

# The Doctrines of Eternal Marriage and Eternal Families

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**T**he doctrines of eternal marriage and the eternal family are teachings unique to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While the structure and practice of marriage and family have been and continue to be redefined in many countries and religious traditions throughout the world, these doctrines of the restored gospel remain uncompromised but not unchallenged. In the United States for example, fundamental changes to the definition of marriage have recently taken place.<sup>1</sup> These changes have led to both civil and uncivil debate arising from different interpretations of history, doctrine, scripture, and of the Prophet Joseph Smith's foundational revelations regarding eternal marriage and the eternal family.

In addition to reviewing the historical contexts in which the doctrines of eternal marriage and the eternal family were restored, this chapter will demonstrate how marriage and family relationships are vital parts in the process of sanctification that leads to the exaltation of the individual and of the family. This discussion will also affirm the significance of the unique contributions the doctrines of eternal marriage and eternal family bring

to the present debate concerning homosexual and heterosexual family and marital relationships.

## Historical Overview

The first indication of the eternal nature of family relationships in this dispensation was alluded to in Joseph Smith's earliest revelations. The Book of Mormon prophet Moroni included the following words from the writings of the prophet Malachi during his visit with Joseph Smith on 21 September 1823:

Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers.

If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming. (D&C 2:1–3, see also Malachi 4:5–6)

While the implications of this prophecy may not have been fully understood by the young Prophet when Moroni first appeared (Joseph was seventeen years old), his understanding would mature as additional heavenly messengers were sent by the Lord to instruct him. After the completion and dedication of the Kirtland Temple on 27 March 1836, the Prophet Joseph began to understand the doctrine of the eternal family with greater clarity. Section 110 of the Doctrine and Covenants includes the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy concerning the coming of Elijah as well as includes the visitation of other heavenly beings.

After being visited by the Lord, the prophet Moses appeared and "committed unto [them] the keys of the gathering of Israel" (D&C 110:11). The Prophet Joseph then recorded: "After this, Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed" (D&C 110:12). While the identity of the "Elias" in this text has not been identified, he apparently lived during the time of Abraham and held keys relative to eternal marriage and family.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained the purpose for the coming of Elias as follows:

Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham," meaning the great commission given to Abraham that he and his seed had a right to the priesthood, the gospel, and eternal life. Accordingly, Elias promised those upon whom these ancient promises were then renewed that in them and in their seed all generations should be blessed. (D&C 110:12–16.) Thus, through the joint ministry of Elijah, who brought the sealing power, and Elias, who restored the marriage discipline of Abraham, the way was prepared for the planting in the hearts of the children of the promises made to the fathers.<sup>2</sup>

Following Elias came the long-awaited and much-anticipated coming of Elijah, the prophet who bestowed the priesthood keys upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. These keys enabled couples and families to be sealed for eternity.

Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—

To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—

Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors. (D&C 110:14–16)

While Joseph now possessed the keys necessary to organize eternal marriages and eternal families, it does not appear that he did so for at least four years. After moving to Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1839, Joseph formally introduced various doctrines and practices that would fully realize Malachi's promise to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers." On 15 August 1840, during the funeral of Seymour Brunson, a member of the high council and bodyguard to Joseph Smith, the Prophet himself first began to discuss sacred ordinances being performed for the

dead. After reading extensively from 1 Corinthians 15, Joseph informed the Saints that they “could now act for their friends who had departed this life, and that the plan of salvation was calculated to save all who were willing to obey the requirements of the law of God.”<sup>3</sup> Reportedly, Jane Neymon (also Neyman, Nyman), a woman who attended the funeral, was so inspired by the concept of vicarious baptism for the dead that she immediately asked Harvey Olmstead to baptize her in behalf of her deceased son, Cyrus. Her request was granted and, with Vienna Jaques as witness, the first proxy baptism for the dead in the dispensation of the fullness of times was performed.<sup>4</sup>

