

Constant Communication

The Lord's continual endeavor to save us

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Effective communication as we know it involves a two way process; someone gives a message, if the other receives it, he responds. If someone said something to another, and the other completely ignored him, there wouldn't be much communication at all. Communication greatly affects our relationship with others because with communication comes conjunction, or a bringing together. For this reason our good relationships typically have stronger levels of communication.

What does this say about our relationship with the Lord? Our relationship with the Lord indeed involves communication, which also goes two ways; the Lord speaks to us He acts on us, and if we are receptive, we respond. One fundamental difference between the Lord and ourselves is that the Lord's communication with us is constant. Our response, on the other hand, is not always constant. There are times when we respond to Him, and there are others times when we don't respond. What we see in the Word tells us that we are not always receptive to the Lord. It is worth taking a look at what the Word reveals.

The Old and New Testaments, in a historical sense, are a documentation of how the Lord has communicated to people in the past and how they have either heard Him and obeyed, or turned away from Him and disobeyed. Throughout the Old and New Testaments there seems to be a pattern of people hearing the Lord, turning away from Him, then either coming back to Him

or being rejected. In the Garden of Eden people were most receptive to His revelation. Then they preferred to take care of things by themselves, so they turned away from God by eating of the tree. This marked the beginning of a decline in the church on earth. Since this moment, people grew more and more distant from the Lord and were not so receptive to Him. People could still turn to the Lord, but never in the same purity and innocence as those in the time of Adam and Eve. So to people like Noah and Abram, the Lord seemed strange and separated. It was due to their obscure reception of the Lord that gave that appearance of a distant God.

Then we read something like Psalm 78. Here we get a sample of how communication between the Lord and people kept changing. In brief, the Psalm talks about how the Word was given to the Israelites and they received it, but they did not live according to it. They did not uphold their part of the covenant, so "they turned back in the day of battle." Not upholding their part of the covenant meant that they did not shun evils or resist temptations. They did return to the Lord on account of the miracles the Lord did when He brought them out of Egypt. Miracles after miracles were recounted in the Psalm, and this should have been more than enough assurance that the Lord is the one and only God to follow. God sent them "food to the full," they "ate angel's food." He gave His love abundantly, yet they still turned away. They worshipped other gods and falsities took over. Worshipping other gods is a symbol or indication of the desire to praise self and feel capable of living without the Lord's acting in our lives. In the end of the Psalm the Lord established a new Church where people would worship Him, and He would lead them and feed them as a shepherd tending his flock. Communication between the Lord and the human race continued.

Throughout the Psalm, there was never a moment when the Lord turned away from the people, He never stopped talking to them, He did not even frown upon them. Although we read

sometimes that God "became furious" or "full of wrath," it was just an appearance owing to the quality of reception among the people. To them God appeared angry, just as a shouting parent appears angry to a child who runs into the street. More often than not, the Lord appears as a loving and compassionate God in the Word. The Lord has always been there accommodating to man's needs.

The Lord is most definitely communicating with us today, at this very moment. He was talking to us this morning, yesterday, last week, last year; since we were born, He has constantly been with us. Sometimes we feel His presence, other times not. How we hear the Lord at any given time will depend on how receptive we are to Him. If we hear the Lord it isn't because He decided it was time to talk to us. Rather, it is the Lord's constant endeavor to reach us and give us more. It is our responsibility to hear Him and follow Him. Whether we know it or not, He reaches us at every moment for we read in the Heavenly Doctrine, or the teachings of the New Church, that "the Divine Providence works in every man in a thousand ways, even to the most secret, and that its unceasing end is to purify him, because its end is to save him" (DP 296:15). Without the Lord's contact, or His acting into our lives, we would all perish. But how does the Lord, who is infinitely superior to all people, reach us who are so inferior?

We can find the answer to this by observing the patterns of communication in the Word. Accommodation is a fundamental part of communication. We can see how the Lord accommodated by observing the way people saw the Lord over time. In the beginning people saw Him in visions, then later on in dreams. Then He used angels to represent Him. Later He used judges, then kings, then prophets until finally He came down on earth and used His Human to show Himself to the world. These are some of the ways the Lord accommodated to people, and He did this so that people could still acknowledge Him.

When the Lord came on earth the world was in a state of obscurity. There was nothing but darkness, and this seriously limited everyone's ability to see and acknowledge the Lord. Yet, despite the obscure state of the people, and despite everyone's state in this world, the Lord still managed to get through to them. He did so by means of accommodation. The reason why the Lord accommodated is explained in the Heavenly Doctrine where it says that "unless God's truth or the Word appeared in an adjusted form it would be unintelligible" (AC 8920:3). This same passage adds that if the Lord's truth were above people's level of perception, no one would understand it and so it could never become a matter of faith. The Lord simply could not reach us if this were the case, so He accommodates for our own sake.

