

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

There are many things that contribute to the feeling that marriage love has vanished. Different interests and habits can cause partners to draw away from each other. Having a negative attitude toward a partner can also hurt the relationship. Deeper kinds of coldness in marriage can develop when partners hold fundamentally conflicting views about religious topics such as the nature of God, what is most important in life, and how we should live. The Heavenly Doctrine offers practical steps for helping marriage love return. These steps include putting your partner first, being polite, doing favors that appeal to your partner, fulfilling household responsibilities, and doing friendly and useful activities together.

READINGS FROM THE WORD

The Heavenly Doctrine identifies specific challenges married partners may experience. What steps does it outline for overcoming these challenges?

What Causes the Feeling that Love Has Vanished?

When a friendship sours, it may be hard to identify a specific cause. Maybe you and a friend have changed and see things differently. Perhaps meeting a new friend makes you see old friends differently. Married couples may feel similar shifts in their relationships—especially during times of stress e.g. moving, starting a new job or having a baby. Over time partners may discover underlying differences between them that may lead one or both of them to feel that the love they felt for their partner has grown cold or even vanished completely. The Heavenly Doctrine identifies several reasons for this.

There are many reasons for cold states in marriage, some of them are internal, some are external, and some result from a particular situation. Their origins lie hidden deeply within a person, and they develop until they appear outwardly (see *Conjugal Love* 237).

We will take a closer look at what causes cold feelings between married partners.

How Are Religion and Marriage Connected?

Religion is a key part of marriage love. Married partners who share the same religion share a life-view and life-goals. Marriages based on religion grow as the partners put their religious ideals to work in their life. This is the *source* of their married happiness.

People were created to be able to become more and more interior beings—to be introduced or elevated nearer and nearer to a marriage of good and truth and so into truly conjugal love, to the point that they feel its state of bliss. The only means by which they can be introduced or elevated is religion. Where religion is lacking, conjugal love does not exist either; and where conjugal love does not exist, coldness develops instead (see *Conjugal Love* 238, 239).



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Turning to the Lord

From the outside, there may appear to be no difference between couples who share common religious beliefs and couples who do not. Both may seem happily married. But if we could look inside, we would see a different picture. The spiritual life of religion warms the heart of marriage. If there is no religion, marriage is a practical arrangement that benefits both partners but is cold at heart. Lack of religion is an *internal* cause of cold in marriage. It can happen in a variety of ways. Both partners might reject religion. One partner might be religious and the other not. Partners may have different religious beliefs or believe false ideas are true such as that adultery does not harm marriage (see *Conjugal Love* 238-243). Common interests unite minds, but not souls. Religious differences prevent partners from experiencing the *full* delights of marriage. Partners may live together, cooperate on the jobs that keep a house running, make decisions large and small, and even share social life and entertainment, but this is only the surface of what the Lord hopes marriage can be for a couple.

Backgrounds and Habits Affect Marriage

Partners who share the same religion will almost certainly experience challenges from differences in behaviors, attitudes, interests and tastes that are the result of growing up in different households. Over time, and especially when a person is in a more self-centered state of mind, some habits may become annoying, and one or both partners may no longer feel in love. For example one partner may be very concerned with cleanliness while the other partner places little importance on it. Things like this are *external* causes for coldness between partners. Other examples of this are competing to be right or best; one partner working hard while the other is lazy; having a large difference in ages, wealth or position (see *Conjugal Love* 246-255). Unlike *internal* cold, these *external* differences disappear after death because life on earth is different than life in heaven.

In heaven, there is no difference in partners' ages, positions in society, or levels of wealth. All there are youthful, and they remain that way to eternity. People are regarded in accordance with the useful services they render and put the value of service before status (see *Conjugal Love* 250).

Negative Attitudes May Affect Marriage

Sometimes negative thinking causes coldness between married partners. For example a person may be suspicious about what his or her spouse is thinking or telling others about the relationship. Coldness like this is called *incidental* coldness, as it is the unintended consequence of certain ways of thinking. Once a couple feels estranged, their minds may close towards each other. This distance may then start showing up in the ways partners express their affection for each other (see *Conjugal Love* 256-260).

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The Lord Has a Way Forward

No matter what challenges cause partners to feel as if they no longer love each other, the Heavenly Doctrine gives reasons for remaining married and suggests practical ways to nurture marriage so that feelings of love may eventually return. One of the first principles of being a loving person is to think about making another person happy.

The essence of love is not loving ourselves but loving others and being united to them through love. Loving is feeling the joy of someone else as joy within ourselves. Feeling our joy in others and not theirs in ourselves is loving ourselves (see *Divine Love and Wisdom* 47).

Putting your partner's joy before your own is a good first step! The Heavenly Doctrine lists additional things partners can do that hold the potential to bring a couple closer.

A married couple's qualities can be joined in time if they bend to one another's wishes, share responsibilities, treat each other kindly, refrain from unchaste thoughts and behaviors, love and care for their children, and, most importantly, do what their religion teaches (see *Conjugal Love* 228).

