

# How Are Men and Women Different?



## ***Bird's Eye View of Lesson***

The Lord's creation is filled with variety. A significant kind of variety is the variety between men and women. Men and women are created to be different in every aspect of their souls, minds and bodies. The Lord designed these differences so that He can bless us with happiness through marriage. The masculine and feminine are capable of complementing each other perfectly so that when they are joined in a marriage that looks to the Lord, they can form a human being in the fullest sense over time.

## **Readings from the Word**

*This lesson takes a look at the different gifts and strengths that the Lord gives to men and women. These differences enable the Lord to bless men and women through their interactions, roles, relationships and through marriage.*

### **In His Image**

One of the amazing facts about creation is that no two things are identical. Each flower, bird, or sunset is unique. We will never meet two people who look *exactly* alike because each face reflects a person's inner spirit—and no two people are the same.

The qualities of one person, although they may appear similar to that of another are yet not the same; and with all people in the universe the good qualities of one are different from that of another. The same is true with human faces, which portray much of the person's affection, and throughout the whole human race none are exactly alike (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3804).

The variety of human faces reflects the infinite qualities in the Lord as if it was an image reflected in a mirror (see *True Christian Religion* 32). Genesis chapter one teaches that

God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:27-28).

Each human being is created in God's image. By creating men and women as different and yet with equal value, the Lord at the same time created marriage love—a special love between one man and one woman. It is through marriage love that we have the capacity to receive the Lord's greatest blessings and gifts.

### **David and Abigail**

So in what ways are men and women different? Let's begin by taking a look at an incident in the Word between a man and a woman. As you read, notice how Abigail uses her feminine intuition and courage to prevent a deadly fight between two men—David, the



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future king of Israel, and her selfish husband Nabal. Abigail and Nabal are introduced in this way:

She was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man was harsh and evil in his doings (1 Samuel 25:3).

The story takes place when Saul was king in Israel and saw David, who had been anointed as his successor, as his enemy. David was roaming the country as a fugitive with a band of men. David sent men to Nabal, a wealthy local farmer, asking if he and his hungry men might share the feast Nabal was preparing. Nabal refused with such rudeness that David planned to attack Nabal with hundreds of men. Abigail heard what was happening and intercepted David, bringing a rich supply of food for his men and hoping to prevent disaster. Falling at David's feet she begged him

Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord fights the battles of the Lord, and evil is not found in you throughout your days.... And it shall come to pass, when the Lord has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart of my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself (1 Samuel 25:28, 30-32)

Her words softened David's heart and with gratitude David recognized her wisdom and called off the attack. Her words beautifully illustrate how a wise woman can influence a man's actions to exercise diplomacy and so to bring good. Other stories in the Word show how women can help motivate men to do things they would not do on their own, and how men's best qualities can be an influence for good for women.

### What Are the Differences between Men and Women?

The Heavenly Doctrine explains the fundamental difference between men and women with the following simple distinction:

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 that which predominates (*Heaven and Hell* 369).

This basic difference affects everything—what men and women look like, how they behave, and how they think.

A male is born with an affection for knowing, understanding and becoming wise, while a female is born with a love for joining herself to that affection in the male. Furthermore, because inner qualities form the outer ones to their likeness, and the masculine form is a form of the intellect while the feminine form is a form of the love of the intellect, therefore the male has a different look, a different sound, and a different physique from the female.... The two

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sexes also differ in behavior and manners. In short, nothing in the two sexes is the same, although there is nevertheless a capacity for conjunction [ a close relationship of love] in every detail (*Conjugal Love* 33).

These differences come from the souls of men and women and affect everything they think and do. The Heavenly Doctrine states that men and women both have a will and an understanding and that the *fundamental* characteristics of the two sexes are determined by the quality that *predominates* in each sex. This difference exists in every part of a man and a woman.

Indeed masculinity in the male is masculine in every part, even in the least part of his body, and also in every idea of this thought, and in every bit of his affection. So too with femininity in the female. And because one cannot as a consequence be converted into the other, it follows that after death a male is still a male, and that a female is still female (*Conjugal Love* 33).

The difference between men and women is so fundamental to who they are as human beings that men remain men and women remain women for ever in the life after death.

