

Marriage and Family



Bird's Eye View of Lesson

The Lord intends that the innocence of infants flows into their parents and caregivers and forms a close bond between them. The Heavenly Doctrine calls this bond “storge” (pronounced stor'-ge). This bond is present regardless of whether there is a happy relationship between parents or not. As children grow it is hoped that this bond will be replaced with bonds that are based on shared spiritual values. Raising a family helps establish and purify marriage love because it is a responsibility that requires partners to work together.

Readings from the Word

How is marriage love linked with a love of children? What special part does innocence play in your life? Look for answers to these questions in today's lesson.

Innocence

Throughout the world people recognize that babies and young children are surrounded by a beautiful sphere of innocence—even during tantrums! When Jesus was on earth He said,

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 9:14).

He introduced the idea that young children and angels in heaven share a special quality. The Heavenly Doctrine defines innocence as a willingness to be led by the Lord (*Heaven and Hell* 278). What is the source of this kind of innocence?

People know that little children are embodiments of innocence, but they do not know that their innocence flows in from the Lord. It flows in from the Lord because He is the essence of innocence. Innocence radiates from little children's faces, from some of the movements they make, and from their first speech. Little children have this innocence, because they do not yet know what is good and evil, and...so are without any purpose for evil. They do not have a character acquired from love of self and the world. They do not credit anything to themselves. All that they receive they attribute to their parents. They do not worry about their food and clothing, and are not anxious about the future. They love their parents, their caregivers, and their little companions, and play with them in a state of innocence. They allow themselves to be guided. They listen and obey (*Conjugal Love* 395).

Just as children love and trust their parents without question in many states, angels love, trust, and obey the Lord—their heavenly Father. The innocence of children comes from



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their ignorance—they do not know good from evil and so cannot deliberately choose either good or evil. The innocence of angels is different. They know good and evil and choose to love and trust the Lord

Storge—A Bond of Innocence Between Parents and Infants

As innocence flows into babies from the Lord, it also flows through them into their parents and caregivers—especially through the sense of touch. As innocence flows into the souls of parents it is joined with the innocence of their infants creating a special parent-child bond. The Heavenly Doctrine calls this bond “storge”. Storge is united with conjugal love since protecting and nurturing children extends from the love of conceiving and bearing them. This love transfers to a baby after he or she is born.

On a spiritual level storge and conjugal love are joined together, yet parents who do not have a happy marriage partnership can experience the same bond with their children.

A love of little children is found in married partners who love each other from the heart, and it is found in partners who are discordant in heart. It is also found in partners who have separated and is sometimes tenderer and stronger in them than in others (*Conjugal Love* 385).

The special bond between parents and their children helps protect and support little children who are unable to care for themselves. Sometimes this bond seems to be absent, causing problems both large and small for both parent and child.

Spiritual Parenting

As children grow up their sphere of innocence gradually declines. The Lord expect this change. Parental love or storge also fades as this happens. Parents who choose to live by spiritual values often work hard to teach these values to their children. As storge fades they form new bonds with their children that are based on shared spiritual values.

Spiritual parents love their children for their spiritual intelligence and their moral way of life, in other words from their fear of God and piety realized in deeds and life, together with their affection and devotion to purposes of use to the community, that is, their virtues and good behavior. They provide for and supply their needs out of a love for these traits (*Conjugal Love* 405).

Parents who live by natural values tend to love natural qualities in their children. As storge fades they remain attached to their children because they view and love their children as extensions of themselves. For example if a child excels, his or her parents take pride in the success as if it was their own achievement.

Natural fathers and mothers look upon their children as a single heart and a single soul with theirs. As they advance from childhood to adolescence and beyond...their love for them comes not from any fear of God and religious feeling expressed in their way of life, nor from any moral intelligence in them.

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They pay hardly any attention to their...virtues and good behavior, but only to the outward features which they find attractive.... This makes them also close their eyes to their faults, making excuses for these and favoring them. The reason is that in their case the love of their offspring is also a love of themselves. (*Conjugal Love* 405).

It is not easy to be a parent and recognize that one's maturing child has faults and flaws. But this reality doesn't have to be seen as just a negative issue. A marriage blessed with children is a marriage enriched with experiences and delights that promote spiritual growth and development.

