

## Endure to the End

By Rev. Kenneth J. Alden

1. "And because iniquity is multiplied the charity of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:12-13)
2. To be saved, we must endure to the end.
  - A. Although the Lord was responding to questions about the sign of His coming and the end of the age, we face many challenges to our ability to have the Lord fully present with us, for example, in the uses we perform, in our interactions with family, colleagues and friends, or in our recreational pursuits.
    - 1 In all of these "ends of an age" on a lesser scale, much can go wrong by our own hand.
    - 2 To be saved from disaster, we must endure to the end.
      - a. What resources do you have that will give you that endurance?
3. When Jesus was speaking of His coming and the end of the age, He was helping them understand what He meant by saying of the temple that not one stone would be left upon another that would not be thrown down. (See *Matthew 24:2-3*)
  - A. Although we think of the Lord's coming as a joyous event, much of what Jesus spoke about sounds terrifying and disheartening.
  - B. Will we not face similar tribulation on a lesser scale as we make way for the Lord to be fully present in our lives?
4. Jesus began His reply to the disciples, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." (*Matthew 24:4*)
  - A. Since the name "Christ" refers to the truth by which the Lord is worshiped, so *Arcana Coelestia* tells us that Jesus was prophesying that people would pass off falsity as the truth and as the sum and substance of faith. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3353:2)
    - 1 Here we find a spiritual connection between His reply and His earlier statement that not one stone of the temple would be left upon another.
  - B. On a literal level, by the temple destroyed, Jesus meant that the Romans would destroy the temple that Herod had built for the Jews. (See *Brief Exposition* 71)
    - 1 On a deeper level, by the temple as a house of God, He meant the church He was now setting up—the Christian Church

- a. This temple—would have every one of its truths thrown down until it was destroyed as a dwelling of the Lord. (See *Apocalypse Revealed* 191:3; *Brief Exposition* 71; *Apocalypse Explained* 630:7)
  - 1) The connection with His warning about many saying they are Christ is that when truth is cast down, falsity passed off as truth can deceive many.
- 2 On a still deeper level, Jesus meant His Divine Human by the temple. (See *Brief Exposition* 71)
  - a. As every truth about the Lord was thrown down by the church, this temple, too, was destroyed with them. (See *True Christian Religion* 174:2; *Apocalypse Explained* 391:4)
  - b. With every truth about Himself destroyed, the church would be very susceptible to people coming in His name, deceiving many.
- 5. With the temple destroyed and people claiming to be the Christ, that is, with truths about the Lord thrown down and falsity being passed off as truth, what is meant by wars and rumors of wars follows.
  - A. *Arcana Coelestia* says that in the spiritual sense of the Word, the Lord is here describing the arguments and disagreements over the truth that would arise in the church. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3353:2)
    - 1 The nations fighting each other mean evils fighting, and the kingdoms mean falsities doing battle with each other. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3353:2)
    - 2 We read in *Arcana Coelestia*: “The fact that such things perverted the Church before very many centuries had gone by is evident from the consideration that the Church in the Christian world became divided, and that its divisions were the result of opinions concerning goodness and truth; so that the Church began to be perverted a long way back in the past.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3488)
- 6. After speaking of wars, Jesus foretold tribulation or affliction, in which the apostles would be killed and hated by all and false prophets would arise and deceive many. (See *Matthew* 24:9-11)
  - A. *Arcana Coelestia* says that here, in the spiritual sense, a second state of the perversion of the church is dealt with. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3488)
    - 1 Whereas before people no longer knew what was good and true and argued about it, now good and truth would perish from the church through perversion and denial. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3488:2)

