

What I Believe

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Chapter 1 Faithfulness to God in Love and Friendship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

Chapter 2 The Biblical Foundation of Faith

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

Chapter 3 The Divine Union of Love

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

Chapter 4 God the Father—God of Love

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

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

Chapter 5 God the Son—Representative of Love

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

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

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

The Bible describes this event in Revelation 12:7-9: 'And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

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

Chapter 6 The Holy Spirit—The Embodiment of Love

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

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

Chapter 7 Love Created Our World

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Everyone waited enthusiastically for the events that would follow.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To sanctify means to set apart for a special purpose.

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

Chapter 8 Masterpieces of Love

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

Chapter 9 The Great Controversy Between Love and Sin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

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

Chapter 10 The Life of Jesus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

Chapter 11 The Death of Christ

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

Chapter 12 The Resurrection of Christ

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

Chapter 13 Salvation in Christ

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Love is the crown of my salvation in Jesus.

Questions for Reflection

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

Chapter 14 Growing in Christ

When I hear accounts about God, about His love, about His mercy, and about His desire to save me from the power of sin and from death, a genuine interest arises within me, and something amazing begins to take place in my mind. An unknown power draws me to Jesus and reveals incomprehensible things about Him. I suddenly begin to understand that God exists, that He loves me, and that He has prepared something better for me—not what this world offers. My mind awakens, and the thought dawns on me that I can begin to live with God, believing in Him and learning His will. And I decide to take this step, and I do so.

When I had only begun to know Christ, and He convinced me that I needed to repent of my sins, I decided not to put it off, but turned to Him in a prayer of repentance and was accepted by Him without any particular objections. Jesus loves me and loves every person, without respect of persons. For He is our Creator, our Savior, our Heavenly Friend. Whoever we may be, the Lord receives into His embrace anyone who turns to Him in repentance and with a desire for deliverance.

Repentance is God's gift, which God gives to people as a special mercy so that they may leave the past behind and begin a new life without sin. God's grace descends upon a person and prompts him to acknowledge and confess his transgressions. He gives both the desire and the strength to do this. And this is a very important moment that takes place in the life of every person, and when it concerns the heart, it is extremely important to answer, 'Yes.'

I know many people who heard such a call but decided to wait a little longer, to sin a little longer, to settle all their affairs, or to have their fill of worldly pleasures; but later, when it seemed that they should have been ready to begin something new, they could change nothing. The mind understands, the soul trembles, but the heart remains silent. Other cases are also known. People resisted God's mercy for years, and then, leaving everything behind, turned to Him with all their heart. God once

said that His Spirit would not always strive with man, and this principle remains in effect to this day.

Love suffers long, but when God's mercy is completely rejected, another attribute of love—justice—then comes into its own. And how God does not desire that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

There is a very interesting factor in your salvation and mine. When we repent and come to Christ with our repentance, He accepts us and places us in His school called 'life with Jesus.' And the Lord begins to teach us this life. In His school study all those who have bound their existence to Christ, all who have believed in Him as their Savior and desire to know His will. God pours out His light upon these people, enters into a covenant with them, and receives them as His children, blessing them at all times.

All of us who have believed in Christ become one family, and in Him we are accepted by God the Father. The Lord desires to raise all of us and gives us spiritual growth, sends us strength to fight sin, grants us light, and teaches us to distinguish evil from good and sin from righteousness.

But unfortunately, the enemy of souls also has access to this school. He introduces his own adjustments into this process of learning, dividing God's children into denominations, movements, and groups, convincing them that they are right and endowing them with a spirit of religious intolerance and fanaticism.

From church history we know of cases when those who desired freedom in their religious beliefs were persecuted, imprisoned, and killed—and this was done by the very people who considered themselves followers of Christ and called their society by that name, while being led by an entirely different spirit.

But God always has had and always will have those who know how to distinguish darkness from light and who know the voice of their Shepherd. They do not follow a stranger, but follow Jesus wherever He goes. And Jesus does not merely lead His

flock; He gives His sheep the Bread of Life and cares for the spiritual growth of everyone who has entered into a covenant with Him. And the purpose of this school of Christ is to reveal to His children the fullness of Biblical truths in their true light, to teach us to love one another, to prepare us for life among holy beings, and to prepare us to testify of Him in the spirit of love and truth.

And this process of growth may be described as the revelation of God's true character to a person and the restoration of that character within him. God does not merely desire to reveal Himself to us as the God of love; He seeks to become love within us. And this does not happen instantly. It is a process lasting throughout Eternity, but it begins in the earthly school. And this is the foundation of my faith.

God needs obedient boys and girls with whom He will populate all the heavenly space prepared by Jesus for His friends. But where can these obedient children be found, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God? That is why the school is needed. God calls all the unfit boys and girls in order to begin raising them, teaching them the skills of Eternal life, and preparing us to move to Heaven. And a miracle of transformation takes place. From an unfit and dirty lump of clay, I am transformed into a masterpiece in God's hands. He molds me into what pleases Him and makes me what He Himself desires; and when the process of creation is complete, the Lord places me into a hot furnace in order to temper the soft qualities of my soul and make them firm and strong. After this, He fills this vessel with that for which it was designed and continues to teach me.

And I grow like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf does not wither and which brings forth good fruit in its season. And God expects much fruit and teaches me this art, dwelling forever in my heart.

Through studying the Bible, I learn God's will and His plans, see my sins, discover the depths of God's love, learn about God's promises, and grow in the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ, Whom He has sent.

I learn to fellowship with my Creator and Savior. As I read His Word, I hear Him speaking to me; and as I open my mouth in prayer, I begin to converse with Him. We have a daily dialogue: we exchange knowledge and experience, I seek counsel from my Teacher, and He answers my requests, needs, and questions. And I grow.

And in this school I have very many friends with whom we study the science of love together and learn to respect, understand, accept, and love one another. It is so interesting! We had never known one another, but in Christ we became dear and close, came to love one another with a pure heart, and dream of how, having ascended to Heaven, we will eternally bring joy to one another before God's face and remember how wonderfully the Lord gathered us all together and united us in friendship on this sinful Earth in His school of love.

And already here on Earth we become God's people, God's family, God's children, who have chosen love and friendship as our attitude toward one another; and this has brought us to happiness in Jesus and joy in the Holy Spirit. And we will live in this forever.

Can you imagine Eternity without love? It would be unceasing torment and suffering, constant war and never-ending conflict. But love casts this out and fills our hearts with itself in order to bring a little piece of Heaven into our busy life even now. We have only a little time left to study here. But what we are learning in this school here and now will be very useful to us in Eternity.

The science that God is Love can be comprehended only by having Eternal life, and we have begun this. And we are growing.

Questions for Reflection

1. What interesting things did you learn in this chapter?
2. What leads a sinner to repentance?
3. What does it mean to repent?
4. Is there a limit to God's mercy? When does justice come into its own?

5. What does the school of Christ teach?
6. How does growth in Christ take place?
7. Are you growing in Christ? How can this be determined?
8. Is it possible to remain forever in the first grade in God's school?
9. Please read 1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalms 1:1-2; 23:4; 77:12-13; Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Philippians 3:7-14; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:6, 14-15; Hebrews 10:25; 1 John 4:4; Romans 8:38-39; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 5:19-20; 6:12-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 23; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18 in the light of this chapter.

Chapter 15 The Church

There was a time when I thought that a church was a place where people could come to watch a service, listen to singing, and pray before icons. In my understanding, a church had to have domes, preferably gilded ones. I associated the concept of a church with a religious building. I could not imagine anything else under this name. I considered any religious gathering of people outside a church building to be a sect, and those attending it to be sectarians. But the Lord decided to reveal to me the true meaning of this word and establish me upon the foundation of His Church.

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

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

By virtue of my baptism, I was an Orthodox Christian, but I did not understand what that meant. My mother told me that she

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

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

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

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

But the Lord sent me light: I received the book *The Great Controversy* as a gift. I learned what the true Church is and read about its history, its apostasy, and its reformation. I understood that God has a people who are very closely united, who have close relationships, and among whom love is at work. All this seemed very strange to me because my stereotypes about the Church were deeply rooted. I did not want to change anything, yet I decided to find such people and see whether they truly existed. And I began to search.

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

according to the commandments and sometimes went into frenzied behavior during the meetings. I could not share their teaching, which contradicted the Word of God, so I left them.

I wanted to find the community that keeps God's commandments and has faith in Jesus. I already knew where they gathered, but I was very cautious so that I would not fall into another sect. At that time, my wife and I moved to Germany, where we have lived ever since.

In search of my spiritual family, I visited all the places of worship in the surrounding area. When I found those who took an interest in us, I began attending their worship services, and a year later I decided to be baptized so that I could become a full member of the body of Christ.

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

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

The Church of Christ is the most stable unit of society. It has passed through all earthly crises, regimes, and trials, preserving its purity and its teaching. During this time, it has experienced many divisions and apostasies. The enemy of souls has created many counterfeits that contain a portion of truth mixed with error and have a form of godliness but do not contain love.

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

It brings me great joy that God has established me upon this foundation of faith and convinced me of this understanding.

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

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

Chapter 16 The Remnant and Its Mission

The remnant church is a movement of believers who desire to fulfill God's will foretold in the book of Revelation. It is God's people who must prepare for the closing events of Earth's history.

God has always had a remnant of people faithful to Him. The history of God's Church shows how tirelessly Satan fought against the Most High through His people and destroyed the foundation of faith upon which the Church was built.

In our day, a similar struggle continues, but God provides special advantages for those who heed the message to Laodicea and begin to seek and thirst for what is offered in it.

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

The Lord will gather all His faithful followers under His protection and establish them in truth and love, entrusting this people with a special mission for the last days.

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

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

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

Keeping God's commandments is one of the criteria that identify the remnant people. But the distinguishing feature of this obedience is not merely to agree intellectually with the truths of God's law, but to allow God to write this law in the mind and heart, so as to submit to it not according to the letter, but according to the spirit.

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

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

What determines my faith? It is my ability, during crisis, struggle, and trials, to rely upon God's faithful word and to trust the Lord completely that He will fulfill what He has promised specifically in my life and will do what came from His mouth as a promise. God is unchanging in His word, but He is seeking those who will believe Him and steadfastly, with trust, hold on to what He has promised, watching and praying as they await the fulfillment of everything that was foretold.

Will the remnant keep the commandment of love? Yes. This is what has been foretold concerning God's people. God's message without God's love among the messengers sounds like a verdict without any possibility of repentance. But this distinguishing feature of God's children—their love for one another and for God—will allow the Lord to use His Church in

all its power to proclaim the final warning. It will be heard by all who know God and obey His voice.

In John 10:16 we read: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd." These words accord with the message of Revelation 18:4: "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." God will call His people and gather them.

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

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

I look with sadness upon those who speak of their faith in God but do not keep His commandments, or who replace them with human ordinances and traditions, partly appealing to the fact

that some of the early Christians decided to worship God in this way.

But Romans 13:10 states: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

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

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

But God’s people will receive God’s seal and will be safe. Satan will obtain complete power over those who accept his image. The remnant church, however, will fulfill its mission and meet the One Whom it loves, awaiting His Coming in love for one another.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read John 13:34-35; Daniel 7:9-14; Isaiah 1:9; 11:11; Jeremiah 23:3; Micah 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Revelation 12:17; 14:6-12; and 18:1-4 in the light of this chapter.
2. What new things did you learn from this chapter?
3. How do you understand the word “remnant”?

4. What do Paul's words in Romans 6:14 mean: "for ye are not under the law, but under grace"? Then please read Romans 6:14-16 in full and answer once again.
5. By whom were the Ten Commandments given—God or Moses? And who can abolish or change them?
6. To whom was God's law given in the form of the Ten Commandments? Should we keep it? Does it belong only to the Old Testament?
7. Does God have any other messages for the salvation of the world after the Three Angels' Messages?
8. Whom does God desire to save through the third angel's message? Why does He call people's attention in precisely this way? Could this not be said more gently?
9. Do you desire to take part in proclaiming this message together with the three angels?

Chapter 17 Unity in the Body of Christ

I used to notice a very bad character trait in myself. While in church, among God's people, somewhere in my corrupted heart I would evaluate each person, wondering what level of spiritual growth that person had reached, and decide who would be saved and who would not. And this was very foolish.

Fortunately, I did not share my conclusions with anyone, although I greatly wanted to. And many times the Lord showed me that I was wrong in making such judgments, because I judged everyone by myself, relying on what I saw and heard, while He looks upon the heart. How shameful it is to receive such reproofs. But the truth that we are all parts of the body of Christ and constitute one organism, in which every believer has a particular talent, a gift for ministry, and a function, greatly helped me correct this way of thinking. Christ determines a person's salvation, which is what He is now doing in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

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

God's Word says much about professed Christians, and they do exist in this world. Such people are present in every denomination, but this does not mean that the Church has ceased to be the body of Christ.

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

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

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

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

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

But in every body each organ has its own function. Some people, like the heart, bring life and joy into any community; there are also those who, like hands, do good. There are simply kind members who appear very neutral but work tirelessly. And what are we to do with that part of the body which is located just below the back? It simply shames all of us, and the opening in that part sometimes poisons the atmosphere so badly that it is impossible to breathe. But this is also the body! And if this part becomes sick or is removed, the entire organism will suffer and will understand that we all needed one another.

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

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

Willful interpretation of Holy Scripture and the desire to rule over one another have divided God's children into different movements, and the movements themselves have divided into many denominations. Today it is not difficult to establish one's own church with one's own teaching and constitution and call it Christian. And the world is filled with such organizations, each claiming its own exclusivity and purity. But Jesus looks upon this division with pain. He desires unity, not division. Yet there will be no unity in falsehood and error, except perhaps for a short time in order to fight against the truth. Nothing defiled, abominable, or unclean will ever become part of the body of Christ; like a cancerous tumor, it will be mercilessly removed from the organism.

