

Finding the Deeper Meaning of the Word



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

The Lord reveals His Divine truth in the Word in a way that serves the needs of people on earth and angels in heaven. A basic understanding of the stories of the Old and New Testaments is called the literal sense of the Word. There are deeper layers of meaning that are referred to as the internal or spiritual sense. This spiritual sense of the Word is what the angels understand in increasing depth. The Heavenly Doctrine helps people here on earth learn some of the spiritual meaning of the Old and New Testaments by revealing the symbolic language or “correspondences” with which it is written.

(Note: At the end of this lesson, you will find additional background information about correspondences and vocabulary used in the Heavenly Doctrine to discuss the spiritual sense.)

Readings from the Word

As you read this lesson, consider how much of the inner meaning of the Word we can find on our own and in what ways we need the Lord's help to do this.

Layers of Meaning

The Lord is able to speak to everyone by means of His Word because it has infinite layers of meaning. Children, teens, adults and angels in heaven can all be nourished spiritually, even though they are at various stages in their mental and spiritual development.

The letter of the Word is what we first understand when reading the Old and New Testaments with its stories, psalms of praise, prophecies, and descriptions of the Lord's life on earth. Hidden within these stories are layers of spiritual meaning that are called the internal or spiritual sense. When we read the Word, the angels who are with us understand the spiritual meaning within the literal sense. They aren't even aware of the words we are reading.

The sense of the letter of the Word is changed instantly with the angels into the spiritual sense, because a correspondence exists between every single thing in the natural world and every single thing in the spiritual world (see *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 259 and *Arcana Coelestia* 5648:2).

What does “correspondence” mean? This word is used in the Heavenly Doctrine to describe the relationship between natural things and spiritual things. Every aspect of natural creation corresponds to something spiritual. There is also a correspondence or relationship between what is written in the Old and New Testaments and the heavenly meaning that the angels understand. The people, places, and things that are mentioned in the literal sense all symbolize spiritual things. The Heavenly Doctrine reveals many of these correspondences, helping us explore the spiritual meaning of the Word.



Finding the Deeper Meaning

It is important to realize that the literal sense and spiritual sense of the Word are both essential. In fact, each depends on the other.

Like Body and Soul

The Heavenly Doctrine compares the literal sense of the Word to a person's body and the internal sense to the soul.

Just as the body lives by means of the soul so does the literal sense by means of the internal sense (*Arcana Coelestia* 2311).

A person's words and actions express his or her soul or spirit. Our affections and thoughts motivate us to do what we do. If our words are in harmony with what we are thinking and our actions reflect our feelings, they "correspond." We smile when we feel happy and frown when we are concerned. Smiling does not *cause* the feeling of happiness but communicates it. If someone smiles, but is actually feeling angry, the smile still communicates happiness but it does not "correspond" to what the person is feeling.

In a similar way, the literal sense of the Word is a tangible expression of Divine truth from the Lord, accommodated to the minds of people living here on earth. People can read and understand the stories in the Old and New Testaments literally, but the stories serve another purpose as well. Because there is a correspondence or relationship between what is spiritual and what is natural, every detail in the literal sense of the Old and New Testaments can convey a deeper meaning.

Since every expression in the Word comes from the Lord and so has the Divine within it, it is clear that not one expression, not even one iota, is there which does not mean and embody something (*Arcana Coelestia* 771).

The Heavenly Doctrine gives us tools that can help us explore the spiritual meaning of the Old and New Testaments. Let's see how the details of one story help us understand the deeper meaning of what the Lord wants to tell us in His Word.

Seeing the Lord in a New Way

During His ministry on earth, the Lord took three disciples—Peter, James, and John—up on a mountain to pray. There the Lord's appearance changed dramatically.

His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.... Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:2,5)

The Heavenly Doctrine reveals the spiritual meaning of these words.

"His face shone like the sun" because "face" symbolizes the interiors and His interiors were Divine. The "sun" symbolizes Divine love. "His clothes became white as the light" because "clothes" symbolize Divine truth proceeding from the Lord. Light also symbolizes truth (see *Apocalypse Explained* 64:2).

