



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Home Worship for July 2025

Week 1 (Sunday 6th July): Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31

“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)

This verse is usually used to justify heterosexual marriage, which is great. However there is a layer of meaning, that Swedenborg teaches, that isn’t often mentioned.

I think the Western world is re-assessing its opinions on being ‘woke’. Rather than being totally gender-inclusive, I wonder whether we, as a society, are becoming more gender critical, and questioning whether those born male should participate in women’s sports, or use women’s changing rooms, and so on. Some of us were taught to believe that a man can become a woman and a woman can become a man, just through surgery and hormone treatment. If people want to believe that that’s fine. However, there are people who are unconvinced by the belief. I would much rather focus on spirituality than gender, because this brings people together.

Each of us strives to be awake to the LORD’s guidance. We don’t want to be ignorant, or ill-informed, but open to being enlightened about issues facing our world. (*Secrets of Heaven* §3717; *Apocalypse Explained* §187) We want to value and prioritise other people’s spirituality, rather than their perceived gender, or what they appear to be on the outside, or how they identify themselves. We want to receive “spiritual life”: a compassionate, empathetic appreciation of the LORD working in other people’s lives. We want to encourage kindness in everyone. The LORD “is present in those kinds of people”, within their heart-values (*Secrets of Heaven* §§4959; 5067) namely whenever people are desiring greater self-knowledge or deeper experiences of love, blessedness and happiness from the LORD. (*Secrets of Heaven* §§5064; 5069) “When therefore the Lord is acknowledged and the neighbour is loved, the Lord is present within the love towards the neighbour, however unaware the person may be of it.” (*Secrets of Heaven* §10129:10; cf. *Apocalypse Explained* §746:9)

Part of becoming ‘awake’ is to hate or leave our father and mother behind, and receive a hundredfold and eternal life. We have to hate ourselves as well! (*Secrets of Heaven* §3703:20-21; *Matthew* 19:29; *Luke* 18:29-30; *Mark* 10:29-30; *Luke* 14:26-27, 33) We have to be continually on our guard, just in case our inherited religion is in fact incorrect and limiting. (*Apocalypse Explained* §§710:26; 724:5) The angelic part of us will be perfecting till eternity. We need to be cautiously progressive awaiting inspiration from the LORD, to see whether we can develop a more nuanced position or not. Humble self-reflection and open-mindedness is healthy and heavenly.

Prayer: LORD Jesus, continue to give us humility and self-awareness, as we weigh up how you want us to regard current social issues. Help us to continue to examine what we were brought up to believe as true, against your teachings in the Word and the Writings for the New Church. Help us to listen with our heart, when a new situation challenges us. Grant us calmness and thoughtfulness when we experience a dogmatic viewpoint. Inspire us with gentleness and kindness, whenever we become dogmatic. AMEN.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Week 2 (Sunday 13th July): Times of Transition (Psalm 46)

As a teacher of 25 years – 22 years in England – July was always the end of the school year. (It's December in Australia!) Yes, we would have concerts and the dreaded Sports Day, because I usually ended up on 'crowd control' and keeping excluded children from spoiling the day. The learners – you can't call them 'pupils' any more – were eager to find out who their new teachers were, and which members of staff were leaving.

The only constant in our life is our LORD himself. As Psalm 46 verse 10 suggests we need to find moments of quiet to be with the LORD: "Be still and know that I am God". He brings peace to our troubled minds. How easily we forget he is deep within us and never leaves us. How easily we forget there is a continual stream of inspiration flowing inside us. "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." (*John 7:38*) Our LORD Jesus gives us "living water": "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." (*John 4:14*) Psalm 46 and others passages in the Bible, remind us of the LORD's cool, calming influence helping us resolve our inner turmoil.

Prayer: LORD Jesus, you refresh our hearts and minds with the living water of new ideas and perspectives. From within us flow amazing, uplifting insights, which surprise us, challenge us and renew us. We come alive and are humbled, at how honoured we are that you are present and active in our lives. We thank you for helping us to see through the delusions that demons inspire in our minds. Such demons only spread 'fake news' and distorted versions of reality. You, however, show us authenticity, transparency and ways to be genuine. AMEN

Week 3 (Sunday 20th July): Jeremiah 1:1-10

26th of July is the anniversary of my ordination 36 years ago. I feel all of us are called by the LORD to do something, whatever our occupation, whatever the roles we have in our families. My love for the church's teachings began when I read *Heaven and Hell* at the age of 14! I firmly believe in serving people. "43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (*Mark 10:43-45*) I was impressed with Pope Francis' dedication to humble service, as I am with Pope Leo XIV.

