

Conjugal Love, a Most Precious Gem of the New Church

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“And the two shall become one flesh.”

The narrative account that we read in our lesson from *Conjugal Love* paints a bleak picture of the state of marriage in our world today. Clear in its implication, the paper in the hand of the angel with its words **“the marriage between good and truth”** successively decomposes as the angel descends from heaven and approaches earth.

It is a heavenly analogy, but it rings true today. We live in a climate today where there is almost total ignorance about the sacredness, beauty, innocence, peace and depth that characterize true marriage as defined in the Heavenly Doctrines.

It is helpful to recognize how completely broken our culture’s view today is in respect to its common perceptions about marriage. It is also useful to realize that the heavenly relationship described in the Doctrines is significantly different from how people talk about “marriage” today. While people look for partnership in this world, the cultural definition for what that partnership looks like, its basis for operating and its attributes are weak, temporary and often unappealing when compared with what the Word for the New Church teaches about conjugal love.

For example, think about how the dominant world religions commonly speak about marriage. Christianity in general teaches that marriage lasts only during life on earth. The theology suggests that a person becomes sexless after death and there is no concept of “spiritual marriage” or any notion that men and women can live together as one to eternity. How can people find guidance and spiritual growth in that?

Some Christian faiths take this even further by expressing the view that celibacy is the ideal. Marriage, then, is only said to exist for the purposes of bearing children, and for limiting desire in those who cannot maintain a life of abstinence while on earth. The dysfunction promoted by these beliefs is stunning. One wonders how such false notions contribute toward helping people live lives as human beings instead of animals. Of themselves, these beliefs do little to promote happy lifelong relationships between husband and wife.

These definitions fall short because they define marriage as a purely natural relationship rather than a spiritual one and with that, they miss the essence of what makes a true marriage between husband and wife. Promoting these false beliefs has caused profound ignorance, and it can be no wonder that our culture is left to flounder about. Without any spiritual guideposts, our culture is left to be influenced by tentative opinions and trends about marriage and sexuality that are inherently external and only physical in nature. And since there is nothing to anchor these in any sort of eternal truth, social mores about relationships are unmoored and shift from one year to the next based on what theories rule the day about “healthy relationships.”

It is truly heartbreaking to not only observe the ignorance, but to see the waves of damage done as people blindly fall into behaviors that seemingly damage their ability to have the spiritual relationships defined by our church that promise deep, eternal fulfillment.

The Heavenly Doctrines characterize the essential problem in this way: People are born natural, and with their inherently natural minds, they think natural and physical thoughts. That natural thinking that is locked in the dimension of time and space of this material world is incapable on its own of grasping the inner spiritual reality that lies within all human life. Only the Lord can raise people's awareness up and introduce them into this spiritual reality. It is in this spiritual world that conjugal love and its life exists. It descends into natural life as far as we are open to conforming our relationships in appropriate ways to receive it.

Of this we read: **“The Lord alone opens the internal elements of human minds and makes them spiritual, and implants them then in the natural elements so that they too take on a spiritual essence.” This is what happens if people go to the Lord and live according to His commandments. His commandments in sum are to believe in Him and refrain from evils because they are of the devil and from the devil; to do good things because they are of the Lord and from the Lord; and to do both the one and the other as through one's own and at the same time believe they are done through oneself by the Lord.** (*Conjugal Love* 340)

The Heavenly Doctrines express tremendous hope that this true spiritually grounded marriage that draws from Conjugal love, will be fully restored among people living in our world today! We read, for example, that when Swedenborg was allowed to experience what conjugal love was like with people living in “the Golden Age” (among ancient peoples living long before written history), his angel guide said to him, **“I am sustained by the hope that the God of heaven, who is the Lord, will revive this love, because it is possible for it to be revived”** (*Conjugal Love* 79 e).

Later, Swedenborg himself echoes this hope. After his interaction with angels celebrating the future of marriage, he declares: **“my heart leapt, and I went home filled with joy. And there, returning from the state of my spirit into a bodily state, I wrote down what I had seen and heard. To which I will now add this: that following His Advent, the Lord will revive married love, such as it was among ancient peoples. For married love comes only from the Lord, and is found in people who are made spiritual by Him through His Word.”**

Our hearts can “leap” too, because the Lord is reviving this love with the New Church, and He offers it to anyone who turns to Him recognizing Him as their God, the God of heaven and earth, and who live according to His precepts.

