

In the School of God's Love

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Preface

Epigraph

If I know all the prophecies, know how to interpret them, and see in the news that the end of this world is drawing near, but do not have love, what good is this knowledge to me?

If I have built a health center, opened a health-food store or a school, and through these efforts bring many people to Jesus, but do not have love, what do I gain from it?

If I have many friends and give generously to good causes, but do not have love, what is the point of it all?

Love is calm, strong, and powerful.

Love knows how to wait, endure, and believe; love forgives everything.

Love knows how to live both among people and in solitude.

Love is observant. It sees everything, yet notices only the virtues in others.

Love loves at all times.

Love is the first to seek a way to another person's heart, and once it finds that way, it settles there forever.

Love has no former friends, but it has many future ones.

There is no effective defense against love; it overcomes everything. Yet it gently offers itself, forcing itself on no one, and waits without end. Love respects a person's freedom; it can grow only where it is welcomed.

From the author

This book was written in response to the earnest requests of people with whom I shared my thoughts and observations about God's love. In it, I describe only what I have personally experienced and what I have learned through trial and error and through revelation from above. I sincerely hope that becoming acquainted with my experience of learning about love

will make your journey easier and faster. When we know what lies ahead, we naturally prepare for it, and when a trial comes, we understand how to respond.

This book is a kind of training course that changes the way we think and develops skills that all of us will soon need. Even if you do not yet fully understand the nature of this field of study and have little interest in learning about it, God will give you the necessary desire and understanding. The decisions we make today in response to the light God has given us will determine what we will be in the future—wheat or tares.

As a businessman, I study the laws of business, how it is structured, and the principles by which it operates. In this world, a person can make a great deal of money very quickly and yet lose what no amount of money can buy. Like you, I face a choice every day, and I choose love. It is a narrow and thorny path, yet it is pleasant and easy to walk because it was prepared by the One Who gave His life so that I might live. And I choose life. I follow in His footsteps and understand what awaits me, yet I rejoice that He is with me and in me, and I am in Him.

The most precious and beautiful thing in this world—worth giving up many worldly advantages for—is the gift of God's love, with which God gives us Himself. It is worth more than all the riches of the world. It gives us complete mastery over self and true victory in every battle. I believe that my words and thoughts will help many of you take a step toward this love and toward the One from Whom it comes.

I am sharing with you insights drawn from my personal experience, but they will help you only if they become part of your own experience. If you cooperate with the transformation God has begun in you, one day God will surely bring it to completion and place His seal upon you.

CHAPTER 1. THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT— LOVE

The subject of God's everlasting love interests everyone. People are ready to listen to discussions about love for hours. Yet for many, this interest never develops any further.

Consider, for example, a radio tuned to a particular frequency, even though thousands of frequencies are available. As long as it remains tuned to that one frequency, it has no idea what is being broadcast on another. But if its settings are changed and it is tuned to the desired frequency, it will receive the intended broadcast.

In talking with people, I have noticed that many of them are tuned to their own frequency. Some are preoccupied with personal problems, some are concerned about their future, and others are completely absorbed in business or everyday matters. You tell them something, but they look at you with a distant expression. As a result, you begin to pray that the Lord will preserve in their minds at least the thought that the subject of everlasting love is extremely important and that they need to study it for themselves. Fortunately, there are also those who truly understand the importance of this subject and desire to gain the necessary knowledge and experience.

It brings me such joy when, in answer to my prayers, I meet people who have heard God's call: "Begin to love; begin to study this subject." I gladly share my knowledge and skills with those who truly need them. As I do so, God continues to teach me and reveals more and more new things to me.

"Thus saith the Lord the maker thereof, the Lord that formed it, to establish it; the Lord is His name; Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:2-3, KJV). I love this promise and often appeal to it in prayer: "Lord, I call upon You. Please show me great and mighty things that I do not know." He continually gives me an understanding of spiritual truths that I may have heard before but did not understand. First He gives

me an understanding of the truth, and then He gives me the opportunity to experience it.

Now is a good time to study the subject of everlasting love. Soon this peaceful time will end, and learning will become increasingly difficult. Wars, persecution, and chaos will begin. If I do not learn to love while circumstances are favorable, the oil in my lamp will soon run out, and its flame will go out. If I have run with the footmen and they have wearied me, how can I contend with horses? (see Jeremiah 12:5).

A lack of love

“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12, KJV). Is this prophecy being fulfilled today? Is it being fulfilled in God’s church? Sadly, yes. Christ foresaw this and foretold the present state of affairs.

When we read about the early apostolic church, we may get the impression that everyone simply loved one another and that there were no serious conflicts among the believers. But when we look at the church of our day, we are amazed at how precisely this prophecy is being fulfilled. Yet does God want our love to grow cold? God desires us to love one another. Do we know how to love as God wants us to? Do we even understand what love is? If I answer all these questions honestly, my answer is no.

We see a problem both in my life and in the life of every one of us: a lack of God’s love in our relationships with one another. The good news is that God wants to teach us to love one another and thereby fulfill His commandment. He sent His Son to show us the ideal of love toward which we can strive and which, to some extent, we can attain even in this life, in our bodies and minds. Is this possible? Yes. But we are not capable of it on our own.

Let me give an example that will help us understand how love works and what steps we need to take in order to learn to love.

Imagine that I begin to pray, “Lord, teach me to play the piano.” I believe that the Lord has heard my prayer. He is the

Ruler of the universe and gladly answers prayers like this. What do I do next? Acting in faith, I sit down at the piano and begin to play, for example, "The Flea Waltz." I prayed, and here is the result: I am playing. If I keep praying, I will be able to play this piece perfectly with my eyes closed. In a year, I will be able to take on students and teach them to play.

I can see the smile on your face. "That is not how it works!" you may object, and I agree with you. This example clearly shows how absurd it is to try to master an art by our own efforts alone. The same principles of learning that apply to music also apply in the school of Christ. Prayer alone is not enough for spiritual growth. To master music, I must first enroll in a music school and learn to read music. Will I teach myself, or will someone teach me? Yes, I need a professional teacher. Must that teacher be different from me? Yes. He must know how to play the instrument he intends to teach me, and he must also know how to read music.

Will my newly acquired skills be evident after the first lesson? Hardly! I will gain knowledge, but no significant change will be visible. Only through consistent practice will I acquire the ability to play the instrument—provided, of course, that I am not tone-deaf.

The good news is that absolutely everyone is accepted into God's school—not only those who are gifted, talented, or capable. God accepts everyone. He gave everyone the commandment to love one another. Knowing our human nature, He said, "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matthew 23:8, KJV). God has given no one the right to teach people in His school except His Son, Jesus Christ.

Matthew 10:24 says, "The disciple is not above his master" (KJV). If I know how to play only "The Flea Waltz" and begin teaching others to play the piano, what will I teach them? Exactly! I will teach them to play only that tune. But if a professional undertakes their instruction, different results will become evident over time.

If I go to a professional to learn to play a musical instrument, will he demand that I perform a symphony immediately? Of course not! In the process of teaching us to love, God likewise follows a progression from simple things to more difficult ones. Some learn quickly and others slowly, depending on their abilities. We have a kind Teacher, and He finds the right approach for everyone who enrolls in the school of His love.

Without love, we will perish

We live in a time that is dangerous for the soul, and temptations surround us on every side. God does not want me to perish in this world of passion and lust. He has a plan that involves coming out of and separating from the world. The person best able to resist temptation is the one who maintains a close connection with God every second of life. Love, as a special gift from Heaven, helps us maintain this connection and have the right motive behind every good deed and word. When a child of God reaches this stage of faith and receives God's love in all its fullness, God's blessing comes with this gift.

I will not stand through the trials of the last days unless I possess this gift in all its fullness. Without love, I will simply lose my mind in this world while still thinking that I am sane. I do not know what awaits me in the future, but God knows and is preparing me. Love purifies the heart and thoughts, gives peace, and keeps the emotions under control. It shows the way out of the most difficult situation.

Love always has something to say, but not everyone hears its voice. Therefore, my dear readers, I urge you to make it your life's goal to attain perfect love. Ask for help from above! Run, walk, or crawl toward this goal until you reach it. And may God help you in this!

Understanding the value of love

God wants us to understand what heavenly love is, and understanding this subject is vitally important. Why? Because when we ask Him to give us love, He gives us exactly what we envision, although He desires to give us incomparably more.

Why, then, is this priceless gift withheld? Because if I do not understand the nature and purpose of the gift, I will not value what is priceless in the eyes of Heaven, nor will I be able to use it when I receive it. Purity of heart reveals the value of heavenly love and awakens an immeasurable thirst for this gift.

What the enemy of souls fears most is seeing God's children filled with love. He understands that their influence breaks the power of his temptations and draws souls to Christ. What good will all our health centers, health-food stores, health clubs, and meetings do if there is no love there for those we desire to save? Without truth and love, we will merely produce healthy sinners in this world.

When I write to you about love, my friends, I know what I am writing about. Those who love understand what I mean and rejoice when they see this power at work within themselves. God bestows His love on everyone who trusts Him, and He allows those who seek it most persistently to experience the amazing power of His love in its fullness. Therefore, seek and you will find; ask and you will receive! God is ready to give all the riches of Heaven to those who desperately need them.

I love!

All the truth presented by the prophets and apostles in the pages of the Bible can be summed up in two words: "I love." This is the Gospel that transforms me from within. If I do not understand this message, all other truths may be misunderstood or not understood at all. Why? Because God's purpose is to teach me to love. Love softens all the solid food we receive through God's Word and through our life experiences. It reveals what God wants from us and how He works in our lives, and it also helps us share with others the very truth that God has revealed to us.

If I speak about salvation but do not have love, how will my message sound? It will not always sound right. God uses certain people to draw others to Himself. Yet in the end, those people perish because they have done nothing to change their own hearts and have remained "as sounding brass, or a tinkling

cymbal.” In the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul speaks clearly about the problems that inevitably arise when we try to live the Christian life, do good works, take the Gospel to the world, and know all the truth, but do not have love.

We are someone or something only when love lives within us!

CHAPTER 2. THE SCHOOL OF LOVE

I observe other people and myself. Once again, angry people come and demand that I show them Jesus. I tell them that He is in Heaven, but they want to see Him in me. Once again I fall, get dirty, and go to be washed. The Teacher takes me by the hand and tells me about His love, how precious I am to Him, and how He is teaching me. I begin to notice that I am gradually becoming calmer, growing less irritable, and seeing good qualities in my neighbors. Angry people now seem less dangerous than unhappy. They desperately want to find a friend who will love them unselfishly. I, too, am looking for such a friend. When I find one among the upperclassmen, I walk with him until we reach our first disagreement. Then I go my own way, while my friend smiles and waits.

I fall, get up, and run to the Teacher in despair. He comforts me and leads me back to school. Again I see angry people with angry hearts around me, but they no longer trouble me. I understand that this is how they defend themselves, because I used to be the same way. I feel sorry for them because they do not attend my school. Instead, they linger nearby, strike the students, and shout for us to show them Jesus. But the upperclassmen teach us to pray for these unhappy people and to consider how we can help them meet the Teacher and show them the way of salvation. I see that many students closely resemble my Teacher in character and conduct. I am drawn ever more strongly to my Mentor, spend more time with Him, and feel His support in every situation.

I notice that many new students have come to our school, and they are constantly falling and getting dirty. I want to help them, but they look at me and see a hypocrite. I look at them, recognize myself, and realize that I love them. This love grows greater and deeper within me, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. What a miracle!

I look at the graduates of our school. Each of them bears the seal of our Teacher on the forehead, and they proclaim a special message to the world. I long to be among them, so I

begin praying for greater love. It seems that nothing is happening, but I know that the Teacher has already planned something for me, and I ask Him for strength to stand firm. I see that my clothes no longer become soiled and that my legs have grown stronger, yet I understand that the ground beneath my feet is still very slippery, so I hold more tightly to my Mentor's hand. I continue walking with Him, longing for greater love. I am no longer disappointed, because I know Him in Whom I have believed. Once again He brings me to school and surrounds me with angry people, whom I love even more.

Who am i in the school of love?

A time comes in the lives of God's sons and daughters who receive love from Him when they can no longer keep this love inside and want to speak about it continually. Yet when love enters the human heart, it begins to cleanse it, and the impurity also comes to the surface. I speak about love while seeing so much evil within myself that I feel like a hypocrite. Not knowing what to do, many people simply fall silent and withdraw into themselves, thinking that something is wrong with them.

When you receive the gift of love, expect turmoil in your inner life. Expect the Lord to point out your sins and begin cleansing you. This is the most painful process in a believer's life, and for many it becomes a serious problem. But it is not a problem for our Savior.

There are two roles: student and teacher. If I assume the role of a teacher, I risk becoming a self-confident hypocrite, denying the presence of sin in my life and excusing or concealing my faults. Even if this does not happen, the teacher's role requires enormous responsibility and moral purity. It is no accident that Scripture says, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all" (James 3:1-2, KJV). "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ" (Matthew 23:8, KJV).

If I take the position of a student, it allows for the fact that I will fall, make mistakes, and receive poor grades, but all of this will

happen as part of the learning process. During my education, my faults will be exposed and removed. The Lord expects me to be honest in my relationship with Him. When He shows me my sin, He expects me not to hide from Him but to confess my sin and desire to be cleansed from that evil. Then the Lord will cleanse me from sin and give me strength not to sin. The awareness of being clean brings happiness and extraordinary joy into one's life, and that joy draws people to you.

Therefore, let each of you decide who you will be. Yet even if we choose to be students, at a certain point in our education the Lord calls us to teach others by sharing our experiences, discoveries, and revelations. There is a proper time for everything.

Learning to love

Imagine that I decide to learn to play the violin. I see how well other people play and decide that I, too, will learn this art. Since I have at least some ear for music, I conclude that this is quite enough to master the four-stringed violin. All I need is earnest prayer, faith in my abilities, and the very best of the expensive violins. And, of course, a little time.

I can already foresee the answer to my prayer of faith and your amazement at how quickly I have mastered the instrument. All that remains is to buy a violin and bow and begin astonishing everyone. I even think that music schools and conservatories were established for people who have little faith and are too lazy to learn on their own. My faith knows no bounds, and I invite all of you to my concert exactly one year from now! At that concert I will show you the result of my faith. Then I will take on students, inspire them to master the instrument, and one year later we will have an outstanding violin ensemble.

A wonderful plan, is it not? Does my idea seem foolish to you? You simply have no faith in me or in my abilities!

There is another path—a long and difficult one. I find a good teacher and ask him to teach me to play the violin. Under his guidance, I begin mastering this art step by step. I learn to read music, position my hands properly, and produce a good tone.

The assignments become more difficult as I master the material. Observing my abilities, the teacher gives me new assignments and checks them carefully. He requires me to play the same piece many times to train my muscle memory. From time to time, he takes away my sheet music and asks me to play by ear or from memory. Along the way, he also shares professional secrets and finer points with me.

I do not even dare to dream of a concert, yet he places me before an audience and asks me to play what I know. With trembling knees, I play uncertainly before dozens of listeners, afraid of making a mistake. The teacher does not stop there. He continues refining my skill until I can play confidently and without fear. Although this exhausting process of instruction takes years of both his life and mine, the goal is achieved and the result is evident to everyone.

Which of these two schools appeals to you more? Which one would you like to attend? Intellectually, I understand that the second is better, yet I enroll in the first. Many years later, I end up completely disappointed and without faith. And I had prayed so fervently!

We can learn to love only in the school of Christ. It has its own laws and principles, assignments and examinations, all in accordance with the curriculum. A graduate of this school receives God's seal of approval, is declared an overcomer, and inherits all the promised blessings!

Loving at the proper time

Learning to love follows the same principles as learning music. Prayer alone is not enough. I used to think, "It is so simple! I will pray now, and the Spirit of God will fill my heart with love. Then I will love everyone as the Lord does." I understood that I lacked love and began to pray about it. God answered my prayers, but not as I had expected.

When a person comes to church, no one overwhelms him with a code of laws, rules, and requirements. He is simply welcomed and helped to understand that he has entered a family where he is needed. He makes friends, and all of this contributes to his

spiritual growth. A newborn baby understands nothing, can do nothing, and knows nothing. The child must reach the proper age to sit independently, eat, speak, attend school, and start a family. There is a proper time for everything. God has arranged the spiritual life in the same way.

God wants us to learn to keep His commandments. John 13 records the commandment to love one another, and God wants us to obey it. Yet not everyone hears this command from God.

The apostle Paul received visions and instruction directly from Jesus. We still read his letters, seeking to comprehend the depths of God's love. In 1 Corinthians 13, he evaluates all our knowledge and achievements: "If I do not have love, I am nothing, and all the gifts and talents I possess are of no benefit to me."

Why is it so important to possess love? Why is it so important to love? When we love, we reveal God's character, because God is love. We represent Christ to others. When we love, our message sounds as it should and transforms a person's thinking.

God created all of us to love. He also placed within us the need to be loved. If this need is not met, we begin to suffer. The people around us have the same need, regardless of sex, nationality, or age. This need is clearly visible in childhood, when a child asks to be held and snuggles close to his parents. As adults, we no longer consider this need especially important. We value having a job, financial security, and the things we need. Yet our inner spiritual being thirsts for love. We need love just as much in old age. This is why God wants to teach us to love.

"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:33-35, KJV). Notice carefully what Peter says. He does not ask, "Lord, teach us to love!" Instead, he asks, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" (verse 36,

KJV). He did not hear the commandment or grasp what mattered most. Jesus understood this. Later, in John 15, He repeated the commandment because He wanted His disciples to hear it. Once again, there was no response.

In his First Epistle, often called the “epistle of love,” John shows the importance of revealing God’s love through human love. He had to write an entire epistle to give us the understanding we lack. I do not mean that we have no love and love no one. If that were true, we would not be in the church. But I can say with certainty that God desires to give us more love—love that is full and perfect. This love is as boundless as God Himself. When we begin consciously asking for it, He begins to answer, provided that we are willing to learn. Prayer alone is not enough, although prayer gives God permission to teach us. If we pray and then return to our daily concerns, we will not learn very much. I have discovered this through personal experience.

Besides Christ, there is another Teacher—the Holy Spirit, through Whom we have direct communion with Christ. The heavenly Teacher hears our prayer and gives us exactly what we ask for. If we ask Him to teach us to be patient with our neighbor, He will teach us not to become irritated or speak harshly. God respects our freedom, even though He sees the difference between what we desire and what we need. He honors our choice. If we limit our request to love for our family, He will not give us love for a neighbor or coworker.

But when I ask for the gift of everlasting love so that I can love everyone, God gladly and willingly gives it to me. He desires to give us His love in greater measure than we ask, because only when we possess love can we rightly represent God’s character to others and proclaim His message. Most remarkably, as God teaches us to love, He also gives us a correct understanding of love.

The first step toward love

When a doctor comes to a person dying of cancer, explains the cause of the disease, and says that the patient will die, he is telling the truth. But he leaves the patient without hope, and

truth presented without love sounds like a sentence of condemnation.

People may perceive many biblical truths merely as facts. Christ will return whether or not we believe that He will. The judgment of those who have professed faith in Christ has already begun. There will be a millennium, a final judgment of the wicked, and eternity. All these events are certain and do not depend on our faith. Yet when we begin revealing God's grace to people, they need personal contact with that grace.

People do not know God; they see only us and hear only what we tell them. If we speak to them about Christ's love but they do not see our love for them, will such a presentation of the Gospel succeed? Never! People listen with their hearts.

We now face an excess of information, and each year it becomes more difficult to reach people's minds. Yet from the prophetic Word we know that in the last days people will desire to know the truth. We also know that the truth for the last days is called the Three Angels' Messages. Will God use people who have no love for others to proclaim this truth? Without love in the heart of the person proclaiming them, the Three Angels' Messages sound like a sentence without mercy or hope. Only genuine love can show me how to present this message properly.

If a person needs peace of mind, the Three Angels' Messages by themselves will not calm him. But when, through you and me, he encounters God's love and tenderness and His amazing grace, he finds peace because he meets a loving God in you and me.

When I pray for love, God answers. Every morning I cry out, "Lord, teach me to love. Reveal to me what I do not yet know!" But I want to warn you: love cannot be revealed through an impure heart. God will not reveal His love to others through a corrupt heart. Therefore, He must cleanse that heart from sin.

I prayed, "Lord, teach me to love the people I work with. They are all so angry; they do not know You and do not want to know You. Yet You want me to love them. There is pride,

condemnation, and a competitive spirit within me, but no love. Teach me to love!" I pray this, and God begins to show me who I am. He begins revealing my sins to me. This is the most unpleasant part of learning to love. I desire God's love and pray for it, but He shows me how impure I am. All of us will go through this, whether we want to or not. Even someone raised in the church is not exempt from this cleansing. God will reveal to every one of us just how sinful we are.

I will not describe the truths God revealed to me about myself. At first, I was ashamed to ask for love while being so impure. But remembering that God's grace is intended for sinners, and recognizing that I was a sinner, I began to rely on God's mercy. I saw that mercy at work within me. I come to the Savior, and He accepts me. Today, when I speak to people, I ask God to close their eyes to my faults and reveal His perfection.

Sometimes we feel like complete strangers among our own brothers and sisters. In such a situation, God uses people's shortcomings to show us how desperately we need Him. We will never truly value Christ until we understand our dependence on Him.

From a human perspective, some situations in life seem hopeless. The Holy Spirit can resolve any problem very quickly. The first thing He does is remove it from our hearts. It may remain in our lives, but if God has taken its resolution into His hands, it will be resolved.

Let me give an example. I had a small debt that I could not repay, and it weighed heavily on me. I prayed for the problem to be resolved, but the debt remained. Then I began to pray differently: "Lord, I give this problem to You." It left my heart in fulfillment of the promise, "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7, KJV). I believed these words were effective. The problem left my heart but remained in my life. The debt was still there, yet I understood that God would provide a way for me to repay it. And that is what happened. Most importantly, I found peace because I understood that it was no longer my problem but God's. Later, He showed me

what changes I needed to make in my life so that I would not fall into debt and could live within my means.

Jesus taught us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and He promised that everything necessary for life would be added to us.

Business has its own laws, and as you become acquainted with them, you see how they operate in your life. But there are also unforeseen events that can take everything from you except your debts. Yet even in the world of money, love is the most important unit of value. When everything collapses—when every fund, currency, and loan has lost its value—love, like Noah's ark, will rise majestically above this perishing world, and nothing will harm it. If I learn God's love, that knowledge will remain within me forever.

The teacher's responsibility

When we enroll in the school of Christ, God assumes responsibility for teaching us properly. Every morning I ask Him to take my life into His hands and teach me to love everyone with whom I live, work, or come in contact. And He teaches me. During this time, my attitude toward people has changed radically. I cannot remember being offended by anyone in recent years. This used to be a serious flaw in my character. If I had a conflict with someone or heard a harsh word directed at me, I could easily take offense and withdraw. This happened fairly often in my family. But when I began asking for love, I noticed that the Lord removed this sin from me—a sin that is an expression of pride. As we know, love is not proud. In His school, God does not merely give me new knowledge. He teaches me to examine and change my life.

Let me give an example. I am a driver, and I have a car that I use for business and commuting to work. In the past, I often exceeded the speed limit without considering the consequences. When I received tickets, I was angry with those who sent them. I also ignored traffic signs as though they did not exist. At some point, I understood that this was wrong and began to pray, "Lord, teach me to obey the traffic laws." Then,

whenever I violated them, I blamed God: “Lord, why do I pray for You to teach me to obey these rules, yet I continue to break them?” I shifted my guilt onto God, treating Him as though He were a poor Teacher. I asked Him to change my heart, yet I did nothing myself.

Then I began asking Him to establish me in obedience to the traffic laws I already knew well. I realized that when I got into the car, watched every sign carefully, and firmly resolved to obey its directions, I drove according to the law. A police car behind me sharpened my attention and provided the best possible motivation to obey every rule. The moment my mind wandered to something else, I stopped noticing signs and could easily exceed the speed limit. When I realized that I had broken the rules again, I felt ashamed, because I understood that those laws were written in the blood of innocent people who died because of inattentive drivers. Today I am so accustomed to obeying traffic laws that I do it automatically.

Not long ago, I let a friend drive my car and moved to the passenger seat. Throughout the journey, I kept telling him that he was speeding, that he needed to slow down, and that he was breaking the law. As the owner of the car, I felt responsible for the violation. To avoid irritating my friend with constant reminders, I had to take the wheel again.

