

The three



of love

faces

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Thanks to the Lord for His infinite wisdom that makes us know the truth about what He planned for mankind, showing us the simplicity and the purity of His Creation.

This book is dedicated to all those who need understanding and courage to put into practice the commandment of love, in order to gain the fullness of God for themselves.

“My child, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.” (Prov. 23: 26)

Introduction

There are some difficult subjects to address, especially among the very people of God, because religiosity becomes a barrier to the free flow of the Holy Spirit and His children end up without clarification on many questions that come from the past, when the old self lived without law, just following the natural instincts of his own flesh. The shame to address certain subjects prevents true healing; it only brings an appearance of improvement and inner transformation, but sooner or later, the situation is revealed as it truly is: a bunch of wounds improperly healed, through which the enemy finds out a gap to touch people. On the other hand, the distorted influences of the world go mingling with the word of God also taking out of the believer the freedom to act and even to counsel properly his brothers.

We're talking about *love* in its three known forms: *Agape* (love of God), *Philia* (brotherly love) and *Eros* (between man and woman). There is still a fourth manifestation, the love of family, between parents and children, called by the Greeks *Storge* (στοργή *storgē*), but we won't talk about it here.

In particular, the one that causes most discomfort in the Church is *Eros*; so, in many places, there is pressure on the part of the leadership, almost 'forcing' their members to marry lest there be no more difficult problems to solve in the midst of community. However, this workaround solution generates only bad consequences, because many marriages end up being undone later by a lack of compatibility. What was lacking was the real participation of the Holy Spirit in the choice of the spouse and the courage on the part of the member to assume publicly his free will and let the marriage for later. Another thing that was lacking was a serious commitment with the Lord and a greater spiritual search, leaving the flesh a little aside to be filled with the Spirit. Even today, humans are still carnal seeking the accomplishment of the desires of their own nature to the detriment of the full will of God for him. He created man and woman, He instituted marriage; therefore, He is not against the marital union, but He longs for His children to be more conscious in their choices, lest to be hurt as much as has occurred. No one is forced to marry. Jesus said, "But he said to them, 'Not everyone can accept this teaching [*He was talking about not to marry*], but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can'" (*Matt. 19: 11-12*). What He meant is that volunteer celibacy (to remain single) as a personal and total dedication to His work is not for everyone, as well as a total separation of the secular work. They are personal things, a partnership between divine choice and the choice of the person. Being single is not a 'biblical aberration', as some people think. Perhaps to avoid controversy around this is that Paul says in *1 Cor. 7: 8-9; 32-34a; 35*, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion... I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided... I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord." Here he speaks that the institution of marriage is better than sex without commitment, which opens gaps for Satan, like prostitution, adultery and fornication. Thus, to marry or remain unmarried doesn't matter, but to be coherent with what one preaches and feels and lives. Forming a

family is also a way of serving the Lord, for it is a call from God that needs His participation to be successful. Unfortunately, many people come to Jesus not for who He is, nor by His plan for their lives, but to seek a spouse, a better job, to be miraculously cured from their diseases and so on, just as the crowd did by following Him; they only wanted the blessing, not real source of it; so, few were His disciples.

The second manifestation of the love that is also much distorted is brotherly love, *Philia*, by habits mostly acquired in childhood and that need to be cognized and changed, because the new creature we are now can not continue to act as before, in the selfishness of the flesh. For this reason, in several places, rather than brothers and friends, the person ends up making enemies. It's because that old behaviors and traumas have not been deeply treated. And when we talk about inner healing, we are not necessarily referring to courses or religious services designed specifically for this, where ministers want to reach this or that area, but the free and personalized work of the Holy Spirit for each child who wants to be truly transformed. He does this without trauma or unnecessary destruction that often men, in their eagerness to help, end up doing to the brothers. Our function is only to preach the word and set the example. We have never heard so many complaints about lack of brotherly love as it is today. Everyone wants to be loved and accepted, but few are willing to accept and love their fellow men. If there is no planting, there will be no harvest.

The third manifestation of love and that is fruit of spiritual maturity is *Agape*, the love of God, pure, unconditional, without ulterior motives and focused on everyone equally, without partiality, because the Word says that *He shows no partiality (Rom. 2: 11)*. To manifest this kind of love, we have to be healed in relation to the other two, besides the constant exercise of surrender, donation, self-denial and the availability to the Lord. Many people preach that *Agape* is the practice of the Word itself in action, what it is indeed, but they deny the involvement of emotions in all the process. This is not completely valid, since we are body, soul and spirit, and God uses us as a whole, as used His own Son on many occasions to feel compassion for who was not directly linked to Him as a disciple or close relative (The man with the withered hand, the widow at Nain, the blind man at Jericho etc., when the bible used the expression: *'he was grieved'*, *'moved with compassion'*, *'he had compassion'*. It also says that He wept to see Martha and Mary at the tomb of Lazarus). It is unlikely that Jesus has gone to the cross exempt of emotions, because He was in flesh and His suffering was not only spiritual but also emotional and physical. In *Mk. 14: 32-34* it is written: "They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.'" Who had a human incarnation and felt what the human being feels and says himself One with the Father (*Jn. 17: 21*) knows what love is and what feelings are involved with it. The very bible describes feelings in God like jealous for us, anger or sorrow before sin, injustice and outrage; joy in relation to the children that please Him and walk in His ways, among many others. Jesus set us the example of "to weep with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice" (*Rom. 12: 15*). He uses our emotions both to feel His love for our brothers in Christ and to feel His love for us. Who is a true intercessor must have already felt the same as David, the cry of the Spirit for some of His children. This is a proof that *Agape* involves the emotions, both our own and His; however, it goes beyond our understanding by including other God's invisible qualities that are still hidden from us. In fact, the love of God is associated with obedience, surrender and donation, not nullifying, however, the feelings inherent in all this. His fullness is transferred to us.

Based on this, we can understand that He cares about participating in our brotherly fellowship the same way He cares to improve a marital relationship. What happens is that human beings, including God's own children, are losing the contact with their emotions, so the Spirit can not express the love He feels for someone, because someone else does not want to 'lend' his emotions and his body to Him. It is true that when we are in spirit during a prayer, we feel the Lord's presence, His tenderness for us, and we cry; however, in most cases, is through a body of flesh that He manifests: in a look, an embrace, a tender kiss, a friendly word or an act of boon that comes to meet the need of someone. The bible says, "To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted" (*Tit. 1: 15*). If our delivery to the Holy Spirit was true and complete, why to fear what He makes us feel? If we truly believe that He is our only Lord, our whole being belongs to Him; nor ourselves have right over us anymore, only Jesus (*1 Cor. 6: 19*). Hence, *the attitude of love that we have towards God* (our way of showing love to Him) is to obey Him in all that He asks us and commands us to do. *In relation to our brothers*, love is summarized in practical and tangible actions resulting from the experience of the very *Word (Jesus)* in us. Thus, the feeling is joined to an action.

Another important point before finalizing our reasoning is that we can imagine these three forms of love as *steps* to be successively climbed, from the most 'crude' part of our being that is our carnal body, constituted of organic matter, up to our spirit, more subtle and immaterial, after the likeness of God.

