

The Ruling Love

From time to time I have spoken on this Program of the unseen presence of angels and evil spirits with every person in this world and of the way in which our lives are influenced by them. They are a vital link in conveying the impulses of life to us. The lives of all people are constantly being acted upon and influenced from the spiritual world; influenced towards what is good and unselfish by angels, and toward what is evil and selfish by evil spirits. We are in the midst of these two opposing influences reaching us and the decision lies with us as to which we will admit into our lives.

The promptings which reach man from his spiritual associates are in fact promptings towards one or other of several loves, good and evil, which by reason of heredity and other factors are present, if at first undeveloped, in him. And it is concerning these loves about which I am going to speak. At the outset of his life a man is neither good nor evil, but has the potential to become either. As time goes on he can choose to become one or the other and his choice is between diametrically opposed loves which present themselves to him, as to which of them is going to rule his life.

The fact is that the life of every adult comes in time to revolve around one dominant or ruling love. We freely choose which it is going to be and our choice lies between the loves of self and of the world on the one hand, and the love of the Lord and the love of the neighbour on the other. Each at the beginning presses its claims upon us. Evil spirits from hell strive to focus a person's attention on the love of self and the love of the world and to lead him into these. However, angels try to lead him into the love of the neighbour and the love of the Lord. And we determine which will be successful in their endeavours.

The life of every person is governed and directed by their ruling love. It is the prime motivating factor in all they do. While they remain in this world it can be changed. And whilst it can fall within the broad categories suggested by the love of self, the love of the world, the love of the Lord and the love of the neighbour, yet it can never be exactly the same as that of another person. (See *Heaven and Hell* 486). Furthermore, everything which a man sees, hears and experiences which is in accordance with his ruling love gives him pleasure and delight, whereas everything which he sees, hears and experiences which is opposed to his ruling love he finds distinctly undelightful. Our ruling love is what makes us what we are. It lies at the very heart of our personality. And, fixed at death it determines where, either in heaven or in hell, we are going to find a home and remain to all eternity.

"A man's very life", wrote Swedenborg, "is, his love, and such as is the love, such is the life; in fact such is the whole man; but it is the dominant or ruling love which makes the man. This love has many others subordinate to it which are derived from it. These are diverse in appearance, but still they are all included in the ruling love and with it form one kingdom. The ruling love, is, as it were, their king, and head; it directs them, and by means of them as intermediate ends, it regards and designs its own end, which is the primary and ultimate of all." (*True Christian Religion* 399).

It is the ruling love to which, in the ultimate analysis and though he may not be conscious of it, a man is looking in all his activities. "It lurks in his will like the imperceptible current of a river bearing him this way and that in whatever activities he may be engaged: it is his animating principle." (ibid).

All of us are born into the tendencies to love ourselves and to love the world above everything else, and unless these loves are resisted one or other of them will in time rule our lives. Without any effort on his part, man must slide under their control, for here is where the pleasurable things of life first lie. But the attractions which these loves first hold out to us can be resisted in favour of the loves which lie at the heart of heaven. The love of one's neighbour and the love of the Lord.

Without question we have the capacity for change in this regard. For example, at a certain stage we may feel our lives to be dominated by the love of self, yet we can be re-assured that this doesn't always have to be.

Whilst the ruling love of another can never be known and we are forbidden to judge it (Matthew 7:1 and *Arcana Caelestia* 3796), yet when it comes to our own there are indicators of it we do well to observe. It is a question of what pleases us and what displeases us, of what gives us pleasure and what causes us displeasure; of what interests and excites us and of what bores and disgusts us. "What it is that reigns universally" wrote Swedenborg, "may be ascertained from the delight felt at its success, and from the mortification experienced at its failure." (*Arcana Caelestia* 7648). And again, "a man may recognize his (ruling) love by his delights." (*Heaven and Hell* 487). It is in examining our delights that we can begin to know. What are the things which give us our greatest delights? What are the things which please and satisfy us and make us happy? What are the things which interest and excite us? How do we react when we see our name mentioned or overhear it spoken in conversation?

Are we truly interested in the happiness and welfare of our fellow man or only in our own? By answering such questions, - which would be a worthwhile exercise for us all to try to do - we must get some indication of the nature of our ruling love. Only we of course can answer them, and total honesty is called for.

"He who loves himself in all things" it is said, "considers himself in all things; he thinks of himself, talks of himself, and acts for the sake of himself; for his life is the life of self." (*True Christian Religion* 399). And only we can know to what extent this teaching applies to ourselves. With people who are far advanced along the path of regeneration it would hardly apply at all. But this is how it also is with regard to those other objects which a person can come to love supremely. He who loves the world, who loves money and possessions, considers these things all the while; he thinks of them, talks about them and acts in order to acquire them. And so also when it comes to one's neighbour and the Lord. He who loves the neighbour above all things considers him in all things; he thinks of him, talks of him and acts for the sake of him. Here are the primary characteristics of people who are governed by these various loves.

The great purpose which lies behind life in this world is that we should come to resist the loves of self and of the world and instead love our neighbour and the Lord more than these. Here is what the Lord hopes for them from our life here on earth. But the decision is entirely in our hands. And that which a person deliberately chooses as his ruling love in the face of known alternatives, and afterwards confirms it with himself, remains with him to all eternity. As in the words of the old proverb, as the tree falls so it lies. "After death man continues to eternity such as his will or ruling love had been". (*Heaven and Hell* 1180).

Whilst the nature either of another's ruling love, or of our own, may never surface in this world so as to be seen, this is not so in the spiritual world. At first man can conceal his real nature and keep his ruling love hidden away, but in time the teaching is, he loses his inclination to do so.

"After an initial period after death, every person" wrote Swedenborg, "is let into the state of his interiors, or into the state of his interior will and the thought therefrom, in which he had been in the world when left to himself to think freely and without restraint. Into this state he unconsciously glides".

(Heaven and Hell 502).

And as his ruling love comes to the surface so a man takes himself to others who are similar, with whom he feels one and at ease. No one forces the issue either way. Man goes where his ruling love takes him, and this is where he wants to be. It is at this stage that all the shams and pretences drop away and the real person within emerges.

People in the past have thought that it is a man's beliefs, or the sacrament of Baptism, or death bed repentance, or a particularly good deed or an especially evil one, which determines whether after death he finds his home in heaven or in hell. Without under estimating the influences which any one of these things may have had, in actual fact it is none of them. It is the love which he chose to rule his life while in this world. It is what, in the words of Swedenborg quoted earlier, became his "animating principle" here on earth. In the spiritual world a man becomes the embodiment of his ruling love: it shines forth from his face, can be detected from the way he talks, and is perceived from the sphere which surrounds him there. We shall not make a more significant choice in life, both in terms of ourselves and with regard to all those around us, than the choice we must make as to what is going to be our ruling love.

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