

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD

Adapted from a sermon by Rev. Robin W. Childs

Did you ever ask yourself: What type of relationship do I have with the Lord? How do I treat Him and how does He treat me? Does He even have a particular awareness of me? If He does, do His feelings change depending on whether I cooperate with Him or not? Are His emotions unchanging toward me and all people—and if so, does that make Him seem mechanical and insensitive? Do I matter to Him as an individual?

It is likely as we go through life striving to work with the Lord, succeeding and failing, that we will wonder if this affects Him. Such questions probe for the core of who the Lord is and what each of us means to Him.

Divine Mercy

Many of the answers to these questions can be found by looking at the letter and the spirit (or inner meaning) of the Word. For example, wherever it mentions that Jehovah or Jesus wept, what is being portrayed is the Divine quality of mercy. The Lord weeping as He approached Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is explained to have welled up from the grief and pity He felt over the lack of charity and faith in people at the time (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5480).

Think about the last time you saw a loved one weeping or when you last wept. It is a profound and moving experience. In the *Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church*, we read that “Weeping is expressive of grief and love...of mercy and pity, *for mercy is love grieving*. The Divine love is therefore called mercy because the human race is of itself in hell; and when a person perceives this in himself, he implores mercy” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5480, emphasis added).

How Does the Lord Feel About the Human Race?

In what ways are the Lord’s thoughts not like our thoughts and His ways not like our ways? How does He feel toward the whole human race? Does this feeling change?

The *Heavenly Doctrine* explains that the Lord’s life force is “the life of love toward the universal human race, which He ardently desired to eternally save.... This is nothing else than [pure] mercy” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2253). We have a hard time consistently loving even the people who are closest to us. Let us appreciate, then, that the Lord ardently and devotedly burned with a love for saving the universal human race throughout His life and throughout eternity.

By our nature we must form our comprehension and appreciation of the Lord’s mercy from our own limited experience of mercy. Think of a time when you felt most moved by pity to help another person. Remember that feeling. Now simply acknowledge that the Lord’s pity, purer and deeper, is aflame for every person, angel, and devil in the created universe (see *Arcana Coelestia* 1735). This is a way that we can begin to fathom the full living tenderness of our Lord’s compassion.

What Is the Lord’s Goal for Us?

Let’s focus on some more particular questions. What is the Lord’s view of us? What is His goal for us?

How does the Lord feel about us? How should we best respond to Him?

By heredity each one of us has a morally corrupt nature. This is a humbling reality, and it is valuable to cultivate a full awareness of it. From His essence the Lord feels compassion toward every human being because these inclinations often lead us into misery. “For all humankind is evil, and left to ourselves everyone would rush into hell” (*Arcana Coelestia* 587). So the Lord lovingly pities us every moment, no matter what state we are in.

When we indulge in evil, the Lord pities us because we remove ourselves from His mercy and experience unpleasant consequences, which will hopefully serve to turn us to good. The Lord also feels mercy and pity when (as if of ourselves) we shun evil delights and turn to Him, because no one actually *merits* the generous enjoyment of good that He then gives us to experience (see *ibid.*).

Is the Lord Aware of Us Individually?

Now let’s consider the particular questions, “Is the Lord aware of me individually in such a personal way that He grieves when I fail Him and rejoices when I cooperate with Him?” The real answer is that the Lord loves us unconditionally. He is just as loving and just as earnestly working to lead us into a happier state whether we choose, in the present, to receive that love and leading or not.

Spiritually, we can’t afford to have Him take any other approach. If the Lord withdrew His love and leading for an instant, because we rejected them, we would be devoured by the hells. This type of unconditional love is Divinely Human, and it is hard for us to really understand. If someone turned his back on our offer of love and help, we would spend quite a bit of time feeling hurt and upset. It would take quite a while for us to compose ourselves, and also a bit of time before we would chance offering love and help again. But this is not the way the Lord operates.

The Lord’s self-esteem and desire to help are not upset by rejection. His sympathy for human beings whose lives are hampered and saddened by hereditary and active evils is unceasing. He is tirelessly focused on helping us individually and as a human race. Grief and joy in the Lord are just different expressions of love, and for Him both of these touching feelings are something to rejoice over. This is hard to grasp, but true (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5873).

It’s so easy to attribute hurt feelings, conditional love, resentment, bitter grief, and other things we commonly experience, to our Divinely Human Lord. Think instead of our best traits—patience, mercy, tenderness, and love—for these will describe His nature most accurately. Our reception of the Lord’s love and leading does bring Him a sense of joy, but it doesn’t increase the volume of love and desire to help that He feels. In other words, it pleases Him, but it doesn’t change Him who is Divinely loving. Our reception does affect how we see the Lord, though. If we reject His love, then to us He does seem angry and hurt. But this is an appearance caused by our turning away from Him.

Blessings to Eternity

The quality of our relationship with the Lord may be perfected to eternity. More than any person, we can count on the Lord to be there to support us in our worst and best moments. Let’s open ourselves up to receive His unwavering love by patiently exploring and shunning our destructive tendencies. This will deeply please the Lord and allow Him to bless our friendship with others and with Him. For “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalm 145:9).