Something similar happens in the school of love. When we recognize ourselves as God’s students, we begin to control our actions. When we realize that God is always near and that every word, action, and thought is carefully recorded, we become doers of the law. We become so accustomed to this way of life that we can no longer act otherwise. God writes His law in our hearts. When we unintentionally lose control of a situation, God shows us where we stumbled. We repent and go to the One Who accepts, cleanses, and forgives us. Even when there are no signs along our path, the habit of living by the law of love takes effect within us. God takes great pleasure in working with students who seek His counsel in everything.

CHAPTER 3. WHAT IS LOVE?

When I hear the word “love,” what do I picture? Love is a universal instrument that sustains human life in many different circumstances. It is a principle built by our Creator into the design of every living being. It is a special language of the heart and mind, understood by everyone living on our planet.

Like disease, love has many manifestations. The word is the same, but its actions differ, and each person requires an individual approach. The love I show each of my friends will differ according to the closeness of our relationship, the person’s character, age, sex, spiritual maturity, interests, and much more. At the heart of love is the desire to help, give, support, and make another person happy. Love looks for opportunities to do this—sometimes unconsciously, but usually deliberately.

When I try to squeeze the concept of love into a single definition and describe it by one action, I create a stereotype. I apply this stereotype to everyone without exception and expect specific actions from myself and others. When those actions do not come, I become disappointed in people, in myself, and in my love. But when I understand how many-sided love is, I look for its manifestations in myself and in others. If I see that love is absent, I turn to the One Who is Love, and He gives love freely and without objection.

It is very important to understand what love is and how it works. It is an immensely powerful and complex weapon in spiritual warfare. The enemy has no defense against it. But if I do not understand its capabilities, I risk overlooking its enormous potential and settling for a minimal set of functions sufficient for my personal safety, my family’s well-being, and a couple of friends.

Meanwhile, Heaven waits and cries out. With the gift of heavenly love, Jesus offers Himself. The Savior stands at the door of my heart and waits patiently. Do I hear His voice? I do. Will I open the door? That depends entirely on my decision.

Love—the conqueror

Love is the conqueror of the human heart. It sends its signals from an external control center, yet it waits to be invited, respecting freedom and choice.

When a broken heart thirsts for love and calls it into one's life, love responds. It steadily strengthens its positions in a person's character, making them firm and impregnable. It does not surrender its conquests to the enemy and waits for every opportunity to take possession of new territories of the soul and establish its laws there. It knows its goal and moves confidently toward it. Love shows the best way and always finds the best solution in every situation. It is not afraid of problems and does not stop in the face of difficulties. Love never retreats. When obstacles arise in its path, it may pause to gather strength and crush every barrier. It is like a pure mountain river flowing from the throne of grace into the lowlands to flood them. It carries life, happiness, and joy.

Love knows no defeat. It carries out an offensive operation, wisely planning each new advance. It never ceases and never runs dry. Its actions may go unnoticed, but they are constant. Though love possesses tremendous power, it treats the human will very gently and carefully, respecting each person's choice. It patiently awaits the command to begin its next advance. Peace, rest, thanksgiving, and joy come with it. Love is the beginning of a new and better life, and it is what sustains that life. Everyone who possesses it becomes a conqueror to whom much is promised both in this earthly life and in eternity.

Love is fruit

Everyone in this world is given the gift of love to some degree, but many people do not understand the nature of God's love or His character. They do not know how to use this gift and do not develop it. Believers in God, by contrast, consciously make use of the gift of His love. Through faith they bear fruit, although this process unfolds differently in each person.

Imagine a grapevine that produces only one cluster of grapes each year. You would say that this should not be so. If a

grapevine is properly cared for, it will yield a larger and larger harvest year after year. God wants us to bear much fruit. Jesus said to His disciples, "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John 15:5, KJV). We cannot consciously love independently of God. The world is full of songs about love. People know something about love, wait for it, and love in their own way. But the love described in the Bible is the heavenly fruit of the Holy Spirit, a character quality of heavenly origin. The genuine fruit of love in all its beauty will never grow in a person who does not follow Christ. A person may be gifted, sensitive, and compassionate, but the highest love comes from God alone.

This does not mean that everyone in the world is devoid of love. God "sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45, KJV). Rain is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, Who is poured out in measure even upon unbelievers because He loves them as His creation. But the fullness of love is given on the condition that it is consciously received. In its power, love is comparable to an atomic bomb and even surpasses it. Yet unlike an atomic bomb, which destroys and sweeps away everything in its path, love builds, creates, and lays a firm foundation in the hearts of those who love and those who are loved. God entrusts this incredible power to human beings and teaches them how to use it.

Spiritual real estate

What is real estate? It is something that is practically impossible to move: buildings, apartments, and parcels of land. When people invest their money in real estate, they know that this property is not going anywhere. The only things that can deprive owners of their property are its complete destruction through war or a natural disaster.

"Spiritual real estate" is something within me that has a firm foundation and is built day by day. It is my character, which is constructed according to the same laws as a brick house, but from different materials.

Spiritual real estate is built from primary and supporting materials. The supporting material is good deeds. Good deeds

reveal what is taking place in my heart, but they do not reveal who I am. The fruit of the Holy Spirit reveals who I am within. Can evil people do good deeds? Yes. Can good people do good deeds? Yes. Is there a difference between these two groups if both do good deeds? There is, and it is very great, although it can often be seen only with spiritual discernment.

The value of all my deeds and accomplishments is determined solely by the love I put into each action. Suppose I decide to open a health retreat. I pray about it, find sponsors and staff, and welcome guests. Is this a good work? Yes, especially if people begin seeking Jesus after visiting my retreat and find Him. Does the good work I am doing count as my justification? No. Only my personal motive and my personal relationship with Christ in that work can be the basis of my justification.

Let us make the situation more difficult. The country's leadership changes, and the new government decides to take my health retreat away from me. What will remain? Experience and memories. What else? My character, formed under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This is my true real estate. I am blessed if I understand this and invest every possible resource in building this spiritual house properly. It will stand if it has a firm foundation and is built from durable material.

Love is the primary, enduring material that gives my spiritual real estate its true value and makes it strong enough to withstand every trial. In the same way, all my earthly possessions and all my works become holy unto the Lord when love motivates me, when I dedicate everything to God, seek fellowship with Him, and rejoice in His presence in my life. Everything I dedicate to God in a spirit of love becomes His most precious property, and He places His seal of approval upon it.

Feeling or principle?

I am often asked whether love is a principle or a feeling. A principle without feeling is dry theory. A feeling without principle is unstable. Consider marriage as an illustration. You may experience a storm of emotion and delight in the presence

of another person in your life, but that is not enough to build a family. Or you may understand the necessity and benefits of marriage without having any special feelings for the other person, hoping that feelings will arise after you start a family because you share the same faith and ministry. But this cannot be called the right approach either, because both feeling and principle are equally necessary for a happy marriage.

I have come to understand that love is neither a feeling nor a principle alone, but the union of both within my character. My character is who I am. God's seal is placed upon the character that determines my conduct in different circumstances more fully than either principle or feeling by itself. It will be a joy to know that the Lord has written the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbour" in my heart, and that above it stands God's seal, marked with the blood of Jesus Christ and placed there by His hand.

This was a very important revelation for me. I understood how important it is for love to define my character and become the driving force that directs my actions, thoughts, and feelings. God promises, "I will shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3, KJV). I did not know what love was until I began asking for that knowledge. When I began speaking about love, I became even more firmly established in it; and when I began writing about it, an even deeper understanding came. Now I know well how good, merciful, and wonderful the Lord is. Only He knows what awaits me ahead.

Happiness is the Kingdom of Heaven in the heart, and love is its manifestation. Eternity is worth fighting for and casting away everything impure! Let us love one another with a pure heart.

Love is the language of heaven

Love is the language of Heaven. We begin learning it when we realize that, by nature, we do not understand it and begin asking God for this gift. Jesus promised that we would speak "with new tongues" (Mark 16:17, KJV). He will be our Teacher. Without Christ, I will never understand this language, much less be able to speak it. Ask, and it shall be given you!

From personal experience, I can say that when God fills you with His love, you understand what is happening to you. You begin to see many things and to read people's hearts like an open book. This is the language of Heaven, speaking from heart to heart. Sadly, however, to many people you become a foreigner.

The gift of love is worth fighting for. Love is worth surrendering all your stained garments to obtain.

Love is a daily decision

Love has a beginning but no end; it is the eternal continuation of our experience. It is not so much an emotion as a constant principle that permeates every sphere of human life and becomes the motive that guides our decisions.

Love is the daily decision to love your neighbor, your friend, and your enemy. Yesterday's decision is not enough. It helps, but it does not determine what I will choose today. Jesus helps me make the right choice when I entrust my life to Him.

How wonderful it is to decide to love and then ask Jesus to place His seal upon that decision. And He does. Although I remain free to change my decision, I choose to love.

God is the standard of love

God Himself is the Author of love, and with this gift He offers Himself. He reveals Himself, inscribes His image upon the human heart, restores relationships, and becomes part of a person's thoughts and feelings without depriving that person of freedom of choice.

He desires to save everyone, but not everyone wants to be saved. He is ready to give His love to everyone—but do you want to love? Are you ready to love? Do you understand what love is and what awaits you? When you receive it, trials will also enter your life to establish you in love. But do not be afraid. Jesus has experienced all of this, and He will teach you. Do not expect everyone to accept or believe you when they know what you used to be like. Do not expect immediate acceptance. It will come with time as a reward for your faith and perseverance. No

one but Jesus knows what awaits you or what your life of love will become, but the fire of trial is guaranteed. Yet it will not harm you, and the flame will not scorch you. Jesus will always be near, and He will always ask you the same question: “Do you want to love this person today?” In response to your decision, He will give you strength and grace. He will also give you so many friends that you will simply be amazed.

Love is a conscious and purposeful action of the mind toward a particular person. Once that person has entered your life, it is no longer possible to be rid of him—and there is no need to do so.

Another name for love

How many names do we mention in the course of a day, a week, or a month? Yet there is one name that bears incredible power and authority: Jesus. There was a time in my life when I did not know this name and had no interest in it. Without knowing them personally, I considered those who bore it strange and downtrodden people.

Then light entered my life, illuminated my mind, and gave me hope for a better life. I became a believer in God’s mercy. I read books about God, came to know Him through my experiences, and discovered His power and authority. He introduced me to Jesus. He taught me to wage spiritual warfare and win victories, not by my own strength but by the power of Jesus. He taught me to resist the power of sin and live in the freedom purchased for me at the cost of the life of His beloved Son, Jesus. At some point in my life, Jesus became the Lord of my life. I myself gave Him this place in my heart, and every morning of each new day I ask Him to remain there.

I discover new and beautiful qualities of His character and marvel at how tender, tactful, wise, honest, pure, friendly, courteous, meek, kind, just, impartial, attentive, compassionate, responsive, sensitive, patient, pleasant, cheerful, calm, happy, benevolent, truthful, strong, and faithful He is. The list could go on and on. And He is my personal Friend. I have never heard His audible voice, but I hear it with my heart. My conscience

knows Christ and trembles when He begins to speak to it. Sometimes I hear His voice and choose obedience. At other times, I sense His gentle influence in my heart but disregard it and continue on my own way; later I repent of my self-will. Yet He remains beside me and tenderly helps me continue forward.

Biblical truth is of great importance to me. I have read this Book of books extensively, and now what I have read comes to mind at the right time and in the right situation—to preserve me from trouble and evil, and to support, inspire, and encourage me. These words of life are always with me as my guide in a difficult situation and my hope when circumstances seem hopeless. Through the Bible, God speaks to my mind and heart and reveals Himself. Then, in daily life, He reminds me of everything I have read and helps me put it into practice. Yet I remain free to choose my own path. The Lord knows the final destination of my earthly journey and always leads me toward it, whatever the circumstances.

I know Jesus personally, have fellowship with Him, and entrust all my secrets to Him. I give Him all my cares and problems, and He gladly resolves them. He is my Friend, Whom I cherish and love deeply. He has never betrayed or abandoned me. He never grows tired of me and is always ready to spend as much time with me as I desire. He listens to everything I tell Him and never interrupts. He loves me with unconditional love. I see this, and it greatly strengthens me. Even when I cease to value myself in a difficult moment, He always respects me.

Christ teaches me the right habits and wants me to become like Him while preserving my individuality. He skillfully cleanses my heart of everything that displeases Him. At times it is very painful, but He is always near, assuring me that He has not rejected me, that He loves me, that He holds me by my right hand, and that He will not leave me.

Christ has welcomed me into His heart. He reveals the secrets of His soul to me and is not afraid to entrust me with knowledge of Himself. I now learn His love not from books but through my personal experience of life with Him and through my relationships with those around me. He shows me everything

love endures when it declares itself, and how love remains patient and rejoices.

In love, God reveals His true character; and when I love, I understand what a loving God feels. Great in His perfect love, He comes down to my level and reveals what I am able to understand, receive, and apply in my busy life. Love is true life itself—its meaning and its crown. Where there is no love, there are emptiness, vanity, darkness, and anguish of spirit.

I desire Jesus to be the closest and best Friend in each of your lives. He knows how to beautify life and fill it with meaning. Everything that distracts us from Him and separates us from Him is useless vanity.

Rays of love

Love is like rays of sunlight that pierce the darkness yet remain invisible until they strike a surface. When they do, they illuminate it, warm it, and give life. In the same way, a loving person will remain unnoticed until the one he loves opens the windows of his soul and his heart.

Heavenly gold

Love is heavenly gold, a currency that every living being throughout the universe is required to accept. On this sinful earth, the currency has limited circulation. Everyone who possesses it can expect persecution, so any surplus of this currency and all profits from its circulation are kept in the heavenly Bank, where the account holder has unrestricted access at any hour of the day or night.

There are many counterfeits of Heaven's currency. It is printed on clothing, sung about in songs, portrayed in movies, and spoken of with unclean lips. The world is tired of these counterfeits, yet it is not always ready to receive genuine love. But the Chief Treasurer of the universe requires all His clients to pay for everything with heavenly currency and allow Him to cover every loss. He teaches that it is better to make a mistake and pay too much than not to pay at all or to pay with counterfeit valuables.

The heavenly Bank is open to everyone. One of the principal requirements for opening an account is the complete acknowledgment that you have nothing, that you are naked and poor, and that you will take from the Bank only in order to give.

Friends, the doors are open. Come. Jesus is waiting!

We cannot deposit anything into the heavenly Bank. It operates like a bottomless pit: the more you take from it, the larger it becomes. Your account is measured by how much you have taken and given away. This is the treasure that can never perish. Heavenly mathematics differs noticeably from earthly mathematics.

$1 + 1 = 1$. An earthly family.

$1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. The heavenly Family.

$1 - 1 = 2$. Heavenly business.

$9 > 10$. Heavenly property.

Our heavenly treasure is determined by how much love we have taken in order to bring joy to someone's heart, speak the truth, and reveal God's image to others. All our good deeds will be evaluated by how thoroughly I have emptied Heaven's vault of love. Heaven's reserves are as inexhaustible as the ocean.

In Revelation 3, the faithful and true Witness named "the Amen" counsels us to buy gold tried in the fire so that we may become rich. This gold symbolizes the heavenly love that we lack. That is why we are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. What a faithful testimony!

Today is the time to consider what Heaven is offering us. We are counseled to buy this treasure. What can we pay for such riches? The only things Heaven is willing to accept are our stained garments and our thirst for everything pure, holy, and eternal. In return, Jesus promises that we will dine with Him, where there will be an abundance of delicious and nourishing food: the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, personal testimonies, and experiences.

Filled with love

Matthew 25 contains the parable of the ten virgins. They fall into two categories: the wise, who have oil, and the foolish, who do not.

We are accustomed to thinking that oil in the Bible symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit. Personally, I have found that this interpretation prevents me from looking further. Please forgive me, but I will offer one more definition of the oil: agape love.

In chapter 7 of the same Gospel, we read Christ's words: "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:23, KJV). The same words are addressed to the five foolish virgins. Love is the fulfilling of the law. The person who loves has fulfilled the law.

Love cannot be learned quickly; it is learned over a lifetime. For this reason, we cannot transfer our love to another person. God's love identifies me as belonging to Jesus. Through love, Jesus works within me, gives me the right thoughts, and speaks through me to those around me. He calls loving people wise because they have grasped the mystery of divine guidance in their lives and have come to know God within themselves.

The parable of the wise virgins echoes the message to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3, where Jesus counsels us to buy love and righteousness from Him while there is still time. He also says that He stands at the door and knocks, hoping that we will hear His knock and let Him in while the door remains open. Once the door closes forever, no one will be able to learn to love.

Love is a relationship

Love is the most proper attitude toward people and the foundation of right relationships between them. When such relationships are established, they endure forever. God is glorified when we love one another. He gives this love, and He blesses these relationships.

What does the enemy of the human soul do during this time? He prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking every opportunity to steal, kill, and destroy. He tries to convince people that genuine

love does not exist and that we will never be able to love as God expects us to love. Satan continually agitates the minds of those around us so that they accuse the person who loves them of hypocrisy. Yet you continue to love, because love never fails and never ceases. It brings many painful experiences into our lives, but after passing through every trial, we become stronger and more confident.

Love is not a land of pink hearts but a path of special trials, painful experiences, and victories—experiences that add gray hairs, temper a person's character, and make you responsive, friendly, and joyful.

As long as there is no close contact with another person, your love may go unnoticed. But when you touch that person's inner world and open your own heart, love begins to act and reveal itself. It respects the other person's freedom while seeking a path to that person's heart. Every person is unique and requires an individual approach. People with different characters and life stories understand different languages of love, or they may be forever closed to its voice.

For example, if I try to love Satan, where will that love lead me? I do not think I can expect love in return. But I will learn to respect him as a personal being while hating his deeds. I am not suggesting friendship with demons, but it is right to treat the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms with respect. They have the power to tempt those who receive them and are superior to us in many respects. My insults and mockery directed at them could complicate my life, which is already full of trials. Through my ignorance, I could draw their attention to myself and come under a special attack. But my respect for their freedom and my understanding of their status will protect me from their assaults.

We know that we must treat every earthly authority with respect and obey the laws until they come into conflict with God's commands. God expects us to obey and respect every earthly authority and law. The same principle is appropriate in the spiritual realm.

People around us may be possessed and controlled by unclean spirits. They may be so closely bound to the powers of darkness that they will never escape their influence—not because deliverance is inherently impossible, but because they have chosen such a life and have no intention of changing that choice. Jesus counsels us not to give that which is holy unto the dogs or cast our pearls before swine (see Matthew 7:6), but He does not teach us to turn away from such people and become their enemies, giving them occasion for evil thoughts. Even if Heaven were to pour out every blessing upon these unfortunate people, they would not repent, and this must be taken into account. Yet by their very existence, they can teach us unconditional love that never fails. We may have to carry the pain of rejection throughout our lives, but we must respect these people's choice.

Love does not stop; it sees new prospects for victory. And, of course, it flourishes where it is received, valued, and awaited. It has an inexhaustible source of strength in God.

To love is the most fascinating undertaking in a Christian's life. It reveals the depths of my heart and shows me my dependence on God. But the Lord does not drag me onto this path or force me to love. Instead, He gently counsels me to buy from Him everything necessary for victory and to open the door of my heart so that He may reign there. Come, Lord! May my heart be filled with You!

CHAPTER 4. THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF LOVE

When you love, you experience joy, blessing, and a sense of victory. You want to share the knowledge and experience that come with this gift from God. Yet in response, you often hear, "Those are only words—show me your deeds!"

Not every deed of love is visible to those around us. My decision to love someone involves an inner struggle, a search for new paths to that person's heart, control over my own thoughts and feelings, and both spiritual and material sacrifice. All of these are deeds! Yet the presence of deeds does not remove the need to speak about love. We rarely speak about love because we fear that others will suspect us of hypocrisy. But our fear is completely unfounded!

Love is not hypocrisy or a theatrical performance; it is a genuine life with God. We have become so unaccustomed to seeing love expressed in people that at times it seems to us that love does not exist at all. Even when we meet a loving person, we do not believe him. I used to respond in exactly this way. Now, however, all my attention is focused on understanding what measure of the gift of love each person possesses and, whenever possible, helping that person receive genuine love, which comes from God. How can this be done? I have no universal formula. But when I make it my goal and pray for my neighbor, God intervenes and helps.

If you receive God's gift of love, you will become like Jesus, and through you He will be able to accomplish great things and lead many people to the truth. Love is contagious: it breaks down the sinful resistance to righteousness and makes a person open and friendly.

Love changes the mind

People who have received the gift of love all say the same thing: "I used to think that I loved, but now I understand that I was mistaken!" I know this feeling, and I understand their joy. What a joy it is to watch them and see them becoming like the One in Whom they believe!

God's love changes your mind without depriving you of your individuality. It gently teaches you to make right decisions while preserving your freedom of choice. Once you have chosen the person you will love, love powerfully and swiftly fills your heart, driving out everything foreign and impure.

When I realized that I did not have pure love within me, I began asking for this gift, and God gave it to me. I also understood that the love I had received would be tested best within my family. That was when the most interesting part began.

In 2009, my wife and I were on the verge of divorce. This was one of the reasons that moved me to turn to God. Yet I wondered how I could love my wife, who felt like a spiritual stranger to me. Two years later, my wife and daughter left the church, but I continued to love them. The gift of love transforms the atmosphere in a family beyond recognition, so that you cannot simply walk away. Love answers the question, "What should I do?" and it always wins. It complains to no one about its hardships except Jesus, because loving is easier than hating.

My friends who have received the gift of love say with one voice that love for one's neighbor begins within one's own family. They all rejoice in the great and small victories they continually gain.

Love is victory. It does not know how to lose. You are not the one fighting this war; the One Who paid an exceedingly high price for you is fighting it.

The languages of love

We have all been given the gift of communication, through which we can express our thoughts aloud and share our blessings and love with others. But if I speak an unfamiliar language, all my efforts to explain something to someone will be in vain.

Brothers and sisters from Romania sometimes visit our church. They converse warmly with one another. They respond in kind to all my smiles, greetings, and handshakes, but that is where everything ends. All my attempts to befriend them are in vain

because, without knowing Romanian, I cannot communicate freely with them. If they learn German, I will be able to carry on a conversation with them, but we still will not have close and loving fellowship. I can say the same about Germans. No matter how much they may like me, they cannot be friends with me as long as they do not understand me.

Love cannot act in its full strength where its language is not understood. Each of us has a personal language of love and a particular way of perceiving this gift. When I speak to a person in a language familiar to him, he understands me perfectly.

In his book *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman identifies the following languages:

1. Words;
2. Touch;
3. Time;
4. Acts of service;
5. Gifts.

Perhaps words are not your language of love, and the thoughts in this book, clothed in words, sound to you like meaningless noise. Yet love cannot do without words. The Bible consists of the words of God. Jesus is the Word. Our words have an enormous influence upon a person's soul and mind. Prayer also consists of words, but those words set the power of God in motion. Do not be afraid to speak about your love. We were created in the image of God, and our words possess the ability to create and build up.

The prophet Isaiah says that God "confirmeth the word of His servant, and performeth the counsel of His messengers" (Isaiah 44:26, KJV).

Love is heavenly glue

Love is heavenly glue that binds our hearts together so that nothing in the world can tear them apart. The best thing we can do with this glue is cover ourselves with it from head to toe, so that others will stick to us forever. This is exactly what Paul

meant when he wrote, "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:14, KJV). The union of the Divine and the human into one whole is the bond of perfectness.

Power steering enables a person to turn even the heaviest steering wheel. If I ask God for the gift of love and make the decision to love, He applies His supernatural power and accomplishes the impossible. Therefore, I invite you to buy heavenly glue and begin using it.

Love passes from person to person

First Corinthians 15:33 says, "Evil communications corrupt good manners." It follows that good companionship strengthens good character. Become part of a good community so that you can show love to its members. If no such community is nearby, become someone's friend. Love needs fellowship in order to express itself.

In many of you, love has already taken root and begun to grow. Soon you will understand that it needs an outlet. It presses outward and cannot remain silent or alone. This fire cannot be hidden.

Jesus desires to reveal Himself through me. People first see a person's figure and eyes, hear his speech, perceive his spirit, interests, and goals, and personally experience his friendliness and love. This requires close personal contact. Merely observing someone does not allow us to understand him fully. If I feel affection for a fellow believer, this means that God desires us to become friends and to recognize His image in one another. May the Lord reveal to us the meaning of the commandment, "That ye love one another" (John 15:12, KJV).

I need you

Relationships bind people to one another and imply certain actions. Through his actions, a selfish person says and shows, "I do not need you! I need your money, your strength, your time—everything you possess—but I do not need you yourself!" This message can be clearly heard and seen.

