

## DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

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# IMAGINARY HEAVENS

by the Rev. Ottar Larsen

Heaven is not only a place we go after we die. Heaven can begin to be within us now. If we cooperate with the Lord He can make us inside like a heaven in miniature, so we become ready to enter heaven after death.

All people are created for heaven. The only way we can avoid getting there is by doing, or dreaming a lot about doing, what we know to be wrong. That is to seek a false heaven. The Lord created us with a longing for heaven so that we will seek it and so that He can lead us there. Therefore we cannot stop ourselves from seeking what we think will make us happy, for this we call heaven. Good and evil people are alike in that they all seek to satisfy themselves and find pleasure. The difference between good and evil people is that the evil find enjoyment in what the Word forbids us, and the good seek delight by acting according to the Word. The evil seek immediate rewards at all cost, the good seek eternal rewards at the cost of hard and honest work. Evil people like to take revenge, kill, commit adultery, steal and lie. It is their 'heaven.' But we may be sure that it is a false one. It is in fact hell. For it is just as possible to receive and build a hell inside oneself as it is to build a heaven.

But today we will talk about IMAGINARY HEAVENS, heavens that are only in our imagination. Not only the evil seek an imaginary heaven, but also some good people. The real heaven is the heaven that the Lord makes, and an imaginary heaven is one we ourselves try to make. However, it is only the Lord who can make heaven, and an imaginary heaven will fall in the end. Even though the good people do come to heaven eventually, they would be better off by seeking and finding the real heaven right away.

An example of an imaginary heaven is something we consider would make us happy, yet it is not a real source of happiness. Sometimes we excuse ourselves for our bad moods by saying, "If only I could... I would be happy." Often we think that a new bike or good grades in school, being liked by classmates, better food or nicer clothes would make us happy. All such things are good and necessary at times, yet they do not make heaven, nor are they sufficient to give us lasting happiness in this world.

Let us for a moment consider what happened to the human race as a whole, for the same thing may happen to us individually. Before the Lord's Coming many good spirits and evil spirits were together in what we call imaginary heavens in the spiritual world. The evil were able to pretend they were good. They took the lead and made others do their will. When the Lord came and started to teach men and to show them what His will was, the good spirits who were with men on earth received greater light and were able to see the character of others. Also the evil spirits were not able to hide that they liked the people who crucified the Lord. In this way the secret wishes of their hearts came out in the open, and they were seen to be evil and consequently sent off to

hell. This happened all through the Lord's ministry, and it was completed with His death and resurrection.

The Lord separated the evil from the good, and thereby set free those who had suffered under bad leadership. Similarly we may be misled by friends or by wrong ideas, as many people in this world make false or imaginary (self-made) heavens for themselves. In the New Church we are especially able to watch out for this. We break out of these imaginary heavens when we see or experience their emptiness.

However, there are those who have to experience living their empty ideas of heaven when they come into the other world. Some think (as they had done while they were living in the world) that they will be happy if they can live in a paradisiacal garden, full of beauty and plenty; others wish to continually celebrate at parties; others wish to become famous; others wish to have the power to tell others what to do and not to do; still others think heaven consists in worshipping the Lord all the time. The Doctrines tell us how people had to experience the frustration of having their wishes come true. When that did not satisfy them they despaired. Only then did they realize that heaven does not consist in external things. The real heaven lies deeper.

The real heaven is open to all. Yet only those who are prepared can stay there. The things in heaven are real. Yet things do not make heaven or the joys of heaven any more than things give us lasting happiness here. The real treasure is the love we have.

How then do we get to heaven, or what is the same, how do we get heaven to come inside us now? The Lord said that: "I am the truth, the way and the life." It is in the love of Him that we have eternal life. And the love of Him is expressed in the various things we do for one another, which are called uses because they are of use to other people. This is to share one's life through effort for others as well as for oneself. To share one's life in this way opens heaven, because we then act from the Lord. Then our life becomes full of purpose. This is the real heaven. The imaginary heaven of self-satisfaction is dispelled and we realize that our happiness is to do the Lord's will and be conjoined with Him and with all His children.

**Text: *Conjugal Love 3-10***