

Celestial Marriage

Russ Seigenberg

Marriage is governed by celestial laws.

Marriage is a challenging enterprise for the best of people. Far too many marriages are in trouble, even among the more faithful. One way to conceptualize this difficulty is to recognize that we too often turn to worldly methods to handle a celestial problem. Marriage is a celestial institution and can only be managed well by employing celestial principles.

And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.

All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified. (D&C 88:38-39)

Light and truth forsake that evil one. (D&C 93:37-40)

And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom.

For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory. (D&C 88: 21-22)

The family is a priesthood-led organization.

The priesthood holder is the assigned head of the home. His wife is his counselor. He is commanded to obey the Lord (D&C 84:44) and his wife is to obey him in righteousness. (Since all men are imperfect, the wife is not expected to blindly obey the husband.) The husband leads by teaching his family correct principles, not by ordering them about. The wife is to follow him when he advocates true principles. Through her gospel study and inspiration, she can know what is right. The wife can also assist her husband in the task of choosing celestial principles by which the family can live.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. (Colossians 3:18)

The priesthood leads through righteousness and persuasion, and not by force. No final decision should be made where there are strong opposing views. Decisions need to be unanimous. Therefore, the wife has veto power! When there are disagreements, the couple should pray, ponder, and search the scriptures and other good books to find what celestial principle can guide them. Individual feelings need to be placed aside as the couple seeks the inspiration of the Lord. The goal is to live by correct principles and to be united in purpose.

The Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world—thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling.

And they form a quorum, equal in authority to that of the Twelve special witnesses or Apostles just named.

*And every decision made by either of these quorums must be by the **unanimous** voice of the same; that is, every member in each quorum must be agreed to its decisions in order to make their decisions of the same power or validity one with the other. (D&C 107:25-27)*

A husband and wife should be one in harmony, respect, and mutual consideration. Neither should plan or follow an independent course of action. They should consult, pray, and decide together. Remember that neither the wife nor the husband is the slave of the other. Husbands and wives are equal partners. (Marion G. Romney "In the Image of God" *Ensign*, Mar. 1978,2,4)

Marriage is a covenant relationship.

In the temple couples make covenants with Lord to live by his principles. The eternal rewards for obedience are greater than we can imagine. The blessings we can enjoy in this life are wonderful as well. However, all too often, individuals allow selfishness, resentments, and lack of faith to get in the way of their fully keeping the covenants they have made with the Lord.

When we choose to disobey the laws of heaven, we must suffer. Our mate will become unhappy with us and stop meeting our needs, and either become contentious or withdraw emotionally. One or both partners may feel that their mate's attempts to change are insufficient. Arguments over who is at fault can arise and cause further alienation. Negative emotions of hurt, anger, fear, and hopelessness can inhibit couples from giving 100% in their marriage. The emotional barriers that rise up can appear as high as the Himalayas and make any progress seem impossible.

I would like to suggest a positive approach to marital stalemate. Each partner can renew the agreements they have with their spouse and the Lord and make a total commitment toward achieving a transformation in behavior. This renewal of covenants helps both spouses start at the same time to make important changes. As each notes their partner's good efforts, personal motivation and harmony increase, and a positive cycle can begin. As long as the couple continues to obey celestial laws, their marriage can enjoy the wonderful blessing of a celestial spirit. The home can truly become a temple on earth. Once we understand the requirements to maintain such delightful circumstances, we will remain highly motivated to do whatever is necessary.

Marriage, designed to be an eternal covenant, is the most glorious and most exalting principle ordained for the mature development of man. It has the greatest capacity to develop to the fullest the positive virtues of life—unselfishness, tenderness, compassion, love, devotion, integrity, honesty, service, purity, nobility, and a host of others. No ordinance is of more importance and none more sacred and more necessary to the eternal joy of man. (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* p. 533)

Now let me enumerate a few steps on how to pull off this marital miracle. First of all, we want to remain diligent about keeping the basic commandments of the church. These items would include such things as regular meeting attendance, prayer, scripture study, repentance, temple attendance, service to others, and magnifying your calling.