Loving our neighbour, or loving our neighbour more than others, as the angels do, is reflected in some of my favourite hymns. "Will you come and follow me if I but call your name" set to the Scottish tune Kelvingrove and written by two Church of Scotland ministers. "I, the Lord, of sea and sky" by Father Dan Schutte, also talks of accepting a call from the LORD. Bob Gilman's "Brother, Sister, let me serve you" is yet another hymn that means a lot to me.

What hymns or readings from the Bible inspire you to be humble?

Prayer: LORD Jesus, our Heavenly Father, we are unworthy slaves without your influence and guidance. It is only the virtues which we receive from you, which make us Christians or angels. We love being your servants and ministering to other people. We enjoy being your mouthpiece and hands amongst our family and friends. We are humbled and amazed when we receive a great idea from you. AMEN.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Week 4 (Sunday 27th July)

Marriage

Isaiah 54:1-8

29th July is our wedding anniversary and this year it is our 36th! I still very much believe that I am a better person for being married. Each married person is involved in three marriages!: being married to our spouse, our individual hearts and minds being married or productively interconnected, and being married to the LORD.

The Old (and New) Testament talks of being betrothed or married to the LORD: “For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.” (*Isaiah 54:5; cf. Isaiah 62:4-5; Jeremiah 3:14; 31:32; Hosea 2:7, 16*) We have a special, reciprocal relationship with the LORD. We are his partner in sharing his “light” to the world. “You in your small corner and I in mine” as the Children’s Hymn “Jesus bids us shine” tells us. Jesus said, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (*Matthew 5: 14,16*)

“Since a servant therefore means someone who teaches Divine truth, it is apparent that servants in this place in the book of Revelation mean people who possess truths arising from goodness, or faith arising from charity, because they are able to teach from the Lord, that is to say, because the Lord is able to teach and minister through them.” (*Apocalypse Revealed 3:3 [Rogers]*)

I love that phrase “the Lord is able to teach and minister through them”! It is our marriage to the LORD, that is spoken about in: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” (*Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34-35*) Some Christians interpret these verses to mean that we are genderless, singletons in the after-life. Thankfully Swedenborg explains that if we have developed a partnership with the LORD during this life, in whatever form, we will continue it in the after-life like the angels. We will all find an eternal partner with the LORD’s help. Some of us have already found them!

Prayer: LORD Jesus the Messiah, you are our bridegroom and husband. We are your bride and wife, depending on the state of our spirituality. We want to be your partners and co-creators. We want to bring your heavenly rule into what we say and what we do. Continue to help us be faithful to your commandments and your promptings. AMEN.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

HOME WORSHIP - AUGUST 2025 - Rev D Gaffney

WEEK 1 – Who is 'I AM' and how does the I AM in Exodus relate to the 'I am' in John?

The statement "I AM" in Exodus and the "I am" statements in the Gospel of John are deeply connected in New Christian theology, both indicating the Divine presence and identity of the Lord. In [Exodus 3:14](#), when Moses asks God for His name at the burning bush, God replies, "I AM WHO I AM." He tells Moses to say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you." This phrase in Hebrew, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh," can be understood as "He who is," or "Being itself." According to New Christian teaching, this reveals the Lord's Divine essence as eternal, self-existent Being: the one who is, who was, and who will be—the very origin of all that exists ([Arcana Coelestia 8724](#)). He has never been created; He always was and simply IS.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes several "I am" statements, such as "I am the bread of life" ([John 6:35](#)), "I am the light of the world" ([John 8:12](#)), "I am the way, the truth, and the life" ([John 14:6](#)), and most significantly, "Before Abraham was, I am" ([John 8:58](#)). In the last example, Jesus is not merely speaking about His existence before Abraham but is directly connecting Himself to the Divine name revealed in Exodus. The Jews who heard this recognised the reference and reacted strongly, understanding that Jesus was claiming divinity.

