

Plural Marriage

There have always been several major issues that have distinguished Mormonism from the rest of Christendom and that still arouse controversy and anger, from the claim that the Father and the Son have separate and physical bodies and personally visited young Joseph Smith Jr., to the belief that there are several if not many Gods in a monotheistic culture, to the notion that the Lord had to restore priesthood authority on earth because it had been lost and only the Mormons had such authority, to instead of the idea that there is heaven, hell, limbo and purgatory, there are three major divisions of heaven, no hell, and an outer darkness or perdition, to a new book of scripture that originated in the Americas, to the notion that our God was once a man and it is possible for a man to become a god in that he can have an eternal increase in the Lord's kingdom. But the most contentious, publicized, criticized, and persecuted aspect was the principle of plural marriage as a higher order of religion on a man's path to godhood.

Now there are those inside and outside the Mormon Church who claim that Joseph Smith Jr. never actually lived the principle of plural marriage and it was a rogue teaching that infiltrated the church in spite of Joseph's public statements against it. There are others who admit that Joseph did indulge in the affair, but that it is not part of the restored gospel and blame Joseph, Brigham Young and others for the debauched practice.

First of all, Joseph did teach and practice plural marriage. There are far too many records of Joseph's plural wives to pretend that it is all fiction. Here are but two tiny examples.

According to Benjamin F. Johnson, he learned of plural marriage directly from the

Prophet Joseph Smith Jr. in order to facilitate Joseph's marriage to Benjamin's sister, Almera Woodard Johnson, which occurred 3 April 1843.

Joseph F. Smith, December 23, 1894.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A PROPHET

DISCOURSE

Delivered by President Joseph F. Smith,

at the Memorial Services in honor

of the Prophet Joseph Smith's

Birthday, held in the Sixteenth Ward Meeting House, Sunday Evening, December 23, 1894.

Collected Discourses, Vol.5, Joseph F. Smith, December 23, 1894.

I [Zina Smith] received a testimony for myself from the Lord of this work, and that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God before I ever saw him, while I resided in the state of New York, given in answer to prayer. I knew him in his lifetime and know him to have been a great, true man, and a servant of God...

The speaker also related in detail her experience and impressions on the occasion when President Brigham Young seemed to the whole congregation to be the Prophet Joseph, and her convictions were the same as those related by Bishop Burton...

Continuing, she said: "I wish to bear my testimony to the principle of celestial marriage, that it is true. When I think of the man that took his life in his hands and went from place to place where God told him to go, and in the midst of persecutions, trials and vexations of every kind, made covenant with the women of God that have stood true to him—most of them—when I think of his integrity, and of his obedience, I think what a lesson it should be to us, that we know he

did not do this of his own accord. He sent word to me by my brother, saying, ‘Tell Zina I put it off and put it off till an angel with a drawn sword stood by me and told me if I did not establish that principle upon the earth, I would lose my position and my life.’ President Young told us in several places—said he, ‘Brethren, if you want wives take them, for the time will come when you can’t.’

But, thanks to our Heavenly Father, there are many left upon the earth who were born under the celestial covenant, although they do not at present appreciate their position. The day will come when they will feel the Spirit of God resting upon them, and they will feel that it is an honor to be born in that covenant. I feel to bear my testimony to the truth of this work. I know it is the work of God, and that Joseph Smith was His Prophet, and that Brigham Young was his successor, and those by whom I am surrounded are holy men, living to the best of their understanding, according to His will. Joseph Smith said: ‘All you who will not find fault with the words of life and salvation that God reveals through me for the salvation of the human family, I will stand like an officer of the gate, and I will see you safe through into the celestial kingdom.’ I became his wife at this time in Nauvoo, and I never in my life had a rebellious thought against that principle, for which I thank the Lord.” Zina D. H. Smith

Both Benjamin F. Johnson and Joseph F. Smith, the latter of whom became a president of the church, were contemporary and personally familiar with Joseph Smith Jr. It’s very doubtful that these men and the scores of others who have documented the plural wives of Joseph Smith are part of a mass conspiracy to invent such a deception to perpetrate on the rest of us.

Joseph was fearless in preaching all the other controversial principles, doctrines, and notions of the church, but the only two issues about which he was reticent were plural marriage and the status of black skinned people with regard to slavery, the priesthood and

the temple ordinances. The reasons for his reluctance to publically preach about plural marriage became obvious in later years when it was made public by Brigham Young and in the upheaval that followed; statutes were enacted by states and the federal government outlawing the practice. Was it a legitimate doctrine and practice of the early Mormon Church? Of course it obviously was and it began with Joseph Smith not just later with Brigham Young.

But is it a necessary principle of the Mormon religion? One of the clearest opinions on the subject other than that of Brigham Young, who is thought to be an unsavory character by some, comes from Joseph F. Smith, a man revered as one of the church's greatest presidents and leaders who also learned the gospel and its principles and doctrines at the feet of Joseph the Prophet of God.

