



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

7th January 2024

Please begin by reading Matthew chapters 1 and 2. If you can do so at one sitting without a break to appreciate the flow please do so and allow yourself a few extra moments to dwell on the whole sweep of what is being said here if you can. Just be in your own space with the words this Gospel gives us.

Our first Sunday of the New Year is close to the time of Epiphany, celebrated on 6th January, marking the coming of the Magi (Wise Men) and we find the Gospel of Matthew opening with a slightly challenging read as it provides us with a Genealogy confirming a record of Jesus' ancestry from Abraham. This puts Him firmly within that historical context of Jewish history and identifies Him as the Christ, one whose coming had been foretold.

Only then do we begin to read of the birth and then the visit of the Magi.

How wonderful is this opening to the Gospels as our first introduction to the person of Jesus Christ? Not a narrative story, but a deep scene setting draws us in as we hear of the historical authority then the instructions of the angel to Joseph. If, at this point, we forget what we already know of the wider story, then how incredible is this as a first introduction to events?

This child is brought to our notice as the Christ from the very first words on the page and those who know of His birth are men with significant intellectual knowledge and deep mystical insight. When they finally come to the child it is to offer worship as their first action, only then do they open their treasures and present gifts before returning to their own country by another route.



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An encounter with Jesus Christ will always be significant and taking a different way home makes sense in the literal text as well as in our own approach to life as we meet and worship the Lord. The idea of going back by another route obviously avoids a dangerous situation, but it also can allow us to think on the times in life when circumstances filled with bad intent (Herod) may be of help to us on our way towards what is holy. Having reached the Lord, worshipped and acknowledged Him, it then becomes imperative that we change our direction and do not to attempt to go back the same way, do not revisit the old situations or habits and patterns of life but instead to be guided by angelic influences into our new way of life.

Prayer

Lord Jesus

As we think of this wonderful account of Your birth in Matthew's Gospel, help us to see new riches and value in the distinct and different Gospels which we hold and treasure as a whole Christmas story each year.

May our love and confidence in Your Word be strengthened as we read and reflect on the sense of fulfilment of generations of prophetic ministry unfolding. We thank You again for the privilege of being able to hold the Word in our hands and read it freely in our own language. May we never lose sight of how precious this is, continue to be faithful in our personal reading and to sincerely pray for the things of your kingdom to be a growing part of us and our daily life.

Amen



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14th January 2024

What are the things in life that are important to you? Our priorities shape how we spend our time and energy, or at least show what we would choose to do more of if other things didn't keep getting in the way.

Someone I know is keen on amateur dramatics and if not actively involved in the rehearsal and staging of a production, is always on the lookout for the next project. It's a real passion, their existing talent is developing, and more significant roles come along which in turn require a correspondingly deeper commitment towards the next production. Each new show brings opportunity but there is never an absolute guarantee of success, that can only be properly determined after the performance.

What does a reflection on our own priorities around spiritual development and growing in the Lord look like? One way of considering the Lord's life within could be expressed as how much a sense of ego and self-importance are recognised as existing for the purpose of serving the Lord and others. It is so easy to want to work for personal benefit first and foremost. What a difference it could make if we saw ourselves as having a role to bring some heavenly inspired goodness into the world, focussing on helping others.

How much can we say that we identify then reject what is hellish and turn more towards the Lord? This is the very process we can't easily see for ourselves; our own progress isn't obvious to us, and it often feels we are not getting very far.

Yet we can be reassured that our life does bear fruit in ways that are not always visible in this life. The Parable of the Sower in **Luke 8** tells of several different seeds and how they grow... **"But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop".**

Note that the good soil is only part of the process, the hard work still needs doing in order for the productive outcome to be reached. This is the part we can't always see for ourselves but there is reassurance it happens quietly and unseen.

Swedenborg writes of the way our current sense of heavenly life can feel like a quiet peace, but the full joy can't be seen until we are in the spiritual world.

Divine Providence 41...the more closely we are united to the Lord the happier we become. This happiness is very rarely evident in the world, though, because in this world we are in an earthly state, and things on the earthly levels do not communicate directly with things on the spiritual level; they communicate only by correspondence. This kind of communication is felt only as a kind of quiet peace of spirit, especially after struggle against our evils.



