

The Love of Ruling

A Sermon by Rev. Donald L. Rose

The subject of this sermon is the love of ruling other people, a love stemming from the love of self. It is about a selfish inclination to control other people or dominate them. There is a passage about this love in the book Divine Providence which says: "This [love] has its abode in the interiors of every man from his birth; if you do not recognize it (for it does not wish to be recognized) [vult enim non cognosci- it does not want to be known] it dwells securely, and guards the door lest man should open it and the Lord should thereby cast it out" (DP 210).

In contrast to this love there is a beautiful thought articulated by Gideon when he was asked to be leader of his people. "And Gideon said to them, 'I shall not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you'" (Judges 8:23). How beneficial it would be if people would say to themselves as they deal with other people, "I shall not rule over you, the Lord shall rule over you."

There is an invitation in the Writings: "Let those who are in this evil (of ruling others) explore it in themselves" (CL 262, TCR 661:4). The Writings call this evil the head of all infernal loves (see DLW 141). Compared to this love all other evil loves in oneself are easy to see (DP 146). And of course we have already mentioned the saying that if you do not recognize it (and it does not want to be recognized) it dwells securely and guards the door.

What is this selfish love like? We might say, "Oh yes, I know some bossy people. I know some obviously selfish people. I know people who brag a lot, and people who are stubborn about getting their own way." There are personality traits that are caricatures of these evil loves. Historical figures that seem to epitomize these loves are Adolph Hitler, Alexander the Great, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar. The Writings do talk about such people. It is important to understand that they do not differ from us in having these loves, but they differ from us in having the opportunity to let it go **on** without restraint. When we look at someone who goes to great extremes, we are not seeing a different evil love but rather we are seeing a

common love with us, and what it looks like when it is taken to extremes.

In HH559 we read what the love of self is like:

“It rushes on until it finally wants to rule not only over the whole terrestrial globe but also over the entire heaven, and over the Divine Himself, knowing no limit or end. This propensity lurks hidden in everyone who is in the love of self, although it is not manifest to the world” (HH 559).

Looking into evil loves brings surprises. It surprised Swedenborg!

“At first I wondered how it is that love of self and love of the world could be so diabolical, and how those who are in these loves could be such monsters in appearance; for in the world there is little reflection on the love of self, but only on that elated state of mind in external matters which is called haughtiness, which because it is so apparent to the sight, is regarded as the only love of self.” (HH 555)

Let us look for a moment at our own experience of the more evident traits of selfishness, bossiness and pride. If you encounter someone who is constantly calling attention to his accomplishments and superiority, you might sense that rather than an unusually evil person you are encountering an insecure person, perhaps a person who suffers feelings of inferiority. This can be especially evident in a young person who brags about himself.

We read in the Arcana:

“The love of self is not always that which in the external form appears like haughtiness and pride, for such persons may sometimes have charity toward the neighbor, for such an external is born with some, and with others is contracted at an early age, but afterwards is brought into subjection, the externals still remaining.” (AC2219:5)

The number says the love of self is much uglier than that.

Another passage in the Arcana says that the exteriors of the love of self are “contempt for others in comparison with self, and an aversion to those who are in spiritual good, and this sometimes with manifest elation or pride, and sometimes without it” (AC 4750:5).

In our lesson (AC 1505-1508) we read of some who have a kind of over-bearing sphere but conjoined with a sphere of goodness. It is a sphere which they are able eventually to get rid of (see AC 1508). It makes good sense to get rid of the external characteristics of bossiness or of the habit of imposing on the freedom of others. It is good for your popularity and for effectiveness in your work. A good, competent marriage counselor who may have no belief in God or in the spiritual side of marriage will rightly advise you in this regard.

On another level the love of dominion of one partner over the other “entirely takes away conjugal love and its heavenly delight” (HH 380). “Where there is dominion no one has freedom; one is a servant, and the other who rules is also a servant, for he is led as a servant by the lust of domineering.” (Ibid.)

Here is a story of Swedenborg’s experience relating to the love of dominating. Once when he was meditating, there came upon him the wish to understand the universals of heaven and of hell or a general knowledge of each. He asked a wise teacher what those universals were, and he was told of three sets of opposites. The universals of hell are:

- 1) The love of ruling from the love of self;
- 2) The greedy love of possessing the goods of others, and
- 3) Obscene love.

