

## Home Worship

This resource can be used in many different ways. We know that some readers use it for their own personal devotions, and that others use it as a stimulus for discussion as part of a small group. Some readers discuss it with a friend, and others use it to base a sermon on. All of these uses, and others, are valid and we are delighted to envisage people all over this country and others sharing in worship to the Lord in different ways.

We realise that some of the readers have been part of churches that have closed. If you are in the position of wanting to meet as a small group and would like support, please contact Jan Millar, who will be happy to talk this through with you and give guidance where she can. Her contact details are: Mrs Jan Millar, 41 Victoria Chase, Bailiff Bridge, Brighouse, West Yorkshire, HD6 4DE. 01484 401 910, [jan.millar@generalconference.org.uk](mailto:jan.millar@generalconference.org.uk)

If you use this material on your own and would like the opportunity to discuss it with another reader, we could pair you up with a “buddy”. Perhaps you would contact this buddy by phone, email or Skype, and explore your thoughts and feelings together. Please get in touch if you would be interested in us finding you a buddy.

For those of you who have access to the internet, the American website New Christian Bible Study <https://newchristianbiblestudy.org> is a wonderful resource for researching Swedenborg’s Writings, and for reading articles about particular Bible passages.

For those who receive postal copies, you may have noticed that Home Worship is now coming out in a slightly different form. There are a number of people who have faithfully produced Home Worship for many years, and we would like to thank them for their service, particularly Revd Norman Ryder, Sylvia Fay, Marian Kidd, and those at Chester New Church who have made this happen. The new “team” comprises of Revd Christine Bank, Revd Mary Duckworth, Revd Jack Dunion, Revd Becky Jarratt, Mrs Jan Millar and Miss Gemma McLean.

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## Home Worship October 2017 - Revd Christine Bank

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### Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017

**AC1637.2** *The language with which spirits are familiar is not a language of composed of words but a language composed of ideas comprising thought....All souls, the moment they enter the next life, receive this gift of being able to understand what all people in any part of the world are saying, just as if they had been born among those people, for they perceive what a person is thinking. ...This explains why after death of the body souls are able to talk to and mix with all people, no matter what region these came from or what language they spoke.*

### Psalm 19:1-4

I love this idea of simple and trouble-free communication. I haven't studied language since it was compulsory at school so the promise of easy and perfect understanding of what another person means is very tempting. So many difficulties in life are down to communication problems of one kind or another; how delightful to not have to worry about misunderstandings or misconceptions getting out of hand and causing problems. How lovely to be able to spot those intent on causing trouble or sowing hatred with reliable accuracy and to then act accordingly.

It works until I realise how many of my thoughts I would not really like to be open for scrutiny. My body gives me the means to hide feelings and thoughts away; a bit of acting and showing the face I wish to be seen and judged by means I can avoid displaying currently private and quite possibly unflattering thoughts to others. The Psalmist (Ps 19 v3-4) uses the natural world to remind us of the ever present voice of the Lord and I have to admit that I can find it easy to not listen, to ignore or skim past the things that clearly come from the heavenly spheres in favour of the self-satisfaction of hearing my own opinions replayed and reinforced.

The task of learning to be a heavenly minded person requires so much more than appearing to be 'good' as it will be very obvious in the next life where the true feelings and emotions lie. A good "pause for thought" that our preparation for heaven will expose and reveal everything so clearly.

### Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2017

**AC 1640** *I have been allowed to perceive clearly the things which spirits have said to me but also to perceive where these were at the time of speaking – overhead, down below, to the right or left...for they have spoken to me from the various places or positions where they were... according to their state.*

The spiritual world is a place we can struggle to imagine but in some ways it sounds to be quite logically set out. Those who are similar find themselves close together while those with differing attitudes and approaches are elsewhere. This doesn't mean one is better or worse than another, simply that variety and difference can all work together to give a bigger and fuller picture. Back to the natural world again for the obvious ways that spiritual truth finds itself displayed around us.

Seeing a single flower close up is beautiful and complex. The same flower as part of a display combined with other blooms and greenery has a collective beauty that is far above the individual elements alone. Variety and harmony rather than a repetitive sameness is a source of heavenly richness; flourishing with difference rather than monotony and stagnation.

There are so many different blessings from the variety and range of human thought and experience. If we are going to be able to communicate fully and openly with everyone then being aware of their state and place relative to our own will be second nature as nothing can be hidden. Swedenborg's Writings show him being allowed to encounter varieties of spirits and experience for himself the quality of discernment that enables each to be known as they really are. With this knowledge of how we will be living in the spiritual world there is an obvious benefit for us to work towards having thoughts and expressions that are in harmony here too.

