

Trust in the Lord by the Rt. Rev. Alfred Acton

Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
Psalm 37:3

We are told that the Lord's Divine Providence works in the least particulars of our lives, ever leading us toward Himself and the peace which He gives to all who return His love. But how can we follow in the stream of this broad river of life? How can we, who of ourselves are nothing but evil, enter into the bliss of heaven? In what way must we cooperate with our Maker to find the joy of life eternal? As the Psalmist has said, "What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" (Psalm 8:4).

The answers to these questions ring forth clearly in our text: "Trust in the Lord, and do good." But what is trust in the Lord? How can the a person who trusts in the Lord do anything? Did not our Lord command us not to care for the morrow? Would not such trust in Him leave us devoid of all action? If we trust in these words, would we not stand before the Lord with our hands down awaiting the moving of His Spirit within us? Does not trust, or faith, demand blind obedience and perfect humility which will do nothing? Otherwise wouldn't we be ascribing merit to our actions? Would we not, in practice, be denying that very trust which we have been commanded to give?

Those who adhere solely to the letter of the Word could draw no other conclusions. They would indeed ascribe any care for the morrow to natural events, failing to realize that the whole of the Lord's Word is spiritual, that the whole of the Word is the Lord speaking to us, showing us about His love and the spiritual qualities of heavenly happiness. Those who adhere to the letter may thus deny spiritual truth, and sink into a morass of contradictory, natural, man-made dogmas.

The New Church, which has received the Lord in His Second Advent, can rise above this natural paradox. For we have been given a glimpse of spiritual light. In the Lord's New Word we can see Him speaking plainly—opening up to us the spiritual messages of previous revelations. And on this topic, we read in the New Word or the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church:

It is a fallacy that the confidence that is called saving faith, accepted without understanding, is a spiritual confidence, since confidence apart from understanding is a persuasion from another, or from confirmation by passages gathered up here and there from the Word and applied by reasonings from the natural man to a false principle. Such confidence is a blind faith, which is merely natural because it does not see whether a thing is true or false (Apocalypse Explained 781:9).

So, trust in the Lord is not blind faith in Him. And it is never built upon the fallacies of the senses. Trust in the Lord must be spiritual. It must rest on the spiritual sense of the Lord's Word. As the Heavenly Doctrine teaches,

They who think solely from things of sense cannot see one whit of what is honorable, just and good, and therefore they trust to others and speak much from the memory, and thereby appear to themselves wiser than others. But they who are able to think above the things of sense, provided the things in the memory

have been set in order, possess a greater capacity than others to understand and perceive, and this according to the degree in which they view things from what is interior (Arcana Coelestia 6598).

What, then, will the man who thinks spiritually understand when he reads the Lord's command to take no care for the morrow? Listen again to the voice of revelation:

[Care for the morrow] does not mean the care of procuring for one's self food and raiment, and even resources for the time to come; for it is not contrary to order for anyone to be provident for himself and his own. But those have care for the morrow who are not content with their lot, who do not trust in the Divine but in themselves, and who have regard only for worldly and earthly things and not for heavenly things. With such there universally reigns solicitude about things to come, and a desire to possess all things and to dominate over all, which is kindled and grows according to the additions thus made, and finally does so beyond all measure. They grieve if they do not obtain the objects of their desire, and feel anguish at the loss of them; and they have no consolation, because of the anger they feel against the Divine, which they reject together with everything of faith, and curse themselves. Such are they who have care for the morrow. Very different is the case with those who trust in the Divine. These, notwithstanding they have care for the morrow still have it not, because they do not think of the morrow with solicitude, still less with anxiety. Unruffled is their spirit whether they obtain objects of their desire or not; and they do not grieve over the loss of them, being content with their lot.... They know that for those who trust in the Divine all things advance toward a happy state to eternity, and that whatever befalls them in time is still conducive thereto (Arcana Coelestia 8478:2, 3).

Indeed, the Lord lovingly cares for all His children. All those who trust in the Lord can rest assured that He is leading them gently and mercifully into the blessedness of heavenly life. But what is trust in the Lord? Who are the Lord's spiritual children?

Let us turn again to the Lord's Word in the Heavenly Doctrine. "Trust in the Lord is to have confidence that He will save, and as no one can have this confidence except one who lives aright, therefore this also is meant by believing in Him" (*Doctrine of Faith* 36). "The esse of the faith of the New Church is confidence in the Lord God the Savior Jesus Christ [and] a trust that he who lives well and believes aright is saved by Him" (*True Christian Religion* 344).

Yes, people of the New Church must acknowledge that the Lord "out of mercy will teach a person the way and lead him to heaven" (*Apocalypse Explained* 810:4). Such an acknowledgment should be easy, for we can see the Lord's truth openly revealed in His New Word. In its pages we can indeed see the Lord teaching and leading. There, we can recognize that all good comes from the Lord and that our faith must rest on the life of charity. For we know that faith is the form of charity, and that without charity faith is hollow and dead. We read, "Few know that faith is trust and confidence, and among these few, still fewer know that trust or confidence is from charity, and is not possible with anyone who has not lived the life of charity" (*Arcana Coelestia* 3568e).

