JOSEPH SMITH
SEEKER AFTER TRUTH
PROPHET OF GOD

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OF THE
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CHAPTER 37

THE CLEAN FAMILY UNIT

It is nothing short of miraculous that the enemies of Joseph Smith, who have resorted to almost every untruth about him, have seldom charged him with sex immorality. Forty-seven times he was obliged to defend himself in courts of law against trivial charges which were not sustained by evidence. In not one of these was he accused of unseemly relations with women. No woman's name was ever linked, sinfully, with his. He was so clean morally that even those who hated him and his doctrine most did not venture to accuse him of moral wrong.

True, the doctrine of plural marriage announced a few years before his death—though revealed to him about 1831—was declared by enemies to be only a subterfuge for licentiousness. But plural wives were held in honor: there was an infinity of distance between polygamous relations in which all wives were held equal with good homes and education for the children, and the submerged, lawless sex associations of the day.

Likewise, the Church as a whole met no charges of immorality. Life was not polished on the frontier, in speech, manners, or practices. Moral looseness was too often condoned. Though in the midst of such pioneer conditions, sometimes lawless, the Church clung to the commandments of God. The evidence declares that strict chastity and morality for men and women alike ruled within the Church.

Joseph was building a Church for human joy. He was thoroughly aware that to accomplish his purpose morality must be observed. Immorality corrupts and ultimately destroys man's power to lift himself into higher realms of joy. Cleanliness, which is allied to truth, must be the foundation of man's eternal journey toward the likeness of God. The voice of truth cannot be heard in an atmosphere of moral sin. Men and women must keep themselves clean to win God's favor, and to live lives of joy. Morality was always taught by the Prophet. Note the extract from his journal in 1843:

I was present with several of the Twelve, and gave an address tending to do away with every evil, and exhorting them to practice virtue and holiness before the Lord; told them that the Church had not received any permission for me to commit fornication, adultery, or any corrupt action; but my every word and action have been to the contrary. If a man commit adultery, he cannot receive the celestial kingdom of God. Even if he is saved in any kingdom, it cannot be the celestial kingdom. ... I condemned such actions in toto, and warned the people present against committing such evils; for it will surely bring a curse upon any person who commits such deeds.

From the organization of the Church strict morality was required of Church members. The ancient law was restated. To quote:

... thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shall cleave unto her, and none else. And he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out. Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that committeth adultery and repenteth not shall be cast out.

This command led to action. Those found in moral sin were brought before Church tribunals and tried for their Church membership. One of the most notable of such actions was the excommunication, in the early days of the Church, of Philastus Hurlburt. His excommunication for adultery and the refusal of the Church to restore him to membership, after another sin, made him a bitter enemy of the Church and led him to write the scurrilous book called, Mormonism Unveiled, which has been used over the century as the basis of anti-Mormon literature. But in obeying the Lord's commands, the Prophet did not count the cost.

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1Journal of Discourses, vol. 8, p. 16.
2History of the Church, vol. 6, p. 81.
On the other hand, the Church was taught to hold lawful marriage in high esteem. In the early days of the Church there was a society in America which forbade marriage. The members of that cult approached Church members with their propaganda. This brought explicit words from the Lord through the Prophet:

Whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man. 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, and that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made.

It was always understood that the family is the unit of the Church. As individuals are, so the family is and will be, and as families and family life are, so the Church is and will be. Frequently, also, family ideals determine the behavior of members of families. This was recognized, and the family was therefore given constant attention by the Prophet. The place and purpose of the family form an interesting chapter in the history of the Latter-day Saints.

Family loyalty, founded in love, was emphasized in all of Joseph’s teachings. Unless members of a family are loyal to one another, the value of the family vanishes. And that loyalty must be carried into the actual support and care of unfortunate members of the family. He himself displayed in his life and in his journal an inimitable family loyalty. He voiced his emotion of love for the loved ones so that they might know how he felt. Love expressed in word and action is a cementing power in family life. Inarticulate love means little. His words were overflowing with love for his wife. His tenderness included every member of his family and his many friends.

Soon after the Church was organized he broke out in blessings upon his family and fellow workers.

Joseph Smith also emphasized the obligations and responsibilities of family life. Members of a family must care for one another. Each member must preserve in his way the integrity and the welfare of the family to which he belongs. Parents are under obligations to support their children until they come of age, to provide education for them, and to teach them light and truth; that is, to train them in the gospel. Parents who failed to do so were sternly chastised and brought under condemnation.

Even Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams, Joseph’s counselors in the First Presidency, and others, were at one time severely rebuked for not setting their houses in order. They were warned that carelessness in family life would give evil forces power over them. There must be felt among the members of a family a mutual responsibility. They must help one another in every righteous activity throughout life, otherwise the family is not acceptable to the Lord.

