

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

LOVE

by the Rev. Victor Gladish

Do you know what love is? If you do, you are a very unusual person. There are few words in the language that are used as often as the word love; but mostly it is misused. We are told in the Heavenly Doctrine, “love is the life of man” (DLW 1). But we are told that the world as a whole, in this age, does not know what love is. One knows that love exists, from common speech, as when it is said that: He loves me, a husband loves his wife, a mother her children, or the children love their mother; also that some one loves his country, or that he loves this or that thing. But although the word love is so much used, hardly anyone knows what love is. Then these words are used in the Writings, “One is wholly unaware that love is his very life; not only the general life of his whole body and the general life of all his thoughts, but also the life of all their least particulars. This a wise man can perceive when it is said, “If you remove the affection, which is from love, can you think anything, or do anything? Do not thought; speech and action grow cold in the degree in which the affection which is from love grows cold? And do not they grow warm in the degree in which this affection grows warm?” ”

The Lord said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:13). From this teaching alone much can be known about the nature of love.

But to understand the nature of love more fully we need to know the nature of the Divine Love—that Infinite Love which is the Lord’s. We learn from the Heavenly Doctrine that the essence or center of the Divine Love is to love others outside of itself, to desire to be one with them, and to make them happy from itself (TCR 43). All genuine love with mankind has these three qualities in some measure. But the love of self and the love of the world for the sake of self are evil loves, completely opposed to that love which the Lord unceasingly seeks to build up in us. It is evident why love of self is opposed to genuine love, and must be conquered before we can have the Lord with us, for it denies the first thing of genuine love, which is to love others outside of self. Actually, many people without knowledge of the Writings of the New Church have been able to see that ‘love of self is not love’ but is really hatred towards others.

The love of self is called in the Word “of this world” because it is the worst thing of this world and is opposed to heaven, and that is why the Lord said in regard to His redeeming mankind, “Now is the judgment of this world, now is the Prince of this world cast out” (John 12:41). It is by separating in ourselves—or rather allowing the Lord to separate in us, the love of self from love to the Lord, that we draw near to the Lord.

We are told that the loves of self and of the world are opposite to love to the Lord and to the neighbor, and are the origin and source of all evils. But remember that a moment ago we carefully defined the love of the world as the ‘love of the world for the sake of self’. And there is a sense in which the love of self can be useful. After telling us that the loves of self and the world

rule in hell, the Writings tell us: “But they are not in these loves who aspire to honors not for the sake of themselves, but for the sake of their country; and who aspire to wealth not for the sake of wealth, but for the sake of the necessities of life, both for themselves and for their families, also for the good use on account of which the wealth delights them. With such persons honors and riches are the means of imparting benefits” (AC 7377). It is the motive or the purpose of the love, which makes the difference.

It is not wrong to delight in the pleasures of sight, hearing, taste, odor and touch. It is not wrong to have pleasure in the richness and beauty of the world around us. But we need to have a care that these pleasures are of use and do not harm ourselves and others—especially others.

It was said, “If you remove the affection which is from love, can you think anything, or do anything?” (DLW 1). Unless you like a sport, whether tennis, skating, baseball or other, you will never be very good at it. And so it is with everything. There has to be a love that draws you before you will learn anything, and the stronger the love the better you will learn. You may wonder how we may gain a love for Divine Revelation, the Word of the Lord, which includes commandments “Thou shalt not” do this or that? Although it is natural for everyone to want his own way and decide what he will do, a love of the Word is something, which has to grow. When we are young children it is easy for us to realize that our parents and teachers know many things that we don’t, and that they save us from many mistakes that we would make. When we find a satisfaction in obeying what we are told there are two reasons for it. One is when we see it helps us, another is that the Lord flows in through the angels with a delight in obeying what some one in authority says, someone who knows better than we do. When we are introduced into worship, into lifting up our thoughts and our hearts to the Lord, the angels flow into our hearts with the delight that they feel. In these ways an affection of love of what is good and true can grow with us, and continue to grow as we respond to it.

Texts: John 15:13; Divine Love and Wisdom 1