- 2 We are told further, that “when people...treat goodness and truth with contempt and...also loathe them....faith in the Lord will breathe its last, doing so by degrees as charity comes to an end.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8487)
  - a. This is what is meant by “iniquity abounding” and “the charity of many growing cold”.
  - b. The abounding of iniquity leads to the cooling of genuine, interior charity or love toward the neighbor.
- 3 Historically, charity did grow cold in the Christian Church.
  - a. As we read in our lesson from *Arcana Coelestia* the outward appearance of Christians in this world appeared wholesomely religious even while the state of religion with them interiorly deteriorated as foretold by the Lord. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3489)
    - 1) Only when those Christians arrived in the spiritual world could their inner character be seen for what it was—full of contempt and loathing for the goods and truths of faith, and for the Lord Himself. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3489)
  - b. Other passages from *Arcana Coelestia* give more detail about the quality of Christians arriving in the spiritual world in the mid-1700s, and tell of the urgent need for a Last Judgment which would break their oppressive influence on well-disposed people.
  - c. We read: “At the present time the world of spirits is full of evil genii and evil spirits drawn for the most part from the Christian world. Among them nothing but forms of hatred, revenge, cruelty, disgusting behaviour, and also scheming devices prevail.... Because of them souls coming from the world are horribly oppressed.... “ (*Arcana Coelestia* 2121)
  - d. The next passage continues: “As regards souls recently arrived from the world, there is more to be said. Those gathering there from the Christian world have hardly any other thought or endeavour than to be the greatest and to possess all things. All are accordingly eaten up with self-love and love of the world, which loves are altogether contrary to heavenly order, 2057. In addition most of them think about nothing other than what is filthy, disgusting, and profane, and talk about nothing else to one another. They also attach no importance to, and utterly despise, everything to do with charity and faith. Nor do they acknowledge the Lord Himself, indeed they hate all who confess Him; for in the next life thoughts and hearts speak. Besides this hereditary evils resulting from the shameful behaviour of parents become more

wicked still, which like fires hidden and fostered within incite a person to greater violations of what is decent and godly than ever before. Such people are at the present time swarming into the next life and are filling the outer and the inner spheres of the world of spirits, as has been stated....” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2122)

- e. Much more has been recorded for us, but even that is but a fraction of what Swedenborg observed 250 years ago.
    - 1) From the little we have quoted we can see the reality of what the Lord foretold to His disciples when they asked about the sign of His coming and the end of the age.
    - 2) From this we can appreciate something of the need for the age to be brought to an end and the Lord to come.
7. What does all of this have to do with us?
- A. Is it merely a prophecy of what the Heavenly Doctrine declares took place hundreds of years ago?
    - 1 And since the Last Judgment could only take place in the spiritual world, and the Lord’s coming only by an opening of the spiritual sense of the Word, what relevance does the prophecy have for us?
8. If we stop to reflect on our lives, we can see that there are many ways in which the Lord comes to us successively.
- A. We may, for example, sense that He has come into our lives when we are fired up about the truth of His Word.
    - 1 Over time, however, we may find that our efforts to share that truth with strangers, friends, colleagues, or even our own children, are guided more by our need to validate our religious self-respect than by our concern for others’ spiritual well-being.
      - a. The love of self is asserting itself and genuine charity is growing cold.
      - b. We need the Lord to come again in a more meaningful way so that our self-regard may be judged and separated.
        - 1) Only then can the Lord save in us what is truly from Him.
9. The Lord gave the signs of His coming and of the end of the age to fulfill His love for the salvation of all and each of us.
- A. After His prediction about the charity of many growing cold He exhorted: “he

who endures to the end will be saved.” (*Matthew 24:13*)

- B. We are told in *Arcana Coelestia* that spiritually, He meant that those who have charity will be saved, and that they endure to the end by not allowing themselves to be led astray by yielding in times of temptation. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3488:7)
  - C. What we must guard against is those very things which have been forbidden in the Word and which led astray the many Christians about which we just read: hatred, revenge, cruelty, disgusting behavior, scheming devices, filthy and profane thoughts, and so forth.
  - D. We must take care that we are not eaten up with self-love and the love of the world in any of its forms.
    - 1 As others around us are outwardly living an upstanding moral and religious life while inwardly pursuing an agenda that is all about self and the world, we must not allow ourselves to be motivated by similar loves.
    - 2 When others promote disgusting practices as normal or deceit in business as shrewdness, we must not be led away from what the Lord teaches is good and true.
10. After saying that he who endures to the end will be saved, the Lord urged us to flee to the mountains.
- A. In the spiritual sense, this means “that members of the Church are to fix their attention solely on the Lord and so on love to Him and on charity towards the neighbor.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3652:4)
  - B. The antidote to throwing down every truth about the Divine Human of the Lord, is to fix our attention on Him and so on love to Him and charity. (See *True Christian Religion* 434)
  - C. We love the Lord only when, as He taught, we keep His commandments.. (See *John* 14:15, 21, 23)
    - 1 We practice the first thing of charity, as well, when we do the same thing, shunning evils as sins against the Lord. (See *True Christian Religion* 435)
    - 2 Shunning evils is the opposite of letting iniquity abound and letting charity grow cold.
    - 3 So we endure to the end by fleeing to the mountain, that is, by fleeing from evil as we fix our attention on the Lord and so on love to Him and charity toward the neighbor.

