

Will There Be Cars in Heaven?

a sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish
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Do you ever wonder what your life might actually be like in heaven - assuming you make it?

Of course we know it will be pleasant: the whole sphere will be one of mutual love and respect based on a common love for the Lord, His wisdom and the delights of useful service. But what will we actually do from day to day, and what will be the means at our disposal?

You know, there's a curious dilemma presented in our New Church teachings, in that we read about houses – even mansions – with various rooms, furnishings, books, lamps and decorations, lawns and gardens, roads, cities and temples, rocks, gems and other minerals, in short, all sorts of things in heaven, and yet we read that all these things are simply *provided* by the Lord, and not made or built by the angels¹. So what is a person who loves to make things going to do?

There are, as we noted in the children's lesson, many stories in the Word and in the teachings for the New Church involving visions of horses, and some of them also include chariots. Now a chariot is a machine, so what *other* kinds of machines might we possibly find in heaven? Dare we say... cars or trucks? Trains? Airplanes? Helicopters? What about the ordinary appliances we have around the house in this world? Will there be electric stoves or will the angels only cook over open fires? Will there be radios or TVs? Vacuum cleaners? Dish washers? Computers? Suppose you want to paint a picture: - will you go to a store and buy the paints, canvas, palette, brushes and so on, or will they all just magically appear? And if so why would you even paint, since the picture, too, might as well appear as soon as you think of it?

The idea that there might be cars in heaven is not entirely frivolous. There are people – you might be one of them – who love everything about cars, from the refined mechanical precision of the engine to the stylish look of the design, from the dashboard to the 1/4 mile dash or the feeling of freedom driving around the countryside with the top down. The point is, what we experience outwardly in heaven is nothing more nor less than a manifestation of our inner loves, *whatever* these may be. And this could even apply to the people who design, build or maintain cars....

In order to understand all this we need to step back a little and think about what it is that *makes* heaven, and why things appear the way they do there; in short, how do THINGS of any kind come into existence there, seeing it is not a material, physical world like this one?

First of all, our doctrines refer to the appearance of things in heaven as correspondences, which means that they are external forms that *correspond* to internal or spiritual states by having an outward use or function that is exactly the same as the use or function of specific thoughts and affections in the minds of the angels. For example, water corresponds to truth. What water does for the body truth does for the mind: it cleanses, nourishes and acts as a solvent, it evaporates, condensates, floats your boat, and does many other wonderful things. So when there is truth in the mind of an angel there is water in that angel's environment. The difference between the

¹ Heaven & Hell nos. 174, 181, 184, 190

natural world and the spiritual world is that in the natural world the things around us do NOT so much depend on our internal states; they exist whether we like it or not – often when we don’t like it! Even so, things do change (for the most part gradually) as a result of the decisions we make. But in the spiritual world – which, remember, is the world of our minds or spirits – things ONLY exist to the extent that they are present in our thoughts, memories or affections, and they change instantly according to the attention we give them.

Now you might think this would produce an incredibly unstable, even volatile environment where everything looks different – and therefore IS different – for every individual, depending on his or her state of mind at any given moment. But the beauty of life in heaven (and even in hell, for that matter) is that “birds of a feather flock together.” similar loves and affections produce similar appearances, and so when people of like mind come together they experience the world around them in pretty much the same ways – allowing, of course, for variations in awareness and perception. (We have this in the natural world, too, just in a more limited way, since everybody sees even physical things from his or her unique perspective.)

To illustrate, think of going to a big event – by choice. It might be a concert, a play or a baseball game. You know in advance that everyone there is going for at least some of the same reasons, to see the event. Your shared interests bring you to a shared experience. Now imagine that you and your friends all love this sort of thing so much that you think and talk about it all the time: you love it, you plan your lives around it, and you really enjoy the camaraderie that goes with it. You might even say your world revolves around it. You might even say it IS your world.

Well, if that’s how you feel about it then in the spiritual world (whether heaven or hell) that’s exactly how it is. And we don’t have to lift a finger to create that world since it is created instantaneously (and perpetually) by the Lord in perfect accommodation to our states.

Of course we find this hard to comprehend, at least partly because we tend to think it will *eventually* get boring. But that is because in this material world, thanks to the stability of the physical environment against which we can react, we have the freedom to learn from our experience, and grow, and change, re-inventing ourselves from day to day. Plus, a lot of the time we don’t even *really* know what is most important to us; we judge by our sensory impressions rather than by what deeply, inwardly satisfies. And sometimes we just pretend, in order to fit in and get along. So in many cases what we truly love and care about only becomes clear after many years of trying this and that, or after going through a crisis that brings the truth home in some compelling way.

But when all these external circumstances and concerns disappear, in other words, when we die and go on into the spiritual world, who we really are or what we have become inwardly can no longer be hidden, changed or denied. Our primary loves are, in a word, fixed. They do not change. And because they do not change the environment with which we surround ourselves does not change, either, except for slight variations in our thoughts and perceptions.

OK, so now let’s go back to the “things” we experience in heaven. Will there be cars in heaven, or gas stations, or banks, or fast food restaurants? Will there be toasters, or plastic, or pogo sticks or epoxy glue? Will our shirts all be wrinkle free or will we have to iron them?