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However, once we leave this earthly state...a happiness gradually emerges that is beyond description.

Prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus, We find it hard to recognise spiritual changes and progress within ourselves. Help us to be faithful in our daily living, content to serve where we are and in our current situation, knowing your lasting heavenly kingdom is being formed in us, away from sight and under Your continual care. Amen



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21st January 2024

The Lord's Divine Providence is always working towards all people becoming part of the angelic heavens. Luke 3: 3 speaking of John the Baptist says ***“He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”***.

The Jordan is the river the Israelites crossed to enter the “Promised Land” and there is a clear correspondence that the message from John which enables the Lord's physical ministry is heard there first. The spiritual Jordan is a boundary is where we start to take steps from an old to a new life as we move to a more heavenly state.

We live in a world where many people make relatively small mistakes and errors all the time, but generally would say they try to do what is good. Ordinary life requires that when things are wrong there is a need for this to be not only recognised but properly acknowledged in some way. Small as well as large things need to be resolved, not ignored. It may not be possible to reinstate or rebuild a previous situation, but damage can be mitigated, fault acknowledged, apologies made, or for severe wrongdoing a formal legal system could lead towards the guilty being made to provide some restitution or receive punishment.

The idea of giving and receiving forgiveness is altogether trickier. We can, and should, sincerely and humbly ask the Lord's help with the things we come to recognise as ‘sins’ in our life. When others do wrong or inconvenience us in some way it may feel more natural to be cross, to hold those feelings of annoyance or rage and view ourselves as due an apology, some acknowledgement of hurt, or sympathy.

Forgiving those who sin against us is a very heavenly quality and life gives us plenty of opportunities to put this sort of understanding into practice, if only we are willing to do so. Realising we really do receive a loving acceptance and forgiveness from the Lord is only a start. We look to work with Him in future to continue to resist and reject those faults. Then the real test is in how we can also show that heavenly way of life as we deal with others. Living with genuine tolerance, patience and retaining capacity to continue to be loving not only in our actions but in our thoughts is something that can present challenges to our inner reserves every single day.



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John's baptism of repentance is the first step towards being able come closer to the Lord. Our selfish nature can't approach the Lord until those qualities of humility are present; without them the barriers of our own arrogance and self-importance are very real blockages in our relationships with other people and also with the Lord.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ

You took on what it means to be human and know the sense of self, the focus on our own way of seeing the world and the effort it involves for us to be generous, kind and flexible when dealing with others. As we turn to you in the early weeks of another year, may our intentions to do better in the future find real and positive outlets, bringing blessing to others, with humility, generosity and true heavenly love becoming more deeply established within us.

Amen.



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28th January 2024

The presence of the Lord coming into in this physical world opened our readings this month followed by other passages which remind us of the need for our humility and repentance as we grow and learn to see the world through a more spiritual lens.

The sense of life not being fair or predictable is something we recognise easily enough. Christian marriage vows have husband and wife accepting each other ‘for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer and in sickness and in health’. The many uncertainties of life are being acknowledged and the commitment is made with the recognition their combined best efforts may well not be enough to stave off the ‘worse’ and that wealthy and healthy futures are not guaranteed.

Swedenborg speaks of the New Church being established by the Lord and that this Church is seen in **Revelation 21** as the Holy City, the new Jerusalem dressed as a bride for her husband.

Each of us has the potential to be a real part of this process as the church (new Jerusalem) in smallest form is found within individual people. All Divine Goodness and Truth originate in the Lord and reach into this world where human nature receives, but inevitably distorts, the true heavenly qualities. Despite us not being anywhere near perfect the Lord is as close to us as possible, and His love for the human race is often expressed in terms of marriage, which should leave us in no doubt as to His faithful and constant love.

Old Testament prophets regularly speak warnings to the Israelite nation and call for them to be careful about their choices; the breaking of a marriage and people being ‘unfaithful’ to the Lord is very powerfully expressed. Hosea (chapters 1-3) is even told to take ‘an adulterous wife’ and that relationship gives a signal the Israelites are behaving in ways that are going to lead to their defeat and exile. Whatever the Lord does to show loving care then their disloyalty, their worship of other gods and the continual rejection of His ways which the physically broken marriage indicates, will lead to destruction.

