

Timeless Messages in the Word

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Introduction

In the New Church, we are tremendously blessed to have three revelations to which we can turn for guidance: The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Heavenly Doctrines.

Those who have spent time exploring the Word know that each of the three revelations available to us has a character, or style of teaching. We know that the Old Testament was written the way it was because of the people to whom it was addressed. The same is true of the New Testament and the Heavenly Doctrines. Yet by means of all these revelations, the Lord has provided insight into truths that will always be “true”—in all cultures and throughout all time.

We can hear the Psalmist declare concerning the Lord’s commandments and judgments: “More to be desired are they than gold..., [for] by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:10, 11). We can add to that what the Lord said while in the world, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). Yet how literal should we be? What level of interpretation is appropriate and necessary? When do we cross the line in terms of explaining away something that is stated, because the culture in which it was delivered appears so foreign to the world we live in now?

The goal of this presentation is to explore the dynamic of using the revelations we have been given, with all their time-bound imagery, to access those timeless messages. The Word itself gives us ample guidance into how to approach it, so that we discover the Lord’s intended meaning—for us personally, and for the church as a whole.

Revelations Given in Time

To begin, then, I draw your attention to three pivotal Scriptural stories that give us greater insight into the challenge at hand—one for each of the revelations we have at our disposal.

1. The Second Set. The first is the way in which Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai—the specific tablets of stone. We know that the first set of tablets, written with the finger of God, was shattered by Moses when he descended and discovered the Israelites worshiping a golden calf (Exodus 31:17, 32:19). After putting an end to that profane worship, Moses was commanded by the Lord to: “Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke” (Exodus 34:1). The *Arcana* shares with us the significance of this second set of tablets in the following way:

The breaking by Moses of the tablets which were the work of God, when he saw the calf and the dances, and the hewing by Moses, as commanded by Jehovah, of other tablets, which then had the same words inscribed on them...hold an arcanum unknown up to now. The arcanum is that *the literal sense of the Word would have been* different if the

Word had been written among another people, or if the character of the Israelite people had not been such as it was. (emphasis added, *Arcana Caelestia* 10,453:3)

Clearly the character of the Word in the Old Testament was determined by the nature of the people to whom it was delivered. Yet we all know that timeless truths are revealed by means of this revelation. There are powerful reasons, for example, that the Lord appears as a vengeful God; yet we have the opportunity to view these presentations as apparent truths which contain an internal message of a merciful God (see *Arcana Caelestia* 1838). There are so many other things about this revelation that are adapted to the people of that time, such as polygamous marriage, or that Israel is a “preferred” people, that one teaching says, “the truths of the letter of the Word are, for the most part, appearances of truth” (*Apocalypse Explained* 777). All this is conveyed by the fact that there was a second set of tablets.

2. Simeon Holding Jesus. The second story is of Simeon giving thanks as he held the baby Jesus. We read:

So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation...” (Luke 2:27-30)

This image is amazing not only because the God of the universe chose to be born into the world at a specific point in time in a specific middle-eastern part of planet Earth. That in itself is incredibly instructive concerning the challenge at hand—how to see by means of time-bound events eternal truths about the Lord Himself. But “Simeon” himself adds a dimension of time—a change of era that was taking place. He is an old man. The previous era of the church was coming to a close (see Luke 2:26, *Apocalypse Explained* 684:42). A new era of the church was dawning which would have the opportunity to worship the Lord in visible human form, and to hear from His own mouth some of the truths that He would reveal.

This image, then, reminds us that the New Testament too has a character determined in large part by the people to whom it was revealed. One example will suffice. We know from the Heavenly Doctrines that there is one God of heaven and earth, yet the New Testament contains multiple references to Father, Son and Holy Spirit as if they were separate entities. The reason, we learn, is it was “wholly incomprehensible” to the people interacting with the Lord Jesus at that time, that He and the Father were one (*Arcana Caelestia* 6993). The timeless truth that there is but one God was delivered in such a way that people at that time could grasp it, with appearances of truth accommodated to their state.