Love, by contrast, lets a person know that he is dear to you and that you need him, that you see in him a friend created to bring joy to your heart throughout eternity. For a person to understand this, you must first recognize that a living soul stands before you; there must also be contact, communication, and acceptance. When I understand this truth and ask God to change my heart, my actions will say, "I need you!"

When I ask something of another person, he not only hears my request but also sees my attitude toward him. If I display the right attitude and the right spirit, he will willingly fulfill my request. Even one-sided love accomplishes much in a relationship. Therefore, we must learn to hear what we say, how we say it, and why we say it.

There are traditional churches in this world. How does a person feel when entering one of their houses of worship? He understands that he has entered a special place. The interior is striking in its luxury and splendor. Majestic singing fills the sanctuary, and the service appears dignified and beautiful.

Traditions hold people firmly in their power, helping them perform certain actions automatically. Yet there is also a serious shortcoming: a person realizes that, within this entire system of religious worship, no one needs him personally. This sense of insignificance means that, after feeling awe before the sanctuary, its furnishings, singing, and service, people leave the church and continue living as they did before.

The gospel carries a completely different message: "I need you!" Jesus Christ says to people, "I came to save you! I need you so deeply that I want to see you throughout eternity. And even now, I want to give you the salvation and eternal life that you need so greatly!"

Together with God's love comes the understanding that people who have accepted His message and entered into covenant with Him become my spiritual brothers and sisters and my close friends. We are all children of one heavenly Father, Who created us, and children of one earthly father, Adam, who gave us life. We are a family.

When I communicate with people, their ears hear words about God's love, but their hearts hear whether I need them or not. That is why I try to show them that I need them as brothers and sisters, as fellow heirs of a better life and better relationships. Unfortunately, many obstacles prevent this message from being conveyed properly. We make excuses: "I have no time," "We will discuss it later," or "I am busy!" Today, without saying a word, we can make people understand that we do not need them; we need only bury ourselves in our phones. Yet people are waiting for us. They long to be needed and loved; they cry out for it, and genuine love will surely hear that cry and answer it. Love will not stop until it reaches a friend's heart and settles there forever!

Love changes the world

Living in this world and working in secular businesses, we inevitably encounter a consumer-like attitude toward us. If you do not make a profit for your employer, he terminates your contract. If you are a skilled worker, people will try to squeeze everything they can from you until you burn out at work or finally retire. This is the world in which we live. The Lord knows this and does not condemn us for working in the interests of this world. He blesses each of us wherever we work, giving us wisdom, strength, patience, and knowledge.

My former boss valued me highly as a professional, but he had no interest in me as a person or as someone who knew God and the Bible. In such a system, you feel that no one needs you. This is a serious spiritual deficiency of this world. Most people feel that the world treats them merely as something to be used, and many fall into despair, depression, and dependence on stimulants.

God did not intend for this world to proclaim the good news. He intended His church to proclaim it, while the world feeds people the husks meant for swine—the food that the prodigal son in Christ's parable longed so eagerly to eat.

Sometimes people leave the church and go into the world. But the world will give them nothing except death. People lose their

health and die, leaving behind everything they earned and accumulated. As wise Solomon wrote, all is vanity. We do not know who will receive the results of our labor. But God gives us something better: hope. In this world He prepares us for a better life, where there will be no exploitation, violence, deception, or sin. He also gives us love, which fills our lives with meaning here and now. This love will also be needed throughout eternity.

The one who loves builds the Kingdom of Heaven in his life, among those around him, and in this world. Love draws souls and gives hope for something better and lasting. To love is to live the life of Heaven already here and to fulfill God's purpose in this world.

Love and loneliness

The stronger and deeper your love becomes, the less your family, loved ones, and friends understand you. They see your changed attitude toward them and toward life but cannot evaluate it correctly. Very few accept you, while some begin to hate you openly and blame you for all their failures. You realize that you are alone on this path and that the farther you go, the fewer companions you have. There is no point in turning back, while the road ahead only grows narrower. Yet this is the path of happiness, and upon it I notice the bloody footprints of the One Who, while living as a Man, experienced all of this and now teaches me. As I look to Him, I understand that there is nothing new in my experience. He was misunderstood in the same way, and even now not everyone understands Him.

Yet loneliness contains a blessing: you begin to communicate more with Jesus, to leave behind everything unnecessary, and to think more about the happiness of others. Love sees everything—or at least much—yet it does not condemn. Instead, it accepts your neighbor as he is and seeks a closer relationship. When your neighbor understands that you are a friend and that your love for him is unconditional, he will begin to open his heart. The result will be a unity that brings joy.

God is very wise, and His love for us is constant and deep. He seeks those who will receive this love and give it to others. As long as you love, you are victorious. But instead of pride, humility fills you as you realize that this is God's gift, which must be carefully preserved. To love throughout one's entire life is endless happiness! Through the love of Jesus, many people have become family to me, and I rejoice that these close relationships will continue throughout eternity.

Jesus loves you! With Him, you will never be lonely!

Members of one body

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Corinthians 12:13-14, KJV).

Who are we in relation to one another? Can I tell a sister that I do not need her because she is not an eye? Or can I say that you do not need me because I am not a foot in the body of Christ? We are all members of one body. We have different functions and responsibilities, different gifts and abilities, and different perspectives on various ministries. We are all different, yet within the body of Christ we all need one another, and together we form one living organism.

When someone has not attended church for a long time, we are concerned about that person. When someone leaves Christ, we feel a special pain. We understand that this person has gone where there is no happiness, peace, or joy in the Lord—a joy that perhaps he never experienced. We do not know why he left, but his departure causes us deep pain because we are all children of one Father, brothers and sisters. As it is written, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26, KJV). Conversely, when someone in the church has reason for joy, we all rejoice and say, "Praise God."

The human body is designed so that nothing within it is unnecessary. Likewise, none of us can be unnecessary in the body of Christ. Even the person among us who does nothing at

all and only creates problems is needed, because through that person the Lord trains us and teaches us to love and be patient. That person, too, is a member of God's family.

Every one of us has received a gift from the Lord, a special talent. Unfortunately, at times we do not know what these talents are. Or we know them but do not use them because we find no opportunity. Do not be afraid if your talents are not needed at present. The Lord knows when to use them for His glory and for your growth.

God's love within me cannot live in isolation; it needs people toward whom it can be directed. Love does not wait until someone needs it but pours itself out upon the righteous and the unrighteous alike. To be completely happy, a person needs someone whom he can make happy.

Love needs everyone

God gives us the Holy Spirit, Who leads us into this world, which is full of temptations and enticements. At the same time, God promises to protect us, to give us the words to speak, and to provide the strength we need so that we can bring His message to people. Above all, our proclamation of the gospel must communicate this message: "I need you!"

Do not be afraid if you encounter rejection from members of your family, relatives, or brothers and sisters in the church. Do not be alarmed! We may not be able to change their attitude, but we can conduct ourselves in such a way that sooner or later they will understand that they need us. We can pray for a person, and in response to our prayer God will change that person's circumstances and way of thinking.

In one way or another, we all depend upon one another. God designed this interdependence because only within a family can we develop fully. The church is God's family. Even a troubled church is better than peaceful loneliness. Different people come into the church, and through them we are trained and shaped. If we abide with Christ, we see that the problem lies not in the people who come to church, but in our relationships with them and with Christ. Above all, God wants me to have a personal

relationship with Him. My relationship with God will inevitably become a blessing to my church as well.

Our greatest joy is our love for God and for one another. Every parent knows that when children love one another, there is less reason to fear for their safety or their future. This is the spirit that will help them stand firm through every trial.

God desires such a close relationship with us that Isaiah 54:5 says, "For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall He be called" (KJV). He wants to be our Husband—that is, the One Who is closest to us in spirit. It brings Him joy when we respond to Him with our love. He has done everything for us; He loves us and accepts us. He needs us. Imagine how sorrowful it is for Him to hear the words, "But I do not need You!" What unbearable pain is caused to God by those for whom He died. I once spoke these words to God as well. I did not believe in Him and did not know what He had prepared for me. It is frightening to imagine what would have become of me if I had not responded to God's call. Now I delight in fellowship with Him, and I know that the delight is mutual. God is immeasurably glad and happy that I have accepted His love. He desires to see the whole world saved.

There are three kinds of relationships that form a heavenly triangle:

1. God and I. This relationship resembles a two-way street. God gives Himself to us, and we give ourselves to Him. He gives us all the riches of the universe and His grace; we give Him our sins.
2. My neighbor and I. We are equals and learn from one another.
3. My neighbor and God. My neighbor's relationship with God also has an influence.

I work with unbelievers and try to love them as much as I am able. They see that I am not like everyone else, that I am not of this world. To some extent, they like this. Yet I also understand

that our relationships are incomplete because they do not know the One Whom I know and have no relationship with the Savior. Therefore, our relationships cannot be called close friendships, because we have different spirits. In God's family—the church—these relationships are ideal. Although we are all different, we are all children of one Father. In one way or another, we need one another. This is part of God's plan of salvation. As we shape one another, we become witnesses of God's grace before the entire universe and this world. God's hand places His seal upon our character, and the Spirit of God bears much fruit.

Love sees a friend in everyone

I often think about my friends, rejoice that they are in my life, and reflect upon our relationships. I have come to understand that they have become an inseparable part of my life. Most interestingly, many of them do not consider me their friend, yet I see them as mine. I am inspired by the thought that our friendship will continue throughout eternity.

I will tell you a secret: I love my friends. Unfortunately, not all of them believe it, but I understand that without love our friendship would not be genuine.

The love Christ gives is as tender as a flower and brings beauty to life, yet it is also as solid as a rock and can withstand every trial. A person who has received love from the Lord begins to look for opportunities to show it to others. At some point, he realizes that he must speak about it, because not everyone can recognize the true motive behind a particular deed. When he gathers courage and begins openly to declare this principle in his relationships with others, he becomes extremely vulnerable. Many then begin trying to "save" him. But to help someone who loves, you must first plead with God for love, examine it carefully, experience its action and influence in your own life, and show it where doing so seems impossible. Only then can you discern how sincere the person you intend to save truly is and help him be freed from what is merely human and receive what is Divine.

How grateful I am to the Lord for this wonderful gift offered to every one of us! What a blessing it is to love those who seem to be needed by you alone and by no one else! What joy it is to discover a friend in a stranger and love that person without his having earned it, sometimes even against his will, and then watch his heart change. This is the best thing that can happen to us!

Love for friends

Jesus calls us to love one another. He makes this appeal before His death, as though summing up His teaching. He even ends His prayer with these words: "And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26, KJV).

He does not merely advise us to love one another. He longs for it with all His heart and pleads with the Father to give us this gift. Before His death, He thinks of me. He prays for me to receive this treasure.

Earlier, Christ says, "This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12-13, KJV). Christ's death was the highest expression of love. Yet you do not necessarily have to die for your friends to understand that you love them with the highest love.

My soul is my life, and my life is the time God has allotted to me in which to prepare for eternity. Money, in essence, is also time—the time spent earning it. Therefore, when I give my friends my time and money, think about them and pray for them, communicate with them, and help them, I am showing the highest love. Sometimes I set aside all my affairs simply to be with my friends, look into their eyes, hear their voices, and quietly rejoice that they are in my life. Jesus teaches me to love them and to spend my life on them. I agree with Him. If Jesus teaches us something, it always leads to goodness and happiness. Therefore, friends, I urge you as well to accept His counsel.

Love one another! What could be better?

The song of those redeemed by love

Revelation chapter 14 says, "And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth" (verse 3, KJV).

The redeemed sing a song that no one else can sing. What does this mean?

A person who has received love from God and shares it with others sings a heavenly song of love that only one who loves can sing. The angels know this song, but they do not have the experience of struggling against and overcoming evil that belongs to a person filled with the Holy Spirit. Only someone who has lived through this experience can tell of it.

I was present at the birth of my daughter and witnessed my wife's anguish. I can tell you what I observed, but I did not give birth and do not know what my wife experienced. If she and I were to sing about childbirth, whose song would be more authentic?

Friends, ask God for love, and do not rest until you receive it. When it is given, you will know it without any proof. Then you will be able to sing the song of love as no one else can. May the Lord help us!

Love loves to give

At times, our church takes special offerings for various mission projects, and I am asked to hand envelopes to those who wish to contribute and raise their hands. As I walk through the church, I look at their faces. I have noticed that those who raise their hands shine with joy. The others look down at the floor or turn their eyes away so they will not have to look at me. Most of them have very sad faces.

At one point, God showed me that what matters is not the amount of the donation, but taking part and the love you put into your gift. Since then, I have tried to support every project and respond to every appeal. The most meaningful time to give

is when you yourself are in need. Even then, giving is easy when you understand that you are merely a steward of the possessions, not their owner. The Lord always finds ways to multiply them. Yet even when I am unable to give to charity, the Lord gives me love for all the people He sends into my life.

Unrequited love

As we have already said, true love longs to give itself. Sometimes, however, people are not ready to receive it, and this brings bitter tears and suffering to a loving heart.

Good angels continually care for us, shielding us from danger and illness, dispelling the darkness, rejoicing in our victories, and grieving when they see us fall. They know all our attachments and habits very well. In spite of all this, they love us deeply.

Imagine this scene: the Second Coming. The righteous are resurrected, receive new bodies, and ascend to Heaven to Jesus. He so completely holds everyone's attention that we see no one but Him. The heavenly city. The sea of glass. The millennial kingdom. While we are engaged in spiritual growth, the angels stand nearby, ready to come to our aid at any moment. There are millions of them, and each possesses perfect love, wisdom, and knowledge that he is ready to share. Perhaps in their hearts the angels dream of becoming my close friends, giving themselves to me, and teaching me all they know. Yet they respect my choice and modestly stand aside, waiting for years or centuries until I notice them. At the same time, they rejoice that we are in the company of Jesus. Their hearts overflow with love and long to give.

A saved person lives by the same laws of Heaven as the heavenly beings. He receives God's love and wants to share it with someone. Love keeps growing, while those willing to receive it are not so numerous. The desire to help, serve, and give encounters the closed door of the human will. After knocking on that door once again, you carry your sorrow to Jesus. He shows you His pierced hands and comforts you with the assurance that He feels the same way. Yet this is a special

sorrow—one that does not destroy your heart but draws you closer to God, Who understands you and loves you deeply. The greater the love and understanding, the greater the sorrow.

Love without expecting anything in return

Love is a special gift, and God wants us to understand what this gift is and how it works. When we read about love, we expect brothers and sisters to appear who will accept and love us, and we will love them in return. But God says, "I want you to love first and, like a tree, to grow and bear fruit!"

God sent His Son into the world to show us how to love and where love may lead. Love usually brings many friends into your life, but you may also be killed because you love. Paradoxically, God's love revealed through us always encounters opposition. Most surprisingly, this opposition comes from those who seemingly should be the first to recognize your love. In the family, these may be a husband, wife, or children; in the church, brothers and sisters.

People commonly believe that happiness means being understood and loved. Experience shows, however, that even when you are genuinely loved, you are not necessarily happy. Is humanity happy because God loves it? Are people happy that God cares for them, renews His mercy toward them every morning, does not punish them for their sins, and is patient with them? People often do not even understand this. If I told a random passerby that God loves him, how would he respond? Most likely, he would look at me with suspicion. I can even tell many people in the church that God loves them, yet their hearts will not be filled with happiness.

But God wants us to love without expecting anything in return. When we love, we are happy. Is God happy because He loves us? He is!

There are people whom I truly love and for whom I pray, yet they hate me. This no longer surprises me. When you begin to love someone who has not been sanctified by the Spirit of God and does not understand the nature of love, that person may easily speak harshly to you. Do not be afraid! Sooner or later,

God will open that person's eyes and help him receive your love. This is why God calls us to love our enemies. In 1 Corinthians 13:5, we read that love "seeketh not her own"; it does not demand love in return (KJV).

At the same time, this law applies: "What you sow, you will also reap." If I sow many seeds in my garden, many will sprout. But if I sow one seed, only one will sprout. A sunflower will never grow from a pumpkin seed. When we sow love, sooner or later it will return to us as a harvest. But do not expect this to happen immediately.

The world does not always accept God's love, but God is happy that He loves this world and has done everything for its salvation. He is happy whenever someone responds to this love. The same is true of our love for people—do not expect a quick response! When it does come in the form of love returned, thank God!

Love sprouts in its season

At first, love is like a tiny, defenseless seed. When it falls into good soil, it sprouts, takes root, and grows strong. In time, leaves appear, then flowers, and afterward small green fruit. Soon the harvest ripens, bringing joy to everyone. But woe to those who hurry to pick the fruit. When they fail to find it, they become disappointed and believe they have been deceived. Do not hurry! Everything has its appointed time. If your new friend is guarded, it does not mean he cannot hear you. He is simply unaccustomed to being loved. He watches you closely to see how sincere and consistent you are. Then he opens his heart and lets you into his world. Be careful. Another person's heart is very fragile within, and it will receive nothing from you except unconditional love. Jesus will give you wisdom and teach you how to act rightly.

Jesus is ready to teach us. It pleases Him to give us His love and teach us to love in this way. The union of His efforts and mine is the key to success. Every person has enough room in the soul for the priceless gift of love.

What love does

What does love do in a person's life? What does it do in my life?
Why is it needed?

1. Love reveals God's character to me in all its beauty. Through the example of my own life, I see how tenderly and lovingly God treats all humanity, and especially those who have entered into covenant with Him. I fall in love with my Creator and begin to love Him with a pure heart. Love cleanses me from defilement, clears my spiritual vision, and enables me to see all the beauty of God's character and to know the Eternal One.

2. Love restores the image of God in me and makes me like Him in character and in my attitude toward people and creation. Love becomes the driving motive that enters every area of life and directs my thoughts and feelings. It gives me the mind of Christ and binds me to Him with strong bonds of love and friendship that no one can ever break.

3. Love vindicates God's character in my eyes and before the whole world and the entire universe. I am ready to testify before everyone that His law is holy and serves humanity's good; that God's requirements are wise, kind, and just; and that keeping God's will is better than anything the sinful world offers. My life of love is the best testimony that God is right.

4. Love removes the presence of sin from my life. It sweeps away all the rubbish and washes every stain from my character, making me fit for eternal life among holy beings. It makes my speech and thoughts pure and clear. It fills me with light, meaning, and happiness. A life without sin becomes the norm and brings joy and delight. Love shows you what you have not yet attained but can attain in this life. It gives hope for a better future. Where love lives, there is no room for sin.

5. Love teaches me the great and unsearchable things I do not know. It reveals God's plans for me and for this world and prepares me to meet the Great Teacher, Who is coming soon.

I choose love. Here I stand; I can do no other. May the Lord help me!

Immersed in love

Imagine two dirty plastic jam jars. They are dirty inside and out. One has a lid, while the other is open. Now these two jars are thrown into the ocean. At first, both float on the surface. They are in the water, but the water is not in them. As they remain in the ocean, both jars become clean on the outside, yet in the sunlight it is easy to see that they are dirty inside. With the first rain or storm, the open jar fills with water. It becomes so clean that it is difficult to distinguish from the water around it. Because it is light, it does not sink to the bottom but continues to float just beneath the surface. The sealed jar remains on the ocean's surface, carried by the winds and dashed against the rocks. The ocean waits for a change in its life, longing to fill it and cleanse it with its water, but cannot do so because the lid is closed.

Our Lord stands at the closed lid of our heart and knocks. He waits for His voice to be heard and for the soul to open. He has clothed Himself in love and longs to work within us with all His power. By believing in Him, I immerse myself in His love, delight in it, and bear abundant fruit. I can know that He is in me when I see Him imparting the qualities of His character to me and teaching me to love my neighbor.

An obvious difference

During my twenty-seven years of driving, I have owned several cars. Until recently, I drove a small car and was content that it simply ran. But the time came to replace it, and I decided to buy a reliable car that was not too expensive, would not break down often, and would protect me in an accident. I prayed, consulted many mechanics and experts, and finally found the right one. When I bought this car and began driving it, I immediately appreciated its advantages: comfort, convenience, power, attractive design, fuel efficiency, and safety. Now I enjoy driving and do not want to return to the old model. I think other drivers understand me. Still, if I ever had to go back, it would not be a serious problem.

This resembles the difference between the love I once had within me and the love Jesus gave me in answer to my prayers. I used to live like everyone else, love to the best of my ability,

struggle unsuccessfully through trials, and believe I had reached the limit of my spiritual growth. When I understood my helplessness and began asking God for true love, I received something better. Now I delight in the safety, beauty, and power of the gift I received from God. What I fear most is returning to my former way of life. Now even the most difficult and painful trials bring me joy because Jesus goes before me. He supports me and lifts me up in difficult moments.

Love preserves peace

Once I missed a flight, yet I decided to remain happy. Since then, the conscious decision to be happy and not lose heart has helped me in every situation.

On another occasion, I arrived at the airport on time, only to learn at check-in that my plane had departed eleven hours earlier than the time printed on my ticket. The ticket issued to me contained a typographical error that I had not noticed. Yet I remained joyful, even though I did not know what to do next. I wanted to buy a new ticket, but they refused to sell me one because too little time remained before departure. I arranged with the check-in agent for them to wait for me, and a new ticket was issued. Then they refused to accept my luggage because only one bag was permitted and I had two. Even then, my heart remained at peace, and that problem was resolved as well. While traveling, I reflected on the situation. My journey had a purpose—to meet friends, receive God's blessings, and perhaps be a blessing to someone. My friends were praying for me, and every problem was successfully resolved.

How grateful I am to the Lord that He opens doors and shows a way out of every situation!

Love is pure

Love for people, friends, and neighbors has a powerful influence upon their minds. Not everyone accepts it immediately, but that does not stop love. Love studies another person's soul and looks for places in the heart where it can settle, take root, and bear much fruit. A person may need days, months, years, or perhaps an entire lifetime to receive it. Some

hearts will never accept love and will actively resist it, spreading gossip and slander. Yet love's attitude toward these wandering souls will remain unchanged, and hope that they will receive it will inspire special prayers and "groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26, KJV).

There will certainly also be people who receive love, delight in it, and wait for new expressions of it. In the lives of many friends, you may be the first and only person who loves them, and these souls will receive everything love gives with special joy. When your friends become convinced of the sincerity of your motives, they will respond with affection of their own. But love's purpose is not to evoke love in return from your friends; it is to reveal God's character to people. God holds every one of His representatives in this world to a very high standard. He is either glorified in His children or dishonored through them.

True love is poured out upon men and women, the sick and the healthy, the young and the old, the poor and the rich. Yet when directed toward someone of the opposite sex, it maintains appropriate distance in the relationship and gives no occasion to break the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." The enemy of souls cannot overcome your decision to love and be a friend, but he may try to distort your love by causing people of the opposite sex to fall in love with you and tormenting their hearts with thoughts of you. This may lead them to break the law in their thoughts and cause them genuine anguish. Special wisdom is needed to help such people let go of these feelings and thoughts and guide the relationship in the right direction. Boundaries in personal communication and an honest conversation can be very helpful in explaining that your attitude has a purpose other than feeding someone's sentimentality and stirring up emotions. At times, all communication may need to stop temporarily, but this must be done with the utmost tact. Your friend may also interpret your love as sinful and establish boundaries to avoid giving you an occasion for temptation. Yet your understanding of purity in relationships must never become a barrier that prevents God from influencing another person's heart.

Among Jesus' disciples were many men who followed Him everywhere, but there were also women who ministered to Him, washed His feet, brought children to Him, and sat at His feet. Christ received them all. He taught that whoever comes to Him, He "will in no wise cast out" (see John 6:37, KJV).

God gives us the gift of love for our neighbor. A neighbor is not only someone who lives and works nearby, but also someone who is close to you in spirit and interests. At times, a person lives on the other side of the earth yet understands and accepts you as perhaps no one else does. I have friends whom I have never met in person, yet we communicate, share common interests and plans, confide the secrets of our lives, and trust one another. This friendship has continued for years without any prospect of meeting in person, but God's Spirit has made us friends, and we love one another.

Fortunately, modern means of communication allow fuller interaction, but virtual communication can never replace personal contact. If you have the opportunity, I encourage you to attend spiritual camp meetings in order to make new friends.

Love is pure in thought and feeling. It gives no occasion for lawlessness to those who seek one. It breaks down the barriers that keep people in loneliness, has pure intentions, and lives in pure hearts. Such people are called blessed, for they shall see God. They will see Him not only in Heaven but also in their own hearts, and they will understand the great responsibility toward their neighbors and the world that has been entrusted to them.