The *flesh* misses the *Eros* as a feeling that for it is the main manifestation of love. However, other animals also have this kind of behavior, aiming at procreation of the species. Only to man sex was given as a privilege so that he rejoiced, not simply procreated. In *Prov. 5: 15-20*, when God warns against lust and adultery, it is written: "Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for sharing with strangers. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. May her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by another woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?" Sex only promotes a feeling of momentary pleasure, involving endorphins and other neurotransmitters in the brain. Our sexual organs are not essential as the heart, the kidneys and the lungs when it comes to life **maintenance**. The biggest example of this is the cases of serious illness in which one of the first symptoms appearing is amenorrhea (cessation of menstruation in women) or loss of libido (in male or female). Although some branches of science try to prove that man can not spend many days or months without having sex, taking the risk of losing his mental and emotional stability, the bible gives us several examples of single people who were mightily used by God and showed no imbalance; on the contrary, they showed the self-control generated by the companionship with the Holy Spirit.

What makes us different from animals in relation to this area is the emotional involvement, *the second step*, therefore, what the *soul* feels as an essential manifestation of love. This second 'stage of growth' (the love of family, the *Storge*, and the love of friend, the *Philia*) can be also divided, so to speak, in other steps, depending on the emotional and psychological understanding of the person, making the relationship more superficial or deeper with a spouse or any other human being, whether the family, closer friends or mere acquaintances. This is where God wants to enlarge the love in the lives of His children, so that they can achieve a greater degree of maturity, which is the *third step, the Agape*.

At this stage, the personal feelings of the soul and the body remain in the background, giving way to greater feelings of love of the Spirit for more people who not necessarily belong to our personal relationship. For us it is impossible to love the world like Jesus, considering each human being as a friend or someone of the family, but we can let the Holy Spirit, throughout our life, goes removing from us the innate selfishness of the flesh, giving more room to the true spiritual love to flow, for only with this kind of love is that our spirit really feels God's presence and reaches His heart.

So let's put some bible verses that can enlighten us about the manifestations of love given to us by God as a great force that generates life and health. He wants to give us physical, emotional and spiritual fullness; therefore, our part is to surrender unconditionally to this move. Only then we will have the real learning. Depending on our calling, one area should stand out, but none of them can be poorly resolved, otherwise it would affect another and would obstruct the work of God.

Let's try to understand what is right and wrong, based on the Word, and thus walk in accordance with it, free of confusion. Although I have described "*steps*" to be climbed, I don't want to belittle any manifestation of love, because all are sublime when there is involvement of the Holy Spirit. What I meant is that as the spiritual growth makes itself present the needs become different, placing the flesh under the dominion of the Spirit, opening it to a greater depth and breadth of love. It is as if the Spirit of God within our being needed more space in order to move, and a few people to love made Him limited. God needs many people to love. In other words, it is the same 'energy' or 'force', only directed to one area or another according to the need of the moment and the desire of the Holy Spirit. It depends a lot on His call for each child and on the personality of every human being combined with his free will.

May the Lord be with you, guiding your reading and your understanding, enlarging the space of your tent and strengthening your stakes, as Isaiah said, so that you can spread out to the right and to the left and your descendants 'possess the nations'.

I love you in Jesus.

Tânia Cristina

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Notes:

- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [] or parenthesis (), in italics, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995)
- NIV = New International Version (it will be used in brackets in some verses to facilitate the readers' understanding).

1

Eros



What did God plan?

Let's begin our reasoning coming back to Eden, "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." (*Gen. 2: 7*)... "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'" (*Gen. 2: 18*)... "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man" (*Gen. 2: 21-22*). The fact that God has taken a man's rib to make the woman, means that He devised interdependence, that is, as the first woman depended on man to exist, man depends on the woman to be born on earth (*1 Cor. 11: 12*: "For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God"). In the original text of Genesis, instead of the expression 'a rib' it is written: 'part of the man's side.' With all this we may learn that God made everything in a perfect way but man, for his rebellion and selfishness, brought pain and suffering on his own life, leaving aside the divine plan. God continued His creation by planning a perfect marriage for both. In *Gen. 2: 24* it is written: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." In *Matt. 19: 4-6* Jesus returns to the same subject when He said: "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." Jesus gave focus to the fact that God has united, as He spoke clearly about the institution of legal marriage here on earth (*monogamous: 1 Cor. 7: 1-6; Tit. 1: 6*), blessed by Him before men. Later we'll talk about what He disapproves.

When I asked the Lord for help to address the subject, He said in *Matt. 18: 2-3*: "He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" It made me think that the loving and sexual relationship of Adam and Eve was very different from what we see today, for they were made in the image and likeness of God, and the purity and innocence were among them. The bible says that they were naked and they only discovered this after the deceit of the serpent. We can think that God was part of all areas of their lives and, therefore, they saw everything with good eyes, without malice; they were transparent to each other in body, soul and spirit just as they were to the Creator. Their eyes were good (healthy), as Jesus said: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (*Matt. 6: 22-23*). So, there was no sin. With the presence of God among them, there was not only purity, but respect for the body of each other, which made the relationship not only sincere and deep but more pleasurable too.

What did the devil plan?

In *1 Tim. 2: 14* it is written: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." In *Gen. 3: 1-7* we read: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said,

‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.”

What did the serpent introduce through seduction in the mind and the spirit of man?

It introduced the *distortion*, causing Adam and Eve to see everything that had been created with eyes other than those of God; in other words, with evil eyes. Not only sex but all areas of human life the devil made sinful from the moment he opened the understanding of man to impurity; he mingled the purity, innocence and joy of God with the weight and the feeling of guilt caused by disobedience to Him, with the curiosity to know everything, which surely brought accusation and punishment. The devil also implanted an unnecessary emotional burden to man, deforming everything and causing confusion; more than that, he turned the image of the Creator into something punitive, oppressive and vindictive. That’s what the Law ended up bringing to prevent deformities: the restriction and prohibition. This ‘law’ acts until today, unconsciously, in the lives of people who can not deal very well with the emotions and sensations of the soul and body: they deny them, nullify them, ignore them, try to manage them through the intellect, project them on others or forbid them to manifest. This reaction does not bring peace at all to the soul; on the contrary, it increases the conflict and the internal pressure, even more if it was placed in the deeper unconscious. Until the conflicts and the repressed emotions go up to surface to be treated, the Spirit of God will have to work very hard in the person so that he sees what it is about and gives the correct dimension to that.

Therefore, Paul wrote about some life situations that need to be directed by the Lord to receive true healing. And the real healing is a result of understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Let us first repeat what Jesus said in *Matt. 19: 4-6*: “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” As mentioned previously, Jesus gave focus to the fact that God has united, as He spoke clearly about the institution of legal marriage here on earth, blessed by Him before men. Other illegal human practices about it are: polygamy, fornication (sex outside of marriage), prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism, adultery, incest (sex between parents and children or between siblings), narcissism (condition in which the libido is directed to the ego; excessive love of oneself) and other sexual perversions and compulsions that only open gaps for the destruction of the enemy. In this case, before we put God’s word, there is still a comment: many sexually transmitted diseases are causes of problems, as well as other emotional and spiritual diseases may be contracted with these unlawful acts. This dirty strategy occurs, especially, in cases of rape and violence. Therefore, the opposing forces manifest with destruction in someone’s life through sexual contacts not approved by the Lord. When a person performs these acts in a reckless way, he forgets that the Word of God does not change (“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” – *Genesis 2: 24*). Thus, even if not staying with his former partner, he created carnal and spiritual bonds of marriage union that remain as a tie to his walk. It is a strong thing to the extent of God comparing

our spiritual union with Him to a marriage contract. Hence, the need to be aware of these facts, because only the sincere repentance before Him can release the person, and His blood shed on the cross is the only way to undo the former covenants. Another comment is that humans, rebelling against God, not only began to worship animals and inanimate objects, as well as he himself and his passions, including sex. So there is much mystique, today, about something so simple. When the Spirit is present and love is fully in giving, both in the physical, the emotional and the spiritual ambit, there is no need of arts of seduction or anything else that can stimulate the partner. Clothes, objects or drugs are no substitute for true love. Through these things, the devil tries to use the same weapon used in Eden, seduction, that spiritually speaking, is not approved by God.

