

# Peace

A Sermon by John L. Odhner  
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## ***Veterans Day***

Tomorrow about this time will be the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month—the time when an armistice began that brought the first World War to an end. The horrors of that war had surpassed every previous war. It was “the Great War,” “the War to End All Wars,” and its end would be celebrated around the world as Armistice Day and Remembrance Day. It became officially “a day dedicated to the cause of world peace,” and there was some hope that such a war would never occur again. Perhaps the ancient prophecies would come true—

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
And their spears into pruning hooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war anymore.

— *Isaiah 2:4*

Yet time would reveal that that armistice did not end all wars, but set the stage for the even more devastating World War II. It was not a genuine, lasting peace. Real peace cannot come simply by saying “Peace, Peace!” when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11).

People think that someone bad is at peace when he is calm and cheerful because everything is going right for him. But this is not peace, it is the calm and delight belonging to evil desires; it merely simulates the state of peace.

— *Secrets of Heaven 8455*

## ***The Lord's Peace***

When God came into the world as the Messiah 2000 years ago, many who were waiting for Him expected that He would overthrow the Roman oppressors and begin that time of peace, yet Jesus said,

“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

— *John 18:36*

The Lord's battles were not "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) The Lord's victory was not over any earthly power but over hell—and not in fact to destroy hell and end the conflict between good and evil, but to restore a balance between heaven and hell so that we who are in the middle between those opposing sides can freely ally ourselves with either side.

The Lord's battles are not earthly battles, and His peace is not earthly peace. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). Worldly peace depends on what is going on outside us. If all kinds of chaos are going on outside us, we can't have outward peace. But the Lord's peace is inward peace. It flows into our minds through our soul, not from our environment.

### ***Does the Second Coming Bring Peace?***

Some people have hoped that since the Lord (the Messiah) did not bring political peace when He came into the world the first time, the second time when He returns He would bring outward peace to the world. But teachings for the New Church tell us that political peace is not the Lord's true aim.

The future state of the world will be exactly the same as it has been up to now; for the mighty change which has taken place in the spiritual world does not cause any change in the external appearance of the natural world. So just as before there will be politics, peace-treaties, alliances and wars, and all the other general and particular features of society. When the Lord said:

There will be wars, and then nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines, plagues and earthquakes in various places. (*Matthew 24:6-7*)

He did not mean such events in the natural world, but corresponding ones in the spiritual world. For the Word in its prophecies is not concerned with kingdoms on earth or the peoples on it, so not with their wars either; nor is it concerned with famine, plague, and earthquakes on earth, but with the events in the spiritual world which correspond to them.

—*Divine Providence 73*

So the peace the Lord gives is an inner peace that comes from being connected with Him. As Isaiah said,

You will keep him in perfect peace,  
Whose mind is stayed on You,  
Because he trusts in You.

—*Isaiah 26:3*

## **Conflict**

Conflict is a part of our lives. Maybe there are a few harsh words and then someone we love stomps out of the room. Maybe there are a lot more harsh words and someone we love stomps out of our home and our life. Maybe anger leads to physical violence and soon an innocent person is injured. Or maybe a conflict between coworkers leads to someone getting fired. We might find ourselves in court, or in jail. Or maybe the conflict is on a larger scale with one nation fighting another with bombs and guns.

From annoying personal misunderstandings to world wars, human conflict serves a purpose. Through conflict we can become stronger, more patient, more determined, more compassionate, more peaceful. But getting through the conflict can be difficult. So how does the Lord prepare us for conflict?

## **Gideon's Fleece**

Our story today is about conflict in the middle east, not today but over 3000 years ago. Gideon is preparing for battle against the Midianites, who have been raiding the Israelites and stealing their food. The Lord had told Gideon that Gideon will be the one to overcome the Midianites. Now he wants a sign that the Lord will be with him.

Gideon puts a fleece on the threshing floor (where the Lord had appeared to him) and asks that the fleece be covered with dew and the ground be dry in the morning. The Lord does this. Gideon then wants another sign—that the next morning the ground be wet and the fleece dry. The Lord does this as well.

On a literal level, this story does not seem especially helpful. Putting a fleece on the ground and asking for it to be filled with dew seems like a strange request. Why not ask for a helpful miracle, like someone blind or lame to be healed? But there is a deeper meaning to the fleece.