Wisdom suggests that prayer is an important part of marriage. We must seek the Lord's help in understanding each other, resolving challenges, and reaching appropriate decisions—all without becoming defensive. Even more important, we must seek his help in changing our behavior and our hearts. As we invite the Lord to soften our hearts toward one another and as we sincerely repent of our weaknesses, he will change our hearts. He will turn us from our selfish, petty, worldly attitudes and fill us with pure, Christlike love. Only through his grace can we be blessed with Christlike love—the ability to “love thy wife [or husband] with all thy heart, and ... cleave unto her [or him] and none else.” D&C 42:22 (Elder Robert E. Wells “Overcoming Those Differences of Opinion,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1987, 60)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

The Marital Foundation

Now within the marriage there are three basic areas to particularly focus on that will help keep the Spirit of the Lord in your home. All three areas are essential and will be elaborated upon in the next few paragraphs.

There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated--

And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated. (D&C 130:20-21)

Responsibility

Marriage is an adult relationship in which each person has important tasks and obligations. The family organization cannot function unless the important roles of breadwinner, parent, priesthood leader, and keeper of the home are fulfilled. Other important aspects of marriage that necessitate responsible behavior are money management, family activities, time management, cooperation with chores and home improvement projects, and obedience to the Word of Wisdom. While total perfection in these areas of

responsibility should not be expected, each marriage partner can fully embrace these principles and be consistently trying to improve. Each partner can graciously accept the other's best efforts and express appreciation and encouragement. It is much easier to be "patient and long-suffering" when our partner has a good attitude about change.

Let every man be diligent in all things. The idler shall not have place in the church, except he repent and mend his ways. (D&C 75:29)

Love and sacrifice

When people are courting, they concentrate on making their time together as positive as possible. They go on enjoyable activities, readily express appreciation and affection, and treasure opportunities to communicate and share their thoughts, feelings, and dreams. After getting married there are many distractions, and this important work of strengthening the love in the relationship can get sidetracked.

Couples need to continue to maintain and expand the romance and closeness in their relationship. This bonding process includes emotional intimacy and meaningful time together. Bonding always necessitates a certain sacrifice of one's self, time, and interests for their spouse. Sexual intimacy more naturally follows if a couple is deeply in love.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; (Ephesians 5:25)

Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. (Ephesians 5:33)

If young people would resolve from the moment of their marriage, that from that time forth they would resolve and do everything in their power to please each other in things that are right, even to the sacrifice of their own pleasures, their own appetites, their own desires, the problem of adjustment in married life would take care of itself, and their home would indeed be a happy home. Great love is built on great sacrifice, and that home where the principle of sacrifice for the welfare of each other is daily expressed is that home where there is a great love. (*The Teachings of Harold B. Lee* pp.239-240)

Respect

Since we are all imperfect, our weaknesses and shortcomings can effect our spouse's sense of happiness and eternal direction. It is human nature to be able to see the faults in others better than we can see our own deficiencies. Therefore, the most common problem in marriages is trying to fix the marriage by coercing our mate to change. We are usually quite sure that our spouse is to blame for the problems, and if he or she would just change, things would be fine. Typical negative methods of influence include shame, guilt, nagging, shouting, arguing, manipulation, intimidation, withdrawal, verbal abuse, and even physical force. These efforts to control one's mate through coercion almost always cause resentment and bring about only small changes at a great price. The price one must pay for attempting to take away your partner's agency is the loss of a celestial marriage fully blessed by the Spirit of the Lord.

Nevertheless, my servants sinned a very grievous sin; and contentions arose in the school of the prophets; which was very grievous unto me, saith your Lord; therefore I sent them forth to be chastened. (D&C 95:10-12)

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned. (D&C 121:41)

To men within the sound of my voice, wherever you may be, I say, if you are guilty of demeaning behavior toward your wife, if you are prone to dictate and exercise authority over her, if you are selfish and brutal in your actions in the home, then stop it. Repent! Repent now while you have the opportunity to do so.