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

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

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

Our School of Agape Love has the purpose of revealing the beauty of God's character, preparing people's hearts for the

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

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

And God's love binds all of us into one organism, while the righteousness of Christ, like skin, gathers us into one body and covers us, giving us the proper shape and contours. And the Holy Spirit gives everything the breath of life, love, and the ability to complement one another in labor and ministry. And all of this is to the glory of God.

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Psalm 133:1; Matthew 28:19-20; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26-27; Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; 2 Corinthians 5:16-17; Galatians 3:27-29; Ephesians 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; and Colossians 3:10-15 in the light of this chapter.
2. What did you understand from this chapter?

3. What truth will help change our distorted thinking?
4. Is it truly possible to eliminate disagreements?
5. What is important for us to seek in order to be united?
6. Do you think the prophetic message for the last days includes the commandment to love one another?
7. What is the distinguishing feature of unity? How does God produce it in our lives?
8. Why is there no other foundation for the unity of the Church except unity in the knowledge of the one true God?
9. Why can compromise with evil not bring peace?
10. For what purpose will God sift His people?
11. Do you believe that the School of Agape Love helps build up the Body of Christ?
12. What plans does God have for us?
13. Why is it important to remember our place before God and not judge who will be saved?

Chapter 18 Baptism

If a person has ever been acquainted with Christianity, he has surely noticed that the rite of baptism is present in this movement. In every denomination, admission into church membership takes place through water baptism. Yet it is performed differently everywhere. In some places, sprinkling and anointing with water are practiced; in others, pouring; and elsewhere, complete immersion beneath the water.

What is baptism? Why is it necessary? What does it signify? Is it possible to do without this rite and still receive God's blessings?

Baptism is a rite of consecrating a person to a special relationship with God. This act is of Heavenly origin and is a symbolic covenant with God that grants the right to special blessings from Him. Baptism indicates a person's spiritual belonging to the Lord.

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

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

Before Christ began His mission, circumcision of the male foreskin served as the symbol of the Covenant with God. Women became partakers of this Covenant only by faith. The death of Christ abolished this rite.

By His example of being baptized by John, Jesus demonstrated His attitude toward this rite and called it the fulfillment of all righteousness. In this way, the Savior established the symbol of entering into a special relationship with God.

Baptism is like a marriage ceremony. This comparison reveals the meaning of the rite most clearly. Water baptism is a

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

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

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

Any other way of establishing a relationship with God is unlawful and is not accepted from above, whatever people may call it. Christ Himself gave us an example. He did not need cleansing from impurity, yet He underwent this rite, demonstrating its necessity and receiving baptism on behalf of those who, because of various circumstances, would be unable to undergo it—for example, the thief on the cross or infants killed for the Name of Christ.

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

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

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

in His likeness. The forces of evil also watch to ensure that God does not violate a person's freedom of choice, and they hinder people in every possible way from taking this step, suggesting to them that baptism is not so important because God loves everyone. Yes, the Lord loves everyone, but He cannot bring about changes in every heart. He accomplishes them only in the soul that enters into a covenant with Him.

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

Jesus desires to have a lawful relationship with His people.

Does it matter in which denomination I receive baptism? By entering upon this path, I acknowledge God as my Spouse, but the teaching of the church in which I am baptized must meet God's requirements and not contradict the Bible. I become part of a particular denomination, and God begins to work within its framework, nurturing my growth. But when He calls me to Biblical obedience so that I may continue growing and developing, I become restricted by the teaching of the church whose member I am and cannot go beyond its established boundaries; otherwise, I risk being expelled and rejected by the community to which I am bound by traditions, family and friendly ties, and many experiences of spiritual development that I have witnessed and personally undergone. My growth

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

And if the teaching of my church is based on a false foundation, I begin to regard that falsehood as truth and defend it with human arguments. And who will help me break free from this cycle of life?!

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

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

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

I have been baptized three times. The first time, I was a little over one year old, and I did not consent to it. The second time, I was baptized by faith in Jesus, understanding what I was doing, and I was very glad about this event; I believe it was the right step. But as I began to learn the truth, I realized that the movement to which I belonged did not live according to the truth and concealed its sins behind supernatural powers that manifested themselves in its services. I left that congregation and began to study independently. God showed me that He has a people whose teaching is consistent with the entire Bible, and after lengthy study, I decided to become part of this people by receiving baptism again, joining my life with those who base their faith on Scripture rather than on feelings or tradition. And God continues to lead me and reveals a more excellent way.

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

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Matthew 3:13-15; 21:25; 28:19-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 3:27;

5:6; Colossians 2:12-13; 1 Peter 3:20-21; and Ephesians 4:5 in the light of this chapter.

2. What did you understand from this chapter?
3. Why is the rite of water baptism so important for salvation?
4. Is it possible to be a member of several denominations at the same time through baptism in those churches? Is this consistent with Scripture?
5. Does baptism save me? If so, from what?
6. If I do not understand the meaning of baptism, could performing this act with the wrong motive result in condemnation for me?
7. Are you personally acquainted with this rite in your own life? Into what were you baptized?
8. Must baptism always be understood? Matthew 3:14-15.
9. What should I do if I love Jesus but consider baptism unnecessary for me?
10. Is it possible to enter the Kingdom of Heaven without following this rule? Give examples.

Chapter 19 The Love Supper

Just before His death, our Lord Jesus established a very important tradition that became a rule of the New Covenant. This is the Lord's Supper. It is sometimes called Communion or the Love Supper.

A will is drawn up by its owner before his death. While he is alive, he may make corrections and changes to this document. But after the owner's death, the will comes into final force and is no longer subject to revision. Anyone who decides to alter the will of the deceased for his own benefit will be regarded as a fraud or deceiver in the eyes of society and God.

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

Jesus gathered His disciples for the last time in order to reveal to them very important truths that were to strengthen them in the coming trials. Death was already breathing in the Savior's face, and He languished in anticipation of the suffering ahead. The whole human nature of Christ shuddered. He longed for the support and sympathy of His disciples, but they did not understand Jesus; the spirit of rivalry was raging within them. At the entrance stood a pitcher of water for washing feet, a task usually performed for guests by a servant, but this time there was no servant in the house. The disciples sat in proud silence, each considering himself superior. Everyone waited for someone else to take the role of a servant. Judas had already sold Christ and was waiting for the right moment to bring his deed to completion. And what could Jesus do for these wretched people? He rose from His place, laid aside His outer garment, took the pitcher of water, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the dusty feet of the disciples, one after another. The

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

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

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

Obedience to this command became part of the foundation of faith in Christ. For the words of His ordinance reveal special power in those who fulfill them. 'Happy are ye if ye do them.' It is worth being obedient.

I am always amazed that many people simply ignore this rule for receiving Communion, as though it did not exist. Yet it does

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

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

The bread was not to contain leaven, since it was a symbol of the purity of Christ's character. The wine was not to undergo fermentation. It was pure grape juice. In the Greek language, juice and wine were called by the same word, which meant a drink made from grapes, but Jesus explained in Matthew 26:29 that He would no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when He would drink new wine in His Father's Kingdom. New wine is pure grape juice that has not undergone fermentation. An alcoholic drink cannot be a symbol of the blood of Christ, for its use is condemned by Scripture. For this reason, fermented juice is not a symbol of pure blood. Isaiah writes about this in 65:8: 'Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it.'

The blessing of observing the rules of the Supper and partaking of its symbols entered into the New Covenant and is an integral part of the lives of God's children. And the Lord, through His Spirit, is present where believers follow this rite exactly, in order to bless all who are present with His love and grant them the blessings that He promised to His obedient followers.

The Love Supper and its observance are among the conditions of the life of a loving person. It is a recharging of our inner potential that greatly helps maintain the strength and proper condition of love's working mechanism. Although this may sound strange in words, it is a condition that many find difficult to comprehend with the mind, yet it is worth observing, because in the invisible world all these rites and symbols have

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

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

The blood of Christ is His soul in us; it is the life-giving power that washes us from sin, gives us victory over every unclean addiction, and makes us blameless in the sight of Heaven. The blood of Jesus is what the spiritual forces of wickedness fear most. It is God's territory, upon which they do not enter.

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

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

Chapter 20 Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Ministry

Each of us was created by God as an individual capable of living independently in this world and caring for our own needs. For service and self-care, the Lord endowed us with special abilities, while our parents and society helped us develop them and acquire certain skills so that we might be healthy, clean, hardworking, respectful, and useful to others. Although each of us has our own individuality, we all live in a society of people like ourselves and must develop the ability to communicate with one another.

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

When the Holy Spirit draws me to Christ and reveals to me the meaning of the sacrifice of Calvary, and I begin to believe that Jesus is my Savior, my life is transformed and I become a believer. As I grow, I begin to seek fellow believers. But I may also come to faith while already among believers. This community has various spiritual gifts and forms of ministry to help me know God even better, grow in Christ, and attain full spiritual maturity. As I believe in Jesus and learn His will, I decide to receive water baptism and thereby become a representative of God's people. Through this ordinance I am accepted as a member of the church. I become part of the body of Christ. But in this body, every member has special gifts from God for serving the other members and building up the whole body, and for carrying out the work of bearing further witness to the world that God has a plan to save every person from the power of sin and to bring earthly history to its close at the Second Coming of Jesus to this world.

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

goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance—must be in the heart of every church member, regardless of the gift that person possesses or the ministry that person performs. The fruit of the Spirit helps every ministry to be carried out properly, with the right motive and spirit. Can someone be a teacher or pastor without having love? Yes, but the absence of the fruit of the Spirit will affect the other members and exert a harmful influence.

God gives each of His sons and daughters a unique gift according to His own will. In doing so, the Lord takes into account the abilities, desires, and interests of every church member. It is not always possible to understand immediately what gift I possess, and therefore the observations of others help reveal my abilities and develop them. People also have inborn talents, such as an ear for music, a voice, a good memory, or a particular temperament, which may be used in ministry. Yet these are not the same as the gift of the Spirit bestowed for a specific purpose in the life and growth of the church.

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

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

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

become convinced that You are, and I humbly carry out my ministry, striving to do it from a pure heart.

Love harmonizes beautifully with every gift of God. It reveals itself beautifully in every kind of ministry. It is compatible with everything, and through it all the gifts become one whole organism in which every member successfully performs his or her small tasks for the common good and growth. Love binds into one whole what could not otherwise be united or made compatible.

Have you ever wondered who controls my body? I can create favorable living conditions for my body, care for it, or destroy it, but my internal organs do not obey me. They receive commands and instructions directly from God and do what He has placed within them, performing their work independently of my desires. Physicians can study the structure of the body and the laws governing the organs, and they can make certain adjustments, but restoration and healing come from the Lord.

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

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

I do not distribute God's gifts, but I can recognize the talent possessed by other church members, draw their attention to it,

and help them develop it. I cannot claim even one of the gifts for myself. But if I set a goal of accomplishing something in service to people, study the truth in that area, and apply it in my life, it is quite possible that the Lord will bless my efforts and endow me with that gift.

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

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

Questions for Reflection

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

9. How does love reveal itself in the diversity of ministry?
10. Are spiritual gifts present in traditional churches?

Chapter 21 The Gift of Prophecy

All spiritual matters should be passed through the filter of God's Word. Isaiah 8:20 says, 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Such a test helps us very quickly recognize who speaks the truth, who is misguided, who is mistaken, and who is lying. Any public publication or speech influences those who read or hear it. If the words are spoken by the will of God and in accordance with the truth, they may be reinforced by the Holy Spirit and presented to the human mind in all their depth. Yet the understanding of truth also depends on my spiritual perception and on my faith.

I believe that God gives the gift of prophecy to His Church and His people. The Bible contains many books written by people who possessed this gift, and all their prophecies were tested by earlier revelations. These prophecies also extend into the future in which we are now living.

By sharing my experiences and reflections on biblical truths, I may become an instrument in God's hands through whom He will draw people to Himself and give them salvation. But I am not a prophet; I am an ordinary person who desires to do something for the glory of God.

A prophet is a person to whom God speaks with a special message, calling that person to deliver it precisely to those for whom it was intended. The presence of prophets in the last days also allows for the simultaneous presence of false prophets. Otherwise, Jesus would have told us not to listen to anyone because there would be no true prophets. But in His Word the Lord teaches us to test anyone who speaks in God's name or delivers a message from God.

I believe that everything we study in this book undergoes careful examination, as each reader seeks to understand whether this teaching about love is from God. I am open to such testing and welcome those who undertake it. The last thing I would want is to become an instrument of Satan and lead you

astray. Truth will not cease to be truth even when it is carefully examined and tested.

In His love for His children, at a definite time foretold by Him, God gave the world His prophet, who delivered His messages for seventy-one years and recorded them as instruction for us who live in the last days. The name of this prophet of God is Ellen White.

I know that many people who hear this name immediately respond by rejecting everything that comes from her without even trying to determine what, if anything, in her writings does not correspond with the truth.

Her writings possess prophetic authority and serve the Church as a source of comfort, guidance, instruction, and reproof. These writings also clearly establish that the Bible is the standard by which every teaching and experience must be tested.

My Christian life began in my heart through this author's book *The Great Controversy*. I had read the Bible many times before, but I did not understand its meaning or think about my salvation. Through the writings of God's messenger, however, my mind was illuminated by a wonderful light, and the Bible appeared in all its beauty as a living book. I found Jesus, entered into a covenant with God, and began to live a new life. I searched for God's people who live according to biblical laws, and I found them.

