

Seeking Clarity

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever tried assembling a piece of furniture or an electronic gadget with instructions that are either incomplete or terribly confusing?

It's frustrating and annoying, isn't it!

Or what about driving a car in a foreign country whose streets and signs and landmarks mean absolutely nothing to you?

That feeling of not knowing where you're going, of being completely lost is unsettling and scary, isn't it!

The human mind is built to *comprehend* and often

..."shuts down" or "tunes out" if it can't make sense of what it is seeing!

This is because we've been "wired," created, to seek knowledge, truth,

not as an abstract or intellectual exercise but

because our very survival (and sanity) depends on it!

Ever since we were small children, we've been on a quest to understand,

...to comprehend

...to make sense of the world around us...

...to gain knowledge

And so, when it comes to something as important as our faith,
our religion,
our beliefs and ideals,

the Lord wants to make sure that people can...
 - see these things,
 - and see them with *clarity*.

1. THE LORD'S GOAL

This desire, on the Lord's part, to give us clarity on spiritual matters...

- is not of "casual" interest to Him
- it's not a "peripheral" concern...
- it goes right to His core, to the *essence* of His being...

You see, the Lord has a ***burning desire*** to give us *clarity* about...

Who we are
 What we can accomplish
 What we can do for others
 How we can be happy...
 ...and useful
 ...and peaceful
 ...to eternity.

The Lord has this burning desire to give us clarity on the purpose and meaning of life because this is the *nature* of His love.

The book, *True Christianity*, gives us this beautifully, succinct definition of the Lord's love:

"The essence of [God's] love is to love others outside oneself, to want to be one with them, and to devote oneself to their happiness..." (TC 43).

And how does the Lord communicate these goals?

He does so through the spoken Word,
 - through the language of truth,
 - through the language of parable, symbolism, prophecy, metaphor, etc.

In other words, the Lord communicates His hopes and dreams for us through the

Old Testament,
New Testament,
And the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem.

2. AN UNFOLDING REVELATION

As a people, we've not always been *ready* or *willing* to hear the truth.

As a result, it has taken literally thousands of years for the human race to gain clarity about...

who the Lord is
how salvation works
what faith and charity are
what awaits us in the next life...

This lack of "clarity" is not because the Lord has been *unwilling* to share His truth.

It's not because the Lord has been "withholding" important information...

Remember, again, the nature of the Lord's love...

It is His constant, unceasing desire to:

- love us
- be joined to us
- make us happy to eternity

The lack of clarity lies with human beings, with our inability to receive that which the Lord wishes to share with us.

A good way to think about the Lord's revelations (The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem) is to think of them as a...

time-lapsed, sequential, unfolding of truth...

**a gradual shift from "figurative" language
to "plain" language.**

One of our readings this morning compared this gradual, unfolding of truth to the growth and development of a human being,

the point being that there's a fair amount of "growing up" to be had before we are in a position to receive what the Lord is offering us in "plain language."

We read:

The church from the most ancient times, even to the end of the Jewish church, increased in the same way as a person is conceived and born, and who grows up, and is instructed and taught. But the successive states of the church after the end of the Jewish church, or from the Lord's time to the present day, have been like those of a person who grows in intelligence and wisdom, or is being regenerated. ***To this end the interior truths of the Word, of the church, and of worship, were revealed by the Lord when He was in the world; and now, again, truths still more interior are [revealed] and in proportion as things interior are revealed, a person becomes wiser, for to become interior is to become wiser.***

Apocalypse Explained 641:4

This gradual "peeling back" of layers, of revealing more and more "interior truths" which begins in the New Testament and continues more fully and completely in the Heavenly Doctrines is what leads to the clarity we all seek.

3. WHY SO MUCH CONFUSION?

The Lord came into the world to save the human race.

He *also* came into the world because the Word, the Old Testament, had been so badly twisted and perverted by the church leaders, few were able to distinguish between right and wrong.

The Lord *had* actually communicated His love by means of the Old Testament, but that message of love had been lost.

People no longer had clarity.

What caused so much confusion?

Well, this question could be asked another way - what blocks our ability to see the Lord's truth clearly, without confusion?

It's the usual suspects, that serpent of old:

Pride and arrogance
 Selfishness and greed
 Skepticism
 Rationalizations and justifications
 The allurements and appearances of this world

So, during His public ministry, the Lord brought back "clarity"

by calling out selfishness and greed
 by healing people of their diseases
 by re-visiting simple, Old Testament teachings like...