Finding the Deeper Meaning



The sun of our solar system gives us an illustration of what the Lord does for us. Its warmth corresponds to His love and its light corresponds to His wisdom. The vision in Matthew 17 pictures the Lord giving us His Divine truth in the Word from His deep love for us. This is why He came into the world! He knew that people desperately needed the spiritual light which only He could give them.

Up on the mountain, the disciples witnessed something of how the Lord appears in heaven. Seeing Him like this, they had no trouble recognizing His Divinity. The Lord could have chosen to come on earth in a way that would compel more people to recognize Him, but He cherishes our freedom. In a similar way, the deeper truths of His Word are somewhat hidden within the literal sense. This is a protection for us and is pictured by the bright cloud which “overshadowed” the disciples on the mountain. The bright cloud pictures the letter of the Word—bright because of the spiritual sense within it and yet a cloud, because it hides that sense from those who are not yet ready to see it.

Finding the Spiritual Meaning for Ourselves

How can we find the deeper, spiritual meaning of stories in the Old and New Testaments? The first step is to read a story carefully, asking questions such as: Who are the people in the story? Where are they? What are they doing? What are they feeling? What time of day is it? These and many other details can help us begin to understand what the Lord is telling us—especially if we know how these details express spiritual truths.

Next, we can look in the Heavenly Doctrine to see if a story is explained directly. (There are books and computer programs to help find explanations.) Some stories are explained in great detail. Others are discussed more briefly. If a story isn’t mentioned in the Heavenly Doctrine, we can look for the correspondence of key elements in the story. It is also important to consider what we are reading in the context of other teachings in the Heavenly Doctrine to see how it all fits together.

The Lord wants us to seek His guidance in His Word because this is how He speaks to us and answers our questions. If we look to the Lord with a desire to learn from Him, He will help us see how the truths we learn are relevant to our lives. These truths can also help us see the Lord and invite His presence with us.

OPTIONAL READING

The spiritual or internal meaning of the Word is simply the meaning of the letter unfolded according to correspondences, for this makes known the spiritual content that angels in the heavens perceive when a person in the world thinks naturally about what he reads in the Word (*De Verbo* 7:2).

Although the style of the Word seems simple in the sense of the letter nothing can ever be compared with it in excellence, since Divine Wisdom lies concealed not only in the meaning as a whole but also in each word. In heaven this wisdom shines forth (see *Heaven and Hell* 310).



Focus Points

Exploring Analogies for the Word

A Beautiful Infant The Word is like a most beautiful infant, which is wrapped except for the face. The infant itself is in the inmost heaven, the wrappings are in the lower heavens, and the outer wrapping is on the earth (*Apocalypse Explained* 1072:3).



Complete each sentence by drawing a line to the best answer.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. The infant itself is like the _____ sense of the Word. | external sense or Letter of the Word. |
| 2. The wrappings in the lower heavens are like the _____ sense of the Word. | inmost or celestial |
| 3. The outer wrapping is like the _____. | internal or spiritual |

In general, the inmost sense of the Word is about the Lord and the internal sense of the Word is about our spiritual growth.



The Light of the Sun The Divine truth in the spiritual sense of the Word is like the light of the sun by day. The Divine truth in the natural sense of the Word is like the light of the moon and stars by night (*Apocalypse Revealed* 414:2).

- Think about the qualities of what you can see by moon or star light versus what you can see in sunlight. How does this analogy help us understand the light that the spiritual sense of the Word supplies compared to that of the natural sense of the Word?

A Divine Man The Word is like a Divine human being. The literal sense is as it were his body, but the internal sense is as it were his soul (*Arcana Coelestia* 8943).



- There is a common saying which cautions us against judging by appearances: “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” Do you think a literal understanding of the Word (or the Bible) reflects what is inside? Why or why not?
- The angels see the Word shining with light and sometimes it has a rainbow around it. What would the effect be for people on earth if the Word sometimes had a miraculous glow or shimmering rainbows around it as angels see it? How might it affect our freedom to believe or disbelieve?
- Why do you think the Lord gave us the letter of the Word (including all the confusing or easily misunderstood statements it contains)? Why didn’t He just give us the clear, direct truth presented in the internal sense of the Word?

