



Separation and Divorce

FaithBuilder 4 | Lesson 22 | Conjugal Love

Lesson Overview

1. Read

Marriage is civil and spiritual covenant. The Writings outline the circumstances in which divorce is allowable. If divorce is not allowable, couples may separate. It is important not to make spiritual judgements when people divorce. Re-marriage is allowed under some circumstances. pp.1-3

2. Discuss

What are the implications of these teachings?
P. 3

New Church Concept Delight of Marriage

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

Read

Many marriages end in divorce. Recent laws have made getting a divorce easier. They can provide merciful escape from dangerous relationships, but also allow couples to divorce if 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 Writings suggest 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 marriage 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

New Church teachings say 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 Writings say 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, New Church teachings explain,

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 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. (See *Conjugal Love 276*, on right.) So what choices are there if a marriage is struggling, but there are no spiritual grounds for divorce?

Separation

The Writings say 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 Writings outline 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.

New Church Concept

Marriage

After the initial stages of marriage, the state before betrothal sometimes returns. 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*

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 destructive ruinations of society and dissolutions of marriages would result if divorcings of wives were at the good pleasure of husbands. *Conjugal Love 276*

A person can 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. See *Arcana Coelestia 2284.3*

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

Remarriage

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 Writings say that a person’s interest in remarrying is influenced by what their first marriage was like, and by their day-to-day practical needs, 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).

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. Situations involving marriage after divorce are often complicated and vary a great deal.

Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

1. What factors have the potential to impact lasting happiness in marriage?
2. Under what circumstances do the Writings say divorce is permissible?
3. When might *separation* and not divorce be the right choice for a couple undergoing difficulties?
4. What are the differences between civil, moral and spiritual levels of truth? How does knowing about these levels of truth give insight into how to act when a marriage is undergoing challenges?
5. Why is keeping an open mind about partners who are divorcing important?
6. Under what circumstances is divorce the right choice?
7. What factors might affect a person’s decision to re-marry after the death of a spouse or after divorce?

If you have further questions about divorce and remarriage, you might want to talk to your pastor.