

The Lord's Loving Care
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"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." *John 15:11*

These words of the Lord to His disciples on the night of the Last Supper can be seen as the reason behind everything the Lord teaches us. All that He teaches us has the purpose of leading us to lasting joy. It has the purpose of helping us to lead happier and more useful lives. The foundation idea of all this teaching is that there is an all knowing, all powerful God who loves us. He is constantly doing more than we can possibly imagine leading us to a more useful and happier life. We may know this, but there are times when we have trouble believing it or feeling the hope and optimism that it should support.

We can know that the Word teaches us of His presence and care from many passages in the Old and New Testaments:

Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. (*Joshua 1:9*)

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. (*Psalms 23:1*)

I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." (*Psalms 91:2*)

I will lift up my eyes to the hills; From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.
He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night.
The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.
The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in
From this time forth, and even forevermore. (*Psalms 121*)

. . . lo, I am with you always. *Matthew 28:20*

The teachings for the New Church give many further explanations and descriptions of His loving care.

The Lord's life was love toward the whole human race; indeed it was so great and of such a nature as to be nothing other than pure love. (*Arcana Caelestia 1690*)

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. (*Arcana Caelestia* 2077:2)

To support these ideas the Lord has given us many explanations of how He accomplishes His goals. In order to understand nature of the Lord's loving care we need to bring together a number of ideas that are distinguishable in our minds, but which are seamlessly united in the Lord.

In the first place, our mind cannot easily comprehend how the Lord knows the tiniest details of the events of our lives, and even every thought and motivation in our minds. This is hard enough for us to picture for ourselves, but it is even harder to picture the Lord simultaneously knowing all of these things for the billions of people on this planet. It gets harder still when one envisions the number of inhabited planets that must exist in the universe and that the Lord is likewise intimately present with each of those inhabitants.

Quite frankly while we may know and acknowledge the Lord's infinite wisdom and infinite presence, how it takes place is beyond our wildest imagination. In a very real way this is because we cannot really approach the Divine in itself. In the theology of the New Testament, this quality of God is called, "the Father." We are warned against trying to approach the Divine itself, by itself. The opening of the gospel of John states:

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (*John* 1:18)

And Jesus told His disciples:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." (*John* 14:6-7)

The teachings for the New Church explain this by these words:

To put it briefly, faith in a God who cannot be seen is actually blind faith, because the human mind that has this type of faith does not see its God. Because the light of this faith is not both spiritual and earthly, it is a faint, deceptive light. Its light is like the light of a firefly, the light at night over swamps and marshes that contain sulfur, or the light in rotting wood. Nothing can come of such light but pure imagination, which make appearances seem real when they are not. Faith in an invisible God sheds only this kind of light

It is, however, different with faith in the Lord God the Savior. He is both Divine and human and can be approached and seen in the mind's eye, this faith is not without a goal, but has a goal from which it proceeds and to which it is directed; and once accepted, it remains. It is as when one has seen a powerful leader or a king; whenever one recalls them, their likeness recurs to the mind. The vision that faith gives is like looking at a

shining cloud, with an angel in its midst, calling the person to himself so that he can be raised to heaven. This is how the Lord looks to people who have faith in him. The Lord comes closer to us all as we recognize and acknowledge Him. This occurs as we come to know and follow His principles, which are to abstain from evil things and do good things. At last He comes into our house and makes a home in us. . . . (*True Christian Religion* 339:2)

Using again the terminology of the Gospels, the Son of God is the Lord, Jesus Christ. The Son refers both to the picture of the Lord we can gain as we read and imagine the New Testament stories and He is also the Word made flesh. The Son of God is the revelation of the Lord's infinite wisdom and so that quality is also His revealed Word. We read:

The Word is the Divine truth. It is also the Divine proceeding; and this is not only from the Lord, but is also the Lord Himself. (*Doctrine of the Lord* 2)

One of the translators of this passage from the Latin that Swedenborg wrote in observed an important distinction about the term, "the Divine proceeding." He stated: "In the expression 'Divine proceeding,' Divine is not to be understood as an adjective qualifying proceeding, but proceeding is to be taken as a verb (or participle) describing the act which the Divine there performs. Thus, the expression does not mean a proceeding which is Divine, but a Divine that is in the act of proceeding forth." (John F. Potts) Simply stated this means that Lord is actively reaching out to care for each of us.

This work of the Lord in the tiniest details of our lives, bending, guiding, and leading is what is referred to in the terminology of the Gospels as the Holy Spirit. We are told that we cannot imagine one in many millions of the things the Lord is doing for us each moment of each day.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the Lord Jesus Christ, the one God of heaven and earth. This is our God who loves us and cares for us. Over and over again the teachings for the New Church exhort us to see these three elements or qualities as one God as in the following passages:

God is one in Person and in Essence, in Whom is a trinity, and that that God is the Lord. The Trinity in Him is called Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Divine as Source is named the Father, the Divine Human the Son, and the Divine Proceeding, the Holy Spirit. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 146)

People possess the idea of three entities in one Person when their thought is that the Father is within the Lord and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Lord. Then the Trinity resides within the Lord, consisting of the Divine itself, called the Father, the Divine Human, called the Son, and the Divine Proceeding, called the Holy Spirit. (*Arcana Caelestia* 10822)

All of these words are intended to support one central crucial idea. There is an infinitely loving, wise, and powerful God who wants to bring us happiness and is working toward this goal constantly. He asks us to cooperate with Him. He asks us to learn from His Word. He asks us to

reflect on the patterns of our lives. He calls us to seek His help in becoming better human beings. And through this all He is ever guiding us toward heaven.

There is an energy [sphere] continuously radiated by the Lord, which raises all to heaven; this fills the whole of both the spiritual and natural worlds. It is like a strong current in the ocean, which invisibly draws a ship along. All who believe in the Lord and live in accordance with His commandments come within that sphere or current, and are raised up. (*True Christian Religion* 652)

May we sense and live from the knowledge and belief that we are loved. AMEN.

Lessons: *Psalm* 91, Divine Providence 45

Psalm 91

¹He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

²I will say of the LORD, “*He is* my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.”

³Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler *and* from the perilous pestilence.

⁴He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge;
His truth *shall be your* shield and buckler.

⁵You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, *nor* of the arrow *that* flies by day,

⁶*Nor* of the pestilence *that* walks in darkness,
Nor of the destruction *that* lays waste at noonday.

⁷A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand;
But it shall not come near you. . . .

⁹Because you have made the LORD, *who is* my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,

¹⁰No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;

¹¹For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.

¹²In *their* hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

***Divine Providence* 45**

Since the Divine Providence of the Lord has as its goal a heaven from the human race, it follows that it has for its goal the conjunction of the human race with Himself. It has also for its goal that a person should be more and more nearly conjoined to Him, for by means of this a person possesses heaven more interiorly. Further, it has for its goal that each person by this conjunction should become wiser; and that each person should become happier, because it is from wisdom and according to it that a person has heaven, and by means of wisdom has happiness also. Finally, it has for its goal that people should appear more distinctly to themselves to be masters of themselves, and yet to recognize more clearly that they are the Lord's. All these things are of the Divine Providence of the Lord, because all these things constitute heaven, which it has as its goal.