Journal of Discourses, Vol.20, p.26, Joseph F. Smith, July 7, 1878

There is a great deal said about our plural marriage by the outside world, and sometimes it is referred to by the Latter-day Saints at home. I fancy sometimes that not only is the world without knowledge in relation to this principle, but many of those who profess to be Latter-day Saints are far from possessing a correct understanding of it...

Some people have supposed that the doctrine of plural marriage was a sort of superfluity, or non-essential, to the salvation or exaltation of mankind. In other words, some of the Saints have said, and believe, that a man with one wife, sealed to him by the authority of the Priesthood for time and eternity, will receive an exaltation as great and glorious, if he is faithful, as he possibly could with

more than one. I want here to enter my solemn protest against this idea, for I know it is false. There is no blessing promised except upon conditions, and no blessing can be obtained by mankind except by faithful compliance with the conditions, or law, upon which the same is promised. The marriage of one woman to a man for time and eternity by the sealing power, according to the will of God, is a fulfillment of the celestial law of marriage in part—and is good so far as it goes—and so far as a man abides these conditions of the law, he will receive his reward therefore, and this reward, or blessing, he could not obtain on any other grounds or conditions. But this is only the beginning of the law, not the whole of it. Therefore, whoever has imagined that he could obtain the fullness of the blessings pertaining to this celestial law, by complying with only a portion of its conditions, has deceived himself. He cannot do it. When that principle was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, he very naturally shrank, in his feelings, from the responsibilities thereby imposed upon him; foreseeing, as he did in part, the apparently insurmountable difficulties in the way of establishing it, in the face of the popular opinion, the traditions and customs of many generations, the frowns, ridicule, slander, opposition and persecutions of the world. Yes, this man of God, who dared to meet the opposition of the whole world with bold and fearless front, who dared to dispute the religious authority and accumulated learning and wisdom of the age—who dared everything for the truth, and shrank not even from the sacrifice of his own life in testimony of his divine mission, shrank, in his feelings, from the weight of the responsibility of inaugurating and establishing this new innovation upon the established customs of the world. But he did not falter, although it was not until an angel of God, with a drawn sword,

stood before him; and commanded that he should enter into the practice of that principle, or he should be utterly destroyed, or rejected, that he moved forward to reveal and establish that doctrine.

After the Mormons were driven into the western wilderness they openly lived the principle of plural marriage until about 1890. Because this principle of marriage is an essential part of the fullness of the gospel and the fullness of the priesthood, provisions were made for its continuation on earth. The Mormons teach that Joseph Smith was called to restore the fullness of the gospel to include all its doctrines and principles across the previous dispensations of this earth for the final time in what is referred to as the dispensation of fullness of times. Because of this and the implied conclusion that there will not be another restoration of the gospel before the end of this creation, plural marriage could not be lost, ignored, or abandoned because of some men's ignorance, arrogance, political correctness, or spiritual laziness. It is still being practiced with traceable priesthood links back to Joseph, Brigham and John Taylor. Of course there are many counterfeits at large so extreme caution must be exercised to pursue such a thing.

Eventually, the forces of darkness did succeed in compelling the church to abandon the practice of plural marriage. The federal government enacted laws prohibiting plural marriage, which were sustained by the supreme court of the land, even though such laws violate the fundamental constitutional concepts on which our country was founded including the right of religious freedom as long as it puts no other person in peril, and the precept of equal protection under the law for all citizens, and the separation of church and state so that the government is never guilty of imposing a particular religious idea on

anyone within its jurisdiction. Under duress the newly formed state of Utah even included an unconstitutional prohibition against plural marriage in its state constitution. Under attack from those who were supposed to be protecting the constitutional rights of the early Mormons the church abandoned the practice of marrying more than one woman to a man. President John Taylor refused to surrender to the pressure from the government and consequently went on the lam. His successor, Wilford Woodruff, while in the Logan, Utah temple was inspired to grudgingly relinquish the doctrine of plural marriage. He may or may not have known that other arrangements had been made for its continuation. Not altogether in favor of losing that part of the gospel, he and his advisors crafted a Declaration that was designed to placate the U.S. congress without actually defying Lord's gospel restoration. It has been referred to as a revelation, but an educated reading of the text shows it to be from President Woodruff, not the Lord.

Presented at General Conference to the general membership of the church.

Official Declaration 1

To Whom it may concern:

Press dispatches having been sent for political purposes, from Salt Lake City, which have been widely published, to the effect that the Utah Commission, in their recent report to the Secretary of the Interior, allege that plural marriages are still being solemnized and that forty or more such marriages have been contracted in Utah since last June or during the past year, also that in public discourses the leaders of the Church have taught, encouraged and urged the continuance of the practice of polygamy-

I, therefore, as President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints, do hereby, in the most solemn manner, declare that these charges are false. We are not teaching polygamy or plural marriage, nor permitting any person to enter into its practice, and I deny that either forty or any other number of plural marriages have during that period been solemnized in our Temples or in any other place in the Territory.

