

THE ETERNAL MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

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Eternal marriage, as a union of man and woman based on the indwelling relationship with Christ to which the Gospel brings true believers, must be a union of both partners in Christ; and it can be sustain rightfully only as long as both man and woman are alive in Christ. "Very, verily, I say unto you," the Lord declared in explaining the status and glory to be achieved in this exalting union, "except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory. For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives, and few there by that find it, because ye receive me not in the world neither do ye know me. But if ye receive me in the world, then shall ye know me, and, shall receive your exaltation; that where I am ye shall be also."¹

A woman has no covenant obligation--only so far as she is obligated by Christian love and patience to be bear with human weaknesses--to sustain a man or to remain with him in the eternal marriage union, unless their lives are based on this indwelling relationship with Christ. Governed by the Lord's law of love, of sacrifice and of service which each marriage partner must receive and apply, the design of the sacred rites, ordinances and covenants of the Temple is to make each man, in Christ, a king and a priest unto God in the order of Zion which extends into eternity, and in the Lord, to make each woman a queen and a priestess to her husband.

The last phrase in this sentence is of great importance. This relationship may not be immediately achieved to perfection, which makes great patience necessary; so also is a genuine desire to learn and a humble readiness to changes and mature toward the divine standard. The purpose of the Temple is, first, to establish the marriage partners on the path of exalted life, second, to open the vision of this divine relationship to them, which they should then apply themselves to achieve, and, third, to give them the sacred rites, covenants, obligations and endowment of spiritual truth and power by which it can be achieved. By Obedience to the covenants which are made in the ceremony of the Holy Endowment--those that pertain to obedience to God, the obligation to sacrifice all things to sustain the Lord's righteousness, the requirement to apply the Law of the Gospel which Jesus set forth in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in Scripture, the requirement to be chaste and to apply the laws of Christian virtue so that one's confidence can wax strong in the presence of God, and the obligation to live a life consecrated to God in building up Christ's kingdom, even Zion, in the earth--the covenanting partners can then grow in true

union and achieve the life in Christ that is required to make their relationship meaningful, and to assure its continuance in eternity.

Man and woman stand equal before God, in dignity, in rights and in claim to the blessings of God. It is only when a woman covenants to follow the counsel of her husband, as he submits to the law of the Lord, that he becomes the head of their union. Within this covenant relationship, in Christ, a man and a woman each commit themselves to obey the same covenants and receive the same rites and promises, as these sacred things pertain to their sexual nature and to their joyful union in the exalting marriage relationship. Neither the man nor the woman receive any temple ordinance in addition to the other; and each (as they apply to the given gender) receives the same sacred truths and promises of exalted life and power within the eternal marriage relationship. There is no justification, whatever, for an arbitrary subordination of woman to man in the Lord, or vice versa. All rights, privileges and blessings of exalted life are conferred equally upon a man and a woman; and the fulness of the Priesthood, as it is received in the House of the Lord, is only given jointly to a husband and wife.

But in the order of eternal marriage a man has a different relationship to God than that which a woman has. Adam, alone, was given dominion over the earth; and, as stated in the order of eternal marriage, each man in Christ can become a king and a priest unto God, or Christ, while each woman, in Christ, can become a queen and a priestess unto her husband.

It is only when a couple establish their love on a true relationship with Christ that the Gospel can reconcile the irreconcilable. One important key to reconciliation is found in the legitimate use of power within the marriage union. By revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord makes it clear that his honor is his power.² Honor is to have true consideration toward another, as to worth, esteem, respect, admiration and love. Honor is based in integrity, character and love, in celestial life, power can be exercised only on the basis of honor. And by truly acting on the principle of honor, each partner in marriage can be an independent being, with equality and oneness in the union.

The Lord has also said: "The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and ... the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness." This applies to the marriage union; power must be sanctified and oriented to serve, by sacrifice and love, and used only to enlighten and to uplift each marriage partner and their children.

If a person undertakes to cover his or her sins, to gratify his or her pride, or "vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of

the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man."³

The nature of the eternal marriage covenant makes honor the basis of the eternal union, which is based in mutual love. Each person enters the marriage covenant freely, and each sustains it freely, for the fulfillment, benefits and added power it makes possible to them both in their union. The only way power can be exercised consistently within this covenant relationship is by honor. A man must truly honor his wife, and she must truly honor her husband, which implies that there must be a genuine basis on which such honor can exist and be freely exercised.

