

THE IDEAL OF MARRIAGE TO ETERNITY

Rev. Douglas M. Taylor

“For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:30).

For centuries there has been but one standard interpretation of this teaching given by the Lord. It has been regarded as an unassailable proof that the Lord taught that there is no such thing as a married couple in heaven, that angels are not characterized or distinguished by sexes, and that consequently all marriages are dissolved at death and are never to be resumed in the other life. This is the way that people have thought when thinking from the doctrine of their church, though many, when thinking from common perception or common sense, have expressed belief in the idea that they will be reunited with their married partners. When thinking in this way, they invariably, and rightly, think of the partner as remaining of the same gender as he or she was while on earth. The notion that men in the other life are anything else but men, or women anything else but women, mercifully does not then enter their heads.

It is good that this is so—that common perception prevails over the common doctrine—because few things destroy a marriage of love truly conjugal more readily than does the notion that there is to be no marriage lasting into eternity. The teaching on this point ought to be clear, and indeed it is; for we are definitely taught that unless there is in the mind an idea of what is eternal in marriage, that is, an eternal companionship, the woman becomes less than a wife, and the man something less than a husband, and conjugal love perishes (see *Spiritual Experiences* 6110:16, *Conjugal Love* 216).

Yet the error of supposing that there are no married partners in heaven is understandable. If once it is supposed, as is often done, that a human being is a human being from his body rather than from his mind or spirit, then it is fatally easy to fall further into the error of thinking that, with bodily differences erased by death, those in the other world will be neither male nor female. If, further, it is thought that the married state is something less than perfect, a kind of natural permission for the sake of the propagation of the human race on earth—if, in other words, marriage is held to be inferior to the state of celibacy, as has been taught for centuries and is still being taught—then it is only to be expected that people believe that angels would certainly not have anything to do with marriage. Such false and twisted ideas concerning life’s most precious jewel, a marriage of love truly conjugal, act like a pair of distorting spectacles before the eyes of many who read in the Word that the Lord said: “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.” Such false assumptions distort the vision of many readers of these words, causing them to see things there that were never written.

For example, it is not said there, nor anywhere else in the Word, that there are no married partners in heaven. It is said that after death they are like “angels of God in heaven.” It is not said that the angels are a race apart from the human race, or that they live in a state of celibacy. The text does not say that there is no such thing as the state of marriage in the other life. For all joys from first to last, we are frequently taught and reminded in the Heavenly Doctrine for the

New Church, are gathered into conjugal love; it is the container of all other delights. So it is that all in heaven are in the married state, and that heaven is actually compared to a marriage in the Word (see Matthew 22:2).

If married couples, while living together on earth, have begun to receive from the Lord a spiritual love of marriage, *i.e.* conjugal love, and if they have continued steadfastly in it and in the Lord's commandments until the end of their days on earth, then their marriage will be resumed in the other world. They enter into heaven married. It is not necessary for them to marry or be given in marriage, for they are like angels of God in heaven. But if a married couple, believing in the eternity of marriage and having love truly conjugal as their ideal, nevertheless find in the other life that there is a hitherto unsuspected internal dissimilarity that separates them, they will each be provided with a suitable partner with whom they may live as married partners in heaven. But note: it is not that they married or were given in marriage in heaven. The suitable partner is provided on the basis of the person's ruling love, on the basis of the love that he or she had established while on earth. The partner has to be suitable to our degree of regeneration, for regeneration and acquiring conjugal love walk hand in hand. So it is our life on earth that determines the nature and quality of our married state in the other life. The marriage takes place before we come into heaven or it does not take place at all.

This leads us to consider another kind of marriage that is also to be understood by the Lord's words on this occasion. What the Lord was referring to inmosty was the marriage that has to take place in every human mind: the marriage or wedding of the will to the understanding. The mind consists of two parts, the will or affectional side and the understanding or thinking side. The will is made up of affections or feelings, while the understanding is made up of thoughts and reasonings. The whole effort of our life on earth should be to make these two—the will side of the mind and the understanding—to act as one, to be no longer two but one flesh. This is done when we act according to what we believe and understand to be good and true. The understanding is first instructed in what is good and true, and then begins the struggle to bring the will into line with this new vision of heavenly life. What the understanding sees as the true and good way of life, the will must learn to love and live. Or, as the Heavenly Doctrine expresses it, the *doctrine of life* in the understanding must become the *life of doctrine* in the will. In this way, when every deed matches our creed, our mind is united and at peace. One part is no longer battling with the other; the will and understanding work together in conjunction. They are wedded together, married to eternity.