One case has been reported, in which the parties allege that the marriage was performed in the Endowment House, in Salt Lake City, in the Spring of 1889, but I have not been able to learn who performed the ceremony; whatever was done in this matter was without my knowledge. In consequence of this alleged occurrence the Endowment House was, by my instructions, taken down without delay. Inasmuch as laws have been enacted by Congress forbidding plural marriages, which laws have been pronounced constitutional by the court of last resort, I hereby declare my intentions to submit to those laws, and to use my influence with the members of the Church over which I preside to have them do likewise.

There is nothing in my teachings to the Church or in those of my associates, during the time specified, which can be reasonably construed to inculcate or encourage polygamy; and when any Elder of the Church has used language which appeared to convey any such teaching, he has been promptly reproved. And I now publicly declare that my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land.

Wilford Woodruff
President of the Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints.

President Lorenzo Snow offered the following:

“I move that, recognizing Wilford Woodruff as the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the only man on the earth at the present time who holds the keys of the sealing ordinances, we consider him fully authorized by virtue of his position to issue the Manifesto which has been read in our hearing, and which is dated September 24th, 1890, and that as a Church in General Conference assembled, we accept his declaration concerning plural marriages as authoritative and binding.”

The vote to sustain the foregoing motion was unanimous.

Salt Lake City, Utah, October 6, 1890.

A plain reading makes it clear that the bulk of the text is little more than a denial of rumored wrongdoing. Included is a personal commitment to suggest that the people of the church refrain from the practice. The general tone however is to abandon the practice of plural marriage. By itself this declaration is almost meaningless. What becomes binding is the following vote of the church. That is the action that ended the practice of plural marriage in the church and is not only proper, but is sustained and upheld by the Lord. The church had every right to end that practice if they wished to do so. The reason is simple. When the Lord revealed how He wanted the church to be organized and run, He made it clear that certain operations were to be done by common consent. Another way to express this would be to say, by majority vote. This rule could be called the law of the church. The phraseology of “common consent” is also used as an understanding between as few as two people. In this context it means a meeting of minds or agreement.

Date: July 1830

Place: Harmony, Pennsylvania

To: Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer

1 Behold, I say unto you that you shall let your time be devoted to the studying of the scriptures, and to preaching, and to confirming the church at Colesville, and to performing your labors on the land, such as is required, until after you shall go to the west to hold the next conference; and then it shall be made known what you shall do.

2 And all things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith, for all things you shall receive by faith. Amen.

The church, as the Lord's U.S. Corporation, had every right to stop the practice of plural marriage. The priesthood and those who hold it however are to operate under a different requirement. This realization serves to highlight the separateness of the church itself and the priesthood of the men within it.

D&C 84:40

40 Therefore, all those who receive the priesthood, receive this oath and covenant of my Father, which he cannot break, neither can it be moved...

44 For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.

The shameful errors of our government are now being exposed, not by any efforts of the church nor honorable-minded statesmen or politicians, but through the efforts of those fighting for the constitutional rights of homosexuals and trans-genders. Their efforts and successes make obvious the unconstitutionality of governmental interference in the belief

and performance of plural marriage as well. One must ask; what is worse, a cheating husband or boyfriend with one or more mistresses, of which his legitimate wife or significant other knows nothing, or a compound family where all are aware and in agreement with the arrangement, who are living with each other in honor and integrity?

The question is rhetorical and the answer is obvious. It is also obvious that there will no longer be any prosecutions of plural families where the adults are smart enough to not defiantly break well-founded and constitutional laws as well as those good civil and criminal laws against fraud and the mistreatment of others.

The church has not practiced or allowed the practice of plural marriage within its jurisdiction since 1890 to the present time. Those inspired to enter that principle of marriage have had to go elsewhere at the peril of their church membership and the counterfeits who prey on the ill-informed and gullible. Old habits die hard, but one must ask; what now is preventing the church from once again performing plural marriages within its organization to again comply with the requirements of the fullness of the gospel? Has permanent damage been done? Some things are obvious like the provision in the Utah state constitution would have to be struck down, but that's possible. In other states that particular obstacle doesn't exist. Some state statutes would have to be amended or vacated. But outside of the purely legal and civil politics, the church leadership could stop acting cowardly and state that as a people the Mormons should again have the fullness of the gospel and the fullness of priesthood available to the members of the Lord's church as in the beginning and put it to a vote. The government and intermeddling so-called Christians may object, but they would ultimately lose in the courts. The church leadership still has all the priesthood authority necessary to perform

plural marriages; it is inherent in the apostleship. It may be unlikely the modern membership would ever vote in the majority to bring plural marriage back into the church, but the leaders could at least discover where they could send those who wish to live the higher aspects of the gospel and not excommunicate them even if they do require them to be as discrete as possible in their lifestyle. This could be an interim situation while the priesthood leadership works to raise the righteousness level of the general membership if that kind of accommodation would become necessary. Bringing plural marriage back may even boost the missionary efforts; it worked well for Brigham. Supposing the church did reinstitute plural marriage, what might be the response of those who have struggled to keep the practice alive outside the church these past 125 or so years? This situation would certainly expose the motives of all involved in this issue outside and inside the church. Human nature as it is might suggest that those outside the church would perhaps claim the church no had the authority to just take up the practice again without seeking them out to retrieve those keys. Those within the church leadership would certainly be loath to do such a thing.