The three loves of heaven were three opposites:

- 1) The love of ruling from the love of being useful;
- 2) The love of having the wherewithal to be useful;
- 3) True conjugal love (see TCR 661).

Swedenborg went home with this thought and a voice from heaven said, “Examine those three universals that prevail above and below, and afterward we shall see them on your hand.” He realized that when you examine something until you understand it, the angels can see it as if it were written on the hands.

He began with the love of ruling from the love of self.

“While I was studying [it] a perception was given to me that this love is in the highest degree infernal, and therefore prevails

with those who are in the deepest hell. This love is such that so far as loose rein is given it, which is done when no impossibility is in the way, it rushes on from step to step, and even to the most extreme; neither does it stop there'd.. But on the other hand, those who wish to rule from the love of uses have no wish to rule from themselves but only from the Lord, since the love of uses is from the Lord Himself..

“While I was meditating upon these things it was said to me through an angel from the Lord, ‘Now you shall see, and it shall be proved to you by sight what the infernal love is.’” Then there arose a devil from hell so ugly that he did not wish him to come near. This devil said he came from where they are all emperors of emperors, kings of kings. At first Swedenborg started to reason with him and to say that this was insane, but then he realized that he was addressing an impossible insanity.

Then as he beheld this overbearing insane monster it was made known to him that he was not talking to someone who had been a world leader or a prominent figure. In fact he had been a house servant, but had nursed a contempt for other people.

Then another devil arose even more terrible, with ecclesiastical trappings. The first devil fell down on his knees and worshipped him. When asked why he did so, he said, He is God. Swedenborg asked the one who was being worshipped what he said to that. The reply: “What can I say? I have all power over heaven and hell; the fate of all souls in my hand.” Swedenborg was allowed to scold him and say, “How can you rave so? In the world you were merely an ecclesiastic. You have worked up your spirit to such a height of madness that you now believe that you are God Himself.” Being angry at this, he swore that he was God and that the Lord had no power.

This experience gives a glimpse of the political and ecclesiastical love of self. We are taught that priests ought to teach “but still they ought to compel no one, since no one can be compelled to believe contrary to what he thinks from his heart is true” (HD 318). They “ought not” to compel and they cannot compel. Do not do what you are unable to do anyway!

Actually the love of dominating is a love of the impossible. Do not try. Do not want to compel. Say, rather, "I shall not rule. The Lord shall rule."

The encounter with the ugly domineering spirits was followed by a beautiful experience. Swedenborg encountered two angels. He found in them no desire to domineer. They conversed about what it is to serve uses. They said that they had actually sought out their positions, but only so that they could be of more service. They talked of the difference between doing something from a selfish motive and doing it from an unselfish motive. They were asked the question: How can the individual know what his motives are? The answer was that we cannot decisively tell, but "All who believe in the Lord and shun evils as sins perform uses from the Lord; but all who do not believe in the Lord and do not shun evils as sins perform uses from themselves and for their own sake" (TCR 661).

The shunning of evil involves the acknowledgment that evil exists. Most of the time we are unaware of evil in ourselves. Who among us has any sense that he desires to rule over the whole universe? Who among us can say that he has within himself the hatred of God? But there is no one with open eyes who is not aware of evil in the world and its horrible results. In a way we are like Belshazzar in knowing second hand about evil. He knew all about Nebuchadnezzar and how his arrogance had been humbled. As Daniel said, "You knew all this" (Daniel 5:22). He knew it and yet he had not humbled himself.

When we observe the result of evil love, such as the horrible devastation of war (and wars are taking place right now), we are observing the effect of evil loves which have a dwelling place with us. We need not say as we view atrocities, "There go I." We can say, "There goes it." "It" is the love of self. "If you do not recognize it (for it does not wish to be recognized), it dwells securely, and guards the door lest man should open it and the Lord should thereby cast it out. Man opens the door by shunning evils as sins as if from himself, with the acknowledgment that he does it from the Lord" (DP 210).

Put the Lord in the picture as you go about your life, and in the name of the Lord renounce the love of self and the love of dominion. Inwardly say over and over again. "I shall not rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you."

Amen.

Lessons: Daniel 5:18-30, Matt. 20:20-27, AC 1505-1508