



## St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov): "True Love for One's Neighbour Is Based on Faith in God"

What could be more beautiful than love for one's neighbour? To love is holiness-to hate is suffering. All the law and the prophets can be condensed into love for God and for one's neighbour (Matthew 22:40).

Love for one's neighbour is a path which leads to love for God: therefore Christ willed to be clothed mysteriously in each of our neighbours, and God in Christ (John 1).

Do not think, most beloved brother, that the commandment to love one's neighbour was very near to our fallen hearts: the commandment is spiritual, but flesh and blood overpowered our hearts; the commandment is new, but our hearts are old. Our natural love was damaged in the fall; we need to mortify it-Christ orders this-and take holy love towards our neighbour and love in Christ from the Gospel.

The characteristics of the new man must be completely new; no old characteristic suits him. Love that comes from the stirring of the blood and fleshly emotions has no merit in the sight of the Gospel.

And what merit could it have, when he swears to give his soul for the Lord when under the inflaming of the blood, and within a few hours, he swears that he does not know Him (Matthew 26:33-74)? The Gospel rejects love which depends on the stirring of the blood and from the emotions of the heart of flesh. The Gospel says: *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: And a man's foes shall be they of his own household* (Matthew 10:34-36).

The fall has submitted the heart to the dominion of the blood, and by means of the blood, the dominion of the ruler of this world. The Gospel frees the heart from this captivity and this violence and brings it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to love our neighbour in holiness. Love, when stirred up and nourished by the Holy Spirit, is a fire. The fire of natural, fleshly love, damaged by the fall, is quenched by this fire (The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Rung 15, Chapter 3). "He who says, that he can have one love and the other, deceives himself," said holy John Climacus (Rung 3, Chapter 16).

How far has our nature fallen! The one who can fervently love his neighbour by nature must unnaturally coerce himself to love him as the Gospel commands he should.

Fiery natural love is easily turned into depravity and into unpeaceable hatred (2 Kings 13:15). Natural love was also expressed by the dagger. Our natural love is covered with such sores! And how painful is the sore of passion upon it! The heart which is possessed by passion is capable of any injustice, of any lawlessness, if only to satisfy its morbid love. "*A false balance is abomination to the Lord; but a just weight is his delight*" (Proverbs 11:1).

Natural love can only give that which is earthly to its beloved; it does not consider that which is heavenly. It is at war against Heaven and the Holy Spirit; because the Spirit requires the crucifixion of the flesh. It is at war against Heaven and the Holy Spirit: because it is under the direction of the evil, the unclean and dead spirit.



Let us come to the Gospel, most beloved brother, let us look in this mirror! Looking into it, let us cast off the old garment, in which we were clothed by the fall and let us put on the new garment, which has been prepared for us by God. The new garment is Christ. *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (Galatians 3:27). The new garment is the Holy Spirit. *“Ye shall be endued with power from on high”* (Luke 24:49) said the Lord about this garment. Christians are clothed in the qualities of Christ, by the action of the all-blessed Spirit.

This vestment is possible for a Christian. *“Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof”* (Romans 13:14), says the Apostle. Firstly, being guided by the Gospel, cast off enmity, rancour, wrath, censure and all things, which directly oppose love. The Gospel commands us to pray for our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who hate us and to forgive our neighbour for whatsoever he has done against us. Strive, you who wish to follow Christ, to fulfil all of these commandments in deed.

It is not enough just to read the commandments of the Gospel with pleasure and marvel at the high morality which they contain. Unfortunately, many are satisfied with this.

When you come to fulfil the commandments of the Gospel: then the rulers of your heart stubbornly oppose themselves to this fulfilment. These rulers are your own fleshly state, which submits you to flesh and blood, and the fallen spirits, whose domain is the fleshly state of man.

The wisdom of the flesh, its righteousness and the righteousness of the fallen spirits demand that you do not drop your honour and other corruptible benefits, that you defend them. But continue the unseen struggle with courage, led by the Gospel, led by the Lord Himself.

Sacrifice everything to carry out the Gospel commandments. Without such sacrifice you will not be able to fulfil them. The Lord said to His disciples: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself* (Matthew 16:24). When the Lord is with you, hope for victory: God cannot but be victorious. Ask for victory from the Lord; ask for it by constant prayer and weeping. And unexpectedly the action of grace will come into your heart: you will feel suddenly the very sweet rapture of spiritual love towards enemies.