Embedded in this hope is the point that the New Church definition of marriage offers something completely different than our world culture's external view of a marriage. When speaking of the ideal marriage, the Heavenly Doctrines are speaking about a relationship that is as different from “the modern definition of marriage” as heaven is different from earth. While the one is timebound, material in nature, and focused satisfying each other's present needs in the moment, conjugal love is a relationship that is based on its depth, its spiritual purposes that are reflective of the Lord's eternal purposes for the angelic heavens and by extension the human race. It is defined by the Lord in His Word. And so we need to allow that those definitions are

going to be different than how the world might choose to define marriages. That doesn't mean that there isn't helpful advice that can be used to improve communication, relationships, easing tensions and relieving the day-to-day problems people experience in marriage. But there is very little outside of the church that truly defines the internal soul and source of conjugal love and shows its orderly descent into the externals of worldly life.

By definition, conjugal love is a life force that comes from the Lord alone. As such it is **"celestial, spiritual, holy, pure and clean, more so than any other love which exists from the Lord in angels of heaven or people of the church"** (*Conjugal Love* 57). It is said to be the highest form of love that one can experience either as an angel in heaven or as a person living on earth.

Conjugal love is an expression of the Lord's love, which He in turn shares with couples. It is a gift that comes solely from Him. And so, when one deeply reflects on this, one can see that couples receive conjugal love from the Lord alone, in the measure or degree that they are connected with Him. The closer a couple is conjoined with the Lord, the more open they are to receiving this most precious love and to enjoying its delights in their relationship.

One cannot separate God out of the equation, for the life of a true and eternal marriage comes solely from Him. The rationale for this is that conjugal love, as a spiritual love, is dependent on the interiors of a person's mind being open if it is to be received and experienced by human beings. Since people are born naturally, this opening of the interiors doesn't happen by itself. It requires our cooperation with the Lord and His precepts found in the Word. Of this we read that: **"The interiors of the mind are opened by the Lord when people acknowledge Him as the God of Heaven and earth and go to Him, and this in those who live according to His commandments. The actual reason of this is that otherwise there is no conjunction, and without conjunction, there is no reception."** (*Conjugal Love* 341[2]).

From this, we can see why the New Church is a marriage church and is inseparably connected to its need to teach truths about conjugal love. To put it simply, it is essential for the spiritual health of the human race that our church clearly teach what conjugal love is and how people can approach the Lord to find it. If our church fails in this regard, where on earth could people find the path to this love that is such an important part of human spiritual life? The Heavenly Doctrine puts it this way: **"...the human inclination towards marriage goes hand in hand with religion at every step. Every little step and every stride away from religion or towards religion is also a step or stride away from or towards the conjugal inclination that is peculiar and proper to a Christian person. At my (Swedenborg's) asking what that conjugal inclination was, he said, 'It is a wish to live with only one wife, and a Christian person has this wish to the extent that he has religion.'"**

It is important to contextualize these teachings with the understanding that no person receives any love from the Lord perfectly. Every human being on earth is riddled with flaws and imperfections. Everyone is negatively influenced by inherited natural longings for evil. No one lives in an environment that is isolated from the flaws of others. And sadly, people can be deeply impacted by actual harm done by the destructive, corrosive forces of evil -- either in oneself or in others. It is simply an unavoidable product of the culture we live in. But that said,

everyone can make progress toward heaven and, we can progress toward opening ourselves to conjugal love despite our flaws, imperfections and sins of old.

The Writings put it this way: **“No love can ever become pure in human beings, nor in angels. So neither can this love. But because the Lord primarily regards the intention that is in the will, therefore to the extent that a person has the intention and perseveres in it, to that extent he is introduced into the purity and holiness of this love, and gradually makes progress in it.”** (*Conjugal Love* 71)

The Lord knows us. He knows our downfalls. As the Human God, he understands our weaknesses and our flaws better than we do ourselves. And yet, He still loves us and desires that we are blessed in full measure by all of His loves. **“His mercy is everlasting.”** (Psalm 100:5) He is constantly leading us toward heaven.

The Heavenly Doctrines clearly teach the power of the Lord who, with all His omnipotence, is working to lead us toward heaven and help us experience conjugal love in a marriage we will have with an angel partner, which will last to eternity. His careful, quiet leadership is manifestly clear in descriptions of the intimate role that Providence has in how people are prepared for marriage, with each being led from infancy to eventually recognize the one that they were intended by the Lord to marry. We read: **“The Lord’s providence is most specific and therefore most universal in connection with marriages and its operation in marriages in heaven, because all blessings in heaven flow from the delights of married love like sweet waters from a sweetly gushing spring. It is therefore provided by the Lord that marital partners be born, that they are raised and continually prepared for their marriages, neither are the boy and the girl being aware of the fact.”** (*Conjugal Love* 316)

The same force is at work in our lives. The Lord is constantly with us preparing us, giving us strength, courage and a desire to respond to Him in ways that help us to open spiritually so that we can receive the Lord’s life. This is especially true when it comes to receiving conjugal love. Because this love is the highest, most precious form of life that can be experienced by human beings, the Lord works more powerfully with this love so that it can be shared with us. So it is no different with us than it is with the young boy and girl who are continually being prepared and will one day meet and recognize that they are destined for one another. The Lord is working just as strongly in our hearts so that we can receive this love, and receive it to the fullest extent in the measure that we are willing to respond to the Lord and His life.

But the Lord does require cooperation. He asks us to turn to Him as the God of Heaven and Earth, and to do so through a life according to the Ten Commandments where we shun licentiousness and seek to do what He says is good.

This cooperation is the beginning and basis of a spiritual marriage that is different in essence than any kind of relationship that is promoted by our materialistic and time-bound culture. And it is immeasurably better, sweeter, more innocent and more delightful because it is reflective of the eternal presence of the Lord in heaven itself. Through life in the New Church, the Lord is now inviting humanity to enjoy the revival, growth and development of love truly conjugal in our marriages today. By turning to the Lord and responding to Him with a life

according to His teachings, we can enjoy the growth of this priceless gem, with its spiritual life and happiness to eternity in heaven.

Amen.

Lessons: Genesis 2:15-25, Matthew 19:1-6, *Conjugal Love* 115 (portions)

CL 115

The second account: Awakened from sleep in the middle of the night, I saw an angel at some height towards the east, holding in his right hand a piece of paper. It appeared in a shining brilliance owing to the light coming in from the sun. In the middle of the paper there was writing in gold letters, and I saw the phrase, "The marriage between good and truth." From the writing sprang a radiance that turned into a large halo around the piece of paper. The halo or ring consequently had an appearance similar to the appearance of dawn in springtime.

After this I saw the angel descending with the paper in his hand. Moreover, as he descended, the paper appeared less and less bright, and the writing - which said, "The marriage between good and truth" - turned from the color of gold to silver, then to the color of copper, next to the color of iron, and lastly to the color of rusty iron and corroded copper. Finally I saw the angel enter a dark cloud and descend through the cloud to the ground. There the piece of paper disappeared, although the angel was still holding it in his hand. (This took place in the world of spirits, the world all people go to first after they die.)

[2] The angel then spoke to me, saying, "Ask the people who are coming this way whether they see me and whether they see anything in my hand."

A host of people came - a crowd from the east, a crowd from the south, a crowd from the west, and a crowd from the north. Those coming from the east and south were people who in the world had devoted themselves to becoming learned, and I asked them whether they saw anyone with me there and whether they saw anything in his hand. They all said they saw nothing at all.

I then asked the people who came from the west and north. They were people who in the world had believed whatever the learned said. They said they did not see anything, either.

The last of these, however, were people who in the world had possessed a simple faith stemming from charity, or some truth resulting from goodness, and after the people before them went away, they said that they saw a man with a piece of paper - a man handsomely dressed, and a piece of paper with letters printed on it. Moreover, when they looked more closely, they said they could read the phrase, "The marriage between good and truth." Then they spoke to the angel, asking him to tell them what it meant.

[3] The angel said that everything which exists in the whole of heaven and everything which exists in the whole world is nothing but a form of the marriage between good and truth, since each and every thing was created out of and into a marriage of good and truth - both everything that lives and breathes and also whatever does not live and breathe.

"There is nothing," he said, "that was created solely into a form of truth, and nothing that was created solely into a form of good. Good alone or truth alone has no reality, but they take form and become real through a marriage of the two, the character of the resulting form being determined by the character of the marriage.

"Divine good and Divine truth in the Lord the Creator are good and truth in their very essence. The being of His essence is Divine good, and the expression of His essence is Divine truth. In Him, moreover, good and truth exist in their very union, for in Him they are infinitely united. Since these two are united in Him, the Creator, therefore they are also united in each and every thing created by Him. By this the Creator is also conjoined with all things created by Him in an eternal covenant like that of a marriage."