My life has become very closely intertwined with the writings of Ellen White, and throughout all the time I have studied her books, I have found no errors or contradictions with the Bible. On the contrary, in her writings this author continually refers to the Bible as the firm foundation of all her prophecies. I do not understand the position of White's opponents, who at times have not even read her writings or studied her prophecies, yet vigorously oppose her as a false prophet. I do not consider this a very wise approach. Truth and falsehood can be identified quite simply by comparing them with the Bible. If a prophecy about present events was spoken but did not come to pass, then

that prophet may confidently be regarded as false. But all Ellen White's predictions have been accurate, and some of them are being fulfilled before our eyes exactly as they were foretold.

In my studies and sermons, I always refer to the Bible, although I know many passages from the books of God's messenger that explain particular truths more precisely. Nevertheless, I do not quote her writings, though I can recommend them for personal study.

The prophecies about the last days described in the Bible are rather general and are being fulfilled before our eyes. But God made provision to explain in greater detail in our time everything that will happen in our days and how it will happen, and He conveyed these details through Sister White, who recorded them in her writings. Now, when strange things are happening around us, many people want an authoritative answer concerning what is taking place, what will happen next, and what each person should do. Mistakes in answering these questions may prove fatal. Passing off one's own conjectures as truth is very dangerous both for one's own soul and for the lives of others. But the writings of Ellen White indicate very precisely what is happening, who is behind it, and what awaits us in the near future. I believe it is worth heeding these messages so that we may await Christ on the true foundation of faith and enter the right ark, whose doors will close very soon.

God is not opposed to our testing His prophets, but we must do so not on the basis of other people's opinions, but on the basis of His Word set forth in the Bible and the accuracy with which the prophecies are fulfilled. If such a test has been passed successfully and no contradictions have been found, then we should heed the instructions of God's messenger. In order to heed them, we must sit down and study what God is saying and what message He desires to convey to us.

Second Chronicles 20:20 says, 'Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.' These words reveal their power in the lives of those who heed the counsel of God's messengers.

Some people are troubled that God chose a woman for such a role. But the Bible tells us that God also endowed women with the prophetic gift. If He decided to do so, He has the right.

Belief in the gift of prophecy and in the fact that God chooses certain people through whom to convey special messages is a foundation of my faith in God. We are promised that at the end of time the Lord will give prophetic dreams and visions through sons and daughters in order to instruct us (Joel 2:28).

God's love draws me to know the truth about the last days. God desires me to understand what is happening and what to expect, while also preparing my character for Heavenly life. First Corinthians 13:2 says, 'And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.' When studying prophetic writings or possessing the gift of prophecy, I must still remember that without agape love I may be lost.

Love recognizes God's voice in God's prophecies and obeys it in everything. Love delights in obedience to the Lord's will and joyfully heeds His warnings and counsel.

When I want to build a complex structure and have only a picture showing the appearance of the finished building, it is extremely difficult for me to understand how and by what means it is held together. But if I have a detailed plan, then I can build it.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Numbers 12:6; 2 Chronicles 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28-31; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-3; Revelation 12:17; 19:10; 22:9; 2 Peter 1:21; Exodus 7:1-2; Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 14:1, 3-4, 39; and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 in the light of this chapter.
2. Did you learn anything new from this chapter?
3. Why does God choose prophets?
4. How can a true prophet be distinguished from a false one?
5. Can I become a prophet myself if I greatly desire it?
6. Do all people believe God's prophets?

7. Do prophets give us only good and pleasant prophecies?
8. Which biblical prophets do you know who left us no written messages?
9. Does Jesus possess the gift of prophecy?
10. What should I do if I do not believe in any prophets other than the biblical prophets? Will I really perish?
11. What happens to a person who rejects God's messengers?
12. What criteria must a prophet of God meet?
13. Should the writings of God's messengers be studied, or is it sufficient to study only the Bible?

Chapter 22 God's Law of Love

What will happen if I buy a car with a powerful engine in Russia and decide to test the maximum speed at which it can travel on the highway? And what if I then drive to the nearest city at a speed of 230 km/h every time? I think that if the traffic police notice this, I will be in serious trouble. The officers will want to know my name and where such a fast driver came from. I will face heavy fines or the loss of my driver's license.

But if the same thing happens in Germany on a road with no speed limit, the police will not even look in my direction; I will be of no interest to them. Why such a contrast? It is all a matter of the law, which in one country forbids exceeding the prescribed speed, while in another country it permits people to drive at any speed if there is no posted limit. The law of any country defines personal and legal relations among its citizens within that state. All violators are declared offenders, identified, and subsequently subjected to administrative or criminal penalties.

The absence of law releases a person from responsibility. The very existence of law indicates that a state is governed by law.

The absence of law is called anarchy, which means that there is no executive authority in society and that everyone is therefore permitted to do without punishment whatever he considers right.

Every law characterizes the distinctive features of the country or society in which it has been adopted.

Sin is defined solely by the existence of God's law, which governs human conduct and calls things by their proper names. God's law was proclaimed quite clearly by God Himself in the presence of a great multitude of people and was twice written on tablets of stone by God's hand as a testimony for future generations.

If a law exists but there are no representatives of the highest authority to ensure compliance with its requirements, that law

ceases to function and is considered merely nominal. All existing governmental and social laws are, in one way or another, a reflection of God's law.

At the present time, the enemy of the human soul persuades representatives of earthly authorities to adopt decrees that contradict God's rules and to elevate to the status of law what God calls abomination and sin. But human decisions do not abolish God's requirements, and a person who desires to know the truth can very quickly understand what God says and what contradicts His ordinances.

The law of ten words, spoken by God in the form of the Ten Commandments, is an expression of God's character and reveals to the world the Creator's love and care for humanity. The first four commandments govern a person's relationship with God, while the remaining six establish the rules and boundaries of relationships among people.

Every commandment given by God is not only a rule of conduct, but also contains a promise that anyone who desires to live in obedience will receive power from above to do so. Then this law will be written not only on stone, but also in the human heart, becoming the foundation of that person's faithfulness to God—not according to the letter, but according to the spirit. God's law is spiritual, and when studied deeply, it reveals and condemns human desires and motives that do not conform to or that contradict God's will.

For example, if I do not kill anyone but possess an evil spirit or speak unkind words, then in the light of the law I am an offender who violates the sixth commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.'

There are traditions and standards of living that have become firmly established in society but are, in their essence, sin because they contradict God's law. Christ Himself spoke about this in Mark 7:8-9: 'For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And He said unto them,

Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.'

This question remains relevant today and may be applied personally by comparing one's life, in this light, with the requirements of the law.

If the law says, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' and Jesus says that even lustful thoughts violate God's commandments, while society permits people to live and cohabit as they wish and with whomever they wish, approving such conduct and elevating it to the status of law, then it is worth heeding God's will so as not to come under the curse pronounced by God's requirements.

A person who violates God's ordinances and knowingly lives in sin is a representative of the dark forces of evil. He is held captive by Satan and carries out the will of this spirit.

Regardless of whom this person considers himself to be, his mind is under the dominion of sin, and he cannot overcome such influence by his own strength. Only God's power called grace can rescue a sinner from under the curse of the law. This is why Christ came into our world: to become that curse for us and to satisfy the just requirement of the law, which pronounces eternal death upon anyone who has violated God's commandment even once.

Will God's grace save those who violate the law by justifying their sin? No. Grace saves from sin, not in sin.

God's love for me is unconditional, and the Lord does not violate His principles in His relationship with me, but He expects me to respond with love through obedience to His law, which consists in understanding these requirements and fulfilling them in my life.

The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and good. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Those who bear the fruit of the Spirit are not under the law, for this law has been written by God's hand in their hearts and has become part of their lives, while the fruit of the Spirit is the visible reflection, perceptible to the mind, of what the new heart contains.

Does the law save me? No, this power has not been placed in God's commandments. The law is a mirror that clearly shows me myself when I look into it.

Salvation is a gift of grace; it cannot be earned by the works of the law, but a saved person is obedient to the commandments. In such submission the Christian character is perfected, and its result is peace with God. It testifies to love for the Lord and for our neighbors. Obedience by faith proves that Christ possesses the power to transform our lives. It serves to advance the work of the gospel.

Along with the Ten Commandments, God gave His people other laws and ordinances that explained the order of ceremonies, sacrifices, and feasts that pointed to the coming Messiah. Judicial and health laws were also given, protecting the people of Israel from corruption and disease. All these rules are sometimes referred to by the single general word 'law.' Therefore, when studying the Bible or examining the meaning of the law, it is important to understand which law is being discussed, which ordinances were fulfilled in Christ, and which should be observed in life. The Ten Commandments remain the unchanging standard of life for every person. To take something from them and abolish it, explaining that Christ abolished the Old Testament and gave us a new one, is not a very wise decision. Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, in order to give us the power and the example of how we should live. The Bible does not teach that Jesus abolished even one of the commandments; otherwise, He would not have needed to die for our sins. It would have been enough to change the requirements of the law, and then all transgressors would have become righteous, while Satan would have become an enterprising inventor.

And what would follow? Chaos.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Psalm 19:7-14; 40:7-8; Matthew 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Romans 8:3-4; 13:10; Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews

8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; and Revelation 12:17; 14:12 in the light of this chapter.

2. Did you learn anything new from this chapter?
3. How is God's love reflected in His law?
4. How do you understand Romans 13:10: 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law'?
5. Is a person saved by the works of the law?
6. What is the purpose of God's law?
7. Why does the Lord desire to write His law in my heart?
Hebrews 10:16-17.
8. Can a person be judged by a law that has been abolished?
9. Are there any statements of God in the Bible that abolish even one of His Ten Commandments?
10. Why can the law not cleanse my sins, but only point them out?
11. Romans 7:12 says, 'Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.' How do you understand this verse in the light of this chapter?

Chapter 23 Do Nothing!

If I am a law-abiding citizen and live in exact accordance with every requirement of the constitution and the laws of the country, will government officials praise me for it? I think I will be of no interest to them. But what if, despite all my obedience, I begin to steal a little money from the state treasury, since there is so much of it and no one will notice? When this crime is discovered, will my general righteousness in everything else be credited to me, and will it cover my insignificant violation? And if I am compared with those who brazenly steal billions and openly violate the laws, I will look like a good person beside them.

I think you have correctly answered this question with James 2:10: 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' Does this statement apply to the whole law of God, or does it concern only a few important commandments? There are only ten of them, and they were personally spoken aloud by God. It was not Moses who gave this Decalogue to those living on Earth, but the Creator Himself. This law is the foundation of every person's righteousness, for it defines sin.

There are two commandments in God's law that some people consider no longer valid. These are the second commandment concerning the worship of idols and the fourth concerning the worship of God. And the pattern is that those who violate these commandments, making such violation a doctrine of their church, become guilty of violating all the other commandments as well.

If I replace God with various images or statues, or put a human being or an animal in His place and call upon you to worship it, then in spirit I become a spiritual adulterer, a murderer of your purity, a thief of your salvation and my own, a false witness, and a blasphemer of God. I make you a slave to tradition and sin and become guilty of all. Many people will agree about the harm of idolatry and acknowledge that it violates God's requirements. But as soon as the fourth commandment is

discussed, the immediate response is: 'It was given only to the Jews.' 'That belongs to the Old Testament, but we now live under the New.' Or: 'We are not under the law, but under grace.' Yet if this is how the matter is to be understood, then it would be fair to declare the entire law invalid. Why tear out of it something inconvenient while retaining what I consider right?

The command concerning the holiness of the Sabbath was given by the same God Who said, 'Thou shalt not kill.' And the very first verse of Exodus 20 is the key to correctly understanding Whose law this is.

Interestingly, people did not abolish the fourth commandment, understanding that this would leave a breach in the law; instead, they changed it. When adherents of such a teaching are asked to provide a biblical basis for these changes, no one can find one. More educated people claim that the first disciples made Christ's resurrection a weekly celebration and that this became a good tradition that has continued to the present day. This is asserted without evidence.

Let us be honest. Are we building our faith on the solid foundation of God's Word or on the shifting sand of human traditions?

Once, while conducting seminars, I offered a reward of 1,000 euros to anyone who could present even one Bible verse concerning the holiness of Sunday. No one came forward, nor could anyone do so, because the Bible does not say a single word about it.

But the commandment concerning the holiness of Sabbath time does exist, and it was given to the world; there is no escaping this fact. Yet some people take it upon themselves to teach others that Sunday is now our Sabbath, that it should be kept holy just as the Sabbath was kept holy in the Bible, and that under no circumstances should anyone work during this set-apart time. But the Bible teaches us to honor the Sabbath, not another day. We have been given very detailed explanations of what should be done on the Sabbath and what should be

avoided. And if the Sabbath is only for the Jews, then to what nation do the cattle, donkeys, oxen, and strangers clearly mentioned in this commandment belong? (Deuteronomy 5:14). Strangers are foreigners, people from other nations, and they are certainly not Jews.

The Bible does not teach me to observe Sunday; therefore, every attempt to keep this day holy becomes merely a human ordinance or a good tradition. If, in a certain country, this rule has been elevated to the status of a law prohibiting labor, wisdom from above is needed so that one does not enter into open confrontation with the highest authorities of that country. At the same time, one must correctly understand how to remain obedient to God's commandment when everyone around is working and going about their usual business and trying to involve me in the same process.

I have also heard it said that by keeping the Sabbath I am saved by works. Nowhere does the Bible teach that salvation comes by works. Salvation is exclusively by grace—not in sin, but from sin. And the commandment itself says in Exodus 20:10: 'But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.' 'Thou shalt not do' is a call to rest. Yet no one preaches salvation through idleness.

Moreover, God calls us not only to rest on the Sabbath, but also to keep this day holy, to set it apart from other time in a special way, and to spend it worshiping God in spirit and in truth.