Married Love and the Love of Children

Working to sustain a faithful loving marriage partnership can build strengths such as the ability to lovingly support another person through a hard time. Strengths like this grow over a lifetime and transfer to others outside a marriage too. They are "fruits" of the work of the marriage relationship. The highest purpose or "use" that stems from marriage, though, is the nurturing of new human beings. The growth that comes from this work is a blessing from the Lord.

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate (Psalm 127:3-5).

The responsibilities of educating children provide opportunities for partners to grow closer and closer as a couple.

The primary duties which bring the souls and lives of two married partners together into one are those which involve their joint concern in bringing up children. These duties bind the dispositions of a couple into one (*Conjugal Love* 176).

Conjugal love can be established and purified through raising children since this provides parents with abundant opportunities to work together as a team.

OPTIONAL READING

Every delight and pleasure is involved in the love of producing offspring, because from creation all that is delightful, pleasurable, blessed and happy, in the whole heaven and in the whole world, has been brought together in the effort, and so in the act, of producing uses. And these joys increase in an ascending degree to eternity, according to the goodness and excellence of the uses. This explains why the pleasure of producing children, which surpasses every other pleasure, is so great. It surpasses every other because its use, which is the procreation of the human race and thus of heaven, surpasses all other loves (*Apocalypse Explained* 991.2, 3).



Focus Points

1. What does the Heavenly Doctrine say is the source of the innocence of babies?
2. It is widely recognized that mother-infant bonding (storge) is essential for a healthy parent-child relationship. What has the Lord taught about the part innocence plays in this bond?
3. What does the Heavenly Doctrine say about the difference in parent-child bonding if parents are happily married, unhappy together, separated, or are not married?
4. Many babies receive care from people who are not their parents. Compare the bonds caregivers develop with children with the bonds of the parent-child relationship. In what ways are they similar?
5. *Conjugal Love* 405 describes two different types of parenting: spiritual parenting and natural parenting. What are the main characteristics of each kind of parenting?
6. Why is it important to nurture spiritual qualities in children?
7. How does raising a family help a husband and wife to grow closer to each other?

Activity 1

Birth Control

Today most couples can choose whether or not they will have a family. Birth control allows couples to choose whether or not to bring children into the world, and fertility treatments can sometimes help childless couples have children. The New Church does not dictate whether particular methods of birth control are right or wrong, however New Church teachings offer insight into what takes place on a *spiritual* level when a woman receives the seed (or semen) of her husband, and how Divine providence and childbearing are connected.

The Seed Contains the Soul

Human sperm is conceived inwardly in the understanding, formed in the will, and transferred from there to the testicle, where it clothes itself with a natural covering (*True Christian Religion* 584).

The father's sperm contains the soul, and this is clothed with a body in the mother's womb (*True Christian Religion* 92).

The Wife Receives the Seed

A wife receives into her an image of her husband by assimilating his affections into her, by uniting the internal will of her husband with hers, and also by incorporating into her the propagations of his soul (*Conjugal Love* 193.3).

A wife is joined to her husband by her assimilation of the powers of his manhood, though this depends on the spiritual love they have for each other (*Conjugal Love* 172).

Divine Providence

The Divine providence is within the smallest details of all, and people in the stream of providence are being carried along constantly towards happier things, whatever appearance the means may present.... Those who do not trust in the Divine are scarcely willing to allow any mention of providence. Instead they put every single thing down to prudence, fortune or to chance (*Arcana Coelestia* 8478).

The sphere of a love for little children is a sphere of protecting and maintaining those who cannot protect and maintain themselves.... For it exists from creation that things created must be preserved, safeguarded, protected, and maintained—otherwise the universe would fall to ruin. But because this cannot be done by the Lord directly in the case of living beings to whom He has bequeathed free judgment, He does it indirectly through His love implanted in fathers, mothers and nurses (*Conjugal Love* 391).

If a person had the disposing of...the interiors of the organs of generation for propagating, the interiors of the womb for perfecting the embryo, and so on, would he not in innumerable ways pervert and destroy in them the order of the course of the Divine Providence? Is it not enough for him to know about the externals and to dispose them for the health of body and mind? (*Divine Providence* 180)

Questions for Discussion

1. How do different methods of birth control affect the male's sperm?
2. How do different methods of birth control affect a woman's ability to receive her husband's seed?
3. Is a woman's reception of her husband's sperm important? Give reasons to support your answer.