The Ten Commandments
 Two Great Commandments

Sometimes He spoke in figurative language and in parables...

But at other times He used clear, direct language.

All the way through the New Testament you see the Lord's burning desire to "speak plainly," to reveal His deepest hopes and dreams for us.

We see this especially in the Gospel of John:

*"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you **plainly** about the Father" (John 16:25).*

*"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you into all truth**" (John 16:13).*

4. TWO TYPES OF CLARITY

We've been talking about how strong our desire for clarity is, and that a *lack* of clarity in life can be deeply disturbing and disorienting.

This is because our desire for clarity is not just an intellectual thing.

It's also a matter of life, a matter of the will...

because our sense of peace

contentment, fulfillment

only becomes possible when we make the truths of our religion a matter of the will, when we, as one passage says, "abandon evils" (AC 10067:8).

So the clarity which the Lord offers us in His Word is twofold.

1st - clarity of thought

2nd - clarity of intention and will

The first type, ***clarity of thought***, is something that anyone can have...

- it comes and goes, in and out of focus
- can be very inspirational, moving, but is also temporary/fleeting
- this is because it is not connected to our will (life)

The second type, ***clarity of intention and will***, is something that becomes a part of our life, who we are...

- this type of clarity stays with us
- we don't lose sight of it
- it grows stronger and stronger in us because we are doing the work of repentance (AC 4416).
- we are asking the Lord to change us from the inside out

5. BE AN "OPEN" VESSEL

This month we celebrate the birthday of the New Church.

We celebrate the fact that the teachings of the New Church, the Heavenly Doctrines, are a fulfillment of the Lord's promise to speak "*plainly about the Father.*"

In its pages, we get a full and comprehensive revelation, a new kind of *clarity* about the Lord, His love, His wisdom, His Providence, His hopes and dreams for us.

We celebrate the fact that the teachings of the New Church, the Heavenly Doctrines, are a fulfillment of the Lord's promise to "*guide [us] into all truth,*"

because this new revelation is said to be the "*crown of all the churches*" (TC 787) in which all people are now permitted "*to enter with the understanding into the mysteries of faith*" (TC 508).

And so we're taught that:

"All of us have it in our nature to be able to *recognize and understand truth when we hear it.*" (TC 759)

But if this is true, why do we, as New Church people, who have access to so much "clarity," still feel that we lack it?

If we've been guided into all truth...
If the secrets of heaven have now been revealed...
If what was once a mystery is a mystery no more...

Then why do we still doubt?
Why is our faith still weak at times?

It's because we are, as to our spirit, spiritual **vessels**.

And as vessels we are either "open" or "closed" to the influx of truth that flows from heaven into the Word.

And the point is this: we can only receive that which we are *willing* to receive...even if the truth is spelled out in plain language like it is today (see AC 5147:2).

In other words, our "receptivity" has to do with the type "soil" we prepare in our hearts and minds, as the Lord illustrates in the *Parable of the Sower* (Mt. 13).

To get the kind of clarity we all seek, we need "good ground"

- a mind that is humble and willing to be led by the Lord

6. CONCLUSION

Let us be thankful for the clarity of vision that the Lord has given us in the teachings of His Word, in the Old Testament, the New Testament and in the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem.

This new revelation is said to "*surpass all miracles*" (Inv. 39).

It has been given to the world in the "*hopes of shedding light where there is ignorance, and of dispelling skepticism*" (HH 1).

This new revelation has resulted in a Last Judgment in the spiritual world, and a re-ordering of the heavens which means that now the world is experiencing and enjoying a new kind of *spiritual freedom* (see LJ 73).

These "behind the scenes" events are now making it possible for people who are desperately seeking clarity to find it.

All that's required of anyone is that they be an open vessel...

**that they adopt an adult-like innocence,
a humility and willingness to be led by the Lord.**

And, lastly, let us remember what the Lord desires for us.

It is His constant, unceasing desire to:

- love us
- be joined to us
- make us happy to eternity

He accomplishes these ends by coming to us in His Word...

by giving us *clarity* about...

Who we are

What we can accomplish

What we can do for others

How we can be happy...

...and useful

...and peaceful

...to eternity.

Which is why He says,

*"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you into all truth**" (John 16:13).*

AMEN.