

New Church

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www.newchurch.org

New Church Teachings



Understanding the Bible

- The New Church is based on the Word of God, as revealed in the Old and New Testaments and the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.
- There is one loving, personal God, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The life of religion is to follow the Ten Commandments, and to act honestly and faithfully in our daily occupations.
- The Word of God (the Bible) has a deeper level of meaning, teaching about the Lord's essential nature and a person's spiritual development.
- Each of us continues life as a complete person immediately after the death of the body.
- God does not judge us, but we judge ourselves by what we love and how we live.
- People of every faith are saved if they live sincerely according to their religion.

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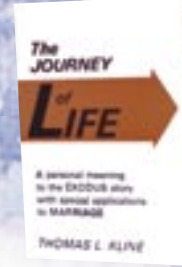
New Church Connection

Exists to inspire, inform, and connect people who are interested in the New Church. Every issue will have background information on the teachings of the New Church; inspirational content from personal testimonies and quotes from the Word; and clear information about the organized New Church (the General Church of the New Jerusalem), how to get connected, and how to get more information. Each issue will have a theme that can help enrich your spiritual journey.

Please contact the production team: David Lindrooth, Bronwen Henry and Eden King at outreach@newchurch.org for more information, to contribute an article or personal story, or to subscribe for yourself or a friend to receive this magazine.

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Check out the *Journey of Life*, exploring the deeper meaning of the Exodus story, by Tom Kline.

"The Word is God's truth itself which teaches people about the existence of God, of heaven and of hell, and of life after death, and above all teaches them how they must live and believe in order to enter heaven and so be happy for evermore."

Arcana Coelestia
9352:1

Cover image contributed by Brittany Barnett. Send in your images for future use to outreach@newchurch.org.

Welcome

Understanding the Bible

Is the Bible relevant to my life? Is it true? It seems so dated and confusing, can it really help me make decisions today, in modern times? What about all the contradictions? Explore these questions and more, in this issue of *New Church Connection*, focused on Understanding the Bible.



Photo Contributed by Hye-Seong Lee

Finding Meaning in Sacred Text

One of the most powerful and uplifting aspects of the New Church, a new Christianity, is that it provides great insight into the Bible. Many people honor the sacred quality of the Bible, and at the same time have a lot of questions and confusion about the specific stories. We hope you see new depth and beauty in the Old and New Testaments from the New Church teachings.

-Bronwen Henry
General Church Outreach



“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
Matthew 5:8

“[The pure in heart] are those who are in enlightenment when they are reading the Word, and to whom the Word shines and is translucent.” *Sacred Scripture 57*

“Quotes on the Bible

“As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.” 2 Samuel 22:31

“Read the Word and believe in the Lord, and you will see the truths which must be the truths of your faith and of your life. All in the Christian world draw their doctrine from the Word as the one and only fountain.” *True Christian Religion 621*

“The Word imparts life.”
Sacred Scripture 19

“People are taught by the Lord when they read the Word not for any selfish or worldly reason but for goodness and truth’s own sake; for they are enlightened then. But when they read it for a selfish or worldly reason they are blind.”
Arcana Coelestia 9188

“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” John 6:63

Who said it?

Emanuel Swedenborg was an 18th century scientist and philosopher who later in life turned to the study of religion. In the New Church we believe his later works are a Divinely inspired revelation for the modern age, touching on all the different aspects of religion with a very rational and common sense approach. See www.newchurch.org/about/swedenborg for more information.

Seeking Answers

Exploring Your Questions about the New Church

Q Does the New Church remove books from the Bible?

A There are different biblical canons to read today, depending on your faith. There is the Catholic Bible, Protestant Bible and even the Jewish Bible, each of which feature different books. The New Church also has its own biblical canon which recognizes some books of the Bible as having a deeper, more spiritual meaning than others. For example, the Gospels, which contain the Lord's own words, have a more spiritual quality than Paul's letters.

Q How were the Writings for the New Church revealed?

A The Writings for the New Church were revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg. For the first fifty-seven years of his life, Swedenborg was a scientist and philosopher in 18th century Sweden. He devoted his last twenty-seven years to writing and publishing the theology and experiences he said he had been called by the Lord to present. He wrote about religious topics including the life after death, the spiritual meaning of many Bible stories, the development of the human mind, and how the Lord lovingly guides each of us.

