

## **PRUDENCE**

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*Lessons: Matthew 10:1-16, Arcana Coelestia 2694:3*

We found in our lesson the word, “prudence.” The Lord said, “Be ye therefore prudent as serpents, and simple as doves.” (Matt. 10:16) This was spoken by the Lord to His disciples. He was telling them of the difficulties they would meet, and the dangers they would have to face, when they began to preach the gospel after He had gone out of the world. If we are going to follow the Lord as we should, become His disciples, and then His apostles, we will have to meet and face the same difficulties and dangers from spiritual enemies; and if we are to overcome them, we, too, must learn to be prudent.

Prudence is one of the many things the Lord gives to all those who seek it from Him, and it is one of the virtues. So we wish to tell you something about it today. What it means is simply putting wisdom into practice by being careful and cautious in all things, considerate, and skillful in making the things at hand serve our purposes. It means especially a very particular kind of wisdom. The word, prudence, comes from two words which mean, to see before, to see ahead of time what is going to happen, and then to provide wisely for the future according to what is seen in this way. In the Lord this is called Divine Providence; in men it is called prudence; and the difference between these two things is that because the Lord is Divine He knows exactly what will happen in the future, while we can only form certain ideas about future events which may be right or wrong.

Now if you think about it for a moment, you will see at once that as prudence is putting the wisdom we have into practice, a great deal depends on the kind of wisdom we have. We are told in the teachings of our Church that there are two kinds of prudence. There is a prudence we can receive as a gift from the Lord, which we should seek because it is good; and there is another kind of prudence which comes from ourselves, and of which we should try to get rid of because it is not good. We learn from the Lord’s Word what each kind of prudence is. The Lord said, “whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house on the rock but everyone who heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand” (Matthew 7:24, 26). In other words, if we live according to the Lord’s teaching in His Word, He will make us Wise and give us true prudence; but if we do not, we will be foolish, and will have only our own prudence.

If a person looks out carefully for his welfare, and at the same time, for the welfare of others, we say that he is prudent in his ways. Now you know, because you have often been told, that everything good and true and useful comes to us from the Lord—that we cannot do anything good, speak anything that is true, or do anything useful, except from Him. You know also that the Lord gives us to do these things exactly as if we did do them from ourselves. He does this so that we may have the happiness of living forever in heaven with Him after we leave this world. And we will be in heaven with Him if we do these things as if of ourselves, but still believe that they come from the Lord. So you see that there is no better way in which we can look out for our welfare—not just in this world, but in the eternal life to follow—than by hearing the Lord’s teaching and then doing it. In that way we are prepared to become angels in heaven. This does not mean that we will just sit down and wait for things to happen to us. It means that we should think for ourselves and plan and work for the future. But we should always go to the Lord’s Word for guidance when we are in difficulties. If our plans fail we should not be cast down or sad, but should remember that the Lord knows better than we do what is best for us.

That is the virtue of true prudence, the kind we should try to have, and that comes only from the Lord. Our own prudence is very different. It comes from the mistaken idea that our life is our own—that we can do good of ourselves. If we believe this then we do not really believe that there is a Divine Providence to take care of us. We will think we must look out for ourselves, and fall or rise by our own efforts and that all our success and happiness in life will depend on our cleverness in planning and scheming. That is really only foolishness. Still, we all sometimes feel this way; but we must give it up because it is evil. Only then can we look to the Lord as the giver of everything good, and trust in Him instead of in ourselves. Then the Lord can give us true prudence, which is always the Lord’s willing servant—doing His will. This is the prudence that He said His disciples would have. *Amen.*