, and that when he is near, I can rest and relax. I am not speaking about the family—do not misunderstand me—but even there, another person's freedom of will is very often abused. And what should I do if I have fallen into such a trap? How can I break free? If I was striving for this and achieved it, I am unlikely to want to change anything. This is not an accident; it has already become a feature of my thinking, and I need to understand this, recognize it, and come to my senses. Without instruction from above and influence from outside, I will not be able to break free from these bonds on my own. But love teaches the laws of freedom and reveals them to the mind.

Nor should one disguise selfishness under the mask of freedom. We should not avoid those who truly need us. Love is also sacrifice. I sacrifice my time, strength, resources, and attachments in order to help, bring relief, strengthen, support, and comfort those who now need it. But I want to do this not under compulsion or out of obligation, but from personal desire, deciding for myself without outside pressure. Of course, there are exceptions. A mother's calling does not take into account her desire to sleep or rest when something simply must be done; the mother gets up and does it—whether with grumbling or with tenderness, she does it. Love sometimes acts this way

as well. My flesh grumbles and groans, but my hands and lips rise and act, and afterward joy and satisfaction may come.

I will never fulfill all your expectations of me. Sooner or later, I will certainly disappoint you. And this disappointment will not be because I am a hypocrite or a deceiver, but because I am free to choose for myself what to do, how to live, how to worship God, how and whom to love, and with whom and how to be friends and communicate. And I do not expect anything more from you or an exception to this rule. I respect your choice, even if you choose what is bad. And I learned this from Jesus. He did many things as He Himself desired, as His heart directed Him, while remaining faithful to the Father's will. He did not want to go to the cross, but love told Him that this was the only way for me to be saved, and He chose the cross, went to a terrible death, and died with love for me, without depriving me of my right to choose. And I stand and think, "What am I to do with this Jesus?" I make some decision, and the Lord respects my choice. This is how love acts. It gives itself, demonstrates itself, and waits—sometimes waiting without hope, knowing that no one will ever respond. It weeps quietly and forces no one. But it humbly stands at the door of the heart and gently knocks: perhaps someone will hear its voice and open the door, and it will enter, and...

Homework 235

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Exodus 20:1-3; Psalm 119:45; Isaiah 58:6; Luke 4:18; John 8:32-36; 1 Corinthians 8:9; 10:29; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 5:1, 6; and 2 Peter 2:19.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Do you like being free?
4. From what does Christ set us free?
5. How do you understand your own freedom and the freedom of the person you love?
6. Is it possible to be a slave to something or someone and still have freedom?
7. Does my love for my neighbor oblige that person to respond with the same love?

8. When can freedom become a curse for a person?
9. Does freedom imply absolute independence from everyone?
10. Are you free? If so, from what? Are you sure that this is so?

Lesson 236 . The Fire of Love

Let us look at the heavenly luminary and pay close attention to it. You see a miracle of God's creative thought. Have you ever wondered what the Sun consists of, why it shines, and why it does not go out? Thousands of questions arise for which there are no answers. If I, for example, as an inventor of spacecraft, were to invite you to take a trip to the Sun, how would you receive this idea? "And no one will ever know where your grave is." Although we are far from the Sun, we understand that it is deadly dangerous to those who approach it, and the closer I get to it, the more difficult it is for me to escape its gravitational field. The Sun is an unquenchable fire that has a certain mass and an inexhaustible internal source of energy. What keeps it burning? According to my understanding, it should have burned out long ago, because its fuel should have run out, yet it continues to shine. This means that there is something I do not fully understand. But I accept without any proof that it is not going anywhere, because that is how it must be.

There is a teaching that somewhere there is a place called "hell," where the souls of sinners are tormented. But where did this interpretation come from? The word translated into Russian as "hell" means a grave or tomb where the dead are laid.

And yet there is a teaching about the lake of fire, into which sinners, death, and hell will be cast. We read in Revelation 20:14-15: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

And the prophet Malachi writes in 4:1: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." This tells us that everything that enters the lake of fire will be burned up by unquenchable fire.

Unquenchable means that no one will be able to put it out, nor will anyone try to do so.

But Satan went further. He instilled in people the idea that they would burn eternally in this lake. For himself and his subjects, he invented the position of overseer, and there would also be some devils serving there who look very strange, though the Bible does not say a single word about them, even though Google can show you this creature in various interpretations. Where did all this come from? Back in Eden, a doctrine arose called “Ye shall not surely die,” and over the millennia its foundations were refined until an entire teaching about life in hell after death reached us. It holds people’s minds so firmly that nothing can persuade them otherwise. I myself believed it and was dying of fear and horror because I knew that I would end up there and burn. But my mind rebelled against such injustice: why should I burn and suffer forever? And to my shame, I will say that I hated such a cruel god, not knowing that all this was Satan’s invention. Through this belief, he kept me terrified of punishment for the very sins to which he inspired me.

But God poured light into my life. And when I learned that there is no eternal fiery hell, I immediately accepted it and believed it, and later became convinced that this is true. There is logic and justice in this for deceived people.

But the Bible writes about fire, torment, and punishment, and sometimes these verses are frightening in their directness. Yet if we consider them in the light of “God is Love,” then they are not so difficult to understand and explain. And if we are to believe the Bible, it is not sinners but the righteous who will dwell in the unquenchable fire and walk in everlasting burnings.

We read in Isaiah 33:14-15: “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his

ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil.”

Does that sound strange? We read in Deuteronomy 4:24: “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.”

Hebrews 12:29: “For our God is a consuming fire.”

Someone once gave me this definition: sin is combustible material that will be destroyed by God’s fire, together with those in whom this sin remains.

A righteous person will live eternally in the presence of the Fiery God.

Just as the Sun consists of fire and yet gives us warmth and light, so God’s fire will be for us the eternal warmth and light of God’s love.

And very often, when one wants to describe the condition of a soul abiding in love, the lips say that it is like a fire within the heart—it truly burns.

Love has the power of fire. It is able to burn away everything unclean in a person’s heart and, with its extraordinary warmth, cleanse the most secret corners of my soul. It refines my soul.

When King Nebuchadnezzar commanded that the three young men who were faithful to God be thrown into the fiery furnace, the fire could not harm them, for they had entered God’s usual dwelling place after choosing death rather than sin. And the Son of God Himself honored their faithfulness with His presence.

A righteous person should not fear everlasting fire. This fire will be dreadful to those who reject their salvation and cling to evil.

But when the fire of God’s love is kindled in my heart, it warms not only me but also begins to shine around me. Its light becomes evident, and it cannot be concealed or hidden in one’s bosom; it will burn through everything in order to shine for all. And this lamp should not be placed under a bed or under a vessel. My lamp will not be able to melt or warm the icy wilderness of Babylon, but for this purpose God has a lake

burning with fire. Yet the lake does not cleanse; it destroys what refused to be cleansed in the fire of human love, which drew wandering souls with tender bonds toward God's fire.

The power of God's Spirit can be compared to wind, water, and fire. In themselves, these manifestations—even in nature—are good when restrained by God, but they are independent of human beings, and very often they become natural disasters when they turn into God's judgments and bring hurricanes, floods, and fires. God's instruments of wrath are beyond human control, yet people sometimes fail to value them when they come as blessings, such as the words of truth, the righteousness of Christ, and the love of God the Father.

By accepting God's love, I give God permission to accustom my soul to the presence of the eternal flame in my life. It does not allow my heart to grow cold under the burden of lawlessness, and it refines within my soul everything that can withstand such a trial.

Lawlessness is love's fiercest enemy and can cause love to grow cold. Therefore, the first thing love produces within me is a struggle against the lawlessness of my heart until this enemy is completely destroyed. And the cleansed heart begins to hear the voice of the Spirit, see God's hand in my daily life, distinguish the clean from the unclean, and love those who have a different spirit. And I grow in this fire.

The Sun of righteousness rises in my life. And I have very many questions about it that I cannot answer on my own. It is God's miracle within me, an unquenchable fire, and I have no desire to put it out. It burns especially brightly when there are people nearby whom I can warm—those who sit in the prison of their fears and delusions, or who are simply disappointed. What a miracle!

Homework 236

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Luke 24:32; Psalms 39:3; 50:3; 97:2-5; Hebrews 12:29; Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3; Isaiah 33:14-15; Exodus 3:2-4, 6; 40:38; Daniel 3:25-28;

Acts 2:3-4; Luke 3:16-17; Malachi 4:1-2; Hosea 6:3;
Revelation 20:14; 1 Peter 4:12-13; and Matthew 5:14-16.

2. Did you learn anything new and useful in this lesson?
3. Does the prospect of living in the unquenchable fire for all eternity in the presence of God bring you joy?
4. Which Bible verses came to your mind?
5. Are you frightened by such a formidable attribute of God as fire?
6. Would you like to visit the Sun with Jesus and see the local sights?
7. Why do many Christians believe that it is not the righteous but sinners who will live in the fire, and that they will do so forever?
8. Is the word “eternal” always used in the Bible to mean something endless, or are there figurative uses that are limited by a particular action?

For example, Jude 1:7 says: “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

Does this mean that the eternal fire went out after completing its work, or is Sodom still burning?

Lesson 237 . Can the Blind Help the Blind?

To do good, one must be good; to set someone free, one must be free; to love someone, one must be loving; to show someone something, one must be able to see; to act wisely, one must be wise. These may seem like commonplace statements, for everyone understands them. Yet true depth is hidden precisely in this simplicity. I do not become such a person by myself. It comes with the years; life experience helps me understand who I am and where I am. And only a believer can attain all this. There are many good people in the world who are wise enough to do good deeds and who do them from a pure heart. But the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Proverbs 9:10). Without God, all wisdom and goodness lose their meaning, although by their very nature they are better than evil and foolishness.

How far can one blind person lead another? If the road is familiar, the journey may proceed confidently, and they may even achieve great things, but any unforeseen trial or obstacle, such as a pit, may have tragic consequences for them both.

Today there are many talented people who have achieved something, learned how to earn a great deal of money, make inventions beyond imagination, master the sciences, and make discoveries. They openly offer all this to the world, desiring to make it better or to build capital for themselves through it. I find it very interesting to observe what is happening and to delve into these sciences and inventions. At times, I come to understand that one can live quite well in this world by plunging headlong into these endeavors. But I always look farther ahead and try to understand: where will I arrive? What comes next? Is it to make a name for myself or accumulate great wealth, only to leave all of it behind as a memorial to those who follow me? Is that all? Suppose I live “like a human being”—what then? The older I become, the more clearly I understand that my earthly lifetime is very short. Truly, if all my deeds are viewed in the light of Eternity, one can confidently say that everything is vanity. Yet there is one

undertaking with an excellent future, both in this world and in Eternity: my life with God, my relationship with the Eternal One, and my faith in the Invisible One.

What can I say about love within the framework of Eternity? If I ask, "What comes next?" I can answer it myself: "An even greater knowledge and deeper discoveries in this science."

What we are studying here has very deep roots and very serious consequences—in a good sense. As I comprehend the science of love, I become a loving person, and my knowledge in this field has the highest value in the eyes of Heaven. I not only receive the right to heavenly citizenship through faith in Jesus Christ, but I become a full citizen of Heaven by actually receiving God into my life in the form of agape love. I also receive the right to possess an even greater, infinite, eternal love throughout all the endless ages of Eternity.

But one must begin learning this sometime. We have taken this small step and are now timidly moving forward, coming to know this amazing love by faith. Yet we are still like blind kittens: we recognize one another by scent and look for our mother so that we may feel safe beside her. But our growth continues. The knowledge and skills provided by the science of love undergo severe trials, adding to our experience and confidence.

At the very beginning of this training, we all greatly need spiritual mentors, and blessed are we when they are present and can guide our steps in the right direction. But we grow and reach the level of those who taught us, and then the Lord Himself begins to lead us further and reveal even greater depths of His love. This path of learning is very important for every son and daughter of God. For love shapes our character in the image and likeness of God. It makes us wise, kind, able to see, loving, rich, and happy; it clothes us in the imperishable garments of Christ's righteousness and leads us onward.

In essence, the entire meaning of earthly life can be reduced to the phrase, "We were born to die." But what comes afterward? All worldly philosophy reaches a dead end, because in death there is neither wisdom nor knowledge—there is nothing there. But if only this short, perishable life has been given to us, then

we who believe in God and deny ourselves empty pleasures are of all people most miserable. Death, however, is not the end, but a short sleep—an immersion into the darkness of nonexistence in order to awaken and receive the eternal reward. And what value will our love have in Eternity? Like the Sun of righteousness, it will shine upon our faces, and like a magnet, it will draw all the inhabitants of Heaven toward us. That is where there will truly be much work to do.

