

Lesson 1: THE FIRST STEP IN CHARITY

Doctrine of Charity, chapter 1

Introductory Ideas for the First Lesson

The Doctrine of Charity is about how we can live lives that lead to heaven. It gives us guiding principles for how we can make moral choices, and how we can be of true service to our neighbor. Before we start to read this book, let's discuss a few ideas.

1. What does the word "charity" mean? (The New Church idea of this word means something different than the meaning that is used in common speech today. It does not simply mean that we give to poor people, but it is the source of all good that we do to our neighbors. See *Charity 7*.)
2. The Lord tells us to love our neighbor as ourself. Who is our neighbor?
3. How can we be truly loving and act in a way that is genuinely good?
4. What is most important in our lives: to do our work (study, job, chores) well, or to go out and "help" others?
5. The *Doctrine of Charity* is a guidebook that answers these questions and many more about how we can be truly charitable.

(It may surprise teenagers to know that the first thing we can do to help our neighbors is to look to the Lord, and to shun evils. Until we can do this, we can really do nothing that is good. This can seem to lack the glorious vision that teenagers have to go out and help the world. (Perhaps it is like Naaman being asked to wash in the rivers of the Jordan.)

Some Key Points in Chapter 1:

This chapter presents the idea that the first things we need to do in order to live charitable lives are to look to the Lord, and shun evil as sin. Until sin has been cast out, the Lord cannot enter.

Charity 2 describes delights in evil that are not removed are like "sweet drugs that kill," or as "flowers apparently beautiful that carry poison in them". We must see the delights of evil as *deadly*.

Charity 4 tells us that we *must consult the Word* and find out what is evil. We must examine our lives and look to see how we are "disguising" our own evils.

Charity 5 gives a good experiment: the illustration is of one who looks in a mirror, and puts a veil in front of it so he does not see his face. You may wish to do this with the students.

Charity 6 Genuine good cannot come from evil.

Charity 8 The Lord does good to everyone chiefly through other people – and this is the Lord's good, not our own. He gives us the appearance that we are doing it. (We can act as the Lord's hands and feet).

Charity 10 The Lord can enter only when evil is cast out.