

## Swedenborg and Paul - a Shared Theology

Swedenborg quotes Paul:

*'The state of one who leads a good life and who believes that the Lord governs the universe, and that He alone is the source of everything good that flows from love and charity, and of everything true that is a matter of faith, and indeed that He is the source of all life - thus the state of one who believes that **'in Him we live, and move, and have our being'** - is such that he can have heavenly freedom conferred on him, and with that freedom peace as well. For he trusts solely in the Lord and has no anxious cares about all else; **he is quite sure that all things work for his good, blessedness, and happiness forever.** But one who believes that he governs himself is constantly agitated, being carried along into evil desires, into anxious cares about things of the future, and thus into a vast number of anxieties.'* AC 2892.

*'God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'* As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' (Act 17:27-28)

*'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'* (Rom 8:28)

This Presentation is in two parts:

The first part is quoting from the Rev Les Sheppard's excellent dissertation:

*'New Church Myths about Paul and his works.'*

The second part compares some of major teachings of Paul and how much they resonate with the Writings of Swedenborg especially when they have been stripped from their more traditional interpretations.

### New Church Myths about Paul and His Works

- Only in the Spiritual Diary is there claims that Paul is in hell character assassination of Paul in all of the other Works of Swedenborg he is honoured.
- Paul is criticised for never quoting the gospels. Les points to explicit statements from the Writings as to why this was so.
- King David is also claimed to be in Hell. Unlike Paul this is in both the Diary **and** in the other works of the writings.
- The criticisms that Paul taught faith alone are misconceive and evidence will be presented from the epistles and from the Writings support this.

#### 1. Paul's Place in Hell.

People who come into the New Church at first find Paul and his predicament of great interest, as no doubt did Swedenborg therefore, perhaps these notes he makes in his Diary are not from the Lord alone.

Only in the Spiritual Diary, and only in 5 places does it arise concerning Paul being in hell and of a "nefarious character," and that Paul did not use one doctrine from the Word. Outside of the Diary, Paul is quoted often and without prejudice. Did Swedenborg change his mind concerning Paul, between the time he first wrote the Spiritual Diary and the time he began the "Published works" for example, the Arcana?

1. *'Paul is among the worst of the apostles, which has been made known to me by ample experience. The love of self, whereby he was ensnared before he preached the gospel, remained with him also afterwards, and because he was then, for the most part, in a like state, he was prompted by that love and by his nature to wish to be in scenes of tumult. He did all things from the end of being greatest in heaven, and of judging the tribes of Israel.... Moreover he has not mentioned, in his epistles, the least word of what the Lord taught, nor cited one of his parables, so that he received nothing from the life and discourse of the Lord, as was also said to him, when yet in the Evangelists is the very Gospel itself.'* SD 4412.

The other derogatory references to Paul: 2. SD 4323 3. SD 4321 4. SD 4413.

5. *'That the Epistles of Paul have not an internal sense is known in the other life; but it is permitted that they may be in the Church, lest those who are of the Church should work evil to the Word of the Lord, in which is the internal sense... Paul was not permitted to take one parable not even a doctrine from the Lord, and to expound and unfold it; but he took all things from himself. The Church, indeed, explains the Word of the Lord, but by means of the Epistles of Paul; for which reason also it everywhere departs from the good of charity, and accepts the truth of faith; which, however, the Lord has taught, but in such wise that the good of charity should be the all.'* SD 4824

It is from these five numbers from the unpublished Spiritual Diary that some New Church scholars have banished Paul and his Epistles in the New Church. This would be fine if the other sixty numbers that mention Paul in the published works were all in the same vein of thought but they are far from it. Swedenborg would continue to make entries in his Spiritual Diary for another eleven years without another mention of Paul in the Diary.

Is it possible that Swedenborg was less discreet in his diary due to the fact he never intended it to be published? Is it possible that in those works he did intend to publish he was more precise with the Lords help?

*'It has sometimes happened that I was earnestly thinking about worldly things, and about such things as give great concern to most persons, namely, about possessions, the acquirement of riches, about pleasures, and the like. At these times I noticed that I was sinking down into what is sensuous and that in proportion as my thought was immersed in such things, I was removed from the company of the angels. ... this was made still more manifest to me from the fact that once when I was led through the abodes of heaven, and was at the time in a spiritual idea, it happened that I suddenly began to sink into thought about worldly things, and then all that spiritual idea was dissipated and became as naught.'* AC 6210

Perhaps we need to remember that the Lord used people of this world to lay down the message of our spiritual life. Swedenborg does say that the works of Paul are doctrinal works. The problem I feel we have had in the New Church as to Paul's works is that we have judged them from the man himself, and not Paul as an instrument of the Lord.

*'For Peter taught and wrote in one manner. James in another. John in another, and Paul in another, each according to his own intelligence. The Lord filled them all with His Spirit; but the Measure in which each partook of it was; in accordance with the character of his perceptions; and this was made use of in accordance with the character of his ability.'* TCF 154.