Can I help a fearful person if I myself live in fear? Perhaps together we will not be as frightened as we would be alone, but a loving heart has greater confidence and knows the right way out of this condition. When I have received freedom from the power of sin and fear and live in that freedom, I understand the process of deliverance from within and can help others obtain this freedom through faith in Jesus.

A loving heart does not worry whether it will have enough love to meet every need and bring its enemies under love's power. It simply joins the boundless ocean of God's Agape and draws from it as many treasures as are needed, without worrying that there will be a shortage.

Love boldly looks death in the eye, because death is not the end of life but a short pause before continuing to do what the love of Christ has taught us.

And why did Jesus come and stand at the door? So that I would open the door to Him and ask Him to teach me how to use what He sold me a little earlier. In Christ, I have the wisest Mentor Himself, Who knows what He is teaching me and what to do with me when something does not work out.

Without love, all my inventions, discoveries, wealth, achievements, names, and titles will become nothing on the day of my death. But I do not fear this loss, because I have a firm Foundation beneath my feet and a true Treasure in my heart, and His name is God, Who is Love within me.

How beautiful this sounds in this lesson, and how inconspicuous it is in my life. God Himself, the Creator of the Universe, sits upon the throne of my heart, while in this world I look like an

ordinary person. As long as I remain silent and take no action, I am no different from others. But I am not like the others: I belong to God. He knows me by name, carries me in His arms, and loves me with an everlasting love. I believe this, although I do not always feel it.

And the most amazing thing is that all this infinite power of God remains unclaimed by anyone, and I must make an effort to find at least one person whom I can convince that God exists, that He is alive and will come soon, and that even now He desires to give us what is best. This life is not everything; it is only preparation for a better life. At present, I am the one doing the searching, but how I wish that those who are lost forever and live without hope would search and thirst. We have something to give them, and we have the One Who gives to us so that we can share it.

Love loves to give—not only what it has, but its whole self. Where are you who thirst? Come and take; drink freely and buy without silver!

Homework 237

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Jeremiah 13:23; 29:11–13; Isaiah 61:1–3; Proverbs 9:10; 24:14; Psalm 37:37; Romans 2:17–20; 2 Peter 1:3–9; Luke 12:15–21, 34; Ephesians 2:6; 1 Corinthians 13:12–13; John 14:26; Jeremiah 31:34; Revelation 21:6; John 7:37–38; and Philippians 4:19.
2. Did you find anything useful for yourself in this lesson?
3. Can evil people do good deeds?
4. Why is it so important to have a close personal relationship with Jesus while learning to love?
5. When planning my path through life, is it worthwhile to think about the future and where I will arrive?
6. Who can give me a future and hope?
7. Does the path I choose now affect my future? After all, can I not correct everything and change my plans at any time?
8. What can those who have no personal relationship with Jesus teach me?

9. Is it important to possess love in the last days? After all, is not the main thing to believe, since faith is counted for righteousness?

Lesson 238 . The Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Reading Luke 16:19–31, we find an interesting account of certain events. When studying this story, we should understand one very important thing that changes the meaning and our understanding of what is written in this passage. Did Jesus tell a parable, or did He reveal the mystery of life after death and give His followers a new teaching? I can understand it one way or the other, but then the conclusions will be completely different.

Yet we should make it a rule that our conclusions must correspond to the general direction of the Bible and not contradict the truth.

For example, let us consider this story as a teaching. And since it is a doctrine about life after death, everything should be understood literally, with attention given to every detail.

Then many questions arise that reveal contradictions with Scripture.

Is it evil to be rich and dress decently—an evil for which there will be severe retribution? Is it wrong to receive good things during one's lifetime and joyfully enjoy one's food, so that one must suffer for it? Jesus does not give the rich man a name, thereby generalizing this category of people.

Is it a great blessing and a sure path to bliss to be poor and neglect personal hygiene?

Judging by the story, Lazarus did not work and desired to eat the crumbs from the rich man's table. Is idleness good?

Scripture teaches that wealth is a blessing, while poverty is a curse. Labor is a blessing, while sickness is a punishment for departing from the truth.

Luke 16:22: "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried."

Strange things happen in this verse. Lazarus's corpse was not committed to the earth; it was carried away and placed upon Abraham's knees, while the rich man was given a proper burial.

It is worth noting that there is not a single word about the soul in this story, so we should not speculate or add what is not there.

Nor is any reason given for why these deceased men ended up in different places. We can only guess.

Then, in some astonishing way, the two corpses come to life and begin a conversation.

We read that the rich man was in hell, in torments, in this flame. Nothing is said here about eternal torment, anyone being there beside him, or the dreadful judgment. The man simply died and found himself in hell. At the very least, justice requires that a judicial verdict be rendered and the measure of punishment declared. But this is absent. Is this some kind of arbitrary action without trial or investigation?

And so the two corpses begin a conversation. It is strange that God is absent from this entire story. The rich man addresses Abraham with a small request: to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue. It is a strange request. I think anyone who found himself in flames would want to escape as quickly as possible. Abraham's persistent hardheartedness is also surprising. He responds rather indifferently to the rich man's request, although he is within reach and could have fulfilled the request himself out of love.

For some reason, however, love is absent from these relationships. The very proximity of the place of torment to the place of bliss is also astonishing. Does this mean that everything will be visible? Will we communicate with those who are burning in hell and, at the same time, receive comfort?

The conversation then turns to the idea that the dead Lazarus could come back to life, appear to the rich man's brothers, and tell them about their brother's torments in order to warn them as well. After all, apparently Abraham could raise the dead and

release them back into the world. Once again, Abraham's answer is strange. He refuses the rich man, explaining his refusal by the brothers' unbelief, without even trying to do it. Predestination to destruction?

I will say honestly that such a prospect of life after death is distressing to me. It completely contradicts the teaching of the Bible. There are so many questions for God. Why does this teaching, when understood literally, so strongly contradict the spirit of the Bible and distort the truth? Where are love and truth? Where are compassion for humanity, sympathy, and mercy?

Now let us consider the same story as a parable.

To whom did Jesus tell it? We read in Luke 15:1-3: "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And He spake this parable unto them, saying." The Lord decided to speak to these people in language they understood, using illustrations from their worldview and speaking in parables. None of us perceives these parables as doctrine, for that would raise many questions and contradictions. The purpose of every parable, however, is for a person to remember the meaning of its central thought, which is clothed in easily remembered images.

If I quote verses from Scripture to you or tell you an example from my life, then a year later you will not remember a single verse I read, but you will repeat my entire life story word for word. Our minds quickly remember vivid moments and do not forget them.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus ridicules the superstitions of the Pharisees and demonstrates the absurdity of their faith in Abraham, whom they had begun to deify and worship. It also speaks of the depth of their unbelief—that no miracle would convince them. In the events that followed, we see that the resurrection of the real Lazarus hardened the hearts of the Pharisees even more, and they did not repent. We read in John 12:10: "But the chief priests consulted that they

might put Lazarus also to death.” Christ’s parable described the spiritual condition of His listeners with great precision.

Why are we examining this parable? A literal interpretation of this story distorts God’s love, His mercy, and His justice taken together. They are simply absent. Yet many Christians have seized upon this parable and made it a dogma of their errors, justifying this by saying that it is Christ’s teaching. Yes, Jesus said it, but it is not a teaching. It is an illustration of an error that dominated society at that time and a rebuke of the evil spirit that burdened the hearts of His listeners.

Christ’s love and compassion for humanity do not contradict God’s character or run counter to the truth. I do not think that those who interpret the story of the rich man and Lazarus interpret the preceding parable of the unjust steward literally; otherwise, they would have many problems with the authorities and with honest people.

And if one is going to be honest and interpret the parable of the rich man and Lazarus literally, one should not introduce into it what is not there and then use those speculations to convince people of something that is written nowhere.

Who will be tormented forever? The one who is still alive and conscious. These torments of the soul are called eternal as long as the soul is alive and a person is unable to renounce them if he has no connection with God. If a sinful person lived forever, then these torments of conscience would also be eternal. But when the soul dies, the torments also cease. In this, too, there is the justice of love toward unfortunate sinners. Proverbs 5:22: “His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.”

There is torment in fear and sin—an unending torment of conscience. It is a very heavy burden that a person is unable to bear. Godforsakenness is what broke Christ’s heart when He drank the bitter cup of our sins. Christ’s soul could not endure such a condition, and He died in the torments of the second death in our place so that we would never experience this horror.

Some teach that the souls of sinners will remain forever in the torments of Godforsakenness. But love will not permit such cruel punishment throughout all Eternity. In justice and mercy, Love will punish everyone according to their deeds and completely destroy them. This is what Love counsels everyone to avoid, offering Herself in exchange.

Homework 238

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Luke 16:19-31; 1 Kings 3:13; Proverbs 14:24; Ecclesiastes 5:18; Proverbs 15:15; Song of Solomon 2:4; Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 88:10; Ecclesiastes 9:5; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 52; Isaiah 26:19; 1 John 4:16; Revelation 14:11; Jude 1:7; Genesis 19:28; Isaiah 34:8-10; Revelation 19:3; 20:10; Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 50:40; and Matthew 10:28.
2. Did you learn anything useful in this lesson?
3. How do you understand this parable?
4. What meaning, in your opinion, was embedded in this story?
5. What was the rich man's name? Genesis 32:27.
6. Can a biblical doctrine be built upon the fifth question and its answer?
7. Why have many movements taken the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as the foundation of their belief in life after death?
8. Do you believe in an afterlife?
9. Can dead people speak?
10. Who was actually speaking with King Saul in 1 Samuel 28:8-20? Would God use the services of a witch to reveal His will?

Lesson 239 . Who Is in Me?

There are two powers that offer their helping hands to the human soul and wait to see which one it will choose.

It was originally intended that, by virtue of birth, all souls belong to God by right of creation, but every person has free will and has the right to decide for himself to whom he will submit it. Until a certain age, children are placed under the authority of parents and educators, who teach them their own understanding of life and the worldview accepted in their society.

Let me give an allegory.

The human soul is like a glove that languishes as it waits for a hand so that it can do something. The soul seeks an occupation for the soul. The soul searches for the meaning of life and tries to understand how it can best realize its abilities.

In essence, a glove without a hand is a piece of material that can do nothing by itself, nor will it. But then a hand takes this glove into its hands and puts it on. And then everything is transformed. The world becomes more beautiful. The glove begins to see many things from different perspectives and to penetrate into the essence of things.

Over time, the glove sees that there are two hands fighting each other for the right to possess it and its will, continually sending it various thoughts so that it will choose which hand will put it on.

There is a dark hand that often assumes the appearance of light in order to lead into darkness. And there is a hand of light that seeks every opportunity to make the glove's life better and fill it with happiness. A choice must be made. Two hands will not fit into one glove, nor will they try to do so together. But each hand offers itself, trying to present as attractively as possible the benefit of being filled by it.

The distinctive feature of the glove's choice, however, is that if it does not choose the hand of light, the dark hand will possess

it. The hand of light cannot impose itself, but it actively tries to convince the glove of the special benefit and advantage of its presence within. But if a vessel is full, it is difficult to pour anything more into it. And the hand must wait.

And so the glove made its choice and chose the light. It entered into a covenant with the hand of light and received the right to the hand's continual presence within itself. The hand did not keep it waiting but began to perform deeds that were pleasing to the glove and brought joy and meaning.

The glove began to notice that this world hated the hand and sought in every way to wound and destroy it. But every action directed against the hand first fell upon the glove, causing it pain and suffering. Trying to protect the hand from trouble, cold, and violence, the glove strained all its strength and applied all its knowledge and experience so that the hand would be well. The hand, in turn, cared for the glove, periodically removing it to mend its wounds and repair the damage, and periodically dipping the glove into a solution of the spirit to give it flexibility and firmness, making it resistant to various trials.

At times, the glove became so thoroughly saturated with the solution of the spirit that it became completely transparent and unnoticeable, so that everyone around saw only the shining hand, did not notice the glove, and went toward the light.

Sometimes the glove decided that it was so important and great that it could do something good on its own, and it often credited itself with the hand's deeds and victories, holding its nose high. But the hand would remove the glove and lay it nearby. Then, realizing its weakness and helplessness without the hand inside it, the glove began to cry out for forgiveness, search for the hand, and ask it to fill it once again. The hand did not keep it waiting.