Q Do New Church teachings shed light on contradictions in the Bible?

A Yes. Consider the following examples:

Creation Story In the creation story, God creates light on the first day. However, it wasn't until the fourth day that God created the sun.

New Church Perspective The story of creation is a parable of each one of us being created anew. The light created on the first day is the first dawn of spiritual consciousness in each one of us, when we 'see the light' and know that there is such a thing as truth. Light is the symbol of truth. The birth of the sun and moon on the fourth day are symbolic of the birth of love and faith in our lives.

God's Character The God of the Old Testament is seen as fierce and angry. However, the God of the New

Testament is a God of love and peace. **New Church Perspective** God is our Father. Just as a good parent can correct and guide us in seemingly angry ways, so it can seem to us that sometimes God is angry with us. But we know that good parents, like our Divine Father, work from love. The anger is only an appearance. He is never angry with us, nor does He punish us. God loves us with His whole heart all of the time.

Trinity At times in the Bible, Jesus and God are one, and at other times there seems to be a separation.

New Church Perspective The New Christianity teaches that God is one (Mark 12:32,

Isaiah 44:6, Zechariah 14:9). Out of love and concern for the human race and the state of humanity at that time, God took on a physical human body conceived of the Divine and born of the virgin Mary. Within the human of Jesus was the Divine itself. Throughout His lifetime Jesus gradually got rid of what was merely human and took on more and more of the Divine from His soul until He made His external human completely Divine. God is one, within whom is the Divine Trinity, and He is

the Lord God, the Savior Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). Just as we all have a soul, a body and the actions of our life (and are one person) so it is with Jesus Christ. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are names given for the soul, body and activity of the one God.

Marriage The New Church teaches about marriage in Heaven. In the Bible, Jesus seems to say that there is no marriage after death. "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage." (Matt 22:30; Luke 20:35-36)

New Church Perspective

In the work, *Heaven and Hell*, this issue is commented on: "In the heavens there are spiritual weddings that should not be called weddings but unions of minds, because

of the union of the good and the true. On earth, though there are weddings, because they concern not only the spirit but the flesh as well.... This enables us to know what is meant by the Lord's words about marriages in Luke 20:35-36 (*Heaven and Hell* 382b). Jesus knew that people thought of marriage as a legal agreement and knew very little about the spiritual love that can exist between married partners.

Thanks to John Odhner, David Roth, Anna Woofenden, and Grant Schnarr for these answers.



QUESTIONS WANTED

In *New Church Connection* we want to answer the questions that are most relevant and compelling to you. Send your questions to questions@newchurch.org.

Changing Lives

Understanding the Bible
In each issue we include stories of lives changed by the teachings of the New Church. In this **Changing Lives** article we highlight the faith journey of **Rachel Dickson** in finding and embracing the New Church.

My family has never been served well by religion. My father's father left his family's farming tradition on the eastern Colorado plains in a rather dramatic fashion: he gave more than 700 acres of land, his only inheritance, to a church that promised him a lifelong home and livelihood in exchange for all his worldly goods. Not surprisingly, the cult's promises didn't pan out, and my grandfather became an itinerant Methodist minister who provided his seven children with not much more than the incessant preaching of hellfire. The childhood stories my dad recounted were made of slums and hunger, but he kept the worst to himself: the physical abuse from his father, and the fact that all those sermons had settled in a deep place inside him and caused him nightmares even as an adult.

As for my mother, she had been raised in the Ozarks in a backwoods stew of ignorance, poverty, and Bible thumping. On their farm they'd had plenty to eat, anyway, but my mother's hunger was enormous nevertheless. She wanted ideas, books, a life apart from the Southern Baptist path of adolescent marriage and endless proscriptions of anything that might compete with the entertainment that revivals provided. Her brains got her out of the woods, via a scholarship. She married my dad, and they decided that their children's religious education should differ significantly from their own.

I will always be grateful to my parents that they kept us from the doctrines of their childhoods. All the thundering from the pulpit that they had endured was distilled for us into no more than a whiff of brimstone. As a result, we have a lot less to contend with than they, for what you are taught as a child about the nature of the Divine has great power to shape your heart, for al-



Author, Rachel Dickson

Life Faith Action

Quotations from the teachings of the New Church and thoughts on how to bring these ideas into life.