The light of love

When the Lord gives a person the gift of His love, that person becomes like a lighted candle that gives light to everyone in the house. To some, this small light becomes a source of blessing and inspiration; to others, it becomes an irritation. The brighter the light, the stronger the opposition from the powers of darkness.

Because of my profession, I have been responsible for the life and health of those under my supervision for many years. Sometimes, to reduce the risk of worker injury, I must

intervene and impose restrictions until the hazards have been removed. Life teaches many lessons, especially when accidents happen because of human foolishness or greed. As a result, the mind becomes trained to anticipate danger and reacts immediately when it sees a violation. If I have authority in a particular situation, I do everything possible to protect people's lives and health.

Spiritual matters work the same way. When you know the truth and understand how the enemy operates, you sometimes must respond quickly and make corrections. But the spiritual realm is very delicate because we are dealing with a person's will, and danger may be well concealed. Your attempts to avert disaster may lead to conflict and strife.

To some people whose lives I saved, I became a stubborn, angry supervisor who did not know how to work with people—but their children still have a father who is alive and well.

One day, the first snow fell. My coworkers saw a little girl climb through an attic window onto the roof of the house across the street, trying to gather as much snow as possible. One worker opened the window and shouted very loudly, "No! Go back!" Terrified, the girl returned to the room and firmly closed the window. She probably watched our building fearfully for the rest of the day. Meanwhile, the workers watched all day to make sure she did not climb onto the roof again. What motivated my coworkers? Anger? Malice? Arrogance? Clearly, love moved them, but to the little girl they were mean men.

Do not expect everyone to interpret your love for people correctly. You may dream of this, but real life is different. Very often, a loving person may be accused of being the embodiment of evil. Love does not justify its actions and often absorbs the blow itself. It acts quickly and gently. Saving a human life is always and everywhere a priority. Love saves a person's soul from eternal death and from the power of sin and darkness, and gives peace to the heart.

Not everyone will understand you or appreciate your love, but God forgets nothing. He places the seal of His approval upon

your love. Those who love will certainly receive their reward from God.

The flow of love

When love leaves the land of silence and makes itself known, those around it often do not know what to do with this declaration or how to respond. Some simply watch it, some test its sincerity and strength, and some cover it with mud. Some turn away, while others rejoice and dream of receiving it. Still others rush into its embrace and become deeply attached to it.

At first, love's timid movements resemble a small stream seeking a path to the heart through the barriers of human character. But this stream begins in the ocean, which gives it added momentum as it moves toward human souls. As much as love may long for a smooth path, it inevitably passes through difficult places where it is rejected or accused of hypocrisy. Yet it moves calmly onward, drawing fresh strength and resources for victory from the ocean.

In reality, there are many streams of love. They flow in the same direction, and as they cross the desert beneath the scorching rays of criticism and ridicule, they also nourish one another.

On the way to its goal, love continually encounters swamps of worldly enticements and temptations that seek to swallow all its resources. Love resists them and flows onward, gaining priceless experience that teaches it to foresee obstacles and ask for help in advance so that it may overcome. And it does overcome!

The current of love grows stronger, and one beautiful day the stream becomes a full-flowing river that fears no obstacle. Love knows its Source. It does not take pride in its victories but rejoices in them and fills every low place, carrying friendship and happiness with it.

Love opens the windows of the soul

A stone flies toward a window, but when it reaches its target, it breaks nothing. Why? Because the window was open.

Love throws open the windows of the soul, leaving it exposed. It does not fear stones or being shattered. People who do not love keep the windows of their souls closed, and every stone thrown at them creates many problems. But love does not defend itself; it calls gently, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink" (John 7:37, KJV). Jesus was the most open of all people, and as we behold Him, we too become open.

Love cleanses

Imagine meeting a homeless man and beginning to care for him—bringing him food, talking with him, and encouraging him. You put all your love and tenderness into your interaction with him, and he begins to open up to you. He is glad to know you, looks forward to seeing you, and listens to you with pleasure.

There is a problem, however: he has not bathed, shaved, or had a haircut for many years. Moreover, he wears and sleeps in the same clothes, which he never washes. As a result, he has an unpleasant odor.

But your new friend sees your love and begins to trust you. He is ready to sit at your feet and learn. At some point in your friendship, he asks what he can do to make you happy. He says he is ready to carry out any task you give him and work until he is exhausted.

What would you advise him to do?

I think it is safe to assume that you would advise him to bathe, get a haircut, and exchange his rags for clean clothes from you. But he has grown so accustomed and attached to his clothing that he cannot comply with your request. Besides, all his friends wear the same kind of clothing, and he does not want to look different, or they will make fun of him.

Will you accept this homeless man as he is? Will you be able to bring him into your home? I believe your counsel will become even more urgent and persuasive. Eventually, he will yield and do what you asked. Your joy will know no bounds. You will take before-and-after photographs, send them to all your friends, and post them on social media. There will be great rejoicing!

Who is this homeless man? It is you, my friend! You have the same problem he does: you wear the same kind of clothing and do not want to part with it, or you do not know how. You are being strongly advised to bathe, cut your hair, shave, and change your clothes. What will you say? The decision is yours.

Love loves at all times

Imagine a young woman and a young man who meet, fall in love, and decide to build a family together in the future. They spend time as friends and get to know each other. They call the mutual feeling between them love and declare it in conversations and letters. We see how perfectly suited they are for one another and eagerly await their wedding so that we may rejoice in their happiness. We believe that love binds them together and will last a lifetime.

Then a crisis arises in their relationship. They see each other in an unflattering light and conclude that they should not continue together. Character traits that were previously hidden and appeared only during the trial now provoke dislike or even disgust. Only a few couples try to save the relationship; most prefer to end it forever. Does this sound familiar?

This often happens in life, and beautiful feelings turn into painful memories. But where is love? It had hoped to take root and bless the relationship, but pride mercilessly tore it out and threw it away.

True love, by contrast, loves at all times. Having once become a friend, it continues to act as a friend and loves with a pure heart. Love studies its friend and treasures all his strengths while also seeing his weaknesses. True love builds relationships even when they appear to have been destroyed. A loving heart never condemns; it looks for reasons to excuse even bad actions because it understands human weakness. A friend remains a friend even in a crisis. Love always desires its friend's happiness, prays for him, and seeks opportunities to take part in his life and make it better and more joyful.

If I do not have such love in my life, I must pray for it and make decisions that build my relationships with people instead of

destroying them. God, Who is rich in mercy and love, will answer my greatest need and show me "great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3, KJV).

CHAPTER 5. THE JOYFUL WORK OF LOVE

God's will is for us to love everyone. He gave us the command, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44)—that is, those who are hostile toward us. They too must be loved. In fact, they are the best teachers and examiners of our love. They make no allowances for us. They require us to complete our assignment correctly while behaving in whatever way they please.

I rejoice that the laws of Heaven are at work on earth and that we can live by them even now. I see the difference between the person I was several years ago and the person I am today. God allows me to fall so that the evil living within me may be exposed. Through such experiences, God reveals the sin hidden within us because He wants to free us from it. To behold God's love and truly love others, we must have a pure heart. When you harbor resentment, envy, or anger in your heart, you cannot reveal God's character and His love.

"All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:27-30, KJV). Jesus calls us to take His yoke upon ourselves and learn from Him. He left us a perfect example of love.

When I ask God to teach me to love, He teaches me. I read the Bible and see on every page God's love for imperfect human beings—a love that changes people. God's love then begins to enter every area of my life: church, work, and family. I try to seek God's counsel in everything, and I see how He helps me. Over time, God's love becomes part of our character. But this is hard work because our sinful nature resists spiritual transformation. At the same time, this work brings joy because, in response to our decisions and actions, God pours streams of His grace upon us.

When I ask God to teach me to love, I give Him authority to teach me. Through particular circumstances in life, God changes my habits and tears down within my mind what displeases Him. I give Him the right to do this. God has limited Himself by my choice. From the lives of other people, I see how right God is in His counsel. I see the disasters that overtake those who travel the broad way, and I also see the blessings of those who walk the narrow way. God is right, and we are wrong. God's ways are not our ways. God makes no mistakes. Who knows better than the Creator of humanity what will be for our good? As I read and listen to the books of the Spirit of Prophecy, I am amazed by the wisdom with which God sends us light. Through the examples of other people, He points out my problem and my sin, shows me the way out, and tells me what to do. First of all, I must turn to Jesus.

The best way to learn love is to study the character of Christ. We see His perfection and strive toward it. You will never learn to love by looking at me and trying to live as I do. You may reach a certain point, but eventually you will be disappointed. When we behold Christ, however, there is no upper limit.

"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thessalonians 4:9, KJV). This verse speaks of normal relationships among brothers and sisters in faith. Paul writes that we are taught by God to love one another—not by Paul or Peter, but by God. God is our true and genuine Teacher. By becoming human, He showed us how to live. I would like to recommend the book *The Desire of Ages* to everyone. It is the most beautiful of all books about the life of Jesus Christ. At this point, I have read it seventeen times. This book clearly shows us the example toward which we should strive. It reveals our human imperfection and shows what we can attain in Jesus Christ. I advise everyone to keep this book close at hand. As you read or listen to it, the Holy Spirit will surely touch your heart, and God's grace will fill you.

A loving servant

One day, God showed me that it is better to be nobody than to put myself in a position assigned to someone else and try to hold on to it. At the time, I was working as a construction foreman. As I studied the character of the workers, I decided how best to deal with each person. One of my good coworkers parked a truck directly in the roadway. I approached him and asked him to move it because it was blocking others from passing. "Let it stay there," he replied. "You sometimes park any way you please too." "All right, then I'll move the truck myself!" I said, heading toward it. He blocked my way, began shoving me roughly, and said he would not let me do it. If a similar conflict had happened earlier in my life, I might well have fought him in response to his aggression. But at that moment, I had no desire to do so. I stepped aside and continued working, although the anger and contempt had not gone away. I began to pray, "Lord, forgive me for thinking of behaving harshly." Then I realized that, to this man, I was nobody. Had that realization come to me earlier, it would certainly have wounded my human pride. But because the Lord had already shown me my place in this life and in this world, it was a joyful discovery to recognize that I was nobody.

Christ advised people at a wedding feast not to take the first place but the lowest one. It is better to be invited to move higher than to be asked to give your place to a more distinguished guest (see Luke 14:8-11). I had thought of myself as the person in charge, but I was shown my true place when I was told that I was nobody. So I decided: Very well, I will take this place. If you choose to raise me in your estimation, I will accept it. But if you want me to remain at the very bottom, I will stay there all my life. That is not a problem for me. I understood that I needed to take the lowest place and simply wait for my time. And if that time never comes, I should live in peace. There is no need to fight or defend my position. Let people determine my place for themselves.

There were other workers, however, who placed me a little higher and, through their attitude toward me, gave me a certain authority. Even when I occasionally exceeded my authority or demanded more than was expected of them, they

did not argue with me. That also brought me joy. In one setting I was at the very bottom; in another, I held a higher position and could influence people myself.

Something similar happens in the spiritual life. When we are only beginning to love, the best place is at the very bottom. This is the position of a "loving servant" in the family or the church. People themselves will grant us authority. We need only preserve it through faithfulness to God and His principles. This is what God requires of us. We do not need to seek the authority of a dictator. Our task is to remain in the place assigned to us. Then we will avoid unnecessary problems. This important lesson helped me see God's principle: "If you want to be above everyone, become the servant of all." Being a servant is a great blessing, but it too must be learned.

When we enter the path of love, God does not expect us to reach perfection immediately. He teaches us, and He knows that a day will come when we are firmly established in His love.

I want to share with you a promise that I have come to love with all my heart: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:16-19, KJV). This promise tells us that, with God's help, we can learn the love we call agape.

The path of love

We have a perfect Teacher of love, and in His hands we are clay, which He shapes according to His will. He knows what to make of us and when to place us in the kiln so that we may become established in love. As He teaches us to love, He surrounds us with evil, sinful people so that we may understand how love works. He also sends us people who already possess love, to support us and make our trials easier. We all need this. But most of all, we need to learn to love. Even if I meet a loving

person, I will not be happy if I myself do not love. But when I love, I am already happy. And when I meet someone who loves me, I am twice as happy. This is the purpose of love: to make us happy so that we may make those around us happy.

Will we enter this path? Many of us are already following it intuitively; many are already studying in the school of love without realizing it. It is impossible to encounter the truth, commune with God, believe in Jesus, and not learn love. Yet it is another matter entirely to study love consciously—when we understand what it is, thirst for it, and take definite steps to receive it. As a result, we will understand how God's love becomes established within us and works through us. Then every testimony we give about God will have power.

God said, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7, KJV). Ask for love, and you will receive it. As we learn at the feet of Jesus, we will draw still closer to God and bear still more fruit. God's love has the power to multiply. It has a beginning, but it has no end. Throughout eternity, we will learn to love as God loves, because He is love. And we will become as perfect as we allow Him to make us.

Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John 15:5, KJV). When by faith I am grafted into this Vine, He begins to nourish me with His sap, which I do not possess within myself. I become part of the Vine, and His life-giving power gives me growth and development. My little branches begin to grow, and fruit begins to form on them, becoming fuller and more beautiful each day. At first, people may look at my small, sour fruit with a smile and make no attempt to taste it. But with time, I see the eager eyes of someone who longs to taste my fruit.

The Vine does not grow His fruit so that it may wither or rot on the branches, but so that it may feed and refresh everyone who hungers and thirsts. The more fruit I bear, the more the Vine will be glorified. But this requires time, complete unity with the Vine, and total dependence upon Him. The skilled Husbandman will prune away everything unnecessary, guide the shoots in the right direction, protect the fruit from pests, gather the ripe

clusters, and at the proper time distribute them to all who desire them.

We need to ask for love

Why should we ask God for love? And what kind of love should we ask for? It is possible that we are asking God for a love entirely different from the love we truly need.

T-shirts often bear the message, "I [pink heart] you!" This world has reduced God's perfect and infinite gift to the image of a pink heart—something we can see and touch. Naturally, we do not take such messages seriously, understanding that they serve mainly as decoration. God, however, reveals to us "great and mighty things" that we do not know (Jeremiah 33:3, KJV). Genuine love belongs to this category. It is comprehended more by the heart than by the mind. But first the heart must open itself to the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Why must we turn to God for love? Because He is the God of love. We read in 2 Corinthians 13:11: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (KJV). In this verse, our God is called not simply God, but the God of love—the One Who possesses love and shares it.

When we begin to believe in God, His love fills our hearts in part and even changes us to some degree, but we must earnestly ask God for the fullness of love. As the apostle James writes in the fourth chapter of his epistle, "ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2, KJV). Every day we ask God for something: strength, wisdom, or courage. Why do we do this? Because asking is a condition of receiving.

God has commanded us to love with His love and has already prepared it for us. All that remains is for us to ask for it and put it to use. We must ask for the love that "beareth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7, KJV). What does it bear? Everything—trials, difficulties, and joys. We must ask for the love that rejoices in the truth: first, in my personal salvation in Christ; and second, in another person's happiness.

Two objects of love

In 1993, doors opened for the gospel, and I learned that God loved me. What attracted me most was the truth that God would not torment me eternally in the fires of hell, something I had greatly feared. I began to fall in love with such a just and wise God. Then I learned that Someone Else had borne my punishment in my place. I decided to give my life to Jesus. He accepted me and began to change me. It was a true miracle in my life. And then I came to love Jesus with all my heart.

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20, KJV). I used to stumble over this verse. I cannot say that I intensely hated anyone. I liked some brothers, but not others. I understood that this was a problem that needed to be resolved. I wished the verse said, "How can you love your brother if you do not love God?" But the text said something different: "How can you love God when you hate your brother?" I understood that God loved me. It seemed to me that I loved Him too. Yet this had no effect on my relationships with the people around me. Therefore, He reminded me of the commandment "That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:21, KJV).

When I grasped this truth, I began asking God for greater love, and I received it. I am firmly convinced that we cannot love our neighbor if we do not love God, and we cannot love God if we do not love our neighbor. I am not saying that I have attained perfection, but from my own experience I am ready to affirm that it is possible to love both God and our neighbor at the same time.

Today I share a special relationship and communion with Jesus that I did not have before. I love Him very deeply, and I am afraid of grieving Him through a careless action. He often asks whether I want to love a particular person and waits for my decision. And I try to make Him glad with my "yes!"

Do you love me?

One day, our pastor was conducting a seminar. At the very end, he asked the audience, "Do you have any questions for me?" I raised my hand and asked, "Do you love me?" It was interesting to watch his reaction. He "swallowed" the question and left it unanswered. A short time later, he again asked whether we had any questions, and I again asked whether he loved me. After being reprimanded, I did not ask a third time.

I sometimes ask my friends this question. I have noticed that when I ask it for the third time, many of them become upset or do not know what to say. This is how I understand it: when you love someone, you never grow tired of saying so.

Sometimes questions like this help us view things from another angle. The pastor whom I asked about his feelings toward me is a close friend, and he knows why I kept pressing him with the same question. Love seeks not her own, but seeks her own people in order to fulfill the commandment of Jesus. The question "Do you love Me?" is found in the Bible. God expects our love and sometimes asks us about it to help us set our priorities correctly. He does not ask this question of His enemies, but of those closest to Him.

When my daughter was six years old, I also asked her this question several times in a row. The third time, she became indignant and expressed her displeasure. Afterward, I explained to her that when you love someone, you never grow tired of saying so. She understood. From then on, she could tenderly answer twenty times in a row, "Yes, I love you!" and she herself could ask me twenty times in a row whether I loved her.

This question should be asked only of those closest to us or of fellow believers. Because it can sound provocative, we must be very careful and considerate. Not everyone will want to expose their shortcomings, and doing so will not benefit everyone.

The spirit in which you ask this question is extremely important. Love dwelling in the heart gives the right tone and meaning to every statement and every question.

Jesus knocks at the door in the hope that we will open it. He longs deeply to enter, but He cannot do so without my consent.

What I decide and how I answer depend entirely on me. Through my choice, I determine what He can do.

Sometimes I ask myself: Do I love God, my friends, and my neighbors? My answer helps me understand my true motives and feelings. And the short prayer, "Lord, give me love for this person!" helps me take the right position.

God expects much from those to whom He gives His gift of love. He wants me to understand what a powerful weapon I am handling and to know how to use it skillfully. He wants me to know the consequences of love and not be afraid of them. There is no defense against love: it always triumphs and gives victory to everyone. Yet love is persecuted in our world, in our church, and in our families. It gives rise to fear and hatred and brings division—not because of its own nature, but because its opponents have chosen darkness. In that darkness there is no room for love, but there is a vast arsenal of destructive weapons. Love, however, builds up; it does not destroy.

Do you want to be made whole?

Almighty God has limited Himself by our choice. He has made each of us free. Therefore, before He blesses us and gives us His love, He waits for us to ask Him for it. At the same time, our request and God's gift received in answer to it are valid for one day. I cannot use today what I received yesterday.

Each day, we decide to what extent God will be present or absent in our lives. What I receive from God in the morning will be enough for me until the end of the day. If tomorrow I ask for nothing, I will most likely not perish. The experience accumulated over my lifetime will help me make it through the next day. Yet I lose God's support when I do not ask for His blessing and instead rely on my own strength, experience, and knowledge. These are clearly not enough to stand firm in the battle.

The one against whom we fight is stronger than we are. He knows how to kill, destroy, and ruin everything because he has thousands of years of experience. And who are we? People who have barely begun to understand anything and have barely

learned anything. Therefore, every day we need the renewing power of God's grace. This does not mean that during five or ten minutes of morning prayer we must recite all our requests to God. It is enough for Him that we have come to Him that morning. And in His love, He gives us more than we ask.

But there are things for which we must specifically ask God. If people who have reached retirement age do not submit the paperwork to receive their pension, they will receive nothing. No one will come to them, and no one will pay them a penny. There is a definite condition: a person must come and request what is due to him. It is the same with God: He has prepared all Heaven for us, but He will give us exactly as much as we ask for. When we ask God to make us like Jesus, however, we receive everything—love, longsuffering, goodness, and wisdom. Everything is included in that prayer.

John chapter 5 describes the healing of the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda. I see my own life in this story, although my illness lasted less than thirty-eight years. Seventeen years after accepting Christ, I realized that I did not have love. I understood this, but I did not know what to do. Then Christ addressed me with the question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" I answered, "Yes, Lord!" And He promised that He would teach me to love.

Christ came to me as He came to the paralyzed man, and He healed me. Only after His grace touched my heart did I begin to understand what love is. During the first year, I told no one about the gift I had received and quietly rejoiced that I loved. I rejoiced that my attitude toward people had changed and that I had begun to understand the Bible in a new way. In the second year, I began sharing with others the knowledge God had revealed to me during this spiritual training.

In the Gospel story, the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed" (verse 10, KJV). He answered them, "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk" (verse 11, KJV). The Jews were outraged and asked, "What man is that?" I experience something similar. Not everyone

understands what has happened to me, but that has not made my condition any worse. I have understood that everyone who enters the path of love encounters a similar attitude.

"And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake" (Luke 21:16-17, KJV). This prophecy of Christ is being fulfilled in my life. I am certain that each of you will encounter similar hatred in your life. What does "for My name's sake" mean? We know that God's name reflects His character, and the chief quality of that character is love! When the love of Christ revealed in our lives enters the life of a neighbor, it moves that person toward change. Naturally, it meets a spirit of resistance. This resistance to God—this unwillingness to change for the better—causes people to react in this way. People are accustomed to obeying the desires of the flesh, and changing that is difficult for them. But genuine love is never exhausted and ultimately overcomes resistance. It works tirelessly until it reaches its goal.

The soil of the heart

Very often I hear this question: "Why do I ask Jesus for love, yet nothing happens in my life?"

At one time, I acquired a garden plot and wanted to plant a vegetable garden there. The entire plot was overgrown with grass, and the ground was so hard that I could not even drive a spade into it. Even if I managed to dig up a patch of soil, after the first rain the ground would dry out and turn to stone again. The soil also contained a great deal of clay and many rocks. But none of this discouraged me in the least. I knew what the plot could become once I put my hand to the work.

I brought in the wire mesh from an old bed frame and sifted all the soil where I planned to plant the garden. I picked out and discarded all the rocks and weeds. Then I brought in eight trailer loads of compost and two truckloads of manure and mixed all of it into the soil. The result was something resembling good ground. The process of clearing and preparing

it took about six months because I did the work in the evenings and on weekends. The soil became loose and soft and was easy to dig even during a drought.

Any good seed that falls into such soil bears abundant fruit if it is watered, the garden bed is weeded, and the plant is protected from pests. If everything is left unattended, many weeds will grow, the sun will dry out the roots, and slugs and mice will eat the young shoots or fruit.

Each plant requires its own kind of care. Cucumbers and tomatoes, for example, need a greenhouse that protects them well. They must also be tied up because their stems are very tender and weak. When they are grown outdoors, their stems are stronger and their fruit tastes better, but dew and rain cause the plants to develop disease and the fruit to turn black, making it unfit to eat.

I have also noticed that every good seed needs time to take root, sprout, and bear fruit. Some things grow faster and others more slowly, but every seed produces its own unique fruit after its kind. The crop that has grown must then be gathered and preserved.

When I ask Jesus to give me love, He says yes. He looks at the soil of my heart and sees what it can become once He puts His hand to the work. It gives Him great pleasure to cultivate and enrich the soil of my heart. I, however, want to see fruit immediately and become disappointed when I do not find it. But every morning Jesus rolls up His sleeves and asks me, "May I make your heart a little cleaner and better today?" My answer determines what He can do.

The process of cleansing the heart in which God desires to sow the seed of His love can be painful for many people because it involves recognizing their own impurity. But this process cannot be avoided; otherwise, the seed will die. During this time, prayers for repentance and cleansing, for the promised new heart, for the Holy Spirit, and for God's love are especially important. The Lord answers these prayers, cleanses the soil, and nurtures the seed so that it may bear abundant fruit. In

some people, the seed grows slowly; in others, it grows quickly. But in due time it begins to bear fruit. Ask, and it shall be given you!

The love i live by

“Draw near to God, and come into closer union with His people. Let your interest and your affections center in Christ and His followers. Love those best who love Christ most” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 47).

In my life, I try to follow this counsel. The greatest joy is to love those who share your faith and with whom you plan to fellowship throughout eternity. Unlike our enemies, they are few, and we must treasure them.

More than anything, I dream that you yourselves will catch the fire of God’s love and spread it to all your friends and relatives. Love does not come alone. With it come peace, joy, happiness, meekness, a clear mind, and a personal knowledge of Jesus.

