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“Doing what is right in their own eyes” – the positive side of our teachings

Revd Brian Talbot writes:

I enjoyed Revd Dave Gaffney’s article about “Doing what is right in their own eyes”. However, I feel he has only talked about the negative aspects of our doctrines and not the positive ones.

I find great comfort in the teachings about the Ancient Church: the religious age following Noah. Members of the Ancient Church were motivated by kindness and goodwill. It didn’t matter what explanations of

God people had, or what rituals they used to worship God, they looked at the heart or spirit of what people believed and did. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1285:3; 1316; 1799:5; 2385; 3268:2) They all did right in their own eyes. It is similar in heaven.

No two angels are alike. They don't have the same faces, nor do they have the same feelings, or occupations, or enjoyment from their responsibilities. Every angel is an individual. (*Heaven and Hell* 405; *Divine Providence* 56:2; *Marriage Love* 362) Every angel embodies what is Divine in a different way. Angels are perfected individually and collectively by truer perspectives or the arrival of new people. (*Last Judgment* 12-13) The one life from the LORD is received differently by different people, (*Secrets of Heaven* 3890e; 4206) such as in marriages. Different angels have a different appreciation of loving the neighbour. Heaven is ordered according to the countless differences in love to the LORD, mutual love and faith between each community. (*Secrets of Heaven* 111e; 684; 1394; 2449; *Continuation concerning the Last Judgment* 21; *Divine Providence* 217:4)

Doing what is right in your own eyes is not necessarily a bad thing.



The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53

A sermon given via Zoom on Sunday 28th June 2026
and expanded

Revd Brian Talbot

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13 – Isaiah 53; Matthew 8:1-17; *Apocalypse Explained* 328:4, 5 (parts)

“Indeed, My servant shall prosper,
Be exalted and raised to great heights.” (Isaiah 52:13)

““It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”” (Isaiah 49:6)

“Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” (Psalm 73:1 [NRSVUE])

¹³ “Indeed, My servant shall prosper,
Be exalted and raised to great heights.” (Isaiah 52:13 from *The Jewish Publication Society's Tanakh version of the Old Testament*)

On 19th June 1770, Emanuel Swedenborg had a vision of seeing our risen and glorified Lord Jesus sending out his disciples, throughout the whole spiritual world, proclaiming that he alone is God, and he rules eternally. Today we will celebrate New Church Day by looking at Isaiah chapter 53, which portrays the Lord as a Suffering Servant. In his Biblical

commentaries Swedenborg talks about the Suffering Servant being the Divine Human,¹ or Jesus because he has an increasingly Divine part and a decreasingly human part. Since our regeneration or spiritual growth is an image of the process of the LORD becoming Divine or glorification,² I would suggest that it also portrays the angel in us as a suffering servant. Swedenborg calls the angel in us, our “heavenly proprium”. I prefer to talk about our angelic personality: the calmest, wisest, most loving, most empathetic, most virtuous part of us, which is devoted to our LORD Jesus, and can sense being moved and inspired personally by the LORD himself.

One of the ways New Church people celebrate what the Lord achieved through Swedenborg, is to think about his Biblical commentaries, and appreciate their brilliance.

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, suffers because of what other people are doing to him. Swedenborg makes it abundantly clear that the sins of other people are not transferred to the Suffering Servant.³ Jews have been telling Christians for millennia that the Suffering Servant doesn’t suffer “instead of” or “in the place of”, or “as a substitute for”, but “because of”, or “on account of”, or “as a consequence of”, or “as a result of”. In a more spiritual sense, it is we who self-harm our angelic personality spiritually, when we allow demons from hell to demean us, insult us, and delude us, and make the situation for the angel in us worse. Like our LORD Jesus himself, our heavenly personality, gets alongside the under-developed parts of our character. In Isaiah 63:9 we read “In their distress he too was distressed”. Like our LORD Jesus, the angel in us cannot help ministering to the more worldly, childish parts of our personality. Like our LORD, he is willing to suffer for others eternally. Our LORD Jesus was “the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world”. (Revelation 13:8)

You might like to ponder the following quotation from Swedenborg:

“The nature of the Lord's love surpasses all human understanding and is unbelievable in the extreme to people who do not know what heavenly love is, in which angels abide. To save a soul from hell the angels think nothing of giving their own lives; indeed if it were possible they would suffer hell themselves in place of that soul. Consequently their inmost joy is to transport into heaven someone rising from the dead. They confess however that that love does not originate one little bit in themselves but that every single aspect of it does so in the Lord alone. Indeed they are incensed if anyone thinks anything different.”
(*Secrets of Heaven* §2077:2 [Cooper])

Swedenborgians, like many other liberal Christians, believe that our LORD Jesus identifies, or empathises, or co-experiences, or comes alongside us, during our trials and tribulations. He helps us re-prioritise our hurts, delusions and other failings, so saves us in that way. He is not a substitute, or a replacement. He is our personal, intimate Divine Friend and

¹¹ *Apocalypse Explained* 409:2, 4

² *Secrets of Heaven* 9987:5; 10367:8 and references

³ *Secrets of Heaven* 1846:3; 3400:1; *Doctrine of the Lord* 15; *Apocalypse Explained* 328:4; 409:6; 805:5

loving Shepherd. Our LORD Jesus is thus our very personal Saviour. Our angelic personality or “heavenly proprium” does the same, because it is a gift from the LORD.⁴

