Pursue Love, for Without It You Will Not Receive the Crown

We will read from verse 1 to verse 3: *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."* Amen.

The word of God in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 is devoted to love, which is a fruit of the Spirit.

Many years ago I was reading this chapter of 1 Corinthians and I noticed that I could not find myself in the love described there. Perhaps the same has happened to you. Scripture tells us that love suffers long, love is kind, it does not boast, it is not puffed up, it does not seek its own…

And the word of Scripture says that if I have not love, I am as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Then Scripture tells us that even if I had faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. When I read that I am nothing, it did not seem so serious to me.

I thought that I still had faith, and if we are saved by faith, then it is not exactly nothing before God. At least I have salvation, even if it says I am nothing.

Then Scripture tells us that even if I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profits me nothing. And you all know that among religious people there is a great deal of talk right now about the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus, and that the Antichrist will put a mark on our hand or our forehead, and if we do not accept it, we will be persecuted. We will not be able to buy, we will not be able to sell…

And here the Lord tells us that even if we do these things and have not love, it profits us nothing. If you are nothing, it almost seems as though you were still something. You are at least sounding brass, and it seems you are something.

But here He tells us that it profits us nothing, and when what you do profits you nothing, it means it truly profits you nothing at all. It is very important that we pursue love, and we must have it, because without love we will not see God. God is love. We must bear the image of the Lord within us, so we must have love.

We also read verse 13: *"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."* And verse 1 of chapter 14: *"Follow after charity."* Amen.

Love is essential for salvation. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit works with us so that we come to have love. As natural people, we know a certain kind of love. The Lord Jesus tells us that if we love the way even the tax collectors love, what great thing are we doing?

We will read from several places in the word of God, to see how God works with us so that we come to love.

Whoever has studied the word of God carefully will have noticed that love is mentioned in every epistle. The apostles Paul, Peter, James and John speak a great deal about love. Love is necessary, it is essential, it is required; it is God's plan that man should come to love. Without it we do not know God and we will not see Him.

We read from 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 5: *"The end of the commandment is charity."* In other words, the main purpose of God's commandments is love.

As I said earlier, people love one another; they have love for each other, the love of natural people. And we also find it written in Timothy that in the last days people will lose even this natural love; they will lose it because iniquity abounds. The love of many will grow cold or be lost, and all that will remain is a pretended form of love.

Let us also go to 1 John to read a few things, from chapter 4, verses 7 and 8: *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."*

Love is of God. Whoever has love is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love has not known God, for God is love.

We also read verse 16: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Do you remember what the Lord Jesus says in John 8? If you continue in My word, if you abide in Me, then you are My disciples indeed. Here He tells us that we must abide in love. If we abide in love, we abide in God and God abides in us.

If you abide in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. But not just abiding in some metaphorical way; we must abide, He tells us here, in love. *"Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world."*

To have boldness in the day of judgment, we must have the love of Christ, which is perfect. *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."* Only one thing drives out fear. Only perfect love drives out fear.

When 1 Corinthians 13 says that I am nothing, it means I am outside with the fearful, as it is written in Revelation. I am not inside, as I used to think long ago.

Let us see how we come to love, so that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. Each one of us gathers here so that in the end we may come to have the love of Christ.

We also read from Ephesians chapter 3, verses 17, 18 and 19: *"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."* Amen.

We have often read from Ephesians chapter 4 about the Church: that it was given for the growth and perfecting of the saints, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, and, in verse 13, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

And here in verse 19 of chapter 3 He tells us: *"And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."* We must come to the love of Christ. And this love of Christ passes all knowledge. We have also read about the peace of God, which passes all understanding.

And here He tells us that it passes all knowledge. It is essential that we know the love of Christ. We also read in John chapter 13, verses 34 and 35: *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* Amen.

We must learn to love the way He loved us, not the way we would like. We must love one another only as He loved us.

We gather, we hug each other, we socialise, then we leave and forget about one another, and we say we love each other. But that is not how He loved us. He gave every moment of His life for others. We must know this self-giving love of Christ which passes all knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fulness of Christ.

By this all will know that we are His disciples, if we have love for one another, and this is the love that He had for others. Not the love that many imagine.

We also read from John 15, verses 9 and 10: *"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."* Amen.

Continue in My love. As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. So how must we love one another? With the love that is found in the kingdom of God; just as the Lord Jesus loved us, that is how we must love.

