

The following article is four pages (129-132) out of the official Mormon Church manual *Achieving a Celestial Marriage Student Manual*. These four pages give an excellent explanation of the world view of Mormonism and the central theme of the importance of Mormon temples within Mormon theology. This article is copied without commentary and is allowable under the “Fair Use” clause of the copy write code. We invite the reader to examine the original document for context and accuracy.

## **Celestial Marriage: Key to Exaltation**

### (1-1) INTRODUCTION

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that man is an eternal being, made in the image and likeness of God. It also holds that man is a literal child of God and has the potential, if faithful to divine laws and ordinances, of becoming like his heavenly parent. These truths are generally well understood by Latter-day Saints.

Less well understood, however, is the fact that God is an exalted man who once lived on an earth and underwent experiences of mortality. The Prophet Joseph Smith refers to this as “the great secret.” (*Times and Seasons* 5:613 [ Aug. 1844]. See also Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 345.) The progression of our Father in heaven to godhood, or exaltation, was strictly in accordance with eternal principles, “for he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.” (D&C 88:22.)

By definition, exaltation includes the ability to procreate the family unit throughout eternity. This our Father in heaven has power to do. His marriage partner is our mother in heaven. We are their spirit children, born to them in the bonds of celestial marriage. The Lord would have all his children attain exaltation, but men must have their agency. Only those who subscribe by ordinance and by faithful adherence to covenant are worthy of “a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.” (D&C 132:19.)

## **GOD WAS ONCE A MORTAL MAN**

### (1-2) He Lived on an Earth like Our Own

“God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God and received instruction from, and

walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.” (Smith, *Teachings*, p. 345.)

### (1-3) He Experienced Conditions Similar to Our Own and Advanced Step by Step

“Remember that God, our heavenly Father, was perhaps once a child, and mortal like we our selves, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement; has moved for ward and overcome, until He has arrived at the point where He now is. ‘Is this really possible?’ Why, my dear friends, how would you like to be governed by a ruler who had not been through all the vicissitudes of life that are common to mortals? If he had not suffered, how could he sympathize (sic) with the distress of others? If he himself had not endured the same, how could he sympathize (sic) and be touched with the feelings of our infirmities? He could not, unless he himself had passed through the same ordeal, and overcome step by step.” (Orson Hyde in *JD*, 1:123.)

## **GOD IS NOW AN EXALTED MAN WITH POWERS OF ETERNAL INCREASE**

### (1-4) Our Father in Heaven Lives in an Exalted Marriage Relationship

“No matter to what heights God has attained or may attain, he does not stand alone; for side by side with him, in all her glory, a glory like unto his, stands a companion, the Mother of his children. For as we have a Father in heaven, so also we have a Mother there, a glorified, exalted, ennobled Mother.” (Melvin J. Ballard, as quoted in Bryant S. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin J. Ballard*, pp. 205-6.)

### (1-5) We Are Literal Children of God, Part of His Family Unit

“We are the children of God, our Heavenly Father. We are members of his family. We are his spirit offspring. We were born in the premortal life as spirit beings, sons and daughters of a glorified, perfected, exalted being. This holy being himself lives in the family unit. He has a fullness of glory and power and might and dominion. . . . We are the literal offspring of the most glorious personage of whom it is possible to conceive. He is God Al mighty, our Heavenly Father.” (Bruce R. McConkie, “Households of Faith,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1971, p. 4.)

### (1-6) We Lived with Our Heavenly Parents Prior to Coming to Earth

“I want to tell you, each and every one of you, that you are well acquainted with God our Heavenly Father, or the great Elohim. You are all well acquainted with him, for there is not a soul of you but what has lived in his house and dwelt with him year after year; and yet you are seeking to become acquainted with him, when the fact is, you have merely forgotten what you did know.” (Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 50.)

## **MEN ARE GODS IN EMBRYO**

### (1-7) We Have the Potential to Become like Our Heavenly Parents

“Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of our earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages of aeons, of evolving into a God.” (The First Presidency [ F. Smith, John R. Winder, Anthon H. Lund I , “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1909, p.81.)

### (1-8) This Potential Was Transmitted to Us Through Our Spiritual Birth

“We were born in the image of God our Father, he begot us like unto himself. There is the nature of deity in the composition of our spiritual organization; in our spiritual birth, our Father transmitted to us the capabilities, powers and faculties which he himself possessed, as much so as the child on its mother’s bosom possesses, although in an undeveloped state, the faculties, powers and susceptibilities of its parent.” ( Lorenzo Snow, *Deseret Weekly News*, 20:597.)