Several things are required to make such a relationship possible: First and fundamentally, marriage partners must truly realize and act upon the divine truth that "the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness."⁴

This point applies to both men and women. Within the Church, which is an organization designed to teach the Gospel, administer basic saving ordinances, and work to counsel and perfect the saints, priesthood is only conferred on the brethren. But within the Holy Order, the eternal celestial family, which is established by the covenants of the House of the Lord a woman is anointed to become a queen and a priestess, which is nothing less than a female priest--a woman who holds the priesthood and functions in its power and authority. In the Temple, the sisters who officiate perform priesthood ordinances in behalf of the sisters. This is not an auxiliary program to the priesthood, as is found in the Church. And a woman is crowned a queen and a priesthood, holding the fulness of the priesthood in connection with her husband, she will preside as a priestess over her posterity, teaching, nurturing, ministering to them, and administering priesthood rites and functions in their behalf within the Holy Order of Zion which extends into eternity.

Second, power must be oriented to serve, and must operate on principle of sacrifice--on the basis of a broken heart and a contrite spirit for that which Christ did in making the infinite atonement which makes the privileges of the eternal marriage union possible. In a revelation given to Joseph Smith the Lord said: "He that is ordained of God and sent forth, the same is appointed to be the greatest, notwithstanding he is the least and the servant of all."⁵ Jesus taught his disciples: "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."⁶ Paul counselled: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church."⁷ Christ is the head of the Church on the basis that he served and died for it and its members. Jesus said: "Even the Son

of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”⁸ Power within the family can only be exercised by both marriage partners ministerially and on in the way of true sacrifice.

The Prophet Joseph Smith stated the basis on which all power relationships must rest when he wrote: "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile-reproving betimes with sharpness [that is, with pointed emphasis on truth and clarity], when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death."⁹

Third, power by man can be exercised only in union with the Holy Ghost, and by its influence and power. When a person exercises the priesthood "in any degree of unrighteousness," the Prophet Joseph wrote by revelation, the "heavens withdraw themselves, the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man."¹⁰ Each person in the marriage covenant must therefore learn to minister by the Holy Spirit and according to its righteous dictates and power. Said the Lord in a revelation on this point: "He that is ordained ... is possessor of all things; for all things are subject unto him, both in heaven and on the earth, the life and the light, the Spirit and the power, sent forth by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son. But no man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin."¹¹

The same principle applies to both men and women within the Holy Order which is built up through the sacred rites and covenants of the House of the Lord. Here charity--which "suffereth long, and is kind," which "envieth not," which "vaunteth not itself," which is "not puffed up," which "doth not behaveth itself unseemly," which "seeketh not her own," which is "not easily provoked," which "thinketh no evil," which "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth," and which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endueth all things"¹² must be the underlying and ruling principle within the eternal marriage union.

When power is exercised in union with the Holy Spirit, by its sacred enlightening influence, Christ, being in both partners by means of the Holy Spirit, then becomes the head in the marriage relationship; and the principle of authority and power is centered in him. This takes the power factor out of the hands of the husband and centers it in Christ and makes equality in the Lord possible. When the marriage partners have achieved this state of life, the principle of honor, based on the righteousness of Christ,--honor which each marriage partner, in Christ, gives to the

other, based on true respect, appreciation, love and admiration--then becomes the basis of power within the home.

On this plane of Christian life, both marriage partners are seen as being equal, in worth, in value, in vital functions, and in the increase of their glory. The executive functions of the home, being center in Christ, are exercised by the mutual consent of the husband and the wife for their mutual growth and benefit, and for the blessings and direction of their family in the Lord.

Of the benefits that come from the application of the divine formula of power which leads to equality and open union, the Prophet Joseph wrote: "Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God [that is, the blessings of the Holy Spirit leading to the blessings of the Second Comforter]; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter and unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever."¹³

Endnotes

¹ D&C 132:21-23.

² Cf. D&C 29:36; Moses 4:1.

³ D&C 121:36-7.

⁴ D&C 121:36.

⁵ D&C 50:26.

⁶ Mark 10:43-4.

⁷ Ephesians 5:22-3 (italics added).

⁸ Mark 10:45.

⁹ D&C 121:41-4.

¹⁰ D&C 121:37.

¹¹ D&C 50:26-8 (italics added).

¹² 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

¹³ D&C 121:45-6 (italics added).