Please pray for God’s love with all your heart. Do not rest until you receive it. Shake the throne of God with your prayers, for everyone who asks receives. Jesus promised to give us this gift abundantly, but do we believe His words? Do we want to receive this love?

I am determined to love you and all who are saved. This love begins on earth and will continue throughout eternity. I also dream of finding a place from which I can watch Jesus and gaze upon Him for hours. I think this will be an endlessly joyful occupation. What attracts me most about eternity is the opportunity to see and hear Jesus. The greatest happiness is to be with the One Whom you love without having seen Him, in Whom you believe, and with Whom you have fellowship. The more you communicate with the one you love, the stronger your love becomes and the more fascinating the relationship grows.

Love is part of my life

Love is a quality of character, a constant inclination toward what is best, and a desire to use every opportunity to encourage someone. It brings about important changes within

you. Love is the union of mercy and justice; one cannot exist without the other. Love determines the spirit in which we communicate with people and makes that communication fruitful. You can speak with a friend once every six months and inspire that person toward major change through a single conversation. Or you can spend years communicating with coworkers and still remain strangers.

Love in the heart is like living water. If there is someone ready to receive it, there will also be a source from which it can be drawn. My phone contains more than six hundred contacts, and I do not stay in regular touch with all of them. But sometimes I feel prompted to call or write to someone, or even to visit that person. As a rule, such communication brings joy to both of us.

For many years, I have spoken about love to many different people. I have noticed that the most grateful listeners are the sisters. They take in every word. Rejection and resistance, however, most often come from the brothers.

For many years, I waited for one of the people I spoke with to say, "I truly love!" The first was Arthur, whom I met three years ago and with whom I am still friends. Later, Albina had a similar experience in her life, and she remains delighted with the gift she received. Today Maxim wrote to tell me about his own spiritual rebirth. I quietly rejoice for my friends and ask Jesus to bless them.

Letters about love

Today I received joyful news from a friend. I would like to share a few excerpts from his letter:

"Something amazing is happening in my life... Yesterday I finally realized what astonishing power from God is contained in the words 'I love you'! When you say these words, both you and the person to whom you say them receive strength. And it is a healing power! Glory to the Lord!"

A little more than a year has passed since we became friends, and this is the result of our friendship and our conversations

about love. It is joyful to communicate with those who understand you.

Sergey writes:

“Hello, Andrey K.! Whenever I read your thoughts about love in the chat, I felt somewhat puzzled. It seemed as though you were writing in an unfamiliar language, so I simply skipped over your reflections. Now, however, I read them and think about them! I became interested in the experiences of Arthur and others who write that they have received the gift of love!”

Here is Maxim’s letter, which I am including in full with his permission:

“Greetings, Brother Andrey! I am writing to you at night because I cannot sleep. I have wanted for a long time to tell you that I too have received the gift of love from the Lord. I did not talk about it, but I shared love with everyone—in sermons during worship services and youth meetings, when visiting church members, and when meeting with friends. Not everyone senses a lack of love. Many people think they love, when in reality they are deceiving themselves. That is how I used to ‘love’ too. When I read your messages, I understood that I did not have the love you were writing about, but I did not ask God for it. But when Arthur wrote that he now loved, I cried out to God.

I realized that I had no love for a person who had sinned. I did not even have selfless love for my own wife and children. I had preached many times about the love of Jesus Christ, yet I did not possess it in its fullness. I realized that I felt hostility toward people close to me who had treated me unjustly. I forgave them, or so I thought, and did not hold a grudge against them, but the hurt remained. At best, I stopped speaking to them; at worst, I rebuked them harshly and waited for an apology.

Once I recognized this, I began asking the Lord to give me love for the people who hurt me, misunderstood me, and did evil to me. And the Lord generously filled me as though I were an empty vessel. I began responding with love to unjust words and

actions in my family, then in the church, and later in my interactions with strangers. I remembered how you called yourself a 'beggar' for God's love, and I became one too. I came to understand that without love from God, I cannot do anything rightly. How wonderful it is to love someone who is not yet able to return your love and to feel God's love changing both you and the people around you!"

Glory to God! There is nothing more beautiful than watching the seed of love fall into good soil, sprout, and bear abundant fruit!

Expressing love

How is love expressed? The most common answer is: through actions. Yet everyone understands actions according to his or her own needs. If your "act of love" does not meet the expectations of the person you love or touch that person's heart, you risk being regarded as someone who merely talks.

I often communicate with people in online chats, and I see that my words have an influence. In the apartment building where I live, I always offer my neighbors kind words and good wishes, and I sincerely want them to be happy, but I often encounter distance and reserve. Then I ask Jesus in prayer, "Is my love genuine?" And I hear His voice in my mind: "Remember the whole path you have traveled! Remember where you came from and what you were like, and take courage! Go forward and do what is within your power, and I will be with you!" Then I become calm and draw even closer to Him.

Love does not merely talk; it bares the soul in the hope that someone will respond. How each person responds is for that person to decide. Genuine love, like a mighty river, always seeks an outlet and is ready to break through every barrier. Once all the barriers have been removed, it returns to its channel and continues to flow peacefully.

Love begins with a decision

A great conflict is taking place between God and the evil one for possession of the human mind. Through love, God gives us the

power to influence people's minds and turn their hearts toward Jesus. Therefore, the right approach in every relationship is to love the person. How can I come to love my neighbor? The Lord directs my attention to that person and asks, "Are you willing to love this person?" My future attitude toward that person depends on my answer. Sometimes personal contact is not even necessary. I simply decide to love and declare my decision aloud to the Lord so that the evil one can hear it too. If the Lord allows me to meet this person, I treat him or her according to the decision I have made. When a conflict begins to develop with someone I have decided to love, the Lord gently reminds me of my decision and gives me strength to remain faithful to my choice.

My choice is not always evident to those whom I have decided to love. Unfortunately, I often encounter open hostility from people whom I love and for whom I pray. Perhaps I myself am at fault and lack wisdom, but I still choose love.

After declaring my decision to love someone, I ask Jesus to give me love for that person. Regardless of how close I am able to become to him or her, my choice has been made, and Heaven has already recorded that this neighbor has entered my heart. Sometimes the person whom I have decided to love does not even know it, and I have no opportunity to tell that person. But the most interesting challenge is loving our enemies. A special battle takes place there, but we will discuss that another time.

Love for enemies

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to love our enemies:

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father Which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not

even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:44-48, KJV).

This call may be understood as a commandment. At the end of His ministry, Jesus gives us another commandment—to love one another. And commandments, as we know, are given to be obeyed. If God has given a commandment, He also gives us the strength and wisdom to keep it.

What does it mean to love an enemy? First, we need to understand who an enemy is and why we must love that person. An enemy is someone who is hostile toward you, or someone toward whom you yourself have hostile feelings. Later, Jesus says, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matthew 10:36, KJV). It turns out that those who live under the same roof with you—the people closest to you, including your spouse, children, and relatives—may become your enemies. You are in constant contact with them, yet they are guided by a different spirit.

Enemies may also be brothers or sisters from the church you attend every week. Another category includes people you do not know who have an evil spirit or are aggressive by nature. In a broader sense, enemies also include people who live in this world but do not believe in Christ as their Savior. An enemy may also be an opponent of the truth, a militant atheist, or a secular person who rejects our faith and values.

In my own life, it was the people closest to me—those from whom I could not get away—who led me to ask the Lord for help and for the gift of love. And the Lord answered. After I prayed, something changed in my mind. I began to think differently about those who had caused many problems in my life. Hostility gave way to compassion. But compassion is not yet love. Then the most remarkable thing happened. "Lord, give me love for these people!" I pleaded. At that moment, I realized that I loved them. This was an entirely new feeling for me. From morning until evening, I thanked God and rejoiced that I loved. From then on, no one could darken my life. If a storm of human hostility and hatred broke over me, I simply asked Jesus to protect me and give me love. And He always answered.

I learned one central principle: do not return evil for evil, abuse for abuse, or ridicule for ridicule, and do not insist on proving that you are right. Once, someone close to me sat beside me and hurled the worst insults at me. I simply remained silent. Then I knelt down and began asking God to bless that unhappy soul. I prayed quietly, asking for love and patience for that person. In the end, the person could bear it no longer and ran away.

During the early stage of learning the science of love, trials like these continually came upon me. At times, I felt as though the entire world hated me and had risen against me. I did not understand what was happening, so I asked Jesus: "What is going on? I ask for love, and You surround me with hostile people." The Lord helped me understand that this was His School. Once I realized this, I became calm and even began to welcome such situations with joy. Later, the Lord sent me many friends and showed me that I could now love not only my enemies but also those who were kindred spirits.

I understood that the best defense against enemies is to go on the offensive. But this is not the kind of offensive you may be imagining. It means responding to attacks with humility and meekness. It means remaining faithful to God and His light regardless of the circumstances. It means praying for an enemy, wishing that person well, and doing good to him or her. Our enemies—including our wives and husbands—are our best teachers of love.

We do not need to keep repeating to someone, "I love you." People do not take these words seriously when words stand alone. The Bible teaches us to love "not in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18, KJV). At the right moment, words are also needed so that a person may understand what lies behind your actions, what you want to give, and what you have to offer. We can and should speak about our love, but deeds of love should come before words of love. And sometimes love is expressed through silence.

Love and friendship

We often hear people address us as “Dear friends!” As with an enemy, it is important to understand correctly who a friend is. Jesus Christ gives us an example of true friendship. He says: “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners” (Matthew 11:19, KJV). The Pharisees called Christ a Friend of publicans and sinners. Was He their Friend? Yes. Were they His friends? Not all of them—far from it.

Christ came to reveal God’s character and offered His friendship to every person. Did everyone respond to His offer? No. Some hated Him. But Jesus clearly understood the principle of friendship expressed in Proverbs 18:24: “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (KJV).

Throughout the Gospels, we see Christ embodying this principle by showing kindness and friendliness to everyone: lepers and sinners, publicans and prostitutes, Pharisees and Sadducees. Christ did not curse anyone, even as He hung crucified on the cross. He prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34, KJV). The Lord treated even Pilate with respect and kindness, though Pilate sentenced Him to death. Jesus calmly told him, “Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11, KJV).

Love defends a person to the very end, looking for any foothold, even the slightest reason, to lift that person up. When the thief turned for help to the Savior hanging on the cross, He accepted the man’s plea for salvation without hesitation and promised him eternal blessedness.

Yet the Bible also gives examples of friendship that does not look virtuous at all.

“The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends” (Proverbs 14:20, KJV). “Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour”

(Proverbs 19:4, KJV). Does this mean that to have many friends, one must become rich? No. These verses speak of false friendship. When someone has an empty stomach, that person may try to befriend whoever will provide something to eat.

“Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts” (Proverbs 19:6, KJV). This, too, speaks of false friendship, which has nothing in common with the friendship Christ demonstrated in His life.

“The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes” (Proverbs 21:10, KJV). This verse also describes false friendship, which offers a person no protection from evil.

“Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity” (Jeremiah 9:4-5, KJV). After reading a statement like this about friendship, we may ask ourselves, “Why have friends at all?” We may also form a false idea of friendship. We must therefore clearly understand that the Bible distinguishes true friendship from false friendship, and we ourselves must recognize and maintain that distinction.

Love makes friendship genuine; its absence makes friendship false. The foundation of true friendship is the unconditional love God gives. It teaches us how to treat a friend rightly. When I decide to become someone’s friend, love places its seal upon that decision and establishes it forever. Yet God’s gift of love is given in response to my decision.

When love enters a person’s heart, it takes hold of the whole being and fills the mind. It draws the mind to Jesus while still leaving the person freedom of choice.

Taste and see that the lord is good

I bought a car. I walk around it, looking it over inside and out, trying to understand how powerful, convenient, and

comfortable it is. For now, I still have only a vague idea of everything it can do. I look through the owner's manual and see numbers, warnings, advice, photographs, and diagrams. I listen to what my friends say about the car, search online for more information, and imagine how wonderful it will be to take it for a drive. Auto mechanics tell me about all the features of my car's engine, and I listen carefully to their warnings about possible breakdowns.

At last, my knowledge reaches the point where I can teach others. Sometimes I even sit in the car, but I still cannot bring myself to start it and drive. My friends who drive laugh at me. They say, "Get in and take it for a drive. Then you will learn from personal experience how wonderful it is to drive your own car." Sometimes they give me a ride in their cars. I listen to the sound of the engine and watch how readily the vehicle responds to them.

Finally, I make up my mind. I get into my car, start the engine, and carefully drive away. I press the gas pedal and the brake, shift gears, and push buttons. Now, through personal experience, I can evaluate my car's characteristics: the power of its engine, how quickly it accelerates, and how much distance it needs to stop. I see what it can do and can plan the time and effort needed to reach a destination. The navigation system built into the car knows better than I do where the destination is and always chooses the best route. Even if I make a wrong turn, it calmly recalculates the route.

We can read and hear a great deal about love, but it is best to experience its power for ourselves. Love is real and active; we can immerse ourselves in it completely. We are given a Navigator Who will always show us the right way and help us find our bearings if we stray from the path or become lost.

Taste and see that the Lord is good!

To love is natural

What is the best way to drive darkness out of a room? Should you take a huge shovel and start throwing it out the window? Or should you light a candle? As soon as light appears, the

darkness leaves on its own. The same is true of sin. Love drives it out of the heart.

Loving is as easy as breathing. You do not need to force yourself or make superhuman efforts. At the same time, love is the most powerful weapon, capable of melting hearts of stone. Those hearts grow hard because of the darkness, lies, and deception all around them. People wrap themselves in heavy clothing when it is cold, raining, or very windy. But as soon as the sun comes out, they grow warm and quickly take off the extra layers. Like the sun, love warms a person, and people will enjoy being in your presence. The important thing is to remain faithful to your decision to love.

When I wake up in the morning, my heart is not filled with love for people; it is completely empty. I kneel and begin to pray. I ask to be filled with love and baptized with the Holy Spirit. God answers these prayers, but the gift of love I receive lasts for exactly one day. I ask God to use me wherever He sees fit, and He finds a use for me. To my surprise, people often find me on their own. But I also pray that He will send me to those to whom I can reveal His love, and He answers my prayer in amazing ways.

Love takes up residence wherever I bring it. It revives hearts of stone and kindles light in the lives of many people.

In search of love

In 1993, I responded to God's call and accepted the Lord into my heart. In 2009, I began to give close attention to the commandment to love and asked God to teach me how to keep it. Now I am sharing with you what God revealed to me in answer to my prayer. I am writing about my personal experience. God gives us not only an understanding of love but also an opportunity to experience its power for ourselves.

I can say with confidence that, in these last days, what God desires most is to teach us to love one another. For unless we have love for one another, He will not entrust us with carrying the most important and solemn message to this world. If we do not learn to love one another, we will not be able to be His

witnesses. What would we testify to—that we hate one another? That we spread gossip about one another? That we have the truth but do not live by it?

The world knows very well what a Christian should be, and it expects God's Church to live up to that standard. It looks for genuine love in the Church but, unfortunately, does not always find it. Many people who come to church see the very same world, only dressed in religious garments, rituals, and traditions. I am speaking here about Christianity as a whole, not about any particular denomination. God gave only one identifying mark of His disciples: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35, KJV). Of course, God also gave us the truth by whose light we live, but truth without love convinces no one.

The happiness of loving

I used to think, "Happiness is being loved, being needed by someone, and being accepted just as you are." I dreamed that one day someone who would accept me would come into my life. Even after Christ came into my life and accepted me just as I was, I continued to wait for the loving person of my dreams to appear. Then the Lord revealed to me that instead of waiting for such a person, I myself could become that person for others. And I understood: you will not be happy when others love, accept, and value you, but when you yourself love, accept, and value others.

To be able to accept others, we need to be friendly. The following counsel from Ellen White helped me develop the habit of being friendly:

"Cultivate the habit of speaking well of others. Dwell upon the good qualities of those with whom you associate, and see as little as possible of their errors and failings. When tempted to complain of what someone has said or done, praise something in that person's life or character. Cultivate thankfulness" (The Ministry of Healing, p. 492).

I used to enjoy discussing other people's faults and mistakes. When you learn to love, you realize that this harmful habit must

be rooted out because it hinders you from loving a person—and the habit itself begins to disappear. You understand that you can no longer discuss the faults of someone you love. You can notice only that person's good qualities. God enables you to see not the person's sin, but his or her potential—who that person will become after turning to God. You pray for that person and ask the Lord to make room in your heart for him or her. And God answers. The greatest joy comes when the person for whom you are praying responds to your love with love, to your friendship with friendship, and to your smile with a smile.

The trial of rejection

People in this world dream of having a loving friend who will enter their lives and accept them just as they are. This friend will be able to meet all their needs while treating their freedom with the utmost care. Many people start a family hoping that their spouse will be just such a friend. In reality, all these people are dreaming of Jesus, for He is the one and only Friend Who can resolve all their concerns and problems while respecting their freedom. The Lord desires a close relationship with every person. This is what the prophet Isaiah says: "For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall He be called" (Isaiah 54:5, KJV).

The greatest paradox is that people reject this Friend and laugh at Him. Yet Jesus continues to seek friends in this world. He wants to become a Friend to anyone who will accept Him, even in the person of one of His followers. To those who have believed in Him, He offers the special gift of His love so that they may bear a true and accurate witness about Him.

When I enter into a covenant with Jesus, I long to share the gift of love that I have received from Him. But not everyone accepts me, and many people need neither me nor my words. Love respects people's freedom and does not force itself upon them. It seeks and finds those who are able to appreciate it, and it rejoices in every home where it is welcomed.

In my interactions with people, I encounter the same response that Jesus experienced. He told His disciples, "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20, KJV). These words are fulfilled in the lives of God's children. At times rejection deeply wounds their souls, but as they look to Jesus, they find peace and press on.

Everyone who loves Jesus goes through the trial of rejection. In these last days, we see a sorrowful picture: chairs in church remain empty, the phone is silent, only advertisements arrive by email, and face-to-face fellowship has become rare. Yet your heart is burning, so you go and knock, hoping that the door will be opened to you.

An even more frightening realization comes when you begin to understand that you, too, do not need everyone. You are not interested in your friends' joys and sorrows; you are immersed in your own concerns and have shut yourself off from everyone. Saddest of all, your friends see and feel this, yet in spite of it, they continue to love you.

Jesus said that in the last days, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12, KJV). This prophecy is being fulfilled. Woe to me if I notice this cooling of love within myself but make no attempt to correct the situation.

Is there a way out of this condition? Yes. The love of Christ is still available to everyone, and all who seek it will find it. But remember: if Christ was rejected, you will be rejected as well. Do not let your hands fall in discouragement—they are needed for so many good deeds!

Narrowly focused love

I often encounter narrowly focused love in the lives of people around me. A person loves his child, relative, or friend and is willing to invest all his time, resources, and feelings in that love. In such devotion to the object of his love, he finds joy for his soul and meaning in life, even if his love is not properly appreciated, as often happens in relationships between parents and children. Everyone else around him receives little or no

love from him, although they see how much love he gives to certain individuals.

When this person hears a call to love, he recognizes love in his own life and even tries to develop it. Yet he fails to understand that other people need his love as well. In the end, his favorites receive every benefit, while everyone else is left with nothing. What should be done with this kind of love?

Imagine that God has favorites whom He blesses abundantly, while everyone else receives only crumbs from time to time. What a glaring injustice that would be! Yet this is sometimes exactly how we imagine God, attributing distinctly human qualities to Him. We judge Him by ourselves and deprive ourselves of many blessings because we are afraid to ask Him for anything.

If I misunderstand God's love, I will be unable to represent it properly in my life. I will love and be patient only with those whom I choose, rather than with those who truly need my love. As a result, the circle of my influence will be limited to those whom I have chosen, who are dear to me, and whom I love.

But God desires to reveal His true character to me. He is impartial, and His love for every person is equally great. His love is constant and deep; it seeks not its own and gives itself without reserve. It has no favorites, and it tactfully corrects everyone it loves.

This is the very kind of unconditional love that God desires to see in the human heart. Yet it is impossible to love this way without God's personal presence in one's life. Therefore, along with the gift of love, He offers us Himself. God loves everyone, but not everyone believes this. Those who receive God's love into their hearts become the objects of their Heavenly Father's special care. This kind of relationship with God is available to everyone, but not everyone desires it. Love is limited by a person's choice and cannot cross those boundaries without permission.

Two words—"yes" or "no"—determine God's actions toward me and decide my eternal destiny. Which will I choose?

My neighbors also make a conscious choice regarding my love for them. In response to my decision to love them, they say either “yes” or “no,” and what I can do for them depends on their decision. But true love continues to love even those who reject it, because it cannot treat people in any other way. It will not diminish, but will wait in the hope that one day it will be noticed, accepted, and appreciated.

Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap

Words of love and encouragement are like good seed. They contain life-giving energy and have a tremendous influence on a person’s mind. When I sow this seed and later meet those who have heard or read my words, I see kind faces, smiles, and embraces, and I hear words of gratitude. The harvest of love has a way of multiplying many times over. This is the Lord’s reward for keeping His commandment to love one another.

There is nothing more pleasant than seeing a friend’s genuine joy and sharing the blessings of love with that friend. We all take part in one another’s salvation. Let us sow love if we desire to reap love, and the Lord will help the crop grow and enable us to gather the harvest.

Love expressed in words

My words are a reflection of my character, the melody of my heart, and my identification. Everything I write or say is carefully examined in the spiritual realm, because words are instruments of good or evil influence, a blessing or a curse.

We often hear the phrase, “They are only words!” This creates the mistaken impression that words mean nothing because they depend on one’s mood. Yet there are other sayings: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34, KJV), and “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:37, KJV). These statements help me understand that everything I say is subject to strict accountability. My words affect both those to whom they are addressed and me personally.

I often hear people in an argument hurl cutting words at one another and attach labels to each other. To justify themselves, they point to Jesus or John the Baptist, who sometimes gave uncompromising descriptions of those to whom they spoke. Without considering the circumstances or the people to whom those words were addressed, we treat them as instructions for action and verbally brand our friends and neighbors.

I have decided to remove such expressions from my vocabulary when speaking about anyone, because my love for people thinks no evil and does not exalt itself over their mistakes. As believers, we avoid using vulgar insults against others, and rightly so. Yet we have our own collection of abusive labels with which we like to lash one another, without realizing the harm we cause. Yes, on exceptional occasions Jesus used unflattering words to describe people, but let us not forget that He died for them.

I have decided to remove certain words from my speech and never use them when pointing out the faults of others. These include Pharisee, Pharisaism, heretic, heresy, fanatic, fanaticism, extremist, servant of the devil, legalist, scribe, generation of vipers, and others. These are biblical expressions, but on my lips they may offend my neighbors and God, Whom I desire to represent faithfully. I have heard these words directed at me and know how a person feels when they are spoken to him. I do not decide the eternal destiny of others; the Lord does. A person's error can be pointed out in other ways.

Love does not brand people but looks for reasons to show mercy to those who are mistaken or think differently. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:10, KJV). May our good Jesus keep our lips and hearts pure and holy!

The power of words of love

Our words have a tremendous influence on the minds of other people, and advertising companies know this truth very well. With ordinary words, they persuade us what to buy, what to wear, and what to eat. Words of love are no less powerful. They

can encourage a person, heal emotional wounds, guide a person's thoughts in the right direction, and draw that person closer to the Creator. They can also fill a life with meaning, reveal the plan of salvation and the will of God, convict a person of sin, and lead that person to repentance. Conversely, words devoid of love wound, cripple, and kill.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21, KJV). With our tongues, we can awaken a person to eternal life or condemn that person to eternal death. With our words, we can curse or bless, but we cannot do both at the same time! "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? . . . So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh" (James 3:11-12, KJV). The bad always cancels out all the good. No matter how many kind words I say to someone, they lose their meaning if I curse that person even once.

Words are one of the languages of love. A person who hears kind words addressed to him feels the love of the one speaking to him. When someone speaks to him tenderly, expresses admiration for him, and openly notices his good qualities, this is the best reward and the clearest language of love for him. In turn, he tries to praise the person speaking with him in the same way. Words help us express love properly and, at the same time, hear it.

If words are not your language of love, do not reject those who speak it. Ask Jesus to teach you to hear the language of love spoken by your brother, sister, husband, wife, or children. Sometimes we see little value in words and demand that a person prove his love for us through actions. Yet words may mean everything to him; he pours his whole heart into them. By devaluing a person's words, you can cause him deep pain.

Words are more than a language of love. They are our record, possessing a special power and standing in the spiritual realm. They reflect our character and faith and also testify to whom we belong.

When you cannot say "i love you," write it

Another language of love is the written word. How is a letter different from speech? In conversation, we may leave out something important or, conversely, say too much. When a person writes a letter, he considers every word. Some people can express their love only in writing.

