

# 24 Plural Marriage

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A person can only be held accountable for sins (if that term might be used) in the time in which they live, as all would hope to become free and clean from the sins of their generation. None can be held accountable for things that might have been considered sins in the previous generations of Abraham, Moses *or even Joseph Smith's day*. Likewise, the ancients could not be accountable for sins that did not exist in their day but may exist today. If this were not so, then most would stand condemned for not living the Law of Moses, and be held bound by the dietary laws, sacrificing those succulent dishes of “crab and lobster.” Men would also be justified in carrying out blood feuds living the law of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Consequently, the individual may ONLY be held accountable for the *laws and commandments* given by God in the day in which one lives. Thus, the primary need for modern revelation and living prophets through all generations and dispensations of the gospel, are to declare the sins of *their* generation to the people of the Church of Jesus Christ that live during the prophet's tenure (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

In the church there are ‘doctrines’ and there are ‘church policies.’ The doctrines of salvation and exaltation will not change; however, the policies that govern the teaching and administering of the doctrines and ordinances may change based upon the social, environmental, and cultural needs—and sometimes the spiritual tendencies of the members of the church which may have a power and consequence to close the heavens. The Lord may desire that young men serve a mission, but whether they serve two years or eighteen months is a matter of policy. Latter-day Saints are commanded to meet together often to partake of the sacrament with a request to attend Sunday School, Priesthood, and Relief Society meetings. This could be split-up during the day or week, or it could be accomplished in a three-hour block. The commandment or doctrine is kept but the policy of administration may change in every generation based on the needs of a particular time or place.

There are, however, certain commandments, and ordinances that are required in every dispensation. In the order of battle, there are ‘general orders’ and ‘specific orders.’ General orders would include common commandments viable in every dispensation, such as the Ten Commandments. Specific orders may be for a single dispensation or given time during a single dispensation of the gospel. For instance, the “gospel” (i.e. Faith, Repentance, Baptism, and the reception of the Holy Ghost), must take place in the life of every individual for salvation. There are also moral commandments connected to the ordinances of salvation and exaltation that seem to prevail in all time periods, such as the charge to care for each other, with scriptural and God-given prohibitions against adultery, fornication and homosexuality, to name a few.

One important “doctrine of exaltation” is that of “eternal marriage.” This *doctrine* is found in section 131:1-3 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It states:

In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, (the highest is only for those to be exalted) a man (or a woman) must enter into this order

of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

This passage, as well as the following section, states that an *ordinance* of “sealing” between a male and a female must take place preparatory to exaltation. Thus, a man cannot become exalted without a perfect woman at his side. Likewise, a woman cannot be exalted without a celestial man at her side. That means, as we understand it, that Godhood or exaltation in the highest degree must consist of two people, a “sealed couple”.

The Doctrine and Covenants teach that the purpose of the creation and the earth itself is securely connected to the doctrine of marriage and the children of that necessary union.

15 And again, verily I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for *marriage is ordained of God unto man*.

16 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*;

17 And *that it might be filled with the measure of man*, according to his creation before the world was made. (D&C 49:15-17.)

The purpose of the creation, then, is for a man to have “*one wife*” so that the earth might be filled with the measure of men that were prepared to come to this earth as spirits before the earth was even created. (This scripture, doctrine, and concept also holds the answer to the Church's position on same sex relationships, covered in chapter 26.)

In a lengthy discussion, the Apostle Erastus Snow described the idea of deity and the exaltation of the male and female in the light of scripture and modern revelation:

“And God said, let us make man in our own image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be ye fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”  
(Genesis 3:26-28)

We also read, “This is the book of the generations of Adam: In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him, male and female created he them, and blessed them and called their name Adam in the day when they were created.”

The being we call man, in the original language of the scriptures written by Moses, was called Adam, “male and female created he them, and called their name Adam.” There was no effort at distinguishing between calling one man and the other woman. This was an after-distinction, but initially he called their name Adam. He created them male and female, for they were one. He said not unto the woman multiply, and to the man multiply, but he said unto them both, multiply and reproduce your species, and replenish the earth.

He speaks unto them as belonging together, as constituting one being, and as organized in his image and after his likeness. The apostle Paul, treating upon this subject in the same way, says that man was created in the likeness of God, and after the express image of his person. John, the apostle, in writing the history of Jesus, speaks in the same way; that Jesus was in the likeness of his Father, and the express image of his person.