3. The Rider on the White Horse. The third Scripture comes in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Revelation. We read:

I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. *He had a name written that no one knew except Himself*. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. (emphasis added, 19:11-13)

This prophetic vision of the white horse is directly associated with the revelation of the Lord's Second Coming—specifically, “the spiritual sense of the Word revealed by the Lord and the deeper meaning of the Word thereby disclosed, which is the coming of the Lord” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 820). In other words, this is a picture of the Heavenly Doctrines themselves.

Nevertheless, a curious thing is said about this new revelation. The Rider “had a name written that no one knew.” Concerning this we read, “A name symbolizes someone's character, here the character of the Word, or what the Word is like inwardly, that is, in its spiritual and celestial senses” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 824). It would seem, with the revelation of the Heavenly Doctrines, that we *would* know what the Word is like inwardly. But no one knew the name. Even with the revelation of the Heavenly Doctrines, we absorb the amazing statement that no one sees “what the Word is like in its spiritual sense [except] the person to whom the Lord reveals it” (*Ibid.*).

This is stated even more directly in the next passage, which says concerning the spiritual sense, “Nor is it revealed to anyone now unless he or she possesses Divine truths from the Lord” (*AR* 825; cf. *Sacred Scripture* 26). The conclusion we reach from these passages is that the Heavenly Doctrines too have a “letter” or a mode of manifestation. In other words, there's still the challenge of a revelation given at a certain point in time, within a certain culture. It goes a long, long way to helping us see the timeless truths of the Lord directly on the pages themselves, but apparently it still needs some level of rational engagement based on enlightenment. Otherwise the “name written that no one knew” concept would be moot.

A Particularly Telling Example

I'd like to offer a case-in-point, or an example of the dynamic conveyed by means of the three Scriptures we've just reviewed. I am choosing the Law of Retaliation and the Golden Rule, because the same truth spans all three of the revelations we have, and brings forward the “accommodated-to-the-people-of-the-time” challenge in each case.

In the Old Testament, the Lord commanded,

But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (Exodus 21:23-25; cf. Leviticus 24:20)

Here's a place where it is relatively easy to see the character of the people influencing the message. How many of us have heard, in a sermon or elsewhere, that the intent of this law was not to encourage retaliation but to limit the extent to which people took the law into their own hands? You can retaliate, but only to the level of the offence endured. The implication is that the people at that time would be inclined to do much more than was done to them or their loved ones, in a never-ending escalation of violence. Of course, we are aided in our teaching by passages such as *Arcana Caelestia* 9049, which reminds us of a similar law that exists in the other life, namely that “one who does evil to another with all his or her heart receives evil in like measure.” We are also taught that this law of retaliation is the law of hell (*Apocalypse Revealed* 762), reminding us that we're not talking about the better states of human beings, but

the necessary limits to our selfish tendencies which can “burn with hatred and revenge against those who set themselves in opposition” to us (*Arcana Caelestia* 8744). There’s a timeless truth delivered by a time-bound Scripture; it has an accommodated form in ancient Israelite culture, and it is speaking about a timeless human tendency, namely the selfish urge to lash out at those who cross us.

In the New Testament we hear the polar-opposite of the law of retaliation: “Whatever you want others to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).¹ On the surface, we can see it as a summary message of the many new truths that the Lord was delivering by means of His life on earth—truths about love toward the neighbor. We can consider the people alive at that time hearing, perhaps for the first time, about the kingdom of heaven. We can imagine them absorbing this principle to live by: if you want to go to this kingdom, stop and consider what you would want to happen to you in any given situation, and treat others likewise. Again, there’s a historic context which feeds into why the Lord delivered this truth in the way He did.

But we know there’s much more to this principle, revealed by means of the Heavenly Doctrines. *Arcana Caelestia* 8223 is a great example. It provides us with a broad statement of reality: This law is “unchanging and everlasting in the spiritual world.... [There] the evil which people aim in the direction of others recoils on themselves....” The same is true of goodness: it comes back on those who do it in overflowing measure (see Luke 6:38). There is a timelessness to a truth like this that’s right there for us to see.