It was this kind of marriage to which the Lord was primarily referring when He said that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.” This marriage of good and truth, of will and understanding, of deed and creed, must take place in this life or it will never take place. In the resurrection it will be too late. After death, the will and the understanding do not marry nor are they given in marriage. They must be united in this life.

But why didn't the Lord explain this to the Sadducees when they tried to trap Him with their question about marriage in the afterlife? Why did the Lord not explain plainly that there is certainly a heavenly marriage, though it differs from an earthly one? Could He not have given (at that time) the unambiguous explanation He has now given in the Heavenly Doctrine?

No. That would have been worse than useless. The Lord in His infinite wisdom and mercy could perceive that humankind was incapable at that time of seeing such interior truths. Even the disciples, who were allowed to see more than the multitudes, were unable to see the heavenly meaning of the parable of the sower and needed to have it explained to them (see Luke 8:9). There were many things that they could not bear, including the doctrine about the spiritual marriage of good and truth and the idea of a happy marriage to eternity. This was simply over the heads of the disciples.

Still less could the Sadducees have grasped even an introductory idea of a spiritual marriage. They were renowned for their complete denial of the afterlife. Concerning the nature of such people, we read: "When a person is such that he does not believe that he will live after death, he also disbelieves that there is anything internal which is spiritual and celestial; and such are those who live in mere lusts, because they live a mere life of the body and of the world..." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1201). These Sadducees were like that, and because their idea of marriage was restricted to the plane of the body, the concept of conjugal love—a love pure and clean above any other love of which humankind is capable—the concept of a spiritual kind of marriage, was quite beyond them. It was better, then, to let them think that there was no marriage in heaven than to have them defile the idea of a heavenly marriage with their bodily ideas. For it is certain that there is no such thing in heaven as the kind of marriage the Sadducees had in mind. There is no such thing in heaven as marriage simply and solely for the sake of the propagation of physical offspring. The Lord's words were literally true when applied to the Sadducees' concept of marriage, and that is another reason for His speaking in the way He did.

It should not be supposed from this, however, that in the other world the inhabitants are bodiless minds without shape or form. There is a spiritual body as well as a natural body, and when the natural body is put off by death, we live in the spiritual body, which is an exact replica of the mind. A beautiful mind is represented or manifested by a beautiful spiritual body, a masculine mind being manifested in a male spiritual body, a feminine mind in a female spiritual body. So it is that in the heavens the conjunction of minds resulting from the conjunction of good and truth, also descends into the body, the spiritual body. The only difference is that there is no propagation of physical offspring, but instead the propagation of spiritual offspring, that is, of new affections and delights belonging to good and truth.

These and many other detailed teachings about marriages in heaven are given in the Heavenly Doctrine, and it is of the utmost importance for the men and women of the New Church to understand these teachings so that they can use them, because it is promised that to the New Church will be restored that precious jewel of life, conjugal love. But this is not attained simply by being a member of a church organization. Conjugal love is given by the Lord according to His laws, according to His way of operation. It is received by humankind only in the proportion that what is contrary to conjugal love is shunned and rejected. And one of the forces most destructive of conjugal love in the world is the notion that there is no marriage in the afterlife, that marriage has nothing of eternity in it. Likewise, in a particular marriage, the failure to keep before the mind the ideal of a happy marriage continuing into eternity causes the loss of conjugal love in that marriage. To entertain constantly the idea that one's married partner in this life is probably not going to be one's conjugal partner in the spiritual world is to cause conjugal

love to dry up in that particular marriage, leaving an inward coldness even if outwardly there is agreement.

Such is the teaching of the Heavenly Doctrine, especially in the following passage:

The reason why those who are in love truly conjugal look to what is eternal is that there is eternity in that love; and its eternity is from the fact that this love with the wife and wisdom with the husband increase to eternity, and in their increase or progression married partners enter more and more deeply into the blessings of heaven, which their wisdom and its love at the same time store up within them. If therefore the idea of what is eternal were eradicated, or if in any case it were to escape from their minds, it would be as if they were cast down from heaven.... It is the same in marriages on earth. There, when married partners tenderly love each other, they have what is eternal in their thoughts with regard to the covenant, and nothing at all of its end by death; and if they do think of this, they grieve, and yet in thought are comforted with the hope of its continuance after death (Conjugal Love 216a).

The practical purpose for which the Lord has revealed so much about the nature of marriage in the heavens is clear. We are to hold steadfastly to the ideal of the eternity of marriage. We are to enter into our own marriage with the conviction that it will last to eternity, and at all times we are to abhor the corroding thought that it will end at death. We are to act as if we know for certain that we are eternal partners, for only in this way can conjugal love, the container of all joys from first to last, be given by the Lord and preserved upon the earth.

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 22:1-33; *Heaven and Hell* 382a&b, 383