

Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith

The Eternal Union of Husband and Wife

“Chapter 20: The Eternal Union of Husband and Wife,” *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith*, 173

The man and woman who are sealed for eternity under the authority of the holy priesthood can, through their faithfulness, attain exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God.

From the Life of Joseph F. Smith

While serving as a Counselor to President John Taylor, Joseph F. Smith traveled to Hawaii with his wife Julina, who he said was “as true as steel; as constant as the pole star, as faithful as time and better than gold.” [1](#) In Hawaii President Smith suffered from a serious illness and Julina nursed him back to health. Several months later, in March of 1887, it became necessary for Julina and their children to return to the mainland while Joseph F. remained on the islands.

On March 15 he recorded in his journal: “The steamer cut loose at 12 p.m. and at exactly 12:15 she commenced her course out of the harbor; and I took the last look at the receding forms of my loved and loving ones until God in his mercy shall permit us to meet again. When the ship passed the line of sight, I hastened [to a better vantage point] ... to look again at the speeding steamer *Australia* with her precious sacred treasures until lost behind Diamond Head. When once alone, my soul burst forth in tears and I wept their fountains dry and felt all the pangs and grief of parting with my heart’s best treasures on earth.” [2](#)

Despite the pain of such separations, President Smith knew the power and promise of the eternal principle revealed to the world by the Prophet Joseph Smith: “What is it? The union of husband and wife for time and for all eternity. ... Who understood the responsibility that dwells with the union of husband and wife, till Joseph Smith revealed it in the simplicity and plainness with which he has revealed it to the world? ... It has opened my eyes. If anything in the world could have made me a better man, or a better husband, ... it is that principle that the Lord has revealed, which shows me the obligations that I am under.” [3](#)

Teachings of Joseph F. Smith

God instituted marriage for our eternal glory and exaltation.

God instituted marriage in the beginning. He made man in his own image and likeness, male and female, and in their creation it was designed that they should be united together in sacred bonds of marriage, and one is not perfect without the other. [4](#)

The lawful union of man and woman [is] the means through which they may realize their highest and holiest aspirations. To the Latter-day Saints, marriage is not designed by our heavenly Father to be merely an earthly union, but one that shall survive the vicissitudes of time, and endure for eternity, bestowing honor and joy in this world, glory and eternal lives in the worlds to come. [5](#)

[The gospel] takes men and women and it joins them together in an eternal covenant of matrimony, holy and pure, given of God, which supplies the necessities and meets the purest and strongest desires of the soul. It makes men and women complete—husbands and wives for time and for all eternity. What a glorious thought this is! [6](#)

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. [7](#)

[People] ... are more and more being imbued with the selfish and ungodly idea that marriage is wrong and children a disgrace. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints takes an entirely opposite view, and believes in, and teaches as gospel truth, the first great scriptural commandment of God to man: “Be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it.” [[Genesis 1:28.](#)]

... God has commanded, authorized and instituted the marriage relation. This was made very plain in the revelation of God to the Prophet Joseph Smith, as witness this language in the Doctrine and Covenants, section

49:15: "And, again, I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man." [8](#)

Marriage is ... a principle or ordinance of the gospel, most vital to the happiness of mankind, however unimportant it may seem, or lightly regarded by many. There is no superfluous or unnecessary principle in the plan of life, but there is no principle of greater importance or more essential to the happiness of man—not only here, but especially hereafter, than that of marriage. [9](#)

It is a glorious privilege to be united as man and wife for time and all eternity.

It is a glorious privilege to be permitted to go into a Temple of God to be united as man and wife in the bonds of holy wedlock for time and all eternity by the authority of the Holy Priesthood, which is the power of God, for they who are thus joined together "no man can put asunder," for God hath joined them. [10](#)

The man and the woman who engage in this ordinance of matrimony are engaging in something that is of such far-reaching character, and is of such vast importance, that thereby hangs life and death, and eternal increase. Thereupon depends eternal happiness, or eternal misery. [11](#)

Why did [God] teach us the principle of eternal union of man and wife? ... So that the man receiving his wife by the power of God, for time and for all eternity, would have the right to claim her and she to claim her husband, in the world to come. [12](#)

Men and women may be saved singly, but men and women will not be exalted separately. They must be bound together in that union which has been revealed in this great latter dispensation. The man is not without the woman in the Lord, and neither is the woman without the man in the Lord. Whatever men and women may say or think in relation to this, they cannot obtain an exaltation in the kingdom of God single and alone. ...

