

Lending Clarity to Confusion: A Response to Kirk Van Allen’s “D&C 132: A Revelation of Men, Not God”

“The Prophet said that the practice of this principle would be the hardest trial the Saints would ever have to test their faith. It was not his, but that of the Almighty.”

–Helen Mar Kimball Whitney

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has generally not addressed the practice of plural marriage, but increased attention on the subject apparently prompted the Church to release several essays on the topic last year.¹ The essays created a frenzy in the media with coverage by major national newspapers, television news, and countless blogs. While the essays were unexpectedly candid, they did not seem to assuage all of the concerns of members as evidenced by the questions and concerns that continue to be expressed.

On February 2, 2015, Kirk Van Allen posted a blog entitled, “D&C 132: A Revelation of Men, Not God.”² In it, he brings up some valid questions, which have previously been voiced by members and non-members in their quests to try and understand this “strange doctrine.”³ However, he also advances arguments that seem to superficially examine the topic without taking into account theological and historical contexts. Since this essay is traversing the blogosphere and stirring up a whirlwind itself, an alternative view of his assertions seems useful. In this response, we do not wish to misrepresent the words of Kirk Van Allen, so readers may want to read [his essay](#) first. Also, please note, we have avoided presenting a point by point counterargument or addressing all areas of disagreement.

Fruits of the Spirit

Kirk Van Allen begins his essay by discounting the notion that polygamy could be divinely sanctioned because it “does not mesh with the fruits of the spirit,” of which he lists “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, [and] faith.” This observation is somewhat paradoxical because many Church members who lived this practice had great faith, experienced longsuffering, and through their gentleness and goodness were, by their own accounts, blessed.

It is true that we do not uniformly associate the practice of polygamy with joy and peace during mortality, but God has commanded many things not directly related to joy and peace in this life.

¹ “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo>.

² <http://mormonverse.com/2015/02/02/dc-132-a-revelation-of-men-not-god/>.

³ Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo after the Martyrdom,” *Women’s Exponent* 11, no. 19 (March 1, 1883), 146.

Faithful followers will be tested with challenges that will stretch them. We are taught in the D&C that “after much tribulation come the blessings” (D&C 58:4).

Several polygamists wrote about the refining nature of the practice. Lucy Walker, recalled the value of plural marriage in teaching character strengths: “I will say [that polygamy] is a grand school. You learn self control, self denial; it brings out the nobler traits of our fallen natures, and teaches us to study and subdue self. . . . There is a grand opportunity to improve ourselves, and the lessons learned in a few years, are worth the experience of a lifetime.”⁴

Common Misconceptions

Van Allen then voices a few concerns regarding plural marriage that are not uncommon but are unfortunate because they may not be accurate and their contemplation causes undue distress.

1. “How else would Heavenly Mother be able to give birth to billions of spirit children, unless she did not have fellow women to help her?” *We would argue this statement is false. It does not reflect any official teaching and is based upon speculation.*
2. “When they bring back polygamy ...” *Do we know that polygamy will ever be commanded again? In the 6000 years of religious history, the only adherents to be commanded were the Latter-day Saints between 1852 and 1890. Upon what basis does anyone assert that it will be commanded again?*
3. “If the prophet asked you to practice polygamy, would you do it?” *“What ifs” steal joy from our present by causing us to obsess over speculative sadness in a possible future based on unknown variables.*

Discussing such hypotheticals creates needless turmoil among the Latter-day Saints because there is no data to support the existence of these future events.

Monogamy and Polygamy on Earth

Van Allen makes an eloquent case for monogamy. It is an easy sell that we highly endorse. On earth, polygamy expands a man’s emotional and sexual opportunities as a husband as it simultaneously fragments a woman’s emotional and sexual opportunities as a wife. It is inherently sexist and unfair. Here in mortality a plurality of wives fractures the foundation for intimacy in a marriage. *Exclusivity*, not just of sexual relations, but of a host of other interactions between a husband and wife, is absent, diluted by other intimate relationships.