Under the scenario of the church resuming plural marriages inside the church it might become clear who will actually live the gospel at its most fundamental and important levels. Those who have been living legitimately and authoritatively made plural marriages outside the church should rejoice that the church is striving to live the fullness of the gospel for the benefit and blessing of more of the Lord's people and willingly and anxiously assist the church in any way possible, so their exile from the body of the church could end and they could dismantle their group. Those inside the leadership of the church should embrace those who have courageously kept this important principle alive on the earth with respect and gladness and include them back

into full fellowship along with their extended families and their records. Only these actions would prove who actually has an eye single to the glory of God instead of their own status and glory among men. That single precept will determine the success or failure of more salvations and exaltations than any other.

It seems to be a prevalent notion among those who deny the legitimacy of plural marriage as a necessary part of the restored gospel that Brigham Young primarily, along with some others, modified or invented sections 131 and 132 of the D &C, which deal specifically with the subject of plural marriage. These accusations are foolishly unfounded and a modicum of research proves these ideas are false delusions. This, and other issues are of such importance to one's eternities that childish conspiracy theories serve to do little more than amuse the juvenile-minded. The following reference material should settle the issue of those accusations and expose their falseness to anyone of average intelligence who is seeking truth and righteousness.

Encyclopedia of Mormonism, Vol.1, DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

Section 131 contains selected statements made by Joseph Smith on May

16-17, 1843, during a visit to members of the Church in Ramus, Illinois, 22 miles

east of Nauvoo (HC 5:391-93). They were recorded by William Clayton in his

diary. In addition to its teachings on eternal marriage, section 131 also defines

the phrase "more sure word of prophecy," declares that no one can be saved in ignorance

(cf. TPJS, p. 217), and explains that spirit is purified matter.

Otten & Caldwell, Sacred Truths of the Doctrine & Covenants, Vol.2, p.347 Joseph Smith, Jun.

[Tuesday, 16 May 1843]... Before returning, I gave Brother and Sister Johnson instructions on the priesthood; and putting my hand on the knee of William Clayton, I said: [Section 131:1-4 follows]...

1 In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

2 And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

3 And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

4 He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.

The clarification that is inserted in the brackets was not done surreptitiously by Brigham Young, but included by William Clayton at the time and at the very least approved by Joseph Smith if not included under the direction of the prophet.

Otten & Caldwell, Sacred Truths of the Doctrine & Covenants, Vol.2, p.347

Wednesday, 17, [May 1843]... At ten a. m. preached from 2nd Peter, 1st chapter and showed that knowledge is power; and the man who has the most knowledge has the greatest power. [Section 131:5-6 follows]

5 (May 17th, 1843.) The more sure word of prophecy means a man's knowing that he is sealed up unto eternal life, by revelation and the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy Priesthood.

6 It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.

Otten & Caldwell, Sacred Truths of the Doctrine & Covenants, Vol.2, p.348

In the evening went to hear a Methodist preacher lecture. After he got through, offered some corrections as follows: [Section 131:7-8 follows]

7 There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes;

8 We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter.

(HC, Vol. 5, pp. 391-392)

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.29

The date in the heading of the Revelation on the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant, Including the Plurality of Wives, notes the time at which the revelation was committed to writing, not the time at which the principles set forth in the revelation were first made known to the Prophet. This is evident from the written revelation itself which discloses the fact that Joseph Smith was already in the relationship of plural marriage, as the following passage witnesses:

“And let mine handmaid, Emma Smith, receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph, and who are virtuous and pure before me.”

There is indisputable evidence that the revelation making known this marriage law was given to the Prophet as early as 1831. In that year, and thence intermittently up to 1833, the Prophet was engaged in a revision of the English Bible text under the inspiration of God, Sidney Rigdon in the main acting as his scribe. As he began his revision with the Old Testament, he would be dealing with the age of the Patriarchs in 1831. He was doubtless struck with the favor in which the Lord held the several Bible Patriarchs of that period, notwithstanding they had a plurality of wives. What more natural than that he should inquire of the

Lord at that time, when his mind must have been impressed with the fact—Why, O Lord, didst Thou justify Thy servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; as also Moses, David, and Solomon, in the matter of their having many wives and concubines (see opening paragraph of the Revelation)? In answer to that inquiry came the revelation, though not then committed to writing.

