

Spiritual Purity and Integrity

Psalm 146
Matthew 19:16-27
Apocalypse Explained 932:2; 933; 934:3

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Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven: and come and follow Me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Matthew 19:21, 22

The story of the young man who had observed the Divine Commandments from his youth up, but who could not give up his great possessions, is recorded in three different places in the New Testament and is expounded in several places in the Third Testament, which may indicate its importance for us, today. The "young man" represents the understanding of truth and intelligence (AE 734:21; AC 7668:2). In instructing the young man on how to attain eternal life, the Lord said: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments... Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother, and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

The young man had readily answered that he kept "all these things" in his mind and was open enough to ask: "What lack I yet?"

What a question to ask.

The Lord's replied by pointing to the spiritual principle according to which it is impossible for a man to keep the Commandments from self. A person must turn to the Lord if he is to receive the power to live according to the Decalogue. By looking to oneself, away from the Lord, we deprive ourselves of all legitimate spiritual power. And as we then begin to imagine things, we can no longer keep the Commandments. The Decalogue cannot be kept unless a person's heart is pure, and the heart is pure when it is full of God. Whether you say "full of God", or "empty of evil loves", here it is the same. Evil loves spiritually enslave you by keeping your inclination towards evil and falsity active, and are represented in the Bible quote by the young man's "great possessions." After hearing the Lord's words it is recorded that he "went

away sorrowful." Indeed, it may be hard for a man who considers himself religious to hear that he cannot follow the Commandments from self, apart from the Lord.

In the Gospel of Mark we read that after the young man said he had observed the Divine Commandments from his youth, "then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him: One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." (Mark 10:21). Again, we are told that the young man was "sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions." Then, "Jesus looked round about, and saith unto His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them. Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23, 24).

In Luke, in relation to the same story, it is written that those who heard these words of the Lord asked, "Who then can be saved?" To which the Lord answered: "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:26, 27). Here again the Lord teaches that no one can follow the Commandments apart from following Him.

Every person in the Church knows the Ten Commandments, acknowledges their importance, and perceives something of the general direction with regard to their application to life. For it is obvious to every well-disposed person that his or her life depends upon the observance of Divine Law. Daily observance of the Commandments, indeed, gives a positive spiritual direction to life, and this is represented by the young man's saying, "All these things have I kept from my youth up." For this reason it is recorded that "Jesus beholding him loved him." On the natural plane of life, people may say that from their earliest youth they have kept the Commandments, and that they know the Lord is beholding and loving all who obey His Law. But it may happen that for the person keeping the Commandments, the acknowledgment of the Lord may be of secondary importance, a matter of education and memory, rather than a matter of spiritual discipline and a living perception of the Lord's presence and operation. For this reason the Lord said to the young man: "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

In many places in the Word the Lord teaches that keeping the Commandments in their obvious, literal sense is in the beginning relatively easy, but that "to sell whatsoever one has," "to take up one's cross," and "to follow the Lord" is much more difficult. For the former involves a certain change in the externals of our habits and behavior, while the latter implies a fundamental change of life.

In teaching the young man "to sell whatever he has" the Lord is telling us to put to good use the knowledge of truth from the Word, for of what use is spiritual knowledge if not for the continuous amendment of life? We read from the Latin Word: "What is a commandment for? not that a man may know, but that he may live according to the commandment, for then he has in himself the Kingdom of the Lord" (Arcana Coelestia 916:2). Even though it is possible to know the Commandments and to give an appearance of living according to them, the real question for us is whether we make proper use of Divine Law? The question is whether we use the Commandments in such a way as to overcome and leave behind all things of the old life—all bad habits, all evil inclinations and all infernal desires—or whether we use the Commandments in a superficial way only, in a way which allows disorders of the mind to remain hidden behind the appearance of our own goodness. Happily, the appearance of such imaginary goodness does not hold up well over a period of time, regardless of how skillfully presented and how carefully maintained. On this fact rests our hope to overcome the danger of perverting the knowledge of spiritual things, particularly the knowledge of the Commandments. For as long as we look to the Lord as our Master and Father, the power of Divine truth will be allowed to subdue the proprium. On the other hand, if we look at ourselves only, away from the Lord, the power of His truth will tend to inflate what is meant to be subdued. It is therefore of utmost importance for everyone to put to good use their knowledge of the Divine Law, "to follow commandments from God and not from self, because nothing else "purifies the internal man, opens Heaven, admits the Lord, and makes man as to his spirit an angel of Heaven" (Apocalypse Explained 902:6). He who lives in this way is said to be conjoined with the Lord, for then the Commandments not only teach life but also give life, and thus open the way to Heaven, and the sight to the Lord (Arcana Coelestia 8767e).

