

Celestial Marriage—Bishops and Deacons Should Be Married—Divorce

Remarks by President George A. Smith, delivered in the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, October 8, 1869.

It is a difficult undertaking to address this immense audience. If a man commences speaking loud, in a short time his voice gives out; whereas, if he commence rather low, he may raise his voice by degrees, and be able to sustain himself in speaking some length of time. But with children crying, a few persons whispering, and some shuffling their feet, it is indeed a difficult task to make an audience of ten thousand persons hear. I have listened with pleasure to the instructions of our brethren from the commencement of our Conference to the present time. I have rejoiced in their testimonies. I have felt that the elders are improving in wisdom, in knowledge, in power, and in understanding; and I rejoice in the privilege, which we have at the present day, of sending out to our own country a few hundred of the elders who have had experience—who have lived in Israel long enough to know, to feel, and to realize the importance of the work in which they are engaged—to understand its principles and comprehend the way of life. They can bear testimony to a generation that has nearly grown from childhood since the death of the Prophet, Joseph Smith.

The Lord said in relation to those who have driven the Saints that He would visit “judgment, wrath, and indignation, wailing and anguish, and gnashing of teeth upon their heads unto the third and fourth generation, so long as they repent not and hate me, saith the Lord your God.”

I am a native of Potsdam, St. Lawrence County, New York—a town somewhat famous for its literary institutions, its learning and the religion and morality of its inhabitants. I left there in my youth, with my father’s family, because we had received the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as revealed through Joseph Smith; and followed with the Saints through their drivings and trials unto the present day.

I have never seen the occasion, nor let the opportunity slip, from the time when I first came to a knowledge of the truth of the work of the Lord in the last days, that I understood it was in my power to do good for the advancement of this work but what I have used my utmost endeavors to accomplish that good. I have never failed to bear a faithful testimony to the work of God, or to carry out to all intents and purposes, the wishes and designs of the Prophet, Joseph Smith. I was his kinsman; was familiar with him, though several years his junior; knew his views, his sentiments, his ways, his designs, and many of the thoughts of his heart, and I do *know* that the servants of God, the Twelve Apostles, upon whom he laid the authority to bear off the Kingdom of God, and fulfil the work which he had commenced, have done according to his designs, in every particular, up to the present time and are continuing to do so. And I know, furthermore, that he rejoiced in the fact that the law of redemption and Celestial Marriage was revealed unto the Church in such a manner that it would be out of the power of earth and hell to destroy it; and that he rejoiced in the fact that the servants of God were ready prepared, having the keys to bear off the work he had commenced. Previous to my leaving Potsdam, there was but one man that I ever heard of in that town who did not believe the Bible. He proclaimed himself an atheist, and he drowned himself.

The Latter-day Saints believe the Bible. An agent of the American Bible Society called on me the other day and wanted to know if we would aid the Society in circulating the Bible in our Territory? I replied yes, by all means, for it was the book from which we were enabled to set forth our doctrines, and especially the doctrine of plural marriage.

There is an opinion in the breasts of many persons, who suppose that they believe the Bible, that Christ, when he came, did away with plural marriage, and that he inaugurated what is termed monogamy; and there are certain arguments and quotations used to maintain this view of the subject, one of which is found in Paul’s first epistle to Timothy (3 chap. 2 v.), where Paul says: “A bishop should be blameless, the husband of one wife.” The friends of monogamy render it in this way: “A bishop should be blameless, the husband of *but one* wife.” That would imply that anyone but a bishop might have more. But they will say, “We mean a bishop should be blameless, the husband of one wife only.” Well, that would also admit of the construction that other people might have more than one. I understand it to mean that a bishop must be a married man.

A short time ago, the Minister from the King of Greece to the United States called on President Young. I inquired of him in relation to the religion of his country, and asked him if the clergy were allowed to marry. It is generally understood that the Roman Catholic clergy are not allowed to marry. How is it with the Greek clergy? "Well," said he, "all the clergy marry, except the bishop." I replied, "You render the saying of Paul differently from what we do. We interpret it to mean—a bishop should be blameless, the husband of one wife *at least*;" and "we construe it," said he, "directly the opposite."

Now this passage does not prove that a man should have but one wife. It only proves that a bishop should be a married man. The same remark is made of deacons, that they also should have wives. Another passage is brought up where the Savior speaks of divorce. He tells us that it is very wrong to divorce, and that Moses permitted it because of the hardness of their (the children of Israel's) hearts. A man should leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife, and they twain should be one flesh. That is the principal argument raised that a man should have but one wife.

