

## **A Sense of Our Own Life: Abram Longing for an Heir**

By the Rev. Eric H. Carswell

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But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” *Genesis 15:2-3*

Does it seem somewhat outspoken of Abram to question the Lord’s blessings the way he did? It is almost like Abram is saying, “You’ve given me all these wonderful promises of wealth and land but what value do these gifts have if I have no son to pass them on to?” Certainly a basis of all wisdom is the acceptance of “Thy will be done” but it is also important that we recognize what we hope and long for. It can be very useful to express these things in prayer to the Lord. These prayers of one of the ways that the Lord can provide us with answers, as He also answered Abram.

A key part of spiritual development according to the teachings of the New Church is that it is a process with many elements that can be distinguished from each other. These teachings can help us to see that the story of Abram’s life, though founded in genuine history, is written to be a parable describing many steps in this process. In Genesis, prior to chapter fifteen the following events occur.

- a. Abram was called by the Lord to come to the land of Canaan.
- b. He and his family traveled there.
- c. A famine in Canaan led Abram to go to Egypt.
- d. Abram nearly lost his wife Sarai to Pharaoh.
- e. As they return to Canaan, Abram and Lot can no longer travel together.
- f. Northern kings maintain control over the southern kings and put down to their rebellion.
- g. Abram rescued Lot when he is captured by the northern kings.

These events can be seen to represent the spiritual development that each of us can go through many times in our pathway toward a heavenly home. They can be seen to represent the following spiritual steps.

- a. How we can first sense the need to change some aspect of our lives.
- b. A growing commitment to bring about this change.
- c. Recognizing the need for knowledge to accomplish this change.
- d. Overcoming the inclination to be captivated by learning as a goal in itself.
- e. Facing the need to make choices brought about by the knowledge that we have gained.
- f. Recognizing the benefits of following new rules for some aspect of our life
- g. The dangers of clumsy application of those rules even when they don’t properly apply in a situation.

Imagine a man who

- a. Recognizes that he is uncomfortable with aspects of the conversation that take place with some of his co-workers. He has a sense that it isn’t evoking a spiritually healthy response within himself.

- b. From the day he first has this thought glimmer within his conscious mind, little issues or occurrences keep reinforcing the idea that this is something he wants to attend to.
- c. Eventually he focuses his mind on what the issues are. Perhaps there is a pattern of innuendo and banter that he senses is corrosive of a respect for marriage and the commitment it represents. It may be a pattern of gossip or criticism that is coloring his view of others in a destructive manner. The man can reflect in his mind that he knows that the Lord has given us powerful teachings about the sanctity of marriage or that charity calls us to wish well to our neighbors.
- d. He may realize that while he is regularly have these ideas come to mind, he isn't doing anything more about his response to the conversation patterns other than remembering that aspects of them don't seem to be what the Lord would wish for him.
- e. The man can recognize that he cannot continue to be the same regular part of the banter with his co-workers and also take better care of his spiritual states.
- f. He may establish a rule for himself that says, "I will leave the room anytime the conversation seems to head in an undesirable."
- g. This may have some very useful results but he can also recognizes that sometimes he is rudely interrupting or cutting off his co-workers to leave the room even when they get close to a topic or issue that he thinks might be undesirable. This is producing some unnecessary distance between himself and them. He realizes that he needs to be more discerning in his application of any self-given rules.

Going back to the literal story in Genesis, after Abram had rescued Lot from the four kings, the Lord appeared to him saying: "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceeding great reward." These words represent the Lord's promise to each of us that as we follow Him we will receive protection against evil loves and false ideas. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1787) In the example just given about the man and his co-workers, we can see that he has made real progress on doing his part to bring about a change in that part of his life. While he may have been having his mind muddled by some of the perspectives, stories, and jokes of his co-workers, the Lord promises that He will lead him to a state that will no longer be prey to the evils loves and false ideas they have evoked in him.

