

THE MARRIAGE PLEDGE



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

The transition to married life is marked with a wedding ceremony and celebration with family and friends. Couples marrying in the New Church hope that they will continue to be husband and wife in heaven forever. The family and friend-filled activities during the wedding reception celebrate the joys of marriage love. After the wedding couples experience changes in their relationship. These changes continue throughout life. The work of building the marriage through shared decision-making and useful activities, and protecting marriage from hurtful influences takes effort. Walking through life with another person provides opportunities to grow spiritually both as individuals and as a couple.

READINGS FROM THE WORD

A wedding is an important symbol. The Lord recommends that couples first live together as husband and wife after a wedding and gives significant reasons for this. The Heavenly Doctrine outlines some elements to be included in a wedding. What are they?

In the Presence of the Lord

A wedding ceremony sets couple on a shared journey of life as husband and wife. It is often among the happiest and most emotionally filled days of a person's life.

The Heavenly Doctrine outlines the essential elements of a wedding. Since a wedding is a sacred commitment it should be made in the presence of the Lord. This is because:

Marriage is spiritual and holy. It descends from the heavenly marriage of good loves and true ideas. The details of marriage correspond to the Divine marriage of the Lord and the church. And so marriages come from the Lord Himself and depend on the state of the church with the each of the partners (see *Conjugal Love* 308).

An officiating minister represents the Lord's presence with the couple. Witnesses (family and friends) help a couple share the joy of their wedding day and support the couple as they begin married life. Witnesses are important during the wedding and also during the signing of the marriage certificate. (The certificate is a legal contract that establishes the rights, responsibilities and protections of married partners under civil law. The time and place this certificate is signed varies and depends on local laws.)

A New Church Wedding Service

A New Church wedding service usually begins with a minister opening the Word. This act symbolizes inviting the Lord's presence. The couple then process to the front of the church and listen as passages from the Word are read. Each partner answers questions that express his or her consent to be married and vows or promises to love,



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honor, comfort, and cherish their partner exclusively. The minister then dedicates the wedding rings, and says—“May these rings be a sign and token of love truly conjugal”—or something similar. The bridegroom places a ring on the bride’s finger, and the bride places a ring on the bridegroom’s finger. These rings can be life-long reminders of the marriage covenant. The couple joins right hands and the minister lays his right hand on their hands and says: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pronounce you husband and wife. What God has joined together, let no one put asunder.” After a kiss, the couple and the wedding guests kneel and say the Lord’s Prayer. The minister then blesses the couple and shares thoughts about marriage and the path ahead. This is called a “charge”. Shortly afterwards the couple returns down the aisle to sound of joyful music and the smiles of family and friends.

Celebrate!

The Heavenly Doctrine says that a wedding should be followed by a celebration.

The reason is that the love which the bride and bridegroom felt before the wedding descends into their hearts and radiates from there throughout their bodies, so that they begin to feel the delights of being married.... Their minds are filled with festive thoughts and it is useful for the festive feelings of their minds to be shared by others (see *Conjugal Love* 309).

The reception or party can help introduce the couple into the joys of married love! For many couples the reception is followed by a honeymoon. And so the marriage of the spirit that takes place during the betrothal period becomes a full marriage of mind and body after the wedding.

States of Marriage

For couples who follow the ideas described above so many things are new after a wedding! Men and women go through significant changes in the early days of marriage. Experiences vary—and no two people experience these changes in quite the same way. To the extent that the couple seeks to be led by the Lord, the minds of a husband and wife gradually open up towards each another; the woman becomes more and more a wife, and the man, more and more a husband. Partners who choose to think and act from spiritual intention become more and more beautiful in spirit (see *Conjugal Love* 192).

Marriage love strengthens as partners honor their vows with their thoughts and actions. One example of this would be each partner speaking well of the other—whether talking directly to the partner, or about the partner in front of others. Partners should also try to think lovingly about each other when they see things differently or disagree. Marriages take care commitment and regular effort in order to grow and become strong.

Protecting Marriage

The New Church teaches that a wedding symbolizes the connection of the couple’s spirits as well as their lives on earth. This means that even if one partner dies, the couple remain

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married in spirit. Partners meet again after death, and if they truly love each other, their spirits will remain married to eternity.

Ancient fairytales picture beautiful lasting marriages—often after good has triumphed over evil. Ugly fairytale characters represent evil forces trying to entrap all who allow themselves to dwell on disorderly thoughts, to commit harmful actions—even briefly—or are willing to let this happen. The Heavenly Doctrine warns of similar unseen dangers threatening marriages today.

