MARRIAGE, THE FAMILY AND THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS
(AN INTRODUCTION)

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Lawrence Stone in his monumental book, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, has in a remarkable way shown what exciting and significant history can be written when one studies a particular region's households. While Vicky Burgess-Olson, Stanley Ivins, Eugene Campbell, and a few others have both studied and written about some aspects of the Mormon plural marriage experience, and Reuben Hill, Blaine Porter and other Mormons trained in family life and marriage counseling, have published articles and books describing family life among the Mormons today, still no one has made or at least published a complete history of marriage and the family within the Latter-day Saint culture.

Though many people today assume that the twentieth century LDS family does in fact mirror those families of the nineteenth century, it just might be--at least if Stone's work can be duplicated in a Mormon setting--that many aspects of family life can and do change over the years. Stone found for example that life was so cheap in the 1500's, and that death came both so easily and often that it was highly "imprudent to become too emotionally dependent upon any other human being." Thus relations within the nuclear family, between husband and wife and parents and children, he says were not much closer than those with neighbors, relatives, or friends. Concluding
this aspect of his study, Stone states that "marriage was not an intimate associaton based on personal choice" as it is in twentieth century America.

Even the most casual study of Latter-day Saint history poignantly illuminates the alarming number of deaths that occurred both among adults and children, as the Mormons were driven from Ohio, to Missouri, to Illinois, to Utah, and also while they attempted to make the desert blossom as the rose. This being true it would be both interesting and profitable to discover whether or not this aspect of Stone's findings would also be true of Mormon families.

Other very important and significant differences that have occurred during the past 150 years could also be cited but it is perhaps much more important to point out that the same sort of study that Stone did in England should also be commenced relative to the Mormon culture. However, it would seem that any study of the Mormon family would, if it were to be valid, have to be based upon those scriptures which are peculiar to the Mormon faith. A scholar would assume that those teachings which a Latter-day Saint believes to have originated in the mind of Deity Himself would have had the greatest impact on Mormon marriage and family customs.

Still it could be effectively argued that Mormon family life, sprang not from the pages of the Book of Mormon, but rather from the customs, traditions, and teachings found in that book of holy writ known as the Bible. Sherwin Bailey, in his book, Sexual Ethics, A Christian View, argues that Christianity does not make a clear and decisive break with the past, but rather, at least in sexual matters, is a blending together of Jewish, Greek, and Roman customs. Such a position he concludes, accounts for much of the tension and insensitivity and even much of the misunderstandings and inconsistency that are found in the writings of the Apostle Paul relative to marriage, sex, women and children.

Both Marvin Hill and Ernst Sandeen have argued, and effectively too, that many early Mormon converts were "Bible literalists," and thus one would suppose that there would be more than the usual amount of Biblical absorption especially the New Testament kind permeating Mormon marriage and family habits. Still Joseph Smith was often found breaking with the past and plowing new frontiers though often in reluctant soil, and therefore, it might be profitable for us today to limit our study to those foundation stones that pertain to the Mormon family as found in that book of scripture now titled the Doctrine and Covenants.

In the very first sections of this inspired book the Lord is repeatedly found using the term my son or my sons, when addressing such men as Joseph Smith, Jr., Hyrum, his brother, and the "church physician" Thomas B. Marsh, and refers to Emma Smith in Section 25 as "his daughter." While it can be argued that this term is used at times to denote those who came into the fold or kingdom or church of Jesus Christ, still at other times the Lord seems to be using this title to denote more than just an organizational relationship. In fact the term son or daughter or child or children is used over a dozen times in the Doctrine and Covenants alone, in referring to other than Jesus Christ.
Thus the concept is firmly established in the very first part of this book that all men have both a father and a son relationship with God their Father. In fact this powerful concept has become such an essential part of the Mormon faith that Joseph Smith in one of his last published discourses declared that God the Father dwelt on an earth "and is even now if we could but see him in the form of a man" and thus implies that God himself is both a Father and a Son. In fact, some Latter-day Saint theologians suggest that the concept that there never was a father without a son or a son without a father explains the origin of God himself which idea is often referred to as an infinite filial regress. Elder Boyd K. Packer has repeatedly told us that the most powerful and moving title for Deity found in scripture is that simple appellation Father. Thus the Fatherhood of God and our relationship as a son or daughter is abundantly established by the Doctrine and Covenants.