The time came when the glove realized that it was no longer merely a glove but part of the hand, for such a profound union of these two souls had taken place that they had filled one another. You are in me, and I am in you. Neither of them

wanted to part any longer; they desired to continue their harmonious fellowship and perform deeds.

Then a moment came when the hand told the glove that it was already time for it to rest from all its labors. The hand gently removed it and laid it down to rest, so that on an appointed day it could awaken the glove, put it on, and never part with it again.

The hand of light does not change its gloves “like gloves.” It knows each one by name and tenderly cares for them, improving them and preparing them for a better, eternal purpose.

What does the dark hand do with those gloves that have chosen it of their own will or through ignorance? It does not spare them or care for them. It soils them in the dirt, uses them for its own interests, and then removes them and throws them onto the rubbish heap of history, without caring in the least about their suffering. And who needs these unfortunate gloves in such a condition—in dirt, covered with wounds and mold? They suffer and pass into oblivion because they once made the choice to surrender themselves to the power of dark hands, which enticed them so alluringly in order to give them sinful pleasure, base gratification, and the right to die.

Yet even in such a pitiful condition, these dirty gloves are needed by the hand of light. They are called to change, to true light and happiness, to love and joy. They are given hope. Will any of them believe? Will they accept this light? Will they rise out of the dirt and ask the hand of light to fill them? While there is breath, there is hope, but is there hope in the deceived soul?

And God says through the prophet in Jeremiah 29:11-13: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.”

The Lord stands at the door of my heart and desires to enter. And I invite Him in. But what is the purpose of God’s visit to my

life? Does He really want to enter only to have supper with me? And what happens afterward? Could there be something more important?

Knowing God, I understand that if He enters somewhere, His plan is to remain forever. Although He conducts Himself very graciously and treats me very tenderly, His embrace is very strong, and no one can pluck me out of His hand. The purpose of His visit is to establish His Kingdom, His laws, and His order in my life. He does not merely eat supper in my house; He makes it His dwelling place, replacing my “closets full of skeletons” with His own furniture. He removes all the rubbish from His apartment, which used to be mine, yet He allows me to regard this house as my own and listens to my requests.

I marvel at the changes taking place in my life. Jesus in me is so extraordinary, and I in Him is so wonderful. His love, like a banner, waves over my house and draws guests to it from all over the world. I rejoice in new light and new revelations about love, considering them very good and thinking that someday they will be useful to me. As a result, however, I see that under the influence of this knowledge I have become different. Of my old self, only my name and the appearance of my face remain so that my friends can recognize me—although even my face has begun to shine with joy and peace. Everything else has gone somewhere and become different. How painful it was to learn this science of love in practice, but how sweet its fruits are and how abundant the harvest my sowing brings! How much happiness and joy there is in my life and in the lives of those with whom I share and into whom I sow!

I have become different, truly different. Although to someone else I may still be the same, I know that this is not so. I am God's, and God is mine.

Homework 239

1. In the light of our lesson, please read John 10:27; 14:23; 15:4, 8-9; Psalm 91:14-16; Matthew 6:24; Jeremiah 24:7; John 14:17; 17:23; 16:24; Luke 17:21; 1 Peter 2:5; Joshua 24:15; and Deuteronomy 28:1-2.

2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. How can I determine whose hand is in me and to whom I belong?
4. Can I decide for myself who will live in me, or does God decide this?
5. What should I do if I see that dark powers are controlling me and I do not want this?
6. Why, when God makes His dwelling place in me, does He immediately cleanse my heart of rubbish and establish His order within it?
7. What awaits me if I decide to become completely united with the One Who is Love?
8. What do friendship with God and continual abiding in His love give me?
9. Are you familiar with and do you understand the state of abiding in God while He abides in me?
10. How can I determine whether I love?

Lesson 240 . A Spiritual Beggar

The Lord's Prayer contains the idea of asking God daily for heavenly blessings to meet our needs. In the original, it is expressed as a communal prayer, in the plural, for all of us. And this is the model the Lord set forth for what every person needs each day.

One might ask, "Why is there no request for agape love in it?" After all, if without it I am nothing and everything else profits me nothing, then perhaps it should also be included in the list of requests.

I think that perhaps only in our school is there such a persistent assertion that love must be asked for and pleaded for, and that this is vitally important for each of us. As we have examined Holy Scripture in this light, we have become convinced that it confirms this idea. Yet this truth does not lie on the surface and is not visible to those who study the Bible superficially or pay no attention to the importance of love in their lives.

The Lord knows that many hearts will not respond to this call, will let this message pass by unheeded, and will build their faith solely on belief in Jesus and obedience to His commandments. But Jesus desires a relationship.

It is not for us to decide the eternal destiny of these people. God also has a plan for the salvation of these souls who are dear to Him but simply did not see what has been revealed to us.

If possessing agape love in all its fullness were the sole condition of salvation, the Lord would have made this known more specifically and would not have hidden its meaning in symbols. Perhaps He would have placed love on the first or second step of development and spiritual growth instead of assigning it a place at the very highest stage of faith, which not everyone reaches even during an entire lifetime with God.

But God does not think as I do, and His plans are higher than mine. As I observe what is taking place among God's people—

the variety of growth and spiritual ministry carried out by the church—I can only say, “Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty!” How good it is that I am not the one saving people, but the One Who never makes a mistake.

There is, however, this principle: the Lord holds a person accountable according to how much light he was given and what opportunities were provided to him. When I understand what God is offering me and how He reveals Himself through this gift, yet pretend that I do not understand and choose something else, there is a strong possibility that I will lose something very important and precious that I will never again be able to obtain. There are many examples in the Bible of people who were offered great privileges by God but chose something else: the rich young ruler, Judas Iscariot, Pontius Pilate, King Herod, and others. For some reason, the Lord did not plead with them to accept special blessings; He silently watched their choice and never offered them anything again.

When I understand that there is a special kind of love and that there are people who study it, ask for it, and receive it, God begins to open these doors for me as well and clearly show me all the possibilities and prospects of this supernatural gift. Then I am faced with a conscious choice. When I understand what love is, how near it is, and how accessible it is, I am expected to express my decision about what I want to do with it: yes or no.

The advantage of possessing love in these last days will play a key role in many matters connected with the closing events of world history, the sealing of God’s people, and the proclamation of the warning message. If the importance of possessing this power of love is indicated in prophecy, then it is worth devoting time and special attention to it so that we do not miss something very, very important.

I choose love. I ask God for this power and pray for this gift from Heaven. And the Lord begins to act. I grow and see how God’s grace changes my thoughts and feelings. I confidently begin to plan my life in love and dream about how I will love everyone and how wonderful it will be. Considering myself a victor now, I boldly go into battle, even forgetting to pray for

God's help, because there is a whole ocean within me. I rush into battle and receive serious wounds, or I simply cannot withstand the onslaught and behave according to my old habits.

During trials, however, I see the opposite picture: not everything is as simple as I thought, and I am somehow empty.

The fact that I received the gift of love and accepted it into my heart does not mean that it is now mine for life and that I will never lose it, so that at any moment I can take it down from the shelf and use it as needed. In some respects, this is how things work: if I have learned to drive a car, I will not forget how. But I will not be entrusted with the steering wheel if I break the rules, run people over, or drive while intoxicated.

God desires to give me everything, with Himself in addition, but He values Himself very highly and cannot place this Treasure into the hands of someone who does not understand with Whom he is dealing. Love is not a car, a toy, or even some kind of weapon. It is the Lord Himself within me, changing my way of thinking and directing my feelings. He desires to bring all of this into complete harmony with His plans and waits for my interest and thirst.

Thirst is expressed in my prayers. It cannot remain silent, for it will die if it does not plead and receive. God desires to see me as a spiritual beggar—not only for the needs of the community, but also for me personally. He does not endow a group of people with one identical gift of love. Instead, He works with each of His children individually and uses a special approach with each one.

A request for love is always appropriate, but without an inner thirst, I will not receive that special power which knows no defeat. It is possible to ask for love as an addition to other gifts and talents, but that will be very different from the extraordinary love obtained through earnest pleading—if you will pardon the expression. You yourselves will see the difference when you begin to receive it.

There is a concern that in favorable times, a person does not feel any particular need to plead earnestly for something. But I

am writing so that this knowledge may help us look within ourselves and allow God to bring about this change.

Thirst for love is also God's gift, and it is worth praying for this as well.

As I observe people and their response to the subject of God's agape love, I notice frightening things: indifference, busyness, lack of time, failure to understand what is being discussed, smirks, anger, insults, excuses, and self-justification. And these are not inhuman people from the world, but those whom the Lord has prepared to receive even more.

God will not give His love as though He were doing us a favor—as if to say, “At last you have asked.” This is not a commodity He scatters about at bargain prices. It carries a very high price, and the requirements for the buyer are very high. Sometimes prayer alone is not enough; sincere tears or my entire broken heart may be needed—a heart that knows no other way out and can no longer live without love. I cannot produce this within myself. The fullness of the power of the Holy Spirit is needed so that, together with Him, I may plead for and receive that great and inaccessible thing which I do not yet know.

Yet, for all the seriousness of this lesson, I want to add that not everything is as difficult as I describe it. Even if this is not yet within me, I should not give up and go away empty-handed. Love will gently fill every heart that wants to possess it but does not yet thirst for it. Thirst comes from God, and the time will come when everyone will have it—but then it will be too late.

Homework 240

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Hebrews 3:7-8; Revelation 3:22; Ephesians 3:16-21; Luke 11:13; Hosea 6:1-3; Jeremiah 33:3, 6; 32:40-42; 29:11-13; Hebrews 4:16; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 5:3; Isaiah 55:1, 6-11; Psalm 42:1-2; Hosea 11:2-4; and Amos 8:11-12.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Have you heard God's call to enter the path of love? If so, what have you decided?

4. What do you expect from God when you ask Him for special love?
5. How do you envision God's love?
6. Why should we not neglect God's grace when He calls us to certain actions and decisions?
7. Do you believe that through persistence you can receive from God everything He has promised and desires to give?
8. What should I do if I do not see thirst in my prayers, yet understand intellectually that I should ask for love?
9. Will God entrust Himself and His power into the hands of frivolous people?
10. Why is it so important to possess agape love in the last days?

Lesson 241 . The Gift of Prophecy

All spiritual matters should be passed through the filter of God's Word. It is written in Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Such a test helps us very quickly recognize who speaks the truth, who is deceived, who is mistaken, and who is lying. Every public publication or speech influences those who read or hear it. If these words are spoken according to God's will and in harmony with the truth, they may be strengthened by the Holy Spirit and presented to the human mind in all their depth. But the understanding of truth also depends on my spiritual perception and my faith.

I believe that God gives His church and His people the gift of prophecy. The Bible contains many books written by precisely such people, and all their prophecies were tested by earlier revelations and also extend into the future in which we now live.

By sharing my experiences and reflections on biblical truths, I can become an instrument in God's hands through whom He will draw people to Himself and give them salvation. But I am not a prophet; I am an ordinary person who desires to do something for the glory of God.

A prophet is a person to whom God speaks with a special message, calling him to deliver it exactly to those for whom this message was given. The presence of prophets in the last days also implies the simultaneous presence of false prophets. Otherwise, Jesus would have told us not to listen to anyone because there would be no true prophets. But the Lord teaches us in His Word to test every person who speaks in God's name or delivers a message from God.

I think that everything we study in our school undergoes careful examination, as each of you desires to understand whether this teaching about love is from God. I am open to such examination and welcome those who undertake it. The last thing I would want is to become an instrument of satan and lead you astray.

Truth will not cease to be truth even if it is carefully examined and tested.

In His love for His children, at a definite time foretold by Him, God gave the world His prophet, who delivered His messages for seventy-one years and recorded them as instruction for us who live in the last days. The name of this prophet of God is Ellen White.

I know that many who hear this name immediately react by rejecting everything that comes from her, without even trying to examine what in her writings might not accord with the truth.

Her writings possess prophetic authority and serve the Church as comfort, guidance, instruction, and reproof. These writings also clearly establish that the Bible is the standard for every teaching and experience.

My Christian life was born in my heart through this author's book *The Great Controversy*. Before that, I had read the Bible many times, but I did not understand its meaning and did not think about my salvation. But through the writings of God's messenger, my mind was illuminated by a wonderful light, and the Bible appeared in all its beauty as a living book. I found Jesus, entered into a covenant with God, and began to live a new life. I sought God's people who live according to biblical principles, and I found them.