As a comparison in the writings we see the difference between the character of King David the man, and his representation:

*'That by David is meant the Lord has been stated already; the oath was still "to David," because he was of such a character that he believed that the confirmation was concerning himself and his posterity; for David was in the love of himself and of his posterity, and hence believed that it was concerning him; that is, as said above, that his seed should be established forever, and his throne to generation and generation,'* AC 2842

*'It was shown that David was desirous of being chief in heaven, for such a cupidity cleaves to him from his understanding himself (to be spoken of) in the Psalms. It is therefore sometimes permitted him to ascend, and thus to suppose himself to be in the highest heaven.'* SD 3656.

It is worthy to note that Swedenborg slates David in both the Diary and the published Works, and Paul only in the Diary!

*'It's time for us in the New Church to put aside the character of Paul, just as we pay no attention to the character of David, and look at the works of doctrine that the Lord gave to establish the first Christian Church through Paul, which he is still establishing today among the external church and the unchurched.'*

## Part 2 Similar experiences and theology:

1. A Visit to Heaven
2. Body Of Christ And The Grand Man
3. The Divine In The Human
4. Paul's Belief in a Real Resurrection.
5. The Hells and the World of Spirits.
6. A Wisdom of the Spirit
7. Did Swedenborg Really Say Paul Taught Faith Alone?

### 1. A Visit to Heaven

*'I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know-- God knows. And I know that this man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows-- was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.'* (2Co 12:2-5)

*'It has accordingly been sometimes granted me to be among the angels of the middle and of the highest heaven, and to hear them conversing with one another, at which time I was in an interior natural state, removed from worldly and corporeal things, namely, when first waking after sleep; then I heard things unutterable and inexpressible, as we read happened with Paul; \*\* ' De Verbo 6.*

Both Paul and Swedenborg began their ministries with a supernatural encounter. Presumably this was necessary due to the fact that they were both presenting doctrines and teachings that had never been preached before and needed not only the big picture but also the confidence provided from a firsthand experience.

*'Peter, James, and John were in a like state when they saw Jesus transfigured, and Paul when he heard from heaven things ineffable.'* TCR 157.

### 2. Body of Christ and the Grand Man

Christians refer to the Church as the body of Christ (Corporis Christi). Paul spoke of this unity of Christians with Christ, in images such as that of a whole body with Christ as its head.

*'For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.'* (1 Co 12:14-20)

Swedenborg took this image and extended it into the spiritual world by speaking of the Grand Man (Maximus Homo) in both these images there is not just **form** but also **function** not only do both look the part but they are intimately made up of separate parts with their individual activities and responsibilities.

*'On one occasion also I was shown in a wholly living way the communities which constitute the province of the face and which flow into the muscles of the forehead, the cheeks, the chin, and the neck. I was shown which*

particular communities they were, what those communities were like, the manner in which they flowed in, and how they communicated with one another also the communities which flow into the lips, the tongue, the **eyes**, and the **ears**. Lord's heaven is vast, so vast as to surpass all belief. Compared with heaven the inhabitants on this planet are very few, little more than a pond in comparison with the ocean'. AC3631

Also:

*'For heavenly communities exist according to all the genera and species of spiritual and celestial things; indeed they exist in such order that all of them together represent one human being. They do so in every single detail of the human being, both interior and exterior. This is why heaven considered as a whole is also called the Grand Man, and why so many times already one community has been spoken of as belonging to this part of the body, another community to that, and so on.'* AC 2996

*'...in the Lord's eyes the entire Church is like a human being;'* AC 9276.5

### 3. The Divine in the Human

One of the big issues in the early church was not only a belief in Jesus but a belief that He was both a man and God. Gnosticism could not accept him as a man any more than others including his disciples could believe in him as God. Yet Paul like Swedenborg was adamant in his support of both.

*'...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. (13) For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (16) For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. (17) He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. (19) For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, (20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.'* (Col 1:12-20)

*'You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had, who though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross! As a result God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.'* (Phil 2:5-11)

*'Therefore Paul says;—that in Jesus Christ dwelled all the fullness of Divinity bodily (Col 2 v9);"'* TCR 101.

*'These the Lord fulfilled to every tittle, and so made Himself a receptacle of Divinity in all fullness. Therefore Paul says;—that in Jesus Christ dwells all the fullness of Divinity bodily (Col, 2v 9). And the Lord Himself says:— That all things that the Father hath are His (John 16v15)... Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life (1 John v.20). Also from Paul:- In Jesus Christ dwelled all the fullness of the Divinity bodily (Col, 2v 9);"'* TCR.110.5

*'This Divine, that is, Jehovah's manifestation of Himself in heaven, is the Lord from eternity. It is also the appearance assumed by the Lord when He glorified, that is, made Divine, the Human within Him, as is also quite evident from the form in which He appeared before Peter, James, and John at His transfiguration, Matt. 17:1, 2, and in which He appeared on a number of occasions to prophets. All this being so, anyone can think of the Divine itself as Man, and at the same time of the Lord in whom the entire Divine and perfect Trinity dwell; for within the Lord the Divine itself is the Father, the Divine that manifests itself in heaven is the Son, and the Divine proceeding from these is the Holy Spirit - from which it is clear that these three are one, as He Himself teaches.'* Arcana Celestia 5110.