Although Joseph’s language regarding baptism for the dead is reported to have instructed the Saints that they could “act for their friends,” when put into practice the proxy work almost always followed familial ties. According to Susan Easton Black’s research into proxy work done during the Nauvoo period, only 203 of the 6,818 proxy baptisms performed were for “friends.” All others were performed for uncles, aunts, parents, siblings, in-laws, spouses, children, and so forth. Joseph’s first major revelation during the Nauvoo period laid the pragmatic framework for later revelations regarding the eternal family.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1841 and 1844, Joseph Smith would both privately and publicly introduce the doctrines of eternal marriage and eternal families. Joseph would also be asked to follow the example of some of the Lord’s servants in biblical times and practice plural marriage (see Genesis 16; Jacob 2:30). Beginning with Louisa Beaman in April 1841, Joseph entered into a number of polygamous relationships. Some scholars offer a possible reason for these relationships: “These sealings may have provided a way to create an eternal bond or link between Joseph’s family and other families within the Church. These ties extended both vertically, from parent to child, and horizontally, from one family to another.”<sup>6</sup> The reality of God-sanctioned polygamous unions is evidence for some fluidity in the definition of marriage and family. While the number of participants varied as instructed by the Lord, the necessity of those relationships being between man and woman has not. There is no scriptural precedent for authorized homosexual unions.

One of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s first public sermons on eternal relationships came during a sermon to the Saints in Ramus, Illinois. Joseph taught, “And that same sociality which exists among us here [in mortality] will exist among us there [in the world to come]” (D&C 130:2).

Contextually, the “sociality” most prevalent during the 1800s was that of the family specifically and not merely general human interaction. Of that time, the *Encyclopedia of American Social History* reports, “Most families, regardless of class or ethnic background, were nuclear in structure; between 1 and 3 percent of households contained a solitary resident, and between 9 and 12 percent of households contained extended families.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is clear from the revelations and other writings of Joseph Smith and other leaders that have followed that the meaning of the word “sociality” includes marriage and family relationships.<sup>8</sup>

In a later discussion, parts of which became canonized as scripture, the Prophet Joseph explained the following to Benjamin F. Johnson and his wife Melissa LeBaron Johnson concerning the eternal nature of marriage and family relationships:

In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;  
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];  
And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.  
He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his king-  
dom; he cannot have an increase. (D&C 131:1–4)

The bracketed phrase “meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage” included in this scriptural text first appears in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants and clarifies that the Prophet Joseph was teaching Brother and Sister Johnson that eternal marriage was necessary in order to attain exaltation. The following entry (Tuesday, 16 May 1843) from the journal of William Clayton confirms that Joseph Smith was indeed teaching the doctrine of eternal marriage and not simply about the necessity of receiving the priesthood. Brother Clayton recorded Joseph Smith’s words as follows:

Except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity, while in this probation; by the power and authority of the Holy priesthood; they will cease to increase when they die, that is, they will not have any children after the resurrection; but those who are married by the power

and authority of the Priesthood in this life, and continue without committing the sin against the Holy Ghost, will continue to increase and have children in the celestial glory.”<sup>9</sup>

A journal entry from Joseph Smith dated 24 November 1835 suggests that the doctrine of eternal marriage was being discussed prior to the 1843 revelations. After requesting the couple being married, Lydia Goldthwaite and Newel Knight, to “join hands,” the Prophet Joseph introduced the ordinance by teaching that “marriage was an institution of heaven, instituted in the garden of Eden.”<sup>10</sup>

The phrase “institution of heaven” is significant in light of the historical and cultural context in which it was delivered. The early American culture, of which the Latter-day Saints were a part, was heavily influenced by the Puritans who immigrated to America in the early 1600s. The Puritans had left England in large part because they rejected the Church of England’s assertion that marriage was a religious covenant and not a civil contract. Joseph Smith’s teachings were much more in line with the pre-Reformation beliefs and practices that viewed marriage as a sacrament than with the teachings and practices of the churches in the nineteenth century. Describing marriage as having a heavenly connection was incongruous with the prevailing religious and civil perspectives of the time.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants includes the following direction concerning the wording of the wedding ceremony specific to that time:

You both mutually agree to be each other’s companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives. And when they have answered “Yes,” he shall pronounce them “husband and wife” in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country and authority vested in him: “may God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from *henceforth and forever*. Amen.”<sup>12</sup>

The phrase “henceforth and forever” is an important contrast with the phrases “till death us do part” and “so long as ye both shall live,” which

are included in *The Book of Common Prayer*, the handbook used by the Protestant clergy of the day and which were the norm for marital vows in the 1830s.<sup>13</sup>

The following statement from Elder Parley P. Pratt recorded sometime in 1839 or 1840 clearly and eloquently illustrates that the doctrines of eternal families and eternal marriage were being taught prior to the time the formal revelations were given in 1843:

[The Prophet Joseph Smith] taught me many great and glorious principles concerning God and the heavenly order of eternity. It was at this time that I received from him the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes in those inexpressibly endearing relationships which none but the highly intellectual, the refined and pure in heart, know how to prize, and which are at the very foundation of everything worthy to be called happiness.

Till then I had learned to esteem kindred affections and sympathies as appertaining solely to this transitory state, as something from which the heart must be entirely weaned, in order to be fitted for its heavenly state.

It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity; while the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore.

It was from him that I learned the true dignity and destiny of a son of God, clothed with an eternal priesthood, as the patriarch and sovereign of his countless offspring. It was from him that I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand as a queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign

for ever and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still increasing offspring.

I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling, which would lift my soul from the transitory things of this grovelling sphere and expand it as the ocean. I felt that God was my heavenly Father indeed; that Jesus was my brother, and that the wife of my bosom was an immortal, eternal companion; a kind ministering angel, given to me as a comfort, and a crown of glory for ever and ever. In short, I could now love with the spirit and with the understanding also.<sup>14</sup>

Elder Pratt articulates the theological and practical benefits that were inspired from Joseph Smith’s teachings regarding eternal marriage and the eternal family. In Joseph’s theology, families are more than a social construct for the perpetuation of humanity in mortality, but were to continue beyond this mortal sphere. When family relationships are understood in this light, the importance of Elijah’s return and the consequences of not heeding Malachi’s warning begin to be more clearly understood. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught:

Through the power [and keys] of this priesthood which Elijah bestowed, husband and wife may be sealed, or married for eternity; children may be sealed to their parents for eternity; thus the family is made eternal, and death does not separate the members. *This is the great principle that will save the world from utter destruction.*<sup>15</sup>

President Smith’s warning about “utter destruction” provides commentary on the concluding verse of the Lord’s words in Malachi that if the hearts of parents and children are not turned one to another the earth will be smitten with a curse (see Malachi 4:5–6). The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles refer to this and other prophetic warnings in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”:

We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further,

we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.<sup>16</sup>

Having provided historical context for many of the earliest doctrinal statements concerning the introduction of eternal marriage and eternal families in the early part of the nineteenth century, this chapter will address the following questions:

- Why is there not more scriptural evidence that the doctrines of eternal marriage and eternal families were taught and practiced anciently?
- Why are eternal marriage and the eternal family such important parts of God’s purposes?
- Why is marriage and family necessary in the world to come?
- Why must marriage be restricted to relationships between a man and a woman?