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.30

Corroborative evidences of the fact of the revelation having been given thus early in the Prophet's career are to be found in the early charges against the Church about its belief in "polygamy." For example: When the Book of Doctrine and Covenants was presented to the several quorums of the priesthood of the Church for acceptance in the general assembly of that body, the 17th of August, 1835, an article on "Marriage" was presented by W. W. Phelps, which for many years was published in the Doctrine and Covenants. It was not a revelation, nor was it presented as such to the general assembly of the priesthood. It was an article, however, that represented the views of the assembly on the subject of marriage at that time, unenlightened as they were by the revelation already given to the Prophet on the subject. What the Prophet Joseph's connection was with this article cannot be learned. Whether he approved it or not is uncertain, since he was absent from Kirtland at the time of the general assembly of the priesthood which accepted it, on a visit to the Saints in Michigan (see HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, Vol. I, pp. 243-53).

In this article on marriage the following sentence occurs:

"Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication and polygamy, we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife, and one

woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.”

From this it is evident that as early at least as 1835 a charge of polygamy was made against the Church. Why was that the case, unless the subject of “polygamy” had been within the Church? Is it not evident that some one to whom the Prophet had confided the knowledge of the revelation he had received concerning the rightfulness of plural marriage—under certain circumstances—had unwisely made some statement concerning the matter?

Again, in May, 1836, in Missouri, in a series of questions asked and answered through the Elder’s Journal, the following occurs:

“Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one?”

To which the answer is given; “No, not at the same time.”

This again represents the belief of the Saints at that time, unenlightened as they then were by the revelation received by their Prophet. But again, why this question unless there had been some agitation of the subject? Had someone before the time had come for making known this doctrine to the Church, again unwisely referred to the knowledge, which had been revealed to the Prophet some seven years earlier?

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.31

All these incidents blend together and make it clearly evident that the revelation on marriage was given long before the 12th of July, 1843. Doubtless as early as 1831. In addition to these indirect evidences is the direct testimony of the late Elder Orson Pratt, of the council of the Twelve Apostles. In 1878, in company with President Joseph F. Smith, Elder Pratt visited several states east of the Mississippi in the capacity of a missionary; and at Plano, Illinois, at a meeting of

the so-called Reorganized Church of the Latter-day Saints, he was invited by the presiding officer, a Mr. Dille, and the meeting, to occupy the time, which he did. In his remarks, according to his own and his companion's report of the meeting-

“Elder Pratt gave a plain, simple narration of his early experience in the Church, relating many interesting incidents connected with its rise; explained the circumstances under which several revelations were received by Joseph, the Prophet, and the manner in which he received them, he being present on several occasions of the kind. Declared [that] at such times Joseph used the Seer stone when inquiring of the Lord, and receiving revelation, but that he was so thoroughly endowed with the inspiration of the Almighty and the spirit of revelation that he often received them without any instrument, or other means than the operation of the spirit upon his mind. Referred to the testimony which he received of the truth of the great latter-day work while yet a boy. Testified that these things were not matters of belief only with him, but of actual knowledge. He explained the circumstances connected with the coming forth of the revelation on plural marriage. Refuted the statement and belief of those present that Brigham Young was the author of that revelation; showed that Joseph Smith the Prophet had not only commenced the practice himself, and taught it to others, before President Young and the Twelve had returned from their mission in Europe, in 1841, but that Joseph actually received revelations upon that principle as early as 1831. Said “Lyman Johnson, who was very familiar with Joseph at this early date, Joseph living at his father's house, and who was also very intimate with me, we having traveled on several missions together, told me himself that Joseph had made known to him as early as 1831, that plural marriage was a correct principle. Joseph declared to Lyman that God had revealed it to him, but that the time had not come to teach or practice it in the Church, but that the time would

come.’ To this statement Elder Pratt bore his testimony. He cited several instances of Joseph having had wives sealed to him, one at least as early as April 5th, 1841, which was some time prior to the return of the Twelve from England. Referred to his own trial in regard to this matter in Nauvoo, and said it was because he got his information from a wicked source, from those disaffected, but as soon as he learned the truth, he was satisfied.

(Signed) “ORSON PRATT, (Signed) “JOSEPH F. SMITH”

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.32

(The above is taken from a signed report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith of the Council of the Twelve on the occasion of their visit to the East in 1878, and is to be found in the Millennial Star, Vol. 40, Nos. 49 and 50.)

DISCOURSE BY ELDER JOSEPH F. SMITH,

Delivered at the Funeral Services over the Remains of Elder William Clayton, Held in the 17th Ward Meeting House, Salt Lake City, December 7th, 1879.

LAW OF CELESTIAL MARRIAGE—THE RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT—
EXTENT OF THE MISSION OF THE SAVIOR.

Journal of Discourses, Vol.21, p.9, Joseph F. Smith, December 7th, 1879

By request of President John Taylor, I arise to make a few remarks. I deeply and sincerely sympathize with the family, the wives and children of the deceased, Bro. William Clayton, who remain to mourn the loss of the society of their husband and father for a little season. And yet, when we consider all the circumstances, we may conclude that we have not very great cause to mourn.