Let's see the texts:

- *Rom. 1: 18-27*: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles [*human idolatry or making God in the image of animals*]. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.”

- *Gal. 5: 18-21*: “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication [NIV: sexual immorality; ARA: prostitution], impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Here, let's get to what is interesting for our reasoning: 1) *Prostitution (in NRSV, fornication; NIV, sexual immorality)* regards to sexual promiscuity, where several partners are intertwined in the relationship. This brings several complications, including sexually transmitted diseases already mentioned. 2) *Impurity* is more than obvious: to think of the opposite way to the innocence that God put in us through His Spirit; to think of filthy and worldly things instead of heavenly ones. 3) *Licentiousness* is lust, sensuality, debauchery, sexual satisfaction without shame. 4) *Idolatry* is to put other things and entities on the altar instead of Jesus, the Son of God. Greed is considered by God as idolatry (*Eph. 5: 5; Col. 3: 5*) as well as pleasure (including sex), money, fame, knowledge and power can also be considered gods. 5) *Sorcery* includes all acts of rebellion to the will of God as well as all acts of occultism, superstitions, occult arts of divination and prediction of the future, familiar spirits, necromancy etc., that lead us not to believe only in the power of the Word to get something. Rebellion is considered by God as witchcraft or any art of divination (*1 Sam. 15: 23; Lev. 20: 27*).

• *1 Cor. 6: 9-12*: “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.”

• *1 Cor. 6: 15-20*: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, ‘The two shall be one flesh’. But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”

• *Rom. 6: 12-14*: “Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

• *Lev. 18: 6-30*: “None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness: I am the Lord. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife [*stepmother*]... You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister... You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son’s daughter or of your daughter’s daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife’s daughter, begotten by your father, since she is your sister. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s sister; she is your father’s flesh. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister, for she is your mother’s flesh. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law: she is your son’s wife... You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife... You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, and you shall not take her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are your flesh; it is depravity... And you shall not take a woman as a rival to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive [*Monogamy has always been God’s plan for man, though He allowed polygamy to some extent for the multiplication of the human species or in the case of “Levirate”, marrying the sister-in-law not to destroy the offspring of the deceased brother*]. You shall not have sexual relations with your kinsman’s wife, and defile yourself with her... You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. You shall not have sexual relations with any animal and defile yourself with it, nor shall any woman give herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it: it is perversion.... For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from their people... I am the Lord your God.” He’s talking about unlawful weddings and abominable unions: sex with father and mother, stepmother, sister or half-sister, granddaughter, uncle, aunt, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, niece, as well as homosexuality and bestiality.

• *Mk. 7: 1-23*: “there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile... It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For

it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

• *2 Cor. 6: 14-17; 2 Cor. 7: 1*: “Do not be mismatched [*NIV: yoked together*] with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters’, says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.” Another factor that the bible mentions as important in this ‘prevention’ of physical, emotional and spiritual diseases is to avoid unequal yoke with unbelievers, because this undermines our strength and thus we take the risk of moving away from Him, by the spiritual struggle with other gods.

• *1 Cor. 7: 10-15*: “¹⁰ To the married I give this command – not I but the Lord – that the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband, and that the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹² To the rest I say – I and not the Lord – that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you.”

First he explains that if there is separation of the couple [in verses 10 and 11 Paul was speaking to couples of believers] there should be no marriage to another person. In the first two verses, the Greek word used to “separate” is “chorizo” or “chorizetai” (Strong #g5563), which means: to depart, to separate, to leave, to go away (...“that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate”). Yet, in the second part of verse 11 (“let not the husband put away his wife” – KJV), the Greek word is “aphiemi” or “aphienai” (Strong # g863), which means: repudiate, send away, leave, leave alone, put aside. We can say that this is an informal separation. Among Jews, divorce was permitted only when there was adultery, and the Greek word for “divorce” is “apostasion” – Strong # g647. From v. 12 (“To the rest I say – I and not the Lord”) he refers to the union between a believer and an unbeliever. Paul also says that the believing spouse sanctifies the unbeliever and should not be separated. However, if the unbelieving spouse wants to separate (i.e., divorce from the converted spouse to Christ because he/she does not want to convert either, or because the believing spouse does not want to feel obligated to leave the faith in Jesus) the brother or sister is no longer bound to slavery. He focuses on the second part of verse 15: “It is to peace that God has called you.” Most important of all is being at peace in a relationship and at peace with the Lord. Here, we must make a parenthesis to explain that each case is unique, and if reconciliation is not possible, it is best the legal separation through divorce. This way, the person remains married or, then, chooses divorce, but not an uncommitted separation, where the person remains halfway, and leading to illegal

unions such as adultery or fornication. It is written: “Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?” (*Am. 3: 3*).

- *Mk. 12: 18-27*: “Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, saying, ‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; and the second married the widow and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, ‘*I am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ ‘He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.’”

The Sadducees were testing Jesus about the resurrection and eternal life, so He told them that God is still (the verb is in the present tense, “*I am*”) the God of the ancestors because who has Him as Lord and Savior has also eternal life. However, for us, we can draw a lesson here that is: even though the marriage is a strong bond, it is not permanent; when one dies, the other is released from the commitment and more than that: no one owns the soul or the spirit of anyone; we are all ‘lent’ by God to each other to accomplish His sovereign project on earth. This is for couples emotionally and spiritually ill who want to own one another, mainly exercising dominion and possession through sex.

- *Ex. 20: 14*: “You shall not commit adultery.” Adultery is the violation of the vow of marital fidelity. Therefore it is not approved before God. When this occurs, sin must be cleansed through repentance and forgiveness, and when it’s not possible to reconcile, divorce is released from God (*Matt. 5: 27-32; Matt. 19: 7-9; Deut. 24: 1-4*). However, this brings trouble for both parts involved, for a mark was left. The separation that follows the act of adultery brings emotional and spiritual wounds that are slow to heal and often are not healed. So, our whole life must stand before the altar of the Lord so that He carries out in us only His will, bringing the mastery of His Spirit upon our will. Only then we can walk in agreement with Him and will err less in our choices. None of us on earth is without sin; we are liable to error, so the Lord directed us to pray always so that the Father saves us from temptation and all evil.

- *Matt. 5: 27-32*: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of infidelity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

- In *Matt. 19: 7-9* it is written: “They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?’ He said to them, ‘It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for infidelity, and marries another commits adultery.’”

What happens is that Jesus' prophecies are being fulfilled:

- *Matt. 24: 12-13*: "And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

So, for lack of love, generated by selfishness of man's heart, many unnecessary separations are occurring today, because the human being no longer wants to make an effort to love, to share, to give in, and to be united. This way, he loses strength, opens gaps for the devil and generates hereditary curses for the generations to come. That's why the participation of the Holy Spirit in marriage as the threefold cord is extremely important. He strengthens the relationship in every way.