⁴ Lucy Walker statement, quoted in Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience* (Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888), 50–51.

A few valiant sisters made bold declarations in the 1880s regarding the superiority of polygamy over monogamy, but in our view most of their statements are unconvincing. Perhaps allowing women, who would have otherwise been spinsters in a monogamous society to become mothers was the only aspect that we personally found useful. Regardless, with those few exceptions, we believe that most polygamous wives of the nineteenth century would have gladly chosen to NOT share their husbands if they could have done so without spiritual penalty. More generally, women spoke of how this extra trial helped them grow, which is more a reflection of their faith and character than of their preference in marital dynamics.

It is true that Brigham Young and other Church leaders tried to extol polygamy and downplay intimacy in marriage. Van Allen insightfully observes that the leaders “needed [polygamy] dressed and painted to look presentable to the world.” This is true. What else could they do? They believed it was a commandment from God. For those Saints at that time and place, marriage was going to be a different dynamic—one that brought many challenges that God’s followers in all other eras of documented history did not have to face. They could not foresee a future without polygamy as it was their reality.

Van Allen speaks of polygamy between 1852 and 1890 as an “ultimatum.” Was it? Well, was living the Law of Moses or circumcision or offering burnt offerings “ultimatums” to Moses, Abraham, and Adam respectively? We could quibble about verbiage, but if one wants to refer to a commandment as an ultimatum, then the term does apply from a spiritual standpoint. This is, after all, inherent in the definition of a commandment.

Specific commandments have been given at specific times and places to specific people and disobedience has led to condemnation. But in all cases, individuals were allowed to use their agency. While social consequences sometimes result when individuals break ranks, followers are not forced to obey commandments.

The Math

One of the weaker sections of Van Allen’s essay is the discussion of “THE MATH.” He observes that there are more men than women born on earth claiming the ratio to be 107 to 100. In fact, the numbers are not quite that disparate. Demographers Graziella Caselli, Jacques Vallin, and Guillaume Wunsch observed: “The sex ratio at birth (number of male births per 100 female births) is generally very close to 105. This is one of the very rare demographic parameters that is virtually constant.”⁵ According to this ratio, 51.2% of births are male and 48.8% are female.

The numbers supporting these ratios have been extracted from nearly three centuries of statistical data. Van Allen proclaims: “There is already a shortage of girls in the world and polygamy

⁵ Graziella Caselli, Jacques Vallin, and Guillaume Wunsch, *Demography Analysis and Synthesis: A Treatise in Population* (Burlington, Mass.: Elsevier, 2001, 36; emphasis in original).

compounds the problem.” What seems to be an obvious conclusion in reality is flawed because it fails to take into account other relevant data.

Examining birthrates from the past 300 years and extrapolating those values back through previous millennia may not be justified. Three centuries of statistics comprises only a small fraction of human existence. Since the phenomenon arises from as yet unidentified reproductive physiological factors, assuming a constant trend throughout previous human history is not scientifically warranted.

But a bigger issue is involved here than simply birth rates. Multiple surveys during the past century of religious involvement in Christian churches support a greater participation among women. In his 1958 book, *Religious Behavior*, Michael Argyle concludes: “It is obvious that women are more religious on every criterion.”

A more recent 2009 study by the Pew Forum reported the respective ratios for women to men for several religious activities: “Are affiliated with a religion” (1.09); “Have absolutely certain belief in God or universal spirit” (1.18); “Pray at least daily” (1.35); “Say religion is very important in their lives” (1.29); “Have absolutely certain belief in a personal God” (1.29); and “Attend worship services at least weekly” (1.29).⁶ An even more recent study of Episcopalian adherents showed a ratio of 1.63 women to men.⁷

In a 1992 article in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Tim B. Heaton discussed the gender distribution of Church members: “Latter-day Saints in Utah, other western states, and the South Pacific have gender ratios of approximately 95 males per 100 females, which is the value for the total U.S. population. Ratios in the Church are somewhat below the U.S. average in the eastern United States, Canada, and Asia, and females outnumber males by a large margin in Latin America and Europe.”⁸

These observations could support an enhanced propensity among women to obey a celestial law on earth, but they are not conclusive. Just as the birth ratios appear to have favored males 105 to 100 over the past few centuries, the opposite trend for participation in Christianity has favored women to a greater degree. Neither observation allows for sweeping conclusions regarding the preceding millennia. In short, it does not appear that demographic observations can accurately predict whether more men or women will be eligible for exaltation.