The Writings for the New Christian Church explain that the Lord's declaration "I AM" denotes Divine Being (Esse): the inmost reality from which all things come, and in which all things continue to exist. In His life on earth, Jesus, who was Divine Truth (the Word made flesh), united Himself with His own Divine Good (the Father), and so His "I am" statements are the voice of God Himself now present in the Human ([Arcana Coelestia 8724](#)). This is also mirrored in [John 14:6](#) ("I am the way, the truth, and the life") and [John 15:4–5](#) ("I am the vine"), where the Lord emphasises that all spiritual life flows from remaining connected to Him as the True Vine, since all good and truth originate in the Lord alone ([Arcana Coelestia 10773](#)).

In summary: The "I AM" of Exodus reveals God's eternal, self-existent Divine Being. The "I am" statements in John show that the Lord Jesus Christ is that same Divine Being, now present in the Human, making Himself known to people in a more direct and intimately accessible way. The Lord in Jesus unites Divine Being and Divine Human, fulfilling what was foretold in Exodus and revealed in fullness in the New Testament ([Arcana Coelestia 8724, 10773; John 8:58; Exodus 3:14](#)).

The 'I am's' mentioned here seem to describe the six stages of regeneration and the seventh stage of peace in the Sabbath. These are described in order throughout the book of John. In the following three weeks of this month, I shall briefly describe the first, fourth, and Sabbath days. To deal with all seven will require further work. However, there is an excellent booklet, entitled "I AM," written in 1990 by Rev Ian A Arnold of the New Church in Australia: ISBN 0 7316 9314 0.

Prayer: Risen Lord Jesus, You are the source of life in us; You are Life itself. Help us to read Your word and live by it. Help us to resist temptations which would lead us astray. Protect us from all thoughts and actions that might militate against Your creative design for mankind. Help us to become branches attached to You as the Vine. Amen



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

WEEK 2: I am the Bread of Life. (Please read John Chapter 6.)

(An introductory note on 'remains': During the very earliest stages of life, even as babies, the Lord flows into us with feelings of safety, love, goodness, and innocence. Every person receives these in some way. These are called "remains" because they remain with us, and it is from these that we search for divine truths as we grow, so that we can do good ourselves and form good hearts. Good in the heart is the essence of the "bread of life." Remains continue to build up throughout our lives as we search out truth and live it, and we must be very careful not to profane them—that is, not to knowingly act against them.)

In John chapter 6, Jesus proclaims, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" ([John 6:35](#)). This statement conveys the central theme of spiritual nourishment and eternal life provided through the Lord. Throughout the Bible, "bread" represents not only physical sustenance—as seen with the manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you'" ([Exodus 16:4](#))—but also points to spiritual nourishment, the goodness and truth from the Lord which sustains the soul. The bread's use in Passover and, later, the Holy Supper underscores this symbolism, demonstrating God's perpetual sustenance of His people. Bread represents Divine Goodness.

Within the context of [John 6](#), Jesus had just miraculously fed a multitude with five loaves and two fish, yet the crowd's focus remained fixed on material needs. Jesus redirects their attention, urging them, "Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you" ([John 6:27](#)). Declaring Himself the "bread of life," Jesus signifies that His teachings, love, and presence provide the ultimate fulfilment—the spiritual sustenance that grants eternal life, far surpassing physical bread which only satisfies temporarily.

This journey from physical to spiritual meaning opens the discourse to a deeper understanding, grounded in New Christian teachings, especially the notion of "remains." Remains are described as "all the states of innocence, charity, and mercy, with their accompanying truths, which a person has ever received from the Lord and stored up in the interior man" ([Arcana Coelestia 561](#)). "Remains are goods and truths stored up by the Lord in a person from infancy to the end of life" ([Arcana Coelestia 5894](#)). These spiritual goods are preserved by the Lord as a foundation for all spiritual growth and regeneration.

Jesus' invitation to "eat" the bread of life is thus an invitation for an inner reception of His divine goodness and truth—formally described in New Christian teachings as living in conjunction with the Lord through faith and charity, or truth and good. "To eat the bread, in the spiritual sense, is to appropriate to oneself the good of love and charity from the Lord" ([True Christian Religion 703](#), where the Lord's flesh and blood represent goodness and truth). "The Holy Supper represents the conjunction of the Lord with the church, and thus the conjoining of good and truth, for this constitutes the church" ([True Christian Religion 707](#)). Spiritual nourishment is the process of receiving divine life, which revitalises and elevates our inner being, especially during times of temptation or spiritual struggle.