It so happened that my life is very closely intertwined with the writings of Ellen White. Throughout all the time I have studied her books, I have found no errors or contradictions with the Bible. On the contrary, in her writings this author constantly refers to the Bible as the firm foundation of all her prophecies. I do not understand the position of White's opponents, who sometimes have not even read her writings or studied her prophecies, yet vigorously fight against her as a false prophet. I do not consider this a very wise approach. Truth and falsehood can be determined very easily by comparing them with the Bible. If a prophecy about events in the present was given but did not come to pass, then that prophet can confidently be

considered false. But all of Ellen White's predictions have been accurate, and some of them are being fulfilled before our eyes exactly as they were predicted.

In my studies and sermons, I always refer to the Bible, although I know many passages from the books of God's messenger that explain particular truths more precisely. I do not quote her writings, but I can recommend them for personal study.

The prophecies about the last days described in the Bible are quite general and are being fulfilled before our eyes. But God made provision to explain in greater detail in our time everything that would happen in our days and how it would happen. He conveyed these details through Sister White, who recorded everything in her writings. Now, in our time, when strange things are happening around us, many people want authoritative answers to the questions: What is happening? What will happen next? What should I do? Mistakes in answering these questions can be fatal. Presenting one's own conjectures as truth is very dangerous both for one's own soul and for the lives of others. But the writings of Ellen White point very precisely to what is happening, who is behind it, and what awaits us in the near future. I think it is worth heeding these messages so that we may await Christ upon the right foundation of faith and board the right ark, whose doors will close very soon.

God is not opposed to our testing His prophets, but this should be done not on the basis of other people's opinions, but on the basis of His Word set forth in the Bible and the accuracy with which these prophecies are fulfilled. If this examination is successful and reveals no contradictions, then we should heed the instruction of God's messenger. To heed it, we must sit down and study what God is saying and what message He desires to convey to us.

It is written in 2 Chronicles 20:20: "... Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." These words have power in the lives of those who heed the counsel of God's messengers.

Some people are troubled that God chose a woman for this role. But the Bible tells us that God also endowed women with the prophetic gift. If He decided to do so, He has the right.

Belief in the gift of prophecy and in the fact that God chooses special people through whom to deliver special messages is foundational to my faith in God. We are promised that at the end of time He will give prophetic dreams and visions through sons and daughters in order to instruct us. Joel 2:28.

God's love draws me to know the truth about the last days. God desires me to understand what is happening and what to expect, while also preparing my character for heavenly life. It is written in 1 Corinthians 13:2: "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." When studying prophetic writings or possessing the gift of prophecy, we should still remember that without agape love we can be lost.

Love recognizes God's voice in God's prophecies and obeys it in everything. It loves obedience to God's will and joyfully heeds God's warnings and counsels.

When I want to build a complex structure but have only a picture showing the outward appearance of the completed building, it is very difficult to understand how it is held together and what supports it. But if I have a detailed plan, then I can build.

Homework 241

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Numbers 12:6; 2 Chronicles 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28-31; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelation 12:17; 19:10; 22:9; 2 Peter 1:21; Exodus 7:1-2; Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 14:1, 3-4, 39; and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20.
2. Did you learn anything new in this lesson?
3. Why does God choose prophets?
4. How can a true prophet be distinguished from a false one?
5. Can I become a prophet myself if I desire it very much?
6. Do all people believe God's prophets?

7. Do prophets tell us only good and pleasant prophecies?
8. Which biblical prophets do you know who left us no writings?
9. Does Jesus possess the prophetic gift?
10. What should I do if I do not believe any prophets except the biblical prophets? Will I really perish?
11. What happens to a person when he rejects God's messengers?
12. What criteria must a prophet of God meet?
13. Should we study the writings of God's messengers, or can we limit ourselves to the Bible alone?

Lesson 242 . May I Give You the Sun?

The sun is one of the most unique sources of energy, light, and heat. It hangs upon nothing, yet it is the center of our system and thus the firm foundation to which our planet is bound by invisible chains of gravity. Because of the action of centrifugal force, calculated to the millimeter, we neither approach the sun nor move away from it. The earth's rotation on its axis is designed so that its surface neither overheats nor becomes too cold. And what is most interesting is that the gravity of the earth and the other planets also affects the sun, attracting it and altering the path of its movement. And all together we fly at tremendous speed into the infinite universe.

The sun is also unique in that it is compared with the beauty and constancy of God's character, although the Bible forbids worshipping this heavenly body. Yet its qualities are very similar to Divine love, and this comparison communicates revelations about eternal love to us very clearly.

The sun always shines, regardless of anything. God Himself is the Source of this light. He gave this heavenly body its law and sustains that law by His power. According to our laws of physics and logic, the sun should have burned out and gone dark long ago, yet it shines without burning out. It seems to have combustible material within itself. Only God can do such things.

The sun is the source of life for the entire plant and animal world, sustaining it with its warmth, energy, and light. In its light, every object acquires its visible form and color in its true beauty.

The sun warms our world enough for that heat to last through the dark hours and sustain life on earth.

And we know from the Bible that the sun will shine throughout eternity, but at a time appointed by God, it will become much brighter.

Agape love, like the sun, possesses qualities of special power and constancy. It holds its souls very securely around itself, not allowing them to leave their orbits, yet not drawing them so near that they would perish from God's glory and majesty. Love always exists; it does not end or pass away, and nothing can diminish its influence or its qualities.

It is the source and meaning of life for every living thing. In its light, everything begins to look right, beautiful, and wonderful—except sin. It is embedded in all the laws of nature and in the structure of the earthly microcosm. Every molecule is permeated with its laws of existence, and every atom bears the imprint of God's love.

It warms the soul and melts the icy mountains in human hearts. We were originally created for love and for life in the light. The sun was created for man in order to give him everything necessary for life. Love, however, created man in its own image, after the likeness of God.

The most eternal law of the universe—to love and to give—was placed within man. And in all this, man had freedom of choice. He could live in harmony with the Creator, or he could choose another way, which, unfortunately, is what happened.

But the law of love remained just as eternal and did not change. God sustains all His laws of existence and watches over their constancy and harmony, for without them there would be chaos and catastrophe. If the sun were switched off, what would happen? We would fly away into darkness and die very quickly.

If love were removed, we would scatter into tiny atoms and simply cease to exist anywhere. And in spite of all this, we manage to rebel against God, take offense at Him, and shake our little fists at Heaven. Yet His love for us remains constant, deep, and unchanging. He cannot relate to us in any other way. We are His creation; we are the living embodiment of His creative thought. And He is only waiting for us to notice Him, turn to Him, and come into harmony with Him.

May I give you the sun? Perhaps this phrase sounds absurd coming from my lips, but this is exactly what the Lord says to

us when He offers us Himself—Himself, the Great, Eternal, Boundless, Loving One; the Sun of Righteousness, the Radiant Light, the Morning Star, the Source of Light. I cannot contain the sun within myself; it would destroy me. But God is greater than the sun, and He wants to live within me, and this will not kill me but revive me. The Lord longs for this and teaches me how it can be. And He has already come and stands waiting—not in silence, not in inactivity. He is waiting for my decision. What amazing love! What patience and respect for my choice!

Why is it this way? Why did He promise to come in other ages, but has come and now stands precisely before us in our time?

Our time differs from the past in that God has allowed all temptations to break loose and attack us. In this battle, it is possible to stand only by having love within and close personal fellowship with Christ. It is He within me Who works both to will and to do of His good pleasure, resists evil, and teaches me to love. Without Him I will not stand, no matter how highly I may think of myself. God Himself foresaw this battle, and He Himself gives victory to everyone who opens his heart to Him.

Satan serves those who accept him and turn to him for help and advice. He has a great army of demons, and they gladly help all who are foolish and desire to live according to the flesh. They provide every kind of service and steadfastly defend their territories, offering all their resources and strength in support. They love their subjects so strongly that they are ready to kill anyone who betrays them, and the demons serve those who are like them in spirit with all their soul. They have power to bewitch those who do not walk with God. They take the appearance of angels of light, but in spirit they are fallen in their nature.

These are the last days of our earthly history, and very soon everything will reach its climax, unfold rapidly, and end with the final victory of God's love.

God knows how to conduct this war, and by His own blood He has already defeated the enemy of all righteousness. All that

remains for me is to enter into this victory, put on the whole armor of God, and act through love.

Love is the brightest and most beautiful means of attaining victory. It is impossible to withstand it, just as it is impossible to withstand the sun, but one can run away and hide in the darkness.

Have you ever fought against the sun? Did you manage to defeat it? A funny question. It is just as funny when asked about love.

Love does not lose. It is the spirit of a victor. It attacks and conquers; it does not surrender and knows no defeat, and it accomplishes everything it purposes.

Then perhaps it is worth choosing love and giving it authority in my life—going through the process of learning and purification and joining the ranks of God’s victorious army?

And now God asks me, “May I give you the sun?”

And from His lips, these words sound very powerful. How will I answer? “Yes, Lord! Give it to me! I accept it! Thank You!!!”

And what should I do with it now? Please teach me. How simple and interesting everything is!

And silently, in my thoughts, the Lord invites me to visit this heavenly body. At first I am afraid, for I will burn up, but then I think: if Jesus is beside me, what have I to fear? He takes me by the hand, and we fly. How beautiful it is—what a boundless ocean of fire and light! We plunge into its very depths, and a new world that I had never imagined opens before me.

How many wonderful discoveries love has prepared for us! It is so frightening to approach it, and there is such a desire to run away from it; but as I plunge into this ocean of fire, I discover something great and inaccessible that I did not know before.

I release my grip on fear and fly forward to meet it.

Homework 242

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Ecclesiastes 11:7; Psalm 19:4-6; Genesis 1:14-18, 27; Revelation 1:16; 22:16; Hosea 6:3; Psalm 46:10; 1 Corinthians 15:40-44; 3:16-17; Deuteronomy 4:19; 1 Chronicles 16:11, 22; Genesis 32:24-28; Luke 18:7-8; Hebrews 12:28-29; John 17:22-23; and 15:4.
2. What thoughts came to your mind as you read this lesson?
3. Which thought from this lesson did you like?
4. Why is it so important in our time to know Jesus personally and have a close relationship with Him?
5. What role does the Holy Spirit play in my friendship with Jesus?
6. Do you think it is actually possible to travel to the sun with Jesus? If so, share how you imagine it.
7. How do you understand the expression "Sun of righteousness" in Malachi 4:2?
8. Can a person command the sun? Joshua 10:12-13.
9. How do you understand the expression "works that are done under the sun"? Ecclesiastes 1:14.
10. Do you believe in the literal fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 30:26?

Lesson 243 . Open It or Leave It Closed?

We are all awaiting a glorious event to which we attach many of our hopes and expectations—an event that will change everything in our lives and give us far more than we can imagine. This is the Second Coming of Christ. Whether I believe in it or not, whether I await this event or not, whether I make plans for that time or live for myself, it will take place regardless of how I regard it or prepare for it. Christ will come in the clouds of heaven with all His angels, and it will truly be an impressive sight. His Coming does not depend on my faith or my expectations. It is certain, and it will take place on the day that He determines, according to the authority He has reserved for Himself.

But what is interesting is that He promised long ago to come. In every generation He addressed people with the words, “Behold, I come quickly,” but now, in our time, He says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.” What does this mean? It can mean only one thing—that He has already come.

Please do not confuse these two events. Christ has now come to the chosen ones in order to do and give them something special—to help them change something in their lives and prepare them for something. At the Second Coming, however, He will come for everyone in order to put an end to everything sinful on earth and give both those who await Him and those who continue in sin what they deserve: to some, the right to life; to others, the right to death.

There will be a glorious resurrection from the dead; human nature will be transformed into immortality; all the righteous will be taken up to Heaven, into God’s presence; and those who receive the right to death will be completely destroyed. At last, the earth will have rest from man and will remain at rest in this condition for a thousand years.

But the message for our time is that Christ has already come. Whether I believe it or not, He is here at the door. He is knocking, asking me to open it, and waiting for me to respond

to this appeal. His voice can be heard. Yet in this appeal He also makes it clear that there will be those who hear but do not open the door and let Him in, or who let Him in once and then ask Him to leave. The word “if” makes it clear that someone will leave Christ standing outside the door of his heart forever and will pay no attention to the appeal to open the door and let Him in.

Has a friend ever come to visit you, and you did not open the door even though you knew it was him? Those are not very pleasant memories. Perhaps he was being intrusive, perhaps I was not ready for his visit, or perhaps the family situation did not allow me to let him in. The friend did not remain there until I let him in, nor did he try to force his way through my door; he quietly went away. Perhaps that friend visited another time and I welcomed him. Earthly friends come and then leave, but Jesus wants to come in order to stay. This is an enormous difference. I understand what He wants. Sometimes I even ask Him to come in, but then there are times when I ask Him to leave my house so that I can be alone. And, just to be safe, I close the door behind Jesus—a door closed to Jesus, but not to temptations.