If the revelations that God has made of himself to man agree and harmonize upon this theory, and if mankind would be more believing and accept the simple, plain, clear definition of Deity and description of himself which he has given us instead of hunting for some great mystery and seeking to find out God where he is not and as he is not, we all might understand him. There is no great mystery about it. No more mystery about it than there is about ourselves and our own relationship to our father and mother and the relationship of our own children to us. That which we see before our eyes, and which we are experiencing from time to time, day to day, and year to year, is an exemplification of Deity.

“What?” says one, “Do you mean we should understand that deity consists of man and woman?” Most certainly I do. If I believe anything that God has ever said about himself, and anything pertaining to the creation and organization of man upon the earth, I must believe that Deity consists of man and woman. Now this is simplifying it down to our understanding. The great Christian world will be ready to open their mouths and cry, “Blasphemy! Sacrilege!” They will open wide their eyes and wide their mouths in the utmost astonishment. “What! God is a man and woman?”

Then these Christians – who say he has no form, neither body, parts nor passions – will object. One party may say he is a man, and the other may say he is a woman. I say he is both. How do I know? I only repeat what he says of himself; that he created man in the image of God, male and female created he them, and he called their name Adam, which signifies in Hebrew, the first man. So that the beings we call Adam and Eve were the first man placed here on this earth, and their name was Adam, and they were the express image of God.

Now, if anybody is disposed to say that the woman is in the likeness of God and that the man was not, or vice versa, I say you are both wrong, or else God has not told us the truth. I sometimes illustrate this matter by taking up a pair of shears or scissors, if I have a pair, but then you all know they are composed of two halves. They are necessarily parted, one from and they joined to another to perform their work for each other, as designed. They belong together and neither one of them is fitted for the accomplishment of their works alone. 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, nor 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, except they are made of these two component parts: a man and a woman; the male and the female. (Erastus Snow, March 3, 1878, *JD* Vol 19, pp. 267-272.)

Elder Snow explains that God is two people, not a single man, nor a married man, but a man and woman sealed together by the power and authority of God in an ordinance of exaltation. The rules of Hebrew grammar require the noun to agree in number, gender, and definiteness, except for the

word "God." The word "Elohim" is a plural word used in a singular context. Indeed, the Prophet Joseph said that "Elohim" should be translated in the plural throughout the Bible (*TPJS*, p.372).

The scriptures explain the creation of man and woman in these words: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... and I, God, created man in mine own image... male and female created I them." The creation of Adam and Eve was patterned after God, in the image and likeness of the perfect and exalted husband and wife, male and female.

It would be foolish to think of an exalted male God going off to 'creative priesthood meeting' in order to learn how to judge, create and destroy worlds, while the female Goddess joins a society to learn how to crochet eternal doilies or fix celestial meals or keep the heavenly home a perfect place for her omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent spouse. Foolish thoughts like these are surely blasphemous to the doctrine of exaltation. God is two people; the sealed couple become God, as Elder Snow explained above.

### **The Equality of Male and Female**

Chapter two of the Book of Moses, records the creation of Adam and Eve and how they were made in God's "image" and "likeness." Created like God in looks and in substance, they were formed, God said, "in mine own image...male and female created I them" (Moses 2:26-27). Before proceeding further, a few points about the creation so far as the man and woman are concerned should be reviewed. The Hebrew word for our English translation 'help meet' comes from '*kenegdo*', meaning a 'helper meet for him.' The root '*neged*' means to be 'in front of' or 'counterpart' and connected with the preposition as it stands in scripture '*ke-negdo*' means '***corresponding to him, equal to, and adequate to himself.***' In short, it is to be worthy of each other and be a "helper meet," one who will 'match' and not to be unequal (in a greater or lesser degree) to the spouse. This "help mate" is understood to be equal, a "mate" the same as one might mate socks. Equal in size, wear, and color, a mate in all aspects of creation, potential, and blessing. Before the fall, (and this must be kept in mind) this verse *establishes an anthropology of equality and "grounds a relationship of mutuality between the sexes."*

### **Polygamy**

In scripture, one requirement for exaltation is the 'sealing ordinance' of one man to one woman. Nowhere in scripture does it state that 'polygamy' is a necessary requirement for exaltation. This discussion will likely be contrary to many of the traditional teachings that Latter-day Saints are familiar with. This article is not meant to correct the church or any doctrine espoused by its members or leaders, but instead present a point of view that is based on the scriptures rather than commentary.

The scriptures give only two reasons for polygamous marriages and relationships. The first is found in the Book of Jacob. The Nephites were desirous to have more than one wife like many of the peoples and cultures in the ancient near east. Because of the brass plates, the Nephites knew that not only the patriarchs of Genesis but also the kings of Israel had multiple wives and concubines. In the passage below, Jacob addresses the general orders and law of all dispensations, yet explains that there are times that this law may be adjusted by policy for temporal needs.

23 But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son.

24 Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.

25 Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph.

26 Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.

27 Wherefore, my brethren, *hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord*: For *there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife*; and concubines he shall have none;

28 For *I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women*. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts.

29 Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes.

30 For *if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things*.

31 For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands. (Jacob 2:23-31)

Verse 26 states: “*Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.*” The Lord, through his prophet, told this generation that they were not to live the law of polygamy, and that He (the Lord) delights in the “chastity of women.” But he continues, (in verse 30) “*For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.*” Here the Lord states that “if” He decides or determines that it is necessary to live the law of polygamy to raise up a righteous seed on earth, He will command it for that time period. Otherwise all are to live the monogamous doctrine and law.

In 1832 the Prophet Joseph speaking to Levi Hancock told him: “Brother Levi, the Lord has revealed to me that it is his will that righteous men shall take righteous women even a plurality of wives that a righteous race may be sent forth upon the earth preparatory to the ushering in of the Millennial Reign of our Redeemer.” (Levi Hancock Diary). Notice that Joseph Smith explains that the plurality of wives was for this temporal life and time “preparatory” to the coming of Christ. Not many years ago if someone asked in a Sacrament meeting (in the Mormon axis of Idaho, Utah, and Arizona) for a raise of hands of those who descended from polygamist families, almost 80% would raise their hands. What would be the membership of the church today if that righteous seed and not been raised up during the early days of the Church?

In this dispensation, in Section 132:63 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord reaffirms the use of polygamy for raising up a righteous posterity and adds a second reason:

...for they (multiple wives) are given unto him to *multiply and replenish the earth (raise up seed unto me)* according to my commandment, and to fulfil the promise which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, and for ***their exaltation in the***

*eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men;* for herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified. (D&C 132:63)

This verse, like the one in Jacob, indicates that the law of polygamy could be instituted to raise a righteous people unto the Lord, and also for the woman's "exaltation in the eternal worlds." This second reason is for ordinance only. This is true because no person, male or female, can be exalted without the ordinance of eternal marriage (D&C 131). Polygamy was a dispensational policy and therefore could be changed according to the needs of the church.

There will be a time when men are few and the ordinance of exaltation might only be available to righteous women in this manner. This does not mean in any way that the numerous women sealed to a particular man will be his wives in the hereafter. A righteous woman who has had the opportunity to receive the ordinance of eternal marriage, and is worthy of celestial glory, will be sealed "by the holy spirit of promise" to a man worthy of her. They together, the two, will become God. Statistics indicate that many more male children die before the age of eight than female children. We know that those who die before the age of eight are immediately taken into the presence of God. In order for that person to receive his or her exaltation, they must participate in a sealing. It will be an easy task for the perfect man to love a perfect woman with perfect love and vice-a-versa. The important thing to keep in mind is that exaltation is being sealed to someone who is worthy of the same glory. Women sealed in the earthly ordinance to a man have participated in the ordinance and are now prepared, if found worthy, to be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise to an eternal mate and companion into the "image of God." This ratification by the Holy Spirit of Promise must follow the earthly ordinance of temple marriage when we have been found true and faithful in all things. Thus Adam and the Lord may declare that "a man must leave his father and mother and be sealed (by the Holy Spirit of Promise) to his wife (singular)."

In a personal letter sent to a missionary, a loving parent taught that President Woodruff stated that he had 'been sealed to 700 good women,' not with a view of claiming them as his wives, but to 'afford them the chance of spiritual advancement thru the sealing ordinance, that was necessary for them.' President Woodruff then referred to the millions of unmarried soldiers slain in the battles of the world from earliest times, stating that they would have their temple work done by their descendants and 'then be eligible to choose a wife from among those for whom the sealing ordinance had been performed' (as in the case of the 700 women sealed to him). President Woodruff made it clear that he did not 'expect to claim them as his wives in the hereafter,' but that they would be elevated to a place where 'they would meet and choose their own worthy celestial mate.'

Many have been taught that polygamy is a requirement for exaltation, believing that all in the celestial kingdom must be willing to live in polygamous and eternal relationships, however this is not necessarily a doctrine according to scripture and the statements of Joseph Smith. So the question must be asked: How did this notion get entrenched in Mormon tradition?

After the westward movement of the saints, polygamist unions were outlawed for those living in the governed territories of the United States. As there were many saints living in Canada and Mexico who were still living in polygamist marriages, there was a code word that was used when the leaders wanted to speak to those still living a polygamist lifestyle. This code word was "celestial marriage." During conference, when a leader would say something similar to: "I would

like to talk about celestial marriage,” it would be the code phrase indicating that they were about to address those who were still living in polygamy outside the United States. After a generation, polygamy and 'celestial marriage' became synonymous, and it was just a matter of time before this idea took on the weight of doctrine.

If polygamy were necessary for exaltation, then only a few people throughout time would be exalted. Polygamy, in scripture, becomes necessary only “to raise up seed unto the Lord” and to provide the ordinances necessary for exaltation in the next life.

This law is difficult to understand fully without keeping in mind that God is two people: the “twain” become sealed, or “cleave” unto a spouse—a sealed husband and wife—equal in all aspects, working for their own immortality and eternal life as well as that of their children. The word “help meet” which Eve was called, means “one equal to and worthy of in every respect.” This concept would disallow more than one wife to one husband *in the exalted sphere* unless the woman is not and could never be equal to her husband, which is not so. As it is stated in scripture:

Then shall **they** be gods, because **they** have no end; therefore shall **they** be from everlasting to everlasting, because **they** continue; then shall **they** be above all, because all things are subject unto **them**. Then shall **they** be gods, because **they** have all power, and the angels are subject unto **them**. (D&C 132:20)

The cultural Church has evolved through three doctrinal phases. Many instructors quote from the 23 volume *Journal of Discourses* when it comes to the purpose and doctrine of polygamy. In many ways this collective tome could be viewed as the “Journals of Research and Development.” Following the death of Joseph Smith, many of the early brethren were trying to determine “why” particular things were taught and restored by the Prophet Joseph. In process of this, there was much conjecture and opinion presented by the leaders that wasn't necessarily congruent with scripture, but which represented their best answers to the questions. During this era of doctrinal discovery, many traditions, opinions, and interpretations became cemented as doctrines—rather than using scripture as the standard of doctrine. Hence, many beliefs were contradicted within the Journals in answering why polygamy exists, leading to multiple opinions that are still being taught—from one leader stating that multiple wives are needed to populate worlds without number, to another proclaiming that each world requires a separate wife, and so on.

After the turn of the century, the church moved into a ‘do or die’ phase as the doctrines from the research and development age became set in an acceptable concrete. Unlike the present, where they offer mostly 'entertaining fiction of men, mingled with scripture', forty years ago Deseret Book published nothing but doctrinal books about LDS beliefs, doctrines, and answers to difficult questions.

During this period, many missionaries were taught that if a door was slammed in their face, that person would never get another chance—and his entrance into the celestial kingdom was damned forever. The non-member, it was commonly believed, would have no chance in the next life: it was the LDS way or no way. Sins were categorized and numbered according to the level of wickedness and ability to receive forgiveness. The Lesser Law rose to the top like cream, as members were told what was good and what was evil. Many felt like they were told what movies to watch and what food and drink would be acceptable, rather than teaching the higher law as

taught by Joseph Smith, which is: to teach correct principles but allow them to govern themselves. During this era, excommunications were rampant as bishops were counseled that if they didn't take care of the sins in their wards, they would suffer for, and be accountable for, those very sins. This second phase lasted from the opinions and writings of B.H. Roberts until the beginning of the presidency of Ezra T. Benson.

The third phase became one of 'loving and rescuing', accepting that individuals have weaknesses rather than trying to purge the church of any and every unclean thing, burning the wheat along with the tares in the process. For those living through that era, there was a noticeable move from the doctrinal hard line to one of perfecting the saints through love and acceptance and service, heralding a generational change during the lengthy tenure of President Hinckley.

In summary, the Lord sets the standard in scripture and through the prophet and president of the church during his time of responsibility. In this life, God may command and revoke according to His will and knowledge of all things (D&C 56:4). The eternal doctrine of exaltation requires the ordinance of sealing, but the policy and practice of polygamy may come and go as God sees fit for the benefit of his church and kingdom *on earth*. Polygamy is not an accepted practice for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and those who believe or practice so will not be able to maintain their membership. Time, place, and need all play a part in the policies of any organization and particularly in the Church of Jesus Christ, as its founders and leaders are inspired to do the work that the Lord requires, despite their personal weaknesses in body, mind, or spirit.