Finally we encounter Emanuel Swedenborg’s testimony concerning this reality: “It is a frequent occurrence in the next life for the evil to be severely punished...” (*Arcana Caelestia* 8223:3). Our mind is drawn by this statement to the reality that the Lord caused Swedenborg to be able to see into the next life and share with us what he saw there. A time-bound series of events is the means of adding depth and perspective to this universal law. Not only is it stated, but we can see through Swedenborg’s eyes how it plays out in the lives of people in the life to come. We can imagine the whole of heaven and hell governed by means of this eternal truth, and we can reflect that our own lives will be too.

So we see one thread of many in the Word where truths are given within a particular context. They’re true in that context as literally spoken, yet also deliver one of the most powerful “timeless” truths we have about human interactions.

Two Other “Test Cases”

It could be argued that the example just given is so obvious as not to present any challenge whatsoever. After all, most of us would agree that the Golden Rule is a “face and hands” or “genuine truth” passage (see *Sacred Scripture* 55, *True Christian Religion* 444).

¹ There is also an obvious companion to the Law of Retaliation spoken earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person...” (Matthew 5:38-41). I choose the so-called Golden Rule instead, because the Heavenly Doctrines say that it and the Law of Retaliation are essentially the same law (see *Arcana Caelestia* 9049).

Therefore, we could consider other teachings where the intended meaning could be debated. Take, for example, the so called “needlework” passage in *Conjugal Love*. In the chapter on “The Origin of Conjugal Love from the Marriage of Good and Truth” we read:

With respect to the employment of the female, it can be seen that it should do with things that are works of the hands and are called *sewing, needlework, and other names*, which serve for decoration, for her personal adornment, and for enhancing her beauty. (emphasis added, *Conjugal Love* 91)

Context can help us see that the goal of this passage is to define femininity as opposed to masculinity. But many of us know that this teaching has caused much debate within the church, as to whether the intended message is about what women should do, namely learn sewing, needlework, etc., or is using things from Swedenborg’s day to illustrate the deeper fundamental differences between men and women, or whether it belies a cultural bias of Swedenborg himself that is off-base in some way. My own way of absorbing this teaching is that it is primarily illustrative—using examples to get to a timeless truth about the complementary nature of men and women. My assessment aside, the point is that a level of interpretation comes into play with a teaching such as this one, however you might weigh its meaning.

Another test case, or series of them, comes in the form of Swedenborg’s direct reference to the limitations of human language. We read:

What they were saying is beyond description. *Most of it cannot be put into the words of any natural language*. But because I had been myself a number of times in the company of angels in heaven, and had then used the same language as they, being in the same state, I was consequently able to understand them now and to take from their conversation some thoughts that I could express in rational terms in the words of a natural language. (emphasis added, *Apocalypse Revealed* 961)

The subject at hand is “the oneness of God, conjunction with Him, and so salvation.” It is a beautiful passage using a number of concepts and words to get some measure of the truth across. But the full message was “beyond description.” The invitation, it seems, is to see something about the Lord beyond what the words themselves can convey.

Principles to Guide Our Access to Timeless Messages

Hopefully by now we see the challenge, in that all forms of the Word, even the Heavenly Doctrines, require some level of interpretation, or a process of discovery, as we seek to absorb the messages the Lord delivers to us. There are, however, principles of engagement that we are called to utilize to keep ourselves successful in this regard. What follows is a list of seven such principles—not intended to be exhaustive, but to contain many of the things that the Word itself says can aid in our understanding of its teachings.

1. Seeking Enlightenment

The first is to acknowledge that we need help from the Lord to understand His Word. We could turn to the fourth law of Divine Providence, which tells us “It is a law of Divine providence that people be led and taught by the Lord from heaven through the Word and through doctrine and

preaching from the Word, and this to all appearance as though of themselves” (*Divine Province*, heading to n. 154ff). One major message of this law is that “the Lord teaches a person by enlightenment,” this being His direct path of light into our lives (*DP* 165). It matters not that we receive the Word through the agency of others (preachers, teachers, parents, etc.), for it is the Lord who teaches us by means of these people (*DP* 172:4). It also matters not, evidently, what part of the Word we are talking about—Old Testament, New Testament, or Heavenly Doctrines—as all qualify as “the Word” and therefore require the Lord’s enlightenment to understand.