- To complete, *Deut. 24: 1-4* says: "Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man's wife. Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession."

When I asked the Lord for discernment on that last passage, it came to my mind the biblical passage where King Ahab annexed to the palace the vineyard of his subject Naboth (*1 Kin. 21: 19*), ordering the inhabitants of the city to kill him in order to keep it. According to Israelite thinking, the land owned by a family or clan was understood as a gift from God and everyone should respect that right. This incident was considered a violation of rights, moving Elijah once again to Samaria, by order of the Lord to prophesy the fate of Ahab, Jezebel (his wife) and his descendants (*1 Kin. 21: 17-29*). So, there was also the right of ransom of the land by the kinsman-redeemer of the family if the owner died and left his widowed wife, as happened with Ruth and Naomi. Bringing this to our text, God meant that the wife's body was the *land* that He had given to the first man by law and, after being 'invaded' by others, he would not have right on it anymore. Thus, he could no longer take possession of something *he himself had abandoned and allowed to be stolen*, because he had neglected it, as Esau did not value the birthright. **In clearer words**, if the separation occurred because of trivial problems, Paul confirms (as seen above) that is better the couple to be reconciled. However, if the separation occurred because of adultery, it is advisable that the woman does not marry her first husband again, and her husband does not marry his former wife again, because their bodies were 'invaded' by strangers. Doing the spiritual parallel with the 'kinsman-redeemer' (*book of Ruth in the Old Testament*), Jesus is the redeemer of our souls and our bodies. He came to take possession of us, who were formerly property of the devil. Now, Jesus is our master.

- *1 Cor. 7: 8-9; 32-34a; 35*: "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion... I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided... I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord."

- *1 Cor. 7: 39*: "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord."

- *Rom. 7: 2-3*: “Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.”

- *1 Pe. 3: 7*: “Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life – so that nothing may hinder your prayers.” Treating the wife with dignity makes her be spontaneously submissive to her husband through love, besides what this loving union will ease the couple’s prayer before the throne of God.

- *Ecc. 4: 9-12*: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” The expression ‘the threefold cord’ emphasizes the value of alliances at any level of human relationship. The threefold cord is the Holy Spirit, which strengthens the relationship of the couple in every way.

Here I leave a tip for couples: when both are believers, before starting to quarrel they should take each other’s hands and begin to pray. God always has a third solution. Thus, none of them prevails in his reasons, but Jesus.

As to the question about divorce and a second marriage, one must take into consideration what we mentioned about the causes of separation, the emotional and spiritual limits of every human being, if the choice of the spouse was spontaneous (not imposed by others), and remind us that God has called us to peace. In *Prov. 25: 24* it’s written: “It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a contentious wife” (repeated in *Prov. 21: 9*). Instead of ‘contentious wife’ can also be placed the expression, ‘contentious husband’, because no one can live well with who does not want to dialogue, give in, to talk, or that is always willing to fight and argue about anything. Love ends up being blocked, then it is better to divorce and live with whom one loves. Our God is love, and certainly, He is not happy with an unstructured marriage that could compromise future generations with hereditary curses because of so much quarrel and discussion. I also think that He would not be angry or fail to give a second chance of happiness to a sincere son who serves Him, provided there is the correct disposition in the heart of that son or daughter to walk in His ways and not repeat the same error of the past. Besides, it’s necessary the sincere desire to want to build a family, letting oneself be molded by God, dropping the selfishness of the flesh so that the Holy Spirit may prevail.

“What can we do to improve?”

“Come back to innocence”

We’re talking about the book of *Song of Solomon or Song of Songs* in the Old Testament. The title “*Song of Songs*” (Hebrew, *shir hashshirim*, *Song 1: 1*) is a superlative which means “*The best of the songs.*” It was the first of the five scrolls to be read on Jewish holidays and used during Passover. The traditional attribution of the book to Solomon (10th century BC) is based on the citations on him (*Song 1: 1; Song 3: 7; Song 3: 9; Song 3: 11; Song 8: 11*), especially in verse of the title (*Song 1: 1*). Some

believe that Solomon wrote this song in his youth, before acquiring his huge harem. Others think that the book of *Songs* reflects the love of a young Israelite shepherd and his bride, creating the fantasy of being king and queen for one day. There are innumerable interpretations, but little agreement among scholars as to its origin, meaning and purpose. The rabbinic and Christian allegorical interpretations raised the poems in the book above the sensual level. The two main characters are Solomon and the young Shulammitte. Having taken her from her home in the north of Israel and brought her to Jerusalem, Solomon ended up for loving her as his wife with a fondness that was lifted much above the physical attraction. The word *shulammitte* (*shūlammit̄h: complete, having perfect peace*) can be variant of *shunammite*, natural of Shunem (*shūnem: resting place or storehouse*), a city in the territory of Issachar, near Jezreel (*Josh. 19: 18*). It was from Shunem that was brought the beautiful Abishag to David to comfort him in his old age. Whether be Solomon the author of the work or not, certainly it shows the story of a couple in love, and not only speaks about the purity of human love, but its inclusion in the Canon (the bible) reminds us of a love that is purer than ours, God's love (*Agape*), the love of total surrender. Thus, the book of *Songs* expresses the desire of the human heart to be united with God in full and complete manner. Under this spiritual vision, we can have important revelations from the Lord for His Church, for His bride, whom He hopes to find pure without spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, but holy and without blemish on the day of His coming (*Eph. 5: 27*). This spiritual parallel was made in the book: "*The bride is ready.*" Link:

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/livrosevangelicosonline.html>

In this chapter, we'll take a few texts and study them from the physical point of view, sexual, for they bring some interesting guidance to us (Note: I write here the same words used in the NIV for the characters (beloved, lover, friends), although the verses are taken from NRSV):

- *Song 2: 7* – The beloved says: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the wild does: do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!" The beloved tells the other women, probably those of the harem of King Solomon or the ladies of the court, about the true love and tells them that sexual intimacy can not be forced and that love and sensuality is not the same thing ("*Do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready*"). On the spiritual level, this means that the intimacy with God is not forced; is the heart of the person who is awakened to a deeper relationship with Him. On physical level, this text warns us about the teens who suffer a lot in the world by the external influences that the devil uses, awakening their sexual life early, causing great inconvenience. At puberty, which is the period during adolescence when the hormonal changes begin to generate physical and psychological changes, it is normal that people start to feel certain bodily sensations and psychic desires of 'discovery' of themselves. At this stage, more strict parents, traditional and fearful, discover that they do not deal very well with the situation and end up suppressing certain manifestations in their children. What they think to dominate eventually turns against them because the children will seek the answers in other sources not so reliable and that are openly available in the world, bringing family problems later. Unfortunately these teens 'awake love before it is ready' and are injured. How many boys are traumatized and how many girls are abused and get pregnant without any maturity to be mothers! The case is delicate when parents are leaders within the church, even ministers and, because of the community they reject the daughter, the son or the future grandson or grand-daughter, causing problems even bigger for all. In some places, many leave the leadership position because of shame and discrimination by their own brothers in Christ. Others, who manage to deal with this family situation, finally disappoint some sheep, which go

to another church. When parents are not converts things can get worse, depending on the degree of emotional maturity and the love they have. The result is abandonment, abortion, rejection, prostitution, separation etc. that could be avoided if parents talked openly with kids before or took them to the doctor, if they are not able to explain them certain things. The factors that hinder so much the process at this stage of puberty and adolescence are: the inexperience of parents and pastors in relation to the area in question, religiosity, traditionalism (taboo), fear of creating confusion in the mind of the adolescent and even the malice of adults that holds the ‘victims’ in ties, and prevents all from addressing the subject with frankness. In most cases, the best way at this point is to pray, to ask the Lord for wisdom and let nature to follow its course without ‘making a storm in a teacup’, but give support to the needs of the son or daughter, as their curiosity is aroused. A bit of psychology to address the matter is a good strategy; even better if the bible is near. Another important tip is to direct this energy that has awakened to other activities that edify (Music, arts, sports, etc.), for as I spoke previously, it is the same force that exists within us and will be directed to an area or to another. I’m not saying that the teen should sublimate everything, deny or flee to the spiritual world; what I mean is that good sense is necessary.

