

Abide in the Lord's Word and You will Know the Truth

By the Rev. Eric H. Carswell

June 23, 2019

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. *John 8:31-32*

A fundamental concept in the teachings for the New Church is that the Last Judgment and Second Coming foretold in the book of Revelation were necessary to reestablish the spiritual freedom of all human beings. We are told:

There are many reasons why the Last Judgment takes place when a church comes to an end. The primary one is that the equilibrium between heaven and hell then begins to be destroyed, and together with it people's true freedom. When people's freedom is destroyed, they can no longer be saved. For then their loss of freedom carries them to hell, and they cannot be brought in freedom to heaven. No one can be reformed without freedom, and a person's freedom is wholly dependent upon the equilibrium between heaven and hell. (*Last Judgment 33*)

This second quotation does not use the term freedom but instead redemption, which means being set free from hell.

Redemption was actually a matter of gaining control of the hells, restructuring the heavens, and by so doing preparing for a new spiritual church . . . This new redemption began in the year 1757 along with a Last Judgment that happened at that time. The redemption has continued from then until now. The reason is that today is the Second Coming of the Lord. A new church is being instituted that could not have been instituted unless first the hells were brought under control and the heavens were restructured. (*True Christian Religion 115*)

The Lord's words in John connect knowing the truth and spiritual freedom. He said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' (John 8:31-32).

What does it mean to know the truth? Imagine that you need to hire someone to look after your aging parent or spouse. One of the people who came to interview for the job tells you that she knows all about caring for the elderly. You ask her for her previous experience and she replies, "None." When asked how could she know about providing excellent care for an elderly person without any experience, she says, "I've read three books on the subject." Would you be inclined to believe that reading several books qualifies her as knowing all about caring for the elderly? I doubt it.

We know that knowledge and practice of that knowledge are separable. You can have a very knowledgeable person, say a medical doctor, who nevertheless consistently makes poor decisions concerning his own health. You can have a person who has little formal training in health or nutrition who conversely has been paying attention to what seems wise and unwise

behavior for promoting long-term health. The second person may not know terminology and may actually be deficient in a broad understanding, but in terms of personally living from the truth, that person knows it better than the medical doctor.

Sometimes people have taken the last part of the quotation that is the text for today, “the truth shall make you free” and misused it. They have thought that having a broad knowledge of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Heavenly Doctrines meant that they knew the truth and were free. But the Lord has clearly told us that we have several levels of thought that compose our minds. Knowledge of revealed truth can be just further facts stored in your natural memory. If they are learned and valued no more than practical worldly knowledge, such facts will be left behind by the person with the death of the natural body. None of these facts can really become the person’s own until that person freely chooses to live according to what they teach.

A higher level of thought than simple memorized knowledge is the ability to organize that knowledge into broad ideas and to see how these ideas or concepts might apply in new situations. A person’s ability to do this also isn’t a sure sign of knowing the truth. Someone can become very skilled at this kind of reasoning and be heading to a very unhappy place in hell after death. Such an individual does not know the truth.

The Lord said that a person has to “abide in His Word” in order to know the truth and to be free. A person has to receive a growing desire to do what is good from the Lord before the truth can really be known. Consider the following teaching.

All people are deceived who believe themselves to be in enlightenment, unless they love to know truth for the sake of truth and for the sake of living a good life, thus unless they love Divine truth for the sake of how they live their life, because to live according to Divine truths from the Word is to love the Lord, and all enlightenment comes from the Lord when He is loved. But those cannot possibly be in any enlightenment who do not have as their goal living a life according to Divine truths from the Word; but who have as their goal honor, gain, and reputation; and who thus regard the Divine truths of the Word as means; for this goal is worldly and bodily, and not spiritual and heavenly; and it therefore closes the internal person, and when this is closed, no light can flow in from heaven and enlightens. If such persons, when reading the Word, believe that they are in enlightenment, they are quite mistaken; for they do not think from heaven, but from the world; thus not from the Lord, but from themselves; and in so far as they think from themselves and from the world, so far they think from natural light separate from heavenly light, and in spiritual things natural light separate from heavenly light is mere thick darkness. If these people persuade themselves that they have seen something from enlightenment, it is a fallacy, for they perceive whether a thing is true solely from others by means of confirmations, which is to see truth from without and not from within, or to see it from persuasive faith. . . Such people are able to see falsity as truth, and truth as falsity; also they are able to see evil as good, and good as evil. (*Arcana Caelestia* 10551:2-3)

What we care about gives order and form to what we think. Prior to any steps of regeneration or spiritual development people cannot have motivations that are their own other than natural ones

tainted by hereditary inclinations to evil. No one enters adult life without having these hereditary inclinations to evil loves present and active. Certainly a young twenty-something may have strong convictions and have the capability of saying and doing many true and good things, but these things are only just starting to be the young adult's own.