And verse 12: *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."* Amen. Perhaps we do not often stop to think why we must love one another as He loved us. Why must His love be made perfect in us?

Love will never perish; it is the bond of perfectness, the glue that will hold our relationships together in the kingdom of God. It is not just a commandment that we fulfil because we have been commanded. We must not love one another merely because we have been commanded to; we must have love, because without love it profits us nothing, and we do not reach what will be in eternity.

And if I give my life to be burned at the stake, it profits me nothing. Even if I serve all my life, if I have not love, it profits me nothing, because I do not know the Lord. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ.

We also read verse 13 of chapter 15: *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* Amen. We read earlier that if we give our life at the stake, if we give our body to be burned, it profits us nothing if we have not love.

If you refuse the mark of the beast, that does not mean you have love; love does not mean giving your life at the stake. There is no greater love than that a man lay down his life for his friends, but that does not mean you must be burned at the stake.

What does the Lord Jesus mean here? How did He love us? He had not yet been on the cross, He had not yet been offered as a sacrifice, yet He was giving His life every day for His friends.

Scripture teaches us that whoever wants to be greatest must be the servant of all, must lay down his life for his brothers and sisters. That is how we come to sacrificial love, to perfect love.

As an illustration, take a family with ten or twelve children. If the parents there are responsible people, they give their lives for their children. Not long ago I was in Bistrita, a city in northern Romania, and we were welcomed into the home of a young family. And we talked.

We had fellowship there, and I noticed that the young man's parents did not have time to sit with us; instead they prepared food and served both their children and us. They gave their time for the good of their children. That is what parents generally do: they give their lives for their children.

And this is natural love. What must spiritual love be like? No one is born with the love from above that we find in 1 Corinthians 13.

A newborn spiritual baby does not have love; he must learn it with the help of his spiritual parents. We read in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 1: *"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"* Amen.

What do quarrels and divisions show? Is that how we show that we have love? These people in Corinth were just beginning and did not know the love of God.

Let us look at who works with us so that we come to the love of Christ. We read from Romans chapter 5, verses 3 to 5: *"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."* Amen.

The Holy Spirit was given to us so that we might be born again and so that we might grow. Scripture says that the Holy Spirit has poured love into our hearts. And yet there is envy, strife and division among us.

How does the Holy Spirit pour out love? It is explained just before. We rejoice in our tribulations because tribulation brings patience. Patience brings victory in trial. We find written in 1 Corinthians 13 that love suffers long. God allows us to go through trials in order to pour love into us. And patience is part of love, and the Holy Spirit works so that we come to patience.

Reading from John chapter 14, verses 15 to 18: *"If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."* Amen.

Why does He give us the Holy Spirit? If we love the Lord Jesus, He sends us the Holy Spirit so that we come to love.

Let us pause for a moment at verse 18: I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. What characterises orphans? What do we call the institutions that house orphans? Why do we call them orphanages? The absence of parents is the thing that is utterly missing there.

The difference between an orphan and a child with parents is that the one who has a parent learns to love from his parents, through their personal example.

That is why the Lord Jesus does not leave us orphans. So that we may learn from Him and know His love, which passes all knowledge. And in this work the Holy Spirit works together with us, along with the spiritual family, which is the Church, the Body of Christ.

We read from Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 to 13: *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,"* or the knowledge of the love of the Son of God, *"unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."* Amen.

Besides the Holy Spirit, there are also the members of the body of Christ who work on our character. There is the Holy Spirit, but there are also the apostles, the pastors and so on. We read verse 16: *"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."* Amen.

Let us turn to Philippians to see a few things that are found in the Church of Christ, and let us pay very close attention to these things, because many have the impression that love comes by chance, that it is poured into our hearts in some miraculous way.

We read chapter 1, verses 8 and 9: *"For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge."* Amen.

This is the apostle Paul, who wrote this epistle to the Philippians. As an apostle he was given the task of making disciples through the gospel and then of growing and perfecting the saints.

We have read that he loved the little children he had begotten with an inexpressible love. What does inexpressible love mean? He loved them with this love. And he prayed that their love would grow more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, until their love reached the fulness of Christ.