### Differences Bring Men and Women Together

The differences between men and women can draw them together into a powerful and enriching relationship with each other.

The human male and the human female were so created that from being two they might become as though one person or one flesh. And when they become one, then taken together they are a human being in the fullest sense (*Conjugal Love* 37).

The special qualities of men and women have in them the potential to unite husbands and wives in marriage.

### OPTIONAL READING

A male...has a disposition to know, understand, and be wise—a disposition to know in childhood, a disposition to understand in adolescence and early youth, and a disposition to be wise from this time of his youth on into old age. The male is by temperament inclined to develop his understanding, consequently he is born to become intellect-oriented. But because this cannot happen apart from love, the Lord attaches love to him according to his reception, that is, according to the spirit in him that wills to become wise (see *Conjugal Love* 90).

With respect to the disposition of the female...it is a disposition to love knowledge, intelligence and wisdom—though not in herself but in a man—and for that reason to love a man. For a man is not lovable simply on account of his physique, the fact that he looks like a man, but on account of the gifts he has in him which make him human (*Conjugal Love* 91).

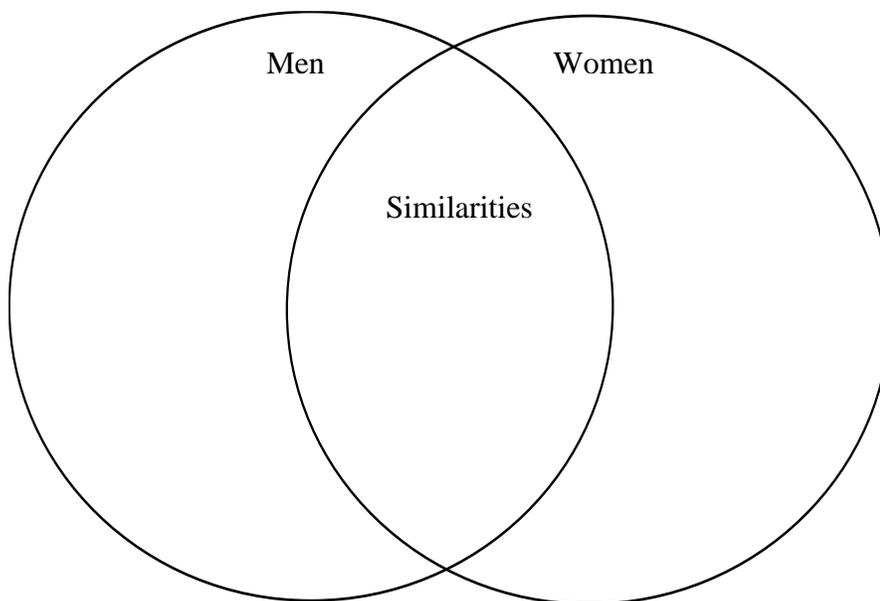


## Focus Points

1. Use the space below to brainstorm a list of adjectives that describe men.  
*Group option: brainstorm using a large piece of paper or board.*

2. Brainstorm a list of adjectives that describe women.

3. Compare the adjectives, using the chart below to note similarities and differences between men and women.



4. Marriage between one man and one woman pictures the marriage between true ideas and good loves. How might the similarities and differences between men and women fit into this picture?

## Activity 1

# Qualities of Friendship



Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

The Word contains many stories about friendship. Some of the friendships are healthy, while others are not healthy. 1 Corinthians 13 describes attitudes and behaviors belonging to healthy friendships. The Heavenly Doctrine gives us more insight into what lies behind different kinds of friendship.

### Identify Qualities of Friendship

In the chart below, mark healthy friendship qualities with a ✓ and unhealthy qualities with an ✗. Put a ? next to statements that you are not sure about.

Friends are people who...			
will do you a favor when you ask them to	agree with everything their friends say	abandon you when they disagree with you	
need to be right all the time	love others no matter how they behave	do whatever others want to do	
are happy when others are successful	interrupt frequently when others are talking	complain about people who don't agree with them	
speak their mind	give an honest opinion	are always ready to give advice	
talk about themselves a lot	listen without judging	put a good interpretation on criticisms they hear	
repeat everything they hear about others	make up their own mind about other people	are affirming	
don't listen to what other people say	look people in the eye	don't repeat hurtful things they hear about other people	

*Group Option: Discuss your responses.*

### Kinds of Friendship

The chart below explains kinds of friendship described in the Heavenly Doctrine.