After the initial stages of marriage, the state before betrothal sometimes returns, and in that state a person may start to forget the marriage covenant they entered into. In fact it may be totally wiped out if someone who has no respect for marriage encourages them to behave in ways that destroy the marriage covenant, and with it the shared trust and confidence the partners have in each other (see *Conjugal Love* 307).

All married people experience temptations that attack their marriage commitments—even if they are married to someone with whom they will eventually spend eternity. The *greatest* danger to a conjugal marriage of minds is adultery—when one partner has sex with someone outside of the marriage. Adultery—especially adultery that occurs after a pre-meditated decision—is so destructive that it can completely destroy married love.

When opposite acts upon opposite, one destroys the other to the last spark of its life. This is what happens with conjugal love when a married man deliberately and thus purposefully commits adultery (see *Conjugal Love* 255).

Zeal and Jealously

People are afraid of losing what they love. They experience great pain if they fear that this may happen. This is also true of conjugal love. The fear and anguish that protect marriage are called zeal and jealousy. Sometimes people think of jealousy as a fault, but...

...zeal is a fear of losing eternal happiness, and not a person's happiness, but their partner's as well. It is also a protection against adultery. It is a just fear of losing eternal happiness, both for the person and their partner, from the fact that the blessedness of their souls, the happiness of their minds, the delight of their breasts, and the pleasure of their bodies comes from conjugal love. And because these continue for them to eternity, it is a fear for the couple's eternal happiness. Such a zeal is a just protection against adulterous affairs. On that account it is like a fire blazing out against any encroachment and protecting itself against it. It is apparent from this that anyone who loves his partner tenderly is also jealous—justly and soundly so... (see *Conjugal Love* 371).

With vigilance and care married partners can experience the profound and lasting happiness that a marriage of conjugal love offers.



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OPTIONAL READING

All the delights of marriage were provided from the beginning for people who are in true married love, because in the Lord there is an infinity of all blessings. He Himself is Divine Love, and the essence of love is to will to communicate all its goods to another whom it loves (*Conjugal Love* 335:2).



FOCUS POINTS

1. In what ways might the type of wedding ceremony you choose (civil or religious) affect your commitment as a couple?
2. What role does the Lord indicate witnesses have at a wedding?
3. In what ways can a legal marriage certificate help protect a marriage? (Think of the implications for children, inheritance, difficult times in relationships.)
4. In what situations might a person feel a marriage certificate to be limiting or restrictive? Is this sense of being restricted a bad thing?
5. How might wearing a wedding ring help a person's marriage?
6. Why does the Lord indicate that wedding celebrations or receptions are important?
7. What has the Lord told us has the power to completely destroy marriage?
8. How can knowing about threats to marriage help to protect marriage?

COMMITMENT. MORE THAN A BEAUTIFUL DAY

Based on ideas by Donnette Alfelt

Weddings are one of life's most special days. Couples plan intensively and save money for years to enjoy the wedding of their dreams. Many people use online services to track their wedding progress for everything from finding a location for the event to purchasing wedding favors for guests. At the touch of a button sites connect couples with companies servicing all aspects of weddings.

In 2010, the *average* worldwide cost of a wedding was approximately US\$20,000. This is higher than the cost of many cars. It is as much as many young adults earn in six months to a year, and it is more than most people will spend on any single event for their entire lives.

Most wedding plans involve making choices—deciding what is most important and using this to prioritize spending. The table below lists the kinds of things a couple may consider when planning a traditional wedding. Rank the following list in order of importance *to you* as if you were planning your wedding.

Planning My Wedding

Wedding dress		Vows		Flowers
Music		Budgeting		Family
Including friends		Invitations		A fantastic party
Wedding cake		Hairstyling		Great photos
Making plans for life afterwards		The setting		Honeymoon
Bridesmaids dresses		Planning with your partner		Your choice:

Discuss your choices. Remember there are no right and wrong answers!

1. Which items in the chart above can potentially contribute to happy married life as well the dreams for your wedding day?
2. Which items will make a difference to your wedding day, but will probably not affect your future married happiness?
3. When the ceremony and party are the main focus, the relationship and marriage itself risk being neglected or ignored. When this happens, there may be a big let down as life bets back to “normal.” What might you do to prevent this?