Other texts of *Song* that can be used to our edification are those in which the beloved or the lover speaks poetically about their own bodies:

- *Song 4: 6-15* – the lover says, “Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! Your lips distill nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon. A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed. Your channel [NIV, plants; ARA: sprout] is an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices – a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.”

- *Song 5: 10-16* – the beloved says, “My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set. His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh. His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

- *Song 6: 4* – lover, “You are beautiful as Torah, my love, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.”

- *Song 7: 1-9* – lover, “How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus. Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses. How fair and pleasant

you are, O loved one, delectable maiden! You are stately as a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches. O may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your kisses like the best wine that goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth.”

• *Song 7: 10* – the beloved says, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.”

So far, it is interesting to notice the poetry with what the relationship is described. Very different from the disgusting pornography that we read, hear and see here and there! Not everyone was born a poet; however, the learning is about the difference between an act done in the presence of God, with love, and a mechanical act without emotional involvement or between partners who barely know each other. Here they compare their bodies to beautiful and good things, instead of some names that more mundane people give to parts of theirs; it seems that they are cursing them. There is nothing so bad and so rude than such an act under unkind or obscene words; there is no gain, only trauma and hatred! Is there anything more embarrassing than receiving glances or hearing seductive words from worldly people who do not even know us? It is an invasion of our privacy and an affront to the holiness of God in us. They find out an intimacy that they are not entitled to have, simply because they distort and confuse the charisma that is in us, which is the presence of the Spirit of God, with another low behavior existing in the world. It is not our fault, but of who behaves this malicious, sinful and unclean way. That’s what the devil does with the unsuspecting. Therefore the Lord warns us to have more awareness of our way of being and about our past wounds, lest they are gaps through which the enemy can enter. They must be truly healed, and the authority He has delegated to us must be ready to be exercised when necessary. So, we can say about ourselves what is written in *Isa. 26: 1-4*: “On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; he sets up victory like walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, so that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock.” We are the temple of the living God, therefore we should respect our bodies and do not allow anyone to dishonor them. The word above means that only those who are righteous and guided by the Holy Spirit can ‘pass through our gates,’ both in the physical and the emotional ambit. In the spiritual, Jesus alone has rights.

• *Song 4: 16* – the beloved says, “Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.”

This text tells us about inviting the Lord to participate in love. When the bible mentions ‘wind’ it refers to the Holy Spirit, comparing it to the action of the winds in Palestine: the north wind cleans the air, it is fresh and moist; the south wind warms and ripens the crops. Therefore, Solomon refers to these beneficial qualities of the wind. Here, the beloved not only invites the lover but the presence of God in him. This is the point where we find more barriers, the barriers of modesty and shame left by the marks of Adam and Eve, which unconsciously move everything and everyone away of this moment, including God, considering Him an ‘intruder.’ The barriers are invisible, but they must be thrown down, not only to have greater sincerity between spouses, but so that the devil does not meddle, trying to participate. Many spiritual and emotional influences may act at conception; this is because the Lord was not really invited to be the ‘threefold cord.’ Then, ‘the meddlesome’ can decide ‘to invite himself’ to the meeting; so what? Let’s be honest: how many couples in Christ invite Him to participate in the ‘feast?’

- *Song 8: 6-7* – the lover says, “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce [*NIV, jealousy unyielding*] as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one’s house, it would be utterly scorned.”

- *Song 8: 10* – the beloved says, “I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers; then I was in his eyes as one who brings peace.”

These last two texts talk about *loyalty, faithfulness*. Love, as the lover says, is strong as death, but jealousy is hard as a grave, because it closes the heart for true love and forgiveness. Therefore, in a relationship where there is distrust, there is no way to continue. Where there is insecurity related to each other, there is no chance for growth. When someone is relating with other person, fantasizing that he is with a third person, it is a sign that he is not happy with what he has before him or he can not face reality and work it to make it better. The world today, besides the mystique that it created around the subject, looks for not only aphrodisiacs to replace the love and the presence of God, as it requires the perfection of physical standards, leading people beyond the limits of moral and health, trying to acquire an external image that they do not have, just to feel truly loved and not to suffer rejection. Our body, although the temple of the Holy Spirit, must being cared in all areas (health and aesthetics), is only a ‘shell’ to our true self. On the other hand, often becomes ridiculous, not to say hypocritical, to talk about inner beauty when we are face to face with appearances outside the normal standards because, we like it or not, prejudice and vanity are still deep-rooted within the human being. However, what I am trying to say is that what it is up to us to do for ourselves, we must do, without any guilt, as if we were taking care of the appearance of Jesus Himself in us; not to appear, to compete or out of vanity, because it would be to deify the flesh. The believer should take care of his external appearance without exaggeration (Paul says, “*everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think*” – *Rom. 12: 3*), but under the guidance of the Spirit; this is a way to love the partner, giving our best to him as we give the best of us to the Lord. Even more to Him! If we can adorn and beautify ourselves to someone, we can do the same with Jesus, physically, emotionally and spiritually. No one contradicts the bible when it says that He does not see the appearance, but the heart. However, this is no excuse to neglect the care with hygiene, sleep or diet, for a healthy body is necessary to do the work of God, and a pure soul, without sin, beautifies the exterior to those who need to see Jesus in our life. Sin makes us ugly.

Finally, a comment: our sexuality is directly linked to our identity as a living being and unique on the planet. It is also linked to the freedom of to show ourselves as we really are, even through our body movements. Any trauma in that area will affect bones, joints, muscles, nerves and tendons, in short, our whole posture (internal and external); therefore one of the spiritual strategies that the Lord uses to treat us is through music, more specifically, the praise. People too shy that have been too repressed can not praise Him fully, for even their movements are restricted. So, in places where one has no freedom to raise arms, to move according to the rhythm of the music, where one sees sin and malice in all things, it is unlikely that the Holy Spirit is completely free to act through His children. When someone is in the world, so many things go unnoticed; however, when he becomes a believer, how many gifts of God are ‘pruned!’ What a pity! The Word tells us that all things should be done decently and in order (*1 Cor. 14: 40*). Nobody is in favor of improper movements and with ulterior motives during the worship of God because it would be disgusting to participate in something like that. But the Spirit also wants to heal us through the movements of our body, for it is written:

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” – 2 Cor. 3: 17. David was the greatest example of this freedom and intimacy with God and with his own emotions. When he was sad, overwhelmed and persecuted he gave vent to tears; when he was happy, he danced. It was under praise and dance that he brought the ark back to Jerusalem. Miriam danced, like many other sons of God after a big win. The Jews keep this tradition of dancing and joy in many of their feasts. If they keep the praise to the Lord, who and what made Jesus a sad, serious, suffering and lifeless man? The Church needs to reconsider many things, including free and holy behavior in relation to Him. The bonds of religiosity are preventing countless lives to be happy and to feel the fullness of God. The Word tells us that He has given us the fullness and grace upon grace (*Jn. 1: 16-17: “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*). Jesus came to make us happy in every way. Next I put some references found in the book of Psalms in relation to the participation of our entire body, both in prayer and in praise, in addition to songs and musical instruments: *Ps. 33: 2-3; Ps. 47: 1; 6; Ps. 63: 3-4; Ps. 87: 7; Ps. 88: 9; Ps. 95: 6; Ps. 134: 2; Ps. 141: 2; Ps. 143: 6; Ps. 145: 4; Ps. 149: 3; Ps. 150: 4; 1 Tim. 2: 8*. There is also reference in *1 Tim. 2: 8*.

Prophetic message from God to a couple:

“I am a God of covenants, and sincere and lasting commitments, so I have called you to my presence, my children, so that you may know my plan for your life that will lead you to inner growth and spiritual fructification. Leave aside the carnal individual desires and think as a single being. My Spirit is in your midst like a threefold cord that will never break and will make you overcome all the trials I have put on your way to prepare you each day, more and more, for my unconditional love. I have loved you and taken away your limitations so that my true love can be shown to my people. You are a blessed family on earth and I desire to keep my blessing upon your offspring. So, today, meditate on my word and take the responsibility to rebuild. I’ll be with you, do not fear. What seems to threaten you is just a lie that has no power to destroy you. Seek my throne and you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free”.

2

Philia



To speak of the true love, we need to set aside first the sick and distorted actions of the devil that take on the beautiful clothes of love, but are sickly and evil ways of arresting the human being in chains for many years. Love presented by him is a way to mask the emotional blackmail, misuse of power, ridiculous emotionalism, the will to dominate or subjugate others, to take away the free will given by God to people, to manipulate each other, to put the burden of concern on the shoulders of those who love and those who are loved, to remove protection of a life as a result of uncontrolled worry, carnal desires or simple physical attraction, jealousy, emotional dependency and possessive behavior that leads to homicidal impulses in an extreme degree of imbalance, and other bad attitudes that only bring pain and oppression.

I said in the introduction that God cares about participating in our brotherly fellowship, the same way He cares to improve a marital relationship. What happens is that human beings, including God's own children, are losing the contact with their emotions, so the Spirit can not express the love He feels for someone, because someone else does not want to 'lend' his emotions and his body to Him. It is true that when we are in spirit during a prayer, we feel the Lord's presence, His love for us, and we cry; however, in most cases, is through a body of flesh that He manifests: in a look, an embrace, a tender kiss, a friendly word or an act of boon that comes to meet the need of someone. This is what we know as *Philia* love (brotherly love), one of the things that people need most today after the love of God in their lives.

Since the Old Testament, by giving the Law to His people, God cared to sow love in the hearts. So Moses wrote in *Lev. 19: 18*: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

Let's see other texts of the Old Testament where the Lord manifested the desire of brotherly love for all His children.

- *Ps. 133: 1-3*: "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred [*NIV, brothers*] live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore."

Hermon means *sacred mountain, sanctuary (hermôn)*, and is the southern peak of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range with about three thousand and seventy seven yards height, probably the tallest of them. The snow almost never disappears from its peak during the whole year, causing abundant dews in sharp contrast to the dry land of the region, while the thaw is one of the main feeding sources of the Jordan River. Most likely, it was in the Hermon where the episode of the transfiguration of Jesus occurred, near Caesarea of Philippi. The *Hermon* is also called *Senir (S^enir, hauberk = a long coat of mail, often sleeveless)* by the Amorites, and *Saniru* by the Assyrians. It also called, in *Deut. 4: 48, Sihon (lofty or Holy Mountain)* [in *NIV*; in *NRSV* it is written *Sirion* (breastplate) as it was called by Sidonians and Syriacs]. Explaining a little *Psalm 133*, in the first place the psalmist expressed the joy of the Lord to see the unity among the brothers. He compares this anointing of unity with the precious oil with which the priests were anointed and that ran from the head throughout the body, symbolizing the protection of God poured upon them. This anointing of unity and brotherly love is also compared to the water that runs from Mount Hermon after the thaw and fills the Jordan River, consequently all Israel, maintaining the life where regions are desert. As we have seen, *Hermon* means *sacred mountain, sanctuary*. Therefore, the unity that comes from God's heart to His children is something sacred that should remain flowing like the waters that quench the thirst of those who are needy. When the leader of a community

(‘Aaron’) manifests the brotherly love within him, all other members who are in submission to him will also be blessed by that love and will learn to develop it. When *Philia* is full within the Church, the blessing of God is also full. We could say that communication between people on emotional level flows as something fluid and malleable that quenches the thirst and releases the life of each one from the barriers of prejudice, timidity, trial, guilt, shame, etc. When such communication is prevented by any cause we feel the weight of the stiffness, coolness and hardness of heart. The life of Jesus may not manifest in such a place. So it is important to have within us the willingness to love our brothers so that these barriers fall within the Body of Christ, and the revival of the Spirit may act. We must remember the words of Jesus when He said that we are the salt of the earth and if salt loses its flavor, it is no longer good for anything. The salt means the fidelity of God’s promises, faithfulness of the covenant He made with us (*Lv 2: 13; Nm 18: 19*). If we put a little salt on a piece of ice, it starts to melt. So it should be with us; as salt of the earth we must shed our anointing of love wherever we go, because its heat will melt the ice of the coldness in the hearts of those who do not yet know this strength given by God.

- *Prov. 17: 17*: “A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity [NIV: a brother is born from adversity].” Being a true friend is not as easy as we think, because our carnal nature often makes us run away from any difficult situation lest to get involved in trouble. It is easy to be friends of each other when things go well, when there is prosperity, health and joy, but when trouble arises is that we come to know who the true friends are: those who remain fighting alongside us, giving us strength and encouragement to continue and win the battle. The Lord tells us here in Proverbs that the friend should love his neighbor at all times, but it is in times of trouble that these bonds are narrowed, making them more than friends, brothers.

- *Prov. 18: 24*: “Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one’s nearest kin” [NIV: “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother”]. This proverb is a complement to what we have said, for who thinks he has many friends, at the time of pain or need he ends up losing, because he finds out that most of them were there for some kind of advantage; there was no sincerity in the relationship. However, the same verse says that there is friend closer than a brother, for this one exercises the true *Philia*, whose greatest example for us was Jesus.