It would appear that the first instruction regarding the divine expectations of what sort of relationship ought to exist between a husband and his wife is found in the twenty-fifth section which is of singular interest because it is the only section in the Doctrine and Covenants given by the Lord through his Prophet to a woman. After declaring to Emma Smith, the Prophet's wife, that all those who receive the Gospel become "the sons and daughters of Christ," the Lord instructed Emma that as a wife her relationship with Joseph was as an office and divine calling, to be a source of comfort and that such comfort is to come in the form of consoling words and rendered in the spirit of meekness.

It is of interest to note in passing that on almost every occasion when the Lord speaks of how priesthood leadership is to be done He includes the attribute of meekness. This important character trait has been defined by scholars as a synonym for teachable, kind, and loving.

Continuing Emma is told in verse nine that she need not fear because her husband will support her in her church calling. While the Book of Commandments, as it was to be printed in Independence, Missouri, had this verse reading from the church rather than in the church; still it is significant that it was, at least in the Lord's eyes, the role of the husband to be the support of the wife, and if one takes the rendering of this verse as found in both the Book of Commandments and in the Doctrine and Covenants then it could be argued that it was not only the duty of the husband to support the spouse in her church calling but also financially. Emma was also encouraged to lay aside her concerns for this world and spend more of her time with those things that have eternal value and significance. Then in the next to the last verse of this very important section Emma was further admonished to beware of pride, and told that she was to let her "soul delight" in her husband.

In what must have been a terribly significant statement, as one takes into account both the temporal condition of the Prophet and his wife and the terrible persecution they had already had to endure, the Lord told Emma that if she would keep His commandments she would one day receive a crown of righteousness. And the implication is also there that she will dwell with
God when her life on earth is over. Thus we have developed in the church as early as July, 1830 several important principles as they relate to the proper associations of husbands and wives.

By September of 1830 the Lord through Joseph Smith declared that not only are little children redeemed but that Satan has not been given power to tempt them until they begin to become accountable. It is in March, 1831 in connection with the translation of Genesis 17:11 that we learn that children become accountable at age eight. The innocence of children is also referred to in section seventy-four, verse seven, in Joseph Smith's explanation of First Corinthians, chapter seven, verse fourteen given in January, 1832. It is important and significant that LDS theology rather than beginning with the theological doctrine of original sin teaches parents that they have a significant period of grace in which they can teach their offspring thus giving them a "great leap forward" in their pending battle with Satan.

The section of the Doctrine and Covenants known as the Law of the Church provides the most significant divine information relative to marriage fidelity that we have thus far encountered in that book of scripture. Given when the church was not yet a year old the Lord declares that men are to love their wives with all their hearts and are to "cleave unto her and none else." This, it would appear, places a sort of modern divine sanctity on the marriage relationship that even in a way foreshadowed what is to come in later sections of this divine book.

Then in the following verse the Lord declares that the husband should not even look upon another woman with eyes of lust or he shall lose the spirit of the Lord and will be cast out. This reinforces the teachings of the Master as found in the Bible and the Book of Mormon which powerfully portray both that: as a man thinketh so is he, and that one usually first becomes unfaithful in the mind and later in his deeds.

Continuing, the Lord forbids adultery but then declares that even this sin can be forgiven and that only after one had repented and then transgressed again does adultery become unforgiveable. It would appear that the Lord really wanted his sons and daughters to know just how important it was and is for husbands and wives to be true to the covenants they made with each other at the time of marriage, and also that they remain absolutely clean, because in verses seventy-four and seventy-five He declares again the seriousness of adultery and fornication. He also clearly illuminates the consequences that will follow such transgressions, and again in verse eighty proclaims that a man or a woman who commits adultery shall be tried before the church and if found guilty is to be dealt with by the law of God.

In contrast to many in the Christian world who incorrectly interpret Paul and others as saying that it is only better to marry than to burn, the Lord through Joseph Smith states in section forty-nine of the Doctrine and Covenants that not only is marriage ordained of Him but that those who mistake the Lord's instructions on this matter and forbid marriage are not "ordained of God."
We learn in verses that follow that it is, in the eyes of God, lawful for a man to have a wife and that the man and the wife shall become one flesh so that the earth can answer to the end of its creation, that it may be populated.