The enemy of souls does not ask my permission before visiting. He forces his way through the doors and windows of the soul, bursts into my life without asking, occupies the available living space, plants his banner there, and offers me his friendship. He is not interested in my wishes, yet he still takes my choice into account. Satan tries to convince me that the voice outside the door is not so important, that I can wait a little longer, and that I am not yet ready for such a Guest. The only thing that can drive the prince of darkness out of my life is the presence of Christ. The enemy of souls knows this and is afraid. Yet I am not afraid to live with such a dangerous guest, who teaches me to sin. He is my relative according to the flesh, while Christ offers only spiritual values, and my flesh resists them.

But somewhere deep in my soul, I dream that something in me must change. I even read about it in the Bible. I have already accepted and believed many things. I open the window, lean

outside, and ask Jesus to help me solve my problems, and He gladly helps me. Then He waits for me to open the door. But I go back into the room and begin to sing hymns to the glory of God. And my demon friends sing along with me. Sometimes they do not like my singing and begin to tremble, fearing that under the influence of those words I might open the door to Christ. But I calm them by expressing my desire to think it over and make a decision while postponing everything until tomorrow. Meanwhile, Jesus stands and knocks. He sends me His friends so that they may tell me about their experiences of life with Him and how good it will be for me if Christ makes His home with me. But I have so many important things to do, so many missionary projects, and so much that must be accomplished before I die. I listen to them and rejoice that someday, in my old age, I will finally take this step, let the Lord in, and sup with Him. He will bless me and pour out His Spirit upon me. I will guide young people onto the true path, and everyone will listen to me and be deeply moved. I will point them to Jesus and teach them obedience. How interesting all this is!

The parable of the ten virgins tells us that five of them were foolish. I never counted myself among that group, and I always felt sorry for them. I always thought they were heathen who had no interest in the marriage feast. Now I understand that this parable is about me and that my vessel must be filled with oil. But I do not understand what this is. I know the answer, but what should it look like in my life? Where is the heavenly standard by which I will be weighed? Will I be found wanting? What determines my weight?

In a museum in Switzerland, there is a precise balance that the staff enjoy demonstrating to tourists. They place identical pieces of paper on both pans, and the balance shows that they have equal weight. Then they take one piece of paper, put a signature on it, and place it back on the pan. The pan holding the signed paper confidently descends, showing that it is heavier than the blank one.

Will there be a signature upon my character that gives weight and significance to all my deeds?

I had never before considered why Jesus has come precisely in our time and stands at the door. Why did He not come earlier? But this was His plan, not mine.

Precisely in our time, He decided to give me something special that had not been given to those who lived before me. And now He Himself has come and stands at the door. He offers Himself for a special relationship with Him. He teaches me as He has never taught anyone before. Why now, all of a sudden? Simply because there is no time left. The door of grace is about to close. Then it will be far too late to learn anything. There are now so many temptations, and they have taken such deep root in the church that they have become the normal way of life among God's people. But it must not be this way. God will not share His throne with sinners. For this reason, Christ Himself decided to take the battle of the last days into His own hands, for He understands that without His presence I will not stand. He never loses; therefore, it is not I, but He within me and through me, Who fights and gains the victory. This is His plan for the last days. He stands at the door, not so that I may decide whether I need this or not, but so that He may enter and teach me to fight and overcome. He gave me freedom of choice, but not so that I would perish. He suffers when He sees me dying spiritually, and He takes no pleasure in such an attitude toward Himself. He does not go away offended if I delay my decision, but continues to stand and knock—to knock loudly and call out. He leaves only those who have decided once and for all not to open the door to Him and have become firmly established in that decision.

Homework 243

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Revelation 3:20-21; 3:8, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; 3:3; Revelation 17:14; 13:13-17; Matthew 24:21-25; Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 5:27; 12:1; Revelation 15:8; and Isaiah 60:1-2.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?

3. What caused God to decide to send Christ into the world in precisely this way before the close of earth's history?
4. What advantage does the personal presence of Christ in my home give me?
5. Where exactly does Jesus desire to enter?
6. Why, in the message to Laodicea, did the Lord limit His actions according to my choice?
7. If Jesus has entered my home, does this mean that He will now live there forever, or is His remaining there subject to certain conditions?
8. Do you think your door is open to Christ?
9. What will happen to those who do not hear the Guest's voice or do not open the door to Him?
10. Why did the Lord choose precisely this plan?

Lesson 244 . Why Do I Need a Crisis?

A crisis is a situation that knocks me out of the familiar course of my affairs, does not fit within the bounds of my perception, becomes a turning point in my life, shatters my customary worldview, and compels me to seek new ways of solving problems. The consequences of a crisis can be unpredictable.

All of us have gone through such times at some point and have learned lessons from them. A crisis itself is neutral, but my perception of it and my reaction to it may differ from yours.

It is also very important what store of knowledge, experience, and preparedness I have when I encounter something I have never experienced before, and who I am. A crisis reveals all these aspects of my life, but I myself decide how I will move forward and live.

For example, the police unexpectedly come to you with a warrant for your arrest, and you are taken into custody until the circumstances of your offense are clarified. Is that a crisis? Yes. What will happen next? It is difficult to predict. How are you to live? You have to adapt to new conditions.

A crisis is not always a catastrophe. From an optimistic perspective, it offers new opportunities for new discoveries and achievements. If my mind is enterprising, I begin to study the new situation and seek the best way out and the right solution, so that I may benefit from it or learn something, for life goes on.

But I can react differently to what is happening. I can fall into discouragement and apathy; I can become angry with everything and everyone and turn to accusations and criticism. Some people begin to seek an answer from God and find something better.

If I am a believer, I begin either to ask God for help and support or to blame Him for what is happening, and I reconsider my relationship with Him. As a result, I either become stronger and draw closer to God, or I become disappointed and leave Him.

Crises are different, and there is no universal rule for what the right course of action is or what will be best. There is general advice from those who have gone through such things, but even that advice does not always reach the mind and does not suit everyone.

What kinds of crises are there? Personal and societal, financial, family, political, economic, spiritual, psychological, natural, military, and others. And all of this opens new doors for me onto a new page of my life.

The Lord always uses every crisis for the good of those who have a personal relationship with Him. But He also has dark milestones in my life that He has planned for me, into which He deliberately leads me in order to help me move to a new level of development and relationship, reevaluate all my values, and rid myself of the unnecessary and dangerous burden of cares and problems. During this time of trial, it can be very dark and painful, but the Lord is always near to support and save.

In every crisis, the Lord controls the situation and, in a special way, preserves His faithful children, turning everything to good and helping them find their bearings in the new circumstances of life.

And although all the crises listed above can provide new opportunities for anyone, there is one crisis that will bring many to a dead end and destroy them morally and physically. This is the crisis of the last days—the closing of the door of grace. It will be a brief and rapidly unfolding event that will end with the Second Coming of Christ in the clouds of Heaven. This truly is the crisis of all crises. After it, everything will change, but not in the same way for everyone.

And in the light of all these events, all the crises I am experiencing now will seem like little crises compared with what awaits us.

But now—right now, and not later—is the time for me to prepare for all this, so that I may enter into it with a deep personal relationship with Christ, Who will lead me through this fire, and nothing will harm me.

There was a time in the history of God's people when the Lord decided to give them over to captivity for seventy years in order to cleanse His people from many vices and return them to their homeland with a different way of thinking. Not everyone endured this trial, but it was for the good of all. The Lord decided to act in this way, and nothing could change this decision; it was fulfilled exactly.

What is happening to God's people now? They are mingled with the tares, and attempts are being made to make them drunk with the wine of Babylon. How much longer will God look upon such an attitude toward precious Salvation? The Spirit of God will not be disregarded forever. And how God's heart languishes as He awaits this time. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." What a sad picture. A sleeping church does not bring joy to its Head, but although it slumbers, life reigns within it. Have you seen trees in winter? They are all bare, standing without leaves or fruit, as though dead, but life reigns in every branch. The crisis of cold has laid bare their essence, but it has not killed them. They await better times, and that time will come.

Christ teaches that there will be a time of trouble and that, in the last days, not many will stand, but the love of many will grow cold. Yet "many" does not mean everyone. I have hope that in many students of God's School of Agape Love, love will find a place in the heart, kindle into flame, and never grow cold, even when it is very dark, damp, and cold all around. This will not be a mere emotional experience, but a firm knowledge of the truth, steadfast faith in God, and unconditional love for our neighbors and for one another.

When my heart opens to God's love, this Eternal Love enters, brings me a new heart, and begins, by the hand of the Creator, to write God's laws within me—upon my new heart of flesh and in my mind. This was promised long ago as something distant and beautiful, and now it is being fulfilled in my life. I experience the fulfillment of this prophecy, understand what it is, and rejoice.

The coming crisis does not frighten me, although I tremble at the thought that some hidden sin might be found in me that could destroy me and kill my love. “Lord, reveal it to me now, while there is still time to correct something!”

Love truly casts out fear. You may want to be afraid, but you cannot. There is watchfulness, and attentiveness becomes sharper. There is also the danger of exalting oneself because of what is good and wise, but the Lord humbles me under His mighty hand and leads me onward, higher and deeper.

How I long for all of us, friends, to experience even now a crisis of love—a crisis of realizing that man does not possess the agape that God alone has and that He alone can fill my heart with it to overflowing through His personal presence and instruction. As a pledge of this event, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who makes His home in the thirsting heart, subdues my disposition, purifies my understanding, and brings forth the good fruit of love. And I learn from the most wonderful Teacher Himself, Who is Wisdom and Graciousness.

Love brings everything within me to perfection. It cleanses my thoughts and brings order to my feelings. It gives me strength to resist sin and gives me victory in trials and battles. It prepares me for the crisis of the last days.

When a crisis is an opportunity for a person, he seeks ways out. But when there is no way out and death—eternal death—lies ahead, then terror comes, true terror. All previous experiences and victories will help no one overcome it. But love boldly enters that time and holds firmly to Christ, comparing my every action with God’s law, which is in my heart.

Homework 244

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Psalm 118:24; Revelation 11:15–17; Matthew 24:32–34, 22, 12–14; Daniel 12:1; Romans 2:7–8; 5:2–5; 15:13; 2 Corinthians 4:17–18; Colossians 3:14; and 1 John 4:17–19.
2. What useful lessons did you take for yourself from this lesson?

3. Have you experienced personal crises in your life? If so, how did you come through them?
4. Why does the “narrow way” pass through all kinds of personal and societal crises?
5. How do you picture the global crisis, and how can you prepare for it?
6. What role will love play in the closing events of earth’s history?
7. When should we prepare for the time of trouble? How should we do this?
8. How can I determine what I have within me and whether I am ready for the final events? Or should I not engage in self-examination?
9. Do you have a fear of the coming trial that deprives you of peace and the joy of life with God?
10. What must I do to be saved during that time?

Lesson 245 . Resentment Toward God

Have you ever been resentful toward God? Unanswered prayers. Insurmountable trials. Unsolvable problems. Endless debts. Fears. Unreasonable brothers and sisters. Unforgiven sin in my life. Unbearable children or an angry life companion. Bitter resentment toward my neighbors. All this and much more separates me from God, Who is called Love. And resentment toward Him reigns in my heart because He has allowed so many difficult trials in my life and does not even try to resolve them. I do not want to go to church to worship Him; the desire to pray disappears, and life itself loses all meaning amid this nightmare. How am I to live? What am I to live for? What should I do? And no one in this world is able to help me. I want to distract myself, but the problems grow worse, and there is no comfort in anything.

Unfortunately, such disappointment is very common in this world and even among God's children, who suffer and do not know a way out. And the saddest thing in all this is that God becomes the guilty One because He is accused of indifference. The qualities of my own soul that oppress me are involuntarily attributed to God. And as for His love toward me, I cannot even imagine it.

