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‘Every City or Household Divided Against Itself Will Not Stand’

Matthew 12:25 NIV

- Unhappy about a relationship or situation?

By Revd Mary Duckworth

We all say and do things that we immediately regret. From people's reactions we are aware that they feel hurt or criticised. We can excuse ourselves saying, "Sorry, I didn't mean it like that", or "I wasn't speaking about you personally", or with more awareness, "I'm so sorry, that was an awful thing to say." If we don't clear the air straightaway, it is so much harder later on.

Sometimes we are distressed by the behaviour of a family member, a friend, or someone at work, a colleague, social acquaintance or someone at church. We try to sort it out but it happens again, or we do nothing and a barrier grows between us.

How do we get on with people when the going is tough? We can't change other people, but we can change ourselves! We don't know what caused them

to behave in the way they did at that time – what factors were at play in their life – so how dare we judge them? We can only guess and be far from the mark. The Lord forgives us all, no matter what. He forgives, even though we may not be ready to receive it! We are all his children and he loves us. If he forgives us, who are we not to forgive others? Don't we pray regularly, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"? Do we really mean this? If we do, then can we change from condemning, blaming or criticising and begin to forgive?

If we are struggling with this, and which of us doesn't, because we can't change ourselves, even though it might appear that we can; the only way we can change is with the Lord's help.

I have been reading Swedenborg's 'Heaven and Hell' recently [Translated from the Latin by K C Ryder, The Swedenborg Society, 2010] and am struck by certain sentences:

'In heaven it is divine truth which possesses all power, and without it there is no power whatsoever... Through it angels have dominance over hell and over all who oppose them... Angels are angels because of their reception of divine truth.' Heaven and Hell [HH] 137.2

Divine truth 'possesses all power'! **All** power - and is what makes an angel an angel! I thought God was all-powerful. He is. He is Divine Love Itself, and from this love divine good and divine truth come forth. So angels' power from divine truth is from the Divine in heaven. It is not essentially their own but granted them as they are moved by love to act according to the truth they know. Might the Lord grant us power – maybe the power to forgive - as **we** are moved by love to act according to the truth we know?

'Divine truth has power in itself, and the power is such that heaven and earth and all things in them were created through it.' HH 137.3

What can have greater power than what created the whole universe and everything that exists? *'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.'* Psalm 33:6 NIVUK. If Divine truth has such power, what can it not achieve? What might it do for each one of us in the situation we find ourselves in?

'Everything in the universe, in heaven and on earth, relates to goodness and truth, and if they do not exist together they have no existence at all.' HH 137.4e

Good is always united with truth for truth to be truth. When we act from what we understand to be truth, we must check that what we are doing is also from a good motive. I like to think that on the whole I act from good motives, but I am aware of my own weakness - how I resist making a phone call or contacting someone. How will they respond? What will they think of me? Will I be able to cope, mess things up, make matters worse? Better let sleeping dogs lie?

Yes, like all of us, I am human, and as such, have no strength of my own and make excuses for my own weak behaviour. Truth is all powerful, has power in itself, is from the

Lord. He speaks his truth to us in his Word, as in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." KJV. Is it possible to change from blame to forgiving? It requires more than our own power. Only the Lord's power will do.

We can soak ourselves in his words of truth, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." We can turn to him, call on him, rely on his strength and presence to make a shift in us, to turn our hearts to forgive - for his truth and power to begin to heal any damaged relationships.

Lord, I love you and would love others. I am sorry for any wrongdoing, for any hurt I have caused. Forgive me. Help me! Help me to begin to change my thoughts about others, my feelings, my attitude, my heart. Help me to remember that we are all your children and we all mess up at times, each in our own way and we all need your forgiveness. May your Word, your truth, act powerfully within us, Lord, enabling us to forgive and be forgiven by each other. Heal us, Lord, or we fall! Amen.

Maybe there's a situation in your life that you are unhappy with. Now is an opportunity to bring it to the Lord for him to shine a new light on it, for you to feel differently about it. Allow him now to bring about change.

Postscript

The Annual meeting of Conference is rapidly approaching. If you have responsibilities, you will have been preparing for some time – reports, presentations, services of worship, technical services, arrangements with the Conference Centre, and looking forward now to it actually happening, meeting together and getting on with it. If you are a representative or visitor, you may be reading through the proof reports in preparation; or you may not be able to attend but are still interested in the affairs of Conference.

How are you feeling about last year's Conference and the part you played in it or in events around it? Are you feeling content with what you did to bring about change? Are there things you regret doing? Are there things you would do differently with hindsight?

How are you feeling about where you find yourself now as a consequence? Would you like anything to be different? For you? For others?

Some have taken on greater responsibilities; others have lost them. Some have moved to the centre; others have felt a need to distance themselves. Some may be feeling they have taken on a lot of work, and are happy to serve the Lord in this way even though it is demanding; others now find themselves bereft of the role, in which they served the Church diligently and faithfully for many years. How must this feel? Where and how are they now? Have they been able to move on and find other ways of serving?

However we ourselves are feeling, let us be aware that some may still be struggling to accept the current situation and be reconciled with others. Let us be sensitive to their

needs and, if we are struggling, to our own. Can we pray for them, and ourselves, and for any unresolved situation? Let us place ourselves in the Lord's hands.

What do we want, as we prepare for next week's Conference? More importantly, what does the Lord want of us? We will do well to ponder and pray each day over the theme of Conference,

"What does the Lord require of you?" Micah 6:8 NIV