

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

IS HEAVEN A PLACE?

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Heaven! What a wonderful thing it would be to enter heaven—for some people. Here is an account from the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church about a person who sadly did not find entering heaven the happy experience he had thought it would be. As we pick up the story he is describing what happened to him:

When I first came into the spiritual world I asked the wise ones I met if a person would be allowed to come up to heaven. They said everyone was allowed to come up to heaven, but added that a person should be careful that he doesn't get thrown down. I laughed at this and went up. I believed, you see, like other people do, that it is possible for everybody in the whole world to take in the joys of heaven completely. But the truth is that as soon as I was in heaven, I almost lost my breath. And on account of the pain and torment in my body I threw myself on the ground, and writhing like a snake laid right in front of a fire, I crawled to a precipice and threw myself over it. Some people standing around below then picked me up and carried me to an inn, where I came to my senses (*Conjugal Love* 10:5).

This man learned the hard way that heaven is not a place a person can just “go to”—the way a person would go to a party or a vacation site.

This is the basic truth the angels emphasized to the man when they heard him telling his story. “You now see,” one of the angels said, “that the joys of heaven and eternal happiness are not the joys of a *place*, but of the state of a person's life.” The angel then explained that everyone who becomes an angel after he dies already carries his heaven *within* him from his life on earth.

This is exactly what the Lord Himself taught us when He was on earth: “The kingdom of God [meaning heaven] is within you” (Luke 17:21).

What makes the kingdom of God be in a person? The living presence of the Lord in that person's heart. Specifically, it is the Lord's *love* in a person's heart that makes heaven in him. The Lord's love is love for others, an intense desire to bless them and make them truly happy—now and forever. This love is always bringing heaven into being wherever it can, because it is a love of being useful and working for others' sakes.

Because the goodness in the Lord's love is so powerful, a person with the Lord in his heart is basically at peace and inwardly content wherever he may be. But a person who has shut the Lord and His love for others out of his heart feels terribly uncomfortable whenever he comes into a group of people who do have this essence of heaven within them.

This is what happened to the newcomer to the spiritual world whose story we just read. Because he had nothing of heaven inside himself, he felt terribly uncomfortable when he came among the angels, who did have heaven within them. The selfish love in this man's heart clashed so completely with the gentle atmosphere of love flowing from the Lord through the angels that he felt like a snake near a fire.

In other words, as the angel explained to him, "the joys of heaven and eternal happiness are not joys of a place (that is to say, of *being* in a place), but of the state of a person's life." The happiness that makes heaven 'heavenly' is not the happiness of *being* somewhere. It is rather the happiness that comes from *doing* something, from doing good things for others because one loves them.

Yes, heaven is primarily a state of mind, something within a person, not a place one gets into or doesn't. But nevertheless heaven does look like a place, a wonderfully beautiful one. The spiritual love that makes heavenly life within a person is beautiful, and it creates a beautiful spiritual environment around such a person. In heaven this environment is experienced by the angels just as vividly as we experience the objects around us in this world. For, as the Lord explains in *Heaven and Hell*, "when something spiritual touches and sees something spiritual, it is just the same as when something natural touches and sees something natural" (461).

In heaven, the Lord creates a beautiful environment around the angels through His love that lives in their hearts and minds. They have homes designed and provided by the Lord to suit their needs and personalities exactly. And these homes are set in lovely landscapes that perfectly picture, outside the angels, the goodness of the Lord that they have inside their hearts.

But while the angels enjoy and appreciate the beautiful homes and scenery, they never regard these things as their chief source of pleasure. As far as they are concerned their beautiful environment is just a nice setting for them to work in and do what they like to do most—caring for others and bringing them happiness.

Indeed, this useful activity—which results from the presence of the Lord's love in every angel—is what makes heaven the wonderfully happy kingdom it is. As it is put in *Heaven and Hell* 399,

The extent of heaven's joy can be judged simply from the fact that everyone there takes delight in sharing his own delight and blessedness with someone else. And since everyone in heaven is like that, you can see how vast heaven's delight is. For in heaven there is a sharing by all with each individual, and by each individual with all.

Texts: Luke 17:21; Conjugal Love 10:5