The Word teaches nothing else than that everyone should live in charity with his neighbor, and love the Lord above all things. *Arcana Coelestia* 1408

Application: What random acts of kindness can you do for someone else today? Make a list of ways that you can be charitable toward your neighbor. Ask God to help you do these things today. Make a list of the ways that you show your love to the Lord.

The acknowledgment and worship of the Lord, and the reading of the Word, cause the presence of the Lord; but these two together with a life according to His commandments effect conjunction with Him. *Apocalypse Revealed* 796

Application: Make a conscious effort to connect what you are doing to why you are doing it. Is it the media? Friends? Or is your faith guiding your decisions? How can you put God at the center of what you do?

Therefore everyone, even at the present day, who, while reading the Word, approaches the Lord alone, and prays to Him, is enlightened therein.

Doctrine of the Lord 2

Application: At times, reading the Word can feel frustrating, and void of meaning and relevance. Before reading the Word today, pray to the Lord for an open and willing heart. Ask Him to quiet your busy head so that you can connect with Him.

Everyone's God is that which he or she loves above all things.

Apocalypse Explained 935

Application: Are you coming to the Lord first? Alone? Is there a false god you are worshipping instead? What is first in your life? Where do you spend most of your time? How can you shift your priorities to better reflect God's presence in your life?

Read the Word and believe in the Lord, and you will see the truths which should constitute your faith and life. Everyone whose soul desires it is capable of seeing the truths of the Word in light.

Apocalypse Revealed 224

Application: The Lord wants to be part of your life. He will come when you ask. Deliberately ask the Lord to be a part of your day. Read the Word with the intention of being conjoined to the Lord.

Changing Lives Continued from p.8

ways. Decades after my dad had turned his back on fundamentalist Christianity, its images of hell still dwelt within him, terrifying him of his impending death and leaving the people who loved him at a loss for how to help him. The New Church calls fundamentalist doctrines "falsities." I call it poison.

I myself was raised in the Unity Church, which is a very positive expression of Christianity, with none of the baggage. I haven't attended a Unity Church for a decade, however, as its open message is susceptible to being startlingly transformed into some wild New Age teachings that I'm not comfortable with. Where I did find a high degree of comfort was in the academic treatment of faith. The first time I read the Bible was for a college literature course. While I enjoyed absorbing the lore and the majestic language, this experience left me mostly critical. Much of it seemed to me to be a justification for the genocidal crimes and land robbery of a primitive, ethnocentric people. The Ten Commandments seemed written for those who are morally remedial, and all those other strictures in Leviticus and Deuteronomy seemed like micromanagement at its worst. I decided that there was better history and better literature elsewhere. And wasn't this a misogynist, repetitive, contradictory document, full of far too many scolding prophets? The semester wore on; I started skimming. I ended up with an A in the class and the unfortunate impression that a good

grade can bring: that I was knowledgeable in a subject of which I was, in fact, densely ignorant.

I haven't been exactly fertile ground for religious teachings. My family's experience with the more toxic forms of Christianity and my own disappointment

What you are taught as a child about the nature of the Divine has power to shape you, for always.

with my New Age background gave me what I only half-jokingly refer to as a belief disorder. I've been attracted to Eastern religions, and done some explorations there. But I found it hard to persuade all those exotic practices to truly live in my heart. I wanted a rooted religious life, yet the choices on my own culture's menu did not appeal, largely because of the manner in which most flavors of Christianity lay exclusive claim to God's love. So we—I now had a husband and two sons—had no church. I did my yoga faithfully, and every year or so we would make a half-hearted attempt to go church shopping. My search became more motivated as my father lay dying two years ago. My grief was only one of many shadows in my life, and in the darkness, I sorely needed community and comfort. So we headed back to the church we had liked most during our forays of the previous years, the New Church of Boulder Valley. This is not a story of instant

healing, nor of spontaneous acceptance of the teachings. I couldn't help but be disappointed that this "new" church was based on the same old Bible that had driven my grandfather nuts. And did the language have to be so male oriented? Perhaps we wouldn't have come back if the kids hadn't been assigned roles in the upcoming Christmas pageant, making us feel obligated to show up for four Sundays running. Still, there was always something in the service that I liked.

I would sit there in alternate resistance and tears—my dad, after all, was slowly dying. And as I sat there, I changed. Darned if those Biblical messages didn't work their way inside me via the songs we sang, for music finds its way to a place where words don't usually go.