### (1-9) Exaltation Is Attained “by Going from One Small Degree to Another”

“Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to an other, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in ever lasting power...

*“When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation.”* (Smith, *Teachings*, pp. 346-48.)

## **EXALTATION IS ATTAINABLE ONLY IN FAMILY UNITS**

### (1-10) The Family Is the Basic Unit of Time and Eternity

“*Eternal families* have their beginning in celestial marriage here in mortality. Faithful members of them continue in the family unit in eternity, in the highest heaven of the celestial world, where they have eternal increase. (D. & C. 131:1-4; 132:16-32.) Perfect peace and a full endowment of all good graces attend such eternal families. By obedience to the laws of the gospel (which are celestial laws), Latter-day Saint families begin here and now to enjoy much of that peace, joy, love, and charity which will be enjoyed in eternal fulness (sic) in the exalted family unit.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 273.)

### (1-11) Family Units Sealed by Priesthood Authority Remain Intact Throughout Eternity

“Through the restoration of the priesthood held by Elijah, knowledge has been given to the Church that *each family unit*, where the parents have been married for time and for eternity, shall *remain intact through all eternity*. Moreover, each family unit is to be *linked to the generation which went before*, until all the faithful, who have proved their title to family membership through obedience to the gospel, shall be joined in *one grand family* from the beginning to the end of time, and shall find place in the celestial kingdom of God. *In this way all who receive the exaltation become heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in the possession of eternal family relationships.* . . .

“Eventually, when this work is perfected, and Christ delivers up to his Father the keys and makes his report, and death is destroyed, then that great family from the days of Adam down, of all the righteous, those who have kept the commandments of God, will find that they are *one family, the family of God*, entitled to all the blessings that pertain to the exaltation.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:67-68.)

## **ONLY THROUGH CELESTIAL MARRIAGE CAN A PERSON BECOME LIKE GOD**

### (1-12) The Lord Commands Marriage

“Many people imagine that there is something sinful in marriage; there is an apostate tradition to that effect. This is a false and very harmful idea. To the contrary, God not only commends but He commands marriage. While man was yet immortal, before sin had entered the world, our Heavenly Father Himself performed the first marriage. He united our first parents in the bonds of holy matrimony and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. This command He has never changed, abrogated or annulled; but it has continued in force throughout all the generations of mankind.” (Joseph F. Smith, *Juvenile Instructor*, 1 July 1902, p. 400.)

### (1-13) Exaltation Is Based on Celestial Marriage

“If you want salvation in the fullest, that is exaltation in the kingdom of God, so that you may become his sons and his daughters, you have got to go into the temple of the Lord and receive these holy ordinances which belong to that house, which cannot be had elsewhere. *No man shall receive the fulness of eternity, of exaltation, alone, no woman shall receive that blessing alone; but man and wife, when they receive the sealing power in the temple of the Lord, if they thereafter keep all the commandments, shall pass on to exaltation, and shall continue and become like the Lord.* And that is the destiny of men; that is what the Lord desires for his children.” (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2 :43-44.)

#### (1-14) “Then Shall They Be Gods, Because They Have No End”

“But if we are married for time and for all eternity and it is sealed upon our heads by those who have the authority so to seal, *and if we then keep our covenants and are faithful to the end*, we shall come forth in the resurrection from the dead and receive the following promised blessings: “ ‘*Then shall they be gods.*”

“So if you want to enter into exaltation and become as God, that is a son of God or a daughter of God, and receive a *fulness* (sic) of the kingdom, then you have got to abide in his law—not merely the law of marriage but *all* that pertains to the new and everlasting covenant—and then you have the ‘continuation of the lives’ forever, for the Lord says: “ ‘This is *eternal lives*—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. I am he. Receive ye, therefore, my law.’ (D&C 132:24.)” (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:62-63.)

#### (1-15) Only Resurrected and Glorified Beings May Become Parents of Spirit Offspring

“So far as the stages of eternal progression and attainment have been made known through divine revelation, we are to understand that only resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring. Only such exalted souls have reached maturity in the appointed course of eternal life; and the spirits born to them in the eternal worlds will pass in due sequence through the several stages or estates by which the glorified parents have attained exaltation.” (A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency [ F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, Charles W. Penrose] and the Twelve, “The Father and the Son,” *Improvement Era*, June 1916, p.