When the prophets and evangelists saw into the spiritual world they saw things that were consistent with their experience: horses, eagles, locusts and other creatures, chariots, armies, thrones, rivers and lakes, fish, blood, lamps, lampstands and so on. When Emanuel Swedenborg saw into the spiritual world he saw things that were consistent with *his* experience, including books and papers, horse-drawn carriages, kings and queens and cities and streets and fountains and gardens. Why? – not just because they were on his mind but because that is the way the world was in his day, and he had the special commission to observe and comment objectively on them. He also saw things from previous ages and described them in great detail. But of course he saw no cars, or toasters or computers, or anything made of plastic, which had not been invented yet. What, then, can WE expect to find in OUR spiritual world?

Well, it depends on what we really love, care and think about. And it must be admitted that much of what we love, care and think about is pretty selfish, so if we want to go to heaven we're going to have to let go of a lot of that "stuff." On the other hand material things can be the means of expressing sincere love and care for others, and even for the Lord if we are trying to improve our ability to do useful things according to His Word. So a computer game, for example, is not necessarily good or bad; it depends on how or why it is being used, what thoughts and affections are tied up with it, and what other useful activity is being neglected to play it.

A car likewise can be the embodiment of something good or bad. If it all comes down to pride and showing off, and that's what's really important to you, you may well have your car(s) in the other life but they will not be in heaven. By the way, it is interesting to note that in the United States alone there are approximately 6 million car "accidents" every year, including 43,000 fatalities, which is about one every 13 minutes. Why? Not because cars are evil, but they embody a lot of mass and energy which, if it is not used VERY thoughtfully, can be the means of doing terrible harm. Furthermore, as presently made they pollute the atmosphere and deplete the world's non-renewable resources. In other words, they can be extensions of our spiritual selfishness or thoughtlessness with a corresponding negative impact on many, many people.

On the other hand there's something beautifully refined about the precision and utility of a great motor car. And if people in the heavens of ancient times ride horses or climb into chariots or carriages to get around (when they could easily get around without them) is there any reason to suppose we won't have cars, provided we use them wisely, safely, and to good effect? Really, it's not about the car itself, it's what the car says about YOU; it's about the substance and appearance of the thing as a means of expressing yourself.

In fact a detailed appreciation of the various parts of a car can be the focal points of appreciation for the people themselves who make those parts, from the workmen on the shop floor to the engineers who design them and the executives who run the companies and even the advertising, sales and service people associated with them. Every one has special skills and every one puts thought and affection into the process. So in the spiritual world, even though a car, like a chariot or a carriage, might be provided directly by the Lord without the application of a single tool or process, still it would represent the thoughts and affections from the Lord that are tied up with it, and the uses that these thoughts and affections can express.

But what are these uses? In the book, Heaven and Hell, various occupations of angels are described, with the caveat however that "It is impossible to enumerate the employments in the

heavens, still less to describe them in detail, but something may be said about them in a general way” (HH 387). Again, referring to them as “functions and services and occupations,” Swedenborg writes “in the world there are few in comparison” (HH 393). So a good deal is left to our imaginations. But in the context all that are mentioned seem to relate to worship, instruction, protection or inspiration, in other words, human relationships. What, then, do “things” have to do with this? Why do we need ANY “thing” in heaven?

Remember, every “thing” is an expression of some love or thought process. A car in particular with its complex engineering is the synthesis of many ideas, many wishes and desires, and many practical applications. *In short, it represents an enormous achievement in collaboration – which is the very essence of heavenly life.* Does that mean there will be cars in everybody’s heaven? Of course not! Other tools and objects (trains, perhaps, or ships or helicopters) will represent other kinds of collaboration, with infinite variety as human minds are inspired by the Lord to respond to one another’s needs, every new invention building on previous inventions and the accumulated wisdom of the race. But for those for whom a car symbolizes something very important in their social and spiritual lives, yes, all the indications are that there will be cars in heaven – safe, non-polluting cars, perhaps even cars with automatic accident avoidance systems.

Of course, by the same token there will most likely be cars in the 21st century hells, too. However these will be expressions of the selfish and worldly loves to which they correspond: they will be ugly, dangerous, accident-prone and abusive of everyone’s freedom, just like those who drive them. These will not be provided by the Lord but rather permitted as the perversions of inflowing goodness and truth that they represent.

In sum, the world of our lives after death really isn’t going to look and feel much different than the world of our unrestricted ideals on earth. There will be banks in heaven and banks in hell because bankers will continue to do what bankers always do – but in one case it will be all about helping people and in the other it will be all about taking advantage of them. As for fast food restaurants, the service in heaven will be incredible since all the food is provided by the Lord and the servers will be all over it, but in hell... well, you can just imagine. There will be computer games, too - in both places: just ask your kids. And TV? Hah! – the ultimate in HD DVRs, and you don’t need to ask what will be showing in hell as opposed to what’s showing in heaven.

But what’s the point for today? It’s very clear. If you want to live in heaven you’ve got to cultivate a heavenly life now or you won’t make it. Think about that in relation to your THINGS and what they mean to you, and put your life in order so that they all represent, as much as possible, the sort of loves and interests and priorities that will take you there, with the humble gratitude and eagerness to share that is the essence of heavenly life.

Amen.

Lessons: Revelation 19:11-16
Children’s talk on what sort of THINGS exist in heaven

Ezekiel 1:1-21 & Heaven and Hell nos. 170-175, 186 & 190 – selections