We have come here to be conformed to the likeness of God. He made us in the beginning in His own image and in His own likeness, and He made us male and female. We never could be in the image of God if we were not both male and female. ... When we become like Him you will find that we will be presented before Him in the form in which we were created, male and female. The woman will not go there alone, and the man will not go there alone, and claim exaltation. They may attain a degree of salvation alone, but when they are exalted they will be exalted according to the law of the celestial kingdom. They cannot be exalted in any other way. [13](#)

There is no union for time and eternity that can be perfected outside of the law of God, and the order of his house. Men may desire it, they may go through the form of it, in this life, but it will be of no effect except it be done and sanctioned by divine authority, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. [14](#)

The Latter-day Saints marry for time and eternity, not merely until death parts husband and wife. Marriages performed under the civic law and by ministers of other denominations are regarded as honorable and effectual so far as relates to this life, but in order to be effectual in the life to come such covenants must be made for eternity, such unions must be formed according to God's law and under his authority, or they will have no force or effect hereafter. The family is the foundation of eternal glory, the nucleus of a kingdom without end. The husband will have his wife, the wife her husband, parents their children, forever, provided they secure them in the manner prescribed by him whose right it is to regulate all things pertaining to his kingdom. [15](#)

Marry in the faith, at the appropriate time, and in the house of the Lord.

We say to our young people, get married, and marry aright. Marry in the faith, and let the ceremony be performed in the place God has appointed. Live so that you may be worthy of this blessing. [16](#)

I want the young men of Zion to realize that this institution of marriage is not a man-made institution. It is of God. It is honorable. ... It is not simply devised for the convenience alone of man, to suit his own notions, and his own ideas; to marry and then divorce, to adopt and then to discard, just as he pleases. There are great consequences connected with it, consequences which reach beyond this present time, into all eternity, for thereby souls are begotten into the world, and men and women obtain their being in the world. Marriage is the preserver of the human race. Without it, the purposes of God would be frustrated; virtue would be destroyed to give place to vice and corruption, and the earth would be void and empty. [17](#)

Bachelorhood and small families carry to the superficial mind the idea that they are desirable because they bring with them the minimum of responsibility. The spirit that shirks responsibility shirks labor. Idleness and pleasure take the place of industry and strenuous effort. The love of pleasure and of an easy life in turn make demands upon young men who refuse to look upon marriage and its consequent family enlargement as a sacred duty. ...

... This loss to the home is a loss the nation must feel, as years go on. Time will vindicate the laws of God and the truth that individual human happiness is found in duty and not in pleasure and freedom from care.

The spirit of the world is contagious. We cannot live in the midst of such social conditions without suffering from the effects of their allurements. Our young people will be tempted to follow the example of the world about them. There is already a strong tendency to make sport of the obligations to marry. Pretexts of ambition are set up as an excuse to postpone marriage till some special object is attained. Some of our leading young men desire to complete first a course of study at home or abroad. Being natural leaders in society their example is dangerous and the excuse is one of questionable propriety. It were better far that many such young men never went to college than that the excuse of college life be made the reason for postponing marriage beyond the proper age.

[18](#)

Young men want to get homes that are palatial, that are fine in all their appointments, and as modern as anybody else's before they will get married. I think it is a mistake. I think that young men and young women, too, should be willing, even at this day, and in the present condition of things, to enter the sacred bonds of marriage together and fight their way together to success, meet their obstacles and their difficulties, and cleave together to success, and cooperate in their temporal affairs, so that they shall succeed. Then they will learn to love one another better, and will be more united throughout their lives, and the Lord will bless them more abundantly. [19](#)

The Church authorities and the teachers of our associations should inculcate the sacredness, and teach the duty of marriage, as it has been revealed in the latter days to us. There should be a ... sentiment created in favor of honorable marriage, and that would prevent any young man, or any young woman, who is a member of the Church, from marrying except by that authority which is sanctioned of God. [20](#)

Marriage should be built upon principles of love and sacred devotion.

There should be no difficulty in holding in the highest reverence and exalted thought, the home, if it can be built upon the principles of purity, of true affection, of righteousness and justice. The man and his wife who have perfect confidence in each other, and who determine to follow the laws of God in their lives and fulfil the measure of their mission in the earth, would not be, and could never be, contented without the home. Their hearts, their feelings, their minds, their desires would naturally trend toward the building of a home and family and of a kingdom of their own; to the laying of the foundation of eternal increase and power, glory, exaltation and dominion, worlds without end. [21](#)

A home is not a home in the eye of the gospel, unless there dwell perfect confidence and love between the husband and the wife. Home is a place of order, love, union, rest, confidence, and absolute trust; where the breath of suspicion of infidelity can not enter; where the woman and the man each have implicit confidence in each other's honor and virtue. [22](#)

Zion is no place for a war of the sexes. God intended them to be one, and so declared. It is not doing His work to keep them separate, or to cause them to feel that they have diverse and opposed interests, and that separation, not union, is the object of their creation. [23](#)

What then is an ideal home—model home, such as it should be the ambition of the Latter-day Saints to build ... ? It is one in which all worldly considerations are secondary. One in which the father is devoted to the family with which God has blessed him, counting them of first importance, and in which they in turn permit him to live in their hearts. One in which there is confidence, union, love, sacred devotion between father and mother and children and parents. One in which the mother takes every pleasure in her children, supported by the father—all being moral, pure, God-fearing. [24](#)

