

# Preparing for Marriage



## ***Bird's Eye View of Lesson***

The free choice of a marriage partner is an important foundation for a marriage relationship. The New Church teaches that “giving consent” implies that each partner wants to work on an eternal relationship with the other. Men and women are gifted with different personal strengths. There are important reasons why it is useful for a man to propose marriage and for a woman to choose whether or not to accept his proposal. Once couples decide to marry, they can bring their consent to the Lord in a betrothal ceremony. The time of betrothal lasts until marriage. There are important reasons why the Lord recommends that a couple wait to engage in sexual intercourse until after their wedding.

## **Readings from the Word**

*The Heavenly Doctrine lays out progressive steps for the start of a marriage that can grow through good times and bad in healthy ways. Why is this important? How does the Lord provide hope for people who struggle with these steps?*

### **Isaac and Rebekah**

The story of Isaac and Rebekah is perhaps the most beautiful love story in the Word. Abraham sent his servant to relatives living far away to find a suitable wife for his son, Isaac. He returned with the beautiful Rebekah. The servant prayed for the Lord to give him a special sign so he would know he had met the right woman when he saw her. As he finished praying, a young woman appeared. Genesis 24:16 says:

“Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up.”

Rebekah willingly gave him a drink of water and also drew water for his camels. Her actions were the sign he had asked for, and so he gave her gifts of bracelets and a ring. She invited the servant to her home and he followed. He explained his mission and Laban and Bethuel (Rebekah’s brother and father), gave their consent to her marriage.

They called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” And she said, “I will go.” (Genesis 24:58)

With her consent, Rebekah left to become Isaac’s wife. As she arrived at Abraham’s home Isaac was meditating in the field. Seeing Isaac, she dismounted from her camel, veiled her face and went towards him. Isaac brought her into his mother’s tent, and she became his wife. The internal sense of this story pictures the start of a beautiful marriage relationship.



## Preparing for Marriage

### Consent

The success of any endeavor is impacted by how it begins. For example a person building a house needs to make a plan, choose a suitable location and lay a solid foundation. Without these steps the builders will probably run into trouble later, and the house may be both unsafe and unpleasant to live in. This holds true in marriage relationships as well. A marriage built on a solid foundation has an easier time flourishing than one that has a weak foundation. The first step in preparing for marriage is the decision to marry. The Heavenly Doctrine states that healthy marriages are founded on *consent*.

The consent is the essential element in marriage, and the rest of the things that follow are its formalities (*Conjugal Love* 21).

Consent involves more than a person saying “yes” to a marriage proposal. It sets the stage for asking and giving consent *throughout* marriage. By consulting each other and making joint decisions again and again in their married lives partners may experience increasing freedom and trust and a deeper sense of truly being married. Decisions such as going to church, starting a family, and spending money are all opportunities for growing together.

### Why Should a Man Propose Marriage?

The Heavenly Doctrine states that there are important reasons why a man should take primary initiative in both beginning a relationship and proposing marriage. One reason is that by nature the masculine mind has the capability of objectively considering whether a particular woman will be a suitable partner. Another reason is that men and women are attracted to the opposite sex in different ways. If a woman obviously expresses a strong interest in a particular man he may enjoy it and respond positively. However other consequences are also possible. He may dislike being pursued, or he may try to take advantage of the woman’s clear interest by seeking sexual intimacy even though he is not interested in a real relationship with her.

The Heavenly Doctrine says that part of the reason this happens is that men have a general love of the opposite sex—that is, it is easy for them to be attracted by many different women. By contrast women may appreciate qualities in a number of men but tend to want a relationship with just one man. So the masculine mind looks around more freely and considers numerous possibilities, from which he chooses one. Because of her innate love for one, a woman tends to focus quickly on one man. Since this innate love is for one of the opposite sex, women are drawn to conjugal love (see *Conjugal Love* 296).

The Heavenly Doctrine encourages us to see that men and women experience different kinds of freedom when choosing a marriage partner. A man’s freedom is in choosing the woman to whom he will propose marriage. A woman’s freedom is in accepting or declining an offer of marriage.

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### Betrothal

In the book *Conjugal Love*, the Lord recommends a betrothal ceremony (a special worship service) for couples who have consented to marry. During the service a couple brings their commitment to the Lord. Couples may also exchange tokens of their love—such as rings. Some couples celebrate this step privately. Others invite family and close friends to share their joy. Although not a legally binding like the promises made at the marriage ceremony, the promises made at the betrothal ceremony help a couple reflect and focus on new and deeper levels of friendship and love in preparation for marriage. The Lord tells us:

The souls of two unite when love for the opposite sex is confined to one of the sex—as happens when a young woman has pledged herself wholly to a young man and the young man conversely has pledged himself wholly to the young woman—and this is clearly apparent from the fact that their two lives unite, and so consequently their souls, because these are their life in its beginning (*Conjugal Love* 482).

The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that the Lord can bring about the marriage of a couple's spirits before they begin living together as husband and wife. This marriage of the spirit is an important spiritual marriage foundation and it can most easily take place before partners fully express their love physically.

By betrothal each is made ready for conjugal love.... [B]y the order engraved on it, truly conjugal love ascends and descends. It ascends from its first warmth progressively upward toward people's souls in an effort to form conjunctions there, and this by continually more interior openings of their minds. There is, moreover, no love which strives for these openings more intensely, or which opens the interior recesses of minds more forcefully and adeptly, than conjugal love; for it is the soul in each which impels it. On the other hand, in the same moments that this love ascends toward the soul, it also descends toward the body and invests itself in it. People should know, however, that conjugal love is of the same character in its descent as it is in the height to which it ascends. If it soars aloft, it descends chaste; but if it does not soar aloft, it descends unchaste (*Conjugal Love* 302).

If a couple's sexual intimacy focuses their relationship on a physical level of communication, preparation for the deeper levels of marriage—in their freely sharing of values and ideas—does not take place. Consequently *Conjugal Love* states:

During the time of betrothal it is not lawful to be joined physically [in sexual intercourse]. For if they joined physically the order engraved on conjugal love perishes (*Conjugal Love* 305).



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Focusing on spiritual qualities and healthy friendship during the betrothal period draws a couple's souls together and provides a strong foundation for their marriage.

From this union of souls, where it exists in its spiritual holiness and purity, conjugal love flows down into the life of the entire body and fills it with blessed delights, so long as its course remains open, as is the case in people who from the Lord become spiritual (*Conjugal Love* 482).

### Why Wait?

The Lord tells us that this is the ideal way to prepare for marriage because He wants us to have the happiness of true marriage love. Many young people today have little or no sense that premarital sexual intimacy can have real effects on the quality of the marriage they hope to have some day. They often know about the dangers of pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, but they rarely have a sense of the spiritual effects of this experience. When we make "detours" from the ideal path we complicate the process, but the Lord gives us the opportunity to try again in each new situation. The Lord says that

No love can ever become pure in human beings, nor in angels. So neither can conjugal 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 conjugal love, and gradually makes progress in it (*Conjugal Love* 71:2).

A person's intentions and efforts to cooperate with what the Lord teaches about the foundations of conjugal love help that person more easily receive the blessings the Lord intends.



## Focus Points

1. What special meaning does *Conjugal Love* give to word “consent”?
2. Can you think of benefits to asking and giving consent throughout marriage?
3. Why does *Conjugal Love* indicate that it is best for a man (and not a woman) to propose?
4. In what ways can betrothal help a couple prepare for their wedding?
5. What does *Conjugal Love* say are the beneficial effects of waiting to engage in sexual relations until after the wedding?
6. Can a true love of marriage or conjugal love ever become completely pure?
7. How can any person make progress in conjugal love at different stages of his or her life (early teens, later teens, early twenties, any adult states before marriage and the adult states of life after a person is married)?

# Premarital Sex

## Activity 1

Adapted from an activity by Donnette Alfelt. Used with permission.

The strong physical attraction between the sexes is a gift. It may also be your adversary as you struggle to accept that gift in the context of its purpose. Today’s media and culture mock fidelity and offer entertainment that appeals primarily to physical passion. They ignore the many consequences of promiscuity and also the blessings and benefits of commitment and trust.

Many teens who long for a lasting relationship based on love and trust have decided they would rather wait for marriage. A percentage of these young people ultimately give in to the pressures and get involved in inappropriate sexual behavior. Studies suggest that many succumb to pressures because their convictions are based on dreams of a happy marriage without enough information on how to build a healthy relationship or enough solid compelling reasons a monogamous marriage is worth working for. This makes them vulnerable to peer pressure and to giving in the first time they feel they are in love.

<b>Some reasons young people have sex</b>	<b>Some negative consequences of premarital sex</b>
It is expected today	Guilt
Peer pressure	Pregnancy
To feel wanted	Loss of respect or self worth
To be popular	Depression potentially leading to suicide
To express what feels like “love”	Disease
Carried away by the moment	Ruined relationships
Fear of being alone or losing him/her	Memories that may intrude in the future
Judgment blurred by alcohol	Marriage to the wrong person

Most rational people long for a chaste marriage. Chaste does not mean no sex, it means sex with only the person to whom you are married. One definition is “avoidance of anything that cheapens or debases.” That would include casual sex. About chastity the Heavenly Doctrine says “That all the delights of true marriage love, even the ultimate ones, are chaste.” (*Conjugal Love* 144)

The blessings and benefits of a chaste marriage include peace and trust and an increasingly deep union of hearts and minds. It requires effort and commitment, but true marriage is the highest and most satisfying relationship possible. The fairy stories where two people find each other is only the very beginning. Many chapters both difficult and enjoyable follow. However, “And they lived happily ever after” is the true outcome of real marriage.

1. What are the top three things you would like your future husband or wife to bring to your marriage?
2. What are the top three things you would like to offer the person that you want to be your eternal partner?
3. In what ways can you begin to work on your future marriage now?

## Activity 2

# Good Habits

*Note: Please use judgment when selecting an activity on this sensitive subject. A number of alternatives are presented so that you may choose one that meets the needs of your group.*

A union with a partner of a similar and compatible nature may be provided on earth when people from their youth love, desire, and seek from the Lord a lawful and lovely partnership with one and who reject wandering lusts as an offense to the nostrils (see *Conjugal Love* 49).

Many people living in the world have lost sight of the fact that sex is intended as part of a committed loving relationship. The media portray intimacy as a form of entertainment or self-gratification. Living together before marriage is considered “normal” or at least “acceptable” in most western cultures today.

The consequences of these behaviors do not support this view. Many teens worry that they might be pregnant—or may be responsible for a pregnancy. People who contract a sexually transmitted disease may experience a tremendous loss of self esteem. The guilt of sexual behavior can have a crippling effect many years later, once someone marries the partner they genuinely love.

Just because you have a friend who decides to have sex does not mean that it’s the right decision for you. Look at this list of steps you can take to develop personal habits that support saving sex for marriage. Put a ✓ next to three steps you would like to set as goals for yourself. If some of these steps are already habits, try committing to something new.

## Steps You Can Take

Ignore dirty jokes	Set an example	Show respect for the opposite sex
Turn off inappropriate movies or TV	Express your views openly	Exercise self-control
Walk away	Be honest with yourself and others	Take responsibility for your actions
Be all right about being different	Listen to conscience—it’s the Lord talking	Choose friends who support your viewpoint
Show respect for marriage	Don’t repeat dirty jokes	Read the Word
Break off potentially harmful friendships	Avoid situations that might be dangerous	Don’t look!

## Discussion

1. What difference might it make if one person stands up for what they believe? (Think of people who have stood up for what they believe and how that has changed the world *e.g.* Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa.)
2. How might standing up for your values affect your relationships with others?
3. Are people who do not share your values true friends?

## Virginity

*Note: Please use judgment when selecting an activity on this sensitive subject. A number of alternatives are presented so that you may choose one that meets the needs of your group.*

Allegories and fairy tales provide non-personal situations that can stimulate thinking about relationships between the sexes. Here are several different ones you might enjoy.

### ***The Golden Locket* by Robert Wolgemuth**

This short story is an excellent parable which supports spiritual ideals presented in the Heavenly Doctrine. It presents the consequences of Matt's choices with a series of girlfriends in a practical way that may appeal to students and be more fruitful than a direct discussion of premarital sex.

*Note: There are two versions of the story, a long and a shorter one. The story is available on the internet at [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com).*

### ***The Magician's Cape* by Anna Wahlenberg**

This story is available in the book *Great Swedish Fairy Tales*. (Olenius, Elsa. *Great Swedish Fairy Tales*. Translated by Holger Lundbergh, illustrated by John Bauer. New York: Dell Publishing, 1974.)

A wicked magician likes to capture young women to serve him. He disguises himself by magic and spreads his cape at her feet. If the girl steps willingly on to it, he quickly wraps her up in the corner of the cape and flies away with her.

The main focus of the story is Alvida, a young woman who is not enticed by the magician's apparently noble offer, but who nearly gets captured nonetheless. However a kind deed she did for the magician saves her and the continuing existence of this deed haunts the magician, forcing him to be useful even though he does not want to.

A mature group of teens could use this story to discuss what a young man might do that is like spreading the cape that might encourage a young woman to willingly accept his advances. Describe what it might feel like if you were trapped in a relationship you were unhappy about? How can people protect themselves from situations like this?

Other stories from the same book that lend themselves to a useful discussion include *The Maiden in the Castle of Rosy Clouds*, and *The Queen*.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the difference between giving *of* yourself and giving *away* yourself?
2. Why do some people do the latter? (Neediness, sense of unworthiness, *etc.*)
3. What do many people believe chastity is? (Not having sex before marriage.)
4. What is it really and why? (Shunning impure thoughts about sex at any time—even in marriage.)
5. How might the hells attack a person who is trying to dedicate him or herself to secondary virginity? (Secondary virginity means choosing not to engage in sexual activity even if you have before. It's never too late to make a fresh start. A choice for abstinence will support your decision to change your focus.)

## Activity 4

# Virginity

*Note: Please use judgment when selecting an activity on this sensitive subject. A number of alternatives are presented so that you may choose one that meets the needs of your group.*

The Heavenly Doctrine gives us spiritual reasons why sex belongs to marriage.

### **1. Conjugal love is pure and clean because it is a love of the soul and mind before it is of the body.** (*Conjugal Love* 64,144-146)

Truly conjugal love ascends from its first warmth progressively upward towards people's souls in an effort to form conjunctions there and this by continually more interior openings of their minds. There is no love which strives for these openings more intensely, or which opens the interior recesses of minds more forcefully and adeptly, than conjugal love; for it is the soul in each which impels it. On the other hand, in the very same moments that this love ascends toward the soul, it also descends toward the body and invests itself in it. People should know, however, that conjugal love is of the same character in its descent as it is in the height to which it ascends. If it soars aloft, it descends chaste; but if it does not soar aloft, it descends unchaste. That is because the lower elements of the mind are unchaste, while its higher elements are chaste; for the lower elements of the mind cling to the body, whereas the higher elements divorce themselves from such things. See *Conjugal Love* 302

### **2. The human seed is a precious gift between a husband and his wife. It binds their souls together.** (*Conjugal Love* 183, 173)

The semen from husbands is received by their wives and added to the life in them, and wives in consequence lead a life in harmony and in progressively greater harmony with their husbands. The effect of this is to bring about a union of souls and conjunction of minds. The angels said that this is because a husband's semen contains his soul, and also his mind in respect to the interior elements of it which have been joined to the soul. See *Conjugal Love* 172

### **3. Virginity is the sign of the holiness of marriage.** (*Conjugal Love* 460, 503)

Virginity is a symbol of the sacredness of marriage; for after yielding the flower of her virginity the bride commits and devotes herself wholly to the bridegroom, now her husband, and the bridegroom conversely commits and devotes himself wholly to the bride, now his wife. We call virginity a token of conjugal love as well, because it is a part of the covenant, a covenant whose end is that love may unite them into one person or one flesh. *Conjugal Love* 503

### **4. Sexual love is for the uses of marriage (bearing and raising children and also the spiritual oneness that grows between married partners). All pleasures are given for the sake of use, and the greater the use, the greater the delight.** (*Conjugal Love* 51, 52)

All delights from their first to their last are gathered into conjugal love because of the excellence of its use above all other uses. Its use is the propagation of the human race, and thence of the angelic heavens; and because this use was the end of ends of creation, it follows that all the states of blessedness, happiness, delight, pleasantness, and pleasure which, by the Lord the Creator could ever be conferred on mankind, are gathered into this love. *Conjugal Love* 68

## Discussion

1. Why does the Lord tell us that it is important for conjugal love to ascend to the soul before descending to the body?
2. What is the spiritual source of a male's semen?
3. What are the uses of sexual love?
4. How does virginity symbolize the holiness of marriage?

## Hope for a New Future

## Activity 5

*Note: Please use judgment when selecting an activity on this sensitive subject. A number of alternatives are presented so that you may choose one that meets the needs of your group.*

No matter what we have chosen in the past, the Lord holds the door open for us to make new choices.

Pre-marital sex is light in the measure that it looks to conjugal love for the reason that the person then looks, from the unchaste state in which he is, toward a chaste state. Moreover, to the extent that he prefers the chaste state, he is to that extent also in it in regard to his intellect; and to the extent that he not only prefers it, but also values it more, he is in it as well in regard to his will and so in regard to his inner self (see *Conjugal Love* 452:2).

People who prefer conjugal love to the lust of pre-marital sex keep evil separate from good, thus keeping what is unchaste separate from what is chaste—that is because they separate them in perception and intention. People who separate these two in perception and intention before they are in a good or chaste state are also separated and purified from the evil of that lust when they come into a conjugal state (*Conjugal Love* 452:4).

No love can ever become pure in human beings, nor in angels. So neither can conjugal 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 conjugal love, and gradually makes progress in it (*Conjugal Love* 71:2)

A person can do what is evil, but not intend what is evil. A person who does this is not assigned responsibility for the evil after death...(see *Arcana Coelestia* 1327:3).

If people who are in a state of good deliberately refrain from one evil as being a sin, they refrain from all evils; and the more so, if they refrain from several evils. For as soon as anyone deliberately and of set purpose refrains from any evil as being a sin, he is kept by the Lord in the intention of refraining from the others. If he does evil through ignorance or some overwhelming bodily desire, this is still not imputed to him, because he had not intended or set his mind on it. A person can achieve this intention, if once or twice a year he examines himself, and repents of the evil he finds in himself. This is not the case if he never examines himself (see *Conjugal Love* 529).

### How to Make a Fresh Start

*True Christian Religion* 530 explains the steps a person needs to take in order to repent from an evil and make a fresh start:

1. Explore your thoughts and intentions.
2. Recognize and acknowledge your sins (evils you have deliberately chosen to do).
3. Pray to the Lord for help with resisting evil.
4. Start a new life by acting on your decision to change next time you are in a similar situation.

It's *never* too late to make a new choice! The Lord invites this at any time.

## Taking It Home



Here are a variety of activities that can help you bring this lesson into your life.

### Spiritual Task

By the Rev. David Roth

#### Wanting What is Best for Others

We are taught that, “It is the essence of Love to love others outside of one’s self, to desire to be one with them, and to render them blessed from oneself” (*True Christian Religion* 43). It sounds like love is about wanting what is best for other people and do things for them whenever possible—this is also how we show love to the Lord (“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). If we want healthy, loving relationships we are going to have to do something to foster them. This includes working on our own regeneration by shunning negative inclinations and habits and speech.

**Task** This week pick someone you want to have a closer, more caring relationship with. Each day do something that you wouldn’t normally do to be of help to him or her. If you don’t feel like doing it, do it anyway. See if your increased outflow allows the Lord more inflow. Take note of any positive feelings or changes in yourself.

### Prayers for Marriage

Prayer is speech with God. Read the following prayer and then write a prayer about your own hopes for marriage.

Lord Jesus Christ, prepare me to receive Your wonderful gift of conjugal love. Help me to turn away from anything that holds marriage lightly and to reject anything that might harm my own future marriage. Teach me what love truly conjugal is, so that I will be ready for a beautiful partnership that You will provide. Amen

*Marriage Prayer:*

## Further Reading

### Marriage and True Morality

A Sermon by the Rev. Geoffrey S. Childs

In Hosea it is said: ““And I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, and in lovingkindness and in mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord”” (Hosea 2:19-20). On interior levels, this refers to the marriage of the Lord and the church, and the marriage of good and truth within the human heart (see *Arcana Coelestia* 9182:6). From these comes conjugal love (see *Conjugal Love* 60, 62, 64) and so this poetry in Hosea speaks directly of the conjugal.

Conjugal love is the gift the Lord offers to the New Church. In it, potentially, is found the sweetness of human life. If it is received, it is a love that is to last forever, and in it husband and wife will find the Lord. This is why it is said in Hosea, “I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.”

The teachings in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church on the nature of conjugal love are not only appealing, but they contain within them, in their very context, a strong challenge. The plain statement is that conjugal love is “celestial, spiritual, holy, pure and clean above every love which is from the Lord with the angels of heaven and the people of the church” (*Conjugal Love* 64). This love excels all others in its use (*Conjugal Love* 68). It is the “chief among the essentials of human life” (PTW, Vol. II, Swed. Found., 1928, First Index on Marriage, under Conjugal, p.493). This love is likened to a parent, and all other loves to its offspring (*Conjugal Love* 65). It is called the “inmost of all loves” (*Spiritual Experiences* 4405).

Conjugal love is the “chief among the essentials of human life”. This is something that we know affectionally in the first states of falling in love and in later states of marriage when the perception is given. But doctrinally it is a teaching that we may underestimate. That is, affectionally we know that conjugal love is vital—but is it held in the same respect in our reflective thinking? If conjugal love is not held as “above every love,” then we will probably fail in truly applying this doctrine to the problems of life.

### Protecting Conjugal Love

Morality in premarital states and morality in marriage are under attack as never before. The revealed truth concerning the value of virginity before marriage is often regarded as a quaint and Victorian idea. The sphere of pornography, of exploiting the sexual relationship to satisfy the selfish proprium [or the sense that our life is our own and we can do anything we want with it], comes at us in many forms. Numerous movies and novels are full of explicit sexual pandering, without the redeeming factor of genuine affection. More and more, adultery is made not only permissible, but is presented as containing within it real love, and therefore real innocence. This attack upon genuine love, or conjugal love, is not universal—if it were our civilization would fall. There is still some perception of what love is. But those who hold on to

this insight are working against a powerful tide. The existential arguments against virginity before marriage and against the sanctity of marriage itself, are dominantly strong in the world around us. Practice speaks louder than words, and the practice of premarital sex and of adultery is widespread. The most powerful argument for adultery is often simply to let the delight speak for itself.

The greatest challenge to the New Church today is this attack on conjugal love and the frightening danger that within our church conjugal love will be undermined and then lost. Outwardly, this challenge comes because of the thinking in the world around us. This challenge is more subtle than areas of attack in the past; it is not directly a doctrinal or religious attack. It is rather a life issue that can undermine both religion and doctrine.

What defenses do we have? None, unless we go directly to the Lord—in prayer to shun the things that oppose marriage and in His Word. In the Heavenly Doctrine there are teachings from the Lord of inestimable aid in protecting the conjugal—positive teachings on its priority and beauty, teachings which show that conjugal love is potentially present on every level of the heart and mind, even to the soul, in the heaven of human internals. There are also powerful truths on the nature and quality of adultery. A good can be known fully only by seeing its opposite clearly; when the qualities within an evil can be known, that evil loses some of its disguises and power. If only the affirmative sides of conjugal love are learned, then the danger is that what is so real will be turned into what is only sentimental. Then what is sentimental can so easily be twisted into what is falsely sweet; the hells love this, for false sweetness betrays real qualities.

## **The Miracle of Falling in Love**

*In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created (Genesis 5:1-2).*

*“He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’.... So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate (Matthew 19:4-6).*

The promise is made that when a young man and woman look to the Lord and pray for conjugal love and at the same time shun what is lascivious, they will be led to each other—to the discovery of the beginning of conjugal love (*Conjugal Love* 49e). There is the miracle of falling in love! And this love develops in the springtime state of betrothal.

*The mind or spirit of the one is prepared by betrothal for union with the mind or spirit of the other.... Upon love truly conjugal this order is inscribed... it ascends and descends; it ascends progressively upwards from its first heat towards the souls, with an effort to conjunction there, and this by openings of the minds continually more interior; and there is no love that more intensely labors for these openings, or which more powerfully and easily opens the interiors of the minds than conjugal love, for the soul of each intends it. But at the same*

*moments when that love is ascending towards the soul, it is descending also towards the body, and is thereby clothing itself* (Conjugal Love 302).

This marriage of the spirit, with its springtime happiness, is to take place before the marriage of the body—before the wedding. During betrothal, we are taught in the Heavenly Doctrine that “it is not permissible to be bodily conjoined” (*Conjugal Love* 305). This prohibition is made by the Lord not out of lack of compassion, but so that the chief of all loves can be established deeply in the heart—so that it may descend chastely and last eternally. There are at least two passages which speak of permissions [that is, things the Lord permits to happen, but not what He wants to have happen] in premarital states (*Conjugal Love* 460; *Arcana Coelestia* 9182), and they still allow for conjugal love to be discovered. But permissions are just that: permissions. If they are incorrectly emphasized as the genuine order, they will undermine the conjugal in the New Church. It is fidelity to the ideal that establishes conjugal love. Permissiveness to lust can destroy all hope.

## **After Marriage**

The Heavenly Doctrine speaks realistically about states after marriage—about how first love is so often lost. But it also says that the first states of marriage can be the beginning of a deeper and deeper relationship (*Conjugal Love* 58, 59). It is the proprium [or the sense that our life is our own and we can do anything we want with it] that undermines marriage, and in the Word, Divine truths are given that expose the subtle nature of the proprium to a person, and enable him to shun its devastating effects on marriage. As long as the ruling evil of selfishness is shunned, the conjugal will stay within a marriage, even though at times it may seem lost. Regeneration or spiritual rebirth, after all, has to be gone through! But, in time, the conjugal in interiors, and then the conjugal fully felt, will come to a man and woman—they will come as the permanent delight of delights and as the use of uses (cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 2039:1, 3952e, 4606:2, 3961; *Apocalypse Revealed* 359; *Conjugal Love* 68, 305).

Knowing the deceits hell uses to make adultery seem good can help conjugal love to grow. Adultery means not just sexual intercourse between a married person and someone who is not his or her spouse but also the term in its widest sense—all that is lascivious [that is, encouraging lustful sexual desire] and contrary to marriage. The devils of hell use deceit as their favorite weapon and love to appear innocent. Evil spirits know that if evil can be made to appear innocent, then the good can be enticed and led to yield to it. In many ways today adultery is made to seem innocent—as touching, moving, compellingly sweet. But the Heavenly Doctrine reveals a secret: behind adultery is not love, but hate! Adultery is an expression of hate and domination, very subtly masked. Adultery counterfeits love, while actually within it is a hate “above every hate.” The cold sphere of adultery comes from the inmost level of the fallen will (*Conjugal Love* 270de). In the revelation given through Emanuel Swedenborg, we read,

*It has been granted me to see...love [of adultery] in its essence, and it was such that within it was deadly hatred, while without it appeared like a fire from burning.... And as that fire with its delight burnt out, so by degrees the life of mutual discourse and intercourse expired, and hatred came forth, manifested first as contempt, afterwards as aversion, then as rejection... (Apocalypse Explained 991).*

## **The Lord Is with a Husband and Wife in the Conjugal**

The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that “No one can be in conjugal love unless he becomes spiritual by combat against evil loves and their false ideas, and unless he acknowledges the Lord and His Divine” (*De Conjugio* 31). What can then flow into a person, secretly and inmosty, is conjugal innocence. It is revealed that Conjugal love “is innocence itself” and also that “conjugal love is love to the Lord” (*De Conjugio* 6-7). This is because the Lord is with a husband and wife in the conjugal. What is good in each person is not really theirs, but the Lord’s in them, and this they love deeply in the other. In loving this, they love the Lord. This comes to fruition in uses, where each contributes an essential part.

As a person shuns adultery, the Lord comes to him with all the power of His glorified Divine Human. The truth is that “no one can be reformed unless he shuns adulteries as infernal and loves marriages as heavenly. In this and in no other way is hereditary evil broken and rendered milder in the offspring” (*Apocalypse Explained* 989). If adultery is so shunned in the secret chambers of the mind, then in the church, the song we sing can come true: “Within thine inmost shrine, that holy dove, the sweet pure spirit of conjugal love, shall dwell forever and increase thine innocence and peace.”