If partners want their marriage to work, they should behave as if they feel "in love". They should cooperate in caring for their children and doing household jobs. They should interact as friends, being polite and loving toward each other. When partners make an effort to treat each other with kindness and respect, the Lord can bless their marriage.

OPTIONAL READING

. . . although states of coldness separate the minds of married partners in the world, partners continue to live together and have children. This would not be the case if there were not states of apparent love as well, which at times simulate the warmth of genuine love. These appearances are necessary and useful. Organized societies would not hold together without them. Some conscientious persons may labor under the idea that disagreements of minds and resulting internal estrangements between them and their partner are attributable to faults in themselves, so that they are to blame, on which account they grieve in heart. But because internal differences are not in their hands to remedy, their distresses can be eased by showing apparent love and favor. Friendship may even return as a result, which carries within it conjugal love on the part of the one, if not on the part of the other (see *Conjugal Love* 271).

Simulations of conjugal love are appearances of love and friendship between partners who differ in spirit. They are done to heal differences when a spiritual person is married to a natural person. This is done by having thoughtful and polite conversations and by doing favors that appeal to their partner. If these do not affect the partner's behavior, a person can look for more ways to make more changes with the goal of preserving order in their home, continuing to help each other, and protecting their infants and children. For the words and deeds of a spiritual person are inspired by justice and judgment (see *Conjugal Love* 282).



FOCUS POINTS

We find others attractive for many reasons. We may like a person’s sense of humor, his passion for what he does, or the way she makes us feel. Many of the things we love about others are relatively superficial—they are *external*. We relate to others on this level when we do things we enjoy—for example listening to music or playing a sport. Our religious beliefs are a deeper or more *internal* part of us. We may guard our beliefs more closely than other parts of us because we care deeply about them. We want to protect them from ridicule. They are who we really are at heart.

Using these criteria, decide whether the words in the list below describe *internal* or *external* qualities of a person. Then write them on the chart.

Internal Qualities	External Qualities

energetic
outgoing
faithful
tall

smart
honest
fun-loving
polite

attractive
loves children
friendly
good fashion sense

moral
kind
positive
religious

Discuss your answers.

Sue and Bill

Sue and Bill met in college. Sue was pretty, dressed well and always looked sharp. Before college, Sue attended church and taught Sunday School. She loved kids. But away from her family, Sue slept in on Sundays and began to wonder if she really believed in God. Bill was a fun-loving guy. Although he could be a little crude at times, Sue felt she could be herself when she was with him. Sue and Bill started dating. Occasionally Bill’s swearing upset Sue. But if she said anything about it, he made fun of her. His “no worries” attitude made her feel she was being silly. Bill and Sue fell into a steady relationship. They shared many things, but religion never came up. Four years later they married. When they started their family, Sue began to dread Bill’s rude outbursts in front of the children. She had thought his swearing in college was a passing phase. Now she wondered why he hadn’t grown out of it. She began to realize she missed going to church. When she wanted to take their children to church, Bill wouldn’t hear of it. Sue began to wonder what they had in common.

Discussion

1. At what point did Sue realize that she and Bill were different in important ways?
2. What clues could have helped her realize this sooner?

Activity 1

HOMOSEXUALITY

Male and female were created to be the very image of the marriage between good and truth (*Conjugal Love* 100).

Men and women are created differently with the potential to be joined in marriage as to spirit, mind and body. This conjunction pictures the marriage between what is good and true in the Lord. People of the same sex do not have the same capability of providing the complementary qualities that reflect this marriage of good and truth.

Teachings from Scripture

The Bible makes several statements about same-sex relationships:

If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination (Leviticus 20:13; see also 18:22).

Apocalypse Explained 410:11 refers to Leviticus and describes forbidden sexual activities there as “adulteries” and forms of prostitution that represent true ideas when they have been so twisted and misapplied that they are false, and good deeds that are polluted by being motivated by evil loves. In other places the Heavenly Doctrine refers to homosexual acts as “the sin of Sodom” or “Sodom.”* The sexual expressions of this love are called “contrary to the order of nature” and “obscene” because they oppose the holiness of conjugal love.

Swedenborg saw people in the life after death who had established a love of adultery through repeatedly engaging in adultery during their lives in this world. Since all adultery corresponds to the contamination of good and truth, they were living in various hells.

Judge Not

Behind every action is an intention. Two actions that look alike on the outside may be quite different on the inside. The Heavenly Doctrine explains how we should apply the teaching to “Judge not, that you be not condemned” (Matthew 7:1).

This cannot in the least mean judging of someone's moral and civil life in the world, but judging of someone's spiritual and heavenly life. Who does not see that if people were not allowed to judge of the moral life of those dwelling with them in the world, society would collapse? But to judge what the inner mind or soul is like within, thus what a person's spiritual state is and so his fate after death—of this one is not permitted to judge, because it is known to the Lord alone. A general judgment is allowed, such as the following, “If you are in your inward qualities as you appear in your outward ones, you will be saved or condemned.” But a specific judgment—as for example to say, “You are of this or that character in your inward qualities, therefore you will be saved or condemned”—is not allowed (*Conjugal Love* 523).