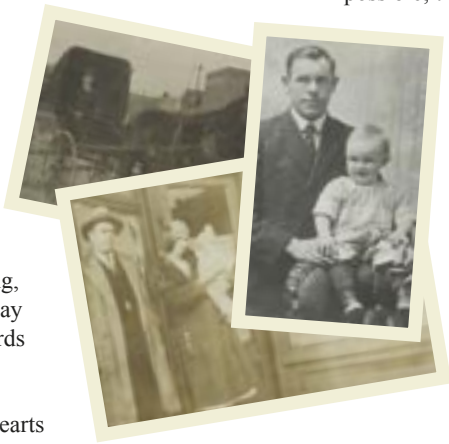
"I will break their hearts of stone, Give them hearts for love alone..." The lyrics seemed to well so joyfully from some divine place inside, that it took me a while to realize that they were out of the dusty, repetitive Old Testament. It still happens sometimes that I realize, startled, that the Word is beautiful. Just yesterday I was reading a quoted passage in a book that begins "How are thou fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" I thought, "How gorgeous, must be Milton." No, knucklehead, Isaiah. It is humbling to find beauty in the foun-

dations of a faith you had comfortably rejected.

I feel indebted to Swedenborg for providing a divine vision pruned of the doctrinal growths that grew up over the centuries, so that you can see its beauty more clearly. Just when you thought you had seen it all, along comes Swedenborg with something different, yet reminiscent of the things I appreciate in other faiths: that mystical experiences are still possible; that the Old Testa-

ment stories I had found so distressing could be seen allegorically as a struggle to conquer the part of yourself that is reluctant to accept God; that the Ten Commandments have an inner meaning that

is challenging and relevant; that it is just as simple, and as difficult, as turning toward the light. People tend to want a snappy transformation, to suddenly be born again and to have the job done for life. But what I've seen is that a spiritual practice, be it yoga or going to church, changes you slowly—and when you stop practicing, it stops changing you. Little by little, my life is evolving into something better than it was, much richer, as I discover my everyday miracles. I had never seen that there is a place to go when your



heart is breaking, that a proper church—my church, now—is a laboratory where kindness is practiced. What a surprise to find that the people who come to the New Church come ready to shine, to provide friendships that shine, too.

On days that things are flowing, I can feel my own heart of stone breaking, softening, healing. Sometimes, in the midst of song, I feel such a well of love in me that I could do anything—even see the desperation in my grandfather's life, and forgive him the cruelty that so scarred my dad.

I feel that I can afford to be more generous, now that I'm not so alone, and that the spiritual breadth of the people around me is inspiring me to find my own kindness in dealing with the challenges in my life. How I savor these new riches. The feeling that I have found my tribe. The feeling of being joyful, and strong with it. The discovery that I could become the first of three generations in my family to be well served by religion. And that's how I became a churchgoer.

There is a postscript. In May I was

spending the night at the church, chaperoning a group of teens. Everybody got to bed late, and as I was lying there in the throes of exhausted insomnia, I found myself entertaining thoughts like "Why am I here? I'm never going to get to sleep. I should have stayed home."

I did eventually fall asleep, though I didn't realize it. In my dream, which I was convinced was waking reality, I was going down a wide dim corridor, full of obstacles and hurdles I had to get over. Suddenly, I was back in the room I had grown up in, back in my folks' house

on a bright morning. And my dad came in, no longer 84 years old, no longer ill. He was just out of the shower, and looked wonderful, the essence of himself, brimming over with enthusiasm in that way he had,

his eyes snapping with joy. In my dream I thought, death has done wonders for him. He asked me, "Have you read Divine Providence yet?" I don't know if I actually responded, I was so taken up by the glad feel of him. He said "It's true! It's true! Great God Almighty, IT'S TRUE!" And my father took me into an enormous embrace. ■

Spiritual practice changes you slowly--when you stop practicing, it stops changing you.

The stories in the Word are the owner's manual for life. In this owner's manual you find "quick reference" principles that define basic operation. By this I mean fundamental, clear and accessible teachings about right and wrong as found in the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and many of the Lord's words and actions. This basic instruction about how to live is sufficient to get anyone on a healthy spiritual path.