1. Having Things in Common	2. Spiritual Friendship	3. Selfish Friendship	4. Destructive Friendship
Sharing friendship only in the context of a common interest or workplace.	Loves what is true and good in other people.	Befriends people simply because of the advantages the friendship offers.	Loving the personality of someone who appears to be acting from self-centered and worldly motives.

Looking at the chart that describes qualities of friendship. Which qualities characterize true friendship? Which qualities might alert you to a destructive friendship?



## Heart and Lungs

### Activity 2

If we find someone unconscious, our first response might be to see if he or she is breathing or to listen for a heartbeat. A working heart and lungs are essential for human life. If *either one* of these stops, a person dies within minutes unless they are put on life support machines.

Although the heart and lungs are separate organs, they work together as a unit. The lungs draw in air. The oxygen in the air passes through the thin cell walls of the lungs and into the blood stream. The heart then pumps the oxygen rich blood throughout the body. Once the blood has delivered oxygen to the organs, it collects wastes and returns to the heart where it is pumped to the lungs to release the wastes and be replenished. Without the heart, life-giving oxygen would not reach our vital organs. Without the oxygen, the heart's pumping would serve no useful purpose.

Everything natural *corresponds* (has a direct spiritual relationship) with something spiritual. *Divine Providence* 374 compares the relationship between what we think about and love with the lungs and the heart.

Since all things of the mind have relation to affection and thought, or what is the same, to will and understanding, and since all things of the body have relation to the heart and lungs, does it make sense that there is a correspondence of the will with the heart, and of the understanding with the lungs?

An angel once compared his relationship with his wife with the way the heart and lungs work:

‘We are one; her life is in me, and mine in her. We are two bodies, but one soul. There is between us a union like that of the heart and the lungs; she is the substance of my heart, and I am her lungs; but because by heart we here mean love, and by lungs wisdom, she is the love of my wisdom, and I am the wisdom of her love. From this you can see the unity of our souls in our faces’ (see *Conjugal Love* 37).

So in a marriage that reflects what they Lord intends the partners are able to share their individual masculine and feminine strengths and work intimately together as a married couple.

### How does this work?

Let's take a look at some important correspondences of the circulatory and respiratory systems.

air	thought	blood	love for others & the Lord
respiration	life of the understanding	heartbeat	life of what we love
breath or spirit	new understanding	arteries and veins	affections belonging to love

1. Why might a husband's qualities work like the respiratory system in a healthy marriage?
2. How might a wife's qualities function like the heart in a healthy marriage?
3. Does picturing the heart and lungs working together help you understand how a husband and a wife can work together in a marriage?
4. When the heart or lungs don't work properly, a person becomes sick. What consequences are likely to follow if one partner in a marriage begins to be less caring and less willing to work on the marriage?

### Activity 3

## The Marriage of Good and Truth



Our lives revolve around what we *want to do* and what we *need to learn* to achieve our goals. For example, people who love to play video games may set a goal of conquering a new game. They may start out by playing the game and seeing what happens. When they get stuck and need help to get to a new level they may look for hints (or “cheats”) online or get help from friends who have more experience with the game. In the end it will probably take a large amount of time actually playing a game to fully master it.

Achieving a goal involves *wanting* something and then linking our desire to have it with the *knowledge* of how to get it and even when we have both desire and knowledge it may take a lot of practice before we enjoy the results or “taste the fruits” of our desires. These fruits are the tangible results of the marriage between what we want and the knowledge that helps us achieve it. They are the “spiritual children” of this marriage. The Heavenly Doctrine calls this the marriage of good and truth.

Let’s take a look at how the marriage of good loves and true ideas works when we set a goal—the goal of going to heaven. A recent online survey\* found that most people believe there is a heaven. The majority of people who believe there is a haven also had the idea that leading a good life would affect a person’s chances of getting to heaven. The Heavenly Doctrine explains the importance of connecting our beliefs about heaven with putting them into practice.