Crucially, the ability to receive this spiritual "bread" depends on the presence of remains within us. These remains function as vessels that allow us to be nourished by the Lord and respond to His divine life. "Without remains there is no spiritual life; ... remains are the means by which the Lord operates" ([Arcana Coelestia 635](#)). Thus, the bread of life symbolises the Lord's divine love and wisdom, offered continually for our eternal good. The remains preserved in each person make it possible to receive this nourishment, be spiritually alive, and ultimately be conjoined with the Lord to eternity: "It is the spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" ([John 6:63](#); see also [Arcana Coelestia 5894](#); [True Christian Religion 703, 707](#)).

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, we give You thanks for sustaining our bodies with daily bread. Help us all to fulfil our heavenly potential by seeking truths from Your Word and doing good from them, which is bread for our souls. Amen

WEEK 3: I am the Good Shepherd

When Jesus says in [John 10:11](#) and [10:14](#), "I am the good shepherd," He is revealing a deep spiritual truth about His relationship to the people who follow Him. In the literal sense, Jesus is describing Himself as one who cares for and protects His followers, just as a good shepherd cares for and protects his sheep ([John 10:11, 14](#)).

According to New Christian teachings, the deeper meaning of this statement is found in the correspondence between a shepherd and the Lord. In the Word, the church is often called a flock, and those within the church are called sheep and lambs. The Lord alone is the true Shepherd; He is the one who leads, teaches, and guides people to what is good, out of Divine love and through Divine wisdom. To "shepherd" in the spiritual sense means to teach and lead others to a life of charity and love, and thus to the Lord Himself ([Apocalypse Revealed 383, Arcana Coelestia 343](#)).

The "good shepherd" is contrasted with a hired hand, who does not own the sheep and flees at danger. Only the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, meaning the Lord's total love and self-giving for humanity, especially through His glorification and passion. This self-giving is not just an act in history but represents the Lord's constant care, presence, and guidance in the spiritual life of every individual who follows His voice (His Word).

The sheep recognize the shepherd's voice and follow Him. Spiritually, this means that those who are conjoined with the Lord through love and faith listen to His teachings—that is, His commandments—and live according to them ([John 10:27, Apocalypse Revealed 621](#)). This creates a bond: the Lord knows His own, and they know Him—a relationship of mutual love and understanding.

In [John 14](#), while the explicit phrase "good shepherd" does not appear, the same theme is echoed when the Lord speaks of keeping His commandments as a sign of love, and of coming to abide with those who do so. This further connects the idea that the Lord's shepherding, His care and guidance, is active wherever people live by His truth, which leads to goodness and heavenly life ([John 14:20-23, Apocalypse Revealed 621](#)).

In summary: The "good shepherd" is the Lord alone, who out of Divine love guides, teaches, and leads His "flock" (all people willing to follow Him) to genuine good and life. Being a sheep of the good shepherd means living by charity and truth, following His voice—His teachings—especially the commandment to love (note: loving is not necessarily giving people what they want; often it is encouraging abstinence). The Lord's shepherding is not just external protection, but an internal leading towards heavenly good, conjoining us with His Divine life ([John 10:11, 14; Arcana Coelestia 343; Apocalypse Revealed 383, 621; John 14:20-23](#)). Thus, "I am the good shepherd" expresses both the Lord's love and His Divine guidance for all who are willing to receive and live by it.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help and guide us to hear Your voice in Your Word, and follow it. Amen



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

WEEK 4: I am the True Vine

In [John 15:1](#), Jesus declares, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the farmer.” This metaphor, found at the opening of a longer passage, is deeply significant in both its literal and spiritual senses.

In the literal sense, Jesus is drawing on the imagery of the vineyard, a symbol often used in the Old Testament for the people of Israel, as seen in passages such as [Isaiah 5:1-2](#). By claiming to be the true vine, Jesus is presenting Himself as the genuine source of spiritual life, not simply as any external or merely representative connection with God.

The vine represents the Lord Himself, who is the source of spiritual nourishment and life. The branches are people connected to the Lord through faith and love. The Father as the farmer (or vinedresser) signifies Divine Providence, caring for and nurturing the growth of all who are part of the Lord’s church. Just as a vine supplies sap to its branches, so the Lord imparts spiritual life to His people. Without remaining connected to the vine, the branches cannot bear fruit. Likewise, people apart from the Lord can do nothing genuinely good; all true good and spiritual vitality come from Him ([The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem 29](#); [John 15:4-5](#)).