Sometimes this whole situation reminds me of an aquarium. I love my fish, know the traits and character of each one, and think about their existence, health, cleanliness, nourishment, and many other things. But when I come very close or lower my finger into the water, they scatter from me in terror, wishing to hide, and wait fearfully for me to leave, swimming out only at feeding time. And their fear of me also affects their attitude toward one another. Yet I love them with all my heart and dream of how wonderful it would be if they came to know me, understood my love for them, and pressed themselves against my finger in the water, wishing to be held in my whole hand. It would be such a joy if they all swam together to the walls of the aquarium when I appeared, followed me wherever I went, and watched to see where I would be, wishing to be closer and

rejoicing in my presence. I can only dream of this. They have fry that are very curious at first, but over time they learn from their parents and fellow inhabitants of the aquarium to fear me. And some of these unfortunate creatures die without ever coming to know my love, and their bodies have to be removed from the aquarium to save the others from infection. The other fish watch this in fear, deciding that they will be next. How I wish that at least one fish would appear among them that could tell the others the whole truth about me and, by its own personal example, reveal to them the beauty of my love and character. And if I myself became a fish like them, then I would probably be able to convey even better to these fearful creatures who I truly am and how much I love them all. And I would move all who believed in me into my pool, where I myself would swim with them and gladden them with my personal presence, rejoicing in their faithfulness and love for me.

God's greatest desire is to reveal to humanity His true character, His love, and His plan for my personal Salvation.

How He longs for every person to see His true love for them, to discover in God the very best and most faithful Friend, and to believe in Jesus as his personal Savior.

He is the One Who has cared for me from my birth and carries me in His arms even to old age, watching over me and loving me at all times. Isaiah 46:3-4.

How many assurances of His love God has spoken from the pages of the Bible! How He cries out to this world that He loves man, desires to save him from the power of sin, and will free him from every care that destroys happiness.

How ashamed I sometimes feel before God for my former vain life, for my rebellion against Him, and for my fear.

In essence, all my disappointments in life, all my fears, and my aversion to my Creator come from the enemy of the human soul, who is occupied from morning to evening with separating me from God, discouraging me, worsening my problems, and ultimately destroying me in my miserable condition. And the enemy of my soul has this task: to impose upon me a false

conception of God and distort His true character by attributing to the Creator the qualities that belong to Satan and the fallen demons. And woe to me if I believe these whisperings.

God is great, and He is awe-inspiring in His majesty. The whole universe trembles before the Creator—some out of love and deep reverence, and others out of fear and ignorance in their knowledge of Him.

But the most interesting thing is that my sin separates me from God, creates a false image of Him in my mind, and brings me into fear of the Creator, while God desires to save me from this very miserable condition of my soul: to forgive me, cleanse me, remove from me the heavy burden of cares, debts, resentments, and disappointments, and teach me to believe in Him, cast all my cares upon Him, receive strength from Him, and find in Him the Source of joy, love, and inspiration. And many succeed in this. But I run away from Him into myself and into my problems, and I perish in this condition of soul.

If I see or feel that something in my life is wrong, or that someone close to me is not entirely kind toward me, then I can bring this to my Heavenly Friend—Jesus—and receive forgiveness, comfort, and deliverance. Happiness is the fruit of my right relationship with God.

In essence, every problem and situation in my life is neutral in itself, but my reaction or attitude toward it creates either an unsolvable problem or another task that I will solve with God's help. Life is very short and passes very quickly, and I need to learn the most important things that will make it beautiful during this brief period and prepare me to enter Eternity: love, friendship, happiness, joy, kindness, contentment with much or little, and a right relationship with my dear Savior Jesus. In this lies my reward in this world. This is the true wealth of my soul, carefully preserved in my heart, with an inexhaustible reserve in the heavenly treasures.

I have decided for myself that it would be very wrong and foolish to be resentful toward God because of some temporary earthly difficulties of mine and to accuse Him of indifference

when He has done and continues to do so much for me and for my Salvation in the past, present, and future. He gives assurance of Salvation and fills the heart with the anticipation of the delight of Eternal Life—not only here and now, but in Eternity itself, when the history of sin will be ended, everyone will receive what he has chosen, and everyone will meet the One in Whom he believed and Whom he loved, never to be separated again. I await this meeting. And I wait not in disappointment because someone treats me wrongly or because something is amiss in my life, but in the assurance that my life is hid with Christ and that with Him I will overcome everything and resolve everything in the best way.

And even if the car in my garage is gone and my business brings me no income, this will not be a reason to be resentful toward God. It is foolish to be resentful toward the One Who cares for me so tenderly and gives so much love and revelation. Resentment is the spirit of pride, and love does not vaunt itself. Considering myself better than God by being resentful toward Him is not a very promising pursuit.

Homework 245

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Luke 11:45; Psalms 103:1-6; 146:5-9; Matthew 20:12-16; Romans 8:3-4; Philippians 2:6-8; 1 Timothy 3:16; John 1:18; 17:3; 1 John 5:20; Isaiah 46:3-4; Revelation 12:12; Jeremiah 33:6-9; Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 12:14; and Revelation 22:17, 20.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Do you harbor resentment or discontent toward God?
4. Have you ever experienced God not answering your prayers in the way you asked? What feelings did such treatment from God awaken in you?
5. How does God relate to those who are resentful toward Him or blame Him for all their troubles?
6. What should I do if nothing happens in answer to my prayers?

7. May I express my complaints and displeasure with God aloud, shaking my fists toward Heaven while speaking with Him in personal prayer? Have you ever done this?
8. Is God ever guilty before people?
9. How many times did Jesus apologize for His mistakes or impolite expressions?
10. Does God love those who sulk at Him?

Lesson 246 . Where Does Your Strength Come From?

Have you ever wondered why schools, gyms, educational institutions, training programs, courses, and other educational activities and enterprises are needed? It seems as though the entire civilized world does nothing but study. But why is this necessary? Who will work? Strange questions. A person who asks such questions resembles an ignorant man, because there is no way to manage without learning. It gives knowledge, teaches the particular features of what you are studying, and, when combined with practical exercises, adds life experience.

Education helps me see the rakes in my path and skillfully avoid them, although in the process of learning or living, I sometimes have to become acquainted with the force of these garden tools. Acquiring knowledge about life and a profession makes me a specialist in the field I am mastering, while the practical application of this knowledge makes me a professional.

Which army do you think will be stronger: one consisting of children and recruits, or one composed of specialists who have combat experience? The answer is obvious.

I can also say with confidence that those who study at the School of Agape Love are mastering a science that changes the mind, strengthens spiritual muscles, opens new prospects for growth, and fills life with meaning and happiness. I become different and gain a deeper knowledge of what I study. This is the law of beholding and transformation: I cannot remain the person I have always been if I begin to study something or to behold something.

There was a time when I distributed tracts containing God's message to mailboxes, and I rejoiced at the thought that perhaps one of the readers would become interested in the truth and order the literature offered at the end of the tract. The greatest joy came when a tract was placed directly into a reader's hands or when there was an opportunity to speak personally with someone about its contents. One day, I took my

ten-year-old daughter with me. The work went faster. She helped me in my ministry with great enthusiasm and always asked, "When will we go again?" I always praised her and called her a little missionary. Then one day, my daughter handed another tract to an elderly woman and received so much shouting and so many indignant words in response that she pressed herself against me in fright and wanted to do nothing more. I explained to my daughter that there are people like that and that she should not pay attention to them. But from that moment on, she stopped helping me and never went anywhere with me again.

There are circumstances or people whom we do not know, and we have no idea how they may affect us or what they may do to us or with us. But if we study the particular features of all this in advance, it prepares us for all kinds of surprises.

Knowledge is useful for general development and teaches a person to think about one subject or another. A thinking person has more prospects in life, which will help him find his way properly and earn a living.

But not every kind of knowledge or education is beneficial. There are fields of study that ruin lives and make their students spiritually disabled. Sin is also a school in which the soul masters the science of death and confidently obtains the right to be dead in trespasses. Satan has an extensive educational system of his own values and gladly admits all humanity into his schools. Everyone studies under him except those who choose the narrow way to Heaven. He has an entire staff of demon teachers who teach the art of lawlessness very professionally. To enter one of the evil one's schools, you may choose whatever appeals to you or simply do nothing, allowing the demons to teach you godlessness and depravity.

To drift with the current, it is enough to enter the water and lie upon it, and the powerful stream of sin will seize your soul, carry it toward the inevitable waterfall, and dash you against the rocks of spiritual death.

But there is another educational system that successfully withstands the temptations and teachings of this world and teaches us to resist evil. A living fish can be recognized by its ability always to swim against the current, and an airplane likewise always takes off against the wind.

Faith in God gives me strength capable of withstanding every wind and current, using their resistance to reach Heaven. I gain experience and knowledge, come to know God's power, and am able to resist every evil. But all this requires time and much effort. It will not entice a lazy person by itself. There is no automatic education in righteousness. And so I enroll in God's school and study. There are elementary grades there, and there are also those who have already advanced to a more difficult level.

Love is the highest school, with the highest knowledge, which unites the soul with the Heavenly Teacher and gives the soul unlimited strength to gain victories over the world and over itself. As I study in this school, I comprehend the character of God Himself, come to know Him from within, and allow Him to know me. My mind merges with God's mind, and He and I become one heart and one soul.

What will happen if, being an unathletic person, you make an agreement with an Olympic champion to prepare you to participate in the next games and place yourself entirely at his disposal? Will he train you according to your rules and wishes, or does he have his own training program? I think you will have to change a great many of your habits and give up a great many things. This is logical and right. Discipline and all kinds of restrictions take first place in this training; without them, you will not accomplish much.

But when I desire to become a spiritual champion and victor in love, for some reason I think that I am free to choose my own exercises and training time, or to do nothing at all and merely ask for a miracle of transformation, without making any effort or studying anything.

The Bible contains the concept of a “wicked and slothful servant.” This is also a child of God, but one with particular traits of character, possessing precisely those qualities that do not please God. I sometimes catch myself thinking that this describes me, and I begin to make efforts so that I will not fall into this condition. But by my own efforts I will accomplish nothing. Sin is stronger than I am, and satan is more agile and clever than all of us put together. But when Christ is my Trainer and Teacher, He does not merely teach me to be strong; He Himself becomes within me that Strength which respects my choice and will, while at the same time binding me in complete dependence upon God and teaching me to hold on to Him with all my might by faith and to follow wherever He leads.

Agape love does not merely give me knowledge; it also becomes my possession, a part of my heart, and is always within reach, ready to begin acting at the first call.

If I have built up my muscles by exercising in a gym and achieved certain results, then all my achievements belong to me and are always with me to help whenever necessary. I do not need this strength while reading books or watching the news; I do not need its special power while eating or taking a bath. But when a situation arises and there is a need to apply strength, it is always at hand, and I use it within the limits of my abilities.

And the love I have learned is always with me, ready to act whenever necessary.

Homework 246

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Ephesians 3:13-21; Proverbs 1:2-9; James 1:5-7, 16-17; Mark 1:22; John 8:2; Luke 6:40, 46-49; Matthew 23:8; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Isaiah 59:4; and 2 Timothy 3:10.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Does our school give you new knowledge?
4. What has changed in your life since you enrolled in the School of Agape Love?
5. Do you believe that God not only gives love but also teaches us to live in it and establishes us in it? Ephesians 3:18-19.

6. Do you enjoy loving those who do not deserve it?
7. Have you become a different person during the time you have been studying?
8. Are we moving too quickly?
9. Would you like to have this material in book form?
10. Do you think you will be able to retain love, or will you lose it, if the school's classes cease for some reason?
11. What suggestions do you have for the organizers of this school?
12. How often do you thank God for your education in love?
13. Is love a science?
14. What else would you like to learn?

Lesson 247 . I Cannot Come Down

Once, I encouraged a well-known person to set a life goal for himself called “agape” and to do everything necessary to reach that goal. In response, I heard indignation from him and was somewhat surprised. He had understood my wish in a way quite different from what I had meant.

In Nehemiah 6:3, there is this expression: “... I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” This was said to the enemies of God’s people, who were plotting evil against Nehemiah. And for many of us, this is a very good example of how we should answer sin and those who tempt us.

But when a similar statement is made to Christ or to His servants, whom He sends into this world as sheep among wolves, it sounds completely wrong.

Do I have oil for my lamp, and do I have agape? This is the most important question that I must answer honestly for myself.

I can load myself down with good works, missionary work, or administrative responsibilities and find such enjoyment and satisfaction in them that there is a danger that, amid all this, I will fail to hear the knock at my door and will ignore the voice of Christ, Who speaks to me very tenderly and offers me something very good and unusual for me. But for this, I must stop, come down to Christ, and sit at His feet. I must simply humble myself under the mighty Hand of God and receive what God desires to give and reveal.

But when I am engaged in important work and simply have no time for God because I am saving this world, what is left for God to do? Perhaps He will bless my work and grant it success. Perhaps He will lead me through the fire, and the flame will not scorch me. Perhaps through my labor many will learn about Christ. But will any of this benefit me if, at the end of the journey, I realize that there is no oil in my vessel with which to trim my lamp, while the Seller of this oil no longer offers me

anything and is no longer even standing at my door? I think it is impossible to imagine a more terrible condition.