The apostle Paul had Timothy close to him, who was his dearly beloved son. What does dearly beloved mean? A beloved child, and a dearly beloved child. Jacob loved his children, but there was one he loved more: he loved Joseph more. And here he tells us about Timothy: my dearly beloved son.

When we have a child and we love him, we pour all our love into him, a love that an orphan child never receives. The orphan child has no parents to give themselves to him and teach him love. Such children will have carers, they will have schoolteachers, they will have teachers.

What does a teacher do? He teaches his geography lesson, then when the bell rings he leaves. He picks up the class register and goes back to the staff room. It is true, he took care to pass on new knowledge to us. But he is not much interested in getting to know the pupils. Someone else will feed them, love them and take care of their material and emotional needs.

That is how the apostle Paul was with his children: *"For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all."* The people in Philippi were his children; he had begotten them through the gospel. He loved them and could tell them that he loved them with an inexpressibly great love.

Many people today preach from the pulpit and call an audience they barely know "my dearly beloved," and there is nothing behind it. Because the term is used in the Bible, they use it too. Many say "my dear friends," and the preacher has no close relationship with almost any of those listening.

Where do we learn love? From teachers, from preachers? If we do not have people in the body of Christ who love us, counsel us and comfort us, will we learn love or not?

God has ordained that the one who is born again should have a family. We must respect God's order. We will see a few things about Timothy. Timothy grew up at Paul's feet. Paul was his spiritual father and raised him the way a father raises his child.

We read from 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 7 and 8: *"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."* Amen.

These are words that many have not paid attention to. The apostle Paul mentions that he had a burning love for those in Thessalonica. First, in Philippians, he has "an inexpressible love," and here "a burning love."

To have a burning love is more than plain love. We were willing to give you not only the gospel, but our very lives. You had become so dear to us. What does it mean to give one's life? To die for them at the stake, or to give one's time and energy?

In our burning love for you, we sacrifice our lives, we spend them for you. Can this love be seen or not? Children feel this love. A child feels it when he is comforted; he feels it when he is loved.

We also read verse 11 about the attitude of the apostle Paul, who was the spiritual father of those in Philippi, Ephesus and Thessalonica: *"As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children."* Amen.

We exhorted you, we comforted you. What does it mean to comfort a child? When we took our little one from the orphanage, another family also took two little children from there. This family, who had also adopted children, applied a few things they had learned from studies done on cases of this kind.

They bought two baby carriers and wore the little ones on their front and back, carrying them around the house for many hours, so that the child could rest against their chest and, step by step, feel a mother's love. These are methods used to help a child feel that he has a parent, that he has a mother.

The Lord Jesus promises us: I will not leave you orphans, I will not leave you alone; I will give you parents who will be with you, who will raise you and comfort you. We were like a nursing mother among you, says the apostle Paul. We were gentle with you.

The Lord Jesus says: *"Come… and learn of me; for I am meek."* Look at Me, see how I am. Learn from Me. And the apostle Paul, who walked in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, says of himself: *"We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children."*

The end of the commandment is love. Keep the commandments of the Lord Jesus and you will come to love. But you cannot come to love on your own. For this, God has created a setting; He has given us His family so that we might come to love.

Without a family, whatever a child does, he is still an orphan; he does not reach the same goal as the child born into a family, a healthy family where there is love, a family that raises its children with affection. If children were raised with beatings and fear, they do not know a parent's love.

We are not meant to grow up in an orphanage; we must have a spiritual family. Paul had an inexpressible love for his children.

If we do not live in the love of spiritual parents, we do not understand the love the apostle Paul speaks about.

It is not enough to read that "Paul loved them with an inexpressible love"; we must experience what the Philippians experienced, we must live these things and feel them. And that is how we too will come to taste the love from above.

We will read again from Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 12 and 13: *"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."* Amen.

This is Paul's prayer: that we may grow in love. It must be our prayer too. That we may grow in love for one another and for all people. *"Giving all diligence,"* says the apostle Peter, *"add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."* And you see, there are stages. And to reach brotherly love, you must have a family. You must have a parent to raise you. You must have the leaders of the church, the elders, who have love so that they can teach you love.

The Lord make you increase more and more in love toward one another. The body of Christ is the workshop where we polish one another in love.

We read from chapter 4, verses 9 and 10: *"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more."* Here is yet another exhortation.

We urge you, brothers and sisters, to increase more and more in love. What does it mean to increase? To grow, to gain more and more. Why? Because we must come to the love of Christ, which passes all knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fulness of Christ.