“Having a husband doesn't mean you are married any more than having a piano means you are a musician.” To become a musician requires learning, sacrifice and practice. So does marriage. A happy fulfilling marriage requires day by day commitment and effort long after the ceremony. The happiness of a good marriage with a faithful loving life partner far exceeds the joy of the wedding day.”

Donnette Alfelt

Activity 2

MAKE A FRIENDSHIP BRACELET OR ANKLET



Marriage is a three-way covenant between the Lord and a husband and wife. Make a braided friendship bracelet or anklet using gold embroidery thread to represent the Lord, red embroidery thread to represent a wife, and white embroidery thread to represent a husband.

Materials:

Gold, Red, and White embroidery thread

Safety pin

Scissors

Ruler

Directions:

1. Measure and cut one 24 inch (60 cm) piece of each color of thread.
2. Lay the strands out so that they line up together.
3. Fold the strands in half and tie a knot at the folded end to creating a loop of thread above the knot (fig. 1).



4. Use the safety pin to secure the loop of thread to something that will hold it still, such as the knee of a pant leg.
5. Now separate the thread by color – you should have 6 strands, 2 strands of each color (fig. 1).
6. Begin with the thread on the **left**. Cross it over the thread in the **middle**. Now cross the thread on the **right** over the thread in the **middle**. Continue this pattern, keeping the threads tight against each other (fig. 2).



7. As you reach the end of the thread, tie the threads together into a knot to finish the bracelet or anklet.

SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

The readings in the following pages may be used separately as a lesson on separation and divorce.

Many marriages end in divorce. Around the world newer laws have tended to make getting a divorce easier. Some laws provide a merciful escape from dangerous relationships. “No fault” divorce laws may also allow couples to divorce simply because they no longer feel in love, decide they are “incompatible” or want to go their own ways. How do these laws relate to what the New Church teaches about divorce?

Three Levels of Truth

The Heavenly Doctrine suggests that actions can be ruled by three levels of truth: civil truth, moral truth and spiritual truth.

Civil truths relate to judgment and government—in general to what is just and fair. Moral truths relate things having to do with social relations—in general to what is honest and right, and to virtues. But spiritual truths relate to things to do with heaven and the Church, and in general to the good of love and the truth of faith (see *Heaven and Hell* 468).

Marriage is both a *spiritual* covenant between two people and the Lord, and a *civil* union in the eyes of the law. The spiritual bonds of the covenant are invisible. They are extremely powerful and important to some people, vague to others, and completely irrelevant to still others. The civil laws that govern this union are relatively fixed, recognized and enforceable by law courts and other civil authorities.

Civil marriage laws have to do with property ownership, children, *etc.* Civil laws vary depending on where you live. What is legal in one place may be illegal somewhere else. Moral and spiritual choices are made within the framework of civil laws. They are based on what the Word teaches and what a person’s conscience allows.

Divorce

An act or actions of sexual immorality involving a married person (such as adultery—sexual intercourse between at least one married person and another person, married or not) is a *spiritual* reason for divorce for the other spouse:

It has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorcement.’ (see Deuteronomy 24:1) I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; *and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery (Matthew 5:32).

* The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that this sentence refers to a person marrying a person who has divorced for reasons that are not permitted in the Word. It also explains why this is a spiritual reason for divorce:

Promiscuity [by a married person] is the one only cause of divorce because it is diametrically opposite to the life of conjugal love and destroys it even to the point of extermination (*Conjugal Love* 468).

In explaining why adultery destroys marriage, the Lord has given us the following:

It can be seen from rational light that marriages are holy and adulteries profane; and thus that marriages and adulteries are diametrically opposed to each other, and that when opposite acts upon opposite, the one destroys the other to the last spark of its life (*Conjugal Love* 255).

So what happens if a couple divorces? In the eyes of civil law, the marriage is dissolved. But if the divorce occurred for a cause that is not *spiritually* allowable under the law of the Lord, the

Activity 3 Cont.

SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

couple remains spiritually married. As the Lord says in Matthew: What God has joined together let not man separate (Matthew 19:6). The Lord encourages people to remain in their marriages if at all possible. *Conjugal Love* powerfully states:

The principle that marriages once contracted are to continue on to the end of life in the world is based on Divine law...which says that it is not lawful to divorce a wife and marry another excepting on the grounds of promiscuity. It is a matter of rational law, because rational law is founded on spiritual law, since the Divine law and rational law are the same. In the light of the one and the other together, or by considering the rational law in the light of the Divine law, it may appear to a great number of people what monstrous and destructive ruinations of society and dissolutions of marriages would result if divorcings of wives were at the good pleasure of husbands, prior to death (*Conjugal Love* 276).