What Should I Do?

What would you say to a 16-year-old says, “I’m pregnant. What should I do?”

1. As a group, discuss what you think the New Church teaches about unborn babies. Use the quotes from the Word (see below) to help you.
2. Write down ways in which the pregnant teen could handle the situation.
3. Which options on your list agree with New Church teachings? Are there any options that do not agree with New Church teachings? Why?

Note: If you meet someone who is facing a situation like this, you may want to encourage her to get help. Any choice she makes will have consequences long into the future—even if that does not appear to be the case now. Sometimes the consequences come years later—when a person is happily married or is ready to start a family. It can be helpful to have an adult help someone in this situation.

Statements from the Word About Life in the Womb

The Lord is Divine love. He is infinite and the Being of all life. People were created into the image of God after the likeness of God. And as every person is formed by the Lord in the womb into that image after that likeness, it follows that the Lord is the heavenly Father of all people, and that people are His spiritual children (see *Divine Providence* 330).

While a person is in the womb he is in a state of innocence. Therefore his first state after birth is a state of innocence, and the Lord dwells in a person only in his innocence (*Divine Wisdom* 111:1).

The purpose of creation is a heaven from the human race.... 1. Every person was created to live to eternity. 2. Every person was created to live to eternity in a state of blessedness. 3. Thus every person was created to come into heaven. 4. The Divine love must needs will this; and the Divine wisdom must needs provide for it (*Divine Providence* 323).

Angels of the inmost heaven...love infants much more than do their fathers and mothers. They are present with infants in the womb, and through them the Lord cares for the nutrition and development of the infants therein; thus they have charge over those who are with child (*Arcana Coelestia* 5053, 5054).

During and after conception, celestial angels are present with the new soul in the ovum and through all its life in the womb, to remove from it evil influences, as far as possible, and to nurture in it the possibilities of good.... Through these angels of the womb the whole heaven is present, forming the body of the child (*Spiritual Experiences* 6011)

The sphere of the love of infants is a sphere of protection and support of those who cannot support themselves.... Since infants cannot protect and sustain themselves, mothers and fathers have a love to protect and sustain infants (*Conjugal Love* 391).

Activity 3

Offspring in Heaven

In the natural world children grow up in families. How do children grow up in heaven? Married couples in heaven do not give birth to children in the way that couples on earth do since people are born on earth in order to be raised into eternal life. However when babies die they are adopted by angels and raised in families in heaven.

A love of little children remains after death, especially in women. As soon as little children are resuscitated, which happens immediately after death, they are raised into heaven and entrusted to angel women who, in their bodily life, loved little children and at the same time loved God. Since these angels when in the world loved all children from a motherly tenderness they receive these little children as their own, and the little children love them instinctively as though they were their mothers. Mothers have as many little children in their care as their spiritual storge causes them to desire.

Little children are all raised under the immediate guidance of the Lord.... After they have passed through this first age, they are transferred to another heaven, where they receive their schooling (*Conjugal Love* 410).

Every child...is taught according to the Divine design and filled with affections for what is good and through them with direct knowledge of the truth; and then, being continually perfected in intelligence and wisdom, all such individuals are led into heaven and become angels (*Heaven and Hell* 329).

All in heaven serve their communities. Raising children who have died is one form of useful service. Couples can also give birth to “spiritual offspring”—which are “goods and truths in their place” (*Apocalypse Explained* 1000). Another way to say this might be “states that are born to a couple through their interaction”. Couples living on earth can have spiritual offspring too—for example creating a book. A husband and wife may conceive an idea for a book. The husband may draft their shared thoughts into a manuscript, and the wife may edit the manuscript and proofread it before publication. The finished book is something they have worked hard to create together. The give and take that is needed to produce spiritual offspring can bring couples closer to each other and closer to the Lord.

Natural and Spiritual Offspring

1. Compare the blessings of raising a child with the blessings of producing “spiritual offspring” with a partner. Note similarities and differences.
2. Give other examples of “spiritual offspring”?
3. How might spiritual offspring bring partners together—whether or not they can have natural offspring?
4. Can a person produce “spiritual offspring” without others?