* Genesis 19 tells of the men of Sodom who demand that Lot’s male guests (who are angels) come out of his locked house so they can commit a gang rape of them. This incident has given rise to the use of “Sodom” and “sodomy” to denote homosexual acts.

Discussion

1. What stands in the way of same-sex partners receiving conjugal love?
2. What kinds of love might same-sex partners experience?

MARRIAGE IN HELL?

Read and discuss the following incident.

Judy and Lisa scanned the crowded lunch room and spotted two chairs next to friends. “We’re in luck!” Threading their way around backpacks their friends saw them coming, made room for them and called out: “Hey—come sit here. We’ve a few minutes before German club!” They slid into the seats, enjoying a brief moment to chat. Several minutes later their friends rose to leave. As they stood up a commanding voice boomed behind them. “Hey Gillian, don’t sit *there*. Sit *here* with *me*.” Jake slammed his tray down next to Judy. “*Gillian. Come here!*” Gillian cowered and put her tray down next to his and muttered, “I just want to sit with *my* friends today!” Jake’s voice rose. “Look—when you’re with me, you do as *I* say. Don’t sit with those losers. They make me sick.” “You’re jealous. You can’t stand it when I talk to anyone else!” she retorted. “Watch it!” he snarled. “Don’t make me angry or *someone* might get hurt!” Judy and Lisa glanced at each other, rose and headed for the trash cans. Lisa ventured, “Wow! I’d be terrified with someone like that. She’s taking a huge risk hanging out with him.”

Discussion

1. Choose one word to describe Jake and Gillian’s relationship.
2. Do Jake and Gillian appear to have a healthy loving relationship?
3. Who does Jake seem to love? Gillian, or himself? Why might Gillian date him?
4. Why did Lisa call their relationship “risky”?

Differences Between Relationships in Heaven and Hell

True marriage relationships are built on love and respect for the Lord and others. When partners love each other more than they love themselves, or love them at least as much, marriages can grow and become happier for ever. This love forms the heart of heaven.

The devils in hell hate and dominate others and love themselves more than everyone else. They work to get their own way whenever possible (see *Conjugal Love* 262). A devil’s happiness depends on whether or not he is getting his own way. Hellish relationships are opportunities for devils to bend circumstances to their own advantage. Unlike stable and loving marriage partnerships in heaven, devils form temporary alliances with one partner after another. They are constantly attracted to new partners because they love adultery.

Discussion

1. Compare a relationship in heaven with a relationship in hell.
2. Could a devil be happy in a heavenly marriage? Why or why not?

All in hell are adulterers and they rage like furies when they perceive conjugal love. They desire to violate chaste marriages, and are in the marriage of evil and falsity (see *Last Judgment Posthumous* 346).

Activity 3

TAKE A STAND AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY

Based on an activity by Donnette Alfelt. Used by permission.

Webster's dictionary defines pornography as "the depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement."

How many magazines, websites, videos or other forms of entertainment fit this definition in today's culture? Their impact on attitudes towards marriage is obvious. If we care, we are called to do something in response to this tragic situation. We can start by looking at the story of the starfish.

The Starfish

Adapted from *The Star Thrower* by Loren Eiseley

Once upon a time an old man shuffled along a beach. Looking ahead, he observed a figure darting back and forth between sand and sea like a dancer. As he got closer he saw that it was a young man who was not dancing, but reaching his hand down to the sand, picking up an object and throwing it into the ocean. The old man called out, "Good morning! What are you doing?" The young man paused and replied, "Throwing starfish in the ocean." "Why are you doing this?" the old man asked. "The sun is up and the tide is going out. And if I don't throw them in they will die." "But young man, don't you realize that there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it. You can't possibly make a difference!" The young man listened politely as he bent down to pick up another starfish. He launched it into the sea, past the breaking waves and said—"It made a difference to that one."

However insignificant our efforts against pornography may seem, they can make a difference. A difference to one group, to one family, to one marriage, to one child, to one friend, to one person (including ourselves), to one conversation, *etc.*

Discussion

1. Why is pornography dangerous?
2. In what ways could pornography affect the way a person views his or her body?
3. In terms of a person's spiritual life, how much difference is there between sexual fantasy and action?
4. How might looking at pornography affect your present relationships with the opposite sex, and your future marriage and happiness?
5. What steps can you take to protect yourself from pornography?



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 doing 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

A GENUINE FAITH IN MARRIAGE

A Sermon by the Rev. Grant R. Schnarr

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).

Conjugal Love is Founded on Religion

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 the Lord Marriages Spiritually Dissolve

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.

Most Marriages Encounter Difficulties

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

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