

“The Lord Bless Thee”

by the Rev. Patrick A. Rose

*“Jehovah bless thee and keep thee;
Jehovah make His faces to shine upon thee,
and be gracious unto thee;
Jehovah lift up His faces upon thee,
and give thee peace.”
(Numbers 6:24-26)*

One of the most fundamental pursuits of the human race is the search for happiness. Though people strive after many different goals, underneath there lies this universal desire: to be happy. Yet, many people are not happy. They go to great lengths to obtain happiness, but they do not find it. Eventually they conclude that it is only a dream, an unattainable ideal. They become cynical about the very thing their hearts yearn for.

This is not surprising, for, in a misguided or selfish way, many people place their hopes for happiness in things which will bring them only misery. Whether their goal is worldly honor or worldly gain, they do not find happiness. At the most, all they experience is a temporary and superficial delight, before lapsing into even greater frustration and unhappiness.

For many people, this is the story of their life. And it is a tragic story—tragic not only because of the misery they undergo, but also because they could have their happiness if they would only look, not to themselves and to their own preconceptions, but to the Lord and to the wisdom of His Word.

Happiness is not an impossible dream. People were created to receive happiness, and the Lord offers them nothing less than ineffable joy. Not only is this joy so great as to be virtually indescribable, it is also eternal. Compared to eternal happiness from the Lord, all other delights and pleasures are as nothing, for they are only temporary. Many people, it is true, place their hope in temporary delights. They seek happiness only in power or wealth, or, perhaps, in sensual pleasures. But when these things become ends in themselves, they offer no permanent delight. Once such worldly goals have been obtained, there then arises a desire for even more of the same, without limit. Frustration inevitably follows, if not in this world, then in the next. For any delight experienced in this world comes to an end, and, because of this, such delight is relatively nothing. It might as well have never existed. As we read in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, “that which is temporal relatively is not, because when it is ended it is no more” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8939:1). Or, as we read in the New Testament: “for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

The Lord does not want us to set our hearts on insignificant worldly pleasures. His desire is to give us everlasting happiness. Unlike the blessings of this world, which do not last, the Lord’s blessing never comes to an end. As we read in the *Arcana Coelestia*: “Divine blessing is to be happy to eternity” (8717:3).

This is the blessing that is described in those beautiful words from the Book of Numbers: “Jehovah bless thee and keep thee; Jehovah make His faces to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; Jehovah lift up His faces upon thee, and give thee peace.” These words are well-known. They are often used in blessing those who receive the rites and sacraments of the church. And they have great power, for their internal sense shines from within, an internal sense which treats of the Divine blessing—that eternal happiness for which we were created, and toward which all of religion leads.

It is said “Jehovah bless thee and keep thee.” The name Jehovah is used in the original Hebrew, because it refers specifically to the Lord’s inmost love. This love is *being itself*, from which all things in the universe have reality. And this love has, as its deepest purpose, the desire to bestow blessing or happiness upon us, and to protect us from those evils which would disturb this happiness. Concerning this inmost love of the Lord we are told, “it wills to save all and make them happy to eternity, and to bestow on them all that it has” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1735:1).

We can have only a very limited idea of what this love must be like. It is unlimited or infinite, and it burns with an intensity so great that it is incomprehensible. In itself it is far above the understanding of any created finite being. Furthermore, if this love were to be present with angels and people, *as it is in itself*, we would be destroyed by a presence we could not bear. Nevertheless, though the Divine love cannot be present with human beings as it is in itself, still it desires to go forth to them to bless them. And the way in which this is accomplished is described in the Heavenly Doctrine in two ways.

First, there is the series of teachings about the spiritual sun. The Lord’s love, high above even the highest angelic heaven, is pure spiritual fire. Just as our bodies could not survive being too close to the fire of the natural sun, neither could our spirits withstand the immediate presence of that spiritual fire which is the Lord’s love. And so the Lord provides that we might receive both natural and spiritual sunshine in a moderated form.

The fire of the natural sun produces heat and light, and when this heat and light are received over a great distance, and moderated by the earth’s atmosphere, we are not killed by the sun’s radiation. Indeed, sunshine is essential to our life here on earth. In a similar way, the Lord’s love shines as a sun and sends forth that spiritual heat and light which gives life to angels and people (*Heaven and Hell* 117). We could not receive the Lord’s love and wisdom directly, for the Divine love is like a fire, and the Divine wisdom is the shining of this fire (*cf. True Christian Religion* 41:1). But we can receive the heat and light—or good and truth—from the Lord, as they flow forth and are moderated by the spiritual atmospheres of heaven.

Now it should be noted that though the Heavenly Doctrine says that the Lord is the sun of heaven, it also says this: “Let everyone beware of thinking that the sun of the spiritual world is God Himself. God Himself is a Man” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 97).