Taking It Home



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

Ideas for Journal Entries *(choose one)*

- ◆ What is an important parenting practice you would like to have when you have your own family?
- ◆ How can taking care of children prepare you for having a family of your own?

For Reflection

Think about strengths of your mother and father. What qualities do you admire in them? In what ways does your mother parent in a uniquely feminine way? How is your father's parenting uniquely masculine?

Spiritual Task

by the Rev. David Roth

Improving Relationships

(True Christian Religion 43)

Story We are taught that, "It is the essence of Love to love others outside of one self, to desire to be one with them, and to render them blessed from oneself".

Meaning 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 one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.") 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, caring relationship with. Each day do something that you wouldn't normally do to be of help to them. 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.

Further Reading

The Uses of Children for Marriage

A Sermon by the Rev. K. R. Alden

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate (Psalm 127:3-5).

In *Arcana Coelestia* (5051) we read of an experience which Emanuel Swedenborg once had:

In a quiet dream, I saw some trees that were planted in a wooden receptacle. One of them was tall, another lower, and two were small. The lower trees delighted me most; and at the same time a most pleasant quiet, such as I cannot express, affected my mind. When I awoke, I spoke with the angelic spirits who had induced the dream. They told me what was signified by it, namely, Conjugal Love; the tall tree signifying the husband, the lower tree the wife, and the two small trees the children. They said further that the very pleasant quiet, which had affected my mind, indicated the pleasantness of peace, enjoyed in the other life by those who have lived together in genuine conjugal love.

Children Help in the Growth of Conjugal Love

The first place of children, then, in the Divine Plan, is in relationship to the growth and building up of Conjugal Love. Swedenborg's beautiful vision, and the indescribably quiet peace that attended it, was a heavenly representation of the family unit consisting of father and mother and children. For we are taught that one of the sources of holiness and sanctity in marriage springs from the fact that it is the seedbed of the human race, and that which is the seedbed of the human race is also the seedbed of the angelic heavens. Conjugal Love, which is the love of loves with the angels and which is promised to the New Church, is knit together, purified, and established by means of the love of infants and children. In *Conjugal Love* 176 we read, "The education of offspring is the primary use requiring the cooperation of father and mother." There is a very real sense in which it is true that the Lord gives us children, not because the children need us as parents, but because we need the children, so that our own entrance into conjugal love may thereby be assured and made firm.

All responsibility brings with it delight. This is of the Divine Providence so that uses may be performed. And with every use there is a "loaned" sphere at its beginning so that people may be encouraged to enter into the use more fully and have the courage and endurance to undergo the temptations and difficulties which must be encountered before

the work is finished. This is a universal law. It is seen in marriage, where the first state is one of almost open communication with the celestial heavens and their innocence. And it may be seen in the conception of any new project. There is always a supreme delight when the first vision of the completed work unfolds itself before the mind. And so a foretaste of the joy of a use is given at its beginning. Were it not for this universal law, people would never be inspired to undertake the great tasks and mighty responsibilities which make up life's journey through this world.

When we apply this universal doctrine to the subject at hand, we find that the Lord inspires parents with a new delight—the love of infants—a delight which is second only to conjugal love itself. This great delight is given by the Lord in order that parents may be moved to undertake the great responsibilities connected with children, that they may assume them with happy, eager hearts, and that they may faithfully carry them through.

The Heavenly Doctrines tell us about the way in which this love of infants is inspired with parents. It is brought about through the sphere of innocence in which the Lord Himself is present. For, we are told that innocence forms the nexus which connects and binds parents to their children. This state of innocence is imparted by the angels that are with all people, through their senses, affecting them with delight when they see infants—lifting their souls with joy when they hear the first innocent sounds of infant speech. It is especially conveyed by the sense of touch, for the touch of an infant seems to bring deep peace to the very soul. Thus, the innocence of an infant awakens the remains of innocence stored up in an adult. In this heavenly Eden they meet and, as it were, sip the sweetness of eternal life. The adult is carried upward in thought and spirit to the Lord in the midst of the sun of heaven, to have a glorious vision of the outpouring of life from the Divine. So “children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward.” They bring with them a foretaste of heaven and open to the husband and wife the delights of a new responsibility.