Activity 1

Striking the Rock

Focus on the Deeper Meaning of a Story About Moses

In this story, the Israelites were complaining because they were in the wilderness and had no water (Numbers (20:1-13). They asked Moses why he had brought them into the wilderness to die. Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle and bowed flat on the ground before the Lord. The glory of the Lord appeared to them, and the Lord told Moses to take the rod and gather the people at a rock.

“Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.” So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”

Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them”(Numbers 20:6-12)

Water poured from the rock but Moses had taken credit for the Lord’s miracle and would not be allowed to enter the land of Canaan.

Exploring the Meaning of this Story

The Heavenly Doctrine reveals correspondences that can help us understand the deeper meaning of this story (see *Arcana Coelestia* 1678:3, 2701; *Apocalypse Explained* 8482).

The **Rock** stands for the Lord.

The **waters** symbolize truths.

To **strike the rock** means to ask the Lord insistently but with humility of heart.

The **land of Canaan** symbolizes heaven.

1. Does what Moses did seem like a significantly evil action to you? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the message of this story is? How might it apply to our lives?
3. What was Moses *supposed* to do?
4. The Heavenly Doctrines teach that Moses *demand*ed water, striking the rock with hardness of heart (*Arcana Coelestia* 8582). What do you think this means?
5. How does the meaning of this story help illustrate an important quality we need in our efforts to be led by the Lord through His Word?

A Sampler of Correspondences

This list is a starting place for exploring the spiritual meaning of people, places and things mentioned in the Word. Please keep in mind that the spiritual meaning depends on the context. Things in the Word can have both a positive and a negative spiritual meaning. (See “Is the meaning always the same?” on page 7.) You may want to **expand this list** as you learn more correspondences.

Creation		People, Places, & Things in the Word	
Above the Earth		People in the Word	
the sun	Divine love, love to the Lord	Moses	the law—Divine truth
light	truth	David	the Lord
stars	truths about heavenly things	Elijah	the prophetic Word
rain	Divine truth from heaven	Herod	love of self
rainbows	truth in the spiritual sense of the Word	Peter	faith
The Mineral Kingdom		James	charity
earth	the natural mind	John	the practice of charity
stone	truth (or falsity)	disciples	all who have truths from the Lord
gold	good	little children	willingness to be led by the Lord
silver	truth	the poor	those who are humble
The Plant Kingdom		Places in the Word	
seeds	truths from the Word	Canaan	heaven
tree	a person; perception & knowledge	Jordan River	introductory truths
wood	good	Mount of Olives	Divine love
leaves	truths	Egypt	learning natural knowledges
fruit	good with a person	wilderness	absence of truth and good
The Animal Kingdom		Some of Our Challenges	
fish	natural knowledge	night/darkness	a state of ignorance
birds	thoughts (can be true or false)	famine	prolonged lack of knowledge
sheep	innocence, trusting in the Lord	flood	immersion in evil and falsities
horse	understanding	enemies of Israel	our evils and our false ideas
lion	the power of Divine truth	Baal	love of self as god
The Human Body		Other	
ears	obedience	bread	goodness
eyes	understanding	garments	truths
face	interior quality of a person	lamp	Divine truth
hands	power	manger	doctrine of truth from the Word
heart	will	oil	love
lungs	understanding	well	the letter of the Word

Think About It!

Brainstorm a list of stories that these correspondences could help you understand better. You might want to consider stories from the Old Testament (such as the Creation story) as well as parables and miracles in the New Testament. Then choose one of these stories to read and reflect on its meaning for your life—paying attention to the correspondences given here.

Activity 3

Exploring Correspondences

What's Missing?

See if you can figure out the best way to complete the following sentences, filling in each blank with answers from the Word Bank below. (You may also refer to The Sampler of Correspondences.)

1. A stone corresponds to truth as _____ corresponds to good.
2. Truth without good is like a _____ without life.
3. A storm corresponds to temptations as _____ corresponds to peace.
4. Bright clouds correspond to the literal sense of the Word and _____ correspond to falsities.
5. A mountain corresponds to _____ while a valley corresponds to focusing on our natural lives or what is more external.
6. A person resembles a _____ when charity and faith are linked in his life and a desert when they are not.

Word Bank—Look here for words to fill in the blanks in the sentences above.

bricks	closeness to the Lord	false ideas	uncertainty	(human) body
dark clouds	mustard seed	wood	calm after a storm	garden

Is the meaning always the same?