Everyone arrives at adult life with the need to be reborn. Everyone arrives at adult life with parts of his or her mind significantly in slavery to natural and evil desires. These desires affect the persons' priorities, their view of themselves and the world around themselves. It affects how they think, what they say and do.

The first adult steps on the path to heaven occur when people work to do what is right and good and recognize that their personal evils and false ideas get in the way. All of us stand somewhere on our own spiritual pathway. Each of us is called to recognize what it means for us personally to grow in our ability to abide in the Lord's Word. Each of us have spiritual battles to face.

People who are spiritually enslaved cannot possibly see the full reality of their state. There are certain truths that they cannot understand. Consider the implications of the following passage from the *Arcana Caelestia*.

The person who is being regenerated and becoming spiritual is first led to good patterns of life by means of truth; for a person does not know what spiritual good, or what is the same thing, Christian good is, except through truth or through doctrine drawn from the Word. In this way the person is initiated into good patterns of life. Afterwards, when the person has been initiated, he no longer is led to good through truths, but to truths through good loves, for the person then not only sees from those good loves the truths which he knew before, but also from those good loves brings forth new truths which he did not and could not know before.... These new truths differ greatly from the truths which the person had previously known.... (*Arcana Caelestia* 5804)

It is these new truths that the person did not and could not know before that bring true freedom. The order of regeneration requires us to first learn, then live according to what we've learned. It is valuable for each of us to acknowledge in humility that our understanding will always be flawed and limited. The Lord seems to want us to recognize that there is a change that will take place, which brings about new truths within our mind--truths that we will get in no other way than by living them. We are consequently told the importance of learning and the importance of living by what we have learned. This is reflected in the following statement from the teachings for the New Church:

Present in an angelic character is a knowledge of the way from walking in it, and a walking in the way through a knowledge of it. (*Divine Providence* 60)

In about a week and a half, the people of the United States are looking forward to celebrating Independence Day. On that day we can reflect on the freedom and opportunities that this country provides for so many. We know that true freedom is not the ability to do whatever seems pleasurable at the moment. If any country is going to remain strong, healthy, and useful, the people living in it need to recognize the value of personal commitment, acting better than one

feels like or can get away with, and an understanding of how we as a greater community are to cooperate with the Lord. Our job as patriots is to be an influence for good in the places and roles within this country that we have. Through our efforts to follow the Lord as members of communities larger and smaller, we will grow in our understanding of what is genuinely true. We will come into the heavenly freedom that we would wish for all in this world as well.

The Lord calls each of us to abide in His Word. He calls us to go beyond just knowing many true things. He calls us to go beyond being able to talk about them with others. He calls us to humbly submit our lives to their dictates. Through this the Lord is able to gradually change us, giving us a new will or heart, and from this a new understanding or insight into what is true. It is then that we will be free indeed. AMEN.

Lessons: *John 8:31-36, New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 43, True Christian Religion 495*

John 8:31-36

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." ³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* you say, 'You will be made free'?" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵ And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever. ³⁶ Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 43

To do evil from freedom, appears as freedom, but it is slavery, because that freedom is from the love of self and from the love of the world, and these loves are from hell. Such freedom is actually turned into slavery after death, for the person who has been in such freedom then becomes a vile servant in hell. But to do good from freedom is freedom itself, because it is from love to the Lord and from love towards the neighbor, and these loves are from heaven. This freedom also remains after death, and then becomes freedom indeed, for the person who has been in such freedom, becomes in heaven like a son of the house. This the Lord teaches in this way:-

Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (*John 8:34-36*).

Now, because all good is from the Lord, and all evil from hell, it follows that freedom consists in being led by the Lord, and slavery is being led by hell.

True Christian Religion 495

All the freedom that comes from the Lord is true freedom. The freedom in us that comes from hell is slavery. To someone in hellish freedom, however, spiritual freedom inevitably looks like slavery, because the two are opposites. Nevertheless, all people who are in spiritual freedom know and even sense that hellish freedom is slavery.