Regarding the gender composition of the celestial kingdom, Van Allen speculates: “If polygamy is the choice form of marriage then there will be some obvious demographic problems with

⁶ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “The Stronger Sex – Spiritually Speaking,” February 26, 2009, <http://pewforum.org/The-Stronger-Sex----Spiritually-Speaking.aspx>. Emphasis in original.

⁷ Elaine Cameron and Marion Chatterley, *Scottish Episcopal Church Gender Audit Report as Requested by the General Synod 2009*, [Edinburgh, Scotland: Scottish Episcopal Synod], published May 2010, 77. Available at http://www.scotland.anglican.org/media/news/files/Gender_Audit_Report_General_Synod_2010.pdf.

⁸ Tim B. Heaton, “Vital Statistics,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1527–28.

heaven. If every man had three wives, that would mean heaven would be composed of 25% men and 75% women.” Such conjectures seem to provide little worthwhile insight because they hypothesize about a possibility that is unsupported scientifically or scripturally.

Plural Marriage in D&C 132

A large portion of Van Allen’s text is devoted to analyzing the revelation on celestial marriage, now D&C 132. He refers to some of its contents as “pure speculation,” revealing that he doesn’t believe it came from God, but apparently from Joseph’s own imagination.

Section 132 gives four reasons for the need for *some* men and women to practice plural marriage.

- (1) To provide a customized trial for the Saints of that time and place (see D&C 132:32, 51).
- (2) To provide bodies for noble premortal spirits by “multiplying and replenishing the earth” (D&C 132:63).
- (3) As part of the “restitution of all things” prophesied in Acts 3:19–21 (D&C 132:40, 45).
- (4) To allow all worthy women to be sealed to an eternal husband “for their exaltation in the eternal worlds” (D&C 132:63, 16–17).

Van Allen asks a few legitimate questions:

It seems curious that very little from Old Testament times was “restored” in this “restoration of all things.” Why wasn’t blood sacrifice restored? Why wasn’t the old dietary laws of no pork or shellfish restored? Why weren’t Levite males the sole possessors of the priesthood like in the times of old? Luckily, Joseph wasn’t commanded to circumcise himself, like they were of old. None of that was restored, yet the primitive practice of polygamy made a triumphant return.

While the revelation does not disclose specifically why these other religious practices were not part of the “restitution of all things” prophesied in Act 3:21, we might note that none of the practices have eternal consequences. So far as we know, blood sacrifice, circumcision, and the Law of Moses rituals have no place in the celestial kingdom. However, the marriage relationship will continue in eternity.

The Law and the New and Everlasting Covenant

Unfortunately for readers, Van Allen temporarily turns Mormon Fundamentalist in his evaluation of D&C 132. He assumes, as most modern polygamists do, that the meaning of the new and everlasting covenant mentioned in the section is polygamy. It is true that verse 1 clarifies that the revelation was given to the Prophet as he inquired “to know and understand wherein I, the Lord,

justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines” (D&C 132:1). Without any doubt, the opening question is about *polygamy*.

If we follow the text of the revelation, we see that in response to Joseph Smith’s question, the Lord reveals a “new and everlasting covenant” and “law” associated with it:

For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory. For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world. And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God. (D&C 132:4–6)

At this point, it is unclear how the “new and everlasting covenant” and “law” (that God is going to immediately reveal in the remaining portion of the revelation) are related to the original question about polygamy. If the law or covenant is polygamy, then believers are going to need to obey or be damned. Okay, God has our attention. No one wants to be damned.