Please read **Hosea 3**; it is only 5 verses and in his short work “Prophets and Psalms” Swedenborg confirms that these chapters speak of the destruction of the old church and the beginning of a new. Here the wife is returned to her husband’s care and it is explained below as referencing the time when evil and falsification lead to apparent destruction, but there is still hope and healing in the future.



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They will live for a long time without the truths and goods of the church, but they will become a church from the Lord, when He comes, and will acknowledge Him. The Inner Meaning of The Prophets & Psalms 186

Prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus, help me to be a faithful follower of your Word and look to shape my life according to the teachings and guidance it provides. Draw me closer to you and lead me in the ways of heavenly life now and forever.

Amen.

Revd Christine Bank



4th February 2024

****Article 1: "Embracing New Beginnings: A Harmonious Dance with Change"****

In the intricate tapestry of human existence, we consistently encounter moments of profound transformation, signalling the arrival of new beginnings. The Bible, a timeless repository of divine wisdom, unfolds insights into the concept of embracing change. Ecclesiastes 3:1, a poetic declaration, encapsulates this timeless truth: "For everything, there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." This profound verse acts as a compass, guiding us to recognize the inevitability of change and to embrace the unique opportunities each season presents for growth and transformation.

Delving deeper into the spiritual dimensions of new beginnings, the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg provide a rich tapestry that complements and extends the biblical narrative. Swedenborg's emphasis on spiritual seasons invites individuals into a continuous dance of self-reflection, encouraging an embrace of the cyclical nature of the spiritual journey. Much like the changing seasons in nature, the ebb and flow of our lives carry a divine purpose, resonating with the harmonious interplay of the natural and spiritual realms. Recognizing this interconnectedness, we find that new beginnings are not mere isolated events but a harmonious dance with the rhythms of life.

Embracing new beginnings involves an acknowledgment that change is not only inevitable but also a fundamental aspect of divine design. The Bible unfolds narratives of individuals who experienced profound transformations, emphasizing the idea that, in every change, there lies an opportunity for renewal and a fresh start. Swedenborg's teachings extend this perspective, highlighting the importance of actively engaging in the spiritual seasons of self-reflection and regeneration. Through this harmonious dance with change, we discover that new beginnings are not isolated moments but a continuous, cyclical journey towards spiritual growth.



11th February 2024

****Article 2: "Faith in the Face of Challenges: Navigating the Journey of Transformation"****

Challenges, akin to the crucible of life, act as transformative catalysts, urging us to reevaluate our beliefs and values. Proverbs 3:5-6, an enduring beacon of guidance, beckons us to trust in a higher plan: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." In moments of adversity, faith becomes a guiding light, and the Bible encourages us to trust in the unseen, embracing the inherent transformative power that challenges carry.

Emanuel Swedenborg's profound insights on spiritual regeneration align seamlessly with biblical teachings on facing challenges with faith. His writings delve into the intricate concept that challenges are not mere roadblocks but integral components of our spiritual journey. By maintaining unwavering faith, we navigate these challenges with resilience, recognizing them as opportunities for profound personal transformation. Swedenborg's philosophy expands upon the biblical narrative, offering a nuanced understanding of how challenges can shape and renew our spiritual identity, making each trial a crucible for spiritual metamorphosis.

In the face of challenges, biblical narratives such as the stories of Joseph and Paul offer enduring examples of individuals who faced adversity with unwavering faith. These stories resonate with the universal human experience of confronting trials and tribulations. Swedenborg's writings complement these biblical accounts, emphasizing that challenges, when approached with faith, become stepping stones on the path of regeneration. The journey of transformation requires courage, resilience, and an unwavering trust in the unseen, echoing the profound interplay between faith and challenges in the grand tapestry of spiritual growth.



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18th February 2024

****Article 3: "The Transformative Power of Forgiveness: A Healing Journey"****

Forgiveness, an elemental cornerstone of renewal, is a theme intricately woven into both biblical teachings and our human experience. Matthew 6:14-15 articulates this transformative power: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." This biblical passage emphasizes the reciprocal nature of forgiveness and its transformative impact on our spiritual journey.