The Bible is nothing other than letters, written by human beings, about God's love. Even now, these letters possess tremendous power because God Himself speaks through them!

Some people understand this language of love better than others. They enjoy reading and expressing their love in writing. Have you ever received handmade cards from people containing good wishes, blessings, or Bible verses? This is their language of love. If you respond with a similar card, you will make that person exceedingly happy. Never disregard such cards and letters! Always thank the person and, whenever possible, keep those messages of love. In doing so, you will bring happiness both to that person and to yourself.

Hospitality

Another language of love is hospitality. The apostle Paul writes about this language: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2, KJV). Entertaining strangers means showing love to those who are away from home—in other words, offering hospitality. In 1 Timothy 3, the apostle Paul also writes that a person who desires to be an overseer must be hospitable.

Among many peoples, hospitality is part of the national culture. A guest is the most honored person in your home, whether you love that person or not. You are expected to show your guest the formal signs of respect prescribed by tradition. God calls us to intentional hospitality. He desires hospitality to become second nature to us.

In Hebrews 13, the apostle writes that we may entertain an angel without even knowing it. As we know, an angel is a messenger of God. The person whom we decide to receive as a guest may have a special message from God for us, and that person's visit may become a blessing. A real angel, or even

Christ Himself, may appear in the guise of a homeless person sitting on the back pew of the church. It is no coincidence that the Lord said, "For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in" (Matthew 25:35, KJV).

Therefore, do not hesitate to invite people to church and into your home to have tea, share a meal, or simply talk. An invitation itself, even if the person declines it, is a sign that he is needed and that someone cares about him. The thought that no one needs you can cause you to lose interest in life. By sending the opposite message, we restore that interest.

A home is a place with a special atmosphere. It is warm, comfortable, and safe. A person who enters your home instinctively begins to regard you as a friend, even if he is meeting you for the first time. Unfortunately, not everyone makes use of this opportunity to invite people over. We make excuses: "I have nothing to serve," "I do not have enough food," "I have too much to do," or "I need to go to bed early so I can get enough sleep." Some would gladly invite someone over but cannot because their husband or wife does not want to see anyone. We cannot invite guests against the wishes of the family members with whom we live. In such a case, there is no need to be sad, because God sees your circumstances. If someone does not invite you over, do not be quick to judge that person.

But if you desire to invite someone and are able to do so, extend the invitation! God calls us to speak to people in this language of love. The influence of this language is enormous!

Material assistance

Material assistance is also a language of love. Do not be afraid to help people. Jesus said, "Give to every man that asketh of thee" (Luke 6:30, KJV). There is a familiar Russian expression: "Do not tell me how to live; help me financially instead." We tend to hear it negatively, as an expression of greed and self-interest. In essence, however, it says that a person's physical needs must be met before all others. Another Russian proverb

says, "A nightingale cannot live on fables." In other words, a person needs food, clothing, and at least the basic means of living. It takes attentiveness to notice a person's need, because not everyone dares to ask for help. It also takes wisdom to avoid harming the person through your help or wounding that person's feelings.

If I am able to help someone, I do so. My help may not match that person's expectations. The amount of help matters less than the sincere desire to help with what one has. Even if I have nothing at all to give, I can always pray for the person or read a few verses from the Bible to him. Spiritual hunger is no less frightening than physical hunger.

Jesus once said, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9, KJV). Our material wealth will sooner or later be destroyed. All our money will one day lose its value. But a friend whom we gained with its help will remain. Therefore, the best investments are investments in friendship!

New obykhody

In the past, I went every year to a camp meeting in the Ukrainian village of New Obykhody. Each year, the Nash Dom (Our Home) Health Center held a camp meeting for everyone involved in medical missionary work or interested in becoming involved in it. Anyone could spend ten days at the health center, be renewed in strength, meet new people, and return home inspired and spiritually refreshed.

As I prepared to attend this camp meeting for the third time, I already knew what awaited me and began praying for the trip a year in advance. Above all, I wanted to experience divine love and apply in my relationships with strangers the knowledge and skills I had received from the Lord. I prayed for the people who would sit at my table. I asked the Lord to send me people to whom I could speak about His love and lead to Him. As I prayed, I came to love in advance the people who would one day sit at the same table with me.

During registration, I asked to be seated at an empty table so that God could place there whomever He desired. On Friday at lunchtime, just before the camp meeting opened, people sat down at my table. After everyone had introduced themselves, I said, "I have been praying for you for an entire year! I even came to love you before knowing what you looked like. The Lord sent you to me in answer to my prayers. You are my gift from the Lord—the friends for whom I prayed!"

Their first reaction was one of great surprise. I could see bewilderment and caution in their eyes. Then I shared my plans with them and began speaking about God's love for us and our love for God and our neighbors. During the camp meeting, we attended the scheduled seminars, but at our table we held a separate seminar of our own. I prayed, "Lord, give me the right words for these people!"

The year before, I had encountered resistance at the camp meeting for which I had not been prepared. Therefore, I spent an entire year preparing myself for another struggle. This time, however, the people listened in silence. Two days passed, and they continued listening to me during meals. No one objected. They gave me surprised looks, but they listened attentively. After each meal, everyone left to attend the seminars.

On the fourth day, my enthusiasm ran out. At our first meeting, I had told these people that by the end of the camp meeting we would be the closest of friends. Yet my own strength lasted exactly three days. Seeing no response, I did not know what else to say, so I fell silent. They immediately asked me, "What happened? Why did you stop?" Then I invited my table companions to ask me questions. Only after that did a real conversation begin. People started opening up, and they began to understand what was actually taking place.

One brother told me, "I find it difficult to understand what is taught in the seminars. But I understand what you are saying, and this is what I need most." The camp meeting program was scheduled from morning until evening, leaving very little time for personal conversation. Yet even during the brief intervals, God sent me people who shared their struggles with me. I told

them about my experience of love, and we prayed that God would help my new friends resolve their problems.

After we had grown close enough, I told them, “I did not tell you about my love merely to make you happy or to gain your love in return. I want you to love the people who live near you and with whom you have constant contact, because they need your love more than I do. Your love would bring me joy, but I want those around you to be happy! Your neighbors must receive what is rightfully theirs—the love of Christ revealed through your character and your life. This is the most powerful testimony!”

After that, lively conversation began at our table. Everyone started sharing personal experiences, and we learned a great deal about one another. By the end of the camp meeting, we had become truly close. We exchanged addresses and telephone numbers in the hope that our friendship would continue. I believe that, through our fellowship, the love of Christ will be revealed to many more people and that the seeds sown in human hearts will spring up and bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Communicating with the opposite sex

In 2013, I once again went to the camp meeting in New Obykhody. After we became acquainted, a group formed of people who wanted to hear my reflections on love. I began sharing what I had learned and saw their hearts catching fire. But my enthusiasm did not last long.

One brother approached me and said, “Andrey, I was asked to tell you that you should limit your interaction with other people. Many of the sisters may misunderstand you because you discuss matters that are too personal. Since you are a married man, you could become a source of temptation to them.”

I fully understand the delicacy of the subject about which I speak. At the same time, Christ commanded us to love everyone. He did not say that brothers should love brothers and sisters should love sisters. He said that we must love one another. Yet as we obey this commandment, we must recognize

appropriate boundaries and take care not to lead anyone into sin. This is especially important when dealing with single people and those whose family lives have not turned out well.

At the time, that warning felt like a cold shower. I thought, "Is this really the end? Has my testimony about love come to an end?" I went into the forest and prayed there. I thanked God for the opportunity to tell people about love and asked Him for wisdom. The Lord answered my prayer. From then on, I exercised the greatest caution in my interactions. I spoke with the sisters only when other people were present. Every walk took place in a group, and I was never alone with any of the sisters. The Lord arranged everything wonderfully, and everyone who wanted to hear the message of love heard it. I sincerely hope that I did not drive anyone away or become a source of temptation to anyone.

"And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:21, KJV).

Zelva

By God's grace, in the fall of 2018 I was invited to conduct a series of seminars about love, friendship, and happiness at the former Zelva health resort in Belarus. This was an unusual experience for me. It is one thing to write down my observations and quite another to speak publicly, present arguments, and give clear examples. I understood that I could not manage without God's help, so I asked for strength from above and trusted that the Lord would not forsake me.

What a joy it was each morning to place myself in God's hands and share with people what I had learned about God's love! It was also fascinating to watch strangers become friends and to see God's grace unite our hearts. By the end of the gathering, we felt like one close-knit family living in the atmosphere of Heaven. Everyone shared with the others the blessings they had received during the gathering.

I was invited to speak in the mornings, both before and after breakfast, and I told the people about the love and happiness that Jesus gives abundantly to everyone who thirsts and asks.

Jesus heard our prayers for a blessing and poured out His Spirit upon us. We all experienced genuine joy. One evening, some Pentecostal brothers came to visit us. For more than two hours, they listened attentively and asked questions. Then they blessed us and departed in peace. Jesus was glorified.

As I prepared for this gathering, I worried that I would have nothing to say. But when the week came to an end, I regretted that I had been able to share so little. Praise God for gatherings like this! Love makes a way for itself, and it cannot be stopped!

Guarding the seventh commandment

When you give your love, in obedience to Christ's commandment, to someone of the opposite sex, there is a possibility that you may fall in love with that person. This can happen even when one or both of you are married and have families of your own. In that case, God comes to your aid and reminds you of the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," which must be kept both in actions and in thoughts. What should you do when temptation comes? Resist it! The sooner you recognize an evil thought and reject it, the easier it is to be rid of it. When God sees our desire to obey His law, He cleanses our minds from all impurity, though this does not always happen quickly. God's grace exposes the corruption in our hearts in order to cleanse them and bring them closer to Heaven's ideal. A struggle begins. It is different for each person, but no one can avoid it.

It seems that at last you have found the person of your dreams, someone after your own heart, and you imagine how wonderful it would be if the two of you could somehow be together. The carnal nature receives this thought as a signal to act, but Jesus does not desire your destruction and holds you securely in His hand. You call upon God for help and ask Him to deliver you from sinful thoughts. God answers, and the sinful thought leaves, but after a while it returns with even greater force. This struggle within the mind may last for seconds, hours, weeks, or even months. Outwardly, you continue to live an honorable life, bear a faithful testimony, and help your neighbors, while evil thoughts circle in your mind like flies. But there is good news:

this trial will not last forever. Deliverance and victory come from God. The habit of obedience takes root, and the next time you recognize the danger more quickly and give sin no opportunity at all.

Our love extends to everyone, regardless of sex or age. We cannot avoid temptation, but we can resist it. Yet woe to me if I become a source of temptation to someone else. Love is a very powerful weapon; it penetrates deep into the human heart. If I pursue my own personal aims and fail to establish boundaries in my interactions, I may become a source of temptation to another person and destroy that person without even realizing it. Therefore, let us exercise the greatest caution! In our relationships with people, let us be guided by the desire to save our neighbor and glorify God.

The complexities of love

More than anything else, our Heavenly Father desires to see genuine and enduring love among His children. He sent Jesus into this world so that, through His example, we could see true love and better understand God's character.

Is there love among us? Is it in me? If so, how fully does it meet God's expectations?

Relationships between people develop in different ways. Let me give an example from real life.

A brother and a sister from the church became friends. Mutual affection grew between them, and they began spending more time together, working on shared tasks and helping each other in every way. Their affection developed into a strong attachment, and a thought arose: "Could this perhaps be love?" Dreams of starting a family appeared on the horizon. Then came a trial in the form of senseless and merciless public opinion, which did everything possible to destroy their relationship. To avoid coming into conflict with established stereotypes, the brother and sister decided to separate.

Struggling with the pain of separation and guilt over their lack of courage, these unhappy people began avoiding one another.

They stopped calling each other, sending messages, talking, and even greeting one another! Yet they continued attending the same church, singing, praying, and reading the same books. God, meanwhile, commands us to love one another. Even if the brother and sister in this example could not start a family, why train themselves to feel hostility and enmity? It is both better and easier to love than to hate!

Another acquaintance of mine has two fathers and two mothers. When he was a child, his parents divorced and formed new families. Instead of the hostility so common in such circumstances, the two families were friends and raised their shared son together. I am opposed to families breaking apart and spouses separating, but if a separation has occurred, friendly relations can and should be preserved. This is what the love of Christ teaches us. Love for one another contains a special blessing from God that endures throughout life and brings meaning, joy, and happiness.

How to respond to accusations

I love, and this is God's gift. You love, and this too is a gift from the Lord, purchased at the price of His shed blood. When I ask Him to give me this gift, He gives it. When I see love being revealed in my heart, I am amazed, I rejoice, and I give thanks. But trials come together with love. Each person's trials are different, yet there are common situations faced by nearly everyone who has received love and lives by it. One such situation is criticism from people who declare, "You do not love!" or "There is no love in you!"

Do not be afraid when you hear such categorical statements! Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God and in Jesus. A loving heart would never speak this way, because it understands that anyone, even the most upright person, can make a mistake or do something foolish. When I hear accusations like these directed at me, I listen carefully because I want to understand where they come from. Sometimes God uses other people to show me my sin. When I see it, I turn to Jesus in repentance and ask Him to deliver me from that sin and teach me to live without it. But if I see that the accusation

is unfounded and arises from an inner problem in the accuser, I try to respond with patience and meekness.

I know how love works within me, but I will not presume to accuse another person of having no love. It is not my place to judge. By making such an accusation, I may close my heart to my neighbor for many years and deprive myself of blessings.

There is a wise saying: "To understand someone better, walk in that person's shoes." Before judging someone, you must place yourself in that person's position, take on that person's responsibilities and circumstances, face a similar situation, and overcome it. Therefore, do not judge those who speak openly about their love. They are vulnerable because they cannot conceal the lamp burning within them.

If love has taken up residence in the heart of a son or daughter of God, it is there forever. It is a tender plant that requires care, but it sends its roots very deep and into every area of human life. Love gives meaning and purpose to everything a person does. Love pins the carnal nature to the ground and does not allow it to rise.

Do not be troubled when a storm of accusations and complaints descends upon you. Hold fast to the truth, and you will surely be called self-righteous, a fanatic, a Pharisee, or a legalist. But what does the Lord say about those who keep themselves in purity, holiness, and love? "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine" (Isaiah 43:1, KJV). "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20, KJV). And what will He say to His loving children when He comes? "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21, KJV).

When love hears unfounded accusations directed against it, it looks to Jesus, finds comfort in Him, and continues its work.

What benefit is there in love?

What benefit do I receive from loving? What has changed in my life? Why do I need this? What am I trying to show and prove by it? First, I must answer all these questions for myself.

There was a moment in my life when I realized that I did not possess true love—the love that never fails and that consciously loves everyone it chooses to love. I began asking for this gift. The Lord gave me this heavenly treasure, taught me how to use it, and moved me to speak and write about this gift.

When I compare my former life with my life today, I see an enormous difference and a tremendous advantage in my present condition—as great as the advantage of light over darkness. When there is light, you can see everything and know which way to go.

I have come to understand God's character, His mercy, and His justice more clearly. I realize that I am incapable of comprehending all His greatness and beauty, yet His revelation through the gift of love fills me with delight. I know that with Him I have nothing to fear!

He loves me and understands me far better than I understand my neighbor, because He is higher and purer than I am. This thought brings me even greater joy. I deeply desire all people to learn this, not merely from my words, but through their own experience of love and life with God.

A loving person will inevitably sow everywhere seeds of love that never run out. Seeds sown in good soil spring up and bear fruit. The lives and minds of my neighbors change; they examine their hearts, begin seeking the Source of love, and find Him in God. I see kind and grateful faces, joyful eyes, and smiles, and I understand that love has taken up residence in their hearts. I see many people respond to my love with even greater love. When I see someone's need, I direct that person to Jesus, and He gives him everything he needs.

Unfortunately, love sometimes encounters rejection and criticism along its path. Everyone who loves goes through this bitter experience. Even Christ was not accepted by everyone. Rejection may come from relatives, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and brothers and sisters in the church. As we build relationships with these people, we must remember that they can change and become loving if they desire it and begin

seeking the One Who is Love. God gives us the gift of love even for these people who live in darkness, and with it He gives us victory over our selfishness. Our view of people changes. We begin to look at them through God's eyes, and they become the dearest and most welcome people to us.

After deciding to love my neighbors, I became calmer, more attentive, and more sensitive. As a result, I gained many friends who are dear to my heart. My greatest joy comes from understanding that, by God's grace, I took part in their spiritual growth and transformation while respecting their freedom and feelings.

Great is the reward of those who love, but it cannot be seen with the eyes. It is the Kingdom of God within them, and the King is the Lord Jesus. According to the law of sowing and reaping, seeds of love will not produce thorns or weeds. Therefore, sow love so that you may reap love!

Heirs to god's throne

In Revelation chapter 3, a special message has been recorded for us—the message to Laodicea:

"These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am

set down with My Father in His throne” (Revelation 3:14-21, KJV).

The more deeply I consider the meaning of this message, the more amazed I am by God’s love and humility. He offers me the most generous gift—Himself, His righteousness, and His Holy Spirit. He desires to reveal all His power in my character and life, in my words and actions, so that He may be glorified through me. He desires to show the entire universe, the whole visible and invisible world, what a person becomes when he fully trusts God and desires to have within himself all the fullness of His love, righteousness, and Holy Spirit. As He offers me this priceless gift, He respects my choice and my freedom. He stands at the door of my heart and knocks softly, hoping to be heard and invited in. More than that, the Lord assures me that He will share with me not only a meal, but also His eternal throne!

Satan tried to seize that throne and was cast out of Heaven for doing so. Yet the Lord tenderly invites me to share His throne with Him. Is that not amazing?!

The gift of love that we offer people likewise requires us to respect their choice and freedom. When I love my neighbor, I am ready to offer him my whole self, but I also understand that he may not be ready to accept this gift because he does not understand my true motives or for some other reason. All I can do is wait and continue sowing the seed in the hope that one day it will spring up and bear much fruit.

The message was given to Laodicea—God’s people living in the last days. God offers no one else the privilege of sharing His throne. He gives this right exclusively to the final generation of believers. The Lord has set apart His people for a special purpose: to reveal absolute holiness, purity, and God’s righteousness in their character. They are to reveal all these qualities in the last days amid overwhelming temptations, when iniquity will abound. We are promised supernatural help from above for complete victory over sin, vice, and Satan. God is waiting for our response so that He may pour streams of living water upon the parched ground and show us great and

inaccessible things that we do not know. He is preparing a special people who will be alive to meet their Savior. Will I be able to stand on that day with my own righteousness and love? Never! Only His righteousness and His love will be accepted by Him.

At the crossroads of opinions

One thing we cannot avoid in our relationships with neighbors and friends is the crossroads of opinions. At this crossroads, human love, friendship, and peaceful relationships collapse. The saddest thing is that a disagreement may arise over the most insignificant question imaginable—for example, which end of a banana should be peeled first. This may sound amusing, but questions like these often destroy lives and relationships. When spiritual interests are involved, the confrontation may reach a complete impasse. Giving up any of one's views is treated as a denial of faith and the loss of eternal life. The inevitable result is a broken relationship, the end of a friendship, and complete disappointment in the other person. Anyone with a different opinion is branded a traitor, and the door to our heart is closed to him.

If we examine this problem more deeply, we will find pride at its foundation—pride that paralyzes the human heart and mind. How does love act in such situations? It respects the person's opinion and choice, yet it does not abandon the convictions on which it stands. When life leads to a crossroads of opinions, love knows what to expect and prepares for the blow, but it continues to love its neighbor. Love does not attach labels; instead, it seeks to understand the motives behind particular actions or words. Love does not harden the heart but softens it and assures the person that, despite the difference in views, he is accepted.

As love approaches another crossroads of opinions, it is ready to meet resistance, yet it is determined to continue on its way. Each person has his own version of what is right—a narrow view of the situation. Love, however, bases its actions not on human notions of what is right, but on eternal divine truth.

The gift of love

I have many friends whom I love very much. Each of them is infinitely dear to me. Naturally, I am filled with a desire to share my spiritual blessings with my friends. At the same time, I understand that my friends possess freedom of choice, which I am obligated to respect.

I gather all the treasures of my heart and all my revelations and take them to a beloved friend, anticipating the joy he will experience when he receives my gift. I approach the closed door of his heart, begin knocking very gently, and call my friend by name. I let him know that I have brought him the most precious things I possess, including my very self. My friend hears me and perhaps even sees my gifts, but he is in no hurry to let me in. I understand that it is not so much I who make my friend uneasy as it is my gifts. He does not understand their full value.

My friend does not let me into the home of his heart, but neither does he drive me away from his doorstep. Therefore, I continue standing at his door, knocking gently and calling to him. I know that my gifts can change his life for the better, fill his mind with new thoughts, and make him a loving son of the Heavenly Father. This moves me to keep appealing to his heart in the hope that one day he will let me in. When that happens, my happiness will know no bounds. I have been accepted! My gift has been appreciated! What happiness!

That friend is you, my reader! I am patiently awaiting your decision!

Who is thirsty?

The Lord tells us, "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring" (Isaiah 44:3, KJV).

Every morning and evening, I remember this promise, thirst to receive what has been promised, and ask God to fulfill these words in my life. I understand that unless God gives me His

love, I cannot produce it within myself. My thirst for love can be satisfied only by the One Who Himself is Love. I am interested in listening to, reading, and studying everything connected with love. I joyfully absorb everything the Lord reveals to me, and I know that "He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness" (Psalm 107:9, KJV).

I pray that this biblical promise and my experience will inspire you, my friends, to thirst for and seek God's love!

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1, KJV).

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38, KJV).

Stewards of love

"For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matthew 25:29, KJV).

I cannot receive a small gift of love and keep it exclusively for myself. I can receive it only on the condition that I become a channel of love to others. God desires to multiply His love within me so that He may use it to bless others. Woe to me if I suppress the expression of this gift within myself, because then the second part of Jesus' promise will be fulfilled in my life: even what I have will be taken away from me.

We face a choice: to steward God's gift of love wisely and be happy in this life and throughout eternity, or to bury God's gift, lose the joy of life with God, and forfeit eternal life.

God's call will not sound forever. The longer we delay making a decision, the fainter it will become, until at last it grows completely silent.

Love for one's neighbor begins with love for oneself

Love for one's neighbor begins with love for oneself. Does that sound strange? Yet this is biblical truth: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39, KJV).

This does not mean selfishness, but rather continual care for one's body, soul, and spirit. In His life, Christ demonstrated such love for Himself. Ellen White writes about this beautifully in the book *The Desire of Ages*.

Jesus prayed, sang psalms, spent time in nature, helped His parents, maintained a friendly spirit, and did many other things that nourish and strengthen a person spiritually and physically. He always found a way to bring Himself joy through absolute obedience to God's will and love for His neighbors. He understood that every kind of evil is destructive, and therefore He hated sin in every form. Through His own experience, He came to the conclusion that we should treat others as we would want them to treat us (see Matthew 7:12).

What about us? Do we love ourselves? Does the way we treat ourselves and our salvation enable us to love our neighbors and our enemies? Do we care about the purity of our minds and of our bodies, which are the temple of the Holy Spirit? What do I love to do, watch, and listen to? Once we are certain that we have the right attitude toward ourselves, we can go to our neighbors, who are eagerly waiting for us.

Can love be lukewarm?

Love reveals itself in a right attitude toward life, service, our neighbors, and God. It is the primary motivation behind everything you do. It is also your greatest treasure, which you always carry with you and are ready to share at every opportunity. The more love you give, the more of it you have.

The problem in these last days is that Jesus calls His Church, and the believers who make it up, lukewarm. In His message to the Church of Laodicea, He says, "Thou art neither cold nor hot" (Revelation 3:15, KJV). This is a very serious accusation. Christ says that He will spew such people out of His mouth. In other words, they make God Himself feel sick. But what does it mean to be lukewarm?

Consider a faucet supplied by two pipes, one carrying cold water and the other hot water. When I turn on one tap, cold water flows; when I turn on the other, hot water flows. If I turn on both, lukewarm water flows. Although this is useful in everyday life, it is harmful in spiritual life. Believers in God are called to serve. There are two kinds of service: service for the good of the Church and service for the good of our neighbors. Both are service to God, Who is the Head of the Church and Who identifies Himself with every neighbor. God expects us to approach both kinds of service responsibly. If I do not understand this expectation and requirement of God, I may be hot and zealous in one kind of service but cold in the other.