The Lord has not, it seems important to state, established one standard of morality for the man and another for the woman but rather has declared that both are to marry, both are to be true to the promises they make with each other and both are to be free from unclean thoughts—although the greater burden relative to lust seems to be placed upon the man. Once again in section sixty-three the Lord repeats that a man is not to look upon a woman with lust nor is he to commit adultery with her in his heart. Should he do so, the Lord declares in the verse following, he shall have a part in the "lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" and shall suffer the second death.23

In some of the subsequent sections of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord provides specific instructions regarding the responsibility parents have to their children. In section sixty-nine the Lord instructed Oliver Cowdery to take the message to the Saints in Zion (Jackson County, Missouri) that He (the Lord) is not well pleased because some of their children are growing up in wickedness, and are not seeking earnestly for the riches of eternity, but rather have eyes full of greediness.24 Then in section seventy-five the Lord tells his Saints that every man is to provide for his own family or he shall lose his crown.25 And again in section eighty-three the Lord tells us that all children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance until they are of age.26

In a very pointed revelation the Lord established forever the very important principle that a man's family does indeed come first regardless of position or calling. To second counselor Frederick G. Williams the Lord says:

You have not taught your children light and truth, according to the commandments. ...and now a commandment I give unto you—if you will be delivered you shall set in order your own house, for there are many things that are not right in your house.27

And much the same instruction is given to first counselor Sidney Rigdon, and even to the Prophet himself. We find in later revelations that the Lord tells us that in any position we attain unto by virtue of the priesthood, we must refrain from the temptation to use power other than that maintained by virtue, long suffering, persuasion, gentleness, meekness and by love unfeigned. It is proper to assume that such a declaration applies to fathers and mothers raising their children.28

Another very important Mormon concept the Lord formed in section seventy-six, tells us that the inhabitants of the worlds that He has created are his BEGOTTEN sons and daughters. This would imply a very intimate and significant relationship between the Heavenly Father and his earthly children.
We know from letters he wrote that the Prophet Joseph Smith's sojourn in the jail, ironically titled, "Liberty," was a most traumatic experience for the Mormon leader. While he had been separated from his family for periods of time before, while attending to church business, it would appear that never before had the full significance of the family relationship been more paramount to him.

His letters to Emma, penned in the full loneliness of confinement, are overflowing with affection, love, and concern for not only her safety but the children as well. In instructions which clearly display his personal view of marriage and his notions of how to raise a family, Joseph continually told Emma how much he loved her and how important it was for her to convey to their children his love. Furthermore, he admonishes his "affectionate" wife to be tender and kind to them, to listen to their wants, and concludes one letter by telling his wife how his heart is entwined around hers forever and ever.29

We see here perhaps the foreshadowing of a great truth which was more fully revealed in the temple ordinance (D&C 132:19.) wherein Joseph was told to teach the church that men and women could be "sealed" together for time and all eternity. While it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the great truths regarding both marriage and the eternal family relationship as taught in the sacred ceremony, it is perhaps needful to mention that the doctrine associated with special ordinances is revealed in sections one hundred thirty-one and one hundred thirty-two of the Doctrine and Covenants.

From these revelations, the members of the church learned that in order to attain exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, a man and a woman must not only be married but must have their marriage solemnized or sealed by the power of that same priesthood that had been given to the chief apostle by Christ Himself, wherein we are told that Peter had the power to seal on earth and it would be sealed in heaven.30 This concept then makes it clear that it is necessary for a man and a woman to be married if they want to achieve all that the Lord has, and become joint heirs with him in a stewardship relationship. This in a very significant way makes the salvation process a joint effort and not wholly an individual one. No other church has stressed this important teaching nor have they made it a part of their official doctrine.

We discover that section one hundred thirty-one was given in the following historical situation: On the 16th of May, 1843 a little company consisting of:

Joseph Smith, George Miller, William Clayton, Eliza and Lydia Partridge, and J. M. Smith, went to Ramus. The Prophet and William Clayton stayed at Benjamin F. Johnson's over night. Before retiring, the little party of friends engaged in conversation on spiritual topics. The Prophet told them that 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.32

Found in these instructions, as given by the Prophet, is the doctrine that not only will the husband and wife be denied each other in the world to come but will also have no children and will be unable to participate fully in the creation process. Joseph Smith elaborating on this doctrine explained:

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 the sin against the Holy Ghost, will continue to increase and have children in the Celestial glory.