Heaven is granted only to those who know the way to it and walk in that way. This way can be known to some extent from knowing the character of those who constitute heaven, and from knowing that no one becomes an angel or comes into heaven except one who brings an angelic character with him from the world. Present in an angelic character is a knowledge of the way from walking in it, and a walking in the way through a knowledge of it (see *Divine Providence* 60).

Developing heavenly character traits involves learning the steps that lead to heavenly life and being willing to practice these steps again and again—putting into practice the marriage of good and truth.

### Questions for Discussion

1. If true ideas lead to what is good, what consequences (“bad fruits”) might there be from thinking and then acting from false ideas such as “Since I can’t prove that God exists, why should I worry about life after death? Life is short. I’ll do what makes me happy!”?
2. When we feel inspired by a good intention, other competing feelings, responses from others, circumstances, lack of information, *etc.* can interfere with our acting on this intention. Can you think of examples of how such things interfere with a good intention?
3. When we have a clear idea or understanding of something, not wanting to interfere, worrying that our input may be rejected, peer pressure, *etc.* can keep us from acting on this understanding. Can you think of examples of how such things interfere with a clear idea or understanding of something true?

- see [www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org)

## Taking It Home



*Here are a variety of activities that can help you bring this lesson into your life.*

### Flowers

Take a close look at a field or a picture full of sunflowers. At first glance they look the same. But take a moment to look closer.... Are they identical? Examine their color, the number of petals, angle to the sun, height, etc. A closer look may reveal tremendous variety in similar objects that may appear to be identical at first.

Each of us is like a single flower. The characteristics that define us—both mental and physical—are unlike anyone else. But the beautiful thing is that when we join with others in friendship, we can create a bouquet that is more splendid than a single flower standing alone.

Take a moment to reflect on the special qualities of some of your friends. In what ways do your different personal qualities add to the life of your group of friends? In what ways is your group different when a specific person is not there?

### Ideas for Journal Entries *(choose one)*

- ◆ What qualities do you admire in friends and family members of your gender?
- ◆ What qualities do you look for in a friend?

### For Reflection

Think about someone who is a member of the opposite sex. It could be a parent, sibling, relative or friend. What qualities do you admire in this person? What is uniquely masculine or feminine about this person?

## Further Reading

### Male and Female He Created Them

From a Sermon by the Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh, adapted by Rachel Glenn

“He who made them at the beginning made them male and female (Matthew 19:4).

#### What Is a Man? What Is a Woman?

There is confusion in the world today about what is truly masculine and what is truly feminine. The God who made us “male and female” has revealed the nature of true masculinity and true femininity in the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church. These teachings, not the external stereotypes we sometimes see, are our sure guide to understanding the difference between men and women.

From the very beginning of creation, the Lord made men and women different. The Heavenly Doctrines teach that the sexes are distinct not only as to biological form and function, but as to every least disposition of mind, and every inclination of spirit. “Nothing whatever in them is alike.... In the male, the masculine is masculine in every part of his body...and also in every idea of thought, and in every grain of his affection; and so likewise the feminine in the female (*Conjugal Love* 33). It is important for us to recognize and respect these different natures.

So, what is a man? What is a woman? There are many ways to answer these questions, but let us look at the essential quality of each sex which is the root cause of all the consequent differences of mind, body and action.

#### Different Loves

The essential element of both man and woman is a love. With man it is the love of growing wise. This is the gift of God which inspires every man from his birth and forms the essence of his life. The love of growing wise, which is a masculine love from the Lord, reaches out to acquire wisdom. Therefore, while man is inmosty a form of love, his love is clothed over with the wisdom he acquires. This is plain from man’s affections, ways and appearance, for his affection is an affection of learning, understanding and being wise; his ways are predominantly intellectual, involving judgment and reason: and his physical appearance hard and rough.

The essence of a woman also is a love, the love of man’s wisdom and how that wisdom can be put to use. This love exhibits itself in woman’s affections, ways and form, for her affections are stirred in loving science, intelligence and wisdom, yet not in herself, but in man, and so of loving those products of man’s love. Her ways are domestic and protective, nurturing uses and perceptively moderating spheres of life to protect what is of value; and her appearance in comparison with man is softer and more beautiful.