### Why Is There Not More Scriptural Evidence?

The absence of well-defined biblical and historical evidence for the doctrinal teachings of eternal marriage and eternal families does not necessarily provide evidence of their absence from the lives of the people who lived at the times these texts and records were being recorded. For most of human history, marriage and family have been the cultural subtext upon which societies were formed. The ubiquity of such institutions oftentimes caused them to be left out of recorded history. An example of the scriptural evidence that does exist on the enduring nature of the marital relationship includes the Savior’s teachings on marriage in the Gospel of Mark:

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Mark 10:6–9, see also Matt. 16:18–19, 1 Cor. 11:11, and Eph. 3:15)

The scriptural texts most often cited as evidence for marriage ending at death are found in the synoptic accounts of the Sadducees asking the Savior, “Whose wife of them is she?” (Luke 20:33; see Matthew 22:23–30, Mark 12:19–25; Luke 20:27–36), after presenting a scenario of seven brothers who were married, at different times, to the same woman. Luke’s account of the Savior’s response to his inquisitors is representative of each of the synoptic descriptions:

And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage. (Luke 20:34–35)

Commenting on this verse, New Testament scholar and Anglican cleric R. T. France explained:

In response to this concern Jesus offers . . . a view of eternal life in which marriage is apparently irrelevant. For those whom marriage is the basis of the deepest joy and love on earth, this is a hard saying. It may be mitigated by the fact that what Jesus excludes from the afterlife is the *process* of ‘marrying and being given in marriage’ rather than the resultant *state* of being married.<sup>17</sup>

Professor France’s explanation is consistent with Latter-day Saint theology that teaches that “not only the ordinance of baptism, but also the sealing of families together [including husbands and wives] as an eternal unit *must be done on the earth*.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, there will be no marrying and giving in marriage in the world to come, therefore these ordinances must be performed in mortality on behalf of someone else who has died and gone on to the spirit world.

The Lord, speaking through the Prophet Joseph Smith, taught that the reason some will not be allowed to experience marriage in heaven is that the marriage has not been authorized by the proper authority and that they “did not abide by my [the Savior’s] Law.” The Lord’s words are as follows:

Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world.

Therefore, when they are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.

For these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever. (D&C 132:15–17)

Elder McConkie provided the following explanation pertaining to the assertion that there is no marriage in heaven:

He [Jesus Christ] is not denying but limiting the prevailing concept that there will be marrying and giving in marriage in heaven. He is saying that as far as “they” (the Sadducees) are concerned, that as far as “they” (“the children of this world”) are concerned, the family unit does not and will not continue in the resurrection.<sup>19</sup>

President Brigham Young taught that the doctrines and ordinances embraced and practiced in the restored Church today were taught and practiced anciently:

The plan of salvation and the revelations of the will of God to man are unchanged, although mankind have not for many ages been favored therewith, in consequence of apostasy and wickedness. There is no evidence to be found in the Bible that the Gospel should be one thing in the days of the Israelites, another

in the days of Christ and his Apostles, and another in the 19th Century, but, on the contrary, we are instructed that God is the same in every age, and that his plan of saving his children is the same. . . . He has not changed his laws, ordinances and covenants pertaining to Himself and the salvation of mankind. The plan of salvation is one, from the beginning of the world to the end thereof.<sup>20</sup>

The fullness of the doctrines of eternal marriage and family relationships is unique to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but there is some evidence of other faith traditions who have embraced (at least in part) similar teachings. John Meyendorff, a scholar and cleric in the (Eastern) Orthodox Church, described the Orthodox belief in eternal marriage as follows: “Christian marriage consists in transforming and transfiguring a natural human affection between a man and a woman into an eternal bond of love, which cannot be broken even by death.”<sup>21</sup> Reverend Meyendorff and those of the Orthodox tradition believe that their church is a continuation of the church established by Jesus Christ and that the doctrine of eternal marriage can be traced to the earliest Christian teachings. Emanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth-century scientist and mystic, taught that “it follows that there are marriages in the heavens just as there are on the earth.”<sup>22</sup>

While there are other churches and traditions that teach the doctrines of eternal marriage and eternal families to a limited degree, it appears that for the most part these doctrines were among the “plain and precious” (1 Nephi 13:28) doctrinal principles and covenants that were lost to humankind in the centuries following the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi describes this doctrinal absence as follows: “They have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many things which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away” (1 Nephi 13:26). The prophet Isaiah described the loss of such covenants when he prophesied, “They have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:5).