A companion teaching comes in the work *De Verbo*, describing three things that we need, in order to see the spiritual sense of the Word: the doctrine of genuine truth, the knowledge of correspondences, and enlightenment (n. 21). I would suggest that the former two have been given to us by means of the Heavenly Doctrines, but that the latter element comes only from the Lord.

If, therefore, we require enlightenment from the Lord to be able to draw meaning from His Word, it follows that we should seek that enlightenment. It could usefully be noted that enlightenment is available to all people who turn to the Word with a desire to understand its meaning for their lives (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 224). An inspiring teaching along these lines comes to us in *Apocalypse Revealed*: “Read the Word and believe in the Lord, and you will see the truths that must be those of your faith and life” (n. 224:3).

2. Going Back to the Text, Repeatedly

There are four powerful Scriptures that illustrate the message that we need the Word as a continuous point of reference. The first comes in the Lord’s commission of Joshua:

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to *do according to all that is written in it*. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” (emphasis added, Joshua 1:8)

The second Scripture comes during the time of King Josiah, when Hilkiah found the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:8). We know that it had been lost and neglected, and that the people had strayed significantly from its commands. We know too that Josiah led a full reform of Judah, leading to these words of praise:

Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him. (2 Kings 23:25)

The third Scripture comes out of the mouth of the Lord Himself when tempted by the devil. In each of the three tests, the Lord responded with the words, “It is written...” (Luke 4:4,8,10; cf. Matthew 4:4,6,7). The answer to the first temptation, concerning turning stones to bread, is particularly instructive. The Lord said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4; cf. Luke 4:4).

The fourth Scripture comes in a famous exchange between Jesus and a lawyer, “who tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 10:25). The Lord responded: “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” (Ibid.). Then come the two Great Commandments.

All four of these Scriptures remind us of the importance of what is actually written and recorded for us. The obvious message is that the Word is intended to be a check-and-balance to our actions—as individuals and as a church. We are to return to it over and over, and where we find ourselves out of keeping with its teachings, we are called to correct course.

3. Drawing on the Lamp of Doctrine

Several teachings in the Heavenly Doctrines point to the need for guiding principles to aid in our understanding of the Word. These guiding principles are referenced under several related names: sometimes just “doctrine” (see below), other times “the doctrine of the church” (*Heavenly Doctrine* 257; *Sacred Scripture* 50), or “the doctrine of genuine truth” (*Sacred Scripture* 25), or “heavenly doctrine” (*Heavenly Doctrine* 7). In all cases, the message is clear that without these guiding principles our understanding of the Word’s intended meaning is beyond us.

For example, regarding the letter of the Old and New Testament, we encounter this somewhat ominous teaching:

From all this it is evident that those who read the Word without doctrine, or who do not acquire for themselves doctrine from the Word, are in obscurity as to every truth, and that their minds are wavering and uncertain, prone to errors, and pliant to heresies, which they also embrace wherever inclination or authority favors, and their reputation is not endangered. For the Word is to them like a lampstand without a lamp, and in their gloom they seem to see many things, and yet see scarcely anything, for doctrine alone is a lamp. (*Sacred Scripture* 52).

This teaching is in the section titled, “The Word cannot be understood without doctrine” (*SS* 51). Then comes a passage with the positive side of the message:

By means of doctrine...the Word is understood, and is like a lampstand with a lighted lamp. People then see more things than they had seen before, and also understand those things which before they had not understood. (*SS* 54)

Fortunately for us, we have a beautiful collection of genuine truths in the Heavenly Doctrines to guide us in our understanding of these Scriptures. But what about the Heavenly Doctrines themselves? What do these teachings imply about them and our correct approach to them?

It appears clear that guiding doctrinal concepts are still needed. Let the following example serve to illustrate: We know that the Lord works entirely by means of our freedom, without which we could not, as of ourselves, follow Him to heaven (see *Heavenly Doctrine* 149; *True Christian Religion* 485). We can use this guiding principle to help us further understand other teachings in the Heavenly Doctrines concerning such things as permissions (see *True Christian Religion* 479ff, *Divine Providence* 234); the reason some are not saved (see *True Christian Religion* 72,

580; *Divine Providence* 333); and why we are not able to see the hand of providence as clearly as we might wish (*Divine Providence* 179, 187).