So what choices are there if a marriage is struggling, but there are no spiritual grounds for divorce?

Separation

The Heavenly Doctrine says that partners should remain married but may live separately. During the separation the couple should remain faithful to their marriage vows and continue to behave as if they are married.

Reasons Marriages Experience Difficulty

The Heavenly Doctrine outlines factors that cause or contribute to problems between married partners. The most deep-seated of these factors relates to the importance both partners place on religion. Problems may surface if neither partner cares about religion; when one partner cares about religion but the other does not; or when partners have different religious beliefs. Different kinds of problems can appear if partners undermine each other by treating a partner as a rival; if partners have grown up under extremely different circumstances and have very different backgrounds; or if partners are of significantly different ages. *Conjugal Love* 234-260 gives other examples as well.

Judge Not

Divorce hurts. When people hurt they may talk about what happened, and express their understanding of who is to blame. But we can never really know what happened in a relationship and what another person holds in his or her mind or heart. When the Lord was in the world He set a beautiful example for us to follow. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who was caught in the act of adultery to Him. They intended to stone her to death, which the law allowed. He simply said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7). The crowd gradually melted away.

The Heavenly Doctrine explains how little we know about another person's spiritual life.

A person can also appear to be evil and yet may have good within. For these reasons a person is never allowed to judge the nature of another person's spiritual life. The Lord alone knows this. But a person is allowed to judge the nature of another person's life, private and public, since this is of importance to society (see *Arcana Coelestia* 2284:3).

Rather than judging, we are asked to examine our own hearts and shun evils we find there.

*Reading Separation and Divorce is suggested in preparation for this topic.

It is not unusual for a person to marry again after suffering the loss of their partner from death or divorce. What does the New Church teach about this?

After the Death of a Partner

When a partner dies, the living spouse may remarry. The Heavenly Doctrine says that a person's interest in remarrying is influenced by what their first marriage was like.

The nearer the previous conjugal love approximated true conjugal love, the less a person inclines to remarry; but the more removed the previous love is from truly conjugal love, the inclination towards remarriage is usually more present (see *Conjugal Love* 318).

Someone who experiences a close marriage bond may choose not to remarry but to wait to be reunited with his or her partner after death. The death of one partner is only a temporary separation. Spouses meet after death regardless of whether one of them has remarried.

Heavenly Doctrine suggests that marrying again could be helpful in certain situations, for example, if small children need a mother or father, a person wants more children, has a job that prevents focus on family and home, needs help with their job or feels lonely (see *Conjugal Love* 319). These practical considerations stand apart from a person's experience of conjugal love with their deceased partner. A person weighs many factors when deciding whether to remarry.

After Divorce

Under civil law, people who are divorced may remarry regardless of the reason they divorced. Spiritual law does not always agree with this. Under spiritual law a person may freely remarry if he or she divorced for reasons supported by the Word. In other words, a person may remarry after divorce only if his or her *spiritual* marriage has ended as well as his or her civil marriage. (Spiritual reasons for divorce are given in *Separation and Divorce* with this lesson.)

A New Church minister may or may not be willing to officiate at a wedding ceremony after a person has divorced. The decision will depend on his understanding of the circumstances of the divorce, *e.g.* whether a person wishing to remarry committed adultery, knew about New Church teachings during their first marriage or divorce, *etc.*

It is not uncommon for people to wonder why there are clear and limited rules about when divorce allows a person to remarry in the New Church and when it does not. People might ask, "If a person was really unhappy in a previous marriage, why can't he or she try again with a new partner?" From this perspective it may not seem fair that an individual is not free to remarry in the church. The clear and limited reasons the Lord gives for when a person can divorce and remarry are part of the Lord's loving and wise support of all marriages—even though a person going through an unhappy time in his or her marriage may not sense this as loving and wise support.

Situations involving marriage after divorce are often complicated and vary a great deal. Your pastor can help answer specific questions you may have about this.



Ideas for Journal Entries *(choose one)*

Use one of these journal ideas to help you develop a deeper understanding of marriage:

- What special images, ideas and memories spring to your mind when you think marriage?
- What steps can you take to prepare for future marriage today?

For Reflection

- We are deeply affected by our relationships with others. Knowing people who are suffering in difficult relationships can profoundly shape the way we view our own future relationships. How can we use hard experiences to change our future?
- How do you picture marriage after death? Does your picture of marriage change when you think the relationship between two people on earth and two people after death?