“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.” —*Isaiah 1:18*

Wool, being white, and clean, and soft is a symbol of being purified from evil.

Gideon put the fleece on the threshing floor, though his first vision of the Lord was at the winepress. Threshing, of course, is the first step in making grain into bread, while pressing grapes is the first step in making wine. We are familiar with bread and wine as important symbols of the Lord’s love and wisdom. He is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world, and His wine is the wine of the New Covenant. In fact, following this service we will offer Holy Supper, and you may choose to eat the bread as a reminder that it is the Lord’s love that satisfies our hunger for goodness and it is His wisdom that quenches our thirst for understanding. It’s in the context of the winepress and the threshing floor that Gideon meets with the Lord and lays down this fleece that represents the peace that we find not by withdrawing from the world, but engaging in the uses of the world. We find the Lord’s love present with us when we are involved with that process of making the bread and making the wine.

### ***Morning Dew***

After Gideon put out the fleece he waited to morning. "Morning" in the Word is not the time of day but a state of mind. A psalm says, “Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5) So morning means moving from a sad, dark state of mind to a happy, bright one.

What brings this new state is our awareness of the Lord.

My soul waits for the Lord  
More than those who watch for the morning —*Psalm 130:6*

My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD;  
In the morning I will direct it to You,  
And I will look up. —*Psalm 5:3*

And with the morning comes the dew. The Lord says,

Let my teaching drop as the rain,  
My speech distill as the dew,

As raindrops on the tender herb,  
And as showers on the grass.

—*Deuteronomy 32:2*

Dew is like rain, but it comes more gently, without any storm, lightning or thunder. One passage says that when brothers live in unity, it is like the dew descending on the mountains (Psalm 133:1, 3). So dew especially means the truth of peace.

The reason why “dew” means the truth of peace is that it comes down in the morning from heaven or the sky and on grassland looks like a light shower of rain. But also it holds a certain sweetness or pleasantness, more than a shower of rain does, and makes grass and crops in the field rejoice. And “morning” is a state of peace.... Peace is said to be like the dawn on earth, which fills people’s minds with overall delight. And the truth of peace is like the light of dawn.

—*Secrets of Heaven 8455*

So it was in the morning that Gideon went to find this fleece

## **Fear**

Gideon was a fearful person. He was hiding in the winepress to thresh his wheat, for fear that Midianites would find him. Though the Lord addressed him as a mighty man of valor, he actually saw himself as the least important person in the weakest clan in the land. He didn’t believe the Lord could be with them because bad things were happening to Israel, and there were no miracles to prevent them. When the Lord asked him to tear down the local idol, he was even afraid that his own family would go against him.

But by the time Gideon went out to battle, he had become a courageous leader able to fight an army that outnumbered him over 400 to 1. The miracle of the fleece was a step that helped change the kind of person Gideon was. After the fleece he sent home every soldier who was afraid, and he went forward without fear.

When we take on a challenge or try to overcome the influences of hell, we cannot be successful if we are coming from a place of vengeance or anger, resentment, jealousy or fear. Before we go into battle we need to “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord” (Ex. 14:13). “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). We need to calm down, get centered, pray, meditate, reflect on the Lord’s providence, allow ourselves to be in a state of peace. In that state of peace we can reflect on the Lord’s infinite power, wisdom and love. We can note that He turns

all evil to some good purpose, and we can see that He is always taking good care of us. This kind of thinking brings us into a state of inner peace, so we can then face our trials with a calm, centered feeling.

## **Peace**

This was the Lord's message to Gideon: "Peace be with you. Do not fear. You shall not die." When he heard this, Gideon built an altar and named it "The Lord is Peace." We might wonder why the Lord said, "Peace be with you" when in fact the Lord was sending him out to battle. And the fact is that the Lord's peace is different from worldly peace.

The Lord is constantly at work to give us peace. He said,

These things I have said to you, that in Me you may have peace.

—*John 16:33*

The mountains will depart  
and the hills be removed,  
but My mercy will not depart from you,  
and the covenant of My peace will not be removed.

—*Isaiah 54:10*

Yet we have a responsibility to participate in the process.

Seek peace and pursue it.