Then there is the more detailed instruction. The descriptions for the finer points of spiritual life, the in-depth "how to" type of instruction that gives information about what happens when troubles come up. Finally there is contextual teaching about the Lord, the spiritual world, and how we are influenced by the spiritual world.

In the New Church, we view the Old and New Testaments as containing all this information. Some of it is clearly taught, and some needs a bit of decoding as it lies beneath the different narratives in the Word.

The system for seeing the far-reaching

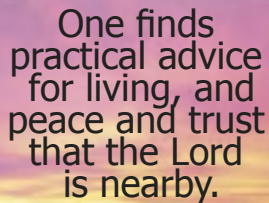
and life-altering truths that are concealed in these stories is spoken of in the Writings for the New Church. For example, books of the *Arcana Coelestia* systematically go through many of the stories of the Old and New Testaments showing the truth concealed within apparently conflicting stories. Books like *Sacred Scripture* show how impossible stories, like the creation of the universe

in exactly seven days, work to portray deeper realities of the gradual growth of a person's spirituality and relationship with the Lord.

The stories themselves are important. They serve as a rich—sometimes beautiful, sometimes harsh

—foundation of imagery that ministers to the varying emotional states of our life. They comfort us when we are grieving, give us courage when we are weak, or help us find peace when disturbed. They give us direction when we need to get out of a spiritual rut.

Knowing the deeper level of the stories gives them context in the Lord's plan. In these three levels of revelation—the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Writings for the New Church—we



One finds practical advice for living, and peace and trust that the Lord is nearby.

see the Lord's presentation of how life works, in detail and the big picture. It is extremely comforting because we can begin to see how the Lord loves us, how He is continually leading us, even when the circumstances of life are difficult.

In the final pages of the book *True Christian Religion* we read that "it is now permitted to enter with understanding into the mysteries of faith" (508). A fundamental element of the New Church is the system described in its doctrines that gives an individual the ability to read the stories in the Old and New Testaments and see what the stories mean on this deeper, spiritual level.

The system for understanding the spiritual meaning of the Word is twofold. First, one ought to seek to know the Lord with a willingness to love Him by living according to His teachings in the Word (*Sacred Scripture* 57). This opens one's eyes to see the Word's deeper

meaning. The process is described in John: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21). A second step is to look for the plain statements about who the Lord is and what He directs us to do with our lives. We can use these concepts to shed light on the other apparently more murky stories. The system takes both practice and prayer.

When one cultivates a regular habit of devotional reading of the Word, with prayer to the Lord for the spiritual light one needs to understand the stories, it is amazing to see the wisdom that the Lord offers. Not only does one find practical advice for living, but one also finds peace and trust that the Lord is nearby.

-Rev. David Lindrooth



Who is Saved?

At times the Bible seems to say we are justified or saved by our works, not by faith (Matthew 7:21). And yet at other times we are justified by faith, and not by works (John 3:16). Which is it?

New Church Perspective A favorite New Church quotation is that "religion is of life and the life of religion is to do good" (*Doctrine of Life* 1). True faith is trust and confidence in the Lord which is reflected in one's life. One can neither find salvation through works alone or faith alone, but through a life of faith and charity together.

Inspiration

Understanding the Bible

From New Church Teachings

“The sacred scripture, that is the Word, is Divine truth itself. Everyone professes the Word to be from God, divinely inspired and therefore holy, but up to the present no one has known where in it the Divine is. For taken literally the Word looks like any ordinary book, written in a strange style, neither high-flown nor brilliant as many secular books appear to be.

This is why if a person worships nature as God or in preference to God, so that his thought comes from himself rather than from heaven inspired by the Lord, he can easily fall into error about the Word and come to despise it.

The person who thinks like this fails to reflect that the Lord Jehovah, who is the God of heaven and earth, uttered the Word by means of Moses and the Prophets, and consequently it cannot be anything but Divine truth. For this is what everything is that the Lord Jehovah Himself speaks.

This is why, as He Himself says, His words contain spirit and life, and why He is the light that enlightens, and why He is truth.”

True Christian Religion 189-190

Reflection

When faced with a difficult decision, where do we go for our help and our strength?
When challenged by a troubled relationship, where do we turn? Who and what do we rely on to give us hope, and strength and the wisdom to do the right thing?

The Lord gives us all these things in His Word. When we go to His Word and read, we are allowing ourselves to tap in to the Lord’s wisdom. When we humble ourselves and turn to the Lord for strength, He can and will give us guidance.