Family unity is the bulwark of strength and the protection from evil within the Church. Besides every individual member of such a family partakes of the spirit of his family to help him throughout life. These principles apply also to the Church as a whole. The Church with its philosophy and practice is best understood when viewed as a great family. Family obligations rest upon the Church. These were necessary family practices in the young Church and are so today.

In addition to all this, Joseph restated prophetically a lost doctrine which raised marriage and the family to inconceivable heights of unending joy. He taught from the Lord’s revealed words that happy family associations may be continued eternally in the life after death. In the hereafter as on earth, the family unit may be preserved, and family relations continued.

In the eternal future, after life on earth, the family retains its prominent place among the hosts of heaven.
The statement through the ages that men and women are wedded only until death parts them need not be true for the righteous. This was of course almost a necessary conclusion from the doctrine of the pre-existence of man. There may be no end of marriage and family relations if they are consummated under the power and authority of the priesthood. Then they may endure forever. In the glorious words of the revelation pertaining to eternal marriage:

[It is a] new and everlasting covenant. . . . All covenants [and] contracts . . . that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise . . . are of no efficacy . . . in and after the resurrection . . . [but] 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 . . . whatsoever my servant hath put upon them in time and through all eternity . . . shall be of full force when they are out of the world . . . therefore they shall be from everlasting to everlasting because they continue.\(^4\)

This doctrine gave a new value to marriage and family relationships. It placed marriage among the eternal things, attainable to all who prepare themselves for it. The two on earth, husband and wife, with their children may continue eternally to build and to extend the everlasting, universal kingdom of God. This goal, under the powerful impetus of love, tempers and shapes the problems of daily life on earth. The family with its associations is given an infinite value and raised to new dignity.

Such sealings for eternity must be performed under the authority of the priesthood. The restored doctrine was stated in noble words:

All covenants . . . that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise of him who is anointed, both for time and for all eternity . . . are of no efficacy, virtue or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.\(^5\)

The practice of plural marriage is not an integral part of eternal marriage. It is an adjunct thereto, to be practised only under direct commandment of the Lord. It came to the Church by revelation and commandment from the Lord to Joseph Smith shortly before his death. He himself practised it as the wives who survived him have testified, in addition to the testimony of those to whom he taught the principle. Yet only about two or three per cent of the male population ever practised it. The restrictions placed upon the practice were severe, and it demanded great personal sacrifices. It was admittedly an honorable relationship, which did not in any way violate the high marriage and family ideals of the Church.

In 1890, under revelation from the Lord to the then Prophet, Wilford Woodruff, the practice of plural marriage was suspended. Unfortunately it was not understood and since the time of Joseph Smith, has been the basis of a library of untruthful, unholy, indecent books about the Latter-day Saints.

The conception and vision of endless family life as husband, wife, and children were tremendous additions to the means provided by the restored gospel to win daily joy. It makes every day a part of eternity. This new light which makes love and its fruits eternal, which the teachers of the dark centuries had failed to understand, is another evidence of the divine inspiration and prophetic power of the Prophet of the restoration, Joseph Smith.
CHAPTER 38

PLURAL MARRIAGE

Moral purity is required of all Latter-day Saints. Men must be as clean as women, and both must be free from any violation of the moral law. That is the requirement of all marriages performed under the authority of the restored gospel in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Church solemnizes two kinds of marriages: first, those that unite husband and wife for the duration of mortal life; second, those that continue the family relationship after death, in the hereafter. The latter are known as eternal or celestial sealings or marriages.

Faithful members of the Church hope to enjoy celestial marriage. They wish to be wedded for time and eternity, that is, to continue their wedded associations forever. To be able to do this is one of the happiest privileges of Church membership. Such marriages, properly called sealings, must be performed in the temples, whenever they exist.

Several approaches to eternal marriage may be made. Two living persons may be sealed to each other for time and eternity. A living man may be sealed for eternity to a dead woman or a living woman to a dead man. Two dead persons may be sealed to each other for eternity. It is also possible, though the Church does not now permit it, to seal two living persons for eternity only, with no association on earth.

Further, under a divine command to the Prophet Joseph Smith, it was possible for one man to be sealed to more than one woman for time and for eternity. This sealing of husbands and wives is one of the important rituals of temple service. It is an earth ordinance since there is no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven.

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The remarkable and soul-stirring doctrine of eternal or celestial marriage came as the result of a question presented to the Lord, as to how the early patriarch, Abraham, was justified in having more than one wife. In the revealed answer came also the principle of plural marriage among the Latter-day Saints. By another divine command to Wilford Woodruff, a successor to Joseph Smith, this order of marriage was withdrawn in 1890. Since that time the Church has not sanctioned plural marriages. Anyone who enters into it now is married unlawfully by persons who have no authority, and is excommunicated from the Church.