—*Psalms 34:14*

## **Our Inner and Outer Person**

When Gideon first found the dew on the fleece, the ground was dry. Later, the dew was on the ground, while the fleece was dry. Though the teachings for the New Church don't directly explain this, it seems to relate to the fact that our regeneration begins in our inner person, the part of us that no one else can see, that we may not even be aware of ourselves. First the Lord has to change us on the inside, and then He can change us on the outside.

Part of the message for us is that we have to find inner peace before we can find outward peace. Inner peace is possible even when everything around us is crazy, like the eye of the hurricane surrounded by violent winds. When the disciples were afraid of sinking in the raging storm, the Lord was fast asleep in the bottom of the boat—completely at peace in the midst of the storm. Later He quieted the storm outside the boat.

The devil's crew constantly strives to destroy our new life. Nonetheless there is a state of peace at our center. If there were not, we would not fight. In the struggles we go through, we keep our eye on that state as the goal, and if we did not have it to aim for, we would never have the strength or power to fight. It is also owing to this vision that we conquer. Since it is our goal, it is also the state we enter after our struggles or trials.

—*Secrets of Heaven* 3696.2

## **Try It**

Next time you find yourself in conflict with someone else, try putting out the fleece. Before you try to resolve your conflict, innocently turn to the Lord, seek peace and pursue it, so that you can come to your conflict with a sense of inner peace, rather than holding resentment, anger, shame or fear. Then whatever the outcome of the conflict, you will have victory because you will have become a better person, and you will have peace because you have placed everything in the Lord's hands. Amen.

## **Lessons**

### ***Gideon's Fleece, Judges 6***

Judges 6: Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, <sup>2</sup> and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. ... <sup>4</sup> Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth, ... and leave no sustenance for Israel, ... and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord...

<sup>11</sup> Now the Angel of the Lord came...while ... Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites. <sup>12</sup> And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!...Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you? ... Peace *be* with you; do not fear, you shall not die." <sup>24</sup> So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-*Is*-Peace...

<sup>36</sup> So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said—<sup>37</sup> look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is* dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said." <sup>38</sup> And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a

bowlful of water. <sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.” <sup>40</sup> And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

### ***Stilling the Storm, Matthew 8***

<sup>23</sup> Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. <sup>24</sup> And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. <sup>25</sup> Then His disciples came to *Him* and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!”

<sup>26</sup> But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. <sup>27</sup> So the men marveled, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

### ***Inner Peace, Secrets of Heaven 3696***

When we are being regenerated, at first we experience a tranquil state, but as we enter into our new life, we also enter a disquieted state. The evil and falsity we previously absorbed emerge into the open and agitate us. In fact, we eventually suffer trials and harassment inflicted by the Devil’s crew, which constantly strives to destroy our new life. Nonetheless there is a state of peace at our center. If there were not, we would not fight. In the struggles we go through, we keep our eye on that state as the goal, and if we did not have it to aim for, we would never have the strength or power to fight. It is also owing to this vision that we conquer. Since it is our goal, it is also the state we enter after our struggles or trials.



## ***Additional Readings***

### **Peace, Secrets of Heaven 8455**

The reason why 'dew' means the truth of peace is that it comes down in the morning from heaven or the sky and on grassland looks like a light shower of rain. But also it holds a certain sweetness or pleasantness, more than a shower of rain does, and makes grass and crops in the field rejoice. And 'morning' is a state of peace.... Peace is said to be like the dawn on earth, which fills people's minds with overall delight. And the truth of peace is like the light of dawn. This truth which is being called the truth of peace is the Divine Truth itself present in heaven and coming from the Lord; it influences all there without exception, and causes heaven to be heaven. Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads towards an end that is good. When a person believes these things about Him he is at peace, since he fears nothing and no anxiety about things to come disturbs him. How far a person attains this state depends on how far he attains love to the Lord.

Everything bad, especially trust in self, takes away the state of peace. People think that someone bad is at peace when he is calm and cheerful because everything is going right for him. But this is not peace, it is the calm and delight belonging to evil desires; it merely simulates the state of peace. This delight, being the opposite of the delight belonging to peace, turns to undelight in the next life, for that is what lies hidden within it. In the next life outward things are rolled away one layer after another through to inmost things at the center. Peace is at the center of all delight—and even of the undelight—of a person governed by goodness. So far therefore as he casts off what is external the state of peace is revealed and he is filled with bliss, blessedness, and happiness, the source of which is the Lord Himself.