Read and reflect: **Psalm 26**, living a blameless life and trusting the Lord

### **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

**AC1759** *The speech of celestial spirits cannot easily pass into the articulated sounds and expressions of human speech.....nor can it accommodate itself to any expression which contains any idea based on factual knowledge. Consequently celestial spirits rarely influence speech other than through affections, which soften expressions like a stream or breath of air.....their speech is in no way out of keeping with their thought – everything sweet and harmonious in the next life derives from goodness and charity.*

Realising that celestial thoughts and expressions can't find a link to allow expression of things linked to factual and therefore earthly knowledge is quite tricky. What is the point of learning and studying if the things that enable us to 'get on' in the world by gaining qualifications or practical skills will be (at least potentially) of no value to our angelic selves? Of course it isn't quite that simple; the Lord gives us our brains to use and develop so the growth of knowledge in this physical world is very much within what he knows will happen as enquiring minds discover new and wonderful aspects of this world and even of the stars beyond our physical reach.

Using our minds to their best ability also has to do with not feeding our own sense of self-importance and ego; maintaining a humility and real awareness that the Lord's

life is in us and that we are not and never can be the most important in situations. The celestial angels may well have been the most intellectually gifted or the most humble, simple and uncomplicated people in this world. It is the inner quality which leads us to the right part of the spiritual world, not the visible things at all. This makes sense when the expression of celestial communication is inexpressible in what we call words – the sounds are too crude, the sentiments too delicate for speech. Instead the expression finds a form in gentleness with no hint of violence or aggressive power.

Imagine a situation that needs calming down or settling in some way, perhaps a crying baby or maybe a more aggressive gathering of older and energetic people. The addition of volume and powerful sounds helps no-one – shouting at people to calm down and shut up won't help much. The distress for a baby gets worse as stresses around them increase and confrontation becomes more likely with older people. The presence of calming and soothing influences can take pressure and tension away which is just the sort of change the angels seek to bring to situations.

Perhaps the best expression of the Lord being found in gentleness and calm is with him appearing to Elijah in **1 Kings 19** after the wind, earthquake and fire have passed by.

### **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017**

This week and next are looking at reading the Word and the reaction of spirits on hearing it.

**AC1771. 2 - 3** *...the Word was heard by many other spirits, but these all grasped it in different ways. With some it filled the ideas comprising their thoughts with many lovely and delightful feelings, and so with a kind of life – with each on according to his capacity to receive it. At the same time it filled them with an effecting power that penetrated to their inmost being. With some that power was so great that it seemed to them that they were being raised up towards the interior parts of heaven, nearer and nearer the Lord – each according to the degree of his affection for truths, and for goods joined to the truths*

*Also at that time the Word was brought to some spirits who had no conception of an internal sense of the Word, but only of an external or literal sense, to whom the letter did not appear to possess any life. From all this it was clear what the Word is like when the Lord imparts life to it, namely that it possesses such an effecting power that it penetrates to people's inmost being; also what it is alike when He does not impart life to it, namely nothing but the letter possessing scarcely any life at all.*

There are several passages when Swedenborg says the Word being read by people on earth finds some link with the heavens and that angels don't see the literal sense such as the narrative and the names of people and places but instead are caught up in the deeper levels of meaning which resonate with their own states and affections.

This passage is part of a section describing how newly arrived spirits, some not yet appreciating they have died, had no grasp of the power of the Word. Yet the Lord works with the states and degree of openness to His love that is within us so the spirits were able to discover for themselves a response to the 'uplifting' aspect of the living Word as their own perceptions could allow.

I love this idea of a physical sensation of being lifted to go along with the internal unfolding of new insights and understanding. It seemed to them they were being lifted – not necessarily that they were moving but they were conscious of this being a gift to them and not in any way a sense of their own ego taking credit for understanding things as the gift of enlightenment is only from the Lord.

### **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

You may wish to refresh your memory of how reading the Word was received by spirits in the previous paragraph used last week.

**AC1774** *There are spirits who are unwilling to listen to anything regarding the inner content of the Word. Indeed, no matter how much they are able to understand they are still unwilling. They are in particular those who have placed merit in good works, and have therefore done good deeds for selfish and worldly reasons, that is, for the sake of position and wealth which they may gain for themselves or the consequent reputation, and so not for the sake of the Lord's kingdom. In the next life such persons wish more than all others to enter heaven, yet they remain outside of it, for they are unwilling to be furnished with cognitions of truth and so to be stirred by an affection for good.*

The Lord's gift of freedom means no-one is compelled to believe and therefore the stubborn qualities and personality traits we encounter in this world will also be part of the spirits entering the next life.

The lack of any spiritual dimension to what is done is quite hard to envisage as the Two Great Commands of love to the Lord and love to the neighbour both have things of heaven in them. Many who don't formally recognise a 'god' will work tirelessly for the benefit of others and do whatever they can to improve people's situations and find their motivation and satisfaction in making whatever positive difference they can to the life of others.

Swedenborg definitely identifies a wholly selfish and worldly focus in some people. They'll look and behave perfectly normally and may achieve great things, but their inner states are turned towards 'what's in it for me' as a powerful driving force. Only in the next life does this quality become evident in the way their reaction to the Word is one of using it to suit their own objectives or deliberately interpreting things their own way. As we read and enjoy our own Bible and seek to learn from it the Lord can open our ability to receive insights and enrich life now. How much more will it mean to us in the next life is both an exciting and humbling prospect.