In the New Christian Church, understanding the internal sense further explains this: Fruit represents good works and a life according to God’s commandments, brought forth by the Lord’s presence within a person. The Lord provides the means and power to live a good life, and people must remain ‘in Him’—that is, in a state of loving and following the Lord’s teachings. If any person fails to live according to these truths, they become like a branch that withers and is removed, meaning that spiritual life departs ([Heaven and Hell 11](#)).

Additionally, being called the true vine indicates that the church, or spiritual community that follows the Lord, draws its truth and vitality from Him. The truths of the Word, and the life they inspire, are what enable the church and its members to bear fruit ([True Christian Religion 708](#)).

In summary: [John 15:1](#) establishes the Lord Jesus Christ as the only genuine source of spiritual life and goodness. Those who remain united with Him—through love, truth, and obedience—receive His life and can bear true spiritual fruit, while those who separate themselves cannot flourish spiritually ([John 15:1-6](#); [The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem 29](#); [Heaven and Hell 11](#); [True Christian Religion 708](#)).

Being a true branch on the True Vine is also to reach the ‘seventh day’ of creation; fully connected to everything the Lord has to give us—the Sabbath Day for ever.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your constant love and wisdom, goodness and truth, which are always available. Help us to become firmly ‘grafted’ onto You, so that we may continuously produce fruit. The more firmly attached to You we are, the more peaceful we become. Amen

Related note: A related point is that, while the New Church Writings do not explicitly state that the seven days of creation in Genesis and the seven “I am’s” in John represent the same system of spiritual regeneration, there are clear relationships when we examine their correspondences. It is also plausible that the seven colours of the rainbow connect with these patterns, though the Bible does not specify the colours of the rainbow in [Genesis 9](#) or in [Revelation 4](#) and 10. Likewise, the colour spectrum known from natural science is not detailed in scripture, though various individual colours are mentioned, and these can be seen to correspond to spiritual states—much like the “I am’s.” This is a subject worthy of deeper reflection.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Home Worship for September 2025

Revd Becky Jarratt

7th September

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.”

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

The “Epistles” are letters written by the apostle Paul and other early Christian leaders during the first century AD. They were written to the earliest Christian churches and contain material to instruct, encourage and nurture the followers of Jesus. As these letters are not part of the New Church canon, readers may be less familiar with them than with other parts of the Bible. Swedenborg called them “good books of the church”, and there is much teaching in them that resonates with Swedenborg’s own doctrine. This month we will look at parts of four different letters.

Corinth was a busy, cosmopolitan city which was dominated by the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The new Christian church was made up of a mixture of races and social classes. There were some Jews and lots of Gentiles, many of whom had converted from permissive pagan backgrounds. Some did not want to let this lifestyle go, and Paul was trying to tackle some of these problems in his letters to this church. In this particular passage, we can read of how Paul wished to tackle the lack of unity among the members, and the belief of some that their particular gifts were more important than those of others.

1 Corinthians 12 seems to fit particularly well with the Swedenborgian concept of the Grand Man, or the Universal Human. He tells us that the heavens are organised like a human body, and every part corresponds to some aspect of human life. The heavens function together in the way that a human body does, with each community of angels corresponding to a different organ or function within this Universal Human. We know that in our own bodies, practically every part has a unique and individual role, just as the different communities that make up the heavens all have a crucial purpose and function.

These different communities relate to different parts of the body. An example of this is communities that correspond to the heart are related to love, with those corresponding to the lungs relating to wisdom and understanding.

In Divine Love and Wisdom 328 we can read:

“By this ‘human’ to whom useful functions relate, I mean not only an individual but also groups of people and smaller and larger communities such as republics and monarchies and empires and even that largest community that comprises the whole world, since all of these are human. So too in the heavens the whole angelic heaven is like a single individual in the Lord’s sight, and so is each individual community of heaven. This is why each individual angel is human.”

