

HIS KINGDOM

Excerpted from a sermon—“What Is Our First Concern?”—by the Rev. J. Clark Echols, Jr.

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

The Lord’s prayer opens with the recognition that He is the source of our life and is to be the most important person in our life. The very next thought is that there is a wonderful, ideal world that is established by His will and that is available to us for the asking.

The Lord encourages us to be spiritual people, and one of the ways we show this is by talking to Him in prayer. He urges us also to be active in this world and, as spiritual people to be useful. We cannot be conscious of the Lord every moment of our day, and we cannot be talking to Him constantly. What the Lord asks us to do is make the quality of our spirituality and our relationship with Him our first priority, our first concern. We need to live as though we really want the Lord’s will to be done on earth, in our lives. Our first concern is that His goodness and His truth reign in our thoughts, desires and actions.

Achieving this connection to the Lord requires that we accept His will over our own. “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven.” How can we honestly and courageously look for ways to implement that request? To accept the Lord’s will for our lives, to have His kingdom be our first concern, is not to describe to the Lord what you want your life to look like, but to ask Him what His kingdom looks like and ask to be made an inhabitant of it.

The Lord invites us to learn truth from His Word first so that we may identify and then strive to put aside, the false ideas and evil desires that blunt the effect of his love upon our lives. His purpose is that His truth will so rule our thinking, intending and acting that His love will make our earth an image of heaven, which we will then manifest to those around us. That is His will.

In the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, we have been given many details about how the Lord’s spiritual kingdom operates. With this knowledge, we can seek to establish a heavenly life within ourselves, here on earth. As we learn more and more about the Lord’s kingdom, and as we come to wish for it more and more, deeper levels of our minds are opened. We become rational people, seeing the application of the deepest truths and the impact of the most basic love. Our plans and our desires are then ruled by the same spiritual principles and intentions as the angels, who have theirs from the Lord Himself.

One sign that we are actually entering into this process will be experiencing temptations. All sorts of reasons why His will cannot be accomplished, cannot be done now, or here or by me, will come to mind. This is the way evil spirits seek to control us. A devil can rarely simply tell us what to do. Only a person already immersed in an evil life can be enticed by what is obviously evil. Rather, the evil spirit subtly reminds us of the reality of our own will and our freedom to choose. We focus on “the facts of life”, and the Lord’s influence becomes invisible to us. His connection with us is hidden by our own concerns, worries, fears, and by our evil desires which now take center stage.

But each time you ask that the Lord's kingdom come and that His will be done, you are ready to make an honest self observation of what you delight in. You are ready to observe what gives you pleasure—even perverse pleasure, like anger or revenge. Turning all of that over to the Lord is a victory of spirit over flesh, of His kingdom over your self-made one. It is the mature human state of what is internal controlling what is external.

As you pray for the Lord's kingdom and for His will to come, you are practicing the process of regeneration. You are responding to the Lord's invitation to come because you thirst for His truth and love. You are responding to His call to read and meditate on His Word. You are priming yourself to struggle (and sometimes fail) to manifest His love. You are asking the Lord to show you examples of His kingdom so that you may support them. You are asking Him to show you what He considers threats to His kingdom, and for the wisdom and strength to counter their influence. You are telling the Lord that you want to be a part of His kingdom.

The Lord has told us that it is His “good pleasure” to give us the kingdom (see Luke 12:31). In turn, let us say, “Not my will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).