There will be little benefit in observing the letter of the law. If there is no love in the heart, the meaning of this commandment—and of every other commandment—is lost. The Pharisees' scrupulousness in this matter led them into fanaticism, which Christ opposed. The Lord was free from the unnecessary rules with which the Sabbath day had been burdened, and He showed how this special time should be kept holy—not by abolishing the commandment, but by fulfilling it in the spirit of truth. Jesus loved His neighbors and did everything possible to relieve their suffering and teach them obedience. The Bible

describes only seven miracles that Jesus performed on the Sabbath. Even these accounts contain symbolic meaning.

Sabbath observance does not save anyone from death. Salvation is God's prerogative, and He decides who will live eternally and who will be punished. But obedience to the law carries a blessing within itself for everyone who chooses submission. For example, if I decide not to kill anyone, I will have peace in my heart in this area of thought, and I will not tremble with fear while awaiting retribution for shed blood. By keeping the Sabbath, I rest physically and emotionally, and this will affect my overall health and way of thinking. The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

I am sometimes accused of speaking only about the Sabbath. This is a strange accusation. All this time we have been speaking about love. And I understand that if there is no love in the heart, such a person will violate the Sabbath in spirit even though its outward form is observed. In marriage, which is important—the official registration or the relationship? Both are important. Without the registration, we are fornicators; without the relationship, we are unhappy formalists.

If I have no relationship with the Creator and do not allow His love to dwell in my heart, I will not be able to keep the Sabbath holy according to the commandment. I will observe it according to the letter, and that is sin, although physically and mentally I will receive rest and relief. Yet this is not all that God desires to see.

The Sabbath is the very commandment that, like a sign, shows the whole world Whose I am and whether I am united with God in the spirit of love and truth. Love is the fulfilling of the Sabbath.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Leviticus 23:32; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Isaiah 56:5-6; 58:13-14; 66:23; Ezekiel 20:12, 20; Matthew 12:1-12; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:16; 1 John 3:22; and Hebrews 4:8-11 in the light of this chapter.

2. Did you learn anything new from this chapter?
3. Do you believe that Sabbath observance saves me from eternal death?
4. If, having a knowledge of the truth, I continue to violate the fourth commandment and observe another day out of love for God, keeping Sunday holy as His day, will this truly bring me under condemnation?
5. How can I understand whether I am obedient to God and whether I am correctly observing the commandment of rest?
6. Why was the Sabbath given to humanity?
7. If I dedicate every day to God, why do I need to keep the Sabbath holy?
8. Can the whole world be mistaken by violating the fourth commandment while at the same time enjoying abundant blessings in everything, yet be under the curse of the law and have no hope of salvation? Will God truly refuse to save good people merely because they did not rest on the Sabbath?
9. What blessing does the Sabbath bring you?
10. How does God sanctify His faithful Sabbath-keeping people?
11. What should I do if the teachings of my church do not permit me to keep the Sabbath holy and the pastor has no intention of changing his views? I love my brothers and sisters and wish to continue believing in God together with them. What is the right course for me to take?
12. Are you certain that you obey the requirement of the fourth commandment in spirit and in truth?
13. What role does love play in obedience and Sabbath observance?
14. Share your understanding and experience of observing the fourth commandment.

Chapter 24 God's Stewards

I believe that when God endows me with various gifts and opportunities, He watches very carefully how I manage all of them. Even here, the Lord draws a clear line between what is mine and has been given for my benefit, and what belongs to Him. I am expected to have a clear understanding of these distinctions and to be faithful in managing everything under my authority. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of Eden was an example of this.

In endowing me with the gift of love, God expects me to empty the Heavenly storehouses daily and allow this water of life to flow through my heart, becoming a blessing to others. And, of course, the Lord desires that a portion of this same love return to Him in the form of our special relationship, thanksgiving, offerings, and blessings.

Jesus desires to see in us channels through which living water flows and, after accomplishing its work, returns to the Lord in the form of good fruit, praise, and thanksgiving; in the form of new souls who desire to live eternally with their Savior; and in the form of generous offerings. Then we will be able to say with joy, 'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee!'

The Lord desires our service to come from a pure heart and to bring us happiness. Worshiping God merely from a sense of duty or from fear of punishment or error is not a proper approach, and it does not glorify the Creator. Such an understanding implies obligations, but heartfelt relationships are absent from it. Love languishes in the prison of my limited consciousness and longs for freedom so that I may exercise my stewardship out of love.

But I also need to understand what has been entrusted to my stewardship, what I possess, and what is under my authority.

First and foremost, there is myself. Although I am the creation of a wise Designer, I have nevertheless been placed under my own stewardship. Caring for my body, soul, and spirit is my

responsibility throughout my earthly life, in order to determine whether eternal values can be entrusted to me. I am expected to study the laws governing my life and to act in accordance with God's requirements and expectations. The Lord has taken upon Himself the greater part and burden of my body's functioning, ensuring that all my organs perform their functions normally, regardless of my understanding. I have been given the authority to supply this organism with everything beneficial and to care tenderly for my body and soul in the spirit of love for myself, following Jesus' example and the instructions for its proper use.

The second thing entrusted to me is my abilities and talents. Each of us is unique, gifted, talented, and one of a kind. And when all these qualities are blended with God's love, they make a magnificent medley that delights Heaven and is a blessing to the Church and the world.

God expects all my abilities to benefit me personally as well as His cause, and that through them I will be able to reflect God's character.

The third is my time. Most interestingly, this gift is sent daily to each of us in equal measure. No one can boast of having more time than another person, yet for some reason many people say they have none. But it exists and is entrusted equally to all of us. We have even been given a commandment concerning our time, in which God Himself states very clearly that the time of the Sabbath day must be devoted to the Lord God. The Lord also gives counsel concerning what should not be done on that day. And Jesus clarified that good deeds should also be done on the Sabbath.

God watches with special attention how I manage my time, how I live during the time that belongs to God, and what I do on the other days. Although all things are lawful for me, not all things are beneficial. Love is offered to assist me in my stewardship so that I do not make fatal mistakes. It gives the right motive to all my deeds and places the seal of Heaven's approval not only upon my actions and rest, but also upon my mind. My time,

clothed in love, serves as a blessing to the world and the Church. And I am regarded as a faithful steward.

The fourth thing entrusted to me is property and material possessions. I may call everything under my authority and at my disposal my own in order to define the boundaries of my stewardship, but in reality only that which I can take with me to the grave is mine.

Money is a resource in God's administration that has been entrusted to me in order to test my faithfulness, determine my wisdom, reveal my selflessness, and expose my attachments and sins.

So that I would not forget Who the true Owner of every material advantage and blessing is, God set apart a special portion of these blessings for Himself and called it the tithe. It is like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of Eden, which was not hidden in a corner but stood in the most visible place, yet did not belong to me. It is holy and should not be touched. It is not mine, but God's, although it passes through my hands. God warns what awaits those who encroach upon His property, while also describing the blessings prepared for those who are willing to prove Him in this matter. Nowhere else does God give a human being the right to test Him. He is the Creator! But in the matter of the tithe, the Lord Himself invites us to prove His power. Will I respond to this invitation?

But after I have given a tenth of my income, nine-tenths remain. I may decide that this is mine and that I have the right to spend these funds as I wish. And I do have such authority, because God has entrusted this property to me. But He did so in order that I would manage it and remember that I am not the owner of material blessings.

Love in the management of resources gives me the right motive. I regard material means as a temporary advantage of my earthly life and understand that I should not set my heart upon them. Love views all my material possessions as opportunities to make my life more interesting by dedicating all of them to the service of God and people. In love I receive

Heavenly wisdom not to regard what I possess as my own, but to view it more simply and to exercise sound judgment in charity. Not every good deed is necessarily beneficial to others. If, for example, I give money to a person addicted to alcohol, he will use it not for the good of his soul but for evil, and I will be accountable for having managed God's property unwisely.

Genesis 1:1 tells us very clearly Who is the Owner of everything, including us.

An understanding of proper stewardship lies at the foundation of my faith and brings happiness to my soul when I am in harmony with God and see His approval upon every wise decision I make. Love also protects me in this world from the evil of the love of money and greed. I am rich not because of what I have, but because of how I manage what has been entrusted to me. At any moment my life may come to an end, and the demand will be made of me: 'Give Me an account of thy stewardship!' And I will be weighed in the balances. What will they reveal then? I hope that God's love and my relationship with Jesus will add weight to my body, while everything else will be found very light and cast away like salt that has lost its savor.

Heaven also expects me to care tenderly for the Earth that has been entrusted to my stewardship within the sphere of my activity, so that I do not destroy it but care for it with love.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chronicles 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 23:23; Romans 15:26-27; 1 Corinthians 9:9-14; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; and 9:7 in the light of this chapter.
2. What did you understand and learn that was new from this chapter?
3. Are you God's steward?
4. What does the Lord expect from those to whom He entrusts His gifts and opportunities?
5. What in this world is mine and rightfully belongs to me as its lawful owner?

6. Is love among the gifts entrusted to my stewardship?
7. How do you envision God's balances, and what is weighed upon them?
8. Are my good deeds taken into account in Heaven? If not, why must they be done? If they are, can I bring them with me to the judgment?
9. Is it easy to be a steward of God's property?
10. To whom should the tithe be given? Why should it not be spent on one's own needs?
11. What happens to those who keep the tithe for themselves or spend it at their own discretion?
12. Does God's trust awaken trust in return within you?
13. What does the Lord desire to entrust to you through this book?
14. Do you enjoy taking responsibility for managing the blessings of Heaven?

Chapter 25 Christian Conduct

Who I am can be understood by observing me and giving me an opportunity to reveal my character and habits in various situations. What I call myself may differ from who I really am. And this difference is called hypocrisy or double-mindedness. Unfortunately, our Christian society has such a problem. It is very sad if I prove to be a hypocritical person. But the Lord brings me to the realization that I am an actor. He desires to make me either an honest sinner or a true Christian. I think you would be surprised if you learned that I do not live as I write. And someone would rejoice at this discovery in order to justify his own ignorance.

But you should look not at me, but at Christ, Who chooses insignificant and weak things in order to carry out His plans and accomplish His purposes.

I am learning together with you, and in doing so I have the right to make a mistake, but not to cherish vice. And if some sin is still lurking in my heart, carefully concealed there, the Lord knows under what circumstances it can be exposed and removed from my life forever.

We are called to be godly people whose thoughts, feelings, and actions are in harmony with biblical principles in every aspect of personal and social life. In order to allow the Holy Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord, we strive only for what can produce Christian purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our pleasures and entertainment must meet the high standards of Christian taste and beauty.

Happiness rests upon this foundation of my faith and does not contradict whatever is true, pure, lovely, virtuous, and praiseworthy.

My appearance should be appropriate to the place, work, culture, time, modesty, and God's standards of holiness.

My food should benefit me and build up my body rather than destroy it, while being sanctified by the Word of God and

conforming to biblical purity and principles. Everything that enters my body must not defile me, deprive me of sound judgment, intoxicate my mind, lead me into a state of sinful pleasure, or destroy my body.

My physical and spiritual activity should be under the influence of the Holy Spirit and strengthen my faith in God as well as my mental and physical health. It should be in harmony with God's requirements and expectations. God watches very carefully what I feed my body and mind and how this can be combined with the science of love. Upon this is laid the foundation of our personal relationship with Jesus.

The photographs I post publicly on social media can tell you a great deal about me and my views on life. If I preach to you about the higher culture of spiritual principles, while my photo album testifies to other values and does not correspond to what I call you to, then all my influence is reduced to nothing. God is dishonored in my life. And even if I once was a bad person, I should not continually tell everyone about it by putting it on public display. The enemy will certainly turn such facts against God and against His influence through me.

For example, I served in the military and know how an assault rifle works. And if I publish a photograph of myself embracing that rifle, even if it was taken in the distant past, many of you will have a great many questions and objections concerning me. And it will be difficult for me to prove that I am different now. I never speak about my sinful adventures and 'exploits,' except when, in a personal conversation, I can share some fragment of my former life in order to win for Christ someone who is perishing and blind. But God gives me new experiences of a pure life, and He casts my old sins into the depths in order to drown them there forever and, in time, erase them from my memory.

I am not called by God to live for myself and do whatever I consider right. The Lord has brought me into His Church, where there are the strong and the weak, those who believe and those whose faith is weak, those in need and those who are content. I must take their expectations into account and allow

God to fit us together like living stones in His building. We were created for one another and gathered by God in order to learn to serve others, at times forgetting about ourselves.

But my conduct does not save me; rather, it reveals how closely I am connected each day with the One Who accomplished and continues to accomplish my salvation.

God has the power to heal every infirmity, but He gives me knowledge of how to avoid illness and what is necessary to keep my body and mind pure and in perfect health. What benefit would there be if God continually healed me but left the cause of the illness? I would become sick again.

For example, to prevent a hangover headache, one should drink Coca-Cola upon awakening. Or perhaps it would be better simply to advise a person not to drink alcohol? Then there would be no headache.

What does a person want to know when he becomes ill? How to be healed. He goes to a doctor with this question and waits for the 'magic' pills that his body supposedly lacks in order to overcome the illness. But a wise doctor determines the cause of the illness and advises the person to change his way of life and thinking; then the problems will go away. And silver pays for everything.

The laws of health are just as wise and holy as God's commandments. They do not contradict one another but complement each other, harmoniously adorning my modest Christian life.

Fresh air, pure water, sunlight, proper nutrition, abstinence and moderation, physical exercise, rest, faith, and trust in God—all these are given to me freely as means that support my health and keep my soul, spirit, and body in proper condition. They are the most accessible and simple means of sustaining my life. Their wise use lies at the foundation of my happiness, and if even one of them is violated or removed, illness will not be long in coming. It will certainly come to destroy what belongs to God.

