

## The Ten Commandments - 2

I would like to commence this talk by quoting a few of the more significant statements which are to be found in the writings of Swedenborg on the subject of the Commandments. Even though in several places he treated them at some length, certain things he wrote specially highlight their importance and emphasise the crucial role they must play in our lives.

Swedenborg writes: "religion with man consists in a life according to the Commandments." Personally, I think this is very important and well worth thinking about. We can and do talk of knowing our Bibles, believing in God, praying and going to Church. But - and this is the point that is made here - these things by themselves do not constitute real religion. Anyone can know their Bibles, claim to believe in God, pray to God and go to Church. What makes a person truly religious however, is that they sincerely strive to live according to the Commandments. When it comes to it, this is what matters. Those other things are necessary and useful, but they do not constitute religion or by themselves make us religious.

Swedenborg also says "I know that many people think in their hearts that no one can shun evil of himself, because man is born in sin, and therefore without power to shun them of himself. But let them know that everyone can shun them, who in his heart thinks that there is a God, that the Lord is the God of heaven and earth, that the Word is from Him, that heaven and hell exist, and that there is life after death." In other words, where there is trust in the Lord and confidence that He will supply the necessary strength, evils can be shunned and overcome. Despite what we are sometimes inclined to think, it is entirely possible to live our lives according to the Commandments. And who of us doesn't need that reassurance?

Again Swedenborg wrote: "The Lord conjoins a person to Himself by that person knowing, understanding, willing and doing the Commandments." Here, in a sense, is what this series of talks on the Commandments is all about. If the Lord is to be present in our lives, in our marriages and in our relationships with people generally; if unselfishness and sincerity is to be the key note of our thinking and behaviour, here is how we go about it. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock" What words from the Bible are more familiar to us than these? "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20) And there is no

other way of opening the door but by "knowing, understanding, willing and doing the Commandments."

We can think of the Commandments then as focussing attention on ten basic requirements if the Lord is to be in anyway present in our lives, and if human living is to know the joy and happiness with which He wishes to bless it. The first Commandment is that we should love the Lord above all things and put Him first at all times. We are especially to be wary of the growth of self love and the love of the world and not let these things become the all consuming passions which they so frequently seem to do. It is these inclinations, to love ourselves and the world in place of God, and to worship other things in place of Him, against which we are particularly warned in the first of the Ten Commandments.

**Here we are dealing at length with the second Commandment, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God".** As we think about it we wonder, 'Who doesn't?' The Commandment is broken widely, indiscriminately, and unthinkingly by possibly the majority of people simply because the easy use of God's name has become so ordinary and everyday. People curse in God's name, use it when swearing, when in distress and at a time of surprise or disappointment. Something breaks, the television fades, the car stalls, or a meal burns and almost invariably God's name enters into the expression of annoyance somewhere. Even worse, in an argument, God is called upon to silence the other person and to make them see a particular point of view. There is no need to go into detail. We all know how it is.

The question arises, 'Well, what is wrong with this?' 'Does it really matter?' It has been argued, and I'm happy to quote the exact words, that 'only the most pompous among us would decry the amiable and easy use of God's name in the everyday currency of our language'. Frankly, I can't agree. Why call upon God thoughtlessly or use His Name indiscriminately? God's name has a special use and is to be used in particular circumstances.

When we utter God's name it should be done thoughtfully and with reverence. We seem to forget the fact that we are dealing here with our Maker; with Him Who loves us and whose Providence is at all times over us. Why then be careless about our use of His Name? Why invoke it unthinkingly? Why must anger or annoyance, surprise or disappointment, find an outlet in the use of a name, or names, with which only our

best and deepest affections and thoughts should be associated?

Some, I know, will argue that it's never meant that way and that for many, God isn't deliberately slighted. But what of others who are within earshot and children and youngsters who are nearby? Why drag in the dirt something which is sacred to others around us? "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God". However I want us to think further about the Lord's Name and about teachings concerning it, which adds an entirely new dimension to this Commandment and which widens considerably the implications it has for us.

Every name brings to mind and is closely associated with certain characteristics and qualities. If in conversation, for example, the name of a person we know is mentioned, there invariably comes to mind certain character traits and qualities we associate with them. In time people's names come to be identified with certain qualities in our mind. A certain name becomes synonymous with certain qualities which we might like or dislike. We choose the name of our children because of what those names suggest to us and because of the qualities we associate with them. Isn't this so?

I say this by way of introducing the teaching that by God's Name mentioned here as it is in the Word, we are to understand and bring to mind, not just a series of titles by which He is designated in the Scriptures, but all the qualities which He possesses and which we associate with Him and by which He is known. And these are many. We think of His Love and His Wisdom. We think of His mercy and forgiveness. We think of His power and work in creation. We think of the Scriptures that tell us about Him and help us to understand Him better. All of these things we associate with God. All of these things are what is meant by His Name.

Knowing this not only adds a new dimension to our understanding of this Commandment but it helps to make sense of the promise the Lord made, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it". Millions of prayers have been uttered in the Lord's Name, but as people we have learned, sometimes with bitterness and disappointment, this has been no guarantee that the petition, that what they ask for, would be granted. The fact is that to ask in the Lord's Name means to ask for those things which are in accordance with the Lord's Divine qualities; which are in accordance with His love and His purposes for us. Things which are in agreement with His order and planning, with His will and His wisdom.

We are warned in this second Commandment of the need to respect and to treat reverently all those things and qualities which are the Lord's. All those things His Name suggests and stands for. We are to respect and reverence the Scriptures. So too all things He has created. We are to respect and reverence the gifts and talents He has given us and given others. We are to reverence the knowledge of truth another has and the faith they live by. "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God". You shall not use carelessly and irreverently all those different things, all those various qualities, which bring the Lord to mind and which in fact are what is meant by His Name at the deeper, spiritual level.

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