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points, touching the Salvation of man, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled.”<sup>23</sup> Many other scholars and Church leaders from throughout history

have made similar statements. Writing as early as the third century AD, Origen, the noted Christian theologian, recorded:

The differences among the [biblical] manuscripts have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they lengthen or shorten as they please.<sup>24</sup>

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the *negligence* of some copyists, a brief discussion of the changes to the text that were *intentional* is relevant to explaining why the doctrines of eternal marriage and the eternal family are not more apparent in the scriptural text of the Bible. New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman has written:

Whatever else we may say about the Christian scribes—whether of the early centuries or of the Middle ages—we have to admit that in addition to copying scripture, they were changing scripture. Sometimes they didn’t mean to—they were simply tired, or inattentive, or, on occasion, inept. At other times, though, they did mean to make the changes, as when they wanted the text to emphasize precisely what they themselves believed.<sup>25</sup>

One of the personal beliefs that has influenced the translation, transmission, and interpretation of biblical text has been identified by Professor Bruce M. Metzger, a respected New Testament scholar, as an “increasing emphasis on asceticism in the early Church.”<sup>26</sup> Just as some copyists and scholars allowed their belief in the doctrine of the Trinity to motivate their addition of forty-one words to the fifth chapter of 1st John (see 1 John 5:7–8) to validate their doctrinal belief that the Father and the Son are different manifestations of the same being, others allowed their belief in the practice of asceticism to validate their distortion of scriptural texts to minimize the importance of marriage and family relationships.<sup>27</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* includes the following description of asceticism:

In the early Christian centuries many ascetic practices seem to have become fairly widespread, the chief of them being renunciation of marriage, home, and property; some ascetics

practised extreme forms of fasting and self-deprivation. In the popular mind there seems to have been an association between the abandonment of human comforts and the acquisition of miraculous powers.<sup>28</sup>

While some biblical texts that challenge allegiance to marriage and family can be understood in terms of not allowing our love of family to take precedence over our love of God (doing so would be a form of idolatry), other scriptural passages encourage the idea that to truly worship God we must be hostile towards our family, or at least acknowledge that devotion to family is a weaker form of discipleship. The contrast between Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26 illustrates the difference between loving God and disparaging family:

He that loveth father  
or mother more than  
me is not worthy of me:  
and he that loveth son  
or daughter more than  
me is not worthy of  
me. (Matthew 10:37)

If any man come to me,  
and hate not his father,  
and mother, and wife, and  
children, and brethren,  
and sisters, yea, and his  
own life also, he cannot be  
my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

The qualifications of discipleship do not include the idea that we must “hate” members of our family, but they do include putting the Savior before anything or anyone else in our lives (see Matthew 10:37). It is apparent from the textual changes in the Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 14:26 that Joseph Smith was not comfortable with the traditional text found in the King James Version. In addition to adding the word “husband” to the list of those whom the disciples of Christ should not allow to come before God in their lives, the JST also clarifies the text by adding, “*or in other words, is afraid to lay down his life for my sake, cannot be my disciple*” (Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 14:26; hereafter cited as JST).

Another example of the influence of asceticism on the early Christian church includes the practice of celibacy. Celibacy was understood by many in the early Christian church as a “higher choice” than marriage.<sup>29</sup> While marriage and family were seen as being a necessary condition to perpetuate humankind, those living the celibate life were understood to be living a

higher law “in advance [of] the nuptial realities of heaven.”<sup>30</sup> The philosophy of asceticism and the practice of celibacy are additional explanations for the text discussed earlier, that in “the resurrection from the dead” they “neither marry, nor are given in marriage” (Luke 20:35). Marriage was seen as a temporal necessity, but it would have no meaning in the world to come.

