



Love of God

We learn from Scripture about the source of love

If you were to ask a person on the street where love comes from, he would probably answer *"From the heart."* Is that true? Does love arise from the heart? If I listen to Scripture, then I conclude that love does not come from the heart. For Scripture tells me that the heart of man is desperately corrupt (cf. Jeremiah 17:9). It tells me that every intent of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually (cf. Genesis 6:5). No, love does not arise out of the heart of man, for the heart of man is inclined to hate God and neighbour. Love is of God. If we love, it is because God has given us the ability to love something that the natural man cannot do. *"Everyone who loves is born of God"* (1 John 4:7).

Now this simple fact has some important things to say about getting ready for marriage. In the first place, no one is ready for marriage unless he has been born anew. No one is able to fulfil the primary command in marriage – which is to love the other – unless the Holy Spirit has given him a new heart. It is no wonder, then, that our forefathers have established the good rule in the church, that no one shall be united in marriage who has not made profession of faith. For those who have made profession of faith display evidence of having been born of God. Their love for God, which becomes evident in their oral profession and in their outward conduct, gives evidence of their spiritual rebirth.

Courting couples should examine themselves as well as their boyfriend or girlfriend to see whether there is genuine evidence of this spiritual rebirth. For without it, there can be no expectation of a love-filled marriage.

The fact that love is of God also teaches us that we cannot simply expect love to flourish between a young man and young woman. Love is a gift of God's grace. And like all other spiritual gifts, one must plead with God for it in prayer. In the Heidelberg Catechism, we are taught that prayer is very important, for *"God will give His grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts"* (Q/A 1 16).

The fact that love is of God means that young couples who are preparing for marriage will need to pray...and pray constantly and with heartfelt longing to God, asking Him to cause that love for the other to grow. It is a good practice that courting couples learn already early in their courtship to pray together – not just a meal time prayer in company with the rest of the family, but a specific time of prayer together as a couple. The close of an evening provides a wonderful opportunity for such prayer. Parents do well to encourage their courting children, to pray together at the close of an evening. Parents will do even better if they make a place available in the home where the young couple can enjoy some privacy for this time of communion with God in Bible reading and prayer. There is a saying worthy of acceptance: *"A couple that prays together stays together."*

Do you, courting couples, take this time to pray together? At first it may seem awkward, but after a few times you will come to cherish those sacred moments together.

Inasmuch as our spiritual rebirth is a life-long process, couples will need to continue to pray for this love throughout their marriage. Even those who have lived many years together in marriage must battle against the remnants of the old nature that cling to them – the old nature which is inclined to hate instead of love – the old nature which tends to destroy a marriage. And those who enjoy the gracious gift of love in marriage have even more reason to pray – to thank God for that gift of love.

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