Regarding the state of peace that exists in heaven one may say it is such that no words can describe it; nor can any idea of a worldly origin enable it to enter a person's thought and perception, as long as he is in the world. It transcends all his awareness then. Calmness of mind, contentment, and cheerfulness because things are going right are nothing in comparison, for these affect only the outward parts of the mind. But peace affects the inmost parts of all; it affects the primary substances, and the beginnings of substances as they exist with a person, and from these it spreads and pours itself out into parts formed from those substances and beginnings of them. It brings a lovely feeling into them; it brings bliss and happiness to the parts where his ideas form, consequently to his ends in life, and so makes his mind into a heaven.

### **Inner Self Regenerated First, Secrets of Heaven 8746**

The Lord regenerates the inner self first, and the outward self after that, as the outward self is regenerated by means of the inner self. The inner self is regenerated through thinking about matters of faith and intending them, but the external through a life in keeping with them.

### **Morning is Peace and Innocence, Secrets of Heaven 2780**

And Abraham rose early in the morning. That this signifies a state of peace and innocence, is evident from the signification of "morning," and also of "rising early," when predicated of the Lord, who here is "Abraham." "Morning" in the universal sense signifies the Lord, and hence His kingdom; consequently the celestial of love in general and in particular (as was shown n. 2333); and as it signifies these, it

signifies the state itself in which they are, which state is that of peace and innocence. The state of peace in the heavens is like that of the dawn on earth. In the state of peace in the heavens come forth all celestial and spiritual things, and derive therefrom all that is auspicious, blessed, and happy in them, as in the time of dawn on earth all things come forth before man as things of delight and gladness; for all the singulars derive their quality from the general affection (see n. 920, 2384). The case is the same with the state of innocence: this comes forth in the state of peace, and is a general thing affecting all the things of love and faith. Unless these have innocence in them, they lack their essential. Hence it is that no one can come into heaven unless he have something of innocence (see Mark 10:15). It is plain from this what "morning" signifies in the internal sense, and still more when it is said that he "rose early in the morning;" and as in the highest sense "morning" is the Lord, and as the state is from Him which effects and affects all things in His kingdom, "morning" and "rising in the morning" signify many other things which come forth in that state; and this as related to the things which follow in the internal sense.

### **The Threshing Floor, Secrets of Heaven 6537**

The fact that 'a threshing-floor' means a place where the good of truth and the truth of good exist, thus where things of the Church exist, is clear in Joel, Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in Jehovah your God. The threshing-floors are full of grain, and the presses overflow with new wine and oil. Joel 2:23, 24. [4] Since 'a threshing-floor' meant good and also truth, they used to celebrate the feast of tabernacles at the time when they gathered in from the threshing-floor. Regarding that feast it says in Moses, "You shall celebrate the feast of tabernacles seven days, when you gather in from your threshing-floor, and from your wine-press" (Deut. 16:13).

### **Why Wars Are Permitted, Divine Providence 251.**

People who worship themselves and the world justify their rejection of divine providence as well when they think that wars are permitted, in which so many people are killed and their wealth plundered. It is not because of divine providence that wars happen, because wars are inseparable from murder, plunder, violence, cruelty, and other appalling evils that are diametrically opposed to Christian caring. However, it is absolutely necessary that they be permitted, because since the earliest people, the times meant by Adam and his wife (see 241 above), our life's love has become basically a love of controlling others, ultimately everyone, and of gaining possession of the world's wealth, ultimately all of it. These two loves cannot be kept in chains as long as it is the intent of divine providence that we act freely and rationally, as already explained in 71-97 [71-99]. There is also the fact that if it were not for this permission, the Lord could not lead us out of our evil, so we could not be reformed and saved. That is, unless evils were allowed to surface, we would not see them and therefore would not admit to them; so we could not be induced to resist them. That is why evils cannot be suppressed by some exercise of divine providence. If they were, they would stay closed in, and like the diseases called cancer and gangrene, would spread and devour everything that is alive and human.

[2] From birth, each of us is like a little hell in constant conflict with heaven. The Lord cannot rescue any of us from our hell unless we see that we are in it and want to be rescued. This cannot happen unless there are instances of permission that are caused by laws of divine providence.

