

## Principles of Marriage

a sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish  
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Jesus said, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man put asunder." – Matt. 19:6

Trust, balance and connectedness: in many ways these three words summarize the relationship of marriage. When we trust one another we assume the best and we commit ourselves to being *trustworthy*. We also balance each other by bringing our masculine and feminine perspectives together in mutual support. And in so doing we are connected more powerfully and intimately than is possible in any other human relationship.

We are all very familiar with the Lord's teaching about marriage from Matthew, chapter 19. He speaks there with words of great power and authority. Unfortunately, like almost all words of great power and authority, they do not come without implied questions – questions like "How do we *know* that God has really joined *these two* together?" - and what does it mean, "Let not *man* put asunder"? Generally speaking when we find ourselves in trouble in our marriages we're inclined to doubt whether God actually DID intend us to be together, and wonder instead if it wasn't all just a big mistake. As for "man" putting two asunder, it is easy to see how such a couple might think it is the Lord Himself directing them to go their separate ways.

But today we are celebrating marriage, and so we want to stay focused on positive things; we want to recognize not only the nature and importance of this "institution," but also the particular commitment and good fortune of the many couples in this church who have passed the test of time, whether for 20 or 30, 40, 50 or now even 60 years.

We begin, then, with what God joins together, and how, and why. And in this matter it is the universal teaching of the New Church that what God joins together is His own goodness and truth – which actually *are together*, perfectly united in Him to begin with. As we *receive* them however they are often separated, as for example in affection and thought, love and wisdom, charity and faith. *People*, then, are joined together precisely to the extent that they re-connect or "marry" what is good and true in their own lives and in their lives with one another.

So... how do we do this? Most basically we do it by bringing together our own two faculties of will and understanding, especially by cultivating a love for the truth and then learning and practicing that truth. This then becomes the good of life. The process produces what we call integrity, really the *integration* of the heart and mind so that there is no pretense or hypocrisy in our lives. It is also called marriage – the heavenly marriage – and this actually is the marriage the Lord spoke about when He said that in the resurrection "they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matthew 22:30), which is to say that if a person has not cultivated personal integrity in this life he will not get it, nor will it be "given to him" in the next.

But of course the same process of integration applies in a special way between a man and woman joined together in marriage. If between the two of them they are working to conjoin goodness and

truth, love and wisdom, faith and charity, then they will be joined together as a true husband and wife, they *will* overcome the temptations that face them as a couple and they *will* grow in mutual love and respect as long as they live. And it goes without saying that if either one of them quits on this, or never really has this interest in the first place, the marriage will be superficial at best and will probably break down under the stress of temptation. After all, if it is only comfort and pleasure that one seeks in marriage, or material support, or an ego boost, or any sort of worldly benefit, there are lots of other ways to get those things.

In fact the truest and most fulfilling union of a husband and wife is based entirely on the complementary nature of the two opposite sexes, and on their spiritual compatibility (what we used to call their “similitudes”).

We begin with the realization that a man’s mind is actually built differently than a woman’s, and that a man actually does *think* differently than a woman does. You can argue that this isn’t true, but many in the fields of neuroscience, sociology, and psychology affirm that it *is*. At the risk of oversimplifying, then, here is a quick summary of the difference as our doctrines describe it.

The basic principle is in Heaven & Hell #369 where we read,

“Everyone, whether man or woman, possesses understanding and will; but with the man the understanding predominates, and with the woman the will predominates, and the character is determined by what predominates. *Yet in heavenly marriages there is no predominance*; for the will of the wife is also the husband’s will, and the understanding of the husband is also the wife’s understanding, since each loves to will and to think as the other, that is mutually and reciprocally. Thus are they conjoined into one.”

What a wonderful and beautiful ideal! Notice especially what freedom and what power there is in such a union, where each loves to think and will as the other! (see CL 68)

Of course a controversial issue in this passage revolves around the word “predominates,” but it’s a pretty simple concept: it refers to something relatively external, something that appears to predominate because it is more obvious than its counterpart. We read,

“The distinction (between male and female) essentially consists in the fact that in the male, the inmost is love and its clothing wisdom, or, what is the same thing, he is love veiled over with wisdom; and that in the female, the inmost is that wisdom of the male, and its clothing, the love therefrom” (CL 32).

In fact, other passages in our doctrines clearly show that it is love that predominates in *every* person’s life, and that a person’s essential love is what defines his or her character and determines his or her place in the spiritual world. But the difference is that in men the essential love is one of growing wise, which leads to a focus on knowledge, information, cleverness and tasks, whereas a woman’s essential love is one of wisdom itself, which leads to a focus on affection, emotion, perception and relationships with other people. Not that women can’t be as knowledgeable, well informed, clever and capable as men – or more so! – but in all these things we are taught that a woman thinks from an affection that has more to do with good than with the truth as such. Men, too, can be very affectionate, emotional, perceptive and concerned about relationships, but again, they will come at these things from a masculine perspective, which generally has more to do with

understanding than with the good in its own right (CL 168).

To put it in very simple terms, the usual question for a man is “How does it work?” whereas the parallel question for a woman is “What is it good for?”

