

# Celestial Marriage

Russell M. Nelson, *Ensign*, Nov. 2008

My beloved brethren and sisters, I am deeply grateful for each of you. Together we feel a profound sense of gratitude for the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this world abounding with misery, we are truly thankful for God's "great plan of happiness."<sup>1</sup> His plan declares that men and women are "that they might have joy."<sup>2</sup> That joy comes when we choose to live in harmony with God's eternal plan.

The importance of choice may be illustrated by a homespun concept that came to mind one day when I was shopping in a large retail store. I call it "patterns of the shopper." As shopping is part of our daily life, these patterns may be familiar.

Wise shoppers study their options thoroughly before they make a selection. They focus primarily on the quality and durability of a desired product. They want the very best. In contrast, some shoppers look for bargains, and others may splurge, only to learn later—much to their dismay—that their choice did not endure well. And sadly, there are those rare individuals who cast aside their personal integrity and steal what they want. We call them shoplifters.

The patterns of the shopper may be applied to the topic of marriage. A couple in love can choose a marriage of the highest quality or a lesser type that will not endure. Or they can choose neither and brazenly steal what they want as "marital shoplifters."

The subject of marriage is debated across the world, where various arrangements exist for conjugal living. My purpose in speaking out on this topic is to declare, as an Apostle of the Lord,<sup>3</sup> that marriage between a man and a woman is sacred—it is ordained of God.<sup>4</sup> I also assert the virtue of a temple marriage. It is the highest and most enduring type of marriage that our Creator can offer to His children.

While salvation is an individual matter, exaltation is a family matter.<sup>5</sup> Only those who are married in the temple and whose marriage is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise will continue as spouses after death<sup>6</sup> and receive the highest degree of celestial glory, or exaltation. A temple marriage is also called a celestial marriage. Within the celestial glory are three levels. To obtain the highest, a husband and wife must be sealed for time and all eternity and keep their covenants made in a holy temple.<sup>7</sup>

The noblest yearning of the human heart is for a marriage that can endure beyond death. Fidelity to a temple marriage does that. It allows families to be together forever.

This goal is glorious. All Church activities, advancements, quorums, and classes are means to the end of an exalted family.<sup>8</sup>

To make this goal possible, our Heavenly Father has restored priesthood keys in this dispensation so that essential ordinances in His plan can be performed by proper authority. Heavenly messengers—including John the Baptist;<sup>9</sup> Peter, James, and John;<sup>10</sup> Moses, Elias, and Elijah<sup>11</sup>—have participated in that restoration.<sup>12</sup>

Knowledge of this revealed truth is spreading across the earth.<sup>13</sup> We, as the Lord's prophets and apostles, again proclaim to the world that "the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."<sup>14</sup>

We further proclaim that “all human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

“In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshipped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life. [Heavenly Father’s great] plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.”<sup>15</sup>

That proclamation on the family helps us realize that celestial marriage brings greater possibilities for happiness than does any other relationship.<sup>16</sup> The earth was created and this Church was restored so that families could be formed, sealed, and exalted eternally.<sup>17</sup>

Scriptures declare that “it is lawful that [a man] should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation.”<sup>18</sup> Another affirms that “the man [is not] without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, marriage is not only an exalting principle of the gospel; it is a divine commandment.

Our Heavenly Father declared, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”<sup>20</sup> The Atonement of His Beloved Son enabled both of these objectives to be realized. Because of the Atonement, immortality—or resurrection from the dead—became a reality for all.<sup>21</sup> And because of the Atonement, eternal life—which is living forever in God’s presence, the “greatest of all the gifts of God”<sup>22</sup>—became a possibility. To qualify for eternal life, we must make an eternal and everlasting covenant with our Heavenly Father.<sup>23</sup> This means that a temple marriage is not only between husband and wife; it embraces a partnership with God.<sup>24</sup>

The family proclamation also reminds us that “husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other.”<sup>25</sup> Children born of that union are “an heritage of the Lord.”<sup>26</sup> When a family is sealed in the temple, that family may become as eternal as the kingdom of God itself.<sup>27</sup>

Such a reward requires more than a hopeful wish. On occasion, I read in a newspaper obituary of an expectation that a recent death has reunited that person with a deceased spouse, when, in fact, they did not choose the eternal option. Instead, they opted for a marriage that was valid only as long as they both should live. Heavenly Father had offered them a supernal gift, but they refused it. And in rejecting the gift, they rejected the Giver of the gift.<sup>28</sup>

One strong sentence of scripture clearly distinguishes between a hopeful wish and eternal truth: “All covenants, contracts, ... obligations, oaths, vows, ... 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, ... 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.”<sup>29</sup>

These truths are absolute. Members of this Church invite all people to learn them and to qualify for eternal life.<sup>30</sup> We invite all to gain faith in God the Eternal Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ, to repent,

to receive the Holy Ghost, to obtain the blessings of the temple, to make and keep sacred covenants, and to endure to the end.

Mercifully, God's great plan of happiness and its eternal blessings can be extended to those who did not have the opportunity to hear the gospel in mortality. Temple ordinances can be done vicariously for them.<sup>31</sup>

But what of the many mature members of the Church who are not married? Through no failing of their own, they deal with the trials of life alone. Be we all reminded that, in the Lord's own way and time, no blessings will be withheld from His faithful Saints.<sup>32</sup> The Lord will judge and reward each individual according to heartfelt desire as well as deed.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, mortal misunderstandings can make mischief in a marriage. In fact, each marriage starts with two built-in handicaps. It involves two imperfect people. Happiness can come to them only through their earnest effort. Just as harmony comes from an orchestra only when its members make a concerted effort, so harmony in marriage also requires a concerted effort. That effort will succeed if each partner will minimize personal demands and maximize actions of loving selflessness.

President Thomas S. Monson has said: "To find real happiness, we must seek for it in a focus outside ourselves. No one has learned the meaning of living until he has surrendered his ego to the service of his fellow man. Service to others is akin to duty—the fulfillment of which brings true joy."<sup>34</sup>

Harmony in marriage comes only when one esteems the welfare of his or her spouse among the highest of priorities. When that really happens, a celestial marriage becomes a reality, bringing great joy in this life and in the life to come.

God's plan of happiness allows us to choose for ourselves. As with the patterns of the shopper, we may choose celestial marriage or lesser alternatives.<sup>35</sup> Some marital options are cheap, some are costly, and some are cunningly crafted by the adversary. Beware of his options; they always breed misery!<sup>36</sup>

The best choice is a celestial marriage. Thankfully, if a lesser choice has previously been made, a choice can now be made to upgrade it to the best choice. That requires a mighty change of heart<sup>37</sup> and a permanent personal upgrade.<sup>38</sup> Blessings so derived are worth all efforts made.<sup>39</sup>

The full realization of the blessings of a temple marriage is almost beyond our mortal comprehension. Such a marriage will continue to grow in the celestial realm. There we can become perfected.<sup>40</sup> As Jesus ultimately received the fulness of the glory of the Father,<sup>41</sup> so we may "come unto the Father ... and in due time receive of his fulness."<sup>42</sup>

Celestial marriage is a pivotal part of preparation for eternal life. It requires one to be married to the right person, in the right place, by the right authority, and to obey that sacred covenant faithfully.<sup>43</sup> Then one may be assured of exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.