The spiritual meaning of people, places and things mentioned in the Word depends on the **context**. Something may have a good correspondence in one story and another meaning altogether in a different story. This is because the functions, characteristics, and qualities of natural things correspond to something spiritual. For example, the ways water is useful in our natural lives correspond to what truth can do for us spiritually. When water is destructive—as in the case of a flood—it illustrates how falsity can affect us spiritually.

7. **A Lion** can correspond to the power of Divine truth or the opposite—the power of hellish falsity against Divine truth (see *Apocalypse Explained* 781:12). In the story of Daniel in the lions' den, what do you think the lions symbolize—the power of truth or the power of falsity?
8. **Arrows** generally symbolize truths fighting against false ideas but can also mean falsities fighting against truth. Read Psalm 127:4-5: "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them." Do you think these arrows symbolize true or false ideas? Why? Does knowing the correspondence of "arrows" help you understand the meaning of this passage? Why or why not?
9. **Look Up** "lion(s)" or "arrow(s)" in a Bible concordance or try using the keyword search on www.biblegateway.com. Find 3-5 examples of where the word is found in the Old or New Testament. Then try to figure out whether it has a positive or negative meaning in each context.

The meaning of a person or thing may also vary depending on whether the spiritual meaning is telling us about the Lord or about people and their spiritual growth.

10. **The Sun** corresponds to the Lord's Divine love but can also refer to ways we respond to the Lord with love. What do you think the sun means in this quotation from the book of Judges? "Let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength" (5:31).

Taking It Home



Here are a variety of activities that can help you learn how to apply these truths in your life.

Ideas for a Journal Entries

Use one of these journal ideas to help you think about seeds of truth in our lives.

- Truth is like a seed. When we look at a seed before it is planted, it is only a seed. But when a seed is sown in good soil, it grows into a plant or a tree. Think about a truth that could help people find happiness if they were to “plant” it and provide the conditions for it to grow in their lives.
- Read a story in the Word about seeds, such as the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9,18-23 or Mark 4:1-9,13-20) or of the seed that grew secretly (Mark 4:26-27). Knowing that a seed corresponds to truth, write a response about the implications you see in the story after reflecting on it and perhaps discussing it with others.

For Reflection

Have you ever thought about the depth and breadth of truths in the Word? The Heavenly Doctrine suggests one way to explore this idea.

The contents of the Word are countless, so that not even the angels can exhaust them. Anything found there can be compared to a seed, which planted in the ground can grow into a great tree, and produce an abundance of seeds. These again produce similar trees to form a garden, and their seeds in turn form other gardens, and so on to infinity (*True Christian Religion 290*).

Take a piece of fruit that grows on a tree, such as an apple or a pomegranate. Cut it open and count the seeds. Assume that each of these seeds would grow into a tree if it were planted in good soil. “Guesstimate” how many seeds each of those trees would produce each year—once they started bearing fruit. How can a person experience something of the infinite number of truths found in the Lord’s Word?

Prayers

Cut out this prayer card and put it where you will see it each day.

O Lord, in Your second coming
You revealed to us the hidden secrets of Your Word.
We thank You for these blessings
which let us approach closer to You. Amen.

Lord, You have opened a door before us that no one can shut.
Give us understanding of the truths that You have revealed,
And the strength to carry them out in our lives. Amen.

(see Psalm 119:34 and Hosea 6:3)

Further Reading

A Deeper Meaning to the Word of God

Adapted from a sermon by the Rev. Peter M. Buss, Jr.

The Word is what God has revealed.
(*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 251)

Imagine for a moment that you knew nothing about the stories of the Bible. You just knew that God's Word was a written document about what He wanted us to know. What subjects would it contain? Wouldn't we expect to find teachings about spiritual life within its pages? Wouldn't we trust we'd hear about the Lord God Himself—the kind of God He is, how He leads us, and what He expects from us? Wouldn't we assume we'd find teachings about how to live a good life—instructions on how to treat each other, how to worship and pray, and what principles of life we should follow? Wouldn't we hope to hear about heaven—the kingdom to which the Lord is leading us—the promised reward for our obedience and faithfulness?