There are two key elements: the willingness to read the Lord’s Word, and the action of actually doing it. We need both. We can ask the Lord to give us the willingness to trust that He has the answers for us. In prayer, we can ask for His help, and go to His Word and read.

Contributed by Joanne Kiel from the New Church Young Adult Connection.

“Jesus said, The words which I speak to you are spirit and life.” John 6:63

The Purpose of Reading the Word

The majority of people in my country have not been taught about the meaning and purpose of the Word to humanity. The Writings for the New Church teach that the Word means the Divine truth itself, which made all things, in which is the Divine wisdom and the Divine life, thus the Lord Himself (*True Christian Religion* 191).

In John 1:3 the Word says, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” The purpose of the Word is to conjoin us with heaven, this is because the Word is revelation from the Divine and it is the Divine in each and all things. It is the word which makes heaven within us as it is the basis of heaven and it is the basis of our angelic life.

In the New Church, we are greatly blessed as we are led by the Lord to learn that His church constitutes heaven with us and that this is where the Lord is acknowledged and where His Word is.

By Rev. Samson Abuga, Kenya

Practical Ideas

Understanding the Bible

Bible Story Unlocked

The Bible seems to imply that rich people cannot go to Heaven, what is the meaning of this?

In *Heaven and Hell* it states:

“The belief that the poor enter heaven easily and the rich with difficulty comes from not understanding the Word where the rich and the poor are mentioned. The Lord said in Matthew 19:24: It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

By the rich are meant the rich in both a natural sense and a spiritual sense.

In the natural sense the rich are those who have an abundance of riches and set their heart upon them, but in the spiritual sense they are those who have an abundance of cognitions and knowledges, which are spiritual riches, and who desire by means of these to introduce themselves into the things of heaven and the Church from their own intelligence.” *Heaven and Hell* 365

7 Keys to Reading the Bible

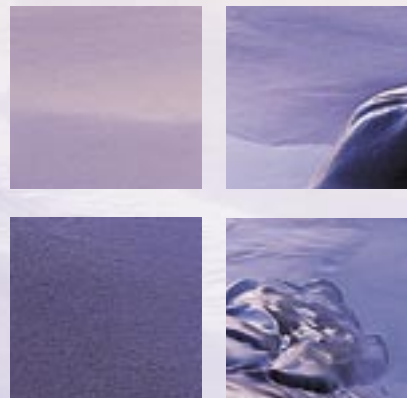


- Don’t read more at a time than you can make sense of. Find the amount of time and length of reading that works for you.
- Pray for desire and inspiration to read.
- Mark passages which are important to you. Consider keeping a journal and include quotes, thoughts, questions.
- Look up puzzling terms and pursue the wider sense of stories or ideas.
- Find ideal circumstances. What time of day and type of environment nurture your focus?
- Follow your interests. What stories or questions are you most interested in?
- Enjoy a sense of progress. Make a reading plan including familiar and unfamiliar stories.

- 7 Keys Contributed by Brian Smith

Everywhere in the Word there are internal things which never appear at all in the external things except a very few which the Lord revealed and explained to the Apostles.”

Arcana Coelestia 1



Window into the Heavens

How do we learn about things like heaven, God, what it takes to have a spiritual life? We all experience intuitions about what God or heaven might be like, or have some perception about how to live spiritually.

Yet, for the most part, we need to learn these things from an outside source. Spiritual books, written revelations, even other people’s opinions about these spiritual subjects can help us gain a view about life that we simply can’t gain on our own. Learning from what God has told us in revelation, gives us a higher perspective, a way of looking at life from God’s point of view rather than our own. Turning to a higher source for knowledge moves us out of our limited and closed

An excerpt from a soon to be published book by Rev. Grant Schnarr titled *You Can Believe*, due in print in 2006.

world view to a new and growing understanding of all things.

There is a book that is written so differently, and is so profoundly powerful because of how it is written, that it is unlike any other book in the entire world. It is designed in such a way that it contains levels upon levels of spiritual meaning, so that when one reads this book in humility, looking for answers, answers are

given that are not present on the literal page. This book is a window to heaven, a constant connection to God, and a guide for life. It is God speaking to us. In fact, it is called the Word of God. Yes, I'm talking about what most people refer to as the Bible.