The act of forgiveness is a healing journey depicted throughout biblical narratives. The stories of the prodigal son and the woman caught in adultery illustrate the transformative power of forgiveness. Each narrative reflects the human capacity for redemption, highlighting the profound shift that occurs when forgiveness becomes a transformative force. This biblical perspective on forgiveness transcends the act of pardoning others; it becomes a sacred journey of self-discovery and spiritual rebirth.

In alignment with these biblical teachings, the principles of forgiveness are also reflected in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg's insights accentuate the transformative power of forgiveness, not only towards others but also towards oneself. As we liberate ourselves from the shackles of resentment and bitterness, we create a sacred space for spiritual rebirth, aligning our actions with divine principles. This dual perspective reinforces the notion that forgiveness is not merely a mending force for broken relationships but also a catalyst for personal renewal and spiritual growth, unlocking the door to new beginnings.



25th February 2024

****Article 4: "Aligning with Divine Harmony: A Symphony of Spiritual Renewal"****

Proverbs 19:21 offers profound wisdom on aligning with divine guidance: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." This biblical counsel invites us to align our lives with the divine plan, trusting that it leads to a purposeful and fulfilling journey.

Swedenborg's writings echo the sentiment of divine alignment, emphasizing the interconnectedness of our will with the divine will. Surrendering to the divine plan becomes a transformative and participatory act, involving relinquishing our ego-driven desires and embracing a higher purpose. This act ultimately leads to a harmonious symphony of new beginnings in our spiritual journey. The dual perspective reinforces the idea that aligning with the divine plan is not a passive surrender but an active participation in a greater narrative that unfolds with each step on our life's journey.

In the biblical context, the concept of aligning with the divine plan is rooted in the acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and wisdom. Throughout the Bible, individuals who align their lives with God's plan experience profound transformations and a sense of purpose. The stories of Abraham, Moses, and Esther exemplify individuals who, through their obedience and alignment with divine guidance, played integral roles in the unfolding of God's plan.

Swedenborg's teachings expand on this notion, elucidating the idea that aligning with the divine plan is not a one-time event but a continuous, dynamic process. It involves an ongoing commitment to seeking divine guidance, trusting in providence, and actively participating in the co-creation of a harmonious symphony of spiritual renewal. This dual perspective reinforces the idea that aligning with the divine plan is not merely a destination but a continuous journey towards spiritual harmony and renewal.

Revd Robin Wooldridge



HOME WORSHIP - March 24 - WEEK 1 - Rev D Gaffney

SHAKING OFF BAD HABITS

“Now the tax-gatherers and the notorious sinners were everywhere in the habit of coming close to Him to listen to Him.” (Luke 15:1)

The tax collectors were generally unethical and cruel, there were no rules to control them, and Roman soldiers backed them up; they seem to be hated by the general public of the Jewry. The ‘notorious sinners’ were similarly disliked. Perhaps surprisingly then, these ‘sinners’ were coming from all directions to listen to Jesus; they were **‘in the habit’**. This suggests that the ones that came were not happy with themselves and their lives. Many of their habits were no doubt very bad habits but their new habit of ‘coming close’ to Jesus to listen to Him, was obviously a very good habit. I think there may have been much guilt there, probably triggered off by the Lord. John Newton the slave trader turned famous hymn writer (Amazing Grace and others) wrote: ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds’: *‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds, in a believer’s ear! It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear.’* (There isn’t space here to include more than the first verse of the inspiring words but it is worth looking up in context of this address.)

None of us are perfect, we all need Jesus. According to Paul, **‘... all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God.’ (Romans 3:23)** Persistent and intentional offence against God is spiritually dangerous. Once we become aware of offence we need to form a habit of staying close to Jesus. It is not where we are at the moment, but the direction we are moving in, which seems to be the most important thing. Bad habits must eventually be given up, the time scale is often an unknown, but with the Lord’s help, we must keep trying.