And what will I teach those whom I am called to save if I do not have love? The law, an understanding of prophecy and biblical symbols, doctrines, church order, and faithfulness to reforms? People need this knowledge too. It helps them avoid falling into error and carries a blessing within itself. But no matter how much I may desire it, I cannot give them what I do not have.

A dilemma arises. Let us try to consider it from within, from the perspective of this busy person:

I labor for God, do God's work, and see God's blessing, yet I do not have this God within me. I simply have no time for Him, nor do I know how to receive Him, although I have been in the church for many years and believe in Jesus. And the constant workload and responsibility in God's work compel me to labor so that the work will not stop or fall into neglect. I simply cannot come down from the rails of my habitual cares.

And what makes you think that I do not have love? I can show it to you through my works. I can bring you living witnesses who will be living examples that I have oil within me. Do you really think I am moving all this forward in my own strength?

Although somewhere in my mind I understand what is being discussed. But if I acknowledge this truth about myself, what will happen to my students? How will they look at their teacher, who teaches them something that he himself does not possess? Yes, it is very difficult to realize, and even more difficult to admit. And what am I to do in that case? I cannot come down; there is simply no time to stop!

I only ask that the Lord of the harvest send laborers into my harvest. Sometimes it is so difficult to carry everything alone, and it weighs on me so heavily.

And to be completely honest, I can even admit the fact that I do not have love. I simply have no deep understanding of what it is or how to receive it. But I think it will come as an automatic addition from God, as a reward for my busyness in God's work.

I can only imagine how many treasures have accumulated in my Heavenly bank.

But life goes on, experience increases, and there is still no love. My students have already surpassed me and even try to teach me. They would do better to remember the filth from which I lifted them and where they would be if it were not for me. In any case, there is so much work ahead that I cannot come down; there is simply no physical time to stop. The work would cease!

But love waits for its time and gently offers itself, knowing only that wherever it takes up residence, there is much joy, peace, and friendship. It draws me to Jesus. It is not afraid of great works or responsibility, but places a special meaning and its whole self into everything I do. It is in no hurry, but goes wherever the Shepherd's voice is heard. It knows Him personally and greatly loves to pause in order to commune with Him. Will I hear this voice?

Love is ...

It is either what Christ offers me or what I imagine for myself based on my life experience.

Agape is precisely the goal that everyone must set and attain. It is the place where we all need to arrive. Failure to hit this goal is called sin.

When I have love, I know it. It is not something I must guess about or search for in the hidden corners of my soul. It is light within me; it is a city on the top of a hill; it is a fire hidden in my bosom that cannot be concealed. It is the Testimony of Jesus.

But if I do not have it, I will be able to find a great deal of evidence that you are mistaken in your assessment and show that this is not so. Or I can honestly admit the fact but quiet my soul with the thought that everyone is like this, so why should I be any different?

And what should I do? I know Christ's answer: "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, ... and come, follow Me."

But I have great possessions. Whether I answer this knock at the door, buy this Heavenly gold, or go away sorrowful is for me to decide.

But I have also noticed that all my students are steadily catching up with me in their development and knowledge of the truth. I have a certain authority among them. They closely resemble me in their zeal, and they are already winning new souls for the church themselves and helping me greatly. And when we gather together, it is such a joy to listen to experiences about who we once were and what the Lord has done with us. And those people who are constantly repeating something about some kind of love probably understand nothing about life with God. Show me works, not some kind of love. I can call anything love and say that it is love, and you will not be able to prove otherwise.

And many of our people are persecuted, humiliated, imprisoned, and killed, and you think that what they need now is love while they are suffering so much for the Name of Christ? Still, I remember the apostle Paul's warning about not having love, but that does not apply to us.

Love is when your works are visible to everyone and God is glorified by them. That is what I can say on the basis of my works.

What would you say, friends, about such a person? Or perhaps this is the person whom I meet in the mirror every morning?

I taught my daughter neatness, kindness, honesty, politeness, and diligence. She is a very decent wife and a dutiful young woman. But despite all this, we do not have a relationship with each other. It is not because I am bad or because she has no interest, but because the heart must be drawn to this on both sides, and there is freedom of choice regarding how and with whom to communicate. Yet she is my daughter and, by law, an heir.

Love is a relationship, and the spirit of this relationship is special—a loving spirit.

Homework 247

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Nehemiah 6:2-4; Matthew 25:13; 5:14-16, 44-48; 1 John 3:11, 16; 4:19-21; 1 Peter 1:22; Psalm 46:10; Micah 6:8; John 17:26; 15:7-12; and Revelation 3:22.
2. What did you understand from this lesson?
3. Is it possible that the work of God which I perform can become a trap for me? If so, in what way?
4. Is it possible to burn out emotionally while serving Christ?
5. Are there any works of God in which the presence of love is not necessary?
6. How can I put all my love into my work?
7. What does it mean to do something with love?
8. What do you experience when you do something for Christ? How can I determine whether the Lord approves of my labor?
9. Which Bible stories came to mind as you studied this lesson?
10. Does God have time for my questions and concerns?

Lesson 248 . God's Law of Love

What will happen if I buy a car with a powerful engine in Russia and decide to test the maximum speed at which it can travel on the highway? And then, every time, I drive to the nearest city at a speed of 230 kilometers per hour? I think that if the traffic police notice this, I will be in serious trouble, and they will want to know my name and where such a fast driver came from. I will face heavy fines or the loss of my driver's license.

But if the same thing happens in Germany, on a road without a speed limit, the police will not even look in my direction; I will be of no interest to them. Why is there such a contrast? It is all a matter of the law, which in one country prohibits exceeding the established speed limit, while in another country it permits people to drive at any speed when there is no restriction. The law of any country defines personal and legal relations among its citizens within that state. All who break the law are declared offenders and, once identified, are subject to administrative or criminal penalties.

The absence of law frees people from responsibility. The very existence of law indicates that a state is governed by law.

The absence of law is called anarchy, which implies the absence of executive authority in society and allows everyone to do, with impunity, whatever he considers right.

Every law characterizes the particular features of the country or society in which it has been adopted.

Sin is defined exclusively by the existence of God's law, which regulates human behavior and calls things by their proper names. God's law was proclaimed quite clearly by God Himself in the presence of a great multitude of people and was written twice on tablets of stone by the Hand of God as a testimony for future generations.

If, even though a law exists, there are no representatives of the highest authority who oversee compliance with its requirements, that law ceases to operate and is considered

fictitious. All existing governmental and societal laws are, in one way or another, reflections of God's law.

At the present time, the enemy of the human soul persuades representatives of earthly authorities to adopt laws that contradict God's principles and to elevate to the status of law what God calls an abomination and sin. But human decisions do not cancel God's requirements, and a person who desires to know the truth can very quickly understand what God says and what contradicts God's laws.

The law of ten words, spoken by God in the form of the Ten Commandments, is an expression of God's character and reveals to the world the Creator's love and care for people. The first four commandments regulate a person's relationship with God, while the remaining six establish the rules and boundaries of relationships among people.

Every commandment spoken by God is not only a rule of conduct but also contains a promise that every person who desires to live in obedience will receive power from above to do so, and that this law will be written not only on stone but also in the human heart and will become the foundation of that person's faithfulness to God—not according to the letter, but according to the spirit. God's law is spiritual and, when studied deeply, reveals and condemns human desires and motives that either conform to or contradict God's will.

For example, if I do not kill anyone but possess an evil spirit or speak evil words, then, in the light of the law, I am an offender who violates the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill."

There are traditions and standards of living that have become firmly established in society but are sinful in their very essence because they contradict God's law. Of such people Christ Himself said in Mark 7:8-9: "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And He said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

This question remains relevant today, and it can be applied personally to oneself, so that in its light one may compare one's life with the requirements of the law.

If the law declares, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and Jesus says that even lustful thoughts violate God's commands, while society permits people to live and cohabit however and with whomever they please, approves this behavior, and elevates it to the status of law, then it is worth listening to God's will so as not to come under the curse of God's law.

A person who violates God's requirements and knowingly lives in sin is a representative of the dark forces of evil and is under the power of Satan, carrying out the will of this spirit. No matter who this person may consider himself to be, his will is under the power of sin, and he cannot overcome this influence by his own strength. Only God's power, called grace, can rescue the sinner from under the curse of the law. This is why Christ came into our world: to become this curse for us and to satisfy the just requirement of the law, which declares eternal death upon anyone who has violated God's commandment even once.

Will God's grace save those who break the law by excusing their sin? No. Grace saves from sin, not in sin.

God's love for me is unconditional, and the Lord does not violate His principles in His dealings with me, but He expects me to respond with love through obedience to His law—obedience that is revealed in understanding these requirements and fulfilling them in my life.

The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and good. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Those who bear the fruit of the Spirit are not under the law, for this law has been written by the Hand of God in their hearts and has become a part of their lives, while the fruit of the Spirit is the reflection, visible to the mind, of what the new heart contains.

Does the law save me? No, this power is not placed within God's commandments. The law is a mirror that clearly shows me myself when I look into it.

Salvation is a gift of grace; it cannot be earned by the works of the law, but a saved person is obedient to the commandments. In this obedience, Christian character is perfected, and its result will be peace with God. It speaks of love for the Lord and for our neighbors. Obedience by faith proves that Christ has the power to transform our lives and serves to advance the work of the gospel.

Along with the Ten Commandments, God also gave His people other laws and statutes that explained the order of ceremonies, sacrifices, and feasts which pointed to the coming Messiah.

Judicial and sanitary laws were also given, protecting the people of Israel from corruption and disease. All these rules are sometimes referred to by the single general word "law."

Therefore, when studying the Bible or seeking to understand the essence of the law, one should understand which law is being discussed, which statutes were fulfilled in Christ, and which should be observed in life. The Ten Commandments remain the unchangeable law of life for every person. To take something from them and abolish it by explaining that Christ abolished the Old Testament and gave us a new one is not a very wise decision. Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it, in order to give us the power and the example of how we should act. The Bible does not teach that Jesus abolished even one of the commandments; otherwise, He would not have needed to die for our sins. It would have been enough to change the requirements of the law, and then all transgressors would have become righteous, while Satan would have become an enterprising inventor.

And what would follow? Chaos.

Homework 248

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Psalm 19:7-14; 40:7-8; Matthew 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Romans 8:3-4; 13:10; Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; and Revelation 12:17; 14:12.
2. Did you learn anything new from this lesson?
3. In what way is God's love reflected in His law?

4. How do you understand Romans 13:10: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law"?
5. Is a person saved by the works of the law?
6. What is the purpose of God's law?
7. Why does the Lord desire to write His law in my heart?
Hebrews 10:16-17.
8. Can a person be judged according to a law that has been abolished?
9. Are there any statements from God in the Bible that abolish even one of His Ten Commandments?
10. Why can the law not cleanse my sins but only point them out?
11. Romans 7:12 says: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." How do you understand this verse in the light of our lesson?

Lesson 249 . Eternal Love

Our time can safely be called the age of information.

Information has become so accessible that, if I wish, without leaving home I can receive answers to almost every question in any sphere of human existence. This gives me an advantage over my predecessors in learning any science. But there is one eternal science that has not lost its power or changed in content, although it is hidden beneath the clutter of all kinds of knowledge. The name of this science is Love, which is Agape.

And if I enter this word into a search, Wikipedia gives me the following result:

“Love is a feeling inherent in human beings, a deep attachment and attraction to another person or object, and a feeling of profound affection. Love encompasses a range of strong and positive emotional and mental states, from the most sublime virtue to the simplest pleasure. An example of such a wide range of meanings is the fact that a mother’s love differs from the love of a spouse, which, in turn, differs from a love of food or love for one’s homeland.”

This is followed by a brief explanation of several kinds of love. It is very difficult to call this a science. Although a great many songs have been written about it and people speak about it very often, few study love as a science, digging into profound knowledge and making amazing discoveries for themselves. Why has God allowed His love to be treated with such neglect? Why is this greatest and most precious Heavenly treasure neither sought after nor valued by those who need it so much?

The most interesting thing is that love is eternal and unchangeable. Its principles are founded upon the most solid foundation, which is love itself.

If we gave everything that we study in our school to the Apostle Paul to read, I think he would say that it harmonizes with his understanding, apart from certain specific terms such as automobile, telephone, and so forth.

Love has endured many millennia of sin and lawlessness. It has seen much, and one day it came into our world in human Form and was crucified by people, yet it did not cease to be love and did not betray a single one of its principles.