11. Although the Last Judgment itself is in the past, historically, we still must endure to the end of our life in this world.
- A. On a smaller scale, we must endure to the end of anything we wish to accomplish that is of real use and spiritual value.
- 1 Whether it is getting through adolescence or parenthood, completing a project or a phase of formal education, building a friendship or making a marriage, we will face an assault on our aspirations and ideals such that iniquity will tend to abound and charity will grow cold.
- B. When we ask ourselves what resources we have that enable us to endure to the end, the answer has to be those resources which come from the Lord.
- 1 He is the source of love for His commandments, for His Divine order, and for all that is good and true, for these are Himself.
  - 2 He is the source of that love of acting justly and faithfully in the uses and activities of life, which love constitutes charity itself. (See *True Christian Religion* 422)
  - 3 If we do not allow ourselves to be led astray by loving ourselves above all or the world more than heaven, we will be kept by the Lord in these loves which endure because they are from Him who is eternal.
  - 4 May we then heed the signs the Lord has given--"And because iniquity is multiplied the charity of many will grow cold."--and answer the call that He issues, where He says:
    - a. "But he who endures to the end will be saved."
    - b. *Amen.*

Lessons: *Matthew* 24:1-31; *AC* 3488:2,3; 3489, parts

***Arcana Coelestia* 3488.** [2] *At that time they will deliver you up to affliction, and will kill you* means that goodness and truth will perish, at first through 'affliction'- that is, through perversion - and then through men 'killing' them, that is, through denial. For 'killing', when used in reference to goodness and truth, means that these are not being accepted, and thus that people deny them.... 'You' - the apostles - means all things of faith in their entirety, and so means the good of faith as well as the truth of faith; for the twelve apostles meant those things.... Here it is quite evident that they have that meaning, for the subject is not the preaching of the apostles but the close of the age. [3] *And you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake* means contempt for and

loathing of everything to do with goodness and truth....

**3489.** To those within the Church it is not apparent that this is the condition of the Church, that is to say, that they treat with contempt and loathe everything to do with goodness and truth, and also show hostility towards those things, especially towards the Lord Himself. They do indeed attend places of worship, listen to sermons with some kind of reverence while they are there, go to the Holy Supper, and sometimes discuss those things with one another in a seemly way. The evil accordingly do the same things as the good, even exercising common charity or friendship to one another, and as a consequence others do not see in them any contempt for the goods and truths of faith, or therefore any contempt for the Lord, still less any loathing of these, and least of all any hostility towards them. But those very actions are outward forms, by which one person leads another astray, whereas the inward forms existing with members of the Church are completely different and the complete reverse of those outward forms. It is the inward forms which are described here and which are of that nature. The essential nature of these inward forms is presented visually in heaven; for the angels pay no attention to anything else than the things that are internal - to ends in view, that is, to people's intentions and wills, and to their thoughts stemming from these. How different these are from external things becomes clear from members of the Christian world entering the next life....

### **Through The Week**

#### Recall the Story

- ◆ Jesus told His disciples that not one stone of the temple would be left on another, that would not be thrown down.
- ◆ He told of false christs who would deceive many.
- ◆ He said the apostles would be killed and hated, iniquity would abound and charity grow cold.
- ◆ He said that he who endures to the end shall be saved.

#### Reflect on the Message

- ◆ We experience the “end of the age” many times in our lives and must endure to the end to be saved.
- ◆ The Christian Church’s end came from throwing down truths about the Lord, turning to hatred and disgusting thoughts and practices, etc.
- ◆ Fleeing to the mountains means fixing attention on the Lord by loving Him and the neighbor by shunning evils as sins.
- ◆ The capacity to love the Lord and exercise charity in this way is what makes us endure to the end, and so be saved.

#### Take Action

- ◆ Practice “enduring to the end” by picking something spiritually useful that you wish to complete this week—a use you are trying to accomplish or a step in mastering a vice.
- ◆ Identify ways self-love or love of the world are making true charity grow cold.
- ◆ Identify resources from the Lord that can help you endure.
- ◆ Fix your attention on the Lord by using those resources to shun your evils and keep the Lord’s commandments.