We read from chapter 5, again in Thessalonians, verses 11, 12 and 13: *"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another… And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."* Amen.

What do our natural parents do? They labour for us until we grow up. Parents must raise and look after their children. They labour among you; they are over you in the Lord and admonish you.

They counsel you so that you may grow more and more in love, and for this you should esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

Let brotherly love continue, Scripture tells us in Hebrews 13, verse 1. What does it mean to persevere in it? To focus on reaching the love of Christ, which passes all knowledge.

Let us remember that 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love does not seek its own. And elsewhere: "seek the profit of others." This is love, and persevere in it.

Many people ask for certain gifts of the Spirit, but not for the benefit of others; rather for their own benefit. But what are the gifts for? So that we may grow in love, so that we may develop and reach the stature of the fulness of Christ.

But we want gifts to use for ourselves, not for others. Yet the gifts are not for us; they are for others, and when they are for others, we must spend ourselves, give our lives to others. Love does not seek its own.

We read in 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 8: *"And above all things"* (everything you do is good, but above all the things you do) *"have fervent charity among yourselves."*

The apostle Paul said in 1 Thessalonians: I love you with a burning love, and in my burning love I was ready to give you not only the gospel but my very life. You had become so dear to me. *"Have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging."* What does it mean to be hospitable?

Do we give ourselves when we are hospitable? Cooking for yourself is easy, but cooking for many people is not so easy. You really have to give of your own life. Cooking for one person is one thing; cooking for ten is quite another.

There is a big difference. How much work and how much expense is involved? Clean the house, make up their beds, put on the sheets, the duvet... Your home is crowded, the house is turned upside down, and you have to clean up afterwards. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. Why? So that you may come to love.

May the Lord help us understand what we are called to; He has not called us to love one another only at church. Hugging each other is superficial; it is not a deep love.

When you welcome guests, you give of your life and you learn to spend yourself. And not necessarily financially, but yourself. You give your time to others. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. If you grumble, you have gained nothing. Many have a pretended brotherly love, because necessity demands it, and they do not want to come and learn the love of Christ, which gives itself wholeheartedly, which gives itself warmly.

We read about this pretended love in 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 22. All these verses have a very specific purpose: to help us understand true love. *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."*

Love one another warmly from the whole heart, not in a calculated way, but from the whole heart. *Love one another fervently with an unfeigned love of the brethren.*

Now we will go to Timothy to see Paul's exhortations to Timothy, a few exhortations concerning love. Let us take these exhortations for ourselves too. We read in 1 Timothy chapter 6, verses 11 and 12: *"But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."* Amen.

Here the apostle Paul urges his son Timothy to seek love, righteousness, faith… 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 22: *"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."* Follow after love. Seek it and pursue it. It is important for us to do the same.

This is the teaching of the spiritual father to his spiritual son. And in chapter 3, verse 10: *"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience."*

You have closely followed my love. Follow me, says the apostle Paul, as I also follow Christ. Timothy followed the apostle Paul closely. He watched how Paul lived, so that he might live the same way.

You have closely followed my love. You have seen that I had a burning love for them. Timothy closely followed Paul's love so that he could copy him in love. Let us take note of how we can learn love. Can we learn it in an orphanage, or only in the family of Christ?

We read in Colossians chapter 3, from verse 12: *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."* Amen.

Above all these things, the most precious is love. *"Love one another, as I have loved you; by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples."* Not with a pretended love, only at church, and then forgetting our brothers and sisters. Love does not consist in hugs and polite questions that would seem to show we care about one another.

And that is about where this pretended, calculated love stops. But how must we love one another? Above all these things, put on the love that does not seek its own, that does not love itself, and that is the bond of perfectness. The Lord does not leave us orphans. He too takes part in this work through the Holy Spirit, and also through the Body of Christ, through the Church, but He also asks us to do our part.

May the Lord help us come to have the fruit of the Spirit, which is love… And, as the end of God's work with us, may we come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Perfect love casts out fear. And fear has torment. Amen.

Bucharest, Romania

12 March 2023

Source: *Pursue Love, for Without It You Will Not Receive the Crown* — Unmodified Word
unmodifiedword.com/written-sermons/pursue-love-for-without-it-you-will-not-receive-the-crown