But the struggle remains before you! You still need to be courageous! Look at the objects of your love: do you really love them? Is your heart really attached to them? Renounce them. The Lord, the legislator of love, requires this renouncement from you, not in order to deprive you of love and of loved ones, but so that, having cast off fleshly love, which is defiled by the impurity of sin, you become able to receive spiritual love, pure, holy love, which is the highest bliss.

Having felt spiritual love, you will behold fleshly love with disgust, like an ugly distortion of love. How can you renounce the objects of your love, which seem to have grown attached to your very heart?- tell God about them: *“They are Thine, Lord, and who am I? A weak creation without any significance. Today I still wander about the earth, I can be of use to my loved ones in some way; tomorrow, perhaps, I will disappear from the face of the earth and I am nothing to them!”*

*“Whether I wish it or not, death will come, other circumstances will come, they will forcibly tear me away from those whom I considered my own, and they indeed are not my own. They were not in their essence mine; there was some sort of relationship between me and them; being deceived by this relationship, I*



called them and recognised them as my own. If they were really just mine, they would have always continued to belong to me.” “The creations belong to the Creator alone: He is their Lord and God. My Lord, I give to Thee what is Thine: I wrongly and vainly attributed them to myself.”

It is better for them to be God’s. God is eternal, everywhere present, almighty; there is no end to his goodness. He is the most faithful Helper and Protector of the one who belongs to Him.

God gives of His own to man: and men become man’s own for a time, by the flesh, yet they become his eternally by the spirit, when God deigns to give this gift to man.

True love for one’s neighbour is based on faith in God: it is in God. “*That they may all be one*, said the Lord of the world to His Father: *as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us*” (John 17:21).

Humility and devotion to God slay fleshly love. This means that it lives by self-regard and unbelief. Do whatever you can that is beneficial and what the law allows for your loved ones; but always hand them up to God, and your blind, fleshly, uncontrollable love will gradually become spiritual, reasoned and holy.

If your love is a lawless passion, then cast it off, like something which is disgusting. When your heart is not free, this is a sign of a passion. When your heart is in captivity, this is a sign of a mad, sinful passion. Holy love is pure, free and entirely in God. It is the action of the Holy Spirit, which affects the heart according to the measure of its purity. Cast off enmity, cast off passions, renounce fleshly love, obtain spiritual love, “*depart from evil and do good*”(Psalm 34:14).

Honour your neighbour as an Image of God, an honour which is in your heart, unseen by others and evident only to your conscience. Your actions will mysteriously correspond to your spiritual disposition. Honour your neighbour and make no difference for age, sex or class and gradually holy love will begin to appear in your heart. The cause of this holy love is not flesh and blood, nor the attraction of the feelings- it is God.

Those who are deprived of the glory of Christianity are not deprived of another glory, which was received at creation: they are the image of God. If the image of God is to be thrown into the fire of terrible hell; even there, I must still honour him.

What have I to do with fire, with hell! The image of God is cast there by the judgement of God: it is my task to retain honour for the image of God, and by this to keep myself from hell. Honour the blind, the leper, the one who has damaged faculties, the infant and the criminal and the pagan, as the image of God. What are their frailties and shortcomings to you! Keep a watch on yourself, so that you have no shortcomings in love.

Honour Christ within the Christian, Who said to instruct us and will say once more when deciding our eternal lot: “*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me*” (Matthew 25:40). In relating to your neighbours, retain in your memory this saying of the Gospel, and you will become a companion in love for your neighbour. The companion in love to their neighbour enters by this into love for God.



For if you think that you love God, but you have an unpleasant attitude to even one person in your heart: then you are in sorrowful self-delusion. *“If a man say,”* says holy John the Theologian: *“I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar... This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also”* (I John 4:20-21).

The manifestation of spiritual love for one’s neighbour is a sign of the renewal of the soul by the Holy Spirit: *“We know,”* says the Theologian once more *“that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”* (1 John 3:14).

The perfection of Christianity is within perfect love for our neighbour. Perfect love for our neighbour is within love of God, of which there is no perfection and for which there is no end to attainment. Attainment in love for God is infinite: because the infinite God is love (1 John 4:16) 4:16). Love for our neighbour is the foundation of the building of love. Beloved brother! Seek to reveal in yourself spiritual love for your neighbours: by entering into it, you will enter into love for God, through the gates of the resurrection and through the gates of the kingdom of heaven.

*Translated from the Russian by Nicola Dockray*