When we talked about the kinds of love in the introduction, we said that there is a certain graduation of manifestation among them and the greater the spiritual growth of a person, that is, the more the flesh is submitted to the Spirit, the more this person will start to leave aside his selfish needs to worry a little more about who is by his side, especially with his closest friends. Between spouses is not only *Eros* that counts; *Philia* must be present so that there is companionship, a pleasurable ‘complicity’, which makes the couple more harmonious in their interests and projects. Likewise, when we work together or when we congregate in the same church, we should seek to maintain friendly relationship with all and, if possible, let the Holy Spirit Himself, through our example of love, goes on harmonizing the goals of the group so that growth and edification of all may occur. Where there are many dissensions, strife and contradictions, the personal and selfish trait is still prevailing and there is no prosperity or life; on the contrary, people feel dead, with no stimulus and no interest in their own work. Competition robs from people the need to live together lovingly. The relationships become impersonal, cold, dry, always aiming at the commercial and professional side, leaving the emotions in the background. When God gave the commandment to love our neighbor in the Old Testament, He knew that later He would give His people a greater challenge that would

be to love with a more comprehensive love, the *Agape*. This is why Jesus said in *Jn. 13: 34-35*: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

How often, in His own House, the Lord wish to manifest Himself in a look, an embrace, a tender kiss, a friendly word or an act of boon that comes to meet the need of someone! As I said previously, these are the most commonly known forms to show the love of friend, to make it clear that we participate in his life at all times.

Let’s read some guidance given by the apostles about the ways to manifest *Philia* love.

- *Rom. 12: 18*: “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” *In short: to have peace with everyone.*

- *2 Cor. 6: 12-13*: “There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return – I speak as to children – open wide your hearts also.” *In short: Not to be limited in the affections, but allow the Holy Spirit to use us as He wishes.*

- *1 Cor. 13: 1-13*: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude [NIV, it does not envy, it does not boast, it does not proud. It is not rude]. It does not insist on its own way [NIV, it is not self-seeking]; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” *In short: patience, kindness, do not envy, be humble and not proud, not be rude, to put aside self-interest and selfishness, do not get angry for anything and be more tolerant, not be resentful and be able to forgive; do not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoice in the truth; to suffer (‘bears all things’), but to understand that God has a purpose for everything and molds His children as He wishes; to believe that there will always be a possibility of salvation and repentance for any life that the Lord calls, even though at the time that person may seem hopeless, despite all our efforts; to wait so that the work of God is complete in us and in our brothers; to endure the difficulties for love of Jesus and not to abandon the ministry that He has given to us. Above all, not to worry about being empty for loving so much, because love never ends; it is the Lord who fills us continuously with it. He is the primary source of love, not we; therefore, we are not giving to anyone something that is ours, but something that flows from His throne in an endless way for everyone. We are only vessels in His hands.*

- *Gal. 5: 13-18*: “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify

the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.” *In short: not to let the flesh prevail with slander, envy, gossip, jealousy, lies, etc., but to learn the mutual cooperation.*

- *Col. 3: 12-17*: “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony [*NIV, and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity*]. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” *In short: patience* means firmness of spirit, generosity, magnanimity, courage and fearlessness. *Kindness* means benevolence, indulgence, mercy, gentleness, to know how to make others happy, sweetness. *Meekness* means serenity, tranquility, calm; to let oneself be shaped by God, calm in the certainty of victory, to be sure that everything has a solution. Being *meek* is to be *submissive to the will of God*, to His laws and the divine plan. It should not be confused with self-indulgence, laziness or passivity that relinquishes the authority that God has already delegated to us. *Being humble* is to be aware of the lack of God and the dependence on Him. Those who are empty of themselves, of the pride of their achievements and of their selfish desires can feel the Holy Spirit filling that void. The humble receive the kingdom of heaven as a reward (as it is written in the ‘Beatitudes’ that Jesus preached); and the kingdom of heaven is now, when everything is possible and where there is peace and joy to serve and obey spontaneously the Lord’s will. It is an experience, not a place. So, *humility* is to know that we depend on God in all situations, regardless of our position within the Church or the society. It should not be confused with humiliation, low self-worth, lack of money or material possessions, nor with the denial of the spiritual authority that God has already given to us. *Compassion (or mercy)* means indulgence, grace, mercy aroused by the misery of others. It is to repay the evil received with good. It is to be like Jesus. But receiving mercy comes after to exercise it. Mercy is like a seed that must first be planted to be harvested later. *Love* is the bond of perfection. Therefore, it makes us think that the concept of perfection to God is different from the human concept. For Him, it means *to exercise love with maturity*. Finally: *to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom (divine, not human)*.

- *1 Pe. 1: 22-25*: “Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever’. That word is the good news that was announced to you.”

- *1 Pe. 3: 8-12*: “Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called – that you might inherit a blessing. For ‘Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the

Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

- *1 Pe. 4: 7-11*: “The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.” *In short: to be hospitable and without complaining, to be willing to serve with what we have; to help the brother with a verse that brings strength to him in his trials.*

- *1 Jn. 4: 20-21*: “Those who say, ‘I love God’, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” *In short: to love the brother, instead of hating him.* Many may argue, “I do not hate my brother.” But Jesus says: “But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny” (*Matt. 5: 22-26*).

- *1 The. 5: 12-22*: “But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.” *In short: respect and esteem for who is in the leadership* because they are ministers of God for edification (‘to admonish’). The same word is written another way in *Gal. 6: 6*: “Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.” This means to give a return of prayer, be thankful for the blessings that was received through the leader so that he also can share our victories. It means to have regard for the brothers who help us. David said: “*The Lord is on my side to help me (Psalm 118: 7a – NRSV; NIV, “The Lord is with me; he is my helper”;* in Portuguese, “*The Lord is among those who help me*”). It is necessary to learn how to cultivate our friendships. Friendship is like a little plant that, if not watered, dries and dies.

- *2 Cor. 8: 1-15*: “We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints – and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves

first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. Now as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you – so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something – now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’” [*Exodus 16: 18 – the original text in Hebrew is written, ‘for each reaped what he could eat.’*] In short: the believers in Macedonia were *happy to offer* and insisted to do it because their heart was prosperous and abundant. A thriving heart does not need to be necessarily rich, but is giver and sower, and will surely reap the fruit, for it received the anointing of multiplication. Even if they were experiencing financial trials, by the grace of God they overcame themselves and gave willingly because they discovered that participating in this ministry was good. By the will of God, they first gave themselves to Him and then to the brothers, that is, for their love of Him they decided to give the saints because they found out Jesus in each of their brothers. Paul wanted the Corinthians imitated this example of the believers in Macedonia, both in the faith and in the true knowledge of God’s word, as well as in the prosperity of their heart. He reminds us that Jesus, being rich in everything, became poor for our sake; He stripped Himself of His glory and majesty so that we might become rich in everything, even in material life.

- *Jam. 2: 15-17*: “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

- *1 Jn. 3: 11; 15-18*: “For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him.” *Summarizing the two texts above: to give material assistance*, when possible, to the brother and friend who is on our side, as the believers in Macedonia did.

3

Agape



We reached the third stage, which is the *Agape*, the love of God, the unconditional love, selflessness and of total surrender, lived by the Father and the Son and taught to us by the Holy Spirit. The bible says that Jesus is the Word; it also says that those who keep the Word are the true lovers of the Lord. Exercising *Agape love* is to abandon totally our carnal desires so that the will of God prevails through the word of His Son acting freely in us. Therefore, the *Agape love* is not free of emotions or feelings, for acting according to God's word is not just to verbalize it or prophesy it on someone's life, but to live it in its fullness, often suffering and having compassion for those who are in trouble, feeling their needs and experiencing the joy of being able to supply them with what is within our grasp. So, who approaches us will feel the presence of Jesus (*Gal. 2: 20: "and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"*) and more than that, will drink the living water that flows from us. He said: "*As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'"* (*Jn. 7: 38*).