One of the teachings for the New Church says that the Word teaches just these things:

Without the Word no one would possess spiritual intelligence, which consists in having knowledge of a God, of heaven and hell, and of a life after death; nor would they know anything whatever about the Lord [Jesus Christ], about faith in Him and love to Him, nor anything about redemption, by means of which comes salvation (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 114).

And yet, when we look at the way the Bible was put together, and the subject matter it contains, we don't primarily see these spiritual concepts. Most of the Word is a history of people who lived thousands of years ago. Why would the Lord choose to reveal His essential spiritual truth by means of stories? Why would He give us details about journeys and choices people made throughout the ages—sometimes stupid choices with disastrous consequences? This sentiment is expressed in another passage:

Taken literally the Word appears like any ordinary book, written in a strange style which is neither so sublime nor so brilliant as secular books appear to be. For this reason a person...may easily fall into error concerning the Word, and come to despise it. While reading it he may say to himself, "What is this? What is that? Can this be Divine? Could God, whose wisdom is infinite, speak like this? Where is there anything holy in it, and where does this holiness come from?" (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 1)

But the Word does teach powerful spiritual truths by means of those stories. Another teaching for the New Church says, "The Word of the Lord is like a body which has a

living soul within it” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1408). Or as Jesus Himself put it, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life (John 6:63). The stories in the Word have an inner meaning—the soul within the body of the literal text.

In the New Church we call this deeper meaning of the Word “the internal sense”. The whole Word is written with carefully chosen words and images. When we understand the meaning, or the reason why those words and images were chosen, the Word comes to life for us—we see some of the living soul beneath the stories, and we feel fed by the spiritual guidance it offers.

A Symbolic Meaning

What do we mean by “the internal sense of the Word”? Perhaps the best way to start is by looking at something natural that is a symbol for the Word itself.

In several places the Lord referred to the Word as “living water” or “the water of life.” In the book of Revelation He says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts” (Revelation 21:6; Cf. Zechariah 14:8-9; Revelation 22:1,17).

Water is a very common symbol in the Word. Everywhere it represents the truth which the Lord offers (or its opposite—the false ideas which can destroy). Add the adjective “living” to that symbol, and you see what the Lord is describing—the spiritual life that He offers within the pages of His Word. Think of the woman at the well in Samaria to whom the Lord offered “living water.” To her He said, “Whoever drinks of this water [from the well] will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (*John 4:13-14*).

Even that natural well, next to which the Lord spoke these words, symbolizes the Word. Think of how water is drawn from a well, like truth is drawn from the Word. Think of the depths of a well—the bottom of which is unknown—being like the depths of the Word which contains more spiritual truth than any person can learn, even in a lifetime.

Each detail in the Word contains levels of meaning within it. Each encapsulates a spiritual idea, and when we see all those spiritual ideas connected together by means of the story, the spiritual messages come pouring out. In the New Church these symbols are called “correspondences.” Of them we read:

Interiorly the Word is spiritual and celestial. It is written exclusively by correspondences, which conceal within [them] all angelic wisdom.... The style of the Word is such that there is holiness in every sentence, and in every word, and in some places even in the very letters (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 3,8).

The Word Is a Parable

One way to see how correspondential symbols fit together is to look at one of the stories the Lord told while He was on earth—the Parable of the Sower. After telling the story, the Lord went on to explain some of its symbolic meaning, the kind of meaning we can see in other parts of the Word if we understand correspondences. The Parable of the Sower has many details: the sower himself, the seeds, the wayside, birds, the stony places, earth in general, the sun, roots, withering plants, thorns, good ground, and crops of a hundred-fold, sixty-fold, and thirty-fold. All of these details encapsulate spiritual truths, and all of them are tied together in the story.

The Sower is the Lord, and the seed is His Word, or the teachings which He wants to give to the people of His church. The different types of ground are symbols for the different types of people in the church—people who either receive or reject what the Lord teaches. The wayside is a picture of a person who is hardened with false ideas, which do not allow the Lord’s teachings to penetrate. Such a person is much more interested in being busy or getting on with things in this world than caring about heaven and preparing for it. The stony ground is representative of the person who hears teachings from the Word, but does not act on them; they just sit in his or her mind and do not cause any change in the patterns of life. The thorny ground stands for people who have made some evil choices, who lash out at others instead of serving them. And the good ground symbolizes good people who hear the Lord’s Word and then live according to it. These are people whose lives bear fruit (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3310:2).