Fortunately, the very next verse addresses this confusion by telling us the “conditions of this law”:

And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power (and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred), 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. (D&C 132:7)

It is plain that polygamy is not a “condition of the law,” since it is not mentioned. Instead, this verse introduces a new priesthood authority: a sealing power that must be utilized to bind things on earth, so they will remain together after death.

Eternal Marriage and Plural Marriage

Van Allen quotes D&C 132:19–20, but he spends little time discussing its content. These verses explain the eternal benefits available to an obedient monogamous couple sealed by proper authority. Exaltation and godhood are promised to a worthy monogamous couple who are

married by the sealing authority. Importantly, these verses demonstrate that God’s highest blessings are available without polygamy.

Verses 16–17 explain the consequences that come to individuals who do not access that priesthood power in their matrimony. According to these verses, the penalties of not utilizing the sealing authority to bind a union are much greater than simply being eternally divorced. These two sentences explain that such individuals are “appointed angels in heaven” to be “ministering servants” to more worthy resurrected beings.

We actually don’t know what their duties will be although Van Allen speculates they would be “doing our bidding for eternity.” This seems odd since these angels or ministering servants would also be resurrected beings in the highest kingdom of glory. The verses do state that they “remain separately and singly, *without exaltation*, in their saved condition, to all eternity” (vv. 4, 6; emphasis added). This is damnation, or the *inability to progress*, within the context of the revelation

D&C 132:16–17 teach a remarkable doctrine that ties exaltation to eternal marriage and, as a consequence, introduce new concerns. If monogamy were the only marital relationship in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, then an equal number of worthy males and females would be required at the final judgment.

Without a “plurality of wives” in eternity, some worthy women would not gain exaltation due to no fault of their own. D&C 132 does not *predict* more women than men at the final judgment, but it does provide an *option* should such occur, and that option involves plural marriage.

God Respects the Righteous

Even though Van Allen commented on these verses, he misses the message:

Did you catch that, The God of D&C 132 is saying that Mormon marriages will pave the way for us to become gods, while all of our single members will become our servants. This God puts so much weight on becoming married in the new and everlasting covenant, that any other unions will be dissolved. Those loving and righteous people will live as single angels ... Which means that God is a respecter of persons.

The logic here is puzzling. God is a covenant-making God, but Van Allen seems offended by the thought. Part of being righteous is accepting ordinances. No ordinances equals no blessings. Obtaining saving ordinances allows God to fulfill His part of the covenant in our lives.

Non-covenant makers are not blessed or respected. Paul explained: “He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons” (Colossians 3:25). Van Allen promotes the proposition that non-covenant makers should receive the blessings of the obedient. If true, then there is a core disparity in his beliefs and the teachings of the Book of Mormon and Bible that require obedience for blessings, on earth and in heaven.

Van Allen's apparent misunderstanding is deeper: "I can't help feeling concerned for my non-temple married friends and the single adults in the ward. D&C 132 even lays it out clearly, marriages do not happen in the here-after." His concern for ward members is commendable, but misdirected, for these are not the teachings of the Church.

The way will be open for worthy individuals in the spirit world to accept the gospel and be eternally married through proxy ordinances performed in a temple on earth. In the April 2014 General Conference, President Boyd K. Packer explained: "Those who do not marry or those who cannot have children are not excluded from the eternal blessings they seek but which, for now, remain beyond their reach. We do not always know how or when blessings will present themselves, but the promise of eternal increase [exaltation] will not be denied any faithful individual who makes and keeps sacred covenants."⁹

Van Allen continues: "God seems more interested in saving and exalting married temple goers, than Mother Teresa, Gandhi, and other people, who have done far-more good than we ever will, but were never married in the new and everlasting covenant." In contrast, Joseph Smith taught: "All these who have not had an opportunity of hearing the Gospel, and being administered unto by an inspired man in the flesh, must have it hereafter, before they can be finally judged."¹⁰

Joseph's God and our God is a just God who allows every man and woman to have the opportunity to hear the gospel, either here on earth or in the spirit world. Vicarious ordinances can and will be performed in earthly temples for spirits who need them. This work will mostly be done during the millennium.¹¹

D&C 132:26—Unconditional Exaltation?

Van Allen's essay puts forward the notion that D&C 132 offers unconditional exaltation to eternally sealed couples. He comments:

I find it most interesting that God said that the only thing that would prevent a covenant married man from entering heaven would be murder. What about abuse, extortion, adultery, torture, child abandonment, or racist hatred? Wouldn't those prevent others from possibly entering the kingdom of God. I am definitely not the judge of anyone's salvation, but it seems clear to me that a loving God would not make such a claim, that anything short of murder is permissible, as long as you enter the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.

He is not alone in this extreme interpretation. Other critics have alleged that this verse guarantees exaltation to sealed individuals who did not murder, which is easy to understand if the verse is

⁹ Boyd K. Packer, "The Witness," 2014 April General Conference, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/print/2014/05/sunday-afternoon-session/the-witness?lang=eng&clang=eng>.

¹⁰ Elders Journal 1 (July 1838):43.

¹¹ Scott G. Kenny, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898*, typescript, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983-85), 6:390, entry for January 15, 1868.

taken out of the context. Called “proof-texting,” this, like all scripture, must be contextualized within all of Joseph Smith’s teachings including agency, accountability, and obedience.

Joseph revealed: “If you keep not my commandments you cannot be saved in the kingdom of my Father” (D&C 18:46). If an ordinance could provide unconditional salvation, then thereafter God would have to look upon new sins with allowance. Unconditional salvation due to the existence of an ordinance contradicts scripture. This verse actually states that for individuals who received the sealing ordinances, the only sin that can prevent exaltation is murder. All others can be forgiven through repentance.

Nauvoo and Utah Latter-day Saints never viewed the revelation the way Van Allen presents it. We could cite many journal entries on this topic, but choose to share only that of Joseph Hovey and his wife, Martha Ann Webster Hovey. They were sealed in the Nauvoo temple on January 16, 1846, and became partakers of the blessings offered in section 132. Martha Ann passed away months later on September 16 and her husband then recorded his desire to remain worthy to rejoin her in heaven: “If I am faithful I anticipate meeting her and embracing her when she comes forth in the morning of the resurrection. . . . My daily prayer is that I may hold out until the end and enjoy the glories of the Celestial kingdom with her and reign with my brethren throughout all eternity.”¹²

D&C 132:61–63—“If any Man Espouse a Virgin”

Verses 61–63 discuss several basic principles regarding how a man could marry a plural wife. It starts “And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else.” Van Allen proposes:

This is one of the most damning of verses for the earlier practitioners of plural marriage. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and many others, by definition, committed adultery. Both presidents of the church married women who were already married and several women who were not virgins.

Here Van Allen makes two accusations based upon a liberal interpretation. First, he insists that this verse demands that all plural wives be “virgins.” Actually, D&C 132:61–63 are the only verses in the entire revelation (of 66 verses) to mention “virgins.” These verses do not state that plural wives must *only* be virgins.

We are not told if the verses equally apply to worthy non-virgins, like widows, divorcees, or repentant unmarried women. Yet, Van Allen takes the narrow view that since virgins are

¹² Joseph Grafton Hovey Journal, MS 1576, CHL. Digitized version at <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/JHovey.html> (accessed January 29, 2010).

mentioned, that is the only possibility that can be considered. A closer reading of the section demonstrates that women who are being sealed are usually referred to as a “wife” (vv. 15, 18, 19, 26, 34, 41) and worthiness is always implied or specifically stated (v. 19). The most important verses, D&C 132:19–20, speak of a “man” who marries a “wife.”

Van Allen’s second complaint is that verse 61 specifies that the women “have vowed to no other man.” He observes that Joseph and Brigham were sealed to women with legal husbands. Since no formal divorce had occurred, he alleges the men “committed adultery.” Again, this is a constricted view of the meaning of the verse.

In fact, the revelation already described how a “plurality of husbands” (called polyandry) was adultery (vv. 41–42), a principle it restates again in verse 63. In the gospel, a woman can have valid marital vows to only one man.

The new and everlasting covenant of marriage causes all “old covenants . . . to be done away” (D&C 22:1), so a woman with a legal marriage and an eternal sealing would not thereafter have two genuine husbands in the eyes of God. The sealing would supersede the civil union and constitute the only valid marital vow. Verse 61 is referring to a previous sealing “vow” or marriage in the new and everlasting covenant.

If a living woman has been sealed to one man already, she cannot be sealed to another without loosening the vow through proper authority. A deceased woman may be sealed to all the men she was legally married to during her lifetime so long as they are also deceased, but only one of those sealings will be accepted by both parties at some time before final judgment.

D&C 132:64—Emma’s Agency

Another misunderstanding promoted in the essay involves D&C 132’s verses to Emma. Verse 64 states that once Emma learns of plural marriage she must “believe and administer unto [Joseph], or she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord your God; for I will destroy her.” Concerning this, Van Allen comments:

What happened to the agency for Emma? The Lord respects the agency of mankind SO much that humans are allowed to commit murders, run prostitution rings, embezzle millions of dollars, torture, and molest, without instant judgment reigned down upon their heads. The Lord, in His mercy, seems to allow them time to change and repent. Yet Emma Smith must practice polygamy or the Lord will DESTROY her? [Emphasis in original.]

There is no timeline regarding the threat of being “destroyed,” yet Van Allen assumes one. The statement dramatically employs scriptural language to describe the ultimate destiny of the unrighteous, male and female. Van Allen implies that Emma’s disobedience would elicit consequences that are different from the disobedience of another person (male or female). A more accurate reading of the verse affirms that the Judeo-Christian God invites His followers on

earth to believe and obey. They are free to do either, but when they refuse to comply, He reminds them in fiery language of the eternal results (see discussion in D&C 19:10–20).

We find Van Allen’s concern for Emma admirable. It is true she struggled with the practice of plural marriage, but she tried very diligently to accept it. In a 1902 statement, Maria Jane Woodward recalled an incident that likely occurred in late 1843. Emma seems to have shared her inner conflicts with Maria Jane, who worked in the Smith home:

I was living at the Prophet Joseph’s as a hired girl to work for Emma Smith, the Prophet’s wife, in the mansion at Nauvoo, Ill. While working in the evening, the rest of the girls having finished their work and gone to bed, I heard conversation between two personages but I did not know who they were at the time. They came into a little room back of the dining room where I was, and after listening a few moments I found that Emma Smith was one of them, but I did not know at the time that it was the Prophet that was with her. After listening I found out that she was crying and in trouble about something. He came to the door of the room where I was and said to me: “It is you that is here is it Jane?” I told him it was and then he asked me if I would go down and tell Brother Hyrum Smith, his brother to come to him and so I went. . . .

Hyrum asked me where Brother Joseph was, and I told him he was in the little room back of the dining room in the mansion. Hyrum said no more to me until we got up to the mansion and he walked through the hall into this back room and I went to my work in the dining room. I heard him say to Emma when he went in: “Well Sister Emma, what is the matter?” Then I heard no more of their conversation that night, but the next morning I was upstairs making beds and Emma came to me and said, “It was you that Joseph came to when he sent for Hyrum last night was it?” I said, “Yes Ma’am.” Then she told me to sit down on the bed by her and we both sat down on the bed that I was making. She looked very sad and cast down, and there she said to me, “The principle of plural marriage is right, but I am like other women, I am naturally jealous hearted and can talk back to Joseph as long as any wife can talk back to her husband, but what I want to say to you is this. You heard me finding fault with the principle. I want to say that that principle is right, it is from our Father in Heaven,” and then she again spoke of her jealousy.

Then she continued, “What I said I have got to repent of. The principle is right but I am jealous hearted. Now never tell anybody that you heard me find fault with Joseph of [or?]that principle. The principle is right and if I or you or anyone else find fault with that principle we have got to humble ourselves and repent of it.”¹³

Many critics today claim victimhood for Emma that she might not appreciate. Emma was very supportive of her husband and administered temple ordinances as the first matron. Just days before the martyrdom she wrote a blessing and in it she penned:

¹³ Signed statement by Maria Jane Woodward attached to George H. Brimhall letter to Joseph F. Smith, April 21, 1902; on Richard E. Turley, Jr. *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2002), 1: DVD 28.

“I desire with all my heart to honor and respect my husband as my head, ever to live in his confidence and by acting in unison with him retain the place which God has given me by his side, and I ask my Heavenly Father, that through humility, I may be enabled to overcome that curse which was pronounced on the daughters of Eve. I desire to see that I may rejoice with them in the blessings which God has in store for all who are willing to be obedient to his requirements.”

The Zenith Teaching of the Gospel

It is true the plural marriage is controversial, but section 132 discusses a much great doctrine that Van Allen does not begin to share. The section can be divided into four parts, based upon the topic covered:

Verses

1–33 Eternal Marriage

34–40 Plural Marriage (see also 61–63)

41–50 Adultery

51–66 Specific Counsel to Emma

Concerning the entire revelation, Apostle Joseph F. Smith observed in 1878:

When the revelation was written, in 1843, it was for a special purpose, by the request of the Patriarch Hyrum Smith, and was not then designed to go forth to the church or to the world. It is most probable that had it been then written with a view to its going out as a doctrine of the church, it would have been presented in a somewhat different form. There are personalities [Emma Smith specifically] contained in a part of it which are not relevant to the principle itself, but rather to the circumstances which necessitated its being written at that time. Joseph Smith, on the day it was written, expressly declared that there was a great deal more connected with the doctrine which would be revealed in due time, but this was sufficient for the occasion, and was made to suffice for the time.¹⁴

Regrettably, Van Allen’s essay focuses upon the last half of section 132 without properly valuing the first half. The first 33 verses discuss eternal marriage, which ironically, has no direct relationship to plural marriage even though it was given in response to a question about polygamy. According to the revelation (particularly verses 19–20) billions of men and women can be exalted without plurality.

Eternal marriage, not plural marriage, is the zenith doctrine revealed in D&C 132. Apostle Joseph F. Smith taught in 1879: “This doctrine of eternal union of husband and wife, and of plural marriage, is one of the most important doctrines ever revealed to man in any age of the

¹⁴ Joseph F. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:29 (July 7, 1878).

world. Without it man would come to a full stop; without it we never could be exalted to associate with and become gods, neither could we attain to the power of eternal increase, or the blessings pronounced upon Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the fathers of the faithful.”¹⁵

Plurality in Eternity

Van Allen explained that he feels “disheartened” for the polygamous wives in Nauvoo and Utah. He wrote of a woman who “was taught that the more righteous the man, the more wives he would have in the life to come. This created a harsh dichotomy in her mind. She wanted to marry a righteous man and yet didn’t want to share her husband in polygamous heaven.” False notions such as this woman was taught continue within the Church, which causes unwarranted pain. These unfounded fears bring needless turmoil and hopefully will be corrected as Church members are steered toward correct doctrine.

Other legitimate fears exist. Some women worry that they might die and their husbands will remarry, creating an eternal polygamous family that they had no influence in forming. Similarly, I recently met a sister who declared she would rather be single in heaven than a polygamous wife.

These, and similar concerns, are very understandable. However we must ask: How can we judge eternity and marriage? What do we know and what do we not know regarding polygamy in the future?

For those struggling with this issue, we offer some observations that may, perhaps, allay some of these concerns:

1. When Church leaders threw their overwhelming support behind Proposition 8 in California a few years ago, they revealed their thoughts on the possibilities that polygamy would again be either permitted or commanded. Proposition 8 prevents polygamy as well as same-sex marriage.
2. Plurality may be *permitted* during the millennium. That will be a time for all worthy single men and women to be sealed to a spouse either personally or by proxy.¹⁶ Will there be any polygamy after the millennium in the celestial kingdom? This is possible and even plausible, but all of those marriages will have been performed by proxy or personally on earth prior to the final judgment. There is no marrying after the resurrection. There is no scripture or other statement from presiding leaders that polygamy will be commanded in the hereafter.
3. Living here on this telestial orb in our telestial bodies, we cannot understand the things of eternity. We simply do not know what we will want. Brigham recalled a woman who thought she would rather be single than married:

¹⁵ Joseph F. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 21:10 (December 7, 1879).

¹⁶ Kenny, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 7:423; entitled “A vision,” June 15, 1878

I recollect a sister conversing with Joseph Smith on this subject [plural marriage]. She told him: “Now, don't talk to me; when I get into the celestial kingdom, if I ever do get there, I shall request the privilege of being a ministering angel; that is the labor that I wish to perform. I don't want any companion in that world; and if the Lord will make me a ministering angel, it is all I want.” Joseph said, “Sister, you talk very foolishly, you do not know what you will want.” He then said to me: “Here, brother Brigham, you seal this lady to me.” I sealed her to him.¹⁷

4. Righteous polygamous wives will inherit “thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths ... they [shall] be gods, because they have all power” (D&C 132:19–20). It seems unlikely that having received these blessings that a polygamous wife would feel less than a monogamous wife.

5. God is just. This truth is proclaimed throughout the scriptures. If a polygamous wife receives less of an eternal reward than a monogamous wife, then God would not be just.

6. The celestial kingdom is timeless (D&C 84:100) and filled with eternal resources. A polygamous wife will inherit “all things” and have “all power.” We don't know what that means, but it doesn't sound like she will have less than a monogamous wife.

7. God has infinite love for us, even noticing the hairs of our heads. The Savior observed: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matthew 10:29–30). With the promise of godhood, a husband's ability to love would be endless, rather than fragmented as occurs on earth. Clearly, plurality in eternity must be different from that in mortality for this to be the case.

Of God or Man?

Van Allen ends his essay saying: “When I look honestly at D&C 132 and the fruits of such words, I do not see God, but the works of men. How about you?” Looking at D&C 132 through a twenty-first century lens is a difficult way to see the blessings it promotes. It speaks of life in the eternities and as such should be held to the realities of eternity. This is obviously difficult to do with the human frailty of limited knowledge. It takes humility, patience, faith in a loving God, and a belief that “He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Article of Faith 9). The promises of D&C 132 are incomprehensible, but then so is God.

To those who continue to struggle with the past practice of polygamy and the understanding of D&C 132, we share that we too sometimes struggle to understand the nuances of this practice and the meaning of this scripture. But through continual study, we have gained greater light,

¹⁷ Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:166-67 (August 31, 1873).

obtained sympathy for those who practiced it in the past, and developed a better perspective on how it may or may not affect us in the future.

Most importantly, we glory in the blessings promised to us as a covenant couple should we be found righteous at the final judgment. Joseph Smith himself knew that this practice would be a challenge to members and offered some words of comfort. Bathsheba B. Smith remembered: “I heard [Joseph Smith] tell the sisters one time not to feel worried, – that all was right ... all will be well in the end.”¹⁸

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For the last twenty years Brian has researched and written about polygamy, most recently authoring Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: History and Theology. It seeks to reference or quote every known document dealing with Joseph Smith’s polygamy, regardless of its origin or bias (see www.MormonPolygamyDocuments.com). Laura joined Brian in writing Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: Toward a Better Understanding (forthcoming May 2015, Greg Kofford Books), which seeks to explain early polygamy in theological and historical context. Together they maintain www.josephsmithspolygamy.org.

¹⁸ Bathsheba Smith, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent’s testimony (part 3), pp. 291, 313, questions 14, 466.