### **CELESTIAL MARRIAGE BRINGS MANY BLESSINGS**

#### (1-16) Celestial Marriage Has Benefits for This Life As Well As Eternity

“. . . Young men and young women who would live the happiest lives would do well to prepare themselves to be worthy of that form of marriage which God has ordained—the union of a man and woman worthy to have their marriage solemnized in the temple of the Most High. There as true lovers kneel to plight their troth, each may cherish the assurance of the following:

“First, that their married course begins in purity. The children who come to bless the union are guaranteed a royal birth so far as inheriting a clean body is concerned.

“Second, that their religious views are the same. The difficulty of rearing children properly is aggravated when Father and Mother have divergent views regarding doctrine and church affiliation. (Another great advantage of seminaries, auxiliaries, Sunday School, etc., you meet those of your own Church!)

“Third, that their vows are made with the idea of an eternal union, not to be broken by petty misunderstandings or difficulties.

“Fourth, that a covenant made in God’s presence and sealed by the Holy Priesthood is more binding than any other bond. “Fifth, that a marriage thus commenced is as eternal as love, the divinest (sic) attribute of the human soul.

“Sixth, that the family unit will remain unbroken throughout eternity.” ( David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals*, p. 465.)

#### (1-17) Celestial Marriage Prepares Men to Be Kings and Priests unto God

“Those who endure in perfect faith, who receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, and who gain the blessings of the temple (including celestial marriage) are eventually ordained *kings and priests*. These are offices given faithful holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and in them they will bear rule as exalted beings during the millennium and in eternity. ( Rev. 1: 6; 5:10.)” (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 599.)

#### (1-18) Celestial Marriage Makes Women Queens and Priestesses unto Their Husbands

“If righteous men have power through the gospel and its crowning ordinance of celestial marriage to become kings and priests to rule in exaltation forever, it follows that the women by their side (without whom they cannot attain exaltation) will be *queens* and priestesses. ( Rev. 1: 6; 5:10.) Exaltation grows out of the eternal union of a man and his wife. Of those whose marriage endures in eternity, the Lord says, ‘Then shall *they* be gods’ (D. & C. 132:20); that is, each of them, the man and the woman, will be a god. As such they will rule over their dominions forever.” (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p.613.)

#### (1-19) Celestial Marriage Makes It Possible for Us to Claim Our Mortal Children in Eternity As Well As to Propagate Ourselves Throughout Eternity

“Parents will have eternal claim upon their posterity and will have the gift of eternal increase, if they obtain the exaltation. This is the crowning glory in the kingdom of God, and they will have no end. When the Lord says they will have no end, he means that all who attain to this glory will have the blessing of the continuation of the ‘seeds’ forever. Those who fail to obtain this blessing come to the ‘deaths,’ which means that they will have no increase, forever. *All who obtain this exaltation will have the privilege of completing the full measure of their existence, and they will have a posterity that will be as innumerable as the stars of heaven...*

“The Father has promised us that through our faithfulness we shall be blessed with *the fulness* (sic) *of his kingdom*. In other words we will have the privilege of becoming *like him*. *To become like him we must have all the powers of godhood; thus a man and his wife when glorified will have spirit children* who eventually will go on an earth like this one we are on and pass through the same kind of experiences, being subject to mortal conditions, and if faithful, then they also will receive the fulness (sic) of exaltation and partake of the same blessings. There is no end to this development; it will go on forever. *We will become gods and have jurisdiction over worlds, and these worlds will be peopled by our own offspring*. We will have an endless eternity for this.” (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:43-44, 48.)

## (1-20) SUMMARY

As shown in this chapter, our Father in heaven was once a man as we are now, capable of physical death. By obedience to eternal gospel principles, he progressed from one stage of life to another until he attained the state that we call exaltation or god hood. In such a condition, he and our mother in heaven were empowered to give birth to spirit children whose potential was equal to that of their heavenly parents. We are those spirit children. We have also seen that the family is the basic unit of society, both in time and in eternity. Only those couples who are sealed in the bonds of celestial marriage by the powers of the holy priesthood of God may expect to enjoy the great blessing of perpetuating their family units throughout eternity. It is this fact that makes marriage in a temple of God such an important step in our eternal progression. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written this:

“Celestial marriage is a holy and an eternal ordinance; as an order of the priesthood, it has the name the *new and everlasting covenant of marriage*. Adam was the first one on this earth to enter into this type of union, and it has been the Lord’s order in all ages when the fulness (sic) of the gospel has been on earth. Its importance in the plan of salvation and exaltation cannot be overestimated. *The most important things that any member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ever does in this world are: 1. To marry the right person, in the right place, by the right authority; and 2. To keep the covenant made in connection with this holy and perfect order of matrimony—thus assuring the obedient persons of an inheritance of exaltation in the celestial kingdom.*” *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 118.)