Gathering all these symbols together into a story shows us the kind of attitude we should have to the Lord’s teachings—to beware of thorny evil tendencies, of false ideas, of spiritual complacency, and remember to receive His teachings and allow them to shape our lives. Such a person is led by the Lord through His Word.

Now this is a relatively easy parable to understand. The internal meaning is not that hidden below the images. But there are many places in the Word where the meaning is not so clear. For example, there are long lists of places and people, such as genealogies, which might seem to have no meaning for us. Speaking of such sections, the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church says: “Here we meet with mere names, from which nothing can be drawn except by the aid of the internal sense, in which all the names in the Word symbolize things of heaven and the church” (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 15). Why did the Lord choose to reveal His truth in this manner? It’s good that we can see spiritual truths in some places by means of the symbols, but why did He make some parts seem virtually unintelligible?

The answer is that the Lord teaches His Word in ways that people can understand (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2520:5). To the ancient Israelites the Lord worked out their rewards and punishment in terms that meant something to them: a secure life in a land of their own in exchange for their obedience, *or* a miserable life, plagued by their enemies if they failed to obey. When the Lord came on earth, He expanded people’s horizons considerably. He taught about the kingdom of heaven, about love toward one’s

neighbors, about justice and mercy. These were new concepts to the people He taught. They would have been able to comprehend Him at all if He had revealed the full scope of the spiritual ideas that He wants us to know at that time. Even His disciples had difficulty understanding most of what He tried to explain to them. As He said to them, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:12-13).

The time has come for us to be guided into “all truth”—to see within the stories of the Word more spiritual wisdom than has ever been available to people before. The Lord our God wants us to understand not only *what* He commands, but *why*. He longs for us to see what kind of God He is—the Creator and Redeemer of the world, who is intimately aware of each and every detail of our lives, who is a close and personal God, who uses countless Divine means to lead each of us to make wise choices. This is the core message of His Holy Word, which in so many ways shows us His Divine qualities. Our Lord yearns for us to know the steps toward heaven—the spiritual development He can lead us through. He wants us to see how He can help us tackle our evil tendencies and develop strong spiritual characteristics of trust and charity. Our own struggles and spiritual journeys are symbolized by the natural struggles and journeys of the people in the Word.

For these reasons, the Lord has revealed the internal sense of His Word in the books which we call the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. The teachings contained in these books open up the stories of the Old and New Testaments. In them, the Lord has given us an understanding of the way the Word was written. He has listed the meaning of many of the correspondential images within it. He has drawn together principles of doctrine which form a philosophy of religion—a rationale about life and the way things work which takes away “the mysteries of faith.”

The Lord will enlighten us, if we approach the Word with awe at its holiness and if we seek to be led by Him to live the life which leads to heaven. This is His promise. This is the message which waits to be seen within the images and stories—the internal sense, the spirit and life of the Word—which can allow the Lord to bring His life and His love to us.

Further Reading

Terminology Used in the Heavenly Doctrine

Terminology	Definitions or Synonyms
The Word	It is Divine revelation—what the Lord has chosen to reveal to us. It includes the Old Testament, the New Testaments, and the Heavenly Doctrine. In the New Church, all three are considered the Word of God.
Sacred Scripture	Old and New Testaments
Heavenly Doctrine	The revelation given through Swedenborg; also called the Writings
The Literal Sense of the Word	The Letter of the Word
The Internal Sense of the Word	The Spiritual Sense of the Word
The Inmost Sense of the Word	The Celestial Sense of the Word
Correspondences	The relationship between natural and spiritual things. Everything in the world is caused by something in the spiritual world. Every part of the Old and New Testaments has a powerful relationship or “corresponds” to something in the spiritual world or to an idea that the Lord wants to teach us.

Talking About Correspondences

The Heavenly Doctrine uses several different terms when talking about correspondences. Here is an explanation of what is meant by three of these terms—correspond, represent, and signify—as well as an example of how each one is used in the Heavenly Doctrine.