But to take this to its logical conclusion, *in an ideal marriage relationship* the husband's love of growing wise will (eventually) lead him to become wise, and the wife's love of wisdom will lead her to bond more and more with him because of the wisdom she finds in him (CL 32, 88). And just to be clear, we're not talking about academic wisdom (mere memory-knowledge) here, but the wisdom of life – especially the moral and spiritual wisdom from the Lord that builds real trust. When these things are missing in a man it is hard for a woman to stay connected. Likewise when a woman's love turns mostly on sensual or material things it is hard for a man really to respect her. So, again, the real basis for a solid marriage is the marriage of love and wisdom from God, love especially in the woman and wisdom especially in the man.

The other key to a successful marriage, mentioned a few minutes ago, is compatibility, or similarity. Simply put, the teaching is that the things that unite a couple, despite their differences, are the things they have in common – the same religion, for example, or the same social values; a shared love and care of children; similar upbringing, education, disposition, skills, temperaments, or even musical tastes. While these things are not all equally important for a happy marriage the principle is that real conjunction, or what you might call “togetherness,” is *always* based on similarities and NOT on dissimilarities (CL 228). Fundamentally, then, it is NOT true that opposites attract. Rather opposites tend to irritate. And the more internal the differences are, the more difficult it is to be inwardly “together.” This is why a common religion is so important for a truly happy marriage, and a truly Christian religion is the best of all (CL 70, 458).

But now, thinking back to where we started, how can we know whether a particular couple is joined together by God and not by some stupid mistake? The answer is pretty simple. We can know it – or at least the couple themselves can know it – by their mutual commitment to His wisdom and love. They can know it by their own determination to avoid temptations, to honour their vows, to seek spiritual wisdom and to practice genuine charity. In short, they can know it by their mutual willingness to subordinate their own wishes to each other in the light of what is good and true, innocent, clean and right from the Lord.

In that vein, the question is often asked – usually by an unhappy partner, “But how can I know who my *true* conjugal partner is?” The answer is, “by looking at your marriage certificate.”

We have of course the special teaching in this church that married couples who earnestly love each other in this world will continue to be married partners in the life after death. But even if they aren't perfectly suited to one another, and so don't continue as partners after death, if they have done their part to honor their commitment as just mentioned, given the partner whom God provided *through their own actions and decisions in this life*, each one will be prepared for the *perfect partner* after death, and there will be no regrets any more than there will have been wasted time or lost opportunities, since everything will have contributed to their *eternal* happiness (CL 229).

And there's more. Ironically our doctrines show that you don't even have to be married in this life to attain the special love that the Lord gives married partners. In fact, if you think you are going to “get” a great marriage simply by marrying “the right person,” you are probably going to be sadly disappointed, because the real work of marriage is not the work of a single decision but of a life-

time of decisions having to do with *your own personal spiritual growth*. True, you won't be as fulfilled without a partner as you could be with one, but if you do your personal work the Lord *will* provide; and even if not in this world, what are a few years on earth compared to eternity in heaven? It is better to be single for a relatively few years than to compromise your integrity.

In any case, does a good, strong marriage come easy? Can we say it *has been easy* for any of our long-married couples? Not likely. We all have our selfish and worldly heredities to deal with, not to mention the evils and falsities that we pick up from all the corrupting influences in our lives. Plus every one of us has our childhood fears and expectations, our family traditions, and a heavy dose of cultural conditioning, all of which tend to restrict our freedom and try our patience as we strive to accommodate to another human being – a fundamentally different human being – in a truly vulnerable, intimate and fulfilling way.

But here's the really good news. When we persevere, when we earnestly seek and hold onto what is good and true in our marriages, when we accept the challenge to work through our "stuff," especially if there is a reciprocal positive response from our partner, the joy, the confidence, the friendship, the blessedness and tranquility of that marriage will grow in the course of time and actually transcend the joys of any other human experience (CL 68 & 180).

Finally, and sadly of course, there are many disorders associated with marriage in our culture. These things are not good, but they are permitted for the sake of our freedom, and so in some cases, where the effort and intention has been good, they can be accepted or excused. The truth is that we can never really judge the spiritual states of others, so we may never know why a particular couple stays married or breaks up, or why they decide to marry or live together in the first place. But this we know: "What *God* has joined together, let not *man* put asunder."

Each one of us has an individual and personal responsibility to do the very best we can to provide for the marriage of what is good and true, loving and wise, charitable *and faithful* in our own lives, looking to the Lord, shunning evils as sins against Him, and, simply, doing the right thing.

We can't control a partner – we shouldn't even try! But if we do our own work then the chances of fulfilment and happiness in marriage dramatically increase. Probably very few couples get *everything* they want out of their marriage, but *every* couple can get what they *need* spiritually if they will invest in the process. For marriage is not just (not even mainly) about personal pleasure; it's about the honor and the joy of being able to give, to share and to grow spiritually with a special man or woman who can help every one of us become a better woman or man.

So let those of you who are married resolve to continue in your quest for the spiritual values that will sustain you. Let those who respect marriage rejoice that this is possible and that it does work and *is working* for every one of us. And finally, let us all pray for the institution of marriage in our age and culture, that love and wisdom may be joined together on earth as they are in heaven.

Amen

Lessons: Genesis 24: selections  
Children's talk on praying and preparing for a true marriage

Luke 20:27-38  
Married Love #41: selections