The first use of children, then, is to build up Conjugal Love. The second use is so that people may have a new inspiration for regenerating.

Children Help Parents and Caregivers Regenerate

Let us think for the moment of the virtues that may be gained from our contact with children. With children there is innocence, breathing forth its close touch with heaven; there are sweetness and purity which are images of the regenerated will and understanding; there are trustfulness and humility, symbols of our regenerate relationship to the Lord God of heaven; there are gentleness and forbearance to be learned, in which the seeds of charity can grow to be mighty forces of character; and, last of all, there is the great lesson of forgiveness to be learned from our children. Only the forgiving heart can come into the kingdom of heaven. “Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.” As the Heavenly Father forgives the trespasses of His children, so must we, as parents, cultivate the habit of forgiveness toward our own children. Much can be done by wise parents who love their children with a spiritual love, for their interactions are destined to impress their children to all eternity.

One of the greatest duties of parents, so the Heavenly Doctrines tell us, is to instill in them the affirmative principle. Hell is a monstrous negation. There God is denied, the sun of heaven is turned into darkness, the moon of faith does not give her light, and all the stars of cognitions and knowledges of heavenly things have fallen to the earth. All has been swallowed up in a terrible negation. Against this sphere of denial, we must fight and never cease battle. And to the children entrusted to our care we must impart the affirmative attitude, for all heaven is one joyful affirmation of the Lord's leading and guidance. All heaven chants "amen" to the glory of God, and angelic choirs are forever entering more and more deeply into the beauty and harmony and eternal truth of the revealed Divine Word.

Wise Parents do not Identify Their Children with Themselves

Wise parents will never identify their children with themselves. To do this is to love them *naturally*, and we are warned against this type of love in revelation, where we find the spiritual love of children sharply contrasted with the natural love of children in the following passage:

Spiritual fathers and mothers, after they have sipped the sweetness of innocence in their infants, love their children quite differently than do natural fathers and mothers. The spiritual love their children from their spiritual intelligence and moral life, thus they love them from the fear of God, and from actual piety, or that of the life, and at the same time from their affection for and application to uses which are of service to society, thus from the virtues and good manners in them. It is chiefly from the love of these things that they provide for and administer to their necessities; therefore if they do not see these things in them, they alienate their minds from them; and only care for them from a sense of obligation.

Natural fathers and mothers, on the other hand, cling even to the faults of their children. In the after life spiritual fathers are content to meet their children that have died before, and inquire their state, and instruct them to call only the Lord father. But natural parents seek to hold their children to them even when some have become Satans. Such are shut up for a time in hell until all are judged and dispersed each to his own place (Conjugal Love 405).

When we meditate upon the regenerating truths that can be learned from contemplating childhood, we can truly exclaim with Isaiah, "And a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). The Lord Himself could not have accomplished the work of redeeming and saving the world except through entering the world as a little child. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God the might; Father of Eternity; Prince of Peace." Nor can we ever forget the part that children played in the Lord's ministry. What tender care He exercised over them! On one occasion we see Him calling them to

Himself, when the disciples had forbid them, crying out, “Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” We see Him placing a child in the midst of the disciples; we see Him taking them up in His arms, putting His hands upon them and blessing them; we hear Him saying, “unless you become as one of them, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Children are given to us so that we may see the beauty of eternal values, on the ultimate plane and in forms we cannot fail to recognize, in this world. The highest value of children is that which present in the internal sense of the Word which is revealed in the Heavenly Doctrines. In heaven, we are told, no natural offspring are born from a conjugal pair, but in their place truths of innocence are born. As we enter more and more deeply into the understanding of spiritual life, these spiritual offspring become more and more real to us. In fact, natural offspring, compared to spiritual offspring, are as nothing, for spiritual offspring are the fruits and rewards of the regenerate life; they are the signs of eternal salvation.

Consider for a moment the fact that at the age of one hundred Abraham had only two sons, yet at the time of the Exodus from Egypt his direct descendants numbered more than two million! This pictures the increase and extension of truths. One truth, conceived and made living in this world,