The Apostle Paul’s writings include the words of a letter written to him which stated, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Corinthians 7:1). Paul’s words have been interpreted by some to justify the philosophy of asceticism. The writings of Paul, while acknowledging that he was speaking by “permission, and not of commandment” (1 Corinthians 7:6), record Paul as saying, “I would that all men were even as I myself” (1 Corinthians 7:7), which appears to be saying that he was single for a specific purpose, not that he believed the relationship between men and women to be inferior to those who were celibate. While the Joseph Smith Translation clarifies that the text of 1 Corinthians 7 was written to those “who are called unto the ministry” (JST, 1 Corinthians 7:29) to remain unmarried for a time, other translations of this text have been interpreted by some to justify lifelong celibacy.<sup>31</sup>

In a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith concerning the practice of celibacy among the early sect known as the Shakers, the Lord taught, “Whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man” (D&C 49:15). President Joseph Fielding Smith explained, “This statement in relation to marriage was given to correct the false doctrine of the Shakers that marriage was impure and that a true follower of Jesus Christ must remain in the condition of celibacy to be free from sin and in full fellowship with Christ.”<sup>32</sup>

### Why Are Eternal Family Relationships So Important in God’s Purposes?

For Latter-day Saints, the family (including marriage) and the Church offer two primary kinds of “sociality” (D&C 130:2), which are a part of the Lord’s “work and glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The Church, however, is second to the family in God’s plan for the salvation of his children. Elder M. Russell Ballard taught, “The Church . . . is the scaffolding that helps support and strengthen the family.”<sup>33</sup> President Boyd K. Packer explained further:



Every law and principle and power, every belief, every ordinance and ordination, every covenant, every sermon and every sacrament, every counsel and correction, the sealings, the calls, the releases, the service—all these have as their ultimate purpose the perfection of the individual and the family.<sup>34</sup>

The only influence more central to the justification, sanctification, and the exaltation of humankind than the family is the Lord Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice. Families, as imperfect as they are, have great power to bless. President Packer taught, “Even a rickety marriage will serve good purpose as long as two people struggle to keep it from falling down around them.”<sup>35</sup> The Apostle Paul counseled, “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband,” and through them the children are made holy (1 Corinthians 7:14). Philosopher Michael Novak described the sanctifying power of marriage and family relationships as follows:

Marriage is an assault upon the lonely, atomic ego. Marriage is a threat to the solitary individual. Marriage does impose grueling, bumbling, baffling, and frustrating responsibilities. Yet if one supposes that precisely such things are the preconditions for all true liberation, marriage is not the enemy of moral development in adults. Quite the opposite. . . . Being married and having children has impressed on my mind certain lessons, for whose learning I cannot help being grateful. Most are lessons of difficulty and duress. Most of what I am forced to learn about myself is not pleasant. . . . Seeing myself through the unblinking eyes of an intimate, intelligent other, an honest spouse, is humiliating beyond anticipation. Maintaining a familial steadiness whatever the state of my own emotions is a standard by which I stand daily condemned. A rational man, acting as I act? . . . My dignity as a human being depends more on what sort of husband and parent I am, than on any professional work I am called upon to do. My bonds to them hold me back (and my wife even more) from many sorts of opportunities. And yet these do not feel like bonds. They are, I know, my liberation.

They force me to be a different sort of human being, in a way in which I want and need to be forced.<sup>36</sup>

While stable marriage and family relationships are vital to the temporal progress of humankind, the doctrines of *eternal* marriage and *eternal* family include an additional principle that is unique to the restored gospel. Not only can marital and familial relationships continue beyond the grave, but also couples, as resurrected beings, can “have an increase” (D&C 131:4), or, as the Lord described to the Prophet Joseph Smith, husbands and wives may have “a continuation of the seeds” in the world to come:

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths—then shall it be written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. . . . And they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. (D&C 132:19)