Health is a blessing, and my happiness is closely connected with it. But health cannot be the foundation of happiness upon which I build my little house. Otherwise, any illness will destroy everything very quickly. Yet I need health, and it is worth fighting for against my flesh, which does not respect these principles and desires what is contrary to the spirit. My flesh also desires and seeks happiness, but it seeks happiness that is immediate and magnificent, no matter by what means, as long as it is obtained here and now. And this ruins and destroys the true foundation, bringing emptiness and weariness of spirit.

Movies, radio, and television are forms of mass media that can very quickly shape the thinking and culture of society. And the building of my happiness depends upon the extent to which I allow these means to influence me and impose values upon me that are foreign to God. The internet includes all of this and adds many other temptations. But online I can choose what is beneficial to me. Mass media, however, impose upon me what they consider right and necessary. It is worth exercising temperance and wisdom in our contact with these features of our time. For there is no happiness in them, but the breath of death is present.

Love teaches me simplicity, wisdom, modesty, contentment, purity, high morality, practicality, economy, and health. Love is an adornment in itself.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Genesis 7:2; Exodus 20:15; Leviticus 11:1-47; Psalm 106:3; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 10:31; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Ephesians 5:1-21; Philippians 2:4; 4:8; 1 Timothy 2:9-10; Titus 2:11-12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; and 3 John 2 in the light of this chapter.
2. What did you understand from this chapter?
3. What does a Christian's conduct testify to?
4. If a person decides to become deeply religious, will this desire be reflected outwardly in a visible way?
5. 'I believe in my heart'—how often do you hear such statements from different people who listen to your appeals for positive change?

6. What from this chapter can be laid in the foundation of happiness or used as building material?
7. Is health given to us as a pledge and guarantee of salvation, as a sign that we belong to God?
8. Is it necessary to be healthy in the last days?
9. Can sick people be happy?
10. Can I build my happiness upon mass media by finding in them things that are useful and joyful for my soul?
11. Is temperance a restriction of my freedom and a dictatorship of goodness?
12. If being happy is so difficult, is it worth fighting for? Does God truly take pleasure in watching me struggle against the influence of the world and desire with my last strength to resist its temptations?

Chapter 26 Marriage and Family

Marriage is a great mystery of God's design for humanity, which is very difficult to explain in words but very easy to create in reality. By God's will, man and woman were designed and created for each other so that through the marriage union they might become one flesh.

The family and the Sabbath are what the Lord gave humanity even before the Fall, and they are what people carried with them out of Eden. And it is precisely these institutions of God that face the fiercest attacks from the enemy of the human soul. For if he succeeds in destroying them, unhappiness will become the lot of all people.

Marriage should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share the same faith. By uniting in such a covenant, Christians assume obligations not only to each other and to society, but also to God. The family is the fullness of the Divine character manifested in the characters of man and woman. And when they harmoniously unite into one whole, they become a complete human being. The family is the environment in which God's image is restored in people through their care for one another. And God's agape love becomes the Heavenly glue that binds two selfish people into one friendly enterprise.

I believe that marriage and family are the Lord's design. Through such a union, God desires to show and reveal to people the kind of relationship that exists among the Heavenly Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The family has a powerful influence on a person's happiness, but it cannot be the foundation of that happiness, nor does it even belong to the building materials, for it depends on wholeness and unity. But when the union collapses because of death, a breakdown in the relationship, hatred, or divorce, the happiness that was laid in the foundation of this little house perishes with it. Although the family is not the foundation of happiness, it nevertheless becomes the very place where happiness is born, where its strength is tested, where it is tried,

passes through the fire of criticism, and takes on visible form. Marriage is one of the best and most important elements filling the little house of happiness, and it also contains elements of love and friendship.

Romantic love draws a man and a woman to each other. They become friends, decide to start a family, and after several years, having passed through the process of adjusting to one another and the struggle for power, and having understood their rights and responsibilities, they begin to love each other, which opens the way for them to earthly happiness.

Unfortunately, in our time the concept of family has been distorted, and if there is no love, then for many such a union becomes hell and endless torment from which there is no escape. Even divorce does not solve this problem. When a relationship breaks down, everyone suffers, especially the children. Divorce is not God's will.

God desires to see happy families bound by close ties of love to one another and to Heaven, in order to reveal to the world the beauty of the gospel and the true splendor of Heavenly relationships. But the enemy of the soul seeks to distort this.

Unfortunately, many allow Satan to sow in their families unrestrained passions, violence, evil lust, perversions, a dictatorial spirit, hostility, jealousy, and other things that very quickly destroy happiness and make life meaningless. A person then dreams of death as the only way out of this nightmare. But even if all this does happen, it does not mean that people should not start families and risk their freedom and independence. The family is a protection against many temptations. It is an opportunity to learn to think about the happiness of one's neighbor. It is a grave for the self, where the concept of "we" is resurrected. Caring for one another forms positive character traits that can later be applied very successfully in relation to other people as well.

Raising children gives us an example of how God relates to us and with what tenderness He cares for all our needs, desiring to instill eternal values in us. The mystery of a new person's

coming into the world is an exact illustration of the spiritual birth of a soul for Eternal life. The stages of a child's growth and development show us how our spiritual person is perfected through faith in God. A family is created forever so that in this union of two hearts people may draw closer to one another, come to know the essence of their spouse, and understand themselves as loving individuals.

I often ask married people, or those who desire to marry, how they understand the purpose of starting a family. And in response I hear anything and everything except a true understanding of the meaning of such a relationship.

And what do you think? What is the meaning and purpose of your family, if you have one or are planning to have one? Not to be alone. To have children. To build a house. To carry out a ministry. To survive in this world. To avoid sexual immorality. To receive physical pleasure. To keep life from being boring. To have someone serve you and prepare your food. And so forth. Families are started with such plans. And it is no wonder that problems come and everything begins to fall apart.

But the true purpose of starting a family is to come to know each other more closely and, through this knowledge, to discover oneself as well. If this does not happen, it is difficult to give meaning to something that is a result rather than a foundation.

Look at the purpose of Eternal life:

John 17:3: "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent."

What is this speaking about? It is about coming to know one's Heavenly Spouse. This will continue throughout Eternity. Does such a prospect bring you joy? Where this knowledge is absent, darkness and death appear.

The same is true in relationships. If I do not know the one with whom I live, then our life turns into a succession of rights and responsibilities. And making provision for the flesh becomes lust.

But we were created in God's image, and God desires to restore His likeness in us and in our relationships. If my wife chooses a different path in life, that is no reason to leave her. Even in such circumstances, I can build happiness upon what I have. And my happiness does not depend on my spouse if it has the right foundation and strong materials. An unbelieving wife continually tests my strength so that it may be revealed how faithful I am to the principles of love and friendship. No counterfeit will withstand such uncompromising trials.

If we do not desire to be changed together into God's image and likeness, then I will steadfastly do this alone so that Jesus may be reflected in me. If I become an enemy and a scoundrel to my life companion because she has decided to see me that way, I will nevertheless continue to care tenderly for her and think about her happiness until death separates us. After all, I promised this to her and to God. Agape love, even when it is one-sided, changes a great deal in a relationship. And one must be very blind and foolish to reject or leave someone who sincerely loves you and cares for your needs. Through the example of our families, we understand how much pain and suffering God endures when He sees the backs of those who do not respond to His love but go away to perdition. What can be done for someone who has chosen the right to die? Only to continue caring for him, hoping that he will come to his senses.

Love does not seek its own, but establishes a strong bond in a relationship and pours its tender streams through this channel in various manifestations, beginning with kind thoughts that pass into words and deeds.

And in order to become one whole with each other, it is necessary to leave father and mother and cleave in soul to God and to one's spouse, so that in this union of two hearts God's masterpiece called "Family" may be created.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Genesis 2:18-25; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Proverbs 22:6; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11-12; John 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 7:7, 10-

11; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4 in the light of this chapter.

2. What did you understand from this chapter?
3. Why can the family not be the foundation of happiness?
4. If the family is not the foundation of happiness, is it worthwhile for a single person to start one?
5. Can children, or their health and cheerfulness, be the foundation of happiness?
6. Why do only two persons of opposite sexes become a complete human being when they start a family, while separately they are only a man and a woman?
7. Does God have feminine characteristics within Himself as well?
8. Does God understand women?
9. Why is it so important to believe that family and marriage are God's institution for humanity?
10. Is common-law marriage God's plan for our time, or is it something else?
11. Why is divorce not the best solution to family problems?
12. How do you understand the purpose of starting a family? Does this agree with the material in this chapter?

Chapter 27 The High Priest of Love

Thus, we have laid in the foundation of our building the Stone, Who is Christ. In words, this sounds beautiful. But what this actually means in the life of each of us is understood by everyone in his own way, according to the measure of his faith and the information he has received.

But it is also worth knowing where Christ is now and what He is doing there. If I do not understand this, then most likely I will invent for myself whatever I consider right. But in the light of the Bible, my speculations may prove false, and I risk being deceived and confusing the historical prophecies about our time with my own ideas or with generally accepted views.

During the Exodus from Egypt, God commanded that a tabernacle be built so that a specific ministry could be carried out in it. Moses was shown a detailed plan of how and from what it was to be built, and who was to perform each kind of work. The exact dimensions and the location of every object intended for the ministry were specified. The ark of the covenant was built, and the tablets of God's law, written by the hand of God, were placed in it. All preparation and all work were carried out under God's absolute control, and there was no place in the sanctuary for anything foreign or unnecessary. Even the fire was taken only from the altar. The Heavenly King set apart the tribe of Levi as His priests. From this tribe the high priest was chosen, who performed the most solemn and significant part of the ministry. Only the clean animals appointed by God were to be offered as sacrifices, symbolically pointing to the coming Messiah, Who became the true Sacrifice for the sins of humanity. All the types and feasts of the earthly sanctuary proclaimed that Christ would come, in Whom everything would be literally fulfilled.

Later, Solomon built the temple for the performance of this ceremonial ministry. All its types were an exact copy of the true Heavenly Sanctuary.

Through the prophet Daniel, the prophecy of the 2,300 evenings and mornings foretold the exact time when Christ would come, when He would die, when the door of grace would be opened to all nations, and when the cleansing of the Heavenly Sanctuary would take place. And this prediction was fulfilled to the very day. At the appointed time Jesus was baptized; three and a half years later He was crucified; and another three and a half years later the command was given from Heaven to carry the gospel to the Gentiles.

In Mark 16:19 we read: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." And if we stop at this account, it is very difficult to understand what happened next.

But in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read a more detailed description of where the Lord ascended and what it means that He "sat on the right hand of God."

Jesus became the true High Priest and began the true ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, after the pattern of which the earthly sanctuary had been built. Christ entered the Heavenly temple with His Own Blood, and therefore all earthly animal sacrifices lost their meaning and power. The types met their reality.

Daniel's prophecy points to the cleansing of the Sanctuary. If this is arranged by dates, the following picture emerges.

In 457 BC, King Artaxerxes issued the decree to restore Jerusalem. From that day the prophecy began to be fulfilled. After 490 years, in AD 27, Jesus was baptized and presented to the world as the promised Messiah. Three and a half years later, at the Passover feast, the sacrifice for our sins was offered through the death of Jesus. Another three and a half years later, in AD 34, the people of Israel completely rejected God's mercy and began the physical destruction of Christ's followers, and the door of grace was opened to the Gentiles. In 1844, Daniel's prophecy received its final fulfillment, and the cleansing of the Heavenly Sanctuary began. In the earthly ministry, blood for sins was brought into the Holy Place

throughout the year, while the cleansing took place once a year on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest brought the blood of the goat for the Lord into the Most Holy Place. On this feast, all who had come to worship searched their hearts and waited with trembling for God's decision. If the Lord forgave the people, the high priest received evidence of it and, upon leaving the Sanctuary, announced God's will to the people. Everyone joyfully listened to the verdict, and rejoicing before the Lord began.

A corresponding event took place in 1844. Our High Priest entered the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary with His Own Blood. The phase of the Heavenly ministry then moved to the judgment, in which the cases of those who had in one way or another been connected with Christianity began to be examined, so that the records in the Book of Life might reveal how devoted and faithful each person had been to the Lord. And now this judgment is deciding the eternal destiny of those who have ever entered into a covenant with God.

I have heard people say that there is no judgment and that it is unnecessary, because God already knows everything and has no need to review every case. Yes, God knows everything, but there is also the universe and those who desire to understand why one person was justified and another condemned. The judgment answers such questions. Each person's case is presented very clearly to everyone, and Jesus pronounces either a verdict of justification, showing His wounds and declaring that His Blood was shed for this soul, or a verdict of condemnation through sorrowful silence concerning unconfessed sins.

I did not invent this. God established the judgment, and the Bible teaches how important it is to know and understand this. I believe that there is a Heavenly Sanctuary in which Christ is now performing His mediatorial ministry as the Great High Priest. One day my name will be spoken in that place, and so will your names. And what will the Lord say? When He hears my name, will He exclaim, "My Blood has washed away the sins of this son. Father! I desire that he be with Me!"?

Understanding what is taking place in Heaven gives me an understanding of what should and should not be done on Earth.

But the message of the Sanctuary also points to the fact that one day this ministry will end, and those who did not believe in the necessity of cleansing and examining their hearts, or who treated the time of preparation carelessly, will find themselves without oil in their lamps and will be unable to enter the marriage supper. This means that they will lose their salvation forever.

Understanding what is taking place, I realize that the standard of judgment is the law of the Ten Commandments, by which all the righteous will be judged. But the good news is also that if Christ is our Advocate, then we do not even need to come into judgment; He Himself will decide everything. (John 5:24)

At the end of the ministry in the earthly tabernacle, the confessed sins of the people were placed upon the scapegoat, and it was led into the wilderness, where it died. In the same way, at the end of the Heavenly judgment, Jesus will place all the confessed sins of the righteous upon Satan, so that he may bear the sentence for all his temptations. But wickedness that has not been forsaken will remain upon sinful people, and they themselves will have to bear the decision of the judgment and drink the cup of punishment. This cup of my sins was given to Jesus in Gethsemane, and He drank it in my place in order to give me the cup of blessings to drink, which rightfully belongs to Christ but is given to me through His love in response to my faith. And this is from God.