All the wars that have ever taken place on Earth have not changed God's law, introduced a single amendment into the Bible, or made love weak and foolish. It continues to draw human hearts to itself and, during military conflicts, remains the very best means of healing.

What should be done when innocent blood is being shed, people are dying, and there is no end in sight to human suffering and grief? How can one make sense of this chaos and horror of human lawlessness? Upon whom should vengeance for the blood be taken, and will this solve my problem? Vengeance does not solve these difficult problems or provide a way out of the dead end, but it does guarantee a mental disorder. And what if this is an unceasing process? If this meat grinder continues for years, how can one live in such surroundings?

For example, the Second World War lasted six years, and during that time, according to average estimates, approximately 75 million people died in it, most of whom were innocent civilians. That is an immense number. Try raising the subject of love and forgiveness against the background of these figures and sufferings, and people will simply not understand you, or they will make you part of those statistics. But love endured even this and continues to remain itself.

Yet every war comes to an end, and life must go on; ruins must be rebuilt, bridges constructed, and friends gained. Here an evil spirit will not help. Someone timidly remembers love and begins to live by it, and a miracle of healing takes place. The spirit of forgiveness removes vengeance, grief, and anger and brings peace and rest into the heart. The soul finds its quiet harbor and begins to make plans and dream about prospects for development.

Our world was created by Love for love, and this is its normal condition. The enemy of souls tries to introduce his own values

and destroy people's way of thinking, but in the end, Satan and his teachings will be destroyed forever, and the world will come to Eternal Love, which has not changed but, having passed through various trials, has remained itself.

Why invent conjectures and seek a substitute for love? It exists and always will, and there is no escaping it. It will cast off the clutter of sciences and teachings alien to it and shine with even greater power, and nothing will extinguish it.

That which is eternal will remain eternal because it is eternal.

Love is the everlasting gospel that will be proclaimed, and everyone will hear it, but not everyone will understand it, and not everyone will accept it. But will this light become darkness if I remain ignorant? For me, perhaps it will, but if love is darkness, how great is that darkness?

I think that if I understand that there is something eternal, bright, unchangeable, and imperishable, of which we are made and which we need, and that it is a science, then it is worth finding, knowing, studying, accepting, and living in this knowledge while discovering new facets of it.

What will I lose if I give preference to love and begin to comprehend its depth? Will I become poorer? No. Will I lose my health? No. Will misfortune enter my life? No. Will I become more foolish? No. Then what will I lose? Pride, an evil temper, fear, hostility, deceit, anxiety, evil lusts, sinful addictions, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, envy, wrath, contentions, dissensions, heresies, hatred, murders, drunkenness, reveling, and such like. Then let them go!

And what will I gain by comprehending the science of love? Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, mercy, faith, meekness, and temperance.

There is something to think about.

So, does this mean that if I comprehend love, I will become the happiest person in this world? And even if everything around me is collapsing and dying, do I run the risk of possessing

stable peace and tranquility of soul while rejoicing in the Lord and growing deeper in the knowledge of God's love? Is this not too good for one person? Is there some kind of catch? Perhaps someone wants to draw me into some sect where I will stop drinking, smoking, committing fornication, and using foul language? How will I then look in normal society?

Nevertheless, what I will gain is far more valuable than what I will lose. It is worth trying. If I am going to build something, let it be upon an eternal foundation!

Will love be the same a billion years from now? No. It will be more beautiful, open, explored, and accessible than it is today. If now it resembles a small lamp burning in the darkness, then it will shine throughout the entire Universe thousands of times brighter than the sun. Then the expression "God is Love" will no longer be a mystery to us but will become an eternal picture, open to knowledge, admiration, and study—a picture that we will approach forever, in which we will forever discover new facets and forever marvel at its boundless depth.

Then what is the purpose of God's law if it does not save? The law reveals to me the absence of God's love in my heart and shows me that without it I cannot be obedient to the spirit of the law, although I may keep the letter or pretend that I do. Love brings my life into complete harmony with God's requirements and fulfills them at the level of my thoughts without violating the letter either. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and it thinketh no evil.

Why is love eternal? It can possess no other quality, for it is the foundation and essence of all existence and universal creation; by it everything is held together, moves, lives, and exists.

Homework 249

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Jeremiah 31:3; John 17:3; Proverbs 8:22-36; Hebrews 13:8; Romans 13:10; 2:6-11; 1 John 4:16; Acts 17:25-28; Revelation 1:8; 14:6; 2 Corinthians 3:3-4; 1 Timothy 6:16; Romans 2:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26-27, 31; Galatians 5:17-24; and Titus 1:2.

2. Did you learn anything new from this lesson?
3. Why is love eternal, and why must it logically be eternal?
4. Is it worth building your life and your plans upon an eternal foundation?
5. If love is not the eternal foundation of Eternal Life, then what is?
6. Why is love so important in relationships with our neighbors? After all, is it not possible to have business relationships without love?
7. How do you envision Eternal Love? Will it not be eternally boring?
8. Why is it worth comprehending love and becoming established in it forever, beginning even now?
9. If my relatives, who do not know Christ personally, see no love in me and accuse me of being the embodiment of evil, is their assessment true?
10. Does Satan love his subjects?
11. What should I do if I see that I do not have love?
12. What happens when I begin to pray for the gift of love?
13. Am I worthy to possess love, to live by it always, and to have it eternally?

Lesson 250 . Do No Work!

If I am a law-abiding citizen and live in exact accordance with every requirement of the constitution and the laws of the country, will government officials praise me for it? I think I will be of no particular interest to them. But if, despite all my obedience, I begin stealing a little money from the state treasury—after all, there is a great deal of it there, and no one will notice—then, when this crime is discovered, will my overall righteousness in everything else be credited to me and cover my minor violation? And if I am compared with those who brazenly steal billions and openly break the laws, I will look virtuous against their background.

I think you have correctly answered this question with James 2:10: “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” Does this statement apply to the whole law of God, or does it concern only a few important commandments? There are only ten of them, and they were spoken aloud personally by God. It was not Moses who gave this Decalogue to those living on Earth, but the Creator Himself. And this law is the foundation of every person’s righteousness, for it defines sin.

In God’s Law there are two commandments that some people consider invalid. These are the second commandment, concerning the worship of idols, and the fourth, concerning the worship of God. And the pattern is that those who violate these commandments, making such violation a doctrine of their church, become guilty of violating all the other commandments as well.

If I replace God with various images or statues, or put a human being or an animal in His place and call people to worship it, then in spirit I become a spiritual adulterer, a murderer of your purity, a thief of your salvation and my own, a false witness, and a blasphemer of God. I make you a slave to tradition and sin, and I become guilty of all. Many people will agree that idolatry is harmful and violates God’s commandments. But as soon as the fourth commandment is discussed, a prepared

answer immediately follows: "It was given only to the Jews." "That was the Old Testament, but now we are in the New." Or: "We are not under the law, but under grace." But if we reason this way, then we must declare the entire Law invalid. Why tear out of it something inconvenient while keeping what I consider right?

The command concerning the holiness of the Sabbath was spoken by the same God Who said, "Thou shalt not kill." And the very first verse of Exodus 20 is the key to correctly understanding Whose Law this is.

But the most interesting thing is that people did not abolish the fourth commandment, understanding that this would leave a breach in the law; instead, they changed it. And when representatives of this teaching are asked to provide a biblical basis for such changes, no one can find one. More educated people claim that the first disciples made Christ's resurrection a weekly celebration and that this became a good tradition that has continued to our day. But they offer no evidence.

Let us be honest: Are we building our faith upon the solid foundation of God's Word or upon the shifting sand of human traditions?

Once, while conducting seminars, I announced a prize of €1,000 for anyone who could present even one Bible verse concerning the holiness of Sunday. No one came forward, nor can anyone do so, because the Bible does not say a single word about it.

But the commandment concerning the holiness of Sabbath time does exist, and it was given to the world; there is no escaping this fact. Yet some dare to teach others that Sunday is now our Sabbath and that it should be kept holy, as the Bible says of the Sabbath, and that under no circumstances should anyone work during this sacred time. But the Bible teaches us to keep the Sabbath holy, not another day. We are given very detailed explanations of what should be done on the Sabbath and what should be avoided. And if the Sabbath is only for the Jews, then to what nation do the cattle, donkeys, oxen, and strangers clearly mentioned in this commandment belong? (Deuteronomy

5:14). Strangers are foreigners, people from other nations, and certainly not Jews.

The Bible does not teach me to observe Sunday, and therefore any attempt to keep this day holy becomes merely a human ordinance or a good tradition. And if, in a particular country, this rule has been elevated to the status of a law prohibiting work, then wisdom from above is needed so as not to enter into open confrontation with the representatives of that country's highest authorities. At the same time, a correct understanding is also needed of how to remain obedient to God's commandment if everyone around me is working and going about their ordinary business, while trying to involve me in that process.

I have also heard it said that by keeping the Sabbath I am saved by works. Nowhere does the Bible teach that salvation comes from works. Salvation is exclusively by grace—not in sin, but from sin. The commandment itself says in Exodus 20:10: "But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates." "Thou shalt not do any work" is a call to rest. But no one preaches salvation by idleness.

Furthermore, God calls us not only to rest on the Sabbath, but also to keep this day holy—to set it apart from other time in a special way and spend it worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

There will be little benefit from observing the letter of the law. If there is no love in the heart, the meaning of this commandment—and of every other commandment—is lost. The Pharisees' scrupulousness in this matter led them into fanaticism, which Christ opposed. The Lord was free from the unnecessary rules with which the Sabbath day had been burdened, and He showed how this sacred time should be kept holy—not by abolishing the commandment, but by fulfilling it in the spirit of truth. Jesus loved His neighbors and did everything possible to relieve their suffering and teach them obedience. The Bible describes only seven miracles that Jesus performed on the Sabbath. Even this detail contains symbolic meaning.

Keeping the Sabbath does not save a person from death. Salvation is God's prerogative, and He decides who will live eternally and whom He will punish. But obedience to the law carries a blessing in itself for everyone who chooses to live this way. For example, if I decide not to kill anyone, I will have peace in my heart in this area of thought; I will not tremble with fear while awaiting retribution for shed blood. By keeping the Sabbath, I rest physically and emotionally, and this will benefit my overall health and thinking. The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

I am sometimes accused of speaking only about the Sabbath. What a strange accusation. All this time we have been speaking about love. And I understand that if there is no love in a person's heart, that person will violate the Sabbath in spirit, even though its outward form may be observed. In marriage, which is important—the stamp in the passport or the relationship? Both. Without the stamp, we are fornicators; without the relationship, we are unhappy formalists.

If I have no relationship with the Creator and do not allow His love to dwell in my heart, I will not be able to keep the Sabbath holy according to the commandment. I will observe it according to the letter, and this is sin. Although I will receive physical and mental rest and relief, that is not all God desires to see.

The Sabbath is the very commandment that, like a sign, shows the whole world Whose I am, if I am united with God in the spirit of love and truth. Love is the fulfilling of the Sabbath.

Homework 250

1. In the light of our lesson, please read Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Leviticus 23:32; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Isaiah 56:5-6; 58:13-14; 66:23; Ezekiel 20:12, 20; Matthew 12:1-12; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:16; 1 John 3:22; and Hebrews 4:8-11.
2. Did you learn anything new from this lesson?
3. Do you believe that keeping the Sabbath saves me from eternal death?

4. If, having a knowledge of the truth, I continue to violate the fourth commandment and observe another day out of love for God, honoring His resurrection, will this truly bring me under condemnation?
5. How can I understand whether I am obedient to God and whether I am correctly keeping the commandment concerning rest?
6. Why was the Sabbath given to humanity?
7. If I dedicate every day to God, why do I need to keep the Sabbath holy?
8. Can the whole world be mistaken by violating the fourth commandment while receiving abundant blessings in everything, and at the same time be under the curse of the law and have no hope of salvation? Will God truly refuse to save good people merely because they did not rest on the Sabbath?
9. What blessing does the Sabbath bring you?
10. In what way does God sanctify the people who are faithful to Him and keep the Sabbath?
11. What should I do if the teaching of my church does not allow me to keep the Sabbath holy and the pastor has no intention of changing his views? I love my brothers and sisters and want to continue believing in God together with them. What is the right way for me to act?
12. Are you certain that you are obedient to the requirement of the fourth commandment in spirit and in truth?
13. What role does love play in obedience and in keeping the Sabbath?
14. Share your understanding and experience of keeping the fourth commandment.