In the New Testament in various places, certain eminent men are referred to as patterns of faith, purity, righteousness and piety. For instance, if you read the epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, the 11th chapter, you find therein selected those persons "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turning to flight the armies of the aliens;" and it is said by faith Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, and that he conferred upon them a blessing to the uttermost bounds of the everlasting hills. Who was Joseph? Why, Joseph was the son of Rachel. And who was Rachel? Rachel was the second wife of Jacob, a polygamist. Jacob had four wives, and after he had taken the second (Rachel), she, being barren, gave a third wife unto her husband that she might bear children unto him for her; and instead of being displeased with her for giving her husband another wife, God heard her prayer, blessed her, worked a miracle in her favor by opening her womb, and she bore a son, and called his name Joseph, rejoicing in God, whom she testified would give her another son. The question now arises, were not Rachel and Jacob one flesh? Yes. Leah and Jacob were also one flesh. Jacob is selected by the Apostle Paul as a pattern of faith for Christians to follow; he blessed his twelve sons, whom he had by four wives. The law of God, as it existed in those days, and as laid down in this book (the Bible) makes a child born of adultery or of fornication a bastard; and the same is prohibited from entering into the congregation of the Lord unto the tenth generation.

Now, instead of God's blessing Rachel and Jacob and their offspring, as we are told He did, we might have expected something entirely different, had it not been that God was pleased with and approbated and sustained a plurality of wives.

While we are considering this subject, we will inquire, did the Savior in any place that we can read of, in the course of his mission on the earth, denounce a plurality of wives? He lived in a nation of Jews; the law of Moses was in force, plurality of wives was the custom, and thousands upon thousands of people, from the highest to the lowest in the land, were polygamists. The Savior denounced adultery; he denounced fornication; he denounced lust; also divorce; but is there a single sentence asserting that plurality of wives is wrong? If so, where is it? Who can find it? Why did he not say it was wrong? "Think not," said he, "that I am come to destroy the law or the Prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Not one jot or one tittle shall pass from the law and the Prophets; but all shall be fulfilled." Of what does the Savior speak when he refers to "the law?" Why, of the Ten Commandments, and other rules of life commanded by God and adopted by the ancients, and which Brother Pratt referred to yesterday, showing you from the sacred book that God legislated and made laws for the protection of a plurality of wives (Exod. 21:10), and that He commanded men to take a plurality under some circumstances. Brother Pratt further showed that the Lord made arrangements to protect to all intents and purposes the interests of the first wife; and to shield and protect the children of a wife from disinheritance who might be unfortunate enough not to have the affections of her husband (Deut. 21:15). These things were plainly written in the law—that law of which the Savior says, "Not one jot or one tittle shall pass away." Continuing our inquiry, we pass on to the epistles of John the Evangelist, which we find in the Book of Revelation, written to the seven churches of Asia. In them we find the Evangelist denounces adultery, fornication, and all manner of iniquities and abominations of which these churches

were guilty. Anything against a plurality of wives? No, not a syllable. Yet those churches were in a country in which plurality was the custom. Hundreds of Saints had more wives than one; and if it had been wrong, what would have been the result? Why, John would have denounced the practice, the same as the children of Israel were denounced for marrying heathen wives, had it not been that the law of plurality was the commandment of God.

Again, on this point, we can refer to the Prophets of the Old Testament—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others. When God called those men He warned them that if they did not deliver the message to the people which He gave them concerning their sins and iniquities that His vengeance should rest upon their heads. These are His words to Ezekiel, “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, therefore hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity but his blood will I require at thine hand; yet if thou warn the wicked and he turn not from his wickedness nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.” (Ezek. 3:17,18, 19.) How do we find these Prophets of the Lord fulfilling the commandments of the Almighty? We find them pouring out denunciations upon the heads of the people—against adultery, fornication, and every species of wickedness. All this, too, in a country in which, from the King down to the lowest orders of the people, a plurality of wives was practiced. Do they say anything against plurality of wives? Not one word. It was only in cases where men and women took improper *licence* with each other, in violation of the holy law of marriage, that they were guilty of sin.