We can see the *Agape* demonstrated by Jesus in several biblical texts:

- *Jn. 3: 16*: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

- *Isa. 53: 4-7*: "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

- *Isa. 53: 11-12*: "Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

- *1 Cor. 6: 20*: "For you were bought with a price [*Jesus' life*]; therefore glorify God in your body."

- *1 Pe. 2: 24*: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

- *1 Jn. 3: 16*: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."

- *1 Jn. 4: 10*: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

- *1 Jn. 4: 19*: "We love because he first loved us."

God's love surpasses our understanding, for He associates it to obedience, surrender and donation, as it is written in *Jn. 15: 13-14*, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." He also said: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." (*Jn. 14: 23*)

Jesus gave everything that was His own life, and it is this love that He pours into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, so that we may also be available in His hands, in order to meet the needs of all those whom He desires to bless and redeem. Moreover, His love is something strong and firm that keeps us from evil and encourages us to walk and

overcome limits. God gave everything for those who deserved nothing. And His love is the love to give of Himself without limits, love that took the risk without being sure of success, a love that made (and makes) itself vulnerable to the possibility that His children despised it and turned their back on it, as they do still today. The cry of abandonment on the cross shows His loving willingness to identify Himself with the human rejected. Both the suffering of the Father by the death of the Son and the suffering of the Son by the separation of the Father are important. His love was exposed to the pain of loss so that we could gain it and have it always available to us. In other words, God as Father knows the pain of losing a child and as a Son He knows the pain of not having a Father. So, whatever our pain or our need we can be sure that Jesus is the most qualified person to fill our empty spaces and restore and rebuild us. He is above all the rejection that the devil tries to throw over our lives, because His love is infinitely stronger and more powerful to defend and supply us. Thus, through the sacrifice of the cross we can trust the good intentions of God concerning us, even if the enemy has tried to prove us otherwise. The bible says that God is love and that His thoughts towards us are of peace and not of evil, His plans are for our welfare and not for harm (*Jer. 29: 11*). His will for us is always good and acceptable and perfect.

- *Jn. 13: 34-35*: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- *Jn. 15: 12-13*: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

- *1 Jn. 4: 18*: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.”

We learn a lot from the experiences of our brothers of the past. Peter was one of them. He experienced both the *Philia* and the *Agape love*, because by denying Jesus, he was faced with the limitation of his love of friend; and by being treated by the Master on the beach of Galilee after His resurrection, he understood the challenge He proposed him, which was to love His sheep with *Agape love*. Let’s see the text:

- *Jn. 21: 15-19*: “When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ A second time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ And he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.’ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’”

The strategy of Jesus was surprising because the same way that Peter had denied Him before a burning fire, the Lord was also stood before one and, the same way as Peter had denied Him three times, three times he heard the Master’s question, “Peter, do you love me?” Here we’ll see three direct guidelines of Jesus to His disciple:

- 1) In the first time, the word used by Jesus in Greek for ‘love’ is *Agape (God’s love)*. Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me with divine love that I love you?” Peter said *yes* and Jesus answered him: “Feed my lambs.” This meant, “Give the best of living (‘feed’) to the small (lambs), to the youngest in faith.”

2) For the second time, the Lord asked him, “Peter, do you love me?” The same word used in the first question (*Agape*) and the same answer of the disciple, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus answered him again, “Tend my sheep”, that is, discipline, teach, exhort, correct, take care (‘tend’) of the oldest ones, those who have already grown and know my word.

3) For the third time Jesus asked him, “Peter, do you love me?” However, this time the Greek word is not *Agape*, but *Philia* (*brotherly love*); that is why Peter wept and acknowledged his fault and his deep need for healing, because he was not able to love Jesus as friend. Jesus answered him, “Feed my sheep”, that is, “Give the best of livelihoods, also to the oldest ones who have grown, for they also need my love.”

His human love had failed and then he discovered that if he had not even the human love, how could he love someone with the love of God and lead a church? He would need a greater amount of love derived from divine enablement through the Holy Spirit, for only this would be strong enough to take him to the same donation and surrender with which Jesus had loved him. Hence, the Lord in the beginning of the gospels repeats the two greatest commandments of the Law: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. But later, at the Last Supper, He says: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”, that is, with the *Agape*, a bigger challenge than the first, for they were already prepared to climb this step else, after walking with Him for three years, being prepared for the ministry. By touching the deep wound of Peter’s heart, in his basic need, Jesus restored him, showing him that all the love he needed was being poured on his being, and therefore the Lord could trust him to give him the leadership of His Church. By sowing this love, his strength would increase and he could face death on the cross, years later, as Jesus faced. The only thing he should worry about at the time was to follow the Master for real, not with indecision, but with the certainty that now he was a new creature, and after Pentecost, there would be no barriers to his work. He would never feel afraid of anything because God’s love, *Agape*, with which he would be clothed, would cast out all fear. Doing the work of God requires something beyond human love to sustain us on our journey, for this is limited and depends a lot on emotions, for it involves “*to like*” (fondness), that is, the natural human affinity for some people and little affinity for others. To like is human, to love is divine. In other words, “*the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (*Matt. 26:41*), as Jesus said in Gethsemane. The spirit is strong to receive and obey the divine commands, for it is clothed with the Holy Spirit; however, the flesh needs to be strengthened in the same manner, to be imbued with the Spirit of God, letting be touched and be cleansed so that the *Agape* can flow completely. *Agape* is unconditional, it does not depend on our will, but on the very Word in action without partiality of persons, so that the righteousness of God already accomplished on the cross be also made among men, liking them or not. Therefore it is difficult the exercise of the *Agape*, because the leader has to deal with people who often he does not like (with human love, brotherly love), but need liberation, healing and care, whether beginners in the faith (lambs) or not (sheep). Only God can put that kind of love in our being and it takes a lifetime to be perfected; we can not give up. We are leaders only when we have *Agape*, for it is the kind of love that brings the power of God to overcome the darkness, since it relates to God Himself in action. Peter may have not felt able at first, but began to experience this strength after Pentecost when He was baptized with the Holy Spirit as the other brothers, receiving anointing for the work of God.

Epilogue



“What I expect of my people is obedience to my word acting on it and practicing the love I taught. I have called all of you to be sowers of this seed among men so that they may know the joy of salvation. Don’t be afraid to carry out my orders, for your unconditional surrender will make you able to win the battles of your life. You all are limited in your affections, hurting each other and killing of thirst my own sheep, as in a dry, arid and lifeless desert. You will not experience my power that you seek so much to get the wins you desire, without the Great Power (the Greatest Gift) is released by my Spirit first. I have heard the cry of the distressed, asking for water and not finding them because of the hardness and the dryness of some hearts in which I have poured my authority, which should be exercised properly. Instead, you think of your personal needs and the glory of men, before giving priority to me. I have raised up prophets to exhort you and bring you back to the path where you came out, but they are not heard. I know those who are mine. That’s why you have gone through tests. I search the hearts and the thoughts, to give to each one according to his works. Seek my throne and you will live. Seek my waters and you will be satiated. Seek my love and you will be enabled for my service. Do not rebel against my Spirit or let the flesh prevail, making you lose heart in your walk. I’m the one who loves and disciplines you, so that my name may be glorified. Tend my lambs gently, shepherd them with dedication and exhort my sheep, in order to remain in the paths of righteousness. I have loved you. I expect from you the honor that is due to me as Father and Lord.”