Paul and Swedenborg are in absolute agreement that Jesus was not just a man but that He was the Son of God. Even more so these verses suggest a process implying that He wasn't born fully God but became fully God, a doctrine that even the present Church does not always fully grasp; (though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself.)

#### 4. Paul's Belief in a Real Resurrection.

The Jews historically did not believe in a resurrection of any form. This is clear from examples from David and Job, who both seemed to despair of any life beyond death.

*'Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?' Job 17:16*

*'What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?' (Psa 30:9)*

Even in Jesus day there was doubt and great controversy about resurrection:

*'That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.'* (Mat 22:23)

Swedenborg tells us this:

*'the Jews before the Lord's Coming, and after it as well had an external worship, which they also celebrated meticulously, yet they were unaware of what is internal, indeed so unaware of it as to imagine that they lived solely with a body. Of the soul, or faith, or the Lord, or spiritual and celestial life, or life after death, they were totally ignorant.'* AC 1200

Consider then the huge leap it was for Paul to insist on the possibility of the resurrection of the body either in a spiritual or fleshly form:

*'So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.'* (1Co 15:42)

*'...this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised!'* (1 Co 15:11-15)

*'I do not know what to choose -- living or dying. It is hard to choose between the two. I want to leave this life and be with Christ, which is much better, but you need me here in my body.'* (Phil 1: 24)

*'It has been proved to me by manifold experience that when man passes from the natural world into the spiritual, as he does when he dies, he carries with him all his possessions, that is, everything that belongs to him as a man, except his earthly body. For when man enters the spiritual world or the life after death, he is in a body as he was in the world, with no apparent difference, since he neither sees nor feels any difference.'* HH 461

#### 5. The Hells and the World of Spirits.

As we have already seen there was barely a belief in the spiritual during Jesus' day:

*'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'* (Eph 6:12)

*'The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.'*(2 Co 10:4-5)

*'There is a perpetual equilibrium between heaven and hell. From hell there continually breathes forth and ascends an endeavor to do evil, and from heaven there continually breathes forth and descends an endeavour to do good. In this equilibrium is the world of spirits; which world is intermediate between heaven and hell (see above, n. 421-431). The world of spirits is in this equilibrium because every man after death enters first the world of spirits, and is kept there in a state like that which he was in while in the world,'* HH 590.

## 6. A Wisdom of the Spirit

Although Paul never used the word appearances he was very familiar with the idea that we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, that to understand spiritual things you need to be spiritual!

*'We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" -- but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.'* (1Co 2:6-16)

*'Seeing from appearances a person cannot grasp that it is because they are not visible before his eyes that spirits and angels are not able to be seen; nor can he grasp that they are able to talk to-man, when in fact they are seen more clearly before internal sight, or the sight of the spirit, than man sees man on earth. And their utterances are also in like manner clearly audible.'* AC 2196.13

*Besides these there are thousands upon thousands of things such as these which man's rational, seeing from its own light, which is born from the evidence of the senses and consequently is darkened, cannot possibly believe. Indeed even in natural things the rational is blinded. It is unable to grasp, for example, how those living on the opposite side of the world can stand erect and walk, or to grasp very many other natural phenomena. How blind must the rational be then in spiritual and celestial things which are far above those that are natural.*

## 7. Did Swedenborg Really Say Paul Taught Faith Alone?

*Still they found the doctrine of their church upon a single saying of Paul, that "man is justified by faith alone without the works of the law", **altogether falsely understood.**"* AR 750.

*'Moreover, Paul closes with these words! Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? ... From all this it is clear that Paul rejected faith without works, just as James did (2v17-26). [3] That Paul meant the deeds of the Mosaic Law, which were for the Jews ... [4] To this they have also added, that they saw in Paul that men should live according to the law of the Decalogue, and that the law is fulfilled by charity'. TCR 506.*

*'James says be doers of the Word, not hearers only; how you deceive yourselves.'* AR 825

Paul says in like manner:

*'Not the hearers of the law will be justified by God, but the doers of the law will be justified.'* (Rom2v 13).

*'To this they added also what they had seen in Paul, that the law of the Decalogue was to be lived, and that it is fulfilled by charity, which is love towards the neighbour (Romans 13:8-11); thus not by faith alone. They said that this was the reason of their being convened.'* Apocalypse Revealed 417