Elder Melvin J. Ballard taught the principle of eternal increase in this way:

What do we mean by endless or eternal increase? We mean that through the righteousness and faithfulness of men and women who keep the commandments of God they will come forth with celestial bodies, fitted and prepared to enter into their great, high and eternal glory in the celestial kingdom of God; and unto them, through their preparation, there will come spirit children.<sup>37</sup>

The doctrines of eternal marriage and eternal families provide a unique perspective on the same-sex marriage debate. Just as procreation through

heterosexual union is one of the major purposes of marriage between a man and woman in mortality, the same is true in the life to come. The following statement from “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” has eternal as well as temporal implications: “Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan.”<sup>38</sup>

### Why Must Marriage Be between a Man and a Woman?

The first principle taught in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” is that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God.”<sup>39</sup> This statement is consistent with the words of the Apostle Paul when he concluded, “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11). This applies not only to mortals but also to the Divine. Although the doctrine is not fully understood, it is a part of Latter-day Saint theology to affirm the existence of a Divine Feminine, a Mother in Heaven.<sup>40</sup> Elder Erastus Snow taught:

“What,” says one, “do you mean we should understand that Deity consists of man and woman?” Most certainly I do. If I believe anything that God has ever said about himself . . . I must believe that deity consists of man and woman. . . . There can be no God except he is composed of the man and woman united, and there is not in all the eternities that exist, or ever will be, a God in any other way.<sup>41</sup>

More recently, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them.”<sup>42</sup>

While arguments for and against gender stereotypes are common (i.e., *Men Are from Mars* and *Women Are from Venus*),<sup>43</sup> the doctrinal reality is that “the nature of male and female spirits is such that they complete each other.”<sup>44</sup> While it is also true that “our claims for the role of marriage and family,” and the specific roles of men and women, “rest not on social science but on the truth that they are God’s creation,”<sup>45</sup> a sampling of research studies that address these issues is worth noting.

It is beyond the purpose of this chapter to provide a comprehensive discussion of the findings from social science research concerning the importance of marriage and family relationships, but there are many research findings that are consistent with the teachings of prophets both ancient and modern. The following statements are a representative sample of conclusions supported by respected research in the field of marriage and family:

- Marriage increases the likelihood that fathers and mothers have good relationships with their children. . . .
- Children are most likely to experience family stability when they are born into a married family. . . .
- Growing up outside an intact marriage increases the likelihood that children will themselves divorce or become unwed parents. . . .
- Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health, on average, than do children in other family forms. . . .
- Marriage is associated with better health and lower rates of injury, illness, and disability for both men and women. . . .
- Children whose parents divorce have higher rates of psychological distress and mental illness. . . .
- Cohabitation is associated with higher levels of psychological problems among children. . . .
- Family breakdown appears significantly to increase the risk of suicide. . . .
- Married mothers have lower rates of depression than do single or cohabiting mothers.<sup>46</sup>

These conclusions are supported by the research of many scholars, including professors W. Bradford Wilcox, William Doherty, John Gottman, David Popenoe, Linda Waite, and Judith Wallerstein.

This research, however, is not without its critics. For the studies that conclude that divorce is detrimental to children, there are others that argue the opposite. When the conclusions of one study state that children raised by homosexual parents are disadvantaged, the conclusions of other studies are contradictory and call those findings into question.<sup>47</sup> The reality that there

is so much controversy in the social sciences regarding these topics underscores the need for an epistemology that includes revelatory and prophetic guidance. President Hugh B. Brown made the following comment concerning the place of academic research in relationship to prophetic revelation:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accepts newly revealed truth, whether it comes through direct revelation or from study and research. We deny the common conception of reality that distinguishes radically between the natural and the supernatural, between the temporal and the eternal, between the sacred and the secular.<sup>48</sup>

Elder Packer taught that there is, however, a prioritization between the sacred and the secular:

