

# Truth for the Sake of Truth and Good for the Sake of Good

A Sermon by the Rev. Malcolm G. Smith  
September 24, 2023

## Readings

*Psalm 119:160-165 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)*

160 The entirety of Your word is truth,  
And every judgment of Your justice endures to eternity.  
161 Princes persecute me without a cause,  
But my heart is in dread of Your word.  
162 I have joy over Your word  
As one who finds great treasure.  
163 Falsity I hate and abhor,  
But Your law I love.  
164 Seven times a day I praise You,  
Because of the judgments of Your justice.  
165 Great peace have those who love Your law,  
And for them there is no stumbling.

*Zechariah 8:16-23 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)*

16 "These are the things you shall do:  
Speak the truth, each man with his companion;  
Judge the truth and the judgment of peace in your gates;  
17 And do not think evil in your heart, each man against his companion;  
And do not love a false promise.  
For all these are things that I hate,'  
Says Jehovah."  
18 And the word of Jehovah of Armies came unto me, saying, <sup>19</sup> "Thus says Jehovah of Armies:  
'The fast of the fourth month,  
And the fast of the fifth,  
And the fast of the seventh,  
And the fast of the tenth,  
Shall be for the house of Judah for joy and for gladness, and for good solemn festivals;  
Therefore love the truth and the peace.'  
20 "Thus says Jehovah of Armies:  
'There shall yet come peoples and inhabitants of many cities;  
21 And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying,  
"Going let us go to implore the faces of Jehovah,  
and to seek Jehovah of Armies.

I myself will also go.”

22 And many peoples and numerous nations shall come to seek Jehovah of Armies in Jerusalem,  
And to implore the faces of Jehovah.’

23 “Thus says Jehovah of Armies: “In those days ten men from every tongue of the nations shall hold firm, and they shall hold firm on the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’” ’ ”

#### ***Matthew 10:40-42***

<sup>40</sup>[Jesus said,] “He who receives you, receives Me, and he who receives Me, receives Him who sent Me. <sup>41</sup> He who accepts a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive the reward of a prophet; and he who accepts someone just in the name of someone just shall receive the reward of someone just. <sup>42</sup> And whoever shall give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink in the name of a disciple, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”

#### ***Secrets of Heaven 9818:3***

The life of the understanding consists in knowing, seeing, and understanding that truth is indeed truth and good is indeed good. But the life of the will consists in willing and loving truth for truth’s sake and good for goodness’ sake.

#### ***Doctrine of Life 89***

To the extent that we love truth we want to know it and we find our hearts moved when we find it. That is the only way to arrive at wisdom; and to the extent that we love to do the truth, we take pleasure in the light that contains it.

#### ***Secrets of Heaven 10683:6***

People who love truth for its own sake, and people who love to do the truth for its own sake, love the Lord and receive heaven into themselves.

## Introduction

- Those passages from the teachings of the New Church that we read in the lessons are pretty inspiring.
  - Don't you want to be someone who loves the truth for its own sake and loves good for its own sake, and who loves the Lord and loves to live according to His truth?
    - That sounds pretty great, doesn't it?
  - Does it also sound unrealistic or unattainable?
- This idea of loving truth for its own sake and loving goodness for its own sake shows up in a number of places in the teachings of the New Church and so it seemed like a useful topic to try to understand more, particularly on a Holy Supper day, when we're already thinking about the goodness and truth that we want to receive from the Lord and how we can best be receptive of what the Lord wants to give us.

## Outline

- To try to understand it better we're going to read some passages that contrast it with its opposite.
- Then we'll talk about how we can work towards this as a goal.
- Finally we'll talk about it in connection with Holy Supper.

## What's the Opposite of Loving Truth and Good for Their Own Sake?

- Let's take a look at the opposite of loving truth and good for their own sake.
- One passage from the teachings of the New Church talks about signs that a person's sins are forgiven or taken away.
- *New Jerusalem* 167 (cf. *Secrets of Heaven* 9449-9450)
  - The signs that sins are forgiven... are the following. Such people feel pleasure in worshipping God for God's sake and in performing services for the neighbor for the neighbor's sake, and so in doing good for good's sake and in speaking truth for truth's sake. They are unwilling to acquire merit by any charitable act or point of faith, they flee from and loathe evils, enmity for example, or hatred, revenge, or adultery, and even thinking about such things with the intention of doing them.

However, the signs that sins are not forgiven... are the following. These people worship God, but not for God's sake. They perform services for the neighbor, but not for the neighbor's sake. So they do not do good or speak truth for the sake of good and truth, but for selfish and worldly reasons. They want to acquire merit by their deeds. They experience a not unpleasant feeling in evils, in enmity for example, in hatred, revenge and adultery, and as a result they have no constraints in thinking about them.

- So the opposite of loving truth and good for their own sake is loving them for how we can use them for our own selfish and worldly purposes.
- By analogy, here is a chunk of stone.
  - What do you think we could use it for? (Building a wall; building an altar to put the Word on; build a church like this cathedral.)

- What else could we do with it?
  - All sorts of things, including really causing some damage by throwing it through a window or throwing it at somebody.
- The same thing applies to truths, even truths from the Lord's Word.
  - They can be used for good purposes or for harmful purposes.
  - Let's imagine an unlikely but perhaps instructive scenario.
    - Imagine you told someone, "The New Church teaches that 'God cannot turn away from us or even look at us with a frown' (*True Christianity* 56)."
    - That's a beautiful, hopeful, important truth to know about the Lord our God.
    - And then let's imagine that the person you told that turns around and says, "Man! How could anyone possibly believe in an angry God? They must be so stupid!"
  - Instead of loving that truth about the Lord for its truth and using it to build their relationship with the Lord, that person is using that truth to serve their own ego and sense of superiority and using it to make fun of other people.
- Perhaps that's an unlikely example but you can probably think of plenty of other examples throughout history where people have used truths from the Lord's Word to justify all sorts of selfish things.
  - We need to realize that we can be equally prone to misuse the Lord's truth and goodness.