- ➔ **Correspond** The function, characteristics, or qualities of natural things correspond to something spiritual. The way water is used in our natural lives corresponds to what truth can do for us spiritually.
- ➔ **Represent** People (in the Word) and what they do are “representative”—they portray or represent something spiritual. Beginning with Abraham, the people in the Old and New Testaments are *doing* the things that reflect the deeper meaning of the Word.
- ➔ **Signify** The words in the Old and New Testament that describe what people did or said, are called “significatives” or “meaningful signs.” These words are symbols for people, things, and actions, and each one is significant because it has a spiritual meaning.

In general, *things* have a correspondence; *persons* and their *actions*, in the Word, represent; and the actual words of the Scripture which are the symbols for things, persons, and actions, signify (W. Cairns Henderson in *Correspondences: A Key to Distinctiveness*, 27).

Examples of these terms being used in the Heavenly Doctrine

“Darkness *corresponds* to falsities as light *corresponds* to truths” (*Heaven and Hell* 488).

“With *representatives*, the character of the person is not considered, but what he *represents*. . . . All the kings of Judah and Israel—of whatever character—*represented* the Lord’s kingly function” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1409:4).

“In the Word ‘shining white’ and ‘white’ *signify* truth because they are from light in heaven (*Heaven and Hell* 179).

Further Reading

What Are Correspondences?

Several ministers have written short definitions of correspondences to help people understand this idea.

The relationship between natural and spiritual things is that of *cause and effect*, which we call “**correspondence**.” It is a functional relationship between specific natural and spiritual things.... The whole of the Word is written in **correspondences**. So every literal action, thing, or event that is mentioned or described has its counterpart in *the spiritual sense of the Word*. But there is much more than just symbolism in these expressions. For the fact is that every natural thing in the Word and life itself not only **represents** something spiritual in heaven or hell but actually comes into existence through the influence or effect of that spiritual thing as its cause.... Natural things exist or take place not just because they **represent** spiritual things but because they actually *are* the physical expressions of spiritual things. Thus whatever use or function the physical thing serves in the world, its spiritual counterpart serves in the spiritual world, that is, the world of our minds (Michael Gladish).

“**Correspondence**” describes the relationship between the spiritual and natural worlds. Everything in this world—objects, physical phenomena, gestures—**correspond** to something in the spiritual world (the mind’s world). Everything in the natural world has its source in the spiritual world—and ultimately in the Lord’s mind. This is true of water. It **corresponds** to the Lord’s truth. In other words, water is actually an expression, on the outermost-plane-of-existence, of Divine truth. More specifically, water **corresponds** to certain characteristics or functions of truth. We can see this “**correspondence**” by comparing the role water plays in the natural world with the role truth plays in the mind (Grant Odhner).

The doctrine of “**correspondence**” reveals the relationship between spiritual and natural things.... In the natural world, spiritual forces (causes) proceeding from the Divine “terminate” or come to rest in **corresponding** effects. The doctrine of “**correspondence**” makes spiritual things real and concrete so that we can see and understand them, and it also reveals the deeper spiritual significance of all natural things, as well as the Word of God which is written in **correspondences** (Walter E. Orthwein).

Correspondence is the condition in which what is higher (or interior) flows into what is lower (or exterior) causing it to live (for all life is from the Lord and it flows down or out) while the lower (or exterior) acts as a foundation (or container) for what is higher (or interior), allowing it to live. An example is the spirit and the body which indeed **correspond**. The spirit flows into the body causing it to live, while the body acts as a foundation allowing the spirit to live. They need each other for life (Prescott A. Rogers).

Correspondence is both a causal and a functional relationship between the Divine and the spiritual or between a spiritual and a natural thing (W. Cairns Henderson).

Correspondences “come down,” rather than “rise up.” The lower is derived from the higher, not the other way around. E.g., The natural or literal sense of the Word is formed from the spiritual or internal sense, not the spiritual from the natural. When we explain the natural sense according to **correspondences**, we are simply unfolding what was already in the living spiritual sense and is constantly there (Erik Sandstrom, Sr.).

References: *Excerpts from the Revs. Michael Gladish and Grant Odhner are from sermons they have published. The other explanations are from Correspondences: A Key to Distinctiveness, published 1992.*