This is why there are lesser and greater wars, the lesser ones between property owners and their neighbors and the greater ones between the rulers of nations and their neighbors. The only difference between the lesser and the greater ones is that the lesser ones are limited by national laws and the greater ones by international laws. There is also the fact that in both cases the participants want to violate the

laws, and that the lesser ones cannot, but the greater ones can, though still not beyond the bounds of possibility.

[3] There are several reasons hidden in the treasury of divine wisdom why the greater wars, with all their inevitable murder, plunder, violence, and cruelty, are not suppressed by the Lord, acting on the monarchs and leaders, either at the outset or while the wars are in progress. They are suppressed only at the end, when the power of one side or the other has become so weak that there is a threat of extinction. Some of these reasons have been revealed to me, and one of them is that all wars, regardless of the civil issues involved, portray states of the church in heaven and are corresponding images. This was true of all the wars described in the Word, and it is true of all wars today. The wars described in the Word are the ones the Israelites waged with various nations such as the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Philistines, the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and the Assyrians. When the Israelites, portraying the church, departed from their precepts and laws and fell into the evils meant by these nations (each of the nations the Israelites went to war with portrayed some particular kind of evil), then they were punished by that nation. For example, when they profaned the holy practices of the church by committing gross idolatry they were punished by the Assyrians and Chaldeans, because Assyria and Chaldea stand for the profanation of what is holy. For the meaning of the wars with the Philistines, see Teachings for the New Jerusalem on Faith 50-54.

[4] Wars in our own times, wherever they occur, portray the same kind of things. Everything that happens in this physical world is in response to something that is happening in the spiritual world, and everything spiritual involves the church. In this world, no one knows what countries in Christendom are the equivalents of the Moabites and the Ammonites, the Syrians and the Philistines, the Chaldeans and the Assyrians, and the other nations against whom the Israelites waged war, but their equivalents do exist.

We in this physical world are absolutely incapable of seeing what the quality of the earthly church is, and which are the particular evils it has given way to, for which it is suffering the punishments of war. This is because all that show in this world are outward matters that do not constitute the church. We can see them in the spiritual world, though, where the inner realities are visible that the real church is concerned with. All the people there form alliances in keeping with their states. Their conflicts in the spiritual world correspond to our wars; and both are correspondingly governed by the Lord according to his divine providence.

[5] Spiritual-minded people realize that the Lord is governing wars in this world by his divine providence, but materialists do not, except when a holiday is declared because of a victory. Then they may get down on their knees and thank God for giving them victory; and they may have said a few prayerful words before the battle began. When they come to their own senses, though, they credit the victory either to their leader's skill or to some decision or event in the middle of the battle, something that they did not think about at the time, but that led to the victory.

[6] On the fact that divine providence, called "luck," is at work in even the smallest, most trivial details, see 212 above. If you recognize divine providence in these matters, you must surely recognize it in affairs of war. In everyday language, we refer to a war's progress and serendipitous events as "the fortunes of war." This is divine providence, especially in the decisions and planning of the leaders, even if at the time and afterwards they attribute everything to their own prudence.

But they may do this if they want to, since they are in complete freedom to think in favor of divine providence or against it, in favor of God or against him. However, they might know that no trace of their decisions or planning comes from themselves. It all comes either from heaven or from hell--from hell by permission, and from heaven by providence.

### **The Future State of the Church, Last Judgment 73**

[2] The future state of the church, however, will not be the same. It may seem much the same in outward appearance, but inwardly it will be different. In outward appearance the churches will be divided from one another as before, their teachings will differ as before, and so will the religious systems of the heathen. But people in the church will henceforward have more freedom in thinking about matters of faith, and so about the spiritual matters which have to do with heaven, because of the restoration of spiritual freedom. For now everything in the heavens and the hells has been restored to order, and it is from there that all thought is influenced about Divine matters or against them; from the heavens when thought favours what is Divine, from the hells when it opposes it. But people will be unaware of this change of state, since they do not reflect on it, nor indeed do they know anything about spiritual freedom or influence from the spiritual world. However, in heaven this is perceived, and people after their deaths can do so too. It is because people have had their spiritual freedom restored that the spiritual sense of the Word has now been disclosed, and by this means Divine truths of a more inward kind have been revealed. For in their previous state people would not have understood them, and if anyone did so, he would have profaned them. It may be seen in HEAVEN AND HELL 597-603) that people's freedom depends upon an equilibrium between heaven and hell; and that people can only be reformed, if they enjoy freedom.