For when a man has lived to a good old age, worn out as it were through toil, passes away, we can realize at least that he has accomplished his mission, that he has performed his work on this earth, and is ready to return to the father from

whence he came; behind the veil.

Brother Clayton had reached a ripe age, after laboring unceasingly among his brethren from his first connection with the Church.

He has had a long and varied experience among this people. He was a friend and companion of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and it was to his pen to a very great extent that we are indebted for the history of the Church—that is, the history of the Prophet Joseph more particularly, during his acquaintance with him and the time he acted for him as his private secretary, in the days of Nauvoo. We have the journals which he kept during that time, in the Historian's Office, from which—in connection with those of Elders Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff and the Times and Seasons, a publication of the Church at that time—we have obtained the history the Church during that period. It was his pen that wrote for the first time the revelation in relation to the eternity of the marriage covenant and of a plurality of wives. Although that revelation had been given to the Prophet Joseph many years before, it was not written until the 12th of July, 1843, at which time Elder William Clayton, acting as a scribe for the Prophet, wrote it from his dictation.

I am happy to say that he has left on record a statement in the shape of an affidavit, prepared by himself, in relation to this important subject, for it is a subject that is of the most vital importance, not only to the Latter-day Saints, but to the whole world; for without the knowledge contained in that revelation, we never could consummate the object of our mission to this earth, we never could fulfill the purposes of God in this estate.

I have this paper in my possession, and have had for a number of months past. In fact, it was written at my request, and then given into my care, and I have preserved it with a view, when thought proper, to have it published. And as

it is a sermon of itself, it would perhaps be more interesting than anything I could say on the present occasion, and therefore, with President Taylor's permission, I will read it to the congregation.

Journal of Discourses, Vol.21, p.10, Joseph F. Smith, December 7th, 1879

[The affidavit was then read by Elder Smith.]

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.32

“On the 7th of October, 1842, in the presence of Bishop Newel K.”

Whitney and his wife, Elizabeth Ann, President Joseph Smith appointed me Temple Recorder, and also his private clerk, placing all records, books papers, etc., in my care, and requiring me to take charge of and preserve them, his closing words being, ‘when I have any revelations to write, you are the one to write them.’ * * * On the morning of the 12th of July, 1843; Joseph and Hyrum Smith came into the office in the upper story of the brick store, on the bank of the Mississippi river. They were talking on the subject of plural marriage. Hyrum said to Joseph, ‘If you will write the revelation on celestial marriage, I will take it and read it to Emma, and I believe I can convince her of its truth, and you will hereafter have peace.’ Joseph smiled and remarked, ‘You do not know Emma as well as I do.’ Hyrum repeated his opinion, and further remarked, ‘The doctrine is so plain, I can convince any reasonable man or woman of its truth, purity and heavenly origin,’ or words to that effect. Joseph then said, ‘Well, I will write the revelation and we will see.’ He then requested me to get paper and prepare to write. Hyrum very urgently requested Joseph to write the revelation by means of the Urim and Thummim, but Joseph in reply, said he did not need to, for he knew the revelation perfectly from beginning to end.

“Joseph and Hyrum then sat down and Joseph commenced to dictate the

revelation on celestial marriage, and I wrote it, sentence by sentence, as he dictated. After the whole was written, Joseph asked me to read it through, slowly and carefully, which I did, and he pronounced it correct. He then remarked that there was much more that he could write on the same subject, but what was written was sufficient for the present.

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.33

“Hyrum then took the revelation to read to Emma. Joseph remained with me in the office until Hyrum returned. When he came back, Joseph asked him how he had succeeded. Hyrum replied that he had never received a more severe talking to in his life, that Emma was very bitter and full of resentment and anger.

“Joseph quietly remarked, ‘I told you you did not know Emma as well as I did.’ Joseph then put the revelation in his pocket, and they both left the office.

“The revelation was read to several of the authorities during the day.

Towards evening Bishop Newel K. Whitney asked Joseph if he had any objections to his taking a copy of the revelation; Joseph replied that he had not, and handed it to him. It was carefully copied the following day by Joseph C. Kingsbury. Two or three days after the revelation was written Joseph related to me and several others that Emma had so teased, and urgently entreated him for the privilege of destroying it, that he became so weary of her teasing, and to get rid of her annoyance, he told her she might destroy it and she had done so, but he had consented to her wish in this matter to pacify her, realizing that he knew the revelation perfectly, and could rewrite it at any time if necessary.

“The copy made by Joseph C. Kingsbury is a true and correct copy of the original in every respect. The copy was carefully preserved by Bishop Whitney, and but few knew of its existence until the temporary location of the Camps of Israel at Winter Quarters, on the Missouri River, in 1846. * * * * * (signed) WM.

