

The Lord's Prayer (4) - Thy will be done

"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth", are the words we are looking at. First of all, I believe it is important to say something about the misunderstanding which exists in some people's minds about them. Right at the outset, let's be clear what is not meant, and then go on to examine what is intended to be understood by them.

I refer to the idea, that they mean people's acceptance of all things which befall them. I refer to the use of this phrase, "Thy will be done", as 'a sign of despair or as a passing acquiescence in conditions as they are'. I refer to an old idea, the legacy of which is still with us today, that God is the instigator of all things, good and bad; that He sends suffering, causes pain and brings on hardship. People used to talk, and often do today 'as if sorrow, pain, bitter experiences, human loss, wealth, or poverty, were impositions of an arbitrary Deity. Men and women, tortured with pain and broken hearts have cried, "Thy will be done" as if it were God's will that people should suffer.' (Charles A Hall "A Programme for Life", page 63). The idea still persists that troubles are divinely ordained, and that we are called upon to meekly submit to them.

But troubles are not Divinely ordained and it is not the will of God that there should exist suffering or hardship anywhere. God does not visit people with misfortune or bring hardship upon them. Where evil or disorder in any form occurs He has permitted it, but He has not willed it. Whether it be pain or poverty, or whatever it be, all that is evil in the ultimate analysis originates from hell, and the impact of that activity is permitted where it cannot be restrained without interference with man's freewill.

The Lord wills the eternal happiness of all people. And such happiness is attained by becoming regenerate; by overcoming the love of self and the love of the world which are with us from the beginning. The Lord wills that men and women should live in harmony everywhere. The Lord wills us to love one another. "This is my Commandment" He said "that you love each other, as I have loved you." (John 15, 12) He wills that we should not condemn, seek revenge, or withhold forgiveness. He wills us to think and act as we would have others think and act towards us. He urges us to trust in His Divine Providence, and to place our emphasis on spiritual qualities rather than on material possessions. He wills that we should strive to live according to the Commandments. For in doing so we shall know happiness.

Swedenborg wrote "By doing the will of God, is meant to do His precepts, or to live according to them, from the affection of love or charity." *Apocalypse Explained* 295(3). And whoever does, has heaven in themselves and can be happy in heaven when they die. As the Lord said, "Not every one that says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of the heavens; but whoever does the will of my Father who is in the heavens."

But to do God's will one must know and understand it. Hence the importance of reading and reflecting upon what is written in the Word. Here is one of the great values of worship, in the midst of which, there should be an unfolding of the Lord's will. We cannot accomplish much if we have forgotten the instructions. We cannot do the Lord's will, certainly not effectively, if we are vague about what it is.

The Lord's will is done in heaven and we pray that it be done on earth as well. Everyone in heaven are doing the Lord's will and seeking to further His purposes in their lives. But the words we are considering are also to be understood in a much more personal sense, not just in terms of circumstances outside of us, but in terms of circumstances within.

There is both the heavenly and the earthly within every one of us; the spiritual and the natural, the internal and the external. "Heaven" denotes the internal and spiritual side of our natures. The "earth" means the external and natural side. Both are present within everyone of us. The spiritual person in us is made up of spiritual affections and thoughts and is the realm of our deeper aspirations and ideals. The natural man, however, is more the person we are; the everyday person we are; the essentially selfish and self regarding person we can be.

The prayer then, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth", is a prayer that the Lord's will should not remain a matter of ideal and aspiration; should not just be limited to the realm of thought about it, and to the interior, abstract heights of our soul; but it should also be brought down into the realm of practical life; that it should truly infill the 'day to day' person we are. "Thy will be done, as in heaven", in other words, as we know and believe and aspire it should be, "so upon the earth", or at the level of our natural and earthly activity.

It has been truly said that 'the descent of the Lord's kingdom from the "heaven" of a person's soul to the "earth" below of their external man, is not effected in a moment, but is the work of years'. (R.L.Tafel, "The Lord's Kingdom",p,50) The reason why, is that the descent is resisted. Every effort we make to do the Lord's will, "as in heaven, so upon the earth", is strenuously contested by our other inclinations. We would be merciful and forgiving and try to do the Lord's will, in this regard, "as in heaven, so upon the earth". But other inclinations and thoughts rise up and contest the effort; thoughts which want us to believe that forgiveness would be to no purpose, and so on. We would be chaste in our thinking and wholesome in our attitudes, here again trying to do the Lord's will, "as in heaven, so upon the earth". But other thoughts and feelings rise up to contest the effort.

Therefore inward struggle and temptation are inevitable, if in our lives the Lord's will is to be done. Every inch of ground in our natural person is contested by the evil spirits of hell who do not relinquish control easily. But the struggle can be won. The Lord's will can become manifest in our thoughts and actions and in all our relationships with others.

Previously we looked at what is meant by the words, "Thy kingdom come" and considered the implications they carry for us. The Lord's kingdom comes to a person when His Divine laws are loved and obeyed, or, in other words when His will is done, "as in heaven, so upon the earth". This is why the two petitions are so closely connected, one following the other. The Lord's kingdom only comes when His will is done. It is an empty thing; to pray "Thy kingdom come" unless it is followed up with a pledge to do His will.

We have seen what is meant by the Lord's will. The Lord's will is that we should become regenerate; that by our life in this world we shall prepare ourselves for life in heaven to eternity. His will is that we should love our neighbour and strive for their happiness. His will is that we should not steal, covet or commit adultery. And though we know about these things we must also apply them to everyday life. From being just ideals in the mind they are to be applied to our day to day affairs.

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