The Bible is a metaphor about our relationship with God. People who claim they 'take the Bible completely literally' and

then go on to tell you how wrong you are and how you need to be saved like they are, and so on and so forth, may have a lot of passion for what they believe but they are mistaken.

No one can take the Bible completely literally, and they shouldn't. God says, If your right eye offends you pluck it out (Matthew 5:29). Don't do it. God encourages his people to dash their enemy's infants against the rocks (Psalm 137:8).

Don't even think God means it. God says he creates evil as well as good (Isaiah 45:7). Don't believe it. The disciples were promised they would see the second coming of Christ before they passed away from earthly life. It didn't happen.

Contradictions exist all through the Bible

"The Word conjoins man with the Lord, and opens heaven."

Sacred Scripture 3

and one cannot take it completely literally or live by everything God commands within it.

This holy book is to be handled with extraordinary wonder, and is to be explored deeper to see the underlying meanings, the real heart of what is being said, the spiritual story behind the story. The Word of God is a metaphor, a mirror in which we behold ourselves, a series of parables which beg us to look deeper.

What can be taken literally in the Bible is fairly clear. The plain statements that ring true in every religion—to live with spirit and integrity, to resist evil, to pursue goodness, to follow the higher path—these teachings can easily be adopted as eternal verities.

The historical aspects of the Bible, the history of the Israelites, of the

prophets and kings, of Jesus himself, can be taken literally. I believe that even the miracles happened.

The point is that many things said have a deeper meaning, and the history

The Bible is a window to Heaven, a connection to God, and guide for life.

itself is a metaphor for our own lives. For instance, when we are told to pluck out our right eye, that right eye symbolizes a way of seeing the world that we must remove from our beings if we are to be whole. The enemy's children

that God says are to be destroyed are the spiritual enemies of our own predisposition to anger, resentment, lust, hatred, whose offspring we know all too well—acts of selfishness and cruelty. These must be destroyed if we wish to escape the tyranny of our own destructive nature.

The second coming is a coming in spirit and in a new understanding of God. The Bible must be seen for its deeper meaning.

Imagine, with the key to understanding the deeper meaning of the Bible, how much more these stories come alive, make sense, and relate directly to your life. The Writings of Swedenborg give us the key to opening the hidden treasures in the Word of God. Knowing the symbolism they teach truly makes the message of the Bible, and all things, new! ■

Congregations Around the World

Understanding the Bible



The New Church (General Church of the New Jerusalem) has congregations around the world. When you travel to different congregations you will notice that they may emphasize different worship styles. One congregation might have recorded music, another might have drums and guitars and yet another an organ or choirs. As various as the music and styles of worship may be, you will find people at each congregation inspired and dedicated to the powerful teachings of the New Church. All people are welcome to join in worship and participate in the life and community of the church.



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Did you know?

The General Church of the New Jerusalem is one of numerous organizations dedicated to the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

New Church Teachings

- **God is Love** and nothing but what is good can come from God, because His very nature is Love. God came to this world in the form of Jesus Christ, who is the one and only God.
- **The Old and New Testaments** have a deeper meaning revealed in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg that helps people learn how to live happy and useful lives to eternity.
- **All religions have goodness** in them. There are many paths and gates into the heavenly city, New Jerusalem.
- **Heaven is for everyone** who wants to live there. Heaven is where people (angels) love God and others and want to be useful. While people are free to choose to live in hell, God wants everyone to live with Him in heaven to eternity.
- **There will be no "last judgement"** for God does not judge us, but we judge ourselves by what we love and how we live. People who love God and try to live a good life according to what they believe to be true are saved.
- **Marriage can last forever** for God blesses people with a special love in marriage that goes on after death, even to eternity.
- **God's providence is powerful** and unending. God guides each person's spiritual path, from the smallest things up to the biggest things, and His angels are with us "every moment of every moment."




Divine mercy
 is a pure mercy
 toward the whole
 human race with
 the intent of saving
 it, and it is
 constant toward
 every individual,
 never withdrawing
 from anyone.
Heaven and Hell 522

The Word
has been written
in such a way
that all the details there,
even the smallest,
correspond to things in heaven.
When the Word
is read on earth
the angels in heaven
are stirred by the holiness
contained in the internal sense.

Arcana Coelestia 8615
Emanuel Swedenborg

www.newchurch.org

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