And the very throne of grace upon which Christ's ministry is now being performed is promised to all overcomers who choose the path of love, friendship, and happiness.

To be happy is to bear witness to the world about my faith: that I understand Whom I serve, Whose Spirit is in me, Whose law is written in my heart, and Who reigns in the third temple of my soul.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Leviticus 16; Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6; Daniel 7:9-27; 8:13-14; 9:24-27; Hebrews 1:3; 2:16-17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Revelation 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6-7; 20:12; 22:11-12 in the light of this chapter.
2. Did you learn anything new from this chapter?
3. How do you understand Christ's intercessory ministry? What does it mean to sit at the right hand of God?
4. Is it important to know where Jesus is now and what He is doing?
5. Why is it important to understand the truth about the Heavenly Sanctuary in this last time?
6. From the example of the earthly types of the tabernacle, can you picture what is now taking place in the Heavenly Sanctuary?
7. How many times does the book of Revelation speak of the Heavenly Temple?
8. What is in the ark of the covenant?
9. What does this chapter have to do with the foundation of happiness?
10. Can you explain in your own words the arrangement of the Sanctuary and what all the objects in it symbolize?
11. Did you understand what this chapter is about?

Chapter 28 The Second Coming of Christ

As I build my happiness and strive for holiness, I leave behind many things that bind me to this world and hinder me from living a pure life. If someone were to look at my life and try to understand why I deny myself many earthly pleasures and sinful enjoyments, it would be worth considering what the ultimate purpose of my building is. For what reason do I want to be holy, and what benefit do I gain from my self-restraint in everything?

If my faith is judged from the perspective of this world, one may conclude that I look strange, and I am labeled a “cult member,” which tells everyone that I am not as “normal” as other people. To many, a cult member is not a person but a fanatic devoted to his faith, and few try to understand what I believe and how my hope has changed my life.

Every year people throughout the world wish one another happiness without even understanding the foundations and principles of a happy life. Yes, happiness exists, and it is available to everyone who desires to have it, but its principles and laws must be studied in order to live in it. A house of happiness built on sin will certainly collapse one day, but a house that has a firm Biblical Foundation will stand.

The culmination of my building will be a special event that will change everything and bring an end to this world, to all earthly plans and claims. I am speaking of the Second Coming of Christ. It is also called “the end of the world,” but I cannot understand how something that begins in order never to end can itself be an end. The Second Coming is the beginning of the fullness of light. It is the end of the history of sin and the continuation of life in Eternity. If this event were not to take place, then all our faith, with its foundations and claims, would be in vain. And what benefit would we gain from all our building? At most, a brief existence in this vain world without much vanity.

Death brings all our plans to an end, and if there is no resurrection, then we are of all men most miserable. But this is not so. Christ will come, and His Second Coming will take place. I believe this, and it is the foundation of my hope. Everything I do while living in this world is done in accordance with this expectation of mine. And this event will show all people very clearly what an enormous difference there will be between those who believe in God and await Him and those who gave no thought to their salvation or did nothing to be saved.

My love languishes in this world, living amid sin. Sin boldly raises its ugly head and desires to plant its banner in my heart as well, but love keeps me in this struggle and gives me victory. I do not know how much longer I am destined to live in this world or whether I will be among the living who meet my Lord, but I am preparing for His Coming and trying to learn as much as possible about my Savior. I seek to become very much like Him in love and character. I am truly eager to meet the One Who saved me from the power of sin, gave me light and strength to live a pure life, taught me to love, and brought about many changes in my heart. My eyes will see the eyes of my Lord, my arms will embrace Him, my knees will bow before Him, and my lips will praise Him. I will be taken from this world to live forever in the presence of God the Father and the Son.

What a glorious scene will open before the whole world! Far away in the sky, a small shining point appears, about half the size of a man's hand. And as it draws nearer, the light of indescribable glory illuminates the whole Earth.

The attention of everyone alive is fixed on this light. Suddenly, people begin to understand that something momentous is taking place in the history of the planet. Its Creator, through Whom all things came into being, is approaching the Earth. Every voice falls silent. The Heavenly procession draws nearer. We see angels and hear their singing. The heavens roll back like a scroll, opening the way for the Lord, Who descends closer and closer to the Earth.

The Earth begins to tremble at God's presence, and a great earthquake takes place, destroying every structure except my little house of happiness. Trembling, I watch this glorious phenomenon, and my lips whisper words of blessing that come to mind. Oh, that all-penetrating gaze of Jesus! Like a sharp sword, it enters the very depths of my heart, and I look on in fear and trembling, not knowing what will happen to me. Will I be able to stand in His presence? For a time, everything falls silent. Christ surveys the whole Earth with His all-seeing gaze and pronounces words of Eternal blessing upon His people. A shout of indescribable joy fills all creation. The Lord commands all who lie in darkness to awake. The trumpet of the Archangel announces the hour of awakening; the earth trembles and opens its depths to yield up to the Lord all who rest in its dust. The dead in Christ rise first. Their new bodies are clothed in garments of light. Loving friends recognize one another. Mothers receive their children. Those who died in suffering cry out with joy at their deliverance and at receiving new, incorruptible bodies. The pain of their former death is replaced by rapture. And this entire joyful company, with shouts of praise and delight, looks upon the smiling Jesus, while an unknown Power lifts these people onto the cloud upon which the Lord is seated.

Then we who remain alive are changed in the twinkling of an eye, receiving new bodies, and an unknown Power lifts us from the surface of the earth, carrying us to meet Jesus. I draw near to my Heavenly Friend, Whom I loved without seeing, Whom I came to know so well without having met Him that I could not live without Him; for Whom I was ready to die and left everything behind. My heart trembles. I do not know what I will hear or what will happen next; I simply fly toward this meeting, anticipating something good. My invisible God has become visible. Our eyes meet, and I cannot hold back tears of joy. My heart tells me that all trials are over and that now begins what I pursued for so long by faith. I worship my Savior and cannot take my eyes off Him. Here He is, my precious Jesus, so dear and close to me! How beautiful He is! Fairer than ten thousand!

I hear voices, painfully familiar, calling me by name. I turn and see the radiant faces of my happy friends, many of whom were separated from us by death and by the trials of the last days. I am pleasantly surprised as I recognize dear, familiar faces, and I fall into the arms of these people. Tears of joy and cries of happiness fill all creation. Then together, in perfect unity, we once again begin to look upon Jesus. How we long to embrace Him too! And He lets us know that this will happen soon.

Out of the corner of our eyes, we look at the Earth and see that it is entirely engulfed by winds and fire, but our gaze returns to Jesus. Our voices blend with the singing of the angels, and together we sing a song of victory to the One Who sits upon the throne of glory and is King of kings and Lord of lords.

What wonderful prospects open before our imagination!

Our joyful procession begins to move away from the Earth and enters open space. We swiftly fly toward the Heavenly City that has been prepared for us and is rightfully ours.

The entire Heavenly family is united into one rejoicing community. God the Father tenderly embraces each of us and invites us to enter into His joy, which we gladly do.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Psalm 50:3-6; Mark 8:38; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; Revelation 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21 in the light of this chapter.
2. Were you able to picture the Second Coming?
3. What did you understand from this chapter?
4. Will the Second Coming be a visible event, or will it take place in some other way?
5. Do you believe that this event will one day take place?
6. What are you doing now to be among those who will be taken to Heaven?
7. Does Christ's Coming depend on my belief in this event?
8. Do you know when Jesus will come?

9. The Lord is now standing at the door and knocking. Does this mean that He has already come?
10. Why must the Second Coming take place?
11. Will Satan be able to counterfeit the Second Coming? Will he make such attempts?
12. What should we do to be among those who will be taken to Heaven?
13. Does agape love play any role in my preparation to move to Eternity?
14. Is it important to love one another in the last days, or should we read more spiritual literature and pray instead?
15. Will there be a different kind of love in Heaven? Is it worth spending time on love now?

Chapter 29 Death and Resurrection

Our earthly life has definite boundaries. It begins with our birth and ends with death. This process has been taking place continually from the very moment the first people appeared. If we look at everyone living on Earth, we will see that there are none among them who live for 200 years or more, while the average life expectancy is 70–80 years.

Death is a reality that we will encounter one way or another. No matter how much I may want to live, the hour will come when something will happen to my consciousness, my breath will leave my body, my heart will stop beating, and my soul will die. Many people fear this event and choose not to think about it, believing that they themselves will never die. But reality and statistics give us stark reports that our world does not prolong human life; it only gives us a certain quality of life, which each of us may choose according to our taste, means, and faith.

In the light of the Bible, death is an unconscious state in which there is nothing. It is sometimes compared to sleep. When my children go to sleep, I do not worry that they will lose consciousness for a time and spend the whole night in that state. Instead, I look with special love at their hair scattered across the pillow, at the way they breathe softly together, and at their clothes strewn around the room. As I watch them, I quietly delight in them, and something very warm fills my heart. I know that morning will come and these little people will awaken to delight my soul once again with their little concerns and to learn about life, discovering new opportunities and prospects for growth.

Psalms 116:15 says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” With what love the Lord looks upon His children who have left this world to rest for a time from their labors! To God, our death is not a tragedy. He tenderly lays us down to rest, knowing that a glorious morning will come when He will awaken all His children with His voice, give them new incorruptible bodies, breathe into them the breath of Eternal

life, grant them an Eternal prospect of unceasing growth, and always behold with joy the travail of His soul.

If everything ended with death, all believers would be the most foolish and miserable of people. Our entire existence would also become meaningless. Our whole life would be vanity without any significance.

I wondered what it would be like if we could live for a million years. Oh, how much we could accomplish! But if those years were doomed to sickness and suffering, such a length of existence would not be very appealing. And the mere presence of death, even in the distant future, would deprive life of meaning. But God has a better plan for each of us. He gives His children Eternal life, in which there is no death, no sickness or suffering, and there will be no sin or sorrow. Life is the proper state of a believer.

God has conceived a beautiful plan called the "First Resurrection." It will be the most impressive and momentous event in the entire Universe. In a single moment, all of God's children from every age and nation will come to life, never to die again. Their suffering ended with their death, and their resurrection will be the beginning of a new and joyful life, which from its first moments will resound with cries of joy and victory. They did not believe in vain, they did not devote themselves in vain to serving the invisible God, and they did not look in vain toward a hidden and mysterious future. Now all of this has become reality, and the believers have received far more than they could have imagined.

The resurrection is an act of God that has been very carefully planned and considered and will certainly be carried out. In this event, not one righteous person will be forgotten, and none of the wicked will rise by accident, except those who pierced Jesus, so that they may see what they lost through their cruelty and unbelief.

The case of every person has been examined and weighed in the judgment, an Eternal verdict has been pronounced, and God

will carry out the decision of the Heavenly court concerning the First Resurrection of the righteous.

But the First Resurrection will have one special feature. Those of God's children who are still alive at the time of Christ's Second Coming will not die in order to rise again. Without seeing corruption, they will meet their Savior. With their own eyes they will see graves open and their departed friends from every age come forth. Human wisdom will not accomplish this; the great Divine creative Power will transform us all. We will become so fully alive that sickness, death, aging, and decay will never again have power over us. Eternal youth, joy, and love will become an everlasting seal upon our faces. The beauty of God's character will be continually revealed in all our deeds, and our garments will never cease to shine with the righteousness of Jesus, which will rightfully become ours.

We are now considering the simplest things, which will certainly happen and will be natural and inevitable. Yet the following is astonishing: many people do not know this, do not believe in God's Power and plan, and do not consider whether they will be numbered among the righteous.

It should be noted that God's plan also includes the Second Resurrection. At this event, all those who had no part in the First Resurrection will rise—all sinful and wicked people who never came to know that God has the best plan. These are those who rejected their salvation while believing in something else. All these people will rise in order to receive just punishment for their sins and crimes.

But God does not desire the death of the sinner. He longs for the wicked person to turn from his way and live. The Lord has an abundance of grace for every person, and all Heaven rejoices over every sinner who accepts the plan of salvation by faith and forsakes the works of darkness.

Building happiness makes us fit for Eternity even now and opens to us here on Earth the Heavenly joy of the life to come. Love is powerful even now and can act in exactly the same way as it will on the New Earth. It is governed by the same Eternal

laws that will be available to all the saved at their First Resurrection. Why wait for that beautiful distant future and deprive ourselves of Heavenly joy and happiness when we can study these principles now and live by them?

Are you not drawn by the prospect of the First Resurrection and Eternal life? Yet these are all conditional rewards, which will be granted only to those who accept God's plan for their salvation. We are now offered justification through faith in Jesus and in the truth that He paid for our sins. We are given the gift of the Holy Spirit in love, happiness, and friendship in Christ as the pledge of our salvation.

Why, then, with such knowledge, do many of God's children fear death? We live in a world of sin, where the enemy of souls tries to deceive even the elect and, if he cannot take away their salvation, at least to spoil their lives by holding their minds in fear and trembling. But "love casteth out fear," because "fear hath torment."

Some people have been deceived by Satan and believe in the immortality of the soul, which has no Biblical foundation or meaning. God alone has immortality, and He will not give Eternal life to a sinful soul in order to torment it continually. There is simply no love or meaning in this. But Eternal life without death makes sense and is entirely logical and right in its fulfillment. As for me, I intend to live forever, and I abide by the laws of Eternity even now, believing in the One Who possesses it and gives it.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Job 19:25-27; Psalm 146:3-4; Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10; Daniel 12:2, 13; Isaiah 25:8; John 5:28-29; 11:11-14; Romans 6:23; 16; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 20:1-10 in the light of this chapter.
2. What did you understand from this chapter?
3. Are you interested in thinking about death?
4. In what circumstances can death be a blessing?