Nevertheless, almost the first question asked by strangers to the Church is about the practice of plural marriage in the early days of the Church. The young people of the Church likewise ask why the Lord authorized his Church to practise a principle obnoxious to many in the world.

In the absence of the revealed answer to the question, it may be suggested that the philosophy of the Church implies an answer.

Those who live faithfully to the Lord's commandments may receive the sealing blessings of the gospel. They are then wedded for time and for all eternity. They and their children are then the ones who in the eternal ages will constitute eternal families, and will increase in the eternal years toward the very likeness of God. It becomes therefore a priceless privilege to be born into such a family, sealed for eternal existence in the holy temples of God. The waiting spirits destined to come on earth, and understanding the vast meaning of the gospel, perhaps asked, perhaps pleaded to come through such a worthy lineage, even if the man, the coming father, had to assume the responsibility of a plural household. Perhaps in that manner came the practice on earth of plural marriage. Moreover, the practice is Biblical. It is in line with the fundamental gospel doctrine of eternal progression, and provides for the use of man's free agency. Thus the prac-
tice of plural marriage takes its place with the spiritual gifts of the gospel.

Looked upon in this light it becomes a glorious privilege of begetting bodies for the waiting spirits.

It is granted that this or any other explanation carries along with it many unanswerable questions. Certainly, however, plural marriage did not come because of economic or social reasons as some have suggested.

The principle and the practice came to the Prophet through revelation from the Lord. Its practice was always permissive. Plural wives could be taken only under severe restrictions and upon the recommendation of bishops, stake presidents, General Authorities, and finally by the President of the Church. The man who entered plural marriage must be fitted in every way for this holy privilege.

The divine purpose of plural marriage, since the Lord has not explained it, is but dimly understood by man.

That Joseph Smith actually was the person who introduced plural marriage into the Church and that he practised it himself are amply proved by existing facts.

The revelation known as Section 132 in the Doctrine and Covenants, which contains the doctrine of celestial marriage and also the permission to practice plural marriage, was dictated to his scribe, William Clayton, by Joseph Smith on July 12, 1843, a year before the martyrdom of the Prophet. It had been received by the Prophet some years before and taught to many, but was not reduced to writing until 1843.

The evidence seems clear that the revelation on plural marriage was received by the Prophet as early as 1831. A sermon delivered by Joseph F. Smith, then a counselor in the First Presidency, later the President of the Church, was reported as follows:

Here the speaker said, perhaps for the first time in public, that the women who entered into plural marriage with the Prophet

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Joseph Smith were shown to him and named to him as early as 1831, and some of them were given in marriage to him as early as that date, although it was not then prudent, under the circumstances, to make these facts public. And when the Lord showed those women to Joseph some of them were not even acquainted with the Church much less him. God knew their hearts, as is proved by the fact that they have been true and faithful through all the trying vicissitudes through which they have passed, and that too in the face of a frowning world; they have endured it all, and are today examples of womanhood and purity.

It seems that Fannie Alger was one of Joseph's first plural wives. She lived many years after the Prophet's death and never denied her relationship to him. There were other noble, pure women who gave like testimonies.

William Clayton lived as an honorable citizen of the highest character. On December 4, 1879, thirty-six years after the revelation was written he died. He never wavered in his simple declaration that the revelation as now found in the Doctrine and Covenants was dictated to him, sentence by sentence, by the Prophet. He adds that "after the whole was written, Joseph asked me to read it through, slowly and carefully, which I did, and he pronounced it correct."

On the day the revelation was written, or the day after, Joseph C. Kingsbury was asked to make a copy of it. This copy was carefully compared with the original by Bishop Newel K. Whitney and preserved by him. Elder Kingsbury, of unblemished character and reputation, lived fifty-five years after this event (he died October 5, 1898), and always bore solemn testimony to the written origin of the revelation in 1843 through the lips of the Prophet. In further corroboration of the claim that the revelation came from the lips of the Prophet are the statements of numerous men and women, then living, who either saw the revelation or heard it read. In fact, the document was read to the high council and presidency of the stake of Nauvoo on August 12, 1843, a month after it had been
reduced to written form on July 12, 1843. Many of the council members testified that the revelation was read at that time.¹

In 1886, President Smith of the Reorganized Church attempted to secure from Leonard Soby, estranged from the Church, but a member in 1843 of the Nauvoo high council, a statement to the effect that the revelation was not read at the said high council meeting. This Soby refused to do, but volunteered to testify that the revelation was actually read at that meeting in his hearing.⁸

A number of men, who in their lives proved themselves honest, have testified that they actually performed the ceremonies that united Joseph Smith to plural wives. Among these were Joseph B. Noble, Hyrum Smith, James Adams, Newel K. Whitney, Willard Richards, and others.¹⁰ Several of these men lived long after the Prophet’s death and always declared that they officiated in marrying the Prophet to a plural wife, giving place, date, and the witnesses present.