When we hear or read about something, and this knowledge is in our heads, then it is only in our ‘external memory.’ It is not until we act upon it that it becomes part of our **life** which means that it is imprinted upon our **will** or our internal memory. It is then a habit and if it is a bad habit, then the more it is repeated the more entrenched it becomes and is taken with us into the afterlife where it is an arduous process to remove it if indeed it can be removed. If we are convinced of the evil of a habit and continue to do it anyway we are in danger of mixing evil with good and this is dangerous profanation. The Writings comment:

‘After we have examined ourselves, acknowledged our sins, and repented of them, we must for the rest of our lives remain constant in our devotion to doing what is good. If instead we backslide into our former evil life and embrace it again, then we commit profanation because we are then joining evil and goodness together. This makes our latter state worse than our former one, according to the Lord’s words: ‘When an unclean spirit goes out of someone, it wanders through dry places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, “I will go back to my house, the



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house I left. " When the spirit comes and finds the house empty, swept, and decorated for it, then it goes and recruits seven other spirits worse than itself, and they come in and live there, and the latter times of that person become worse than the first." (Matthew 12:43, 44, 45) (New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Teachings: Section 169.)

This is the story of an evil spirit which is constantly tempting someone to develop bad habits. The house is our mind. The cleaning of the house and leaving of the spirit is the person trying under their own strength to stop doing the bad habit. So they tidy up their life, but are not strong enough and the spirit comes back as well as others and the person is worse off than before. The Lord has 'put His enemies under His footstool,' which means that He has total knowledge, power and control over every single evil spirit in the universe. He knows intimately who the spirits are who are with us and only He can hold them off from us. This I imagine is a highly complex spiritual business which only He can perform, and it seems to me that He performs these acts with 'surgical precision'; sometimes allowing our minds to be accompanied by 'intermediate spirits' as He, with our co-operation, endeavours to wean us off our bad habit (See AC 4110/2). People who are experienced or practicing these matters may be described in this text from Hebrews: ***"For every one that uses milk is unskilful in the Word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."*** (Hebrews 5:13,14). Where milk refers to parts of the Word which ward off the lighter temptations of our spiritual childhood and meat those scriptures which can help us to repel more stubborn and dangerous temptations, later along the spiritual path.

Prayer: Dear Lord, We know that you will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist. Help us to hold on to you on all our spiritual journeys, even into spiritual maturity, and in all cases to seek your Word and guidance in exchanging our bad habits for good.



HOME WORSHIP 2 - March 24 - WEEK 2 - Rev D Gaffney

CONJUNCTION WITH THE LORD

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.” (Rev 3:20)

There is a famous painting by Holman Hunt which I believe is based around this quote. It is called “The Light of the World.” I’m intrigued by the weeds which are growing up the door on which the Lord is knocking; these are not in the scripture quote, but clearly, the path is not well trodden, and this speaks to us about our general reluctance to open our own doors and receive the Lord.

It seems to me that this is one of those quotations which are a great levellers. We all need to do it if we want to have a relationship with the Lord and grow in spiritual stature of love and wisdom. Whether we are kings, queens or paupers; this quotation puts us all on an equal footing of humility before our Lord the Almighty the King of Creation; with equal opportunity to regenerate within His presence and guidance into becoming angels of heaven.

Here I am, means that He is here, waiting in anticipation for our response. To sit, stand and walk (see Psalm 1) in the Word means being in His ‘will,’ ‘understanding’ and ‘action’ respectively. For the Lord to be ‘standing’ means He is eternal readiness that we should be saved. ‘At the door’ means the entrance to our minds. ‘Knocking’ means He is perpetually seeking our attention whilst still leaving us in freedom. To ‘hear His voice’ is for us to read His Word, and to ‘open the door’ means for us to live in accordance with its instructions. To ‘come in’ means a perpetual process of conjunction - He in us and we in Him. And ‘to eat with us and us with Him’ means to appropriate to ourselves His Goodness in our hearts by living out the instruction of his Word. becoming good hearted and wise. Con-junction means He is joined to us and we are joined to Him.*

The story around Nicodemus, the Jewish leader portrayed in John 3:1-15, seems to have close connections with this theme. In this passage, Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order for him to have eternal life, he must be born again of water and the Spirit. Where water means the Truths of scripture and the Spirit means the Holy Spirit which inspires the genuine searcher of the scriptures as to its true meaning.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you are the source of Life, of everything Loving and Wise, may we be constantly aware of your presence with us, you are always there, our co-operation with your Word allows us to see you. May we may take up your invitation to listen and hear your voice and to open the door by prayerfully reading your scriptures and living in accordance with them. Amen

* *It is worth noting for those who require to analyse these things, that **Conjunction** is not the same as **Union**. The Lord’s Human (Son) enjoyed complete Union with*



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*the Divine Soul (Father) within Himself at the resurrection so that God is One. We 'only' have conjunction with the risen Lord, we will forever be His creatures, His Creation; we can **never** be Divine beings. There is only one Divine Being - the Lord by whom all things are made. (The idea that human beings are 'divine sparks' is contrary to 'New Church' belief, it is a 'New Age' belief which undermines the New Church.)*



HOME WORSHIP - March 24 - WEEK 3 - Rev D Gaffney

IF IN DOUBT DON'T DO IT!