The Heavenly Doctrines give many direct teachings concerning this distinction between the masculine and feminine. “Men were created to receive light, that is, wisdom, from the Lord,” we are told, “and women were created to receive heat, that is, the love of wisdom of the man” (*Conjugal Love* 137). “It is masculine to perceive from the understanding, and feminine to perceive from love.” We read again: “Men are forms of science, intelligence, and wisdom, and women, forms of the love of these with men” (*Conjugal Love* 187e). One wise angel describing the relationship between himself and his wife said, “She is my heart, and I am her lungs” (*Conjugal Love* 75).

## **The Understanding and the Will**

In making this distinction between man and woman the Heavenly Doctrines may seem to ignore the intellectual qualities of women and the affectional qualities of men. It is certainly true that women as well as men have an understanding and that men as well as women have a will. The Heavenly Doctrines do not teach that women are unable to think or that men are unable to feel emotion. “Everyone,” we read, “whether man or woman, enjoys understanding and will; but with the man the understanding predominates, and with the woman the will predominates; and the character [of each] is determined by that which predominates” (*Heaven and Hell* 369).

It can be said that both men and women think; but man thinks from the understanding while woman thinks from the will. “And because the understanding perceives things which are above the body and beyond the world” while the love or will “does not go beyond what it feels,” there must be a difference in the wisdom of men and women. The Heavenly Doctrines teach that there is indeed a difference and that the wife’s wisdom “is not possible with the man, nor the man’s wisdom with the wife” (*Conjugal Love* 168).

This does not mean that one kind of thinking is superior to the other. They are designed, by the Creator, to work together. The Heavenly Doctrines also tell us that wives have a perception of the affections of the husband and use the highest degree of prudence in moderating them” (*Conjugal Love* 166). When a wife seeks to turn her husband’s wisdom to good use, seeking wisdom from him and inspiring him in his quest for ever greater understanding of truth, the Lord blesses both. They find delight in use, man from seeking the means for use, woman from turning those means into beautiful forms of use. They also find delight in each other. Their conjugal relationship grows. The wife becomes more a wife and the husband more a husband. She becomes increasingly feminine, he increasingly masculine.

## **Swedenborg’s Observations**

Swedenborg once wrote about an experience which made the difference between the natures of men and women, even from birth, clearly plain to him. He mentions watching through his window in a great city the gatherings of boys and girls. “I have several times seen them in the street where more than twenty were gathered together every day,” he wrote. “There the boys, following their inborn disposition, played together by making a great noise, shouting, fighting, striking blows, and throwing stones at each other; while the girls sat quietly at the doors of the houses, some playing with infants, some dressing

dolls, some embroidering pieces of linen, some kissing each other, and what astonished me,” he adds, “they yet watched the boys just as they were, with pleased looks. From this,” Swedenborg concludes, “I could clearly see that man is born understanding and woman love. I could also see the nature of understanding and love in their beginnings; and thus, what the understanding of man would be in its progression without conjunction with feminine and later with conjugal love” (*Conjugal Love* 218:2).

## Working Together

The Heavenly Doctrines do not describe a competition between the masculine and feminine natures but a beautiful compatibility. What is masculine and what is feminine are complementary, created for conjunction into a one. “Nothing whatever in them is alike,” we are told, “and yet, in their single parts, there is what is conjunctive. . .” (*Conjugal Love* 33). For they two “shall be one flesh” (Matthew 19:5). “The two affections, that of woman and that of man, can be united only as between two, and never in a single person” (*Conjugal Love* 175e). The cooperation of the masculine and feminine natures is essential for the happiness and strength of family and society uses. For this reason, the teachings about the masculine and feminine revealed in the Heavenly Doctrines have both deep and practical applications for all of us. They apply to us individually in how we strive to be masculine and feminine, to be true men and women in the image of God.

Above all, these teachings apply to husbands and wives in their efforts to establish the conjugal relationship and develop it in their marriage. “For the marriage of love truly conjugal is the union of two in thought and will, in truth and good.... They who are in it love to think and will each as the other, and thus to become as one person. The image and likeness of one is in the mind of the other, and they dwell together in all things of life even to the inmost. They who so dwell together on earth dwell together as angels after death” (*General Church Liturgy*, 2005 edition, p. 229. Derived from *Arcana Coelestia* 2732). It is written: “He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they two shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:4-6).

Readings: Matthew 19:1-12; *Conjugal Love* 175