## How Can We Work Towards Loving Truth and Goodness for Their Own Sake?

### *Have Realistic Expectations*

- How can we work towards loving truth and goodness for their own sake?
- One thing that's important is to have realistic expectations.
- The passages that describe people who love truth for its own sake and goodness for its own sake are pretty clearly talking about people who are pretty far along on their spiritual journey.
  - People whose sins are forgiven (*New Jerusalem* 167).
  - People who have a new will (*Secrets of Heaven* 9424).
- The Lord does not expect us to immediately be at this stage.
- Listen to this passage that describes the process we can go through:
  - *Secrets of Heaven* 10266
    - It does not matter if at first, when the formation starts to take place in the person, the affection for truth is also selfish and worldly; but this fault must be stripped away as good increases with the aid of truths. Also from then on the person is being unceasingly purged of those things, as the bowels are of waste matter. Anyone who thinks that a person can be endowed with the good of love without the truths of faith and without leading a life in accordance with them is much mistaken.

- It's saying, it doesn't matter if we like the truth for selfish and worldly reason at first..
  - If we keep trying to do what's good and right and live according to the truth, then the Lord can gradually get rid of the selfishness in us, just like our bodies regularly get rid of waste matter.
  - If keep on trying to live according to what the Lord's truth teaches, then He will be able to get us to the point of loving truth for its own sake and goodness for its own sake.
- It's a good ideal to aim towards and we *can* get to that point one day.
  - And it's OK if we aren't quite there yet.

### ***This Doesn't Mean to Just Take What Other People Have Told Us at Face Value***

- Another important thing to know is that the route to loving truth and goodness for their own sake does not go by way of just take what other people tell us at face value.
- We might think that that would be the spiritual and trusting thing to do – instead of running the risk of messing with the truth or using it for our own selfish purposes, we're just going to outsource the whole figuring out what the truth is to other people that we trust and not think about it ourselves.
  - But we have to see the truth for ourselves if we're going to really love it for ourselves.
- This next passage begins by talking about what people do who *don't* have a genuine affection for the truth and then it talks about what people do who *do* have a genuine affection for truth.
- *Secrets of Heaven* 8993:3-4
  - [A]n affection for truth which is not genuine consists in willing and desiring truths for selfish reasons, that is, in order to acquire important positions and make monetary gain. Those with an affection for truth that has this origin do not care whether the truths they learn are genuine or not, provided that they are such as can be palmed off as truths. This being so, they confine themselves to endorsing the teachings of the Church in which they were born, regardless of whether those teachings are true or not. They are also in the dark so far as real truths are concerned; for worldly ends or gains, and selfish ends or important positions make people completely blind.

But people with a genuine affection for truth, that is, those who desire to know truths to put them to good use and for the sake of the life they ought to lead, they too keep to the teachings of the Church, until they reach the age when they begin to think for themselves. Then they examine the Scriptures and pray to the Lord for enlightenment; and when they receive it, their hearts rejoice.

- Part of loving truth for its own sake is really wanting to know what the truth is so that we can put it to good use and live our lives according to it.
- Here's another passage that also talks about the importance of an individual working to see things for themselves:
- *Secrets of Heaven* 5432:5
  - People... who are moved by an affection for truth for its own sake and for their life's sake, consequently for the sake of the Lord's kingdom, do indeed have faith in the teachings of the

Church. But even so they examine the Word closely with no other end in view than to see the truth itself, as a result of which they develop a faith and a conscience that are their own. If anyone tells them that they ought to keep to the teachings of the Church in which they were born, they then think that they would have been told exactly the same if they had been born within Judaism,... Quakerism,... or even outside the Church.... This being what they think they decide to examine the Word closely, praying sincerely to the Lord for enlightenment as they do so. People like these do not disturb anyone else within the Church, nor do they ever condemn others, for they recognize that the life led by everyone who is a Church is founded on the faith that is his or her own.

## Connection to Holy Supper

- In the Holy Supper you are the one coming to have supper with your Lord and your God.
  - He is offering His bread and wine, His body and His blood, to you.
- In certain moods and states we can take things for granted.
  - You may have heard certain stories or teachings from the Lord's Word countless times and so might find yourself a bit bored by them.
    - But these truths are actually incredibly precious and not everyone has easy access to them like we do.
  - It's also easy to take goodness for granted.
    - Having something useful to do that you get some enjoyment from, having people that you care about and who care about you – those are fairly normal, run-of-the-mill things but also incredibly precious.
      - We realize just how precious they are when we don't have them – when we don't feel loved or cared about or don't feel like there's anything useful we can do.
- In the Holy Supper the Lord offers us very normal bread and wine but they represent something so precious.
  - Holy Supper can be a remind for us of just how precious the Lord's goodness and truth, His love and wisdom, are.
- There will be times when we mess up.
  - When we use the Lord's truth to try to make other people feel stupid, or when we try to twist the Lord's truth to try to make it say what we want it to say.
  - And times when we will take credit for goodness that actually belongs to the Lord or do things that look good just to try to get people to do what we want.
- Church on Sunday and especially Holy Supper provide a chance to come back to the Lord, to acknowledge where we've messed up, and to ask Him to help us do better next time.
- The Lord will gradually give us a love for truth for truth's sake and a love for good for good's sake.
  - Great peace have those who love the Lord's law, and for them there is no stumbling (Psalm 119:165).
- *Amen.*

If you would like to talk more about this topic, get in touch with Malcolm at [malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org](mailto:malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org).