Jesus once said to the religious leaders, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23, KJV; see also Luke 11:42). Such people are found in our day as well. They know Scripture very well, are ready to defend the truth and lay down their lives for it, can explain every passage of the Bible correctly, and serve actively in the Church. Yet they have few friends. Others find neither joy nor support in fellowship with them. Their love for God is limited to zealous service for the good of the Church, leaving them neither time nor strength for other people.

There is another category of people. They love their neighbors, live for their good, and find satisfaction in doing so. But when they are invited to learn the truth and show zeal in serving the Church and building up the one spiritual body of Christ, they refuse.

Thus, there are two categories of people who are hot in one kind of service and cold in the other. Overall, this is a lukewarm condition. Jesus makes it clear that our service should be equally hot in both directions. In the person of our neighbors, He waits for us to show attention to Him. He also expects us to make efforts to defend the faith and build up the Church. One

loses its meaning without the other. This is precisely why Christ says that it is better to be completely cold than lukewarm.

What, then, should we do? How can we always maintain the necessary fervor in serving both the Church and our neighbors? In the same third chapter of Revelation, Jesus counsels us: “I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (verse 18, KJV). In verse 20, Christ asks us to open the door to Him so that He may teach each of us. Will I respond to this call and follow His counsel? The decision depends entirely on me.

How good the lord is

How merciful and good the Lord is to us! He gives us everything we need for life and expects faith, love, and obedience from us.

We live in a special time—the last days before Christ’s Second Coming—and therefore God has special expectations of us and acts in special ways. The closer we come to the end of earth’s history, the higher the standard of God’s requirements for those who have the light and walk in it. God expects absolute purity, holiness, and dedication from His people. He will accept no one who has a spot or blemish (see Ephesians 5:27). Today His mercy toward every person is great, but in the last days His justice will come to the forefront. He gives us light and the strength to live in that light. Do not think that rejecting God’s will will go unpunished. God is exceedingly exacting, and soon He will require me to give an account of the hope that is in me and hold me accountable for every ray of light.

There are no trifles with God. He cleanses the heart of great sins and of dust in its farthest corners. Sometimes the cleansing of the heart causes pain, but nothing is more joyful than knowing that I belong to God. Through my deeds, words, and thoughts, I reveal who my Master is and who lives in my heart.

Time is rapidly carrying us toward eternity, and God’s requirements are becoming increasingly strict. God pays close

attention to the smallest defect in our character and reproves us. He brings everything hidden to light and watches how we respond. If I decide to be pure, He cleanses me and leads me onward. At the same time, we must understand that God has His own requirements for each person, so we should not compare ourselves with anyone else.

In Revelation chapter 3, God counsels us to buy from Him gold, white raiment, and eyesalve (see verse 18). The gold is “faith which worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6, KJV); the white raiment is God’s righteousness revealed through love; and the eyesalve is the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who endows us with love. In all these gifts, He offers us Himself in all His fullness and beauty. God gives us these wondrous gifts of His grace in exchange for our sins. How good and great our Savior is!

It is not enough to rely on God’s boundless mercy. We must desire to correct our faults with the help of the means God provides. Christ is coming soon, and we must prepare for this glorious event. I pray that the Lord will give us an understanding of our true condition and teach us His love!

Love gives a choice

Our Lord Jesus is good, merciful, and patient, yet He is also holy and just. For all His love toward us, He hates sin. He offers the only means of victory over sin—Himself. Nothing else will free me from the power of sin or change my character. Christ offers Himself with such tenderness and waits for me to accept Him with such patience that the very realization of this mercy breaks my heart. In reverence and humility, our lips ask Him to become our Master and Teacher.

However, Jesus can do nothing for those who reject His goodness or postpone their salvation until tomorrow. Such people will receive the full right to eternal death, because the good God respects a person’s choice and will give him what he has chosen. Christ cannot share His throne with those who do not love Him, do not hear His voice, and do not work out their salvation with fear and trembling. All His righteousness is given to me as a gift in exchange for my sin, which I must recognize

and surrender to Him in repentance. But if I reject God's grace and begin to justify sin, Jesus has no other plan of salvation. The most dreadful condition possible is to claim to belong to Christ while not possessing His gift of love.

The message of love will sound louder and louder in the last days, for in this gift Jesus reveals Himself fully in a person's life. Through it He reveals His character and restores His image in that person. Together with love, Christ gives victory over sin. Love is evidence that God, His righteousness, and His Spirit abide in me.

God's long-suffering is drawing to an end. Imagine that you have come to visit a friend and brought him the most precious thing you possess as a gift. You stand at the door, knock, and call for the owner. He hears your knocking but does not open the door. How long will you remain standing there? What will you do in response to his indifference? Jesus will do the same. The time will come when His knocking at the door grows silent. The place of the good God will be taken by an evil enemy, who will treacherously force his way into your dwelling and bring evil and death with him.

God is still standing at the door and knocking. I let You into my heart, Lord Jesus! Come in and reign within it! Teach me Your love!

The path of love

When a modern person recognizes his spiritual poverty and begins looking for a place where his need can be met, the enemy of human souls first invites him to immerse himself in television or the internet—a world of entertainment and information. But this food does not satisfy him; instead, the feeling of spiritual emptiness leaves him even more disappointed. Eventually, he comes to Jesus and asks Him for help. Christ does not keep him waiting. He throws open the door of blessings, reveals the beauty of His character, and draws the person to Himself. He loves to bless everyone who sincerely asks Him and accepts everyone who comes to Him.

At some point, a believer begins to understand that he needs love—the gold of Heaven—as well as righteousness—the white raiment. He decides to acquire this treasure and timidly asks Jesus to give him these gifts. This prayer sets Heaven in motion. The person expects that his heart is about to be filled with love for each and every person and that he will experience eternal bliss. Instead, he is led into a bathhouse, where the cleansing process begins. He asks for love, but sees irritation, envy, anger, malice, and hatred beginning to come out of him. Carrying this burden, he crawls to Jesus, afraid to lift his eyes and feeling like a traitor; in response, he receives the Savior's assurance of love and acceptance. He finds a Friend in Jesus and begins to trust Him and open up to Him even more. Then Jesus sends him back to the bathhouse, and the cleansing continues.

Over time, however, the believer notices that the evil which came out of him does not return; it no longer controls his mind or determines his actions. The realization of purity brings joy to his heart. He thanks God for this and hastens to tell his neighbors what the Lord has done for him. He declares his love for them and tells them about his happiness. In response, however, he sees the gloomy faces of friends who doubt the truth of his testimony and demand proof.

Then he runs back to Jesus and tells Him about his experiences; in response, he receives comfort and the tender love of his Savior. Jesus assures him that He will not leave him alone and will give him many friends with whom he will share eternity. But these friends must be found, brought to Jesus, and blessed in every possible way. Encouraged, the person continues along the path laid out by God Himself.

Assembling love

Have any of you ever put together a jigsaw puzzle? A large picture is cut into small pieces and packed in a box. When someone sits down to assemble the puzzle, he has a model before his eyes—the completed picture printed on the box. He looks at it and begins selecting pieces. Like many people, I start assembling a puzzle around the edges because the pieces that

form the frame have a distinctive shape and are easy to find. Next come the pieces containing recognizable details, and finally the pieces that share the same color scheme.

The process of assembling a puzzle reminds me of the spiritual experience of acquiring love. We have a model—the Word of God—which we continually consult. The puzzle pieces are the qualities of love that the Lord gives us. Looking at the whole picture, we try to join its pieces together. First, we form the border and gain a general understanding of love. But this outline is not enough for us; we want the entire picture of God’s love to be assembled in our lives. God has given us the model, and He also helps us assemble the whole picture in our character and experience. God enables us to fit together, in the necessary order, patience, kindness, selflessness, humility, self-sacrifice, devotion to truth, faith, and hope (see 1 Corinthians 13).

Reflecting love

When we go outside at night, we do not see the sun because at that time it is illuminating the opposite side of the earth. But then the moon appears in the sky—a satellite that orbits the earth. We say that the moon shines, but in reality it reflects sunlight like a large mirror. Physics tells us that different substances interact with light in different ways: depending on its wavelength, light is either reflected or absorbed by them. Our eyes receive reflected light. We can see one another because the light that falls upon us is reflected.

God pours His love into our hearts like light, and this love reflects His eternal and unchanging character. God sincerely desires us to be His reflection in this world. He wants us to love, because then we will truly reveal God to this world. Christ said, “Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14, KJV). In ourselves, we have no light, just as the moon has no light of its own. It is the light of God’s love that we are called to reflect. That is why, in place of the dark garment of sin that absorbs light, the Lord gives us the white raiment of His righteousness, which reflects His wonderful character.

The sun of god's love

Every second, the sun expends 4,200 tons of its substance as heat and light. The amount of solar energy that reaches the earth's surface every seventy-two hours is equivalent to all the energy contained in the world's reserves of coal, oil, and natural gas. It would seem that such an abundance of heat and light from the sun would be more than enough for hundreds of thousands of planets. Yet God created the sun for one purpose: to warm our earth, illuminate it, and sustain every living thing. It shines continually, regardless of the weather or the time of day.

God's love is like sunlight. He loves us at all times. His love warms everything it encounters. The Lord desires us to reflect the light of His love with the same generosity and constancy, so that the rays of His love may warm our friends and our enemies. The efficiency with which this light works through us may be low, but even a few people saved because of this light will bring joy to our hearts throughout eternity. "Ye are the light of the world," Christ says.

"love one another"

"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another. Simon Peter said unto Him, Lord, whither goest Thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards" (John 13:33-36, KJV).

Jesus says, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Peter listened to Jesus, but what question did he ask after these words? "Lord, whither goest Thou?" Like Peter, we often focus our attention on information that concerns other people. Information that concerns us and our inner life goes in one ear and out the other.

In verse 34, Christ speaks of a “new commandment,” but in reality it is an ancient commandment. Love has always existed and will always exist. Love has conquered this world. Christ came into this world to reveal God’s love to us and to teach us to love truly—to love friends and enemies and to love one another. He gives us this commandment, yet, like Peter, we do not hear it. Therefore, again and again, He addresses His Church: “My dear children, friends, brothers, and sisters! I give you a commandment that is ancient, yet new to you! Receive it, hear it, and learn from Me to keep it. Love one another!”

This commandment, like every other commandment, implies that it can be kept; otherwise, it would not have been given to us. The Lord desires us to hear His voice and do His will. God longs to see us loving one another and rejoicing in that love.

This commandment carries a profound meaning: become close friends with one another, take part in one another’s lives, care for one another, and rejoice for one another. Do you lack strength? Wisdom? Desire and understanding? Christ said, “Without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5, KJV). Without Christ, we are incapable of loving. But He is ready to be our Teacher in the school of love.

Where can love be found?

“There is no love in the Church!” Have you ever heard that statement? It is usually said by those who realize that they themselves have no love, but are afraid to admit it and prefer to shift the blame onto others.

Can love be seen in the Church during a worship service? Perhaps it can, but in my conviction, a worship service is not the best place to see love. Love is revealed most clearly in personal interaction with people and in everyday and workplace situations, where their true nature and character can be clearly seen. “I love!” is the message of every son and daughter of God at every time and in every place.

Therefore, friends, the next time you come to a worship service, do not look there for love. Instead, look for someone to whom

you can give your love through personal fellowship and everyday life!

Love chooses flowers

If you asked a fly whether it had seen any flowers nearby, it would answer, "I do not know about flowers, but that ditch is full of manure and filth!" The fly would then have no trouble listing every garbage heap it had visited. If you asked a bee whether it had seen any filth nearby, it would answer, "Filth? I did not see any. But there truly are many fragrant flowers here!"

I would like to reflect on flies. A Russian song contains these words: "Like flies, here and there, rumors travel from house to house..."

Gossip, malicious talk about others, and whispering accusations have existed in every age, and our time is no exception. Why are such activities so popular among people? The Bible answers this question: "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Proverbs 26:22, KJV).

Eating a delicacy gives us pleasure. The person who prepares these delicacies also receives a certain pleasure. That is why the Bible compares the words of a talebearer to delicacies. In reality, this is a very widespread sin, and all of us are inclined to indulge in it. The Bible calls this practice sin. Therefore, we must repent of this sin, abandon it, and never repeat it. Why? Because our eternal destiny depends on how pure we are in God's sight. When He sends light into our lives, we must receive it and abandon whatever hinders Him.

Love covers all things

"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate" (Proverbs 8:13, KJV). A "froward mouth" destroys another person's reputation and humiliates them. As we study the Gospels, we can see that Jesus never talked about anyone behind their back. He openly

rebuked sin, but He did so with love for the sinner. He always showed compassion to those who stumbled.

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17, KJV). Christ came into the world not as a Judge, but as a Savior. He came to save people from their sins, not to punish them. Among Christ’s disciples was Judas, who had an evil heart and a deceitful mouth. Yet Jesus not only allowed Judas to remain among His disciples, but also did everything possible to save him. When Christ washed Judas’s feet, Judas still had an opportunity to repent of his evil deeds. Judas recognized his problem, but he did not respond to this final appeal and closed his heart.

Christ’s disciples would have been greatly surprised if they had heard their Teacher speak words of condemnation against those who tried to trap Him in His words and destroy Him. He never mocked people’s shortcomings. On the contrary, He sought to relieve their suffering. And He desires us to behave in the same way.

Love does not gossip

“Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:16, KJV). From the beginning, God foresaw that people would behave in this way and made His attitude toward it clear.

“Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer” (Psalm 101:5, KJV). David spoke these words under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things” (Romans 2:1, KJV).

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Proverbs 26:20, KJV).

These are only a few of the verses that speak directly about the harm caused by gossip.

In our conversations, we often cross the line and begin discussing someone else. True wisdom lies in avoiding such conversations. Instead, we should ask ourselves, "How can I draw closer to Christ? How can I know God better?"

When people discuss others, they risk breaking two commandments at once: "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not bear false witness." Words can kill every spiritual aspiration within a person, especially when that person has only recently turned to God and is not yet firmly established in the faith. Slander destroys love, friendship, and every good endeavor. The Bible calls such behavior sin and urges us to renounce it.

One church member was walking past the pastor's house when he heard these words through an open window: "Get out of here! Get out of my sight!" Horrified, he ran to the other church members and said, "The pastor is throwing his wife out of the house! I heard him scolding her myself." But when one of the pastor's friends asked him what had happened, it turned out that the pastor had not been scolding his wife at all. He had been scolding the dog that had damaged his belongings. True love never spreads rumors and does not listen to slander against one's neighbor.

"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (Revelation 12:10, KJV). From this passage we learn that Satan accuses us before God day and night. It gives him great pleasure when we engage in the same activity among our friends. Today, we do not even need to visit someone's home to do this; it is enough to make a phone call and discuss another person. When someone tells you details about another person that you do not need to know, why listen? It destroys your trust in and respect for that person. People often present their own opinions as though they were the truth.

But God loves every one of us. He gave His life so that we might be saved and have life more abundantly. He came to take all these sins upon Himself. And when we read the Bible, we see that Christ gives an important command concerning how we are to respond to another person's sin:

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church: but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-17, KJV).

The first thing we must do when we see a brother or sister commit a sin is speak with that person privately, without witnesses. This does not mean that we must say, "You are a sinner," and express all our indignation. God teaches us to point out sin with wisdom and love. Truth spoken in a way that insults and humiliates a person will do no good. Instead, it will destroy a relationship that may later be very difficult to restore.

We often skip the steps Christ sets out in the Gospel of Matthew and immediately bring a brother's or sister's conduct before a church council, even though the matter could have been resolved more easily and painlessly in a private conversation. Christ gave us this rule, and He expects us to follow it. Sometimes, after talking with someone, you realize that the other person was not mistaken—you were mistaken when you began thinking badly of them. This is why God calls us to speak with one another. When people see that they are loved, they open up to communication and become willing to change.

"And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (1 Timothy 5:13, KJV). In this verse, the apostle Paul speaks about young widows who had nothing to occupy them, so they went from house to house and talked with people. The verse does not condemn fellowship

itself, but the part of it that is needless and unworthy of God. Gossip falls into this category because discussing other people's mistakes does not benefit anyone. The right response is to pray for the person and speak with them directly.

God calls us to look for people's strengths, not their shortcomings. The greatest value in every person is that God accepts and loves them just as they are.

Love does not judge

How do Satan's works differ from God's works? Satan looks for reasons to accuse us. He records all our mistakes so that he can present them before God. "Look at this person," Satan says. "He is not worthy of Your salvation. You must hand him over to me for destruction." But God seeks to save us. He longs to find within a person even a particle of faith that will make it possible to deliver them from sin and save them for eternal life. Our words and deeds are the result of our faith or our unbelief. Through our words and deeds, we reveal what is happening within us, what kind of relationship we have with God, and whether we are fit for Heaven.

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the Law, and judgeth the Law: but if thou judge the Law, thou art not a doer of the Law, but a judge" (James 4:11, KJV). In the preceding chapter of his epistle, James reflects on the power of the tongue: "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" (James 3:8-11, KJV). We can see that James describes the tongue from experience. A horse can be tamed and a ship can be steered, but controlling the tongue is far more difficult.

Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34, KJV). The tongue expresses what we think, what we believe, and whom we serve. Recognizing this

problem, the apostle Paul writes: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29, KJV). Proverbs chapter 6 lists seven things that God hates, and one of them is a lying tongue that attributes nonexistent faults to other people.

Alongside active gossips, there are passive gossips. They do not discuss anyone themselves, but they enjoy listening while others are discussed. To them, it is a real delicacy. This, too, is a serious problem. It is a sickness, and those who suffer from it need the Physician.

The central problem with gossip and idle talk is that they divide the Church into hostile groups, and the Spirit of God cannot work in such an atmosphere. He wants the Church to be one family in which brothers and sisters truly love and protect one another.

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1, KJV).

"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Romans 14:13, KJV).

If what you read or listen to reveals God's love and draws you closer to Heaven, devote your time to it. Conversely, disregard information that carries a spirit of criticism and condemnation. If you do not know about your brothers' sins, you will not lose eternity because of it. But if you encourage those who spread rumors, you may come under condemnation together with the devil. Therefore, be very careful about what you read, listen to, and watch.

"Satan cannot read our thoughts, but he can see our actions, hear our words; and from his long knowledge of the human family, he can shape his temptations to take advantage of our weak points of character. And how often do we let him into the secret of how he may obtain the victory over us. Oh, that we

might control our words and actions! How strong we would become if our words were of such an order that we would not be ashamed to meet the record of them in the day of judgment. How different will they appear in the day of God from what they seem when we utter them" (Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People, p. 328).

Love is not proud

How does pride reveal itself? In a person's look. An arrogant person may say nothing, yet give you such a look that you immediately understand whom you are dealing with. Pride also reveals itself in words and actions. What is pride? It is the arrogance and haughtiness of someone who considers himself superior to others. A proud person unmistakably implies to those around him, "I am better than you! I am smarter, stronger, and more attractive than you!"

Such arrogance can also reveal itself in spiritual matters: "I know the Bible better; my faith is stronger; I have been in the Church longer; I have more love!" All of this is pride. A believer's only true distinction is humility in Christ Jesus.

As a rule, arrogance and haughtiness are characteristic of those who possess wealth, material prosperity, a high-ranking position, social status, or physical attractiveness. The Bible says that Lucifer's heart was lifted up because of his beauty. To be beautiful is a blessing and a gift from God. But if that gift is used for self-gratification, it becomes a curse and leads to destruction.

Do scholars take pride in their intellect? Do the strong take pride in their strength? This often happens. But will the weak take pride in their weakness? Hardly. Talented people, as well as famous and popular figures, are also susceptible to this sin. Television can very quickly make anyone famous throughout an entire country or even around the world. The movie industry quickly turns people into celebrities. Elite sports are another sphere in which there is a danger of becoming proud.

David gives the following description of proud people:

“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth” (Psalm 73:1-9, KJV).

David’s words not only warn us against arrogance, but also teach us how to respond properly when we encounter arrogance in others. Such people often provoke anger and irritation in us, but ordinary envy is frequently hidden behind these emotions. David was able to free himself from it only when he “went into the sanctuary of God” and understood their end (verse 17).

The Lord still invites all of us to come to Him. As I look at Him, I find peace and understand that He provides everything necessary for life. Jesus teaches us to control our emotions. His love teaches us how to respond properly to irritating situations. The demon of malice has no power in a loving heart. Where love lives, there is no room for anger.

Love does not take offense

Taking offense is pride in its highest expression. From my own experience, I know that this is a very dangerous condition. I could go for months without speaking to someone who had wronged me in some way or had simply hurt my feelings. Resentment often takes up residence in families where a husband and wife are hostile toward each other and cause each other pain. Taking offense is a defensive reaction. A person closes himself off and becomes silent. Wounded pride becomes a rusty lock that restrains our actions. Some relatives do not speak to each other for years.

The Lord's Prayer contains these words: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12, KJV). When we act in this way, forgiveness frees us from resentment. Sometimes a person recognizes his guilt, comes to you, repents, and then your resentment passes. But that is not victory. Victory is when you take the first step toward restoring your relationship with the person who hurt you. This is vitally important; otherwise, it will be difficult for us to receive God's forgiveness. As long as we carry the festering wound of resentment within us, we will be unable to receive God's light and His correction.

Resentment against God is also a sin—one that originated in Heaven and grew to catastrophic proportions. Even the smallest resentment lodged in our heart will progress and distort our character beyond recognition if we do not fight it. If, at the very beginning of Lucifer's rebellion, God had shown him what he would ultimately become, Lucifer would have been horrified. Resentment turned a radiant angel into a murderer of human beings and an enemy who sought to kill God.

When I understand how dangerous resentment is and see its beginnings within myself, I begin to seek the Savior. Jesus heals us from this leprosy. Freedom from resentment brings a sense of genuine happiness and liberty. Love does not take offense.

Instruction in love

Another form of pride is the unwillingness to accept instruction from others. A person says, "I know that; I have already heard it! Do not teach me, and do not tell me about it!" This is an unwillingness to hear something that one has heard and rejected before. Children usually ask to hear a story they like again. Adults, however, cannot tolerate being told something twice.

When we become Christ's disciples, the Spirit of God corrects and instructs us. But sometimes the Lord uses people for this purpose and wants us not to resist their instruction. A humble heart listens to any correction, even when it comes from an unbeliever. Unbelievers have often helped me see my sin.

Surprisingly, they know very well what a man of God should be like and how he should live.

Once I was flying on an Ilyushin Il-86 airplane, which had three sections of seats. I sat in the center section. Do you know why? So that when drinks were served, I could take one twice—once from the flight attendant on my left and once from the flight attendant on my right. Beside me sat a young man to whom I was reading Bible verses about God's love. On my other side sat an elderly German woman who did not understand a word of what I was saying, but she saw that I was reading the Bible. As two flight attendants served drinks in the aisles, I took drinks from both and put them into my bag. I did not need them and could have bought them, yet I took them anyway. At one point, the German woman could no longer remain silent and said to me in German, "You are reading the Bible, but you are deceiving these flight attendants." To me, this was God's voice showing me in my true light. The young man did not understand a word, but I felt incredibly ashamed. I accepted this correction as though it had come from the Holy Spirit.

When others instruct us, it is always painful. Our pride makes us resist. What should we do? Love teaches me to accept instruction and correction from people. Love listens to and respects the person who is speaking. It analyzes the information and chooses what is useful and reasonable. Love cleanses the heart from pride and teaches me meekness. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5, KJV).

Love submits to the truth

Another form of pride is resistance to light—an unwillingness to follow Christ, repent, and change. God's task is to reveal my sin to me, and He does this continually through my thoughts, conscience, circumstances, or other people. My responsibility toward God is to accept God's light. God brings me to an awareness of sin and waits for my repentance so that He may cleanse me. But our pride begins to resist, and at times we close ourselves off from people and from God.

Some of us once lived in the world without God and, because of our own pride, did not want to follow Christ. But one day we took a step toward God, and He accepted us as we were. Now He cleanses us and leads us step by step. Therefore, when we encounter an appeal in spiritual literature or someone corrects us, we should not hasten to say, "That is not for me!" The apostle Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:3-4: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings" (KJV).

Love listens to God's voice and distinguishes it from other voices. It is ready to change and thirsts for righteousness and truth. It learns from the Heavenly Teacher and lives in the light. It does not judge its neighbor, but gently corrects them. Love is not proud and accepts every instruction from God, regardless of the source through which it comes.

Love is not jealous

There is a holy jealousy of which the Bible speaks. God Himself calls Himself jealous: "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5, KJV). The Spirit of God loves with jealousy, as James 4:5 says. At the same time, we must distinguish jealousy that is a holy and righteous feeling from jealousy that is an expression of pride.