5. Does death mean a continued life in the world beyond the grave?
6. Does the prospect of the First Resurrection bring you joy? Or would you accept the Second Resurrection, as long as you rise?
7. What must you do to be among the living who meet Christ?
8. Why does Jesus call death sleep? John 11:11-14.
9. Is it permissible to pray for people to die if they are suffering greatly from illness or something else? Have you ever had such an experience?
10. To Whom does a person's life belong?
11. Can God give life and take someone's life without giving an account to anyone?
12. Are you afraid of death?
13. Will you be saved if you die tomorrow?
14. Have you experienced the death of those close to you or of your relatives? Is it possible to be happy at such a time?
15. Does this book about love teach a happy life?

Chapter 30 The Millennium

The Millennium is one of the most mysterious and least understood Biblical prophecies, about which very little has been written.

Yet this period is quite long, and certain important and fascinating events must take place during it. Let us also try to picture them logically.

The Second Coming of Christ, the First Resurrection and transformation of the righteous, the ascension of all the saved to Heaven, and the solemn procession of this multitude to God's Heavenly dwelling place, where God's throne, the Heavenly Sanctuary, and the Heavenly Jerusalem are located.

God's people will be presented as God's children before the entire Universe and before the face of the Most High. At a solemn ceremony of dedication, every saved person will be given a crown of glory and it will be placed upon his or her head. On every crown, like shining stars, will appear the names of those who were saved from the power of sin through the mediating participation of the one who possesses this reward. This will eternally remind us of the labor of soul that was undertaken for our salvation. How grateful we shall be to those who set aside all their affairs and interests in order to help us find Eternal happiness and salvation in Jesus. Their labor will forever be commemorated upon their crowns, awakening in us unceasing gratitude for their self-denial and labor for our good.

And perhaps there will also be someone's name upon my crown, which will bring me Eternal joy. Then the words of Daniel 12:3 will be fulfilled: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

Among the saved will be all those righteous people who believed in the coming Messiah before His birth into the world, without knowing how He would redeem them. When they see our Savior and worship Him, their eyes will behold the wounds in Jesus' hands and feet. They will ask where those scars came

from. We read in Zechariah 13:6: "And one shall say unto Him, What are these wounds in Thine hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends." The astonishment of many will know no bounds. They will greatly desire to learn the details of this event. As they recall the rites of their sacrifices, they will understand that all those symbols became reality in the Lord of Glory. And those of us who know about this in greater detail will have a wonderful opportunity to tell what happened at Calvary and what a high price was paid for our salvation. Then, perhaps, we will all be shown scenes from the life and death of Christ so that we may understand everything correctly. I believe that universal reverence and a realization of the greatness of this Sacrifice will take possession of us, and we will bow in deep reverence before the One Who gave His life so that we might live.

The Cross and its revelations will become an Eternal theme for study and for continual discoveries of the beauty of God's character. In the light of the Sacrifice of Calvary and the true greatness of the Lord's glory, we will continually discover new details and dimensions of God's love, which we will be learning throughout Eternity.

God the Father will reveal Himself to us in all His beauty, greatness, and glory. We will behold His Face without fear of dying. We will understand the mysterious words, "God is love," when our eyes meet and we recognize the One Whom, not having seen, we loved and in Whom we believed.

But the ceremonies of dedication and praise will one day come to an end, and the words of Matthew 25:34 will be proclaimed to us: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Then shouts of praise and thanksgiving will fill Heaven with beautiful singing.

After this, the Lord will show us the Tree of Life and declare that from then on we may eat its fruit and come each month to this solemn gathering. Isaiah 66:23.

Afterward, the Heavenly angels will lead us all to our Eternal Heavenly homes, where each of us will receive the right of permanent possession. With what interest we will explore our homes and dwellings, while cries of praise never cease. Then we will go to meet our neighbors and rejoice at how wisely the Lord has placed us all. We will be given the plan and schedule of future Heavenly events and will also be granted free time.

We will also notice that among the saved there will be many children who have no parents. We will be invited to care for them until they grow up, and we will do so. The Lord has also prepared a Heavenly home for each of these children, into which they will move when they are grown.

Each of us has certain knowledge about the plan of Salvation, God's love, and the revelations that the Lord abundantly poured out upon His people in the last days. We will be invited to share this knowledge with everyone who did not have so much light and did not understand many Biblical prophecies concerning the last days. We will gladly accept this invitation and recommend that everyone who wishes attend lessons on the history of Christianity. Every generation will have the opportunity to share the light and knowledge it possessed. And we, the people of the last days, will tell about our relationship with Jesus, about our time, and about what was revealed to us. All our lessons will be recorded, and those who were unable to attend them in person will be able to watch the recordings.

Moses, Noah, David, Solomon, Abraham, and other well-known friends will sit at our feet and learn the love and happiness that were revealed to us in these last days, listening to the revelations and instructions that were hidden in their time. The Holy Spirit will bring to our remembrance all the details and features of our faith and life and will give us deeper revelations during this instruction. And all the heroes of faith will tell us about their experiences firsthand.

As we become acquainted, we will know one another more deeply and enter more fully into the beauty of the plan of Salvation. Yet we will still have many questions about why one person or another is not with us. At some point, the beginning

of the judgment of those who were not saved will be announced. The records of every person's life will be placed before us in their entirety. Other books will be opened, and we will learn and see every secret thing done and thought by those who are not with us. I believe that in these books it will be possible to examine every deed in detail, as though in a film, to read every thought, and to hear the intentions of the heart. We will be shown every opportunity these people had for Salvation, how the Lord forgave their sins and tenderly drew them to Himself, and how many opportunities for a better life were given to them. We will also see those who became a stumbling block to our relatives and friends, leading them onto the path of destruction. Every vile vice and crime will be revealed, and we will have to pronounce a just sentence upon all who practiced evil.

We will be given authority to judge fallen angels and wicked people and to pronounce sentences upon them according to their crimes.

The case of every person will be examined and closed. God will take note of every verdict reached so that, at the appointed time, He may carry out the sentence. The case of every person will be examined and closed. No one will ever be able to change this Eternal judgment.

The thousand years will come to an end, and the final phase of the judgment and of the history of sin will begin.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Revelation 20:1-6; 1 Corinthians 2:9-10; 6:2-3; 13:12; John 17:3; Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 4:17-18; 5:4; Revelation 2:10; 20:12; 22:1-4 in the light of this chapter.
2. What did you understand from this chapter?
3. What else do you know about the Millennium?
4. Will there be different laws of happiness in Heaven?
5. Do you think that all the saved will know the science of love, happiness, and friendship that we are studying?

6. Will all the saved suddenly become wise and all-knowing in Heaven, or will they still have much to learn?
7. Will God entrust judgment to those who do not perfectly understand the science of love and happiness?
8. Would you like to become a teacher of Noah, Moses, Solomon, or other Biblical figures?
9. Which Biblical heroes would you like to befriend?
10. Do you think Adam and Eve will consider you their relatives? Will they turn us away if we all come together to visit them during a holiday?
11. Are you interested in dreaming about Eternity?
12. Do you consider yourself an Eternal resident of the Heavenly Jerusalem?
13. Does the prospect of always living in the visible presence of God bring you joy?
14. Do you have plans for Eternity?
15. Does this book prepare you for life among holy beings?

Chapter 31 The Second Death

The Second Coming of Christ will put an end to the power of sin and destroy all sinners living on Earth. All the righteous dead will be resurrected and taken to Heaven, and the living righteous will be transformed and caught up to the cloud upon which Christ is seated. The wicked will watch these events in fear. Those whom they hated, mocked, refused to hear, persecuted, beat, and killed for their faith—all these people proved to be right and became victors. The realization of lost opportunities and missed blessings, together with fear of the future, will tear the hearts of many sinners apart in despair. They will look upon the reality of these events and understand that it is too late to change anything. The glory of God's presence will kill many of the wicked, and those who hide in fear from the face of God will be destroyed by a consuming fire.

The time will come when not a single living human being will remain on our planet. All nature will breathe a sigh of relief and enter into its rest.

Satan and his angels will be bound by the circumstances of their new position. Throughout all the time from the beginning of the rebellion in Heaven until then, he devised plans and schemes against God's government. But the hour will have come when there is no one left whom he and his army of fallen angels can lead astray.

The devil will be given another thousand years so that he may have ample time to consider what his sin has brought him to and how much evil he has committed.

The whole Earth lies in ruins; death and chaos are everywhere. And in the midst of this chaos is the enemy of the human soul, who can no longer deceive people because there are none.

Knowing how much time has been allotted to him, Satan will pass through a most difficult period of reflection upon his fall.

Who could have imagined what sin would do to the anointed cherub? From a loving angel radiant with pure joy, he became a fallen being who sows disease, suffering, and death.

During this time, the saints undergo Heavenly rehabilitation. Their minds are renewed under the influence of God's presence and the Eternal sciences that will be taught to them by unfallen Heavenly beings. Jesus Himself will reveal the mysteries of the Universe and explain the Eternal Laws, clarifying every detail. At last, the righteous will see their dream fulfilled—to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His words. God the Father will reveal His Eternal Agape Love to us and tell us about its influence upon fallen humanity. We will look on in wonder at how it was available to all sinners, yet only a few were able to taste it while living on Earth and abide in it, rejoicing before the Lord.

The Heavenly banks will open their doors, and we will marvel at the incorruptible treasures we were able to lay up for ourselves in Heaven. What a return our earthly possessions and good deeds will have brought when we invested them by faith in God's enterprises! We will be amazed at how much good fruit came from the seed that we scattered everywhere with tears and prayers, and what an influence our deeds, words, and letters had upon thirsty and weary hearts.

The good angels will show us our entire journey and reveal how many temptations and deadly dangers they protected us from, how many plans for our destruction they thwarted, and what a great and invisible ministry they performed for humanity, especially for God's children.

Our gratitude will know no bounds. All our blessings and thanksgiving will be directed to the One Who redeemed us from the power of sin.

Although all sinners have perished, sin itself has not yet been destroyed. It has done far too much evil throughout the Universe. All the saints will be given authority to examine the cases of the people who lived on Earth and to understand why they lost their right to Salvation. The deeds and life of every person will be carefully examined, weighed, and discussed. We

will be convinced that God did everything possible to save every soul, but people chose death.

All the evil deeds of humanity will be studied in a special way, and every criminal will be sentenced to just punishment according to his deeds.

I believe that the cases of many people who suffered greatly while living on Earth—who were in a wretched condition, in cruel bondage to wicked people, or under the power of sin, without an opportunity to learn and accept the truth—will be considered with great mercy, and they simply will not be resurrected for judgment. They will be declared lost forever. Their cases will be eternally closed.

After one thousand years, the Heavenly City and all its inhabitants will descend to Earth. All wicked people will be raised in the Second Resurrection, and the outward appearance and sinful power of thought with which they left this life will be restored to them. Satan will once again gain power over the minds of fallen humanity and, seeing this immense host of all his captives, will begin to deceive them again. Everyone will be urged to seize the Heavenly City; a plan of attack will be drawn up, and a time will be appointed. At a certain hour, the armies of all ages and nations will advance against the City of the saints.

But God will intervene for His people and reveal His glory. The vast host will be stopped by God's presence. Then the most solemn and momentous event, known as the Last Judgment, will begin.

All the wicked will stand before God at the same time, experiencing fear and the agony of conscience. The whole life of each person will be presented in detail, and a just sentence will be pronounced upon everyone. All sinners will be cast into the lake of fire. I believe that the measure of punishment will be determined by the length of time they burn in this fire. Some will perish immediately, while others will suffer a little longer for their crimes.

The justice of the punishment will be revealed equally to everyone, and lesser offenders will not share the same fate as hardened evildoers; rather, everyone will receive according to his deeds.

Every sinner will meet his Creator face to face. His entire life will pass before him in a brief moment. Everyone will see all the opportunities he had for a better life and for Salvation. All will understand that they voluntarily forfeited their right to Eternal Life and chose the right to die.

God will perform His strange work and destroy every sin and every sinner. Before their destruction, all wicked people will experience the agony of the second death—the very agony Christ endured in the Garden of Gethsemane and while hanging upon the Cross. All who refused to accept Salvation will have to learn by personal experience the meaning of the words, “The wages of sin is death.” The prophecy of Malachi 4:1 will be fulfilled: “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”

The sins of all the righteous, which they committed under the influence of the spirits of darkness, will be placed upon Satan, and he will have to endure his deserved punishment longer than anyone else.

The second death is an Eternal sentence upon all wicked people and angels, and it will hold Eternal authority over these justly condemned souls. No one will ever be able to change the court’s decision, no destroyed sinner will ever rise again, and sin will never again appear in the Universe.

Sin and the originator of sin will be eternally destroyed, and nothing will remain to remind us of it except the scars in the hands of our dear Savior.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Revelation 20:1-15; 21:1-5; 22:14-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 6:2-3; Jeremiah 4:23-26; Ezekiel 28:18-19;

Malachi 4:1; Isaiah 51:6; 2 Peter 3:9-12; Psalm 96:13; 98:9; 94:1-2; Revelation 1:8; 11:18; Romans 2:6; Malachi 3:2; 1 Corinthians 15:26 in the light of this chapter.

