

How We Look To Angels

A Sermon by Rev. Donald L. Rose

In the book of Revelation it is written, "Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame" (Rev. 16:15). In a red-letter Bible this verse stands out because it is the only one in the chapter that is in red.

In our lesson we read the words, "Do not provoke him" (Exodus 23:20). This is said about the angel sent before the Children of Israel. They guarded their behavior because of the presence of an angel, and they knew that if they obeyed, the angel would keep them and bring them safely to their destination. The angel, then, knew the way in which they walked, and in some manner saw them.

There is a teaching in Heaven and Hell about how we look to angels. It is number 131. It says that when we are in good we are regarded by angels as beautiful, and when evil we appear ugly. The chapter is the chapter on light in heaven. We are told that when that light shines on you, you appear as you really are.

Do you know what you look like? You may have a mirror in the bathroom and one in the hall and one in the living room. We are accustomed to seeing our face in a mirror. But do we feel we know what we look like? We might look with real curiosity at a photograph in which we appear. It is sometimes surprising to see a film or a videotape in which we participate. "Do I look like that?" We might ask someone else to tell us. "Do I move and act like that?"

It is particularly interesting to see something we are familiar with from an entirely different angle. If there is an aerial photograph of our neighborhood, we might search in it for our house or office, and perhaps look with fascination at the route we regularly walk. That reference to the path we walk is of interest, because when we are viewed in the light of heaven, it is as if we are taking certain paths or ways (see HH 534). Sometimes, although we are not moving physically, we walk in the valley of the shadow, and sometimes although there may be confusion and turmoil around us, we walk beside the still waters.

Take some familiar thing and look at it through a microscope. It is surprising. The Writings invite us to look at an object such as a leaf or a

flower or a bee and to examine it with some wisdom. Look at it first naturally, afterwards rationally, and at length spiritually. Use a microscope and you will see "wonderful things, while the interiors that you do not see are still more wonderful" (DP 3).

There is a statement in the Arcana Coelestia which reads as follows:

"If a person should see the quality of a single thing as it appears before the angels, he would be amazed, and would confess that he would never have believed it, and that in comparison he had known scarcely anything" (AC 4930). The passage says that the quality contains many, many things "which cannot be seen in the light of the world, but only in the light of heaven, thus before angels." Look at the world or contemplate the universe and everything in it. What is it? Is it not a theater representing the Lord's kingdom? (see AC 3000, 3483)

But the Writings emphasize something else much more than material objects. They emphasize the mental world of affections and ideas. We think the affections we experience and the ideas in our minds are simple. But they are wonderfully complex. Once in the spiritual world some doubted the wonders within a single idea, and the idea was then opened up for them so far that they seemed to see "a universe leading to the Lord" (AC 4946).

Each idea an individual has is in a way a picture of that individual. We read,

"The quality of a spirit can be known in the other life from one single idea of his thought. Indeed angels have from the Lord the power of knowing at once when they but look upon anyone, what his character is ... It is therefore evident that every single idea and every single affection of a person ... is an image of him and a likeness of him" (AC 803).

What a different feeling we get about our own thoughts and about reading the Word when we have some awareness of how wondrous are the contents of our minds. We are told that angels are in particular delight when children read the Word. Indeed the Word, not on a book shelf but in a human mind, is a resting place for angelic wisdom.

In the sight of the angels, how are we dressed? If someone is going to look at us, we want to be becomingly dressed, and when our minds are engaged with truths from the Word we are so dressed. This brings us to

the verse in Revelation 16. It is said that someone is blessed who is awake and keeps his garments lest he walk naked and they see his shame. Who sees his shame? It is the angels. We will mention this verse again. Let it be noted that the garments mean truths, and that to live without truths is to walk naked. As it is said in Apocalypse Revealed:

"A person may indeed live like a Christian without truths, but this before men, but not before angels" (AR 706).

Is there such a thing as a beautiful deed? Yes, there is, and the real beauty is in the intention and love behind the deed. There is a saying in the Doctrine of Charity that everything a person does is an image of that person. "Before the angels he himself appears in his image ... which I have seen a thousand times" (Charity 6).

As we make our choices from day to day, how much difference it can make to realize how unpleasant in the sight of heaven are some of the things in which we might be inclined to indulge. What a difference when we realize how beautiful to behold is life in which we do not harm others but wish them well.

Paint a picture, if you can, of some of the feelings that can motivate us, such as revenge or pride. What do they look like?

Listen to this from the Arcana Coelestia:

"In order to obtain a clear idea of the nature of the life of the love of self and of the world (or what is the same, of a life of pride, avarice, envy, hatred, revenge, unmercifulness, adultery), let any person of talent make for himself an impersonation of it ... and he will then see, in proportion to the energy of his description or picture, how horrible these evils are, and that they are devilish forms, in which there is nothing human. Forms such as these all those become after death who perceive the delight of their life in such evils ... On the other hand, let the same person delineate for himself an impersonation of love and charity, or let him express it before his eyes under some form, and then in proportion to his power of description or portrayal he will see that the form is angelic, full of bliss and beauty, and pervaded within with what is heavenly and Divine" (AC 2363).

People who make it part of their lives to shun evils as sins against God "appear in heaven before the angels as beautiful human beings, and partners and companions of the angels" (DP 121).

The angels see things so differently. They see in the clearest light. Take all the doubts that can trouble you. Take all the arguments against the beautiful truth about the Lord's loving Providence. Write a whole book about them and put that book in the hand of any angel, " ... and I know," says the seer, "that the angel will write underneath these few words, They are all appearances and fallacies" (DP 213). Our lesson this morning from the Sermon on the Mount was about worries. What shall we eat or what shall we drink? We do find ourselves sometimes filled with worries, and perhaps we feel that we could fill a book with them. But if an angel looked upon that book, would he not see that those worries are based on the appearances of self-life and the fallacies that cloud our trust in the Lord's Providence?

Happy is he that is awake and keeps his garments. The Writings seem to say that this is a wake-up call to people who are associated with the New Church. "Happy is he that is awake and keeps his garments lest he walk naked and they see his shame." Here is what the Writings say on this:

"These things are said for those who will be of the Lord's New Church, that they may learn truths and remain in them, for without truths their connate evils, which are infernal loves, cannot be removed. A man may indeed live like a Christian without truths, but this only before people, not before angels" (AR 706).

Do you know something about the New Church? Then this is a message to you. Learn truths. Remain in them. Yes, remain in them. Do not lose those beautiful garments. What a shame that would be. Stay awake. Think of things the way they really are. Think of your life in this world and in the world to come as it really is. You can call this a warning, but remember that it is a happy warning. Happy is he that is awake and keeps his garments. Amen.