Parents ... should love and respect each other, and treat each other with respectful decorum and kindly regard, all the time. The husband should treat his wife with the utmost courtesy and respect. The husband should never insult her; he should never speak slightly of her, but should always hold her in the highest esteem in the home, in the presence of their children. ... The wife, also should treat the husband with the greatest respect and courtesy. ... The wife should be a joy to her husband, and she should live and conduct herself at home so the home will be the most joyous, the most blessed place on earth to her husband. This should be the condition of the husband, wife, the father and the mother, within the sacred precinct of that holy place, the home. [25](#)

Brethren and sisters, nothing should be permitted to come in between you—father and mother, husband and wife; there never should be a shade of difference of feeling; there never should be a thing permitted to come between you and estrange you one from another; you should not allow it. This is essential to your welfare and happiness and to the union that should exist in your home. We all have our weaknesses and failings. Sometimes the husband

sees a failing in his wife, and he upbraids her with it. Sometimes the wife feels that her husband has not done just the right thing, and she upbraids him. What good does it do? Is not forgiveness better? Is not charity better? Is not love better? Isn't it better not to speak of faults, not to magnify weaknesses by iterating and reiterating them? Isn't that better? and will not the union that has been cemented between you and the birth of children and by the bond of the new and everlasting covenant, be more secure when you forget to mention weaknesses and faults one of another? Is it not better to drop them and say nothing about them—bury them and speak only of the good that you know and feel, one for another, and thus bury each other's faults and not magnify them; isn't that better?

[26](#)

What can there be more joyous to think of than the fact that [a man] who loved his wife and whom she loved, to whom he was true and who was true to him all her days of association with him as wife and mother, will have the privilege of coming up on the morning of the first resurrection clothed with immortality and eternal life, and resume the relationship that existed between them in this life, the relationship of husband and wife, father and mother, parents to their children, having laid the foundation for eternal glory and eternal exaltation in the kingdom of God!

[27](#)

It is marriage, sanctified and God-sanctioned, upon which glorified home is founded—that blesses, happifies, exalts, and leads at length to companionship with our Heavenly parents, and to eternal, united life, and increase.

[28](#)

Suggestions for Study

- For what purposes was marriage instituted by God? How does eternal marriage enable us to realize our “highest and holiest aspirations”?
- Why is marriage “most vital to the happiness of mankind”? Why is it regarded as unimportant by many?
- How do eternal increase and eternal happiness depend on the eternal union of man and wife? How does it make you feel to know that you will have claim on your husband or wife for all eternity?
- Why should we seek to marry in the temple?
- What might be the consequences to ourselves and to others of breaking the bond of the new and everlasting covenant of marriage?
- What allurements or distractions might lead some people to postpone or avoid marriage? How can we know when it is appropriate for us to marry?
- President Joseph F. Smith prophesied that the shirking of the responsibilities of marriage is a “loss the nation must feel, as years go on.” How are nations now feeling this loss?
- How can the covenant of eternal marriage strengthen couples when they face “their obstacles and their difficulties”?
- Why is “absolute trust” between husband and wife important? What other attributes should be cultivated between husbands and wives? How do negative behaviors—such as criticism, sarcasm, failure to forgive, and pride—weaken marital relationships?
- What does it mean for a husband and wife to be one? What sacrifices might couples need to make to become one? What other things can couples do to strengthen their eternal union?

Notes

1. *Life of Joseph F. Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (1938), 453.
2. Quoted in Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph F. Smith: Patriarch and Preacher, Prophet of God* (1984), 153.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1911, 8.
4. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 272.
5. In James R. Clark, comp, *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 4:147.

6. "Discourse by President Joseph F. Smith," *Millennial Star*, 15 Feb. 1900, 98.
7. *Gospel Doctrine*, 274.
8. "Editor's Table: Marriage God-Ordained and Sanctioned," *Improvement Era*, July 1902, 713; paragraphing altered.
9. *Gospel Doctrine*, 105.
10. *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, 10 Sept. 1878, 1.
11. *Gospel Doctrine*, 273.
12. *Gospel Doctrine*, 277.
13. *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, 28 June 1898, 1.
14. *Gospel Doctrine*, 272.
15. In *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:250.
16. *Gospel Doctrine*, 275.
17. *Gospel Doctrine*, 272.
18. *Gospel Doctrine*, 281.
19. *Gospel Doctrine*, 278.
20. *Gospel Doctrine*, 273.
21. *Gospel Doctrine*, 304.
22. *Gospel Doctrine*, 302.
23. "Editorial Thoughts: The Righteousness of Marriage, and Its Opposite," *Juvenile Instructor*, 1 July 1902, 402.
24. *Gospel Doctrine*, 302–3.
25. In Conference Report, Apr. 1905, 84–85.
26. "Sermon on Home Government," *Millennial Star*, 25 Jan. 1912, 49–50.
27. *Gospel Doctrine*, 458.
28. "Editor's Table: Marriage God-Ordained and Sanctioned," 717–18.

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