2. What did you understand from this chapter?
3. Does the account of the end of sin bring you joy?
4. Do you understand how much it means to live forever?
5. How do you picture the Last Judgment?
6. Why will sinners be destroyed forever rather than forgiven and taken to Heaven?
7. Is Satan's repentance possible?
8. How can one prepare for the events of the last days?
9. Is Eternity worth fighting for and, for its sake, giving up everything that prevents us from entering it?
10. Would you be interested in hearing the history of our planet firsthand from God?
11. Will the love I am learning now give me any advantage in Heavenly life?
12. What must I do to inherit Eternal Life?
13. Why would it not be better to let sinners suffer for their crimes and then, once they repent, take them into the Heavenly dwellings and teach them love?
14. Are you prepared to become closely acquainted with all the saved?
15. May I visit you after we move to the Heavenly Jerusalem?

Chapter 32 The New Earth

Sin and sinners have been destroyed. Satan and his angels have been cast into the lake of fire. Death and the grave have been consumed by Eternal fire, which no one will be able to quench. When God's judgment carries out the verdict pronounced upon sinful beings and the fire completes its destructive work, there will no longer be any need to sustain the flames. The entire surface of planet Earth will be cleansed of every trace of the former civilization. Nothing will ever again remind us of lawlessness. The enemy of the soul will perish forever, and his destructive influence will never again darken anyone's mind.

And the Lord will create a New Heaven and a New Earth. Perhaps there will no longer be boundless oceans. God's creative power will make the Earth a unique masterpiece in the entire Universe, and our planet will become the place of the personal presence and dwelling of the Godhead.

God the Father will be our Eternal God, and we will have free access to the White Throne, where we may bow at His feet in joy and gratitude and share our unending love with Him.

We will all attain the full stature of Christ. The incorruptible seal of Eternal youth and unfading beauty will adorn our faces. Perfect Agape Love will be the most precious treasure of each one of us. Every day, this treasure will grow and multiply through good deeds and thoughts, making us even richer. Love will become the one universal currency, accepted on every planet and circulating among all Heavenly beings. This will be proclaimed.

I believe that our bodies will receive amazing abilities for travel and rapid movement over great distances.

Most likely, we will acquire a unique ability to communicate with one another so that we may simultaneously maintain relationships with millions of new friends while learning the details of their views on various matters.

Every request we make to God will be granted, and every prayer will be answered. The wonders of God's creative work will no longer merely surprise us; they will awaken sincere admiration and genuine joy.

All of us who were emotionally attached to our pets will be able to receive them again in the same form and with the same feelings and distinctive traits they had before their death. The animals already living there will welcome their new companions into their joyful family.

The conclusion of the Millennium will also bring time to an end. There will no longer be any need to keep count of the endless years of Eternity, although perhaps, out of interest, we will count the days and weeks during the first million years. After that, only the new moon and the Sabbath will remain, when we will come before God's face each time to worship and gladden our dear Lord with our happiness in Eternal Life with Him.

Considering the fact that we will have the special status of Christ's Bride, perhaps we will also have unique personal relationships with Jesus, in which He will reveal Himself to us in a marvelous way so that we may know Him. Our attachment to Him will be so strong that we will be one spiritual flesh, entering deeply into one another's inner world. God's continual presence in me, and my presence in Him, will become an Eternal feature of our relationship, which will never end. This status will grant us privileges that distinguish us from other Heavenly beings. And everyone will rejoice that we have been honored with such a great distinction.

All our bold dreams will be fulfilled in the most amazing projects. The creative thought of each one of us will find expression in the realities of life.

In the Heavenly Jerusalem, we will have our Eternal dwellings, given to us by God as homes. Yet the New Earth will be so beautiful as a place to live that we will want to build a small castle in some cozy place for temporary stays and for receiving guests from other planets. All our buildings will embody

marvels of engineering and become new masterpieces of thoughtful invention.

God's Word does not reveal whether families will be formed and children born in Heaven. But I believe that many women who gave their lives for faith in God while pregnant will have the opportunity, after their resurrection, to carry their children to full term and give birth to them for God's glory.

I also believe that although we will be given new bodies, the Lord will not deprive us of freedom of choice or separate us from those with whom we were joined by family ties. Knowing how children come into the world, we will always be able to ask God to bless and restore this function of the body, and He will not refuse us. But perhaps we will be offered something better, something we cannot even imagine. Therefore, those who never had time to start a family or have children should not grieve. We have a wonderful God Who has provided answers for these needs and expectations as well. No one will be disappointed.

Will I be happy on the New Earth? What a strange question. I already know that the Eternal principles of the laws of happiness will remain Eternal, while the contents of my house of happiness will be so diverse and amazing that I will have to keep expanding the walls of my dwelling endlessly to make room for everything new and beautiful that I will learn and receive in the New Life. And the Lord will continually give me gifts so that through them I may rejoice even more in Eternal Life with its Eternal surprises.

And the most wonderful thing is that I will be able to give freely to all my new and old friends from everything I possess.

When Jesus once again asks me what He could do for me to gladden my heart, I will present Him with an entire list of my friends' needs, which He will gladly fulfill. And together we will watch the joy of those who receive these gifts.

Eternity is worth fighting for even now, and worth entering even now by comprehending its Eternal Laws with our mind, reason, and heart.

Today we comprehend it by faith, but Eternity is as real as our world. It exists and is rapidly approaching, ready to open its doors to everyone who longs to receive it and does everything possible to establish strong ties with its Creator.

Eternity is God's dream of not spending this time alone, but of filling this vast realm with tireless beings redeemed from the power of sin and death. Never again in Eternity will a moment come when God is left alone to live only for Himself. We simply will not let Him. The Lord will continually devise new joys and activities for us so that our minds may constantly develop in love and creativity.

I believe that God Himself does not cease in His Divine perfection, but opens new prospects for Himself so that, at a certain point in Eternity, He may share them with us.

Are you interested in the world of the stars? Do you think Eternity will be long enough for us to explore the vast expanses of the Universe and, upon reaching its edge, discover how boundless it is?

And wherever we may be in infinite space, we will always know Whose we are, where our Eternal Home is, and Who our Bridegroom is, so that we may return again to this inexhaustible Source of infinite love and happiness and draw incorruptible treasures from Him to share with others.

And we will forever know and understand that God is Love.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Matthew 20:23; 25:31-46; John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Isaiah 35; 65:17-25; Matthew 5:5; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 3:10-14; Revelation 11:15; 21:1-7; 22:1-5; Daniel 2:44; 3:33; Matthew 21:43; 23:13; Luke 22:29-30 in the light of this chapter.
2. What did you understand from this chapter?
3. Are you interested in hearing reflections about Eternity?
4. Are we describing what the Lord is preparing for us in terms that are too good?
5. Why do many people consider Eternity a fairy tale?

6. Why do many people more readily believe in the theory of evolution, which still remains a theory, yet refuse to believe in the reality of Eternal Life, even though it is logical, consistent, and true?
7. Do you believe that your body is a well-designed mechanism created by the Heavenly Creator Himself?
8. Would you be interested to learn who your neighbors will be in the Heavenly Jerusalem?
9. Will the saved have love for one another?
10. Is it worth learning love now if everyone will receive it in Eternity anyway?
11. Do you think fear will have a place in our relationship with God in Eternity? If so, what kind of fear will it be?
12. Have you already packed your bags for the move to the Heavenly dwellings? Have you left behind everything that cannot enter there?
13. Will Eternal Life be conditional? If so, what will the condition be?
14. Why will the saved need the Tree of Life? And what does the phrase "the leaves for the healing of the nations" mean?
15. Do you have a gift for God that you would like to present to Him?

Chapter 33 The School of the Future

Do you enjoy learning? What comes to mind when you hear such a question?

What did you experience while studying at the School of Agape Love? Is there a difference between this school and others?

The Kingdom of Heaven is a very interesting place. It has spiritual significance and is established by God within us, but it is also the real name of Eternity—the very place that truly exists, where the King of Heaven, the Lord God, visibly dwells.

It is part of God's plan for all the redeemed to stand before the great White Throne and see with their own eyes the Divine Face of the Heavenly Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil will not grow in the Heavenly Kingdom, and nothing forbidden will remain that cannot be touched under penalty of death. All God's children who have been saved from the world will receive unconditional salvation and Eternal Life. They will have free access to the Tree of Life.

God is the Giver of life, and throughout all Eternity He will bestow it upon all His creation without any conditions. And two enduring memorials—the Tree of Life and the Sabbath—will forever testify of the One Who is the Creator and Life-Giver.

Jesus taught in His prayer in John 17:3: "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent." This knowledge will become our Eternal school of life. It will never end. There will never come a moment in Eternity when one of us will say, "That is all; I have fully known God, and there is nothing more for me to discover in Him." Billions of Eternal years from now, we will still hear continual exclamations of joy because someone has finally learned something about his God that he had been unable to understand for so long. Now a new depth has opened before him for exploring and knowing a particular aspect of God's character and His love.

At the very beginning of the Eternal Kingdom, people of every age, social class, period, and culture will enter it. Many of them lived and grew up in very simple and primitive conditions and could not know much, yet they accepted the light given for their salvation and believed in the One Who gave His life for them. These people do not possess the knowledge and light that have been sent to us, but they will be given the unique mind of an Eternal person, capable of receiving and processing all the new information presented to them and conveying it to the heart. Like children, they will learn the foundations of Eternal Life, comprehend the science of love and happiness, study the depth of God's law, and discover new laws of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Since there will be no temptations in Heaven, a person will accept every truth without critical suspicion, yet with constructive examination.

I believe that we who lived on Earth during the very last days of the history of sin and came to know the depth of God's love will be asked to lead the educational process under the direct revelations of the Holy Spirit. And, of course, we will agree. Eternal education will differ from earthly education in that every student will possess a capacious mind, an excellent memory, and a unique ability to master the subjects being studied quickly. In a short time, even the least educated person will become one of the most successful students in the Heavenly School of Agape Love. And Agape Love will be the logical conclusion of every truth and every Heavenly teaching that we will continually comprehend throughout all Eternity.

Jesus Himself will become our Chief Teacher, at Whose feet we will joyfully gather to hear new truths and revelations. He will gladly answer any question and give us the true solution to every problem. His lessons will be the most interesting and eagerly anticipated, and we will never grow weary of learning from our Heavenly Friend.

I believe that each one of us will have a Bible, and we will be able to study it in greater detail, discovering amazing depths of God's wisdom, foreknowledge, and love that we did not notice while reading this Book on Earth. We will be able to speak with

the writers of the epistles and with the biblical heroes who served as examples for us, and hear from their own lips the true meaning they placed in their writings. Perhaps we will also be shown the time and circumstances in which the Bible was written. We will study and remember everything carefully so that we never forget it. Holy Scripture will become so living and fascinating that every page will be associated in our minds with real scenes and people who will reveal the whole picture of that time in greater detail.

We will see how rebellion began and how sin arose where there was no reason for it, how it developed and destroyed the strongest family relationships. And in order to stop such an avalanche of curses and lawlessness, the Son of God offered His life. In doing so, He revealed the depth of God's love, which alone could stand firmly against the power of sin and death.

Eternal Life will delight us so continuously that we will never cease enjoying it. It will be frightening to think that we might have lost it because of some sinful attachment to the world or because we rejected the light sent for our good.

How easy it is to love and remain faithful to God's law while surrounded by holy beings and dwelling in the Heavenly mansions! Yet how incomprehensible many Eternal values become when one lives in a world of enticements, under the constant pressure of temptations and sinful attacks from those nearby. Who will deliver us from this environment?

Today it is very interesting to journey in imagination into the Heavenly realities of Eternal Life, but everything around me remains the same, and I must continue to fight, study the truth, and overcome through love.

Right now, I have an enormous advantage for achieving complete victory. It consists in the fact that I am on a real battlefield and can test any weapon in action, comprehend the invisible by faith, and choose the Eternal. I am able to meet every attack of the enemy wearing the whole armor of God and possessing the proper warrior spirit called love, happiness, and friendship.

The School of Agape Love gives me another most wonderful advantage. I first comprehend its lessons in theory by studying the materials presented, and then I receive personal revelations from Christ Himself so that I may immediately put them into practice. This is not dry theory, but life with God, in God, and with Him in me.

As I reflect on Eternity, I understand that the laws of Eternal Life are already at work today, and Agape Love is an enduring value given in the perfect form that it will possess throughout all unending life in the Eternal Kingdom of Love.

And the very same Jesus Who will continually gladden my heart is just as kind and accessible today. Although invisible to the eye, He can be heard by the ear and perceived by the mind. He also speaks with me, carries me in His arms, and cares for me better than anyone else in the world.

The beginning of Eternity will change only my surroundings and give me Eternal peace, but it will leave my character and habits unchanged. Therefore, I am now learning the Eternal principles of happiness and love so that I may make them my permanent inheritance and enter Eternity as my own home, where my little house of happiness will become our shared bliss.

But while I am still here, I will continue learning and make every effort to reach Eternity and take my friends with me.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Hebrews 12:18-29; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; Matthew 23:8; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 13:12; 1 Chronicles 15:22; Jeremiah 31:34; Psalm 119:99; and Isaiah 30:20-22 in the light of this chapter.
2. What did you understand from this chapter?
3. How real is Eternity in your life?
4. What should I do, and how should I live now, so that I will not be ashamed later?
5. If I want to enter Eternity but make no effort and show no interest in doing so, how likely is it that my desire will be fulfilled?

6. Do you think we will continue learning in the Eternal Kingdom?
7. Will God have time to devote to our education?
8. How would you feel if you were asked to organize a school in the Heavenly Kingdom and explain the science of love, friendship, and happiness to its students?
9. Do you enjoy learning? And what have you learned?
10. Do you think you understand everything presented in these chapters?
11. Will schools like this one be needed in Eternity?
12. Do you understand what love is and how it works in your life?
13. Having studied at this school, can you honestly say that you love and know how to wield this weapon?
14. How long do you plan to continue learning?
15. Has your life changed during the time you have been studying?