Any one of us who has studied a subject in any depth knows the rubric of seeing some teachings in the light of others. It is tremendously helpful to us to have a guiding set of principles—from the Word itself, and from the church’s long-standing understanding of the Word. We are wise to interpret anything that may seem confusing in one section in light of the overall messages of the Word.

4. The Discipline of Research

A highly related principle to the need for doctrine is a discipline of research. We are taught in so many ways to be students of the Word, who make it a life-long pursuit to grow in our understanding of its messages. Consider the following teachings:

- “People moved by an affection for truth...examine the Word closely with no other end in view than to see the truth itself.” (*Arcana Caelestia* 5432)
- “A more perfect conscience is possible with those who are more enlightened than others in the truths of faith.” (*Heavenly Doctrine* 132)
- “The Word is...like a mine containing richer and richer veins of gems the further one goes into it.” (*True Christian Religion* 245)
- “Those in the spiritual affection for truth...study the Word, and desire nothing more than that they may understand it.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 112:4)
- The understanding that the church possesses...exists when people read the Word, assiduously take one statement together with another, and by doing so see what they ought to believe and what they ought to do. (*Arcana Caelestia* 6222:3)

The picture that emerges is of a person who takes the time to set aside preconceived ideas, to get the heart and mind in the right place, to see teachings in context, and to check them against the whole of the doctrines. This student of the Word is much more likely to discover the Lord’s intended meaning in any part of His revelation.

5. Letting the Word, Not Culture, Lead

We come next to a sobering warning presented to us in the Gospel of Matthew. The Lord addressed the scribes and Pharisees with a challenging question: “Why do you transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?” (Matthew 15:3). He went on to give them a particular example of where they had encouraged people to give to the church (them) rather than using their resources to care for their parents. “Thus,” the Lord said, “you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition” (Matthew 15:6). Then He followed it up with an even more cutting quote from Isaiah, “In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9; Isaiah 29:13).

If we are being honest with ourselves, our culture cannot but influence the ways in which we see the teachings of the Word. Equality of the sexes, themes of tolerance or a merciful approach, rampant sex outside of marriage, secular versus spiritual trends, even particular religious strands that are more dominant in a given area—these things influence what we research and how we approach the messages of the Word.

Yet none of us would want to find ourselves guilty of the Lord’s reprimand of the scribes and Pharisees. I note that the Lord quoted Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet, and the prophets were often called to say things to the people of the day that they did not want to hear. In many of those cases, it was a trend in culture, or an example of something that serves self, that necessitated a strong and unpopular message.

In this we return to the overarching challenge addressed in this study: how to access the timeless truths of the Word—the things that will always be true, in all cultures and throughout all time—despite the fact that we ourselves live in a particular culture with its significant pressures. This is another reason we need a written revelation to check us.

In this regard I share a quote by my father, the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Sr., from a paper he wrote in 1995 on “The Word of God”:

“I believe very deeply that if we consider the Writings [aka Heavenly Doctrines] anything less than the Word, we will begin to pick away at them, questioning this or that unpalatable truth, assigning certain statements to Swedenborg’s cultural bias, detecting in him the flaws of a dated European culture, holding that we are more advanced in our thinking now, and so on. They won’t be hurt by this. The Lord protects His own. But our church will be weak, and churches which have an uncertain faith don’t stand for very long.” (p. 8)

6. Avoiding Any Kind of Dismissiveness

Related to this goal of letting the Word lead, we come to another sobering challenge in our efforts to see the timeless truths of the Word. We know that we don’t get to pick and choose which teachings to follow and which ones to dismiss. We can’t do away with certain teachings that we wish were not there.

Two Scriptures come to mind to illustrate this point. The first is the Lord’s tunic at the scene of the crucifixion:

Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it...” (John 19:23-24)

We know from the *Arcana* and other places that the tunic represents the Word as to its internal sense, which is seamless or hangs together as one unit (*Arcana Caelestia* 4677:6; *Apocalypse Explained* 64:4, 195:21). There’s a powerful directive here, namely that we should strive to see any given teaching, no matter how challenging, within the context of the Word’s overall messages.