A Prayer on Looking Towards Marriage

Lord God Jesus Christ,
I pray that You will 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 in this life or the next.
Amen.

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Further Reading

THE LIFE WHICH LASTS FOREVER

A Sermon by the Rev. Peter M. Buss, Jr.

Sometimes our thoughts about the spiritual world are closer than at other times. The reality of that world comes home to us when someone we know enters into it—into the life which lasts forever.

It is a comfort to know about the next life: that death is not the end, but a new beginning; that Lord brings each person to life again in His eternal kingdom, the spiritual world; that He awakens the body of the spirit so that we can continue life there. It really is a continuation of life: we continue to be the same people; we meet up with people we know; and, what is particularly touching, husbands and wives who had been separated by death are reunited. This is a beautiful picture, and it can provide tremendous reassurance.

In fact, the whole purpose of our life here on earth is to prepare for the other world—for the life which lasts forever. The Lord has lots to say about this preparation. In the Gospel of Matthew, He said the following familiar words:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (6:19-21).

We can see here the call to rise above our worldly concerns and to recognize the reality of eternal life. There is a teaching which takes these words one step further by saying, “What more ought anyone to have at heart than his life which lasts forever?” (*Arcana Coelestia* 794). It goes on to say, “Nothing is of greater importance to a person than knowing what is true.” We need to know the truth about the spiritual world, about the life which leads there, and about our responsibility to prepare ourselves for it.

Keeping the Spiritual World in Mind

Life is so short. My grandfather said to me once, from his advanced perspective, “You’ll wake up in a few days and realize that twenty-five years have passed.” There is amazing truth in these words. The Lord taught much the same thing in the Psalms, “As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.” (Psalm 103:15-16) Life here on earth, no matter how important it is, is like grass or a flower of the field. The wind passes over it, and it is gone. Sooner or later it will be our turn to cross over to that world we know exists and experience it for ourselves.

How often do we reflect about or picture ourselves dying and entering into the spiritual world? It’s one thing to know about heaven and hell objectively, but it’s quite another to picture ourselves there. People don’t generally like to think of their own mortality. After all, most of us have pressing concerns which occupy our minds—good concerns. Some of us have families we could not imagine being separated from. Many of us have jobs which absorb our energy and make us feel useful at the same time. We often think about things we would like to do in the future, such as trips we would like to take when we’re retired or when our children are grown.

But even these concerns are temporary, or at best transitional, when considered next to eternal life. And so the Lord asks us to prepare for that life as we go about our present concerns. He asks us to do this in the following words: “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:17-18).

Eternal life is far more substantial than earthly life is. It is far more important to prepare for that life, by fearing or honoring the Lord, by keeping His covenant, and by obeying His commandments. When we keep these principles and the reality of the spiritual world in mind, then we are much more likely to prepare for our eternal life, instead of ignoring it.

The Benefits of Thinking about Eternal Life

Teachings like these are not just warnings or reminders. They describe a whole way of thinking and an attitude about spiritual life which is very healthy. Keeping the reality of the spiritual world alive in our minds is a tremendous asset. I would like to mention three areas in which we can see the benefits.

1. We can value the good things in our lives

It reminds us to value the good things in our lives. One way to see this is in our relationships. With an idea of eternal life, we know that some of our relationships will continue after death. Certainly if we know someone who has died, we can anticipate the time when we will meet him or her again, and pick up where we left off with joy.

In another way, we can value our current relationships more. The easiest way to see this is in the context of marriage. Most of us enter into marriage hoping that it will last forever—and it will if we work at it. If we hold onto that perspective of eternity, then we may value our spouse more and not take him or her for granted. The importance of eternity in relation to marriage is emphasized in the Word. For angels, if the idea of eternity is taken away, they feel flat and deeply depressed. The feeling that a relationship will not stop getting better, that it will never end, is essential. Otherwise why work at it? (see *Conjugal Love* 216a)

Another gift we can value is children. The Lord gives parents the privilege of preparing their children, of equipping them with tools which will help them prepare themselves for heaven. The end of His creation is a heaven from the human race (see *Divine Providence* 27). It is a wonderful thing to realize that He allows us to participate in His system. It can inspire us to recognize our responsibility to do all we can for our children to help them on their way—not just for life in this world, but for life in heaven to eternity.

Other things we may be reminded to value are the church and the Word, which the church has been given. The Word teaches us about the life that leads to heaven, and the church supports us in living that life. With a keen sense of our own mortality, we may feel called by the Lord to pay greater attention to these treasures which He has given us.