CLAYTON. "Salt Lake City, Feb. 16th, 1874."

He [Joseph F. Smith] then continued:

As I before said, I felt to read this document because of the instruction it would afford, and for the further object of showing that although "he is dead, he yet speaketh." For this testimony of Brother Clayton will stand forever, though his body moulders into dust. And I am, and so was the deceased when living, at the defiance of the world to dispute those statements. They are made from personal knowledge derived from personal associations with the Prophet Joseph Smith himself, not with a view to gain notoriety, but rather to leave behind him his testimony with regard to this important principle. He had done so. And as he has here stated, as having come from the mouth of the Prophet, this doctrine of eternal union of husband and wife, and of plural marriage, is one of the most important doctrines ever revealed to man in any age of the world. Without it man would come to a full stop; without it we never could be exalted to associate with and become gods, neither could we attain to the power of eternal increase, or the blessings pronounced upon Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the fathers of the faithful.

Journal of Discourses, Vol.21, p.10, Joseph F. Smith, December 7th, 1879

There are but a few witnesses now living in relation to the coming forth of this revelation; there never were many that were intimately acquainted with the prophet and his teaching upon this subject. I look around me and see a number of persons in this assembly whose hair has grown grey in the service of God, and who had an intimate acquaintance with our martyred prophet; but few, if any of them, were so closely identified with him in this matter as Brother Clayton.

Journal of Discourses, Vol.21, p.10, Joseph F. Smith, December 7th, 1879

There are, however, enough witnesses to these principles to establish them upon the earth in such a manner that they never can be forgotten or stamped out. For they will live; they are destined to live, and also to grow and spread abroad upon the face of the earth, to be received and accepted and adopted by all the virtuous, by all the pure in heart, by all who love the truth, and seek to serve Him and keep His commandments; they are bound to prevail, because they are true principles...

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.32

Relative to committing the revelation to writing on the 12th of July, 1843, that can best be told by the man who wrote the revelation as the Prophet Joseph dictated it to him, William Clayton; and the man who copied it the day following, Joseph Kingsbury; and from which copy the revelation was afterwards printed as it now stands in the current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. In a sworn statement before John T. Caine, a notary public in Salt Lake City, on February 16th, 1874...

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.33

On May 22, 1886, Joseph C. Kingsbury made the following statement before Charles W. Stayner, a notary public, in Salt Lake City:

“In reference to the affidavit of Elder William Clayton, on the subject of the celestial order of patriarchal marriage, published in the Deseret Evening News of May 20th, 1886, and particularly as to the statement made therein concerning myself, as having copied the original revelation written by Brother Clayton at the dictation of the Prophet Joseph, I will say that Bishop Newel K. Whitney, handed

me the revelation above referred to either on the day it was written or the day following, and stating what it was, asked me to take a copy of it. I did so, and then read my copy of it to Bishop Whitney, we compared it with the original which he held in his hand while I read to him. When I had finished reading, Bishop Whitney pronounced the copy correct, and Hyrum Smith coming into the room at the time to fetch the original, Bishop Whitney handed it to him. I will also state that this copy, as also the original are identically the same as that published in the present edition [1886] of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.

History of the Church, Vol.5, Introduction, p.34

“I will add that I also knew that the Prophet Joseph Smith had married other women besides his first wife, Emma; I was well aware of the fact of his having married Sarah Ann Whitney, the eldest daughter of Bishop Newel K.

Whitney and Elizabeth Ann Whitney, his wife. And the Prophet Joseph told me personally that he had married other women, in accordance with the revealed will of God, and spoke concerning the principle as being a command of God for holy purposes. (Signed) “JOSEPH C. KINGSBURY.”

Celestial Plural Marriage as restored by Joseph Smith is not plain polygamy, or bigamy. There are rules, stringent rules. It is reserved for those whom the Lord calls and must be done in the correct way, for the right reasons or spiritual destruction waits at the door, even though outwardly all may appear to be on the high road to exaltation. It is a process that is spelled out in section 132 of the D.&C.

D.&C. Section 132:

3 Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same.

4 For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.

5 For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.

6 And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God.

The first step in the process is having this law revealed to someone. This is more than reading and comprehending the words. This also describes how one is called to live this practice. It relies on the purest form of revelation; that of the witness of the Holy Spirit to the effect that the Lord is offering these blessings with the attendant challenges and sacrifices, which will surely come. One should realize that their life will become harder in ways not easily imagined if they accept. This principle is part of the refiners fire to burn the dross from one's soul. There are those who are never converted to believing this practice is essential and that is fine for them and displays that this law has either not been revealed to them as true and essential and they are not called, or they reject the offer. All are free to exercise their agency as they see fit. They would however be well advised to allow others the same courtesy and remain silent on the matter instead of taking up a fight

against it and those who feel differently. A requirement of this process of entering the Law of Celestial Plural Marriage is that those with proper authority perform the ordinance and the Holy Spirit of Promise seals it.