The second Scripture is the “belt” of Aaron the high priest and his sons (Exodus 29:5). This too is a symbol for “the holding together of all the truths and goods of faith in connection” (*Arcana Caelestia* 10014). It is “a common bond to ensure that everything has the same end in view” (AC 9829). It is that guiding set of doctrinal principles ensuring that “the things of love and faith [are not] broken apart and scattered” (AC 9341:6).

Most of us could point to examples from our experience where this tendency of dismissiveness is evident. Sometimes it comes in the form of focusing on the generals of doctrine, and paying less attention to the details. Other times it is seen in a person who loves certain things about the message of the New Church, but is not yet in a place to accept other parts; or there are people who draw on several of the world’s faith traditions, based partly on what is attractive to them, without needing to absorb the whole of any particular faith.

Other times, dismissiveness can come in the form of relegating certain teachings to the time in which the revelation was given. How many of us have heard hesitancy or even outright rejection of certain parts of the Old Testament because they seem so tied to a culture foreign to our own, or fall into the realm of appearances of truth that are so clothed as to be perceived today as offensive? We also know of the challenge before us of figuring out how to absorb the examples that the Lord inspired Swedenborg to use from his own background.

The point is, we cannot get caught up in any dismissiveness. Yes, there will always be a need to see some passages in the light of others, and we can usefully debate their intended meaning as a result. But the key warning is against saying in any way, “I don’t like that teaching so I’m going to leave it over here.” Another Scripture that comes to mind in this regard is Moses before the burning bush. He was commanded by the Lord: “Take your sandals off of your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). Perhaps we could all agree that we are on the same ground when reading anything in the Word of God.

7. Removing Time-And-Space Thinking

A final guiding principle helping us to see the timeless truths of the Word is to rise above time-and-space thinking as much as possible. Several teachings remind us of this difficult challenge. The first comes in *Divine Love and Wisdom*:

However, please do not allow your ideas to become confused with notions of time and space, for the more notions of time and space you have in your ideas when you read the following discussions, the less you will understand them. (n. 51; cf. *Apocalypse Explained* 1217:3)

This same concept is repeated a little later in that work in a more philosophic way: “The Divine is present through all time independently of time” (*DLW* 73). Then there is this teaching the *Arcana*:

The Word may be likened to a Divine human being; the literal sense is so to speak His body, while the internal sense is so to speak His soul, from which it is evident that the literal sense receives life through the internal sense. It seems as though the literal sense disappears or dies through the internal sense; but the contrary is the reality. It does not

disappear, still less does it die; rather it receives life through the internal sense. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9943)

Seeing on two levels, then, appears to be the pivotal challenge of this entire study. Within all of the Word, even the Heavenly Doctrines, there is a “soul” —a message from the Lord Himself that we need to hear. It can only be seen by means of, and must be grounded in, what is actually written. Yet to see it, we have to rise above time and space thinking as much as we can.

Concluding Remarks

We all know that there are timeless truths in the Word. There are things the Lord wants us to know that will be true at all times in all cultures—a few of which are alluded to in this study.

All of them are delivered to us in three revelations given at a certain time in history within a certain culture. No matter how clear the revelation, questions will always come up as to what the Lord really meant by what He has chosen to reveal to us. Fortunately for us, we have the hope of enlightenment, so long as our approach to the Word is valid.

I’d like to close with one more teaching. It relates to a different manifestation of timelessness. We read concerning “old age” in the Word:

In the internal sense ‘old age’ does not mean old age, for the reason that the internal person, or person’s spirit, does not know what old age is; but as the body or the external part grows old, so he or she passes into newness of life. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4676)

When we look in the mirror we may indeed see an aging human form. But we know that the spirit within remains vibrant and strong, because it is eternal. So too with the Word. It has some external forms that can appear at times to be dated and decrepit. Yet it has a spirit within—the voice of the Lord Himself—which will forever enliven it and make it shine. Our job is to discover its timeless messages, so that our spirits may be made forever young by the Lord, as we learn to live the path of eternal happiness that comes to all who follow Him to heaven.