Many of the women who were thus sealed to Joseph Smith lived long after his death. They declared that they lived with the Prophet as his wives.¹¹ These women were of unblemished character, gentle and lovely in their lives, who understood this to be a righteous principle as revealed to their Prophet-husband. They always spoke with loving respect of their martyr-husband and they substantiated in detail the statements of those who performed the ceremonies.

Many of the elders in Nauvoo entered into plural marriage under the authority of Joseph Smith while he was living, as certified to by the men and their wives. Among these were William Clayton, Orson Hyde, Hyrum Smith, John Smith, Erastus Snow, Lyman Wight, James J. Strang, Gladden Bishop, William Smith, Heber C. Kimball, and

¹George Q. Cannon, Life of Joseph Smith, p. 412.
²George Q. Cannon, op. cit., p. 415; Andrew Jenson, Historical Record, p. 227.
³Journal History, January 8, 1886, p. 4, Deseret Evening News, January 8, 1886.
⁴Andrew Jenson, op., cit., pp. 221-233.
⁵Ibid., pp. 233, 240.

Brigham Young.¹² These men and their wives who survived the Prophet made affidavits of their marriages in Joseph’s day in answer to the charge by enemies of the Church that plural marriage was not instituted nor practised, neither authorized by the Prophet. These men and women who assisted in the sealings or were sealed to plural wives, were good citizens, so well-known over such long periods of time that their concordant declarations cannot be gainsaid.

The Nauvoo Temple records, which are in the possession of the Church, likewise furnish evidence that Joseph Smith practised plural marriage. Before the completion of the temple, sealings were usually performed in dedicated rooms in the home of the Prophet. When the temple was dedicated in 1846 for such ceremonies, the plural marriages of Joseph were given temple sanction, and where the original marriages were for time only, they were often later performed as sealings made to continue through eternity.¹³

This was done within a year and a half of the assassination of the Prophet. Later, many more received plural wives in the Nauvoo Temple. It is utterly improbable, if not impossible, that such a new doctrine could have been conceived and carried out immediately by the men who succeeded the Prophet. There would have been a serious resentment among those who entered the temple if the teachings of the Prophet had been violated. Such criticism would have overflowed to the outside.

After the death of the Prophet, women applied for the privilege of being sealed to him for eternity. They felt no doubt that in the eternal ages they would share the companionship of the Prophet. They wanted to share eternity with the man whom they revered as one chosen of God to open the last dispensation of the gospel on earth. To these requests, assent was often given. Such action by women who lived in the days of the Prophet implies a

¹²There can be no question about the matter since the written records are so extensive as to places, dates, and witnesses. See the records in the Historian’s Office, L.D.S. Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah, also the Nauvoo Temple Records.
¹³See Nauvoo Temple Records.
belief in plural marriage. These women, who were not in any sense earthly wives of the Prophet, have been counted by uninformed or antagonistic writers as wives of the Prophet.  

Women no longer living, whether in Joseph's day or later, have also been sealed to the Prophet for eternity. The request for such unions has usually come from relatives or friends who would have their loved ones share eternity with the Prophet rather than with anyone else. Unscrupulous and unreliable writers have even added such marriages to the list of Joseph's wives.

Another kind of celestial marriage seems to have been practised in the early days of plural marriage. It has not been practised since Nauvoo days, for it is under Church prohibition. Zealous women, some of them married as well as unmarried, loving the cause of the restored gospel, considered their condition in the hereafter and asked that they might be sealed to the Prophet for eternity. They were not to be his wives on earth, in mortality, but only after death, in the eternities. Such marriages led to much misunderstanding by those not of the Church and unfamiliar with its doctrines and practices. To them marriage meant only association on earth. Therefore any ceremony uniting a married woman, for example, to Joseph Smith for eternity seemed adulterous to such people. Yet in any day, in our day, there may be women who prefer to spend eternity with another than their husband on earth.

Such cases, if any, and they must have been few in number, gave enemies of the Church occasion to fan the flaming hatred against the Latter-day Saints. The full truth was not told. Enemies made the most of untruth. They found it difficult to believe that the Church rests on truth and virtue.

The existing literature dealing with plural marriage in Nauvoo in the day of Joseph Smith is voluminous. Many affidavits on the subject are in the Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City. Many of the books and news-
tion of the revelation to the whole Church. That explains the statement of 1838 in answer to a question whether the Mormons believed in having more than one wife. The principle of plural marriage had not at that time been presented to the Church. Soon after the Church was established in the Great Salt Lake region, at the conference in 1852, the doctrine of celestial and plural marriage was accepted by the Church as a whole. During the intervening years, however, it was taught and practised.

— Elders' Journal, vol. 1, p. 3.