

Obtaining Conjugal Love

by the Rev. Fredrick M. Chapin

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26,27).

As the words of our text express, man does have dominion over the earth. We are created with abilities that set us apart from every other creature. We are unique *because* we can choose the loves we will be motivated by. And if we discover that we are motivated by bad loves, we can take steps to have them removed. An animal cannot do that. Also, we can know that there is a God and we can even be conjoined with Him. No animal has such capabilities.

The ability to choose our loves is the essence of our humanity. The Lord has given each one of us the capacity to embrace what we are going to enjoy in life. In fact, the character of the loves we choose determines the type of person we are. If our loves are directed toward benefiting the world around us and seeking to work toward what is good, then we are a good person. As the Writings for the New Church plainly state, “Love is the life of man.” What we love determines what we regard as delightful, and this determines how we conduct our lives.

When our loves are directed by the Lord, we discover that we have a desire to share our delights with others. Indeed, this is the nature of heavenly love: to share its joys with everyone else. As a person experiences happiness, he or she desires that others will experience that enjoyment as well. On the other hand, if pleasure comes at someone else’s expense, a charitable person will not indulge in that love. In fact, a good person will take steps to remove that desire from his or her life. The desire to have others share our good delights can come only from a reception of the Lord’s authority within us. Without the Lord’s active presence, such an approach to life would be utterly impossible.

This type of approach applies to all our relationships. We should seek to share our joys with our friends, our fellow workers, our children, and with others we come in contact with and have an influence upon. But this is *especially* true in our attitudes toward marriage. The Lord has given all of us the capability to honor and genuinely appreciate the gifts that the opposite sex can provide to us. He has created all of us to develop the discipline and character to become united with a married partner for eternity in heaven.

Everyone can be in a state of true marriage love. This is true whether or not a person is married, in a happy marriage, or even if no longer married, whatever the circumstances for the separation. A true marriage love in heaven is not dependent upon having a successful marriage on this earth. Certainly, it is the ideal to have both the husband and the wife striving to apply a genuine love from the Lord toward each other, and we are to work toward this end. However, it is possible for a person to be in a wholesome love of marriage even if he or she is not in a happy marriage.

A person is in true marriage love when he or she regards the opposite sex with respect and dignity and wishes to make others happy, especially his or her spouse. For in a true marriage, both the husband and the wife desire to share their joys with each other. And this happiness is centered upon both the husband and the wife being open to the Lord's leading.

The Writings state categorically that true marriage love is the fundamental love of all the loves of heaven and of the church. Therefore, the way in which we view marriage influences our attitudes toward our employments and all our other responsibilities. If we look to marriage in an affirmative and charitable way, we will view our other duties in the same manner. In a broader context, the way in which we regard the opposite sex largely determines the type of person we are. If we seek to respect, honor, and revere the opposite sex, that same attitude will carry over into how we conduct our lives. When we seek to treat our spouse with dignity, we will also treat others with dignity.

The only way we can truly respect and honor the opposite sex is by desiring to apply the teachings of the Word to every aspect of our lives. Complying with the teachings of the Word will give us the aspiration to make our partner happy and the wisdom to know how to do this. This is the union of good and truth in us that establishes the foundation for a sincere love of marriage.

In a true marriage, there will also be the desire for a conjunction to take place. This will go beyond just a physical desire to a wish to have the two souls join together and become one flesh. When there is true devotion in a marriage, we will be willing to allow our partner to influence us and to change us for the better. A true disciple of the Lord welcomes positive changes in his or her loves and beliefs. Instead of having our partner change for our benefit, we will want to change for his or her benefit. We will not seek to dominate our partner or have him or her conform to our selfish wants and desires. Instead, in true marriage, there is a willingness to make the changes that are needed so we are better able to make our partner happy.

These changes result from our personal relationship with the Lord, which requires that when we see evils in our lives and in our marriages, we take action to have them removed. The more we affirmatively confront the states that impede our individual spiritual growth, the stronger our marriages become. We cannot be in true marriage love unless we, as individuals, are being reborn in the Lord. Having a pure and wholesome love in marriage goes hand-in-hand with our personal acceptance of Him.

Having a happy marriage also requires that we learn from the Word what is true and good. So far as we flee from evils that adversely affect marriage, so far our marriages are purified (see *Conjugal Love* 71). This, in turn, enables us to love the spirit of our partner more than his or her body. Having a greater appreciation for our partner's character than physical attributes is another characteristic of being in true marriage love. The more we appreciate the spirit of our partner, the more our humanity will be enhanced and the more we will be in true marriage love.

When we truly love marriage, we will find ourselves in a full state of peace and tranquility. When we truly respect and love our partner and truly honor members of the opposite sex, we will have a deeper, more satisfying enjoyment than if we sought to dominate them. Our states of pleasure will be more calm and serene. We will have security, knowing that there is a trust between ourselves and our partner that cannot be broken. We can have confidence that our partner will be devoted and faithful to what is in our best interest for eternity. We will sense the beauty of having a mutual desire for doing good to each other. Our marriages on earth can be a training ground for putting others' interests before our own. The more we approach our marriages in this way, the more we will be able to recognize and experience the states of heavenly bliss that await us in the spiritual world.

Amen.

Lessons: Genesis 2:18-25, Matthew 19:1-6, *Conjugal Love* 71