

THE GOOD LIFE

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Adapted from a section of "Basic Doctrines of the New Church"

What does the phrase "the good life" mean to you?

Another way to ask this might be, "What makes you happy?" If you were God and had created people whom you loved, what could you do to make them happy?

This is an important question. What can the Lord do to make us happy? Before answering the question, remember that the Lord has purposely made each one of us different. The necessity of being finite or limited means that you are different from everyone else. Each person is born with a very special set of talents. More than that, he is born in a certain place, in a certain time, with a certain environment, and with certain parents. Whatever his future will be is limited by the facts of his birth, his heredity, and his environment. Each of us is uniquely different. How can the Lord, who loves everyone, make it possible, given such variety, for all of us to be happy?

The answer is found in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. There we learn that the real thing that makes people happy is the ability to do what they want to do. Think about that for a minute. If you were always able to do what you wanted to do, would you be happy?

Probably not. If people are always able to do what they want to do, and what they want to do is not good for them, they won't be happy. This point is illustrated in the book of the Heavenly Doctrine entitled *Conjugal Love*, which tells about some people who had just gone into the other world. They were called together and asked, "What makes heaven for you?" Each group of people had a different answer. Some thought heaven was just being there. Others thought it would be the delight of friendship, being able to sit and talk with others who enjoyed their company. Still others thought it would be feasting and entertainment. Wonderful, natural pleasures! The entertainment would be with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the great leaders of the past. Still others thought it would be their own special paradise, a place where all the good foods and sensual pleasures that they could ever imagine would be provided for them. Still others saw heaven as a place of perpetual worship and adoration of the Lord, where they could sit and pray and delight in their worship. Finally, another group saw it as perpetual dominion. They would always be able to get their way.

Each of these groups was allowed to try out their fantasy. And they were indeed fantasies! Each one of them found to their sorrow that what they thought would be heaven was not. The good life had eluded them. Although they were able to do what they wanted to do, they got sick and tired of it. The angels, after letting them become bored to tears with what they were doing, pointed out to them that heaven was not just a single thing. All their fantasies were but parts of the good life, but not the main part. Unless they were doing something for others, unless they were practicing good loves, unless the things they wanted to do were really of service to others, they wouldn't have any self-respect, and so wouldn't have any real pleasure. The happiness of heaven would escape them.

In the New Church we describe the doing of good with a special term called “use”. We talk about a person’s “use”, and by this we mean the effect of his love on others. The use of a doctor who loves to cure people is curing people. The effect of his love is the action of curing. When we combine our talents to express good loves, using our knowledge to do so, then we are “useful”, then we are performing a “use”. Use will take form in the things we do, usually in our occupation. The Heavenly Doctrine says that the happiness of heaven is in the “right performance of use.” Does this make sense to you? Think about your own use. What is your use? When do you find the most happiness? Is it when you forget yourself in doing good to others? If so, you have experienced the life of heaven. You have experienced “use” in the way the Heavenly Doctrine talks about it.

Use, then, is the expression of good. The wonder of the Lord’s creation is that all good is from Him. Although each of us receives special love from the Lord, if it is good, it is in harmony with all other goods, because all good makes one in Him. Perhaps your first idea of harmony is people singing a song. But think of other kinds of harmony, of many parts working together, of people working together. The Heavenly Doctrine illustrates this harmony with nature’s most perfect structure—the organization of the human body. Think how harmonious the functioning of heart, lungs, toes, hair, eyes, ears, brain, *etc.*, is. Think how each little cell is specialized to do one little thing for the bigger organ of which it is part, and how those organs then work in harmony to make one body. Imagine yourself like a little cell in the body, together with a whole group of other people doing their little special tasks, and you will get some idea of the harmony of heaven.

It is similar with the good life. Good people rejoice in the happiness of other people. As other people enter into the harmony of uses with them, they find more and more happiness. As others express their loves in their use, good people find it easier to express their own loves.

The good life, then, is a life of usefulness.