We experience temptation,⁵ or inner crises, or challenges, or trials:⁶ “experiences involving distress of mind, anguish, and despair, which cause the pain described in those verses”.⁷ We are to suffer, as the Lord experienced his Passion.⁸ Part of temptation is humiliation or being made humble, or experiencing degradation, or downgrading, or degeneration, or deterioration, or decline. But we are also able to experience victory: “This is also said of the Lord, of whom the whole chapter treats; here concerning His victory over the hells.”⁹ His victory is an image or reflection of his victory in us over our failings and faults, so that he can make us spiritual and we can be re-born.¹⁰

Our LORD doesn't take our anguish and despair away, he raises us above them. We will always have regrets and bad memories, but our LORD lifts us above them; to see them from an angelic perspective. Some Christians believe that Jesus performed healing miracles by absorbing people's ailments. I would suggest that a Swedenborgian view would be that he lifted people above the demonic influence that was causing the illness or possession.

“Indeed, My servant shall prosper,
Be exalted and raised to great heights.” (Isaiah 52:13)

Humiliation comes from a Latin noun, *humiliatio* -onis, which comes from the Latin verb *humilio* to make low; to make humble.¹¹ It is not as negative nor painful, as it sounds. It is basically a ‘reality check’, a judgment.¹² We are brought low, so that we can be raised from spiritual death. We realise that we're not as good as we thought we were.¹³ Remember the angel in us, like any angel, is “nothing but evil”¹⁴: full of anger and resentment, but the LORD transforms us into something wonderful, brilliant and magical, by holding us back from rushing into hell, or despair, doubt, exasperation and so on. We can be blind like the servant and deaf like the angel of the LORD, (Isaiah 42:19) but when we respond to the LORD moving inside us and inspiring us, we can be truly awesome!

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;

⁴ *Secrets of Heaven* 1947:1; 8179:2e

⁵ *Secrets of Heaven* 9937:6; *Apocalypse Explained* 365:31; 768:2; 900:2; *Apocalypse Revealed* 829:2

⁶ *Apocalypse Revealed* 829:2

⁷ *Secrets of Heaven* 9937:6

⁸ *Lord* 16:4e; *True Christianity* 130:2e

⁹ *Apocalypse Explained* 659:9

¹⁰ *True Christianity* 302; *Canons* 30:8

¹¹ *Secrets of Heaven* 2307; 5758:2

¹² *Apocalypse Explained* 413:7

¹³ *Secrets of Heaven* 2159:2, 3, 6

¹⁴ *Secrets of Heaven* 2307 (= *Heaven and Hell* 342); 4567:2; *Apocalypse Explained* 304:1; *Earths in the Universe* 170

I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)

We all have under-developed, childish, immature, unsophisticated aspects of our personality, that the servant of the LORD needs to minister to, and bring “light” and “salvation” to them from the LORD. “the Lord is the light that produces all enlightenment and perception of spiritual truth”.¹⁵ We can be ugly, disfigured, ill, unhealthy, but our LORD Jesus is the Physician of our soul, and wants to make us better, wiser, kinder, more angelic. We have made progress, but there is more to be made. Angels are perfecting till eternity. Wisdom and intelligence from the LORD, can shine out of us.¹⁶ Since we have Divine ideas from the LORD, we are called servants. The LORD “is salvation in man, for so far as He is in man, so far man has salvation.”¹⁷

The Suffering Servant in us, our angelic potential, is fully aware of the LORD’s presence with us. We know that we have to experience doubt and uncertainty, but it’s all right, because the LORD never leaves us. In fact, during temptation he is closer to us than before.¹⁸ Our LORD Jesus, is still leading us during times of trial, anguish, despair and crisis. He doesn’t stop encouraging us. He never stops giving us brilliant ideas. He never stops keeping us relaxed and insightful. “*In all their distress he was distressed; the angel of his presence saved them*” (Isaiah 63:9) Our LORD Jesus fights for us along with his angels.

During times of temptation we self-talk and put ourselves down. “Oh, I’m such a sinful person!” “Oh, there’s no hope for me!” “I’ll never be an angel!” Such comments are inspired by hell, and we allow them to harm ourselves and our progress. But the LORD is lifting us up above those remarks through his Servant, through the angelic part of us. He is giving us a higher, more angelic perspective. There is some truth in them, but the greater truth is that the LORD is perfecting angels, like us, till eternity. It’s not about what we are now, it’s about what we can become. We can become more whole, when we allow the LORD to raise our thinking and feelings above them. In New Church theology it appears as though the LORD is crushing us. But it is an illusion, a false impression of reality, a delusion, a misconception.

We will only progress when we put our misconceptions to one side, and follow the LORD’s servant or our angel within us. We need to see that weaker parts of our character are being misled by demons, and we are self-harming ourselves spiritually, by listening to their insults. But the angelic part of us, through whom the LORD works, is trying to minister to the unsophisticated, immature parts of our personality, which are persecuting us. In recognising and accepting this inner battle, we find inner peace, harmony and wholeness. We see the conflict from above. By accepting the reality of our angelic personality, we can protect it from self-defeating and self-harming parts of our personality.

¹⁵ *Apocalypse Revealed* 796:3

¹⁶ *Secrets of Heaven* 3155:7

¹⁷ *Apocalypse Explained* 409:6; 460:2

¹⁸ *Secrets of Heaven* 1947:1

“Indeed, My servant shall prosper,
Be exalted and raised to great heights.” (Isaiah 52:13)