D.&C. Section 132:

18 And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife, and make a covenant with her for time and for all eternity, if that covenant is not by me or by my word, which is my law, and is not sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, through him whom I have anointed and appointed unto this power, then it is not valid neither of force when they are out of the world, because they are not joined by me, saith the Lord, neither by my word; when they are out of the world it cannot be received there, because the angels and the gods are appointed there, by whom they cannot pass; they cannot, therefore, inherit my glory; for my house is a house of order, saith the Lord God.

There are specific rules within this law, which govern how it is to be entered. Entering plural marriage cannot be done under this law by a civil ceremony and certainly not by two or more people standing in a field and professing themselves to be married for eternity. This law also regulates with whom one may enter the practice in compliance with the will of God.

D.&C. Section 132:

61 And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he

espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else.

Some explanation may be helpful in analyzing this passage. The word “espouse” as used in this context, clearly refers to the archaic usage, meaning betrothed or engaged. In the old Hebrew culture it amounted to a contract binding the betrothed to a wedding. The first stipulation is the first wife having been a virgin at her marriage. The definition of virgin might not be as simple and clear as one might think. These thoughts and considerations could apply to all women entering the plural marriage situation. One must ask, what if there is a young lady who fell into error and engaged in sexual intimacy before she married and then never married and repented successfully of the transgression? Is she forever barred from receiving the highest blessings? Isn't true repentance absolute with only one exception, which is not simple fornication? Such a person may well be qualified to meet the requirements of this law, but these facts introduce an element of risk into the situation for her and also the man. Prudence would dictate seeking some guidance from the Lord. What if the woman in the first example conceived and bore a child as the only change in the first scenario. Could this woman qualify? Again she may very well be acceptable under the law, but the element of risk seems a little higher with this added development.

The qualifications of this law stipulate the woman is a “virgin” AND that she not be under a vow to another man. This vow obviously means a marriage vow. However, it could include a betrothal until that contract is nullified. Section 132 goes into great detail explaining that common vows do not survive the grave, so what of a widow who was

married to only one man civilly, who is dead and in her life she was virtuous and a mother, or not? Could she qualify too? Perhaps. Again, since the risk is greater, communion with the heavens for guidance is highly recommended. What if she had been sealed to her only and deceased husband in a temple marriage? What then? Research indicates that the most proper course would be to marry her for the duration of this life for the support of her and her children and any new children would be part of her first husband's family if he is allowed to keep them in the eternities.

What of a divorced woman or a widow who had been married and divorced before, who have a living ex-spouse? It is not likely the Lord would condone such a plural marriage. It is possible, but would undoubtedly require an extraordinary act of acceptance by the Lord. The Lord seldom and not passively breaks His own laws.

D.&C. Section 132:

8 Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion.

The law also requires the first wife to consent to other wives. It is unclear whether this is required for just the second wife, or all subsequent wives, or if the second and later wives ever have a say one time, or all do so on an ongoing basis. This determination is likely left to the husband. What is clear is that great care must be exercised to be within the requirements of this law and the more strictly it is followed, the less risk there is of the Lord rejecting those involved. The risk of unhappiness with the principle or between the individuals however is ever-present.

There is an interesting aspect to this process, which bears investigation. It anticipates a

reasonably understood complication.

D.&C. Section 132:

64 And again, verily, verily, I say unto you, if any man have a wife, who holds the keys of this power, and he teaches unto her the law of my priesthood, as pertaining to these things, then shall she believe and administer unto him, or she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord your God; for I will destroy her; for I will magnify my name upon all those who receive and abide in my law.

65 Therefore, it shall be lawful in me, if she receive not this law, for him to receive all things whatsoever I, the Lord his God, will give unto him, because she did not believe and administer unto him according to my word; and she then becomes the transgressor; and he is exempt from the law of Sarah, who administered unto Abraham according to the law when I commanded Abraham to take Hagar to wife.

First of all, who “holds the keys of this power,” the man or the wife and to what power is the Lord referring? Some men might insist it refers to the man and his priesthood, but because of the referred context from verse 65 it actually appears that the “keys” and “power” refer to the law of Sarah. That law is inferred to be the right to “give” a husband another wife for the blessing of the family and for honoring the head of the house and in the current time, to comply with this law. This selection makes it clear that a recalcitrant first wife cannot singlehandedly stop the progress of a righteous man and can lose the right to be involved in moving the family forward. Although it is not spelled out, it is expected that a virtuous first wife be given sufficient time to soften her heart and relent. To be safe, the husband should take his cue for the duration of his patience from the Lord, but in any case he should act out of love and consideration for the tender

feelings of his faithful and loyal wife.

Plural marriage is not intended for everyone and never was. It is part of the fullness of the restored gospel and the Lord will oversee and protect His creation on its way to completion. The best we can do is try to be part of the journey and wind up in the best place possible for ourselves and those we love. May the Lord bless each one of us with all the blessings we are capable of receiving.

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