

## DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

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# THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

by the Rev. Robert S. Junge

If you look at a chair, you see its shape and its color. You can touch it. No one would have to convince you that that chair was real. If they argued with you, you'd say, "Open your eyes, look!"

Yet if I close my eyes and think of someone I love very much, I can picture how they look. I can imagine the color of their clothes. I can even 'hear' the tone of their voice. I can't reach out with my hand and touch them, but no one can convince me that that thought is not real. And even more important, no one is going to tell me that the love I feel for them is not real.

The fact is, the deeper the thought and affection the more real it is, not less. For example, if I say, I like a candy bar, and I also love my mother, not only is my love for my mother deeper, but it more clearly shows what I'm really like. We see this with friendships based on a few external likes and dislikes, or with friendships based on deep and genuine loves. The deeper the love that is shared, the more the real person is involved.

Now the Writings tell us about a world of thought and affection—the spiritual world. This is the world to which we will go when we die. They carefully explain that we have to live in the natural world in order to feel life as our own to make choices, and prepare for spiritual life. We have to learn through our five senses, so that we can choose what we ourselves want to think about and what we decide will be the things we love. But the spiritual world must become real to us, if we are going to make really wise choices.

Actually right now we are living in both worlds, even though consciously we only sense this natural world. We don't after all get a spirit when we die. We have one right now. In fact, we are a spirit now. The real you and the real me is our spirit not our body. I'm explaining some thoughts to you right now, but my body may be hundreds of miles away. Yet you in a certain sense are getting to know me—in fact, a whole lot better than if you only saw my body but didn't speak to me.

Some people feel kind of funny if you tell them they are a spirit, but that's because they think of spirits as vague and ghostly. But if you think of man's character, what he believes and what he loves as his eternal spirit, then it's not weird at all. It's far weirder to think of a friend as to what he looks like rather than what he thinks and cares about. Right now, we all are developing an eternal character, or spirit, which will live forever. Our natural bodies make it so that our character will be exactly what we choose to make it. That character is much more real than the body. When we talk about a man's spirit, we're talking about the real you, and the real me. And so when we talk about the spiritual world, we're talking about a world that is even more real than this one.

We talk a lot today about character development. But when a New Churchman thinks about character development, he thinks about that personality which is developing which will last forever. His character will determine the kind of work he does in heaven, his eternal use. His character will determine the genuine and eternal friendships he will have. It will include that most precious friendship of all, the love he feels for his married partner—conjugal love. In short it will determine the very nature of the happiness he feels to all eternity.

One of the reasons the Writings were given is to make the other world real for us, so that we can learn how to work to get to heaven. If we know where we want to go, and what it is like, we can plan and work hard to get there. Without the Writings our lives would be like planning a trip to another country totally different from our own, but knowing nothing about it, its climate, language, or anything. But the Writings make it possible to get ready and to really be prepared to enter into the life of heaven when we get there.

Now the first thing that happens when a person dies is a very gentle transition or “passing over” from this world to the next. The celestial or highest angels are with the man and hold his thoughts on the Lord and eternal life. He feels a sense of peace, like that sphere many people feel as a person dies quietly in his bed. Then the Writings explain as man desires, the spiritual angels come and as it were roll a veil off of the man’s eyes so he can see in the other world. Then very carefully so as to shock him as little as possible, they explain to him that he is in the other world, and they show him around. Even the natural angels come and render him every service, so that he will really feel at home.

In the beginning, what the Writings call the first state after death, man's life seems very like this. There are houses, cities, even streets with the same names as here. The man is still in the world of spirits between heaven and hell, just as his spirit had been unconsciously during life in the world. His natural memory is still active. So things seem natural, in fact, it is hard to convince some spirits that their bodies have died. Remember of course that they have spiritual bodies with all the parts that our natural bodies have, so it is hard for some of them to even recognize the difference.

But a tremendously important change awaits them as they gradually come into a state of internals—the second state after death. This is the state where the real person shows itself. Here they become as they really are inside. If they are evil gradually that evil comes out, and they no longer pretend. Their faces take on a more and more horrid expression, and they begin to carry out all those evil desires that they didn’t do in the world because they were afraid of getting caught or being punished. More and more they find themselves associating with those who will make their life in hell.

But for those who are good, the way to more and more happiness opens up. You know sometimes how hard it is to tell people what you really feel. Particularly if we are trying to explain something we care a great deal about it seems difficult. But as a good man enters more and more into his internals, his face, even his clothing expresses what he really thinks and feels. Others see him for the type of man he really is. And he is able to express his loves more and more as he rarely was able to in the world. So the man not only feels himself, he feels understood by others. He feels that he can share with others all the thoughts and affections that he has

received from the Lord. He is able to really do the things he has always wanted, for they are good things and will not harm others. So after a period of instruction he enters the life of heaven, a happy life of doing what he loves. If you think about it, we are happiest when we are doing those things we really love to do.

In barest outline this tells us what happens to a man when he dies. The Writings give quantities of details to make these things so real that people all over the world can gradually believe in the life after death again.

If we really understand the life after death, then everything we do can be a preparation for it. Everything then can be seen to have a purpose. It will still be up to us to live up to that purpose, but life will not be something cut off by death. The work we choose, the married partner we choose, even the things we do every day, will have meaning even if we are unconscious of it as a part of our continuous preparation for heaven. We will gradually see in our lives the relation to things that really last, things that are more real than anything we have ever known before. This is the promise that a real belief in the life after death can open for us.