A well-known way the Lord accommodated while He was in the world was by speaking in parables. These parables also describe aspects of our own lives today. What is unique about the parables is that instead of teaching the truth in its infinite form, the Lord uses illustrations, physical objects, real men and women and rich dialogues between people as we see in the parables and other stories. The Lord uses these appearances in order to contain and express the infinite truth within to whomever is ready to receive. This was the use of parables. He speaks to everyone on earth by means of parables as He says in *Psalms*: "I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old..." (Ps 78:1,2) as well as in the Gospel of Matthew: "without a parable He did not speak unto them" (Matt. 13: 34). This can be the only way, by using finite terms in order to express infinite things to us. This is the nature of the entire Word. Another purpose of the Lord speaking in parables was to prevent people from profaning the truth, which is why the Lord said that "those who see do not see, and those who hear do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matt. 13:13, 14). At the same time however, there is a whole lot we can

get from the Lord's parables if we are so affected by them. From the *Arcana Coelestia* we get a full sense of why the Lord's parables are so significant. The passage states that:

It is quite clear that all the details, every single one, mentioned by the Lord in His parables are representative of and mean the spiritual and celestial attributes of His kingdom, and in the highest sense Divine attributes in Himself. Consequently anyone who does not know this cannot make anything else out of the Lord's parables than ordinary comparisons which hold nothing deeper within them ... but in their internal form their nature is such that they fill the whole of heaven. This is because the internal sense is contained within every detail, and that sense is such that its spiritual and celestial content spreads like light and flame throughout the heavens in all directions. That sense is utterly superior to the sense of the letter, flowing from every phrase and every word, indeed from every tiny letter (AC 4637).

From teachings such as these, we can see that there is infinite goodness and truth just bursting from the stories and parables we see in the Word. There is so much spiritual and celestial content that it would "fill the whole of heaven" as we read. In reality, we can barely contain the things that lay hidden beneath the words and phrases we read. We can get pieces of goodness and truth here and there depending on how affected we are by what we read. The more we are affected by the goodness and truth we get, the more the Lord can form heaven inside of us to whatever we are capable of. But again, this can only be according to our reception.

This brings us to the question: how do we become more receptive? What brings us to a state of reception? Being in a state of reception is similar to being in a state of thirst. Being outside too long, getting hot, becoming exhausted inevitably brings on thirst. It then becomes an optimal time to drink water, and lots of it. Being relaxed, calm and cool makes drinking water feel different. Water stays the same, but our need and dependency for it always changes.

As with thirst, being in a state of reception greatly depends on the quality of our lives at this moment. There are times when we have been going through a lot in life, we have been busy working hard trying to help others and do what is right. And if things are not working out well for us and we need some guidance, hearing or seeing something true seems to do us good, like quenching our thirst with lots of water. There are other times when things seem to be going well, and hearing or seeing something true can be pleasing, like having a cool sip of water. Whether we are in desperate need of the Lord, or doing well with the Lord on our side, what makes it possible for the Lord to effectively act into our lives is whether we are trying to follow Him or not. A passage from *The Divine Love and Wisdom* describes how the angels' reception of the Lord depends on their application of the Laws of order, which are thinking and willing from freedom according to reason, and doing this as though from themselves (DLW 57). Although this particular passage is talking about angels, should it be any different for us? The laws of order are the laws of Divine providence, which come down out of heaven and govern the earth. We have these laws of order laid out for us, we know them from the Word. And so to live according to these laws, while acknowledging God, will make us more receptive to Him.

A good way to live according to the laws of order is to do our jobs. If, for example, we do our jobs faithfully, sincerely and to the best of our ability because it is the right and just thing to do, then we keep in line with the laws of order. The reason for this is that by simply doing our jobs we are continually working for the service and benefit of others, and it is for this reason we were created, and this is according to order. Other than work, living according to order is to do the Lord's commandments at all times. We do this by looking to the Lord and keeping our hearts clean and pure from cruel thoughts or selfish intentions that would otherwise harm others.

Living according to order keeps us closer to the Lord, because we are abiding by His commandments. What really helps us be more receptive to the Lord along with a life of service to the neighbor is prayer, attending church, or reading the Word because these are powerful means that the Lord uses to reach us more effectively. Through prayer, we talk to the Lord. By going to church we honor and worship the Lord together. Reading the Word puts us in association with the angels and in touch with the Lord Himself. All these things help to keep our attention focused on spiritual things. When we are directing our attention to spiritual and heavenly things, and striving to live according to what we learn from the Word, the Lord can get through to us.

We can know that He has reached us by the way we are affected by the truth. After all, it is through affections that the Lord leads us. Truth would have no impact on our lives if we were not affected by it. When we are affected by truth, we love the truth we see to the point that we become willing to live by it and make it part of our lives. By making truth part of our lives or living according to it, we are doing our part in the two way communication between us and the Lord. When communication works this way, there is conjunction. There is harmony. Everything such as the relationship we have with others, the things we do every day, even the music we listen to at that moment seems pleasing and meaningful. For the Lord "rained down manna on them to eat, and gave them of the bread of heaven."

Amen.

Children's Lessons: I Kings 4: 20-29; Matt. 13: 31-32

Additional lessons: Psalm 78 (Portions); TCR 481

TCR 481

No one denies that man has free will in natural matters. But this is the result of his free will in spiritual matters, because the Lord flows in from a higher or more inward level filling everyone with Divine good and Divine truth ... and by this means breathes into man life quite different from that of animals; and to enable him to receive these gifts and act upon them He confers the ability and will, which are never taken away. **It follows from this that the Lord perpetually wills man to receive truth and do good, thus becoming spiritual, the destiny for which he was born.** To become spiritual without free will in spiritual matters is as impossible as pushing a camel through the eye of a sewing-needle, or like touching one of the stars in the sky with one's hand.