To follow the Commandments from the Lord is to try to live according to them in humility, with innocence, without calculation or second thoughts. Nothing seems to be more important than this. On the other hand, a person may only look to the Lord, and imagine that his life will take care of itself. Or a person may only pay a great deal of

attention to an apparently good life, without much looking to the Lord. Both of these spiritual shortcuts lead nowhere good.

By "selling all that he had and giving to the poor," is signified that the man of the Church should alienate himself from his proprium and cast it away. More specifically, "to give to the poor" signifies in the spiritual sense to do the works of charity (see *Apocalypse Explained* 893:4). This the Lord also teaches in the Gospels: "If any one will come after Me, let him deny himself (Matthew 26:24; see *also* Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). It is manifestly clear that to deny one's self includes doing unto others those things that do not benefit ourselves in any way. On hearing this, a person may ask: Why should we do things which do not benefit us? This does not appear to be rational or logical. But the Lord gives a simple answer that is often repeated in the form of a Command: "Do good for the sake of good, speak truth for the sake of truth, and for no other reason." Concerning this we read in the *Apocalypse Explained*: "If a man is living according to the Lord's commandments, it is permissible for him to think of eternal life, salvation, and heavenly joy; but it is not permissible for him to keep his mind intent upon reward, for if he does so he has reward as an end, and easily falls into the thought that by his life he deserves Heaven and salvation, and this thought causes him to have regard to self in every particular, and such regard to self removes him from Heaven; for so far as man looks to self in what he does, he does not look to Heaven" (*Apocalypse Explained* 445). Hence the importance of asking the Lord: "What lack I yet?"

There is no easier way to deny oneself than to look to the Lord. And yet, many prefer to do good or speak truth or to observe the Commandments in a way similar to merchants handling their trade. They buy low at the market of propiums and try to sell high. Are we all not sometimes tempted to set a price for doing good, to seek a reward for speaking truth, an approval of others for our obedience to the Commandments? Are we not apt to calculate and protect our own interests before we consider what is in the interest of Heaven? Do we not try to make a profit with the things we have received for free? If the answer to any of these questions is "yes", it will be good to remember what wise men once said concerning a person in such a state: "Outwardly he will have Heaven, but inwardly there will be hell...with him the external is an image of Heaven, and the internal an image of hell. Such a Heaven is an imaginary Heaven. The devil itself wants nothing more than to have such a Heaven in which he can rule, posing therein as an angel of light" (*Handbook*, p. 7).

In a word, to benefit at the expense of life in Heaven is neither good nor wise. The riches of self we should deny, and in denying them, we deny their power and influence, and thus draw nearer to the Lord. Remember His words, when, after the young man went away, the Lord looked round about, "and saith unto His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them. Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!"

It is known that an effort to keep the Commandments without looking to the Lord may put the proprium in some kind of imaginary reality, in which the most brutal and violent things are hidden, but nevertheless are far from being subdued. This is why the Lord asked the young man to "take up his cross," by which is meant that he should acknowledge the Lord to be God, and shun evils as sins against Him. For unless a person humbles himself and acknowledges the Lord to be his Master and Savior, unless a person resists evils and thus allows the Lord to remove infernal loves from his heart, man cannot observe any of the Commandments. But if he does these things in humility and innocence, little by little he will be given power to obey the Divine Law from the genuine love to the Lord *and* faith in Him. Such life allows the internal man to be fashioned into an image of Heaven, and the external man into the image of the world in subordination to Heaven. We are told that what is formed there is formed by the Lord, and will remain to eternity (Arcana Coelestia 9283:2; 10505:3).

Of this we read in the Apocalypse Explained: "It is believed by many in the world...that to know doctrine, and from mere knowing to believe that they are true, saves man...but I can affirm that no one is saved by these alone. I have seen many, even the most learned, cast into hell; but on the other hand, those who have lived according to the knowledges of truth and good from the Word I have seen raised up into heaven. From this it is clear that knowledges are of no avail, but a life according to them; and that knowledges merely teach how man ought to live. To live according to the knowledges of truth and good is to think that one must do thus and not otherwise because it is commanded by the Lord in the Word. When man thus thinks and thus wills and does, he becomes spiritual. Yet it is necessary for those within the church to believe in the Lord, and when they think of Him to think of His Divine in the Human, since from His Divine Human everything of charity and faith proceed" (Apocalypse Explained 105:3).

Amen.