



Marriage & Consent

Lesson Overview

1. BrainBuilder

What is the difference between being told what to do and choosing what to do?

2. Read

Consent is important in marriage, not only to begin with, but throughout marriage. pp. 1-3

3. Discuss

Discuss how New Church ideas about marriage are new and different. p.3

New Church Concept Pledges of Consent

That after declaration of consent pledges (gifts) ought to be given. These gifts are tokens of consent.... These pledges are like abiding visible witnesses of mutual love, and thence are also memorials of it. They are first favors, because conjugal love promises to itself everlasting favor, of which the firstfruits are those gifts. They are the gladnesses of love, for the mind is exhilarated at the sight of them, and, because the love is in them, these favors are dearer and more precious than any other gifts. See *Conjugal Love* 300

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BrainBuilder

Which would you rather?

- Someone says you have to _____.
- Someone asks whether or not you would like to _____.

(Choose a fun option, e.g. watch a movie, go to a party, receive a gift; or a not-so-fun option, e.g. clean up a mess you didn't make, politely accept a gift you don't like, stay home.)

Compare how it feels to be told to do something that you don't want to do with the freedom of being given a choice as to whether or not you would like to do it. Why is it important to *agree* or *consent* to do something? In what ways do we feel "robbed" if we are not given choices?

Read

Until the 18th century, marriages in most parts of the world were arranged. Today, marriages are still arranged in parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, and in specific groups of people, such as royalty. Arranged marriages were more focused on financial security and family status than happiness.

The most beautiful love story in the Word, the story of Isaac and Rebekah, includes the important concept of *consent*. Abraham, Isaac's father, sent a servant to relatives living far away to find a suitable wife for his son. The servant prayed for the Lord to give him a sign so he would know when he had met the right woman. As he finished praying, a young woman appeared.

"Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin.... And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up." Genesis 24:16

Rebekah willingly gave him a drink of water and drew water for his camels. This was the sign the servant had prayed for, and so he gave her gifts. She invited the servant to her home and he went with her. After he had explained why he had come, Rebekah's brother and father gave their consent to her marriage to Isaac. Their next step was to ask Rebekah,

Rebekah left to become Isaac's wife after *agreeing* or *consenting* to the marriage.

"Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." Genesis 24:58

As Rebekah arrived at Abraham's home Isaac was out in the field. When she saw him, she got down 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.

The success of anything we do is affected by how we begin. For example a person building a house needs to make a plan, choose a good location and lay a solid foundation. If this does not happen, there will probably be difficulties later, and the house may be unsafe or unpleasant to live in. This holds true in marriage relationships as well. A marriage built on a solid foundation has an easier time than one that has a weak foundation. The first step in preparing for marriage is the decision to marry. The Writings state that healthy marriages are founded on *consent*—the agreement that two people make to marry.

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

Consent is more than a person saying “yes” to a marriage proposal. The first consent sets the stage for asking and giving consent *throughout* marriage. When married partners consult each other and make joint decisions again and again, they 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.

Should a Man or a Woman Propose?

The Writings give important reasons why a man should take the lead in starting a relationship and proposing marriage. One reason is that by nature the masculine mind can objectively consider 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 shows a strong interest in a particular man he may enjoy it and respond positively. However 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 committed relationship with her.

The Writings say that part of the reason this happens is that men have a general love of the opposite sex—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 man ought to court the woman and ask her to marry him, and not the other way around. This is a consequence following his choosing whom to court. Moreover, it is also honorable and seemly for men to court women and ask them to marry them, whereas it would not be seemly for women to do so in reverse....

Men do not have any innate love for the opposite sex, and without that love, they lack an inner enjoyment of life. Consequently, to enhance their life by that love, it is incumbent on men to make appeals to women, by politely, respectfully and humbly courting them and asking them to grant that sweet addition to their lives.

The woman ought to consult her parents or guardians and then deliberate in herself before giving consent. A woman should consult her parents, because their deliberations and counsels are guided by judgment, knowledge and love. By judgment, because they are older, and...better able to judge and see similarities and differences. By knowledge, because they know the suitor and their daughter, learning what they can about the suitor and being already acquainted with their daughter, so that they draw conclusions about the two together from having a joint sight of them. By love, because to consider a daughter's prospects and look ahead to her having her own home is also in their daughter's interest and a matter of concern to them. *Conjugal Love* 297-298

The Writings encourage 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.

Discuss

1. What special meaning does *Conjugal Love* give to word "consent"?
2. What different kinds of freedom do *proposing* marriage and *accepting* marriage offer men and women?
3. What kinds of benefits would come from asking and giving consent throughout marriage?
4. How might making decisions without consulting a married partner be challenging?
5. Why does *Conjugal Love* indicate that it is best for a man (and not a woman) to propose?
6. The Writings point out that it's important for a married couple to have things in common in order to have a happy marriage. These include things such as religion, background, education, and status in society. If this is true, would the Writings support arranged marriage?
7. The book *Conjugal Love* was first published in 1768—the latter half of the eighteenth century. How might the ideas on consent in marriage have been received at a time when most people had arranged marriages?
8. Many Christians believe that "the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Corinthians 11:3). How does New Church view this idea?

Arranged Marriage

Arranged marriages were very common throughout the world until the 18th century. Typically, marriages everywhere were arranged by parents, grandparents or other relatives. Some historical exceptions are known, such as courtship and betrothal rituals during Renaissance period of Italy and Gandharva marriages in Vedic period of India. In China, arranged marriages (baoban hunyin, 包办婚姻) - sometimes called blind marriages (manghun, 盲婚) - were the norm before the mid 20th century. A marriage was a negotiation and decision between parents and other older members of two families. The boy and girl, were typically told to get married, without a right to consent, even if they had never met each other until the wedding day. Arranged marriages were the norm in Russia before the early 20th century, most of which were within the same social group. Until the first half of the 20th century, arranged marriages were common in migrant families in the United States. They were sometimes called *picture-bride marriages* among Japanese American immigrants because the bride and groom knew each other only through the exchange of photographs before the day of their marriage. These marriages among immigrants were typically arranged by parents, or relatives from the country of their origin. As immigrants settled in and melded into a new culture, arranged marriages shifted first to quasi-arranged marriages where parents or friends made introductions and the couple met before the marriage; over time, the marriages among the descendants of these immigrants shifted to autonomous marriages driven by individual's choice, dating and courtship preferences, along with an increase in interracial marriages. Similar historical dynamics are claimed in other parts of the world. Arranged marriages have declined in prosperous countries with social mobility, increasing individualism and the nuclear family; nevertheless, arranged marriages are still seen in countries of Europe and North America, among royal families, aristocrats and minority religious groups such as in placement marriage among Fundamentalist Mormon groups of the United States. In most other parts of the world, arranged marriages continue to varying degrees and increasingly in quasi-arranged form, along with autonomous marriages. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arranged_marriage