2. We can gain perspective when bad things happen to us

The second benefit of keeping the reality of spiritual world in mind is that it gives us perspective when bad things happen. In the work, *Divine Providence*, the Lord teaches us a principle of His government: “The Divine Providence regards eternal things, and not temporal things except so far as they accord with eternal things” (heading to nos. 214-220). The thrust of this chapter is to show that the Lord is constantly working for our eternal happiness. He does not ignore our present

concerns, but, if there is a choice, He will always choose our eternal happiness over our present happiness.

For example, there are plenty of car accidents involving drunk drivers. In most cases innocent people get hurt through no fault of their own. Does that mean the Lord doesn't care about these people? Of course not. But His eternal end is that all people may be free to go to heaven. He has to permit people to be selfish and cruel, and even allow them to cause others to suffer, if they are going to have the freedom to do the opposite: to turn to Him, to respond to His call, and to return the love He offers from freedom.

Knowing this principle of the Lord's government—that He looks out for our eternal welfare over our short term happiness—helps to give us perspective. When bad things happen to us or to anyone else we can see that the Lord still cares. Our job, from day one of our lives to the end, is to cooperate with the Lord—to let Him prepare us for heaven. His system is set up for that goal—always emphasizing the eternal over the temporary.

3. It helps us when evil delights tempt us

It helps us when evil delights tempt us. The last benefit I want to mention comes in the form of a negative. It may be easier to see the benefit of having an eternal perspective by seeing what it's like not to have one. When people fail to think about or care about eternal life they are actually "laying up for themselves treasures on earth." Such a person is carried away by hell. They are led to think about themselves and occupy their minds with what will make them happy now, in this world.

We know that all people are born with evil hereditary tendencies. What this means is that all people feel pleasure sometimes when they shouldn't—an insane hellish pleasure, but pleasure nonetheless. The hells can use these delights to be tremendously persuasive. They use our pleasures to lure us.

Sometimes the hells don't have to try very hard, because the delights arising from putting ourselves first are so powerful. There is a teaching in Heaven and Hell which says that hellish pleasures are felt more forcefully than heavenly ones in this world (401). If we think about it, that's true. It feels good to drink too much. It gives us a feeling of power to make ourselves look good at the expense of someone else. There is satisfaction in having the biggest house and the best clothes to wear. Our senses are so alive, and the worldly pleasures which arise from them are strong.

But heavenly delights are much less forceful in this world. They are there, but internal. Heaven and Hell calls them "a blessedness that is hardly perceptible, because it is hidden away in the interiors" (401). Of course it feels nice to do good things. There is satisfaction in doing our jobs well. The trouble is, it often feels like hard work while we are doing it. The rewards are secondary, and we have to pay attention to see them. They're there, but less forceful in this world.

Fortunately, things change in the next life. Selfishness is rewarded not with pleasure but with punishment or frustration, while charity brings delight itself. But while we are in this world, we need to be aware. The hells are much less persuasive when we are paying attention. When we get caught up in acquiring stuff in the world and in being well off, it is important to remember the Lord's words:

I say to you, do not worry about your life: what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?...But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:25, 33)

The truth is, heavenly happiness is the only real happiness. “A person who is led by the Lord is in freedom itself, and thus in delight and bliss itself” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6325). Other states which the Lord promises are states of peace, blessedness and happiness—all of which improve to eternity. Reminding ourselves of the reality of the spiritual world can help us forego some of the transitory pleasures offered to us by hell.

Keeping Eternal Life in Mind Helps Us Prepare for It

So we return to the teachings we began with. “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” the Lord says (Matthew 6:20). In other words, He asks that we keep the spiritual world in mind as we go about our lives, for then our hearts will be there also. He also asks us to remember that our days are numbered: “As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” (Psalm 103:15-16).

Finally, He asks that we remember our spiritual responsibility to prepare for His kingdom and obey it’s laws, for we “ought to know what the laws of the kingdom are, so that we can live happily to eternity” (Spiritual Experiences 2331). If we cooperate, then we can be assured of happiness, for “the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:17-18).

So “what more ought anyone to have at heart than his life which lasts forever?” (*Arcana Coelestia* 794). “Wherefore let him who wishes to be eternally happy know and believe that he will live after death. Let him think of this and keep it in mind, for it is the truth” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8939:3).

Amen.

Lessons: Psalm 103: 1-19; Matthew 6:19-34; *Arcana Coelestia* 794