

## **The Purpose of Divine Revelation: That We May Have Joy**

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These things I have spoken to you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy may be full. *John 15:11*

Why has the Lord taught us all that He has in the different revelations that He has provided for the human race over the centuries? Certainly, there are differing themes among the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the teachings for the New Church. The Old Testament tends to focus on obedience in action and on the tangible rewards that a person can receive in this world. The New Testament tends to focus on a deeper level of obedience than mere external action, it strongly calls us to love one another, and it introduces the concept of heavenly rewards. The teachings for the New Church present a depth of explanation far beyond the two previous revelations. It calls us to be aware particularly of motivations behind our thoughts and actions and presents a rich picture of heavenly life. It encourages us to recognize that the states of mind we regularly experience in this world will be similar to those we will experience in the next life. It explains how the Lord, our loving heavenly Father, grants us spiritual freedom in the fondest hope that we will choose a heaven-bound life with its usefulness and happiness.

This theme of the Lord's hopes for us is carried throughout Divine Revelation. The Lord invites us to a life of happiness and joy. The Old Testament speaks of this in so many passages. We're told "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth!" (Psalm 98:4) The Lord describes how He will help His people, leading them from troubles until "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:10). The Lord spoke of heavenly happiness and joy when He taught people during His life in this world. The book of Revelation speaks also of the change that the Lord would seek to bring to our lives: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain." (Revelation 21:4)

In a very real sense all that the Lord has taught us in His Word has as its goal that we might be happy and that our lives be filled with joy. This follows from the fundamental nature of the Lord's love for each of us. We are told:

**The essence of love is loving others than oneself, wishing to be one with them and devoting oneself to their happiness.** There are two things which make up the essence of God - love and wisdom; but there are three which make up the essence of His love - loving others than oneself, wishing to be one with them, and devoting oneself to their happiness. The same three make up the essence of His wisdom, because . . . love and wisdom are one in God. It is love which wills these things, wisdom that puts them into effect.

The first essential, loving others than oneself, is to be recognized in God's love toward the whole human race. On this account God loves everything He has created, because they are the means to an end, and if you love the end, you must love the means. . . .

The second essential of God's love, wishing to be one with others, is to be recognized also in His joining Himself [in a relationship of love] to the heaven of angels, the church on earth, to everyone in it, and to every good love and true idea which compose and make up human beings and the church. Love regarded in itself is nothing but a striving to be joined in relationship. . . .

The third essential of God's love, to devote Himself to the happiness of others, is to be recognized in eternal life, which is unending blessedness, good fortune and happiness, which He gives to those who receive His love into themselves. (*True Christian Religion* 43)

The Lord wants us to be as happy as we can possibly be. He envisions tremendous variety in the form of this happiness. Consider how many words are used to describe the states of happiness that the Lord can bring to a person who is in a true love of marriage:

The states produced by this love are innocence, peace, tranquility, inmost friendship, complete trust, a mutual desire of the mind and heart to do the other every good; also, as a result of all these, bliss, felicity, delight, pleasure, and, owing to an eternal enjoyment of states like this, the happiness of heaven. (*Conjugal Love* 180)

Bliss, felicity, delight, pleasure, enjoyment, and happiness--these are a lot of different words to describe the joy that the Lord wants for us. It conveys a rich and full life of happiness that ranges from the quiet joys of a peaceful and cool early spring morning walk, to the pleasures of gathering with friends to talk and laugh, to those of using one's mind and hands to help another person, and so on. The heavenly life that the Lord wants for us has this variety.

We know well though that the Lord doesn't just talk about happiness and joy. He warns about the dangers of some patterns of motivation, thought, and action. He warns us of the unhappiness of evil. But all of this has as its goal that we accept His gentle and powerful leading. The book, *Divine Providence*, describes it with these words: "[The Lord] leads a person as silently as an imperceptible stream or favoring current bears a boat along." (*Divine Providence* 186) He is drawing us constantly toward the heavenly home that He wishes for us.

In a very real sense a person can follow the Lord's leading by pursuing true happiness through life. The problem is, of course, that we, by ourselves, don't easily recognize the sources of true happiness. Tragic amounts of energy and time are spent by people pursuing goals that will not bring true happiness. One of these has arisen from the early Christian heresy that this natural world and all things in it are evil and that a person needs to turn from all natural pleasures if one is going to "earn" heavenly happiness. Concerning this state of mind the Lord has noted for us:

There are some who believe that to live the life that leads to heaven, which is called the spiritual life, is difficult, because they have been told that people must renounce the world, must divest themselves of the lusts called the lusts of the body and the flesh, and must live spiritually; and they understand this to mean that they must discard worldly things, which consist chiefly in riches and honors; that they must walk continually in pious meditation on God, salvation, and eternal life; and must spend their life in prayers

and in reading the Word and pious books. Such is their idea of renouncing the world, and living in the spirit and not in the flesh. But that this is not at all true it has been given me to know by much experience and from conversation with the angels. I have learned, in fact, that those who renounce the world and live in the spirit in this manner acquire a sorrowful life that is not receptive of heavenly joy, since everyone's life continues the same after death. On the contrary, to receive the life of heaven a person needs to live in the world and engage in its business and employments, and by means of a moral and civil life there receive the spiritual life. In no other way can the spiritual life be formed in a person, or that person's spirit be prepared for heaven; for to live an internal life and not at the same time an external life is like dwelling in a house that has no foundation, that gradually sinks or becomes cracked and rent asunder, or totters till it falls. (*Heaven and Hell* 528)

This passage states that everyone's life continues the same after death. It can be reassuring that aspects of living in the natural world keep us from getting a full sense of heavenly happiness. We are taught:

As regards the happiness of eternal life, no one who is moved by the affection for good and truth is able when he is living in the world to perceive that happiness, but only a certain delight instead. The reason why he is unable to do so is that he is confined to the body, and when confined in the body he is subject to worldly cares and as a consequence to anxieties. These prevent the happiness of eternal life, which is inwardly present in him, being manifested in any other way, for when that happiness passes from the inward parts of his being into cares and anxieties which reside in his outward parts, it sinks into the cares there and the anxieties, and becomes a kind of obscure delight. Nevertheless it is a delight that holds blessedness within it, and happiness within that. Being content in God constitutes such happiness. But once a person casts aside the body, and at the same time those worldly cares and anxieties, the happiness which has been so lying hidden in obscurity within his more internal man comes forward and reveals itself. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3938:7)

Day to day life is supposed to be a setting in which we practice for heaven. Certainly working with other people or dealing with the seemingly chance occurrences of natural life can be very challenging. There are all sorts of events and actions, and reactions in other people that can produce sadness, discouragement, frustration, and anger in us. The Lord encourages us not to try to escape the apparent sources of these reactions in us. He doesn't want us to withdraw from life in this world because it can get us down. He wants us to work with Him in being spiritually reborn. The Lord cannot bring us the miracle of regeneration unless we face some of the issues that most challenge us spiritually. He will lead us to care less about some things that we see as very important now and care more about what He most loves. He will guide us to think not so much in terms of the immediate present as our measure of success and failure, but rather see our current efforts as important, but just one part of a process that will continue on to eternity.

The Lord wants us to have happiness and joy. He wants to prepare us for the deep fulfillment of heavenly life. As we live our lives in this world, may we keep our minds on the Lord's deep

love for each of us. May we reflect on all that He has and will teach us as means to lead us to true joy. As the Lord told His disciples, so He speaks to us saying: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy may be full." *John 15:11* AMEN.

**Lessons:** *John 15:11-14, Heaven and Hell 535, Arcana Caelestia 537, Apocalypse Explained 326*

### **John 15:11-14**

<sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. <sup>12</sup> This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

### ***Heaven and Hell 535***

I have been permitted to talk with some in the other life who had withdrawn from worldly affairs that they might live in a pious and holy manner, also with some who had afflicted themselves in various ways, believing that they were thereby renouncing the world and subduing the lusts of the flesh. But as most of these have thus acquired a sorrowful life and had withdrawn from the life of charity, which life can be lived only in the midst of the world, they are incapable of being affiliated with angels, because the life of angels is a life of joy resulting from a state of blessedness, and consists in performing good deeds, which are works of charity.

### ***Arcana Caelestia 537***

A certain spirit asked whether I knew how he could get into heaven. I was allowed to reply that admission into heaven belongs to the Lord alone, for He alone knows a person's character. Many people coming from the world are like this spirit; their one request is that they may enter heaven, without knowing at all what heaven is and what heavenly joy is. They do not know that heaven is mutual love, and heavenly joy the joy resulting from this. Consequently those who do not know this are first of all acquainted with what heaven is and what heavenly joy is, even by actual experience.

### ***Apocalypse Explained 326***

And they were singing a new song, signifies acknowledgment and confession from joy of heart. . . "To sing a song" signifies confession from joy of heart, because joy of heart, when it is in fullness, expresses itself in song, this it does because when the heart, and in consequence the thought also, is full of joy, it pours itself forth in singing, the joy of the heart itself through the sound of the singing, and the joy of the thought therefrom through the song. The kind of joy of the thought is expressed by the words of the song, which concur and agree with the matter that is in the thought from the heart; the kind of joy of the heart is expressed by the harmony, and the measure of this joy is expressed by the exaltation of the sound and the words in it. All these flow as if spontaneously from the joy itself.