Abram's response to the Lord's promise is raise his concern or complaint:

But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" *Genesis* 15:2-3

These words reflect a state of mind that human beings can experience as they are trying to follow the Lord but sense that their efforts feel like ill-fitting clothing. It seems so external or superficial compared to the more typical patterns of inner response that have come so naturally to them in the past. While external order is very important by itself it can feel relatively lifeless. Consider the following quote:

The external things of the Church when they are without the internal things are of no value. It is to those internal things that they owe their existence, and in character they are the same as those internal things. The situation with them is as it is with a person: with

him what is external or bodily is in itself something valueless unless that which is internal exists to give it soul and life. As is the character therefore of that which is internal, so is the character of that which is external; or, as is the character of the disposition and mind, so is the worth of all the things which come forth through that which is external or bodily. The things of the heart make a person, not those of the lips and gestures. It is the same with the internal things of the Church. Nevertheless the external things of the Church are as the external things with a person, in that they serve as stewards or overseers; or what amounts to the same, the external or bodily self may be called the steward or overseer of the house when 'the house' is that which belongs to interior things. From this it is evident what 'childless' means, namely a time when no internal dimension of the Church exists, only an external. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1795:2)

As we look toward our celebration of New Church, many of us can be thankful for so many blessings that the ideas of the New Church support in our lives. We can see the benefits that we have in our homes, families and in this community. We can sense the opportunities that each of us have that many people in this world lack. But to the extent that all of these things seem outside of who we are personally, they can evoke little inner peace, joy, and gratitude. Real gratitude has to come from the inside. It comes from our response to the things outside of us.

It is a Divinely created feature of human beings that our happiness is dependent on sensing that our life is our own. We are not merely following a set of rules by rote. We are not just fitting into patterns that others have told us are right and correct. We desire to understand and from ourselves freely choose these things as our own.

In the example of the man and his co-workers, the man may long for a different inner response to the less than perfect external circumstances that his co-workers conversations provide. He doesn't like feeling like he has to run or dodge around them as his sole response. He wishes for an inner conviction about the holiness of marriage or the value of wishing well to the neighbor.

The Lord heard Abram's concerns about a lack of an heir and He promised Abram what he hoped for. We read in Genesis:

And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." (*Genesis* 15:4-5)

In the internal sense of this story given in the *Arcana Caelestia* the explanation of this story is not focused on our spiritual growth. Instead it has a young Jesus reflecting that the Church He hoped for did not seem to have an internal quality. It seemed like it was too much external behavior without the internal life of love and faith. He was reassured by the infinite creator and God that Church would indeed have an internal quality and this would be the primary source of heavenly happiness for those who received it. It is what the Lord wants for each of us.

The Lord wishes us to have His life freely received within our own. He wants us to sense the greatest delights that can come from being able to think, will, and choose good and useful things.

But this isn't something that He can give us in a moment. The truly grateful heart is one that can occur only after spiritual progress that takes time. May we long for the heavenly internal life that is a gift of the Lord. May we seek it as we walk the spiritual pathway of our lives. AMEN.

Lessons: Genesis 15:1-7, *Arcana Caelestia* 1798:1-3

### **Genesis 15:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?"

<sup>3</sup> Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."

<sup>5</sup> Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

<sup>6</sup> And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

### ***Arcana Caelestia* 1798:1-3**

"*Abram said, See, to me You have not given seed*" means that there was no internal dimension of the Church. No other kind of faith that constitutes the internal dimension of the Church is meant than the faith which is a product of love or charity, that is, which originates in love or charity.

In a general sense faith embraces everything that is taught by the Church; but doctrinal teachings separated from love or charity do not in any way constitute the internal dimension of the Church, for such teachings are no more than knowledge which is present in the memory and which also exists with the worst of people, even with those in hell. But doctrinal teachings which originate in charity, that is, which are a product of charity, do constitute the internal dimension of the Church, for this dimension is essentially its life. The life itself constitutes the internal aspect of all worship, and so too do all doctrinal teachings that flow from the life that belongs to charity. It is these teachings when they comprise faith that are meant here, and it is faith such as this that constitutes the internal dimension of the Church, as may become clear from the single consideration that anyone who is leading a charitable life has an awareness of all things of faith.

Just examine, if you care to do so, any doctrinal teachings, so that you may see what they are and what they are like. Do they not all have regard to charity, and so to faith that derives from charity? Take simply the Ten Commandments, the first of which is that you should worship the Lord God. Anyone who possesses the life of love or charity worships the Lord God, for it is in this that the life within him consists. Another commandment says that you should keep the Sabbath. Anyone in whom the life of love, that is, in whom charity, is present keeps the Sabbath holy since nothing delights him more than worshipping the Lord and declaring His glory day by day. *Arcana Caelestia* 1798:1-3