It is an easy thing for a man with extensive academic training to measure the Church using the principles he has been taught in his professional training as his standard. In my mind it ought to be the other way around. A member of the Church ought always, particularly if he is pursuing extensive academic studies, to judge the professions of man against the revealed word of the Lord.<sup>49</sup>

While heterosexual marriage is the standard the Lord and his servants have established for procreating and nurturing children, they have also taught that animosity towards those who embrace or practice homosexuality, or any other lifestyle that is not in harmony with the Savior and his servants' teachings has no place in the restored gospel. After receiving a petition from the Human Rights Campaign to change its stance on same-sex attraction, leaders of the Church issued the following statement:

As a church, our doctrinal position is clear: any sexual activity outside of marriage is wrong, and we define marriage as between a man and a woman. However, that should never, ever be used as justification for unkindness. Jesus Christ, whom we follow, was clear in His condemnation of sexual immorality, but never cruel. His interest was always to lift the individual, never to tear down.<sup>50</sup>

“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” warns that those who “abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God.”<sup>51</sup> To abuse someone physically or emotionally because of their sexual orientation or other alternative lifestyle is immoral and is not in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The scriptures teach that Zion can only be reached as its inhabitants are “of one heart and one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness; and there [are] no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). While often thought of in terms of monetary resources, “no poor among them” could also be understood in terms of family. There are those in the Church who are “family rich” and those that are “family poor.” In other words, there are families who fit the definitions described in the Family Proclamation and families who do not. Those who are blessed to participate in a family where “husband and wife . . . love and care for each other and for their children”<sup>52</sup> have a responsibility to reach out and share with those who do not. As members of the Church strive to become “of one heart and one mind,” divisions created by socioeconomic or familial inequalities can be identified and resolved. While scientific research and vigorous debate can certainly assist in such resolutions, following the revealed will of God, as provided by his ordained servants, is what will ultimately create a Zion people and culture.

## Conclusion

Marriage between a man and a woman and the family they procreate has been the Lord's standard of marital and familial structure from the beginning. In Genesis we read: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The same standard was repeated by the Lord to Joseph Smith in 1831: “Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation” (D&C 49:16). The practice of marriage was formally modified for a season with the introduction of plural marriage in 1841 (see D&C 132), but marriage then, as it is now, was a means to an end—the immortality and eternal life of Heavenly Father's children (see Moses 1:39). Unlike the arguments of those who contend for relationships contrary to the Lord's plan for the destiny of his children, marriage as defined by God is for much more than

meeting the personal pleasures and needs of those involved. Instead, as Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, “dating and marriage aren’t final destinations. They are the gateway to where you ultimately want to go.”<sup>53</sup> As outlined by the Lord’s servants, the ultimate destination for individuals and families is eternal life with God and the opportunity to become like him. Such is the purpose of marriage and family, and any aberration from that purpose brings with it the warnings outlined by prophets both ancient and modern. The unique doctrines of eternal marriage and eternal families clearly articulate that marriage has a temporal and an eternal purpose.

## Notes

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4. Alexander L. Baugh, “‘For This Ordinance Belongeth to My House’: The Practice of Baptism for the Dead Outside the Nauvoo Temple,” *Mormon Historical Studies*, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 48. In the early days of the Church, people were baptized for individuals regardless of gender, but now females act as proxies for females, and males only for males. See *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 5:85.
5. Susan Easton Black, “A Voice of Gladness for the Living and the Dead’ (D&C 128:19),” *Religious Educator* 3, no. 2 (2002): 143–44.
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9. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 16.
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13. *The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the United Church of England and Ireland*, (London: George Eyre and Andrew Strahan, 1820), 353.
14. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938/1985), 259–60.
15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1976), 2:118, emphasis in original.
16. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 2010, 129.
17. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 2002), 472; emphasis in original.
18. Eldred G. Smith, “Do Not Procrastinate,” *Ensign*, November 1974, 25–26, emphasis added.
19. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 1:606.
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