

## ARISE & MEASURE: A PERSONAL RULE

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*And the angel stood by, saying, Arise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those worshipping therein. (Revelation 11:1)*

People must wonder, when they hear or read the Word, why so many measurements are mentioned. Spans of time, people's ages, distances, and dimensions are given, often in minute detail. As in our text from the book of Revelation, we even read of such things in the other world, where there are no space and time.

Actually though, as we can conclude from many descriptions in the *Writings* for the New Church, when it is said that there are no space and time, the meaning is that there are no natural space and time. Time and space in the other world simply have a different basis, namely, reflecting the constant characteristics of the human mind. For example, we feel close to people with whom we have things in common, distant from those with whom we have not. So things in heaven are not disconcertingly appearing and disappearing, or changing beyond recognition, but rather reflect the settled states of progress in the governing loves of the inhabitants. It is because of this that heaven is in that wonderfully organized human form the *Writings* call the Grand Man. For the Lord places everyone exactly in the community best suited to his or her function or use in life and thus to the greatest fulfillment and happiness.

And so the things around the angels, the houses they live in, their parks and garden cities, have spiritual dimensions which are a measure of their own character, in much the same way as we might say that a person has a 'big' heart, or is 'broad' minded. It is only when one is in 'a changeable state,' as for

example in the preparatory stages of life in the world of spirits, that one is aware of changes in one's surroundings.

Thus, all the measurements recorded in the Word, down to the very numbers used, correspond to spiritual realities that are the basis of human life. In the book of Ezekiel, for example, written several centuries before the Lord's coming, an angel measures a city and temple in the spiritual Israel. The complete record of his measurements, as we read in part earlier, spans no less than three chapters,— some ninety-five verses! Still it is written in such a way that when a person reads it, the angels associated with him perceive the spiritual meaning and the delight that goes with it, the Lord's love and wisdom enfolded within those verses. The same goes for the rest of the Word.

In the same way, after the Lord's coming, John records in the book of Revelation that he was given a reed like a staff and told to measure the temple of God, the altar, as well as the people in it. "Arise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those worshipping therein." He was being told to find out the state of the church. As we have seen, measurements correspond to qualities or the essential character. Applied to us as individuals, this command conveys the idea that we need to get up and measure ourselves, to carry out a survey of our lives.

As we move through the rhythms and cycles of our short time on earth, as new opportunities present themselves, we feel the need to assess our progress and to encourage ourselves to face the next challenge. Yet we know that our ability to make a true assessment is as weak as a reed. We don't know if we can handle it. But the Lord alone knows our character and what we will become, and He in fact shows us no more than we can handle. for His burden is light.

So do we have the measure of our life? Are we good people? Are we evil? Are we as good or bad as we think we are? Think of the reed that John used to measure the temple. It was like a

staff, it was strong. When the Lord is our guide and support, His strengthens our ability to make a true assessment of our character (cf. *Apocalypse Revealed* 485:3).

We know that whatever measure of good we have comes from what we choose during our life in the world (*Arcana Coelestia* 8533, *Divine Providence* 334, *Heaven and Hell* 349). As the Lord said: “Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom.” (Luke 6:38) ‘Running over’, as well as denoting abundance, implies a limit set only by the container. So we can think of the good received as the church—the real life of religion—in people. And so John was told to not only measure the temple, but also the people in it. In one sense, we can say the church is people—at least the part of them that lives and breathes in the sphere of heaven. And for this heavenly part of our minds to become a living force in our everyday lives, we need to know enough about ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses, to make progress and ourselves.

However, we must conduct this exploration with a reed that is like a staff: we must measure ourselves from the Lord’s perspective, not from ours. “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and measured the heavens with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in a scale, and the hills in balances?” asked Isaiah (40:12). Who but the Lord?

The *Writings* say that to measure means to explore the quality of something. So that when we look at our own lives, we are to make a just measurement of our actions, our thoughts, our intentions, against what we see taught in the Word. This is to measure from the Lord’s perspective. Think of the measurement described in our reading from Ezekiel. All the parts of the temple—the various aspects of our spiritual life as they appear in the mind—were measured with a line of flax and by just such a reed

as we have been describing (cf. *Apocalypse Explained* 629:3). We need to size up the present state of our character by what we know from the Word: this is to be our rule. For it is no accident that the word 'rule' involves both governing and measuring. Rules both govern and are a standard of measurement. We can think of our own rule of life in both these ways.