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (MATTHEW 5: 19, 20)

Just before this quote in Matthew, Jesus had told His disciples that He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil them. Later in Matt 18:1-4 the disciples ask Him which of them will be greatest in the Kingdom of heaven; to which he replied “... those who are like little children.” The disciples as well as most people in those days did not understand ‘spiritual’ development. They generally considered status in terms of material wealth, influence and power. The heavenly quality which the Lord talks about as compared to little children is **innocence**. Innocence in adults, can be defined in terms of humility before the Lord, and goodness stemming from a knowledge of the Truths of the Word; with innocents not comparing their companions at all as being better or worse than themselves. If the angels, were asked to compare other angels to themselves as being more important or less important, I would imagine, the question plunge their minds into deep puzzlement!

The heavens are layered one above another: celestial, spiritual and natural. Although this gives the idea of a hierarchy of importance, it isn't; because every layer would be useless without the others, like links in a chain. And this chain spans the distance between the intermediate spiritual world and the Lord Himself in His Spiritual Sun. The Celestial Angels Love the Lord above all things and the Spiritual Angels love the Neighbour, and the Natural Angels love good works, and within each layer there are myriads of angels all with unique uses. Each angel has their **ruling love** and their uses spring from these. So every angel throughout all levels is of equal importance; they are all angels who are constantly living out their ruling loves.

On this basis, I find it a bit puzzling as to why the Lord uses the terms ‘least’ and ‘greatest’ in the kingdom of heaven in our quotation Mtt 5:19. I can only think that it is because he had not yet introduced them to the concept that greatness equates to innocence (Matt 18:1-4). Guile and corruption are the opposites of innocence and these stem from love of self and worldly things. “So as long a people live in this world, they are kept mid-way between heaven and hell. This is spiritual equilibrium or free will” (Swed True Christian Religion Nos. 475-8). This free will provides a choice between opposites: Love of the Lord and the neighbour vs love of self and the world: Heaven and Hell. Hell is a reality, without it no **free will** to **choose** to love God could exist.



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The Lord wrote the Law and the Prophets through Moses and the prophets. Most were about equitable behaviour towards our neighbour, and love and respect for the Lord and His wonderful creation: the universe, the propagation of the human race, and the angelic heavens. For heavenly life, all the Laws and Commandments about human behaviour towards each other and the Lord, must be obeyed either immediately or eventually. But if eventually, then we need to be moving in that direction immediately that the realisation is present with us. **There is an old saying: “If in doubt, don’t!” it being far better to err on the side of caution.** Hell is for a long time: eternity! I hesitate to use the word ‘Hell’ in this day and age, but it is as intrinsic a part of reality as Heaven is, and I think that at our peril, we tend to brush it under the carpet too much in these hedonistic, self-referential, postmodern times.

There are many of us who have deeply entrenched habits of all kinds which militate against the Lord’s Creation of the human race and the angelic heavens. However, if the **RULING LOVE** is good then I believe the Writings are telling us that those people *will* end up in heaven at the end of the day, and any remnants of these habits will be removed in the intermediate spiritual world by difficult if not traumatic spiritual/angelic counselling.

To break the commandments privately is one thing, but “*to teach men so*” is even more dangerous others and for our own spirits. Human feelings cannot be relied upon; the Word alone is reliable because it is from the Lord the Creator.

It would appear that the primary fault of the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law was hypocrisy; do as I say but not as I do. (See Swed., Doctrine of Life No. 84)

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to be honest and to try to live your teachings. Help us to identify any iniquity within ourselves which may lead us to falsely teach your Word. Amen



HOME WORSHIP - March 24 - WEEK 4 - Rev D Gaffney

THREE DEGREES OF MURDER

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” (Mtt 5:21,22)

The Israelites had received the Divine command, “You shall not murder,” and because they were generally externally minded people, had understood that it prohibited only the act of actual physical murder. But the Lord here teaches his disciples that this law was designed to prohibit not only the physical act of murder, but the emotions which can lead to it. Evils are made worse to the extent that they confirm a rejection of their opposite good or charity, and have disregard or even hatred for the Divine Law, which always encourages charity.