To you wives who are constantly complaining, and see only the dark side of life, and feel that you are unloved and unwanted, look into your hearts and minds. If there is something wrong, turn about. Put a smile on your faces. Make yourselves attractive. Brighten your outlook. You deny yourselves happiness and court misery if you constantly complain and do

nothing to rectify your own faults. Rise above the shrill clamor over rights and prerogatives and walk in the quiet dignity of a daughter of God. (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* p. 323)

I have long felt that happiness in marriage is not so much a matter of romance as it is an anxious concern for the comfort and well-being of one's companion. That involves a willingness to overlook weaknesses and mistakes.

Unfortunately, some women want to remake their husbands after their own design. Some husbands regard it as their prerogative to compel their wife to fit their standards of what they think to be the ideal. It never works. It only leads to contention, misunderstanding, and sorrow. (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* p. 325)

Neither partner will find lasting marital satisfaction if either one chooses to dominate the other. Agency is a precious God-given liberty over which the battle of heaven was fought. Using control and taking away the freedom to choose was Satan's plan and such tactics grieve the soul of man. Contention must be completely done away with or the family will lose the Spirit of the Lord. Regardless of our thoughts and feelings about any specific issue, each partner must be allowed to willingly choose to do the right thing in the marriage.

Some people believe that they cannot control their tempers. To better manage one's anger requires two simple steps 1) Adopt the personal belief that displays of anger are never acceptable or effective except when "moved upon by the Holy Ghost." (D&C 121:43) 2) When not in good control, take a time-out and reason with yourself until you are calm.

Restraint and self-control must be ruling principles in the marital relationship. Couples must learn to bridle their tongues as well as their passions. (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* p. 532)

I hear so many complaints from men and women that they cannot communicate with each other. They must have communicated with each other when they were courting. Can they not continue to speak together after marriage? Can they not discuss with one another in an open and frank and candid and happy way their interests, their problems, their challenges, their desires?

But let that talk be quiet, for quiet talk is the language of love. It is the language of peace. It is the language of God. The voice of heaven is a still small voice. The voice of peace is a quiet voice. (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* p.324)

The desire to maintain a celestial spirit in the home is the major reason each person is very likely to continue to strive to do the right things. The other reason is that this may very well be the only way you can obtain cooperation in those areas most important to you. If either person becomes complacent and falls down in any one of the three basic areas (responsibility, love and sacrifice, respect), the other spouse should gently remind him or her, "Dear, it appears that lately the chores are getting done rather slowly." The partner should humbly and quickly accept responsibility without becoming defensive or making excuses, "Thank you for reminding me. I'll work harder in the responsibility area."

Each must show a willing attitude to always strive to follow celestial law. Communication should be more for information gathering and support than for debate. Disagreements should be resolved by working together to understand the correct principles pertaining to each situation. I firmly believe that couples who try the Lord's way for even a few weeks will never want to return to their previous patterns.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts. (Colossians 3:12&15)

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. (4Nephi 1:15-16)

Russ Seigenberg, Ph.D.
pensio7@comcast.net

Seven Basic Errors in Marriage

1. Failure to assume basic responsibilities

Unwillingness to accept one's role as spouse, breadwinner, homemaker etc. Reluctance to sacrifice. Irresponsible destructive behavior (drug use, infidelity, crime). Wanting to be allowed to act like an adolescent.

2. Excessive debating about who is right.

Exaggerating to convince the other person to see things your way. Emphasizing why your mate is wrong and what they must do to change. Making negative, disrespectful remarks in the course of the debate. Trying to shame the person into change. Not listening or showing empathy. Aggressive language.

3. Negative attitude

Focusing more on your spouse's faults than your own. Allowing negative thoughts and emotions to creep in. Allowing resentments to trigger a negative cycle where each stops giving to the other.

4. Withdrawal

Giving up, making little effort, spending time elsewhere, not making marriage a priority, hopelessness, minimal efforts to improve things, not communicating.

5. Lack of balance

Ineffectual responses to imbalances in the exchange rate of reinforcement, imbalance of power or ratio of positive reinforcement. If the exchange rate