Trust is indeed from love, for a person trusts in that which he loves. The person who trusts in himself loves himself, while the person who trusts in the Lord loves the Lord. To love the Lord, we must place Him above all else. We must truly obey His first commandment, and place no other gods, or loves, before Him.

This teaching, of course, does not mean that we should completely expel all other loves from our lives. Rather, we should order these loves *below* our love to Him. The person who loves the Lord also loves himself. He takes pride in the things which the Lord has given him. He acknowledges that without the Lord he could do nothing, but that with the gifts he has received from the Lord he can do much for the betterment of his fellows. He loves the good which he has received from the Lord, and jealously guards this good, lest by indolence and sloth he defile it. He sees clearly that the good which he does must follow the trust which he has in the Lord. He understands the words of our text, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness" (Psalm 37:3).

But does such a person do good in order that he may inherit the land? In order that he may receive spiritual food? Is not good done from this motive good looking to reward? Is not the desire for merit from good (which is really not your own) evil? The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that doing good from a desire to get into heaven is *not* evil. Every love desires the spiritual food necessary to nourish it. Thus it is not evil to desire the spiritual food which can be found only in heaven. Such desire does not place merit in the work itself. Rather, what is desired is the opportunity to further express a good love. But hear the voice of the Lord:

To think about getting into heaven, and that good ought to be done for that reason, is not to regard reward as an end and to ascribe merit to works; for thus do those also think who love the neighbor as themselves and God above all things.... Such do not trust to reward on the ground of their merit, but have faith in the promise of grace. With such the delight of doing good to the neighbor is their reward. This is the delight of the angels in heaven, and it is a spiritual delight which is eternal, and immeasurably exceeds all natural delight. Those who are in this delight are unwilling to hear of merit, for they love to do, and in doing they perceive blessedness. They are sad when it is believed that they work for the sake of recompense (True Christian Religion 440).

Such trust in the Lord grows as we on our part strive to fulfill the talents which we have received as gifts from our heavenly Father. Such trust will come to fill our whole life as we turn in humility to the Lord, seeking to serve Him, seeking to find the spiritual food that will nourish the good which we have received. Therefore, such trust is the result of the life of regeneration. We acquire it as we put on a heavenly proprium, which we receive from the Lord, and put off our own evil proprium, which we inherited at birth.

And yet it is also such trust that sustains us during the life of regeneration. In times of temptation, trust in the Lord is our strong defense against the flood of evil that seeks our destruction. We read,

All temptations appear evil, for the reason that they are interior anxieties and griefs, and as it were damnations; for the person is then let into the state of his evils, consequently among evil spirits, who accuse him, and thus torment the

conscience; nevertheless, the angels defend him, that is, the Lord through the angels, for the Lord keeps him in hope and trust, which are the forces of combat from within whereby he resists (Arcana Coelestia 6097).

So, we see that trust in the Lord both leads us to the life of heaven and sustains us in it. Trust in the Lord gives us peace. For trust in the Lord opens our mind to the Lord's infinite love and wisdom. Believing in Him, we can see His truth and so enter into the life of heaven, the peace of truth. We read,

Peace is like dawn on the earth, which gladdens minds with universal delight; and the truth of peace is like the light of dawn. This truth which is called the 'truth of peace' is the very Divine truth in heaven from the Lord, which universally affects all who are there, and makes heaven to be heaven; for peace has in it confidence [or trust] in the Lord that He directs all things, and provides all things and that He leads to a good end. When a person is in this faith he is in peace, for he then fears nothing, and no solicitude about things to come disquiets him. A person comes into this state in proportion as he comes into love to the Lord (Arcana Coelestia 8455:1).

Our trust in the Lord will quiet our care for the morrow. We will become content in the knowledge that whatever befalls us is in the hands of our Heavenly Father, who by pure mercy is gently guiding us through the cares of this world to Himself.

But there are those in the world who have a false trust in the Lord. There are those who believe trust must be blind, who believe that trust is not the result of love, or inflowing good. There are those who, because of the evil of their lives, seek to excuse their false loves, placing them above the Lord. They desire to attain heaven and *at the same time* delight in the insanity of their evils. In the New Church, we know the falsity of such spurious trust. We know that we must return to the Lord the gifts which He, in His Providence, has given us. We know that our lives must reflect charity if we are to enter the life of heaven, if we are to trust in Him.

Yet, still, there are times when we may wonder about the nature of our trust in the Lord. How can we judge whether our trust may not also partake of evil? Is there any guide which the Lord has given us by which we may evaluate our confidence in Him? Indeed there is. As the Lord says: "Whoever desires to know the quality of his confidence, let him examine in himself the affections and ends, as well as the practices of his life" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2982:2).

When we seek to approach the Lord through such examination and so shun the ends and practices of life which do not conform to the truth of the Lord's Word, our trust in the Lord grows. It becomes the bulwark on which we may rest in times of temptation, and at length it becomes the confidence that leads us by means of a life of good into the spiritual land of Canaan, into the life of heaven, where we will find spiritual food that will nourish us even to eternity.

"Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness."

Amen.

Lessons: Psalm 37:1-19; Luke 12:22-40; *Divine Providence* 179