Just like those living in Corinth, we all have a place and a purpose, both in our lives in this world and in the next. We may find it hard to know what the Lord wishes us to do, but we can be reassured



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

that He knows and is gently leading us there throughout our lives. We are all needed and important. Each one of us is unique and has our own use, our way of being helpful to those around us. Remembering that the Lord has given each one of us gifts that we can use and share for the benefit of others, no matter how insignificant we may feel they are, is part of our spiritual development. And remembering that others also have important gifts, even if we struggle to see what they are, helps to keep us in the humility our Lord asks of us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you giving us fresh perspectives on teachings. We thank You for the knowledge that there is a place and function for every one of us in Your heavenly kingdom. We ask You to give us the ability and desire to apply these nuggets of wisdom that we might grow in You and in Your Word and in the lives of others. Amen

14th September “...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

Read Ephesians 6:10-18

“Ephesians” is another “epistle” or “letter” written by the apostle Paul to a group of early Christians. It is a circular letter to a group of churches in what is now western Turkey. Ephesus was the most important of these churches. Paul wrote this letter to the people of Ephesus while he was in prison. This was a time when there was struggle against rulers and authorities, something that is perhaps reflected in our world right now.

The notion of “the devil’s schemes” is an interesting one. In the teachings of the New Church “the Devil” refers to a collective of evil spirits in hell, all of whom were once human beings. These spirits led lives of hatred, revenge, and adultery when they lived in the world. Angels and spirits are around us all of the time, wanting to influence our decision-making. The “schemes of the devil” most likely involve those negative spirits who wish to draw us away from heavenly thinking. In this reading, we are encouraged to use the protection the Lord has given us to be more open to the angelic influences, rather than the hellish ones.

There are some clear correspondences in this passage. We can read about swords in Apocalypse Revealed 52:

“Swords are often mentioned in the Word, and they symbolise nothing else than truth combating falsities and destroying them. In an opposite sense they also symbolise falsity combating truths. For wars in the Word symbolise spiritual wars, which are those of truth against falsity, and of falsity against truth. Therefore the weapons of war symbolise the means by which the combat is carried on in these wars.”



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

In layman's terms, we can understand a sword to be to do with integrity – following a moral or ethical code. A shield corresponds to protection from evil and falsity, and it also symbolises trust in the Lord's protection. The shadow side of this is that we, or our “enemies”, can use a shield to defend evils and falsities that we may believe to be true.

Spiritual battles are the internal struggles we face in our spiritual journey. These battles are not physical but are fought within our minds and hearts. They involve a conflict between what is good and true, which comes from the Lord and the Word, and what is evil and false, which comes from our lower, self-centred nature.

And why might we encounter attacks from the hells? One answer is that those of us who are seeking to become closer to the Lord are more likely to come under attack, because the hells would have no need to attack one of their own. This a comforting suggestion because the implication is that we are doing enough good to warrant an attack.

Some challenges may be very small, such as deciding whether to tell the truth or a “white lie”. In these cases, we may not be aware that we are being tested by negative spirits. At other times in our lives, we may feel the full force of attack, when our understanding of truth is challenged. When we have the sensation of feeling our beliefs are being called into question, we can put on the armour of God and through this, He will provide protection from evil and falsity and lead us back into the light.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we ask for Your continued guidance and protection. Strengthen our faith and help us to trust in Your promises. Equip us with the courage to face challenges ahead and to share Your love with others. May Your armour, which surpasses all our understanding, guard our hearts and minds. Amen.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

21st September

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Read James 2:14-26

The writer of this letter is thought to be James, the half-brother of Jesus – his parents were Mary and Joseph. He was an early Christian, and his letters are like an “address” or sermon. It is not clear precisely to whom they were written, but they were in a style that would be acceptable to both Jewish Christians as well as Christians of all nations. James uses parallels to Jesus’ teaching, particularly the Sermon on the Mount.

In our reading today, we read about “deeds” or “works”, depending on which version of the Bible we have access to. We may like to think of “deeds” as actions or uses. They refer to the actions we take in our daily lives that reflect our faith and love. They are the practical expressions of our beliefs and values. This is how our faith comes to life.

There are aspects of this reading that fit very well with Swedenborgian thought. In True Christian Religion 387:3 we hear about how love and wisdom are abstractions until they are put to use. Let’s read the following passage:

“It is much the same with charity, faith and deeds. Charity without faith is nothing, nor is faith without charity, nor are charity and faith without deeds; but in deeds they are something, and the nature of that something is determined by the use the deeds serve. It is much the same with affection, thought and performance; and it is much the same with will, understanding and action. For will without understanding is like the eye without the power of sight, and either of them without action is like the mind without the body. The truth of this can be clearly seen in this temple, because the light we enjoy here is the light which enlightens the interiors of the mind.”