How then are we to go about applying such a measurement to ourselves? To begin with, we need a manageable framework which can become our own personal rule of life—a pattern of living to which we can commit ourselves, not just for a few days, but also for life. This is rule in the sense of a measure based on what we understand the Lord would have us do. It is something He can use to order the cycles of our spiritual life. We may fall short on occasion, but we should not let this discourage us.

So the first step in beginning a new order to our life is a change in attitude—a matter of what we wish for in our will. Basically, it is to stop hankering for what is against the Lord and to wish for good affections. For it is our will that rules (*Divine Providence* 151, *Arcana Coelestia* 7342). Initially, this is more a change of intent than a change in habit. If, for example, we compare it to giving up smoking, or any other addictive habit, then the first stage is to want to stop. The dislike of one's own habit can gradually become stronger until it reaches the point when the person either cuts down or actually does stop. So it is with an evil. We have to begin the new rule by simply disliking the evil.

But when, the *Writings* say, we progress and want to “actually desist from” our evil actions (*Divine Providence* 151), at this point not only have we acquired a healthy dislike of the evil because it is hellish, but we have also begun to shun it and fight against it. And note well that this new purpose can come about simply by measuring our lives once or twice a year against the teaching of the Word. Because the Word embodies all love and

wisdom, it affects our whole life. As it says, as soon as a person deliberately and from set purpose refrains from any evil as being a sin, he is kept by the Lord in the intention of refraining from the others (*Conjugal Love* 529). Not only that, but if a person transgresses unwittingly, or from some overwhelming bodily desire, it is comforting to know that this is not made a permanent part of his character, because, as it is said, he had not intended or set his mind on it (*ibid*).

Our personal rule of life then, can be what we have set our mind on— a confirmation that we want to take a certain path in life. And it seems reasonable to build on what we are already doing. For example, it might be unrealistic for someone who at present only reads the *Writings* occasionally, suddenly to start reading two or three hours a day! On the other hand, one who is already a regular reader may decide to make a manageable increase. The same applies to all aspects of our spiritual life: to prayer and worship, to church attendance, even to the giving of financial support. If we measure these by the principles of revelation, the Lord will show us where to make manageable adjustments. The basic framework is a simple one: "Remember the Sabbath day" gives us a weekly pattern of worship, and "Give us this day our daily bread" provides a daily guide. Within these present guidelines, there is plenty of room for personal decisions about 'where' and 'when' and 'for how long.' Worship may then, in a broader sense, inspire our entire life.

So gradually developing a realistic rule of life could become a useful framework, something there in the background as a personal standard, something that we can use periodically to assess ourselves. In the face of so many pressures in life, do we not need set times at which to look at our actions and the intentions behind them? Yes, modern life has many pressures. Still, we need time for the things that matter—daily, weekly, monthly, yearly. It is our choice. At regular intervals, we can

ponder what it is that gives us the greatest delight or the most grief and use these as pointers. For example, take a person who is inclined to drink too much. That may be the one thing that gives most enjoyment but afterwards the most grief both for the drinker and for other people. By taking notice of such pointers, we can see both the direction we should take and where our intentions are in fact heading.

There is on the other hand a kind of self-measurement that can be destructive. Probably one of the most insidious forms is measuring the way you feel against the way other people appear. This is not a true measurement, and it can destroy a person's trust and confidence in the Lord. We know subjectively how we feel our disappointments, perhaps even our despair over some situation. Then we look objectively at other people, and they seem to be so much better than we are. They seem to cope with their families, their jobs, even with their health! But this is a faulty comparison. We are using the wrong basis of measurement, trusting in a weak reed instead of a strong staff. We actually know very little about the issues in other people's lives. Things may be very different beneath the surface.

So think rather of the Lord standing in the gateway of heaven, teaching us, showing us, that we can trust in what He says in His Word: its wisdom shines in its own light. For the Lord's words are the true rules of life, revealed especially in the *Writings* for the New Church. So let us take heed! For it is His voice we can hear in Ezekiel and again through John: "Look with your eyes and hear with your ears and set your heart on everything I show you" (Ezekiel 40:4). "Arise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those that worship therein" (Revelation 11:1).

Amen

Lessons: Ezekiel 40:1-6; 41:1-4, Revelation 11:1 Isaiah 40:9-14, 25-28 *Conjugal Love* 528, 529