The use of the word **brother** in our text means charity, because charity, or mutual love, is the principle of brotherliness. To be angry with a brother without good cause is contrary to charity. However, I would imagine that few people exist in the world who are so perfect that they never say or do anything calculated to give offence. Fortunately, for most of us anger may soon change into regret. It is only when the anger we have momentarily held in our hearts is cherished and admired within us that we have a serious problem; which can go on to develop into desire for revenge. To the extent that these bad feelings pass away with the moment they are not necessarily incompatible with charity. If directed against evil, rather than against the person, it is called zeal. This is really zeal for good, of the kind our Lord displayed when He overturned the money lender’s tables in the temple courtyard. However if the heart cherishes the anger of uncharitableness, it exposes the soul to the same condemnation that the Divine Truth has decreed against physical murder.

If someone says, ‘raca’ to his brother it seems he is calling him ‘worthless’ and as a brother represents charity then charity is being called worthless. This is clearly a serious misdemeanour. The ‘judgement’ referred to is probably the Supreme Council who dished out the death penalty for very serious crimes. But the inference is also that this is an understanding issue which may be curable by interrogation. Such is the severity in the Lord’s eyes of calling charity itself worthless.

It would appear that the word ‘fool,’ occurs frequently in scripture and means, unlike today, obstinately wicked. To call your brother (who represents charity) worthless, is one thing, but to call him ‘wicked’ is another level of depravity. This represents a malignant opposition to charity in the deepest depths of the human will. This sees evil as good and good as evil and goes hand in hand of a life of internal torment and agitation both in this life and the next which is called Hell.



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Love to the Lord and charity to the neighbour then must become the primary aim of the Christian.

Prayer: Dear Lord: Give us a fresh understanding, of brotherly love that Is real, let there be love shared among us. Let there be Love. Amen (From the chorus Let there be love)



HOME WORSHIP 5 - March 24 - WEEK 5 - Rev D Gaffney

GIFTS AT THE ALTAR – RECONCILIATION

23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5: 23,24)

The Lord, the Divine Teacher now strongly warns his disciples of the need of looking into their own hearts, to see if anything inconsistent with the most genuine charity is lurking there. Personally, I would perhaps define charity for this purpose as, **“... the desire in the heart that your neighbour should enter heaven ...”** This is an overall meaning and covers all eventualities.

To bring our gift to the altar is to offer the Lord our esteem and adulation through prayer and praise, which should proceed from our affections of love to Him and charity towards our neighbour.

A brother, in the Word represents charity which should reign in the hearts of all mankind, and especially in the hearts of the members of the Lord's church, towards each other; being all the children of our Almighty Father, and all, designed for the same eternal end which is heaven. But most specifically *for Christians*, our brothers who have been born again of their heavenly Father, through the reception of his divine truth from His Word.

To remember, then, at the altar, that our brother has anything against us, is to be made conscious, when before the Lord, and reviewing our state by the light of heaven, that something contrary to charity may be possessing our minds and influencing our practice. We cannot be in a state to offer acceptable worship to the Lord so long as we cherish any malignant feeling towards any one. It is often difficult to be honest with ourselves about our feelings towards a person when they have caused us significant annoyance; or for us to analyse what is going on in our hearts and minds. But I find it helpful to ask myself the question: “... do I want this person to enter heaven ...” If the answer is yes, and it should be, then we would seem to have charity for that person. So the next question might be: what single thing can I do to help them on their way? In process of this, we must meditate on the Divine will and Word; and allow the light of divine truth to discover ourselves and any selfishness within us; and therefore, leaving our gift before the altar. That is, still having our minds directed, with devotional feelings, to the Lord, and looking to him for help, we must go his way, and be reconciled to our brother.

Prayer: Dear Lord, In times of challenge and strain help us to constantly and prayerfully turn to You in your Holy Word, seeking guidance as to how best to help those who we perceive are persecuting us. Amen