We can easily supplement the words “love, wisdom and use” for “charity, faith and deeds” if it helps us to understand the passage above. We are really thinking about the same concept. Some people describe it as heart, head and hands. We need all three to be truly productive.

Let’s think about how we can apply this to our own lives. Deeds are about our motivations and intentions, not just on how we present ourselves to the outside world. Our intentions need to be about being of use, rather than of what others will think of us. So, we can help someone without anyone else knowing. We can be involved in charity work, or helping at our local church. We can listen to someone who has a need to be heard.

The Lord knows our intentions. What other people think of us need not be our top priority. In fact, doing some of these things without thinking of the “reward” we would have if others knew makes them more valuable to our personal development.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

And once we start putting our beliefs into action, they become real. They become part of who we are. After a while, we may even stop thinking about them and just be useful because we know it is the right thing to do. This is what the Lord wants from us, and following this path helps us to become closer in our relationship to Him.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for Your inspiration. Over the coming week, help us to remember that it is not enough just to believe in You – we need to put our faith into action. Help us to see the reminders that You give us: the little nudges we receive on a daily basis to help us make Your truths our own. Amen.

28th September

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.”

Read Malachi 3:1-5 and 1 Peter 1:3-9

This week we will hear about a passage from a minor prophet and also from another of the Epistles. Malachi is a short book was written around the time Nehemiah became Jerusalem’s governor, or, perhaps, during his absence. It was a time of great challenge – people had become disillusioned because the prophecies of the prosperity people would receive if they followed the Lord’s teachings, promised by the prophet Haggai, had not materialised, and neither had the predictions of Zechariah that the messianic king would arrive and order would be restored.

The letter of 1 Peter was written by the apostle of Jesus, Simon Peter. Peter became the leader of the new Christian church and we can read in Acts 2 that he was the first to share the glad tidings that Jesus had risen from the dead. The time that Peter wrote this letter to scattered groups of Christians in five Roman provinces was also a time of difficulty for those living through it. Peter and his companions were most likely living in Rome, where they were persecuted because of their beliefs. He knew that this persecution would continue throughout the empire, so wanted to encourage the Christians in their newfound faith.

Both passages speak of metal being “refined in the fire” in some way. This concept would most likely have been more easily understood by the people of the time than in this day and age because nowadays precious metals come to us with imperfections already removed.

How are the imperfections taken away? Well, fully purified gold does not exist naturally. Gold ore is mined from the crust of the earth and comprises of other, less desirable, metals. To create gold that is of high value and purity, the other metals need to be separated from the gold. This is done by heating the gold in a very hot furnace. Chemicals are added to the molten mix to separate the different types of metal, and the impurities can be removed.



Home Worship



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What we have been reading about is purification. Malachi and Peter would have been able to use this analogy, knowing that people would understand from experience what it meant in a physical sense. Of course, the real meaning behind this analogy is that those who wish to become close to the Lord go through a period of purification when they are going through the process of regeneration.

Being refined by fire sounds painful. We may wonder why there is the need of fire to purify us. Couldn't we use soap? We can read in AE 475[11] that washing with soap is not enough – we are trying to be purified by ourselves, rather than looking to the Lord. It is not thorough enough: “This means that if one attempts to purify himself by his own efforts, although by means of truths and goods that are or that appear to be genuine, he will yet lead himself into falsities”.

When we experience times of trial or temptation, staying strong in our love for the Lord allows our internal evils and impurities to be purified. We emerge stronger and are somehow “cleaner”. This process of transformation allows the Lord's divine love and truth to influence and purify our souls. We may feel that the hardship we experience at these times is a test, but it might be more helpful for us to visualise the hardships as opportunities for growth: helping us to be more aligned towards the path the Lord wishes us to take.

Prayer Lord, help us to stay strong in the knowledge that You are always with us, and that difficult times will eventually come to an end. We thank You for the opportunities You give us for refinement, even though we experience pain during these times of trial as they are happening. Help us to feel Your love and strength around us as we battle our own weaknesses in order to be more like You. Amen

Blessing The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen