

A Genuine Faith in Marriage

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The Heavenly Doctrine reveals that there is a love which is so magnificent that it exceeds all other loves. It is the fundamental love of all the loves of heaven and earth (see *Conjugal Love* 65). And into it are gathered all joys and all delights from their first to their last (see *Conjugal Love* 68). This love is called conjugal love, and it is one of God's greatest gifts to humankind.

Conjugal love is a gift from the Lord. The Lord desires to fill every marriage with this love of loves and with its blessedness and delight. He promises us that it is real and that we can receive it. We can love our partners from true marriage love and share our lives together in ever-increasing friendship, confidence, innocence, peace and joy (see *Conjugal Love* 180).

And yet, we do not automatically receive this gift from the Lord when we first marry. It is something which we must work for, something which we must learn to receive. Conjugal love is from the Lord alone. It is a heavenly love and a heavenly state. Therefore, it is founded on religion and can only be received according to the quality of religion in our married lives (see *Conjugal Love* 130). "No others come into this love and can be in it except those who approach the Lord, love the truths of the church and do its goods" (*Conjugal Love* 70).

Thus, we are commanded to build our marriages upon religion. A genuine faith in the Lord is our only guide to true marriage love. There can be no conjugal love without it.

But what is this genuine faith in the Lord? The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church defines it as looking to Him, as confidence that all good is from Him (see *True Christian Religion* 655), and as an internal acknowledgment of the truth in His Word (see *Doctrine of Faith* 13). To have this faith in marriage means to look to the Lord for enlightenment and instruction. It means to put our trust not in ourselves, not in our own preconceived notions about what marriage should be, but in the Lord and in what He teaches about marriage.

This genuine faith in the Lord can be seen in the New Testament by viewing the life of the apostle Peter. Peter represents faith (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3994:5)—faith not only in the life of every person, but also as it exists in marriage. By considering some of the major aspects of Peter's life, we will discover how essential a genuine faith is to marriage and how without it there is little hope for conjugal love.

In Matthew 16 we are told that the Lord asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter answered the Lord by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord praised Peter for his confession and said to him, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (verses 13-18).

Peter's confession is the very essence of true faith in the Lord (see *Apocalypse Explained* 820:4). It is the acknowledgment that the Lord is our Savior and that He is the origin of all that is good and true. This faith in the Lord is called the rock and foundation of the church, because no evil or falsity from hell has any power against those who hold this faith. The Heavenly Doctrine tells us

that evil and falsity dare not rise up against those who acknowledge the Lord as their Savior and live by what He teaches (see *Apocalypse Explained* 820:4).

And so it is that conjugal love descends into our married life when we confess that the Lord is the source of all goodness and happiness in our marriage. When we confess this and then turn to the Lord's Word as our basis for building and strengthening our marriage, then no evil or falsity of any kind can creep into our lives and destroy that conjugal bond. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Without an acknowledgment of the Lord, without His Word as our foundation, it is only a matter of time until our marriage spiritually dissolves. In the beginning there are many things which seem to hold the marriage together. There is external warmth, companionship, someone to talk to and share our lives with. We rely on our partner to help raise our children, to bring home money, to keep our house in order. They give us security and help sustain our life.

But all these things are natural bonds. Underneath them there may not be any real acknowledgment of the Lord, or care for one's partner, but only concern for self. We may live with our partner five, ten, or even twenty years with this selfish motivation as our basis. But if we do this, if we choose to build our marriage on faith in self rather than on the rock and firm foundation of faith in the Lord, then eventually our marriage will crumble. Inevitably, our selfish loves will one day not be satisfied with our partner, and we will be carried off, away from marriage into all sorts of insane folly—what the Heavenly Doctrine calls “the pleasures of insanity.”

This is illustrated elsewhere in the gospels by the Lord's own words to Peter when He says, “When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish” (John 21:18). Here Peter represents false faith, faith in self and not in the Lord or the teachings of His Word (see *Apocalypse Explained* 810:7). With this false faith as our guide, we may feel happy and satisfied while our marriage is young. We may feel as if we do not need the Lord or the truths of His Word. But as our marriage grows old, the love of self becomes stronger and stronger until finally it carries us off, destroying the bond that we had shared for so many years. In the literal sense, the Lord was foretelling Peter's death—that Peter would eventually be taken away against his will and crucified. So too, He warns us that without a genuine faith in Him as our foundation, our marriage will eventually be carried off and destroyed by selfishness.

Now there are few marriages on this earth which do not encounter difficulties or go through temptations. Sometimes married partners can be brought into a state of total despair as they strive to live and work together. Take arguing, for example. Most arguments come and go. But some arguments can last for days or weeks and make the couple feel as if they are sinking into a whirlpool of confusion and strife. All sorts of feelings can come up—bad feelings of alienation, contempt, jealousy, guilt, grief, and many more. But it is precisely at times such as these that the Lord is telling us to stop for a moment, to put our faith into life and focus in on what is truly important—Himself and what He has taught us. This isn't easy. In fact it is one of the hardest things there is to do. But if we can catch ourselves for even a moment and try to turn to Him, our

desperate state will begin to change for the better. And then we can start to work our way out of the hell we've put ourselves into, toward some peace.

This is illustrated in the story of Peter walking on the water to meet the Lord in Matthew chapter 14. It was a stormy night when the Lord came to the disciples' boat in the middle of the sea. The disciples were not sure who He was and were afraid. Peter called out to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." The Lord replied, "Come." Then Peter came out of the boat and walked on the water toward the Lord. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous he became afraid and started to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him (Matthew 14:24-31). In the internal sense, the storm and wind represent spiritual unpeacefulness and temptation. Peter walking on the water represents faith in life (see *Apocalypse Explained* 514:21).

In marriage, in those times of severe arguing and discord, we seem to be in a storm. We can feel as if we are being hit by wave after wave of spiritual temptation. Like a boat being tossed to and fro in the water, it may appear that we have lost control of our marriage, that we have lost the foundation and any sense of order. We can become so bewildered and confused that we no longer recognize the Lord or the power of His teachings. Like the disciples who saw the Lord and were afraid, we, too, in times like these can look at His teachings with fear. They just don't look the same any more. The mercy seems to have gone out of them. They look cold and lifeless as if they cannot help, even as the Lord appeared like a ghost to some of His disciples as He walked toward them on the sea.

And yet, here is the paradox! It is at such times that the Lord beckons our faith to come forth into life and face the storm. In marriage this can be one of the most difficult and frightening things to do. When in a heated argument, all we want to do is hold onto what is ours and what we love, even as those disciples must have been holding onto that boat in terror. But Peter did step out. And although he was afraid and began to sink, the Lord did save him.

Putting our faith into life can bring back peace. If together we can turn toward the Lord instead of toward self, turn to His Word and what it tells us is right instead of to our own feelings, the Lord can begin to lift us up out of our turmoil. It's not going to happen in a moment, but if we let Him, the Lord can work miracles within the states of our married life.

What does putting our faith into life mean? It means calling to mind certain principles which the Lord has laid out for us in marriage: the doctrine of charity—to be courteous and polite, even in an argument; the doctrine of simulations—even if you do feel cold toward your partner to simulate warmth until true warmth returns; the doctrine of order—to strive to return to some working relationship so that more damage is not done. These are just a few matters of faith that, when put into life, can begin to bring order where there was disorder, peace and friendship where there was discord.

To have genuine faith in the Lord not only means to trust in Him; it also means to go to His Word for instruction. The work *Conjugal Love* was written for us so that we can learn to avoid spiritual affliction or disaster in marriage. It points the way out of a merely natural bond to a spiritual and heavenly union, so magnificent and full of splendor that it can hardly be described.

If we ignore the teachings of this revelation and form our marriages around our own self-centered intellect, then we are like Peter when he didn't listen to or believe in the Lord when He said He would be betrayed and that Peter would deny Him. Peter wouldn't accept the Lord's words but said, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You" (Matthew 16:22). But the Lord then replied, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23).

If we are not mindful of the things of God and religion in building our marriages, then in the end we too, like Peter, will deny the Lord. If we do not listen to the teachings of the Word, we may think we understand what conjugal love is and how to create a good marriage, but we will actually be fooling ourselves. If, like Peter, we never really understand the Lord's words, we will be unprepared for the temptations ahead of us. Then, when temptation does come, and we are called upon to stand up for the ideals in marriage, instead we will deny them. When we find ourselves in marital crisis, instead of looking to the Lord, we will turn completely into ourselves and deny the Lord's authority. Like Peter, we might inwardly proclaim, "I know not the Man!" (Matthew 25:72).

After the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, Peter and the Lord were reunited once again. As they sat by a fire beside the Sea of Galilee, the Lord asked Peter a certain question three times. He asked him, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" And Peter replied, "Yes, Lord; You know I love You." Each time the Lord would answer Peter's reply by either saying, "Feed My lambs," "Tend My sheep," or "Feed My sheep" (John 21:15-17).

In the internal sense, we are told that this is the Lord bidding our faith to come forth into act (see *Apocalypse Explained* 820:6). He is asking us whether our faith in Him is real. Do we love Him? Are we willing to use His truth in life to serve others? Are we willing to work together in marriage, with the Lord as our authority and use as our goal?

This is the faith which the Lord wishes us to have. This is the faith which leads to genuine conjugal love. Acknowledgment of the Lord and the authority of His Word is the rock and firm foundation of true marriage love.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:15-18).

Amen.

Lessons: Psalm 40; John 21:1-19; *Conjugal Love* 70