

HIS LIFE WITHIN YOU

Adapted from a sermon on "I Am the Lord Your God" by the Rev. Peter M. Buss, Jr.

The Focus of Your Life

I'd like you to think for a moment about what your life may be like a year from now. Countless things will happen to you between now and then. Whatever activities or landmarks fill your time, you can be assured that life will keep rolling by. Each day will bring new experiences and challenges—some joyful and others which test your endurance. Through it all you will be developing as a person. Your perspective will change as you see more of life.

Beyond the various things which fill up your day is the challenge of making spiritual progress. Each year you get closer to the time when your life in this world will be over, and you will enter the spiritual world, which includes heaven and hell. Your primary goal in this world should be to prepare for that time—to be led by the Lord toward heaven.

So, from time to time, it is useful to reflect on how religion will play a part in your life. How will the Lord Himself help you to make some spiritual progress this year? What is He leading you toward? What does He want you to see about your choices and ways of acting that you should consider changing? What is most important to Him?

"I Am the Lord Your God"

The central principle to keep in mind as you strive to make progress in your spiritual life is dedication to the Lord your God. This is the first commandments the Lord gave from Mt. Sinai. He said:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before My face. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:2-6).

The First Commandment calls you to commit yourself to the Lord—to let Him reign in your life. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church teaches that "A person's whole character is determined by the nature of whatever dominates his life" (*Arcana Coelestia* 8858). The Lord asks you to let Him "dominate" your life. He asks that you love Him above all things, that you make Him and His ways *the* priority in your life, for He is the source and beginning of all life.

Why the Negative Tone?

You may notice that the First Commandment is stated in the negative: “You shall have no other gods before My face,” rather than “You shall worship the Lord your God alone.” There are several reasons for this tone. One is that the Israelites, to whom the Ten Commandments were first revealed, would not have listened unless a powerful God was speaking. The idea of a jealous God caused them to pay attention!

Another reason for the tone is that it tells *how* you can make the Lord the central focus in your life. “You shall have no other gods before My face.” How? Other gods represent things which stand in the way of letting the Lord reign in you. These things could be selfishness—putting yourself before the Lord—which is the root of all evil. They can also be worldliness, or a lack of concern for anything—such as the Lord and heaven—beyond what you can see and experience.

If you focus only on yourself and your own pleasure, the Lord cannot help you. Without Him, your life will be like that pictured by the Israelites in the land of Egypt—in bondage, controlled by negative influences which come to you by means of hell. But the Lord wants you to understand that it doesn't have to be that way. He can free you from these negative influences. If you put Him first, He can deliver you from the influences of hell (see *Arcana Coelestia* 8866).

The seemingly negative message is turned into a positive one in the internal sense or meaning within the words as revealed in the Heavenly Doctrine. The Lord's “jealousness” represents His ardent desire to save you and to warn you of the dangers of evil. He wants you to love Him and keep His commandments, for then He will be able to bless you with peace and happiness and to inspire you to be a good, worshipful, useful person.

The Lord's Life Within You

The angels in heaven love the Lord so much that they want Him to be a part of every aspect of their lives. When they wake up, when they eat a meal, when they are working or socializing, they want the Lord to be in their thoughts. As a result they constantly “have the Lord's life within them” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8865).

This is a wonderful goal—to know what kind of God the Lord is and to keep Him in mind always. It is a high ideal, but it is attainable! Why else would the Lord command it? He longs to shower His mercy upon you, but that can only happen to the extent that you turn to Him and allow Him to guide you.

Life continues. One day leads to the next; weeks and months slip by in a never-ending progression of activity. The Lord asks that you strive to include Him in your thoughts and to ask for His leadership during all these events and daily decisions. Take delight in knowing the Lord your God and in dedicating yourself to Him, so that you may receive His blessings, and so you may feel the joy of His life within you!