While we know that the Prophet only dictated a part of what he knew about marriage to his scribe William Clayton on July 12, 1843, we are given in section one hundred thirty-two of the Doctrine and Covenants one of the fullest and most complete scriptural discussions regarding marriage that can be found anywhere. In this important section of scripture the Lord declares that "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"...then shall they not only come forth in the first resurrection but shall "be gods because they have no end...then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them."33

Continuing, the Lord gave divine sanction to plural marriage, if it is commanded by him and done in the prescribed way, which is following those procedures that have been established by the Lord Himself. Thus it is the doctrine of the Church that for a man and a woman to become truly exalted they must enter into marriage, be sealed by priesthood authority for all eternity, live the commandments given by the Lord through his prophet, and in faith endure to the end.

While some might have taught that it is the case, it is not the doctrine of the Church that a man must have more than one wife to achieve such exaltation. Nor is it the position of the Church that we must accept and practice plural marriage to remain in the celestial kingdom.34

So significant have marriage and family life become in the Church, that Elder Erastus Snow declared:

...and for this reason says St. Paul, "the man is not without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord." In other words, 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, not that ever will be, a God in any other way. I have another description: There never was a God, and there never will be in all eternities that exist, nor that ever will be in all eternities except they be made of these two component parts; a man and a woman; male and the female.35

President John Taylor in the October 21, 1877 Ogden Stake quarterly conference puts the matter this way:

They [women] form a part of us, for the man is not without the woman, nor the woman without the man. It takes a man and a woman to make a man; without woman, man is not perfect. God so ordained it. We are aiming to Celestial glory, and when we reach that exaltation, will we have our wives. Yes.36

While on another occasion President Taylor, before he was president of the Church, published an article wherein he stated that women once dwelt in "the Heavenly Father's bosom, and in His presence, and with thy mother, one of the queens of heaven..."37 giving Priesthood credence to the idea put forth by Eliza R. Snow that we have indeed a mother in Heaven. And when President George Q. Cannon of the first presidency, got after Sister Snow for perhaps stressing too much this Heavenly Mother concept, he was warning the Saints that they should not worship her, which seems to him to come close to the Catholic church's adoration for and worship of Mary; still he did not repudiate the idea that we in fact have a Heavenly Mother nor those ideas propounded by Elder John Taylor and Erastus Snow that were quoted above.38 We find a splendid discourse by George Q. Cannon, as quoted by Daniel H. Ludlow, as follows:

We believe in the eternal nature of the marriage relation, that man and woman are destined, as husband and wife, to dwell together eternally. We believe that we are organized as we are, with all these affections, with all this love for each other, for a definite purpose something far more lasting than to be extinguished when death shall overtake us. We believe that when a man and a woman are united as husband and wife, and they love each other, their hearts and feelings are one, and that love is as enduring as eternity itself, and that when death overtakes them it will neither extinguish nor cool that love, but that it will brighten and kindle it to a purer flame, and that it will endure through eternity; and that if we have offspring they will be with us and our mutual associations will be one of the chief joys of the heaven to which we are hastening. God has restored the everlasting Priesthood, by which ties can be found consecrated, and consummated, which shall be as enduring as we ourselves are enduring, that is, as our spiritual nature; and husbands and wives will be united together, and they and their children will
dwell and associate together eternally, and this, as I have said, will constitute one of the joys of heaven. . .39

Men, we are told, through the centuries have wrestled with the problem of what to do with the family. For instance Plato in his Republic solved the problem quite handily on paper when he forbade marriage, established a community of wives, and placed children under the supervision of the state. The Essenes of ancient Palestine who practiced communal living, abolished the family and chose to live in a state of celibacy. While Sir Thomas Moore did not attempt to grapple with the problem he did assume that the family could exist in the communal arrangement without harm, and that those who had too many children should distribute them among households which had too few.40

For Mormons, this question is clearly answered in the Doctrine and Covenants in that we know that the family, regardless of its problems, is as eternal as God Himself and that our very salvation depends, upon the success we achieve as husbands and wives and as fathers and mothers. Thus while the Doctrine and Covenants does not clearly answer all of the questions the thoughtful person can raise regarding marriage, divorce, and the raising of children it does provide a firm foundation upon which every husband, every wife, every father, and every mother can launch forth. And it provides the knowledge that God will speak through his Prophet and by means of the Holy Ghost to any member of the Church if they live faithfully, and give them guidance and direction relative to marriage and family problems. We can conclude by saying that only wickedness can prevent us, if we have been sealed in the temple by one having authority, from living together and going throughout eternity as husbands and wives, parents and children.

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19 D&C 29:47.

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21 D&C 42:22.

22 D&C 49:15-16.

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26 Ibid., 83:2, 4-5.

28 D&C 121:41-46.

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