



Formalizing Relationships Through Priesthood Authority

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Two weeks ago, I received a message from a former student asking me the following:

“I’m having trouble with the Church policy of ... not allowing homosexual couples to be sealed in the temple. ...

“I don’t understand why they could not enjoy the same blessings that heterosexual couples enjoy including being sealed to children. It’s not any different from adopted children in heterosexual households or households with half siblings (in the event that a homosexual parent has a biological child by another individual) ...

“I was wondering if you [could share] your thoughts on this topic.” (Excerpts from correspondence via Facebook Messenger, 18 May 2021)

I contacted that former student and we had a long conversation about it. Since then, I have been thinking more deeply about that topic, and I would like to share some of the insights I have gained in these two weeks.

The fundamental concept is that God is first and foremost a Father—a perfectly loving Father who has a plan of happiness for all his children. For some, this statement may at first sound somewhat simplistic. Even a child can understand this. However, the consequences, the implications and the applications of the statement are powerful and far-reaching.

There will be a glorious heaven for our brothers and sisters who feel same-sex attraction who accept the laws of God and live the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to the best of their ability.

Remember that the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage is the highest order (or “department”) of the Melchizedek Priesthood. It originated in the heavens, not in Church policies based merely on interpretation of scriptures.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

“Ordinances instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles.” ([Teachings of the Presidents of the Church—Joseph Smith, p.417](#))

Mortal congresses, parliaments and courts may create their own interpretations and variations of marriage and family, but these will have no impact on that divine institution established eons ago in the heavenly courts by the authority of the divine priesthood.

What exactly is entailed in that divine institution? How is it presented to us in this mortal sphere?

Starting with a man and a woman feeling romantic love for one another, and a firm desire to formalize that love and ascend together towards a divinely-appointed glorious eternal destiny. And so, the man and the woman choose to enter the House of the Lord together to formally receive one another as a spouse, enter into a solemn covenant with each other, and make certain solemn promises. These three

elements—receiving, covenanting and promising—being administered by the authority of the Priesthood.

To receive means to accept as authoritative, certified. It also means to assimilate, or to make similar, to absorb the cultural tradition; as well as to support or sustain. This verb must not be overlooked. It is one of the components of the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood. We receive the priesthood, we receive the Lord's servants, we receive the Savior, we receive the Father, and we receive the Father's kingdom with all that pertains to it ([Doctrine and Covenants 84:35-38](#)). And in order to obtain this celestial kingdom with all its adornments, a man and a woman must formally receive one another in a solemn covenant administered by the priesthood.

Then, having accepted this covenant and made these promises, they are pronounced—or “declared officially” husband and wife. Considering that these titles (husband and wife) are declared by the authority of the priesthood, in our minds we can see them in a new light, as offices, or positions of responsibility, in effect priesthood-assigned roles in the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage.

With that, the couple has eternal blessings, privileges and honors provisionally sealed upon them also by the authority of the Priesthood, predicated upon their righteousness as individuals and as a couple.

If we observe carefully, we will notice that the perpetuation of the relationship is dependent on the couple, not on the sealing ordinance itself. While children are sealed to father and mother, a man and a woman are not “sealed to one another”, but voluntarily covenant with each other to be righteous spouses according to the “principles of righteousness” spelled out in [Doctrine and Covenants section 121 verses 36, 41-46](#).

Husband and wife decide, through their exercise of moral agency as individuals and as a couple, how stable and durable that covenant between the two of them will be.

And if they strive to the best of their ability to fulfill their priesthood-assigned roles as husband and wife, having a good and desirable relationship, relying on the power of Jesus Christ's atonement to continually improve and refine themselves and their relationship, one day they will formally receive the divine confirmation through the “Holy Spirit of promise” ([Doctrine and Covenants 132:7, 19](#)) that indeed they will be together as a couple for all eternity.

Now, what can we say about those who do not enter into this divinely-appointed New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage?

We must observe that the human feeling of love, which is part of our divine nature, will always exist, independent of priesthood ordinances. We can expect that the romantic love that exists between a man and a woman, and the familial love that exists between children and their parents, and among siblings, will exist forever, independent of temple ordinances. Perhaps we might extend this to what in Greek is called “*philia*”, or the love that exists among good close friends. As an increasingly popular saying goes, “*Friends are not sealed in the temple, but they are forever*”.

These are good expectations for the future. And what's in the future? What could God, as a loving Father have in store for those who love one another but do not have their relationships formalized through the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage?

The Lord stated:

“[Remember] that all my judgments are not given unto men” ([Doctrine and Covenants 29:30](#); brackets added)

Based on latter-day revelation, we understand that:

“All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations [must be] 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 ...

“[By doing so, such] covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations [will have] ... efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead ...” ([Doctrine and Covenants 132:7](#); brackets added)

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that *“that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.”* ([Doctrine and Covenants 130:2](#))

On mortal earth this “sociality” often includes a desire for association, which translates into affiliations to social or athletic clubs, cultural or service organizations, social media groups, etc.

The eternal worlds are resurrected glorified spheres inhabited by resurrected glorified individuals. What kinds of associations might the Lord have in those eternal worlds that would somehow formalize our familial and friendly relationships that exist outside of the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage?

I don’t have an answer to this question, and I don’t know if we’ll have to wait decades or even centuries to obtain the answer. Although our mortal minds and imperfect understanding will not allow us to predict what forms of social activities might be available in that glorified environment, we can have a sure expectation that good things will come.

The prophet Moroni taught that *“whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world”* ([The Book of Mormon - Ether 12:4](#)). The Apostle Paul called Christ a *“high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle”* ([Bible - Hebrews 9:11](#)) and the prophet Mormon taught that *“in Christ there should come every good thing”*. ([The Book of Mormon - Moroni 7:22](#))

I conclude with the Prophet Joseph Smith’s invitation to the Church:

“Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed.” ([Doctrine and Covenants 123:17](#))

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