There is no contradiction in these two sets of teachings. Seen from one viewpoint, the Lord is the sun of heaven; this sun is from Him, for it is His love which shines upon His creatures. Seen from another viewpoint, though, we must realize that the Lord is not simply a sun. He is a

Man—the Divine Man from whom this sun shines forth. This is why the Lord, when He appears to the angels, is seen as a Man, sometimes within the sun, sometimes outside it (*ibid.*).

This also is how the Lord's love goes forth to those He has created. It is as Man, as the Divine Human, that our Lord comes to us to bless us. From His Divine Human His infinite love goes forth to finite people. This infinite love was the soul of the Lord when He was born on earth. During His life on earth, by the process of glorification, He was gradually united to this love, so that, in the end, the Lord Jesus Christ became nothing less than the Divine love itself in human form. Although this Divine love, as it is in itself, is infinitely beyond our comprehension, we can see it and respond to it as it is shown to us by Jesus Christ, the Man who is our Savior.

It is thus both as a sun and as the Divine Human—that is, as a Man whose love shines forth as a sun—that the Lord's love flows down to the human race to bestow the blessing of eternal happiness. For this reason the Lord in His Divine Human is sometimes called the “‘face’ of Jehovah” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10579:1), and for the same reason the sun of heaven is also called the “Lord's face” (*Apocalypse Explained* 412:2).

Now a person's face has been created to show forth the things that are within his mind, so that his mind might manifest itself before the world (*Arcana Coelestia* 9306:1). So too, the Lord's face manifests that which is within Him. That inmost love which is His very soul shows itself in His face.

In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, the word for “face” or “countenance” is plural in form; and the Heavenly Doctrine at times preserves this plural form and speaks of the Lord's faces. “Jehovah make His faces to shine upon thee.” The Lord's faces are the different ways in which His love shows itself. The Heavenly Doctrine says that “the faces of Jehovah” are “mercy, peace, and every good” (*Arcana Coelestia* 224). Indeed, as an ordinary person has many faces, or many expressions, so, too, does the Lord. But, unlike the faces or expressions of people, the faces of the Lord are all filled with infinite love and with the power and desire to bestow Divine blessing.

These are the faces spoken of in the blessing which was to be pronounced upon the sons of Israel: “Jehovah bless thee and keep thee; Jehovah make His faces to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; Jehovah lift up His faces upon thee, and give thee peace.” This happening is Divine blessing or eternal happiness itself. No true happiness is possible unless the Lord's faces shine upon us as a sun with Divine truth, and unless His faces are lifted up in our minds to bestow His Divine good upon us. Divine good and truth flowing in from the Lord's Divine love—this is what Divine blessing really is (*Apocalypse Explained* 340:11).

Many people would not think that supreme happiness would come from the influx of good and truth. In fact, we are told, that to those who are in evil being affected by good and truth appears “either as something that is non-existent, or as something that is sad; while to some it appears as what is painful, and even deadly” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2363:1). Certainly, a person who is dedicated to finding happiness only in worldly pleasure would show little enthusiasm when told that true eternal happiness lies in the reception of good and truth from the Lord. At times, even people of the New Church find this notion a little unreal or far-fetched. Good and truth seem to be little more than technical theological terms.

But consider for a moment what truth really is and what good really is! Truth is the light of the spiritual sun. It is the Lord's all-embracing love shining forth with spiritual light, to show people the way from misery to eternal happiness. Truth is given to us from pure grace, from pure mercy, by a God who loves each and every one of us, and wants to bestow everlasting joy upon us. "Jehovah make His faces to *shine* upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." Good is the warmth of the same sun, the heat within the light. The heat warms our minds with love, causing us, if we are willing, to open our hearts up to the Lord and to our fellow-creatures, so that we might receive happiness from above, a happiness filled with love and heavenly peace. "Jehovah lift up His faces upon thee, and give thee *peace*."

Good and truth are nothing less than spiritual sunshine within our minds, a sunshine which brings a happiness that is unknown to those who seek merely worldly pleasure. The joys of this world come and go, and in the end they come to nothing. But if the Lord's countenance shines within us, we will experience a happiness which will never cease. It is true that while we live in this world, our sensation of this happiness is, at best, obscure. If, however, we persevere in the life of religion and in this way continually open our hearts and minds to the Lord, then, one day, as we leave this world behind, we will come fully into the Divine blessings of eternal happiness.

This happiness, the happiness of heaven, is indescribable. But it is *not* impossible. Indeed, the whole of the Lord's infinite love desires nothing less for us. To receive from Him the Divine blessing of eternal happiness is the very purpose for which we were born into this world, and it is the purpose toward which all of religion leads. If we just open our hearts and minds to the Lord, and receive His spiritual sunshine, then this happiness will be waiting for us in the world to come.

Amen.

Lessons: Numbers 6:22-27; Matthew 16:24-28; *Arcana Coelestia* 8939:1-2

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