God condemns the attitude that regards a spouse or friend as personal property and reacts with irritation when someone else shows interest in or attention to that person and begins communicating with them. Such unfounded jealousy is rooted in pride and possessiveness.

But there is justified jealousy—for example, when a husband leaves his wife for another woman or a wife is unfaithful to her husband with another man. We should not tolerate such treatment. The Bible also regards marital unfaithfulness as sufficient grounds for divorce. In the same way, the jealous God

does not tolerate the unfaithfulness of His people when they treacherously serve other gods.

The Church consists of brothers and sisters. They fellowship with one another and love one another with the holy love to which Christ's commandment calls us. This is precisely the kind of love God desires to see in us toward our brothers and sisters. But these relationships must always include strict control over our thoughts and feelings and proper conduct toward the opposite sex. Do not become a temptation to others, and do not give an opportunity to those who are looking for one.

But if our spouse gives us no reason for jealousy and we begin to be jealous of Church members, forbidding our spouse to communicate with brothers and sisters, visit others, or invite guests into our home, there is no truth in this. We are not another person's property, even if that person is our spouse. We belong to God. The only things by which we can bind a person to us are our love, kindness, faithfulness, and care. These are the only things by which we can keep that person close. Unfounded jealousy is more likely to destroy a family than to save it. A person grows weary of constant scrutiny and faultfinding. In the end, they may rebel against their spouse's control and do something foolish. Do not allow the situation to reach that point.

Love respects a person's freedom, even when that person chooses the wrong path. Love believeth all things and seeks an explanation for everything. Love hates sin but loves the sinner. Jesus teaches us the principles of right relationships with one another. His grace changes our thinking and forms a righteous character.

Love knows no nationality

The next form of pride is nationalism—the exaltation of one linguistic or ethnic group above others, or of one clan or family above others. We are better than they are. Our family and lineage are better than yours. Our nation is better, more intelligent, wiser, and more capable. In Germany, where I now live, the National Socialist German Workers' Party came to

power in the twentieth century and professed this kind of ideology. Everyone knows what its rule led to. Although lessons were learned, the spirit of nationalism continues to live in people.

If a Russian-speaking group in the Church imagines that it is better than another language group, God will certainly show us how dependent we are on Him. If native Germans should decide that they are better than immigrants, the Lord will humble them as well and show that He is the Head of the Church.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, KJV). “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3:11, KJV).

Language barriers certainly hinder communication. In our church, we have brothers from Romania. Once I approached them to offer them my friendship, but I could not even explain what I wanted. It is difficult to become close to people who speak another language, but that is no reason to consider them inferior to me or to treat them with arrogance or even hatred.

Nationalism has its own insulting names for other people—derogatory terms for Jews, Black people, people from Central Asia or the Caucasus, Ukrainians, Russians, and others. When we use such words, we sin against God. Christ identified Himself with the entire human family. Every person is a child of God by creation and redemption and a potential citizen of God’s Kingdom. When I place myself above another person, I become wrong in God’s sight.

Love is not proud and does not exalt itself. Linguistic and cultural differences exist and will continue to exist, but they are no obstacle to love. Jesus speaks every language, and His language of love is understood even by animals that cannot speak.

Love does not boast

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich

man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23-24, KJV).

Achievements and successes brighten our lives and bring us joy. Sometimes we greatly desire to share that joy. But we must be careful that our joy does not turn into pride and boasting.

When I say, “Look at what I have achieved, what I possess, and what I can do,” it is not difficult to guess whom I want to glorify with those words. The same thing can be expressed very differently: “Glory to God! Look at how the Lord has blessed me. I prayed about this and worked toward it, and God opened the way for me. How grateful I am to Him.” These words will glorify God.

What stands in opposition to pride? Humility, meekness, and modesty. All of these are elements of love. The apostle John says, “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:15-16, KJV). The Lord also says that He “resisteth the proud [that is, He humbles them], but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6, KJV). He alone knows how to humble pride. King Nebuchadnezzar, walking through the royal palace in Babylon, said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30, KJV). Daniel chapter 4 describes how, after these words, God deprived this proud king of his reason for seven years. Each of us builds a personal “Babylon” in this life—a house, a company, a health resort, a store, a fitness center, a café, or a church. All of these things are good and can serve the benefit of society and the glory of God. But woe to me if I take credit for these achievements and begin to boast about them, aloud or inwardly! God carefully examines our motives. Love seeks glory not for itself, but for the One from Whose hand it receives everything. Wisdom, strength, wealth, beauty, and

achievement are not given so that we may boast about them, but so that we may glorify God and serve our neighbors.

Idols in sports

Another form of pride is the excitement of sports fandom and an emotional attachment to a particular team. I root for my favorite team, rejoice in its victories, and grieve over its defeats. This is like building a house on sand: sooner or later, it will fall. The conduct of the athletes themselves can be understood to some extent: they train, deprive themselves of life's comforts, and make this their work and source of income. But what does a fan do? He simply suffers emotionally for his team. This obsession comes very close to the sin of pride.

In our time, however, soccer has been placed on a special pedestal. This sport attracts more attention from the inhabitants of our planet than any other. The FIFA World Cup is a grand event for which athletes and fans prepare for several years. As I reflected on this phenomenon, I came to the conclusion that demonic forces are involved in the frenzy surrounding soccer. I can find no other explanation for its power over the minds of millions of people. Unfortunately, this influence also extends to God's children. Many Church members worship the god of soccer and pray to it for their team's victory.

The god of soccer is very pleased with its worshipers. It gives them emotional pleasure, pride in their team, and contempt for others. But this god takes its greatest pleasure in soccer matches held on the Sabbath, seeking to deceive even the elect. On this special day, which the Creator Himself set apart for fellowship with His creation, many of His children turn their backs on their Savior. They prefer to cheer for their favorite team without considering that their disregard for light and holiness is being recorded in the Book of Life. The apostle John gives very wise counsel in his epistle: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21, KJV).

Love is indifferent to athletic competition; it rejoices in the success of others. In sports, one person wins and the strongest

receives the prize. In love, all who take part are victorious and receive the reward.

Love does not show off

Pride often declares, “Look how handsome I am!” or “Look how beautiful I am!”

God values beauty, and therefore He created everything perfect and beautiful. The Bible tells us that Satan was the most beautiful of created beings—“Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty” (Ezekiel 28:12, KJV). It then states, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness” (Ezekiel 28:17, KJV).

Being attractive is not a sin. Caring for one’s appearance is natural and normal. But at some point, I may realize that I possess an extraordinary appearance that other people admire. I then begin to exalt myself in my own thoughts and place myself above others. Admiring looks, endless compliments, and “likes” on social media become a drug for the soul, and I feel that I must keep meeting that high standard.

People try to attain society’s accepted standard of beauty, sparing neither money nor time. As a result, enormous sums are spent to adorn a perishable body and impress others. Many people will not allow themselves to appear in public without expensive makeup or exclusive clothing. The demon of beauty freely torments its victims.

Youth gives a person natural beauty. At some point, a young person begins to understand that an attractive appearance gives strength and influence. But time passes: wrinkles appear, hair turns gray, and skin loses its firmness. Weight gain or excessive thinness changes the body. The aging process is irreversible. What happens to a proud person then? That person becomes despondent and uses every possible effort and means to remain on the pedestal of beauty. Believers are no exception.

“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth

away” (1 Peter 1:24, KJV). But the Bible also describes an inner beauty found in a godly character. Friendliness, cheerfulness, and a meek and quiet spirit adorn every person at every age. Such people may not outwardly stand out in any way, but their inner beauty will draw others to them. Love gives the person who possesses it an imperishable beauty.

Love and fashion

“Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:3-4, KJV).

Fashion is another invention of Satan, who imposes a particular style of clothing and behavior on his followers. Fashion demands strict conformity to fleeting rules and standards. A person who does not dress fashionably is ridiculed and isolated. A fashionably dressed person, by contrast, is accepted as one of the group and feels confident in any company. How should God’s children conduct themselves in this matter?

There is nothing wrong with following current fashion in certain areas of life when it does not conflict with God’s standards and is appropriate for the time and place. But when fashion changes and moves on, and I spend considerable money and time trying to keep up with it, I will have to answer to God for my wastefulness and my influence on others. Once I succeed in conforming to the latest trend, I feel superior to those who have not. But fashion never stands still, so I chase after it again, losing sound judgment and squandering the talents entrusted to me. I am trying to build my happiness on sand.

What kind of vacation is fashionable now? Any travel agency will tell you where you can spend your savings in a short time.

What kind of body is considered attractive now? Any movie or magazine will show you today’s standard of beauty.

What food is fashionable? The kind most frequently displayed on billboards and in commercials.

What faith is popular now? Faith in oneself and in one's good deeds, which must be put on display.

What car is fashionable now? The latest model from the most expensive manufacturer.

What lifestyle is fashionable today? Minimum effort and maximum pleasure.

What kind of family is fashionable? Living together without marriage.

How many children are fashionable? One—or, better yet, none.

What kind of job is considered prestigious? An office job in a white shirt with a laptop.

What god is fashionable now? Mammon.

Fashion is promoted through movies, glossy magazines, and the media. It is an entire industry designed to impose values and extract money from people.

Love is sensible. It pays attention to what is happening in the world but does not blindly follow fashion. Love is discerning and rational; it knows the value of money and knows how to direct it toward good rather than harm to the soul. Love does not fear ridicule or social pressure. Love adorns the person who possesses it with an imperishable beauty that is valued in every age and every society.

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21, KJV).

CHAPTER 6. BAPTISM WITH THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

When we are baptized with the Holy Spirit—when the anointing of the Holy Spirit takes place—Christ begins, in an incomprehensible way, to live in us. The Holy Spirit makes the presence of Jesus Christ within us possible and real. Yet Christ not only lives in us; we also abide in Him:

“Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:3-5, KJV).

What will happen if a wave carries an empty, dirty jar out into the ocean? At first, it will remain empty and float on the surface. Water will wash the outside of the jar, while the inside remains dirty. But in time, water will enter the jar and cleanse it from within. The water will make it completely transparent, and it will become difficult to distinguish in the surrounding water. This illustrates how we abide in Christ and Christ abides in us. For water to fill the jar, the jar must be open. For Christ to live in us, we must open our hearts to Him. Only then can He cleanse us from every impurity. Carnal thoughts will be replaced by the thoughts of Christ, human passions by His feelings, and a sinful disposition by His righteous character. Living in us, Christ will work in us “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13, KJV).

Love is an inseparable part of God's character, and He wants His character to become our character. God sent His Son to earth to save us from sin and make us like Him, so that even here on earth we may learn to live the life of Heaven.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an inseparable part of the plan of salvation. While living on earth, Christ regarded the coming of the Holy Spirit as the greatest blessing. The disciples communed with Christ, but until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, they understood His teaching only dimly. It was the

Holy Spirit alone Who revealed to them the full depth of Christ's teaching.

The early and latter rain

John the Baptist proclaimed that Christ would baptize “with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew 3:11, KJV). Jesus Himself said in His conversation with Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5, KJV). When, in fulfillment of these words, I receive water baptism through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is given authority to work in my life. At that moment, the very baptism with the Holy Spirit that Christ promised takes place. We begin to understand God, the plan of salvation, and the nature of our relationship with Him.

The Bible speaks of the early and latter rain. Sown seeds lie upon the surface and wait for the early rain—the life-giving moisture that enables them to put down roots and become established in the soil. Only after the plant has grown and become strong does God send the latter rain, which is necessary for the fruit to ripen.

When we ask for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the early rain is poured out upon us. The outpouring of the Spirit upon the Church described in the book of Acts was accompanied by striking signs, and many believers become disappointed when they see nothing similar in their own lives. Yet the absence of visible manifestations should be regarded not as a deficiency, but as an advantage. It allows us to focus on the inward evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit descends upon us, we who have been blinded by sin begin to sense the presence of the invisible God, believe in Him, open our hearts to Him, love Him, dedicate our lives to Him, and become willing to die for Him. When the Holy Spirit descends upon a person, the Word of God acquires special value for that person because this Book reveals God's loving character, and a responsive love awakens within us.

Jesus pointed to the Heavenly Father's desire to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit:

“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” (Luke 11:9-13, KJV).

If you do not have faith that God will answer your request for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, find this biblical promise, place your hand upon it, and say, “Lord, Jesus taught that You give this gift freely and without restrictions, just as we gladly grant the requests of our children. Help me not to doubt this for even a second!” We gladly give food to our children when they ask us for it. Why should God act differently? He sent His Son to die so that He could give us the Holy Spirit. And He willingly gives Him to us when we desire this gift and ask for it. After every prayer for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we receive this heavenly gift, which changes our lives.

The fruit of the holy spirit

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23, KJV). I have read these verses many times, reflected on them, and noticed that the word “fruit” is singular. I could not understand how one fruit could contain such an abundance of qualities until I considered a cluster of grapes. A cluster of grapes is one fruit composed of many individual grapes that share the same flavor. When the Holy Spirit produces fruit in us, it combines all the characteristics listed above.

Love, as an inseparable part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, cannot exist apart from the other parts. We cannot love without believing in God. In the same way, we cannot believe in God without loving or being longsuffering. Everything is

interconnected, as in one body in which all the organs work for one another's good.

As I reflected on the changes the Lord had brought about in my heart, I understood that love is not one separate quality of a Christian's character, but the soil of that character. In this soil, the Holy Spirit plants other qualities independently of me. I asked God for love and received much more. What remains if love is removed from the fruit? Joy without love is delight in another's misfortune; faith without love is fanaticism; peace without love is self-deception.

The Bible says much about love, Whose Author is God. He wants us to learn to love one another because this is fundamentally important to our salvation. This love is unconditional and acts regardless of whether it is accepted or rejected. In God's grammar, "love" is always a verb: it brings about changes in our character, thoughts, and actions, as well as in the lives of our neighbors. God is ready to pour out upon us the gift of His love if we agree to receive it. All who believe in Jesus are called to reveal the precious fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives, so that the promises God has given to all who thirst and are in need may be fulfilled.

CHAPTER 7. THE VICTORY OF GOD'S LOVE

At present, God seems physically unapproachable and awe-inspiring to me, but I understand that in eternity we will perceive Him differently, when we live in His presence and see His face. Just imagine: you will meet your Heavenly Father face to face. That thought alone is inspiring!

Despite all my shortcomings, I matter to God. He constantly thinks about me as though I were the only person in the Universe. To Him, no one is dearer than I am. Christ was not afraid to risk His eternal life, but came into this world to fight the enemy and give us His victory. We are saved solely because of His sacrifice. The prophet Isaiah writes, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11, KJV). And we will see this eternal joy in God's eyes when He looks upon us with love.

Some people have lost their health and become helpless and disabled. Everyone has turned away from them, and they have sunk into the depths of despair. Life holds no joy for them, yet they are afraid to die. The good news is that God needs even these people! He will give them everything in exchange for their faith in Jesus. We all need to understand that someone needs us, and only God can give us this sense of our own worth. The enemy devised the theory of evolution and tries to persuade us that our appearance in this world was an accident and that no one needs us. People live with this inner emptiness. But God teaches that every person is precious to Him and that He has a special plan for each one.

God also wants to convince us that we need one another. We begin to realize this as the Spirit of God works within us and love from God fills our minds. Unfortunately, people today often begin to value someone only after losing them. There is even a Russian saying: "We do not cherish what we have; when we lose it, we weep." Standing beside a grave, we realize that we have lost a friend or a brother, and we suffer because we spent too little time with him and can no longer speak kind words to him. Therefore, the Lord teaches us to show in every possible

way that those close to us—especially those who share our faith and spirit—are needed and infinitely precious to us. And so, every morning I choose love, friendship, and happiness.

Love cannot lose

After observing for many years what the Lord has been doing within me, I noticed an important fact: from the very moment Jesus first gave me His love, I have not lost a single battle. Please do not rush to accuse me of self-confidence or regard my words as boasting, because I am speaking not of my victories, but of God's! I cannot imagine how anyone could lose when God Himself is conducting the war. From morning until evening, my mind is set on victory. If a battle begins, I know Who will ultimately win it. You will understand me when you experience this amazing walk with God for yourselves!

Jesus has not lost a single battle, and in my life He continually wins victories. This is not my achievement, but His mercy. It is wonderful to be on the same team with Him! Without Him, you have no chance of victory; with Him, you have no chance of defeat! Love gives a person the mind of a victor. You begin to understand that you possess the most powerful weapon in the Universe, against which no one has a defense. Jesus has already overcome this world, and His victory belongs to us. The greatest joy is that He promises generous blessings to the overcomers not only in this life, but also in the life to come.

There were times when I did not know what to do or how to conduct myself, when I fell beneath the weight of my problems. When the Lord revealed my sins to me, it was very difficult, but Christ always gained the victory within me. He always came to my aid, lifted me up, and led me onward. "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8, KJV). He Himself leads us into battle and casts us into the furnace of trials so that we may grow stronger and gain the experience of victory. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13, KJV).

The Lord invites everyone who desires to overcome through love to open the door to Him, to buy from Him gold tried in the

fire and white raiment, and to anoint their eyes with eyesalve. What we do with this invitation is for you and me to decide!

A song of love to Jesus

The Lord took my sins and cast them into the depths of the sea (see Micah 7:19). Because of this, I have not only a present, but also a future. Yet even now, God has given me love, joy, and happiness that I can share with other people. Already today I have the greatest blessing—a close relationship with Jesus. I see His hand in everything, know Him personally, and understand His will.

Christ is immeasurably good. He loves all of you, my friends, and waits for the time when, at the Second Coming, He can take us to Himself, never to be separated again. He is the very best Friend, Who will never leave or betray us, but will always listen and understand. He delights in showing mercy, and if He judges anyone, His judgment is just and righteous.

Christ is the very best Teacher. He never scolds or insults anyone, and He never gives up on anyone. He turns every situation to good and teaches us to think and act rightly. He loves and respects the dignity of His students and always seeks an opportunity to lift them up and encourage them. Jesus gives wisdom and knowledge.

Christ is love, and He desires to see this love in me and in you. He waits for everyone who thirsts so that He may pour out this gift abundantly. He respects my freedom and has limited His power by my choice. He takes my will into account and acts in my life only within the boundaries I have set for Him. He is ready to leave me without protest at any moment if I ask Him to, but He will live with me if I desire it. Jesus knows how to wait. He never gives up and calls every person, desiring to enter that person's life and transform it.

Christ accepts me as I am when I come to Him, but He does not leave me as I am. He begins to change me, cleanse me, and bless me for every good work. Like a physician, He listens to my heart and is always attentive to my needs. He always seeks an opportunity to give me something necessary and beneficial. He

constantly thinks about my happiness and does everything possible to bring it about. Jesus sends His good angels to protect me, lest I stumble and fall. If I do fall, they help me rise again. The angels bear me upon their wings and guard me according to His will.

Jesus is preparing me for eternity, for life among holy beings whose only currency is love. He teaches me to store up this treasure in the heavenly Bank, so that when necessary I may withdraw the amount I need, invest it in the lives of my neighbors, and thereby increase heavenly capital.

The strategy of love

Jesus commanded us to love our enemies (see Matthew 5:44) and to love one another (see John 15:12). Love always goes on the offensive. It enters enemy territory and takes possession of it. Those who are accustomed to remaining behind defensive lines will never become victors. Therefore, Christ calls us: act, go, speak, and heal—but do not sit still or sleep (see Luke 10:3–9)!

How, then, does love go on the offensive? It is an entire art, and mastering it requires the full concentration of our spiritual and moral strength, conformity to God's standards, and deliberate decisions of the will. The ultimate goal is to win a person's heart and become that person's friend for life. Love does not surrender its conquests to the enemy, but treasures them.

Let us consider the strategy. First, you analyze your own life and evaluate your motives and actions. Then you come to understand that you do not possess within yourself the strength necessary for the advance and the victory. So we plead with God, with an intense desire and thirst to receive power from above. The Lord answers and gives us strength so that we may use it for a particular person or group of people.

After choosing a neighbor as the object of this loving advance, you should ask yourself: What do you want to do with this person? The only right answer is: love! You begin to ask for wisdom from above and for love toward this person, while also learning about his or her life and interests. God answers and

gives you the resources you need. Then you carefully make contact with your neighbor, striving not to violate that person's freedom in any way, while at the same time seeking a path to the heart. With God's help, you try to discern the person's talents and help develop them. You constantly think about how to help, gladden, and inspire your neighbor. God reveals the person's nature to you and shows you ways to reach him or her, but He never tires of reminding you that this is a living soul whom He loves and will not allow to be hurt. You understand that this person is given to you for life, and you no longer have the right to change your attitude toward him or her, even if your love is rejected.

Sometimes a brief meeting is enough to find the key to a person's heart; at other times, it takes months or even years. But love does not give up; it knows how to wait. You open your heart to this person, welcome him or her into your life forever, and wait for a decision. Love acts strictly within the boundaries established for it and rejoices when it is not restricted. It does not judge a person for caution or timidity, but is happy for the slightest opportunity to serve. When you encounter hostility, you feel pain, but this pain does not destroy your love; it strengthens it. God gives you strength and courage, and you move forward! Ahead of you await new victories and new friends. Jesus walks beside you, and the banner of His love waves above you!

The end of the conflict

Love has many enemies, and one of them is the spirit of war. This spirit originated in Heaven, where purity, holiness, and peace had always reigned. Sin, which arose in an incomprehensible way in the heart of the heavenly angel Lucifer, grew into a universal rebellion. "And there was war in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels" (Revelation 12:7, KJV). This war was spiritual in nature; no living being's blood was shed, and all its participants used spiritual weapons in their struggle against one another. God acted solely through love, which unites mercy and justice, while the enemy used an entire

arsenal: lies, slander, malice, treachery, envy, and pride. Satan and his supporters were defeated and expelled from the courts of Heaven, but their lives were spared. Nor were their supernatural abilities taken away.

Through the fall of Adam and Eve, the forces of evil, which the apostle Paul calls “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12, KJV), gained power over humanity and continued on earth their war against the authority of Heaven. The goal of evil spirits is complete dominion over the human mind. Their arsenal contains a multitude of means and methods for accomplishing their plans.

God, for His part, is also engaged in the conflict and opposes the influence of evil. He has gained victory repeatedly in this war. First He triumphed in Heaven, and then in the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Son of God made the final decision to take upon Himself the sins of the world and pay for them with His own life. Christ experienced the agony of separation from God and eternal death in order to give us eternal life. The law declares, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23, KJV), and Christ satisfied this requirement of the law. Jesus died, but on the third day He rose again, ascended to God’s throne, and received all power in Heaven and on earth.

The death of Christ revealed to the entire Universe the true nature of Satan, which he had carefully concealed beneath a mask of lies. But the death of the Son of God also revealed to the entire Universe the true character of God, Who is love.

The victory has been won, but the war is not over. God now desires to restore His character in human beings, and because His very nature is love, His purpose is to place His love within our minds. Those who have chosen the path of faith in God are expected to trust Him, study the principles of Heaven, and live in accordance with them.

God and the spirits of evil watch closely to see which side each person will choose. Neutrality in this war is impossible. When a person remains indifferent, that person passively takes the

devil's side and permits evil spirits to influence the mind and impose their values.

Today we live in a favorable time, while we still have the opportunity to trust God and receive His character and love. We also know from the Bible that the war between good and evil has entered its final stage. Its outcome will be decided in the last battle, called Armageddon. In this conflict, God's truth will gain the final victory, and God's name will be glorified throughout the earth.

The culmination of God's victory over evil will be the glorious coming of Jesus Christ, when the righteous will be raised from the dead and taken to Heaven, while the wicked will be destroyed. Satan will be bound for a thousand years until the judgment of the wicked is completed. Afterward, all the wicked will be raised to receive their punishment. Together with Satan and his angels, they will be cast into the lake of fire (see Revelation 20:14-15).

Today, as a weapon for the final conflict, God gives us His love and opens the human mind to a knowledge of God's truth and law. It is important to understand God's strategy in this war so that we may overcome sin through love for God and our neighbors. A person who knows the truth but does not have love will be defeated by the devil and perish. A person's decision to follow God and love others enrages Satan, but he has no power over those in whom God's love lives.

We are now living in a peaceful time for making decisions. God protects His children, and everyone can make a choice, but it will not always be so. When the "four winds of the earth" (Revelation 7:1, KJV) are released, a great tribulation caused by disasters and persecution will begin. In such circumstances, it will no longer be possible to choose love and learn to love. Therefore, it is now that God calls us to receive His gift of love, to be guided by it in life, and to gain peace of mind and joy in the Holy Spirit. May the Lord bless us to answer God's call and share in the victory of God's love with all the redeemed!