If plurality of wives had been a violation of the seventh commandment those prophets would have denounced it, otherwise their silence on the matter would have been dangerous to themselves, inasmuch as the blood of the people would have been required at their hands. The opposers of Celestial Marriage sometimes quote a passage in the seventh chapter of Romans, second and third verses, to show that a plurality of wives is wrong; but when we come to read the passage it shows that a plurality of *husbands* is wrong. You can read that passage for yourselves. In the forcible parable used by the Savior in relation to the rich man and Lazarus, we find recorded that the poor man Lazarus was carried to Abraham’s bosom—Abraham the father of the faithful. The rich man calls unto Father Abraham to send Lazarus, who is afar off. Who was Abraham? He was a man who had a plurality of wives. And yet all good Christians, even pious church deacons, expect when they die to go to Abraham’s bosom. I am sorry to say, however, that thousands of them will be disappointed, from the fact that they cannot and will not go where anyone has a plurality of wives; and I am convinced that Abraham will not turn out his own wives to receive such unbelievers in God’s law. One peculiarity of this parable is the answer of Abraham to the application of the rich man, to send Lazarus to his five brothers “lest they come into this place of torment,” which was—“they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them; and if they hear not Moses and the prophets neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” Moses’ law provided for a plurality of wives, and the prophets observed that law, and Isaiah predicts its observance even down to the latter days. Isaiah, in his 4th chap. and 1st and 2nd verses, says, “Seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, we will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel, only let us be called by thy name to take away our reproach. In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent.”

A reference to the Scriptures shows that the reproach of women was to be barren, Gen. 30 chap. and 23 v.; Luke 1st chap. and 25 v.

We will now refer to John the Baptist. He came as a forerunner of Christ. He was a lineal descendant of the house of Levi. His father was a priest. John the Baptist was a child born by miracle, God having revealed to his father that Elizabeth who had been many years barren should bear a son. John feared not the world, but went forth preaching in the wilderness of Judea, declaiming against wickedness and corruption in the boldest terms. He preached against extortion; against the cruelty exercised by soldiers and tax gatherers. He even was so bold as to rebuke the king on his throne, to his face, for adultery. Did he say anything against a plurality of wives? No; it cannot be found. Yet thousands were believers in and practiced this order of marriage, under the law of Moses that God had revealed.

In bringing this subject before you, we cannot help saying that God knew what was best for His people. Hence He

commanded them as He would have them act. The law regulating marriage previous to Moses, recognized a plurality of wives. Abraham and Jacob and others had a plurality. These are the men who are referred to in Scripture as patterns of piety and purity. David had many wives. The Scripture says that David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save in the matter of Uriah the Hittite, 1 Kings. 15th chap. 5 v. "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God, according to His promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus." Acts 13th chap. 22nd and 23rd verses. Did David sin in taking so many wives? No. In what, then, did his sin consist? It was because he took the wife of Uriah, the Hittite—that is, violated the law of God in taking her. The Lord had given him the wives of Saul and would have given him many more; but he had no right to take one who belonged to another. When he did so the curse of adultery fell upon his head, and his wives were taken from him and given to another. We will now inquire in relation to the Savior himself. From whom did he descend? From the house of David a polygamist; and if you will trace the names of the families through which he descended you will find that numbers of them had a plurality of wives. How appropriate it would have been for Jesus, descending as he did from a race of polygamists, to have denounced this institution of plural marriage and shown its sinfulness, had it been a sin! Can we suppose, for one moment, if Patriarchal marriage were wrong, that He would, under the circumstances, have been silent concerning it or failed to denounce it in the most positive manner? Then if plural marriage be adultery and the offspring spurious, Christ Jesus is not the Christ; and we must look for another.

All good Christians are flattering themselves with the hope that they will finally enter the gates of the New Jerusalem. I presume this is the hope of all denominations—Catholics, Protestants, Greeks and all who believe in the Bible. Suppose they go there, what will they find? They will find at the twelve gates twelve angels, and "names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel." The names of the twelve sons of Jacob, the polygamist. Can a monogamist enter there? "And the walls of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb;" and at the gates the names of the twelve tribes of Israel—from the twelve sons of the four wives of Jacob. Those who denounce Patriarchal Marriage will have to stay without and never walk the golden streets. And any man or woman that lifts his or her voice to proclaim against a plurality of wives, under the Government of God, will have to seek an inheritance outside of that city. For "there shall in no wise enter into it, anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, for without are sorcerers, whoremongers, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." Is not the man that denounces Celestial Marriage a liar? Does he not work abomination? "I Jesus have sent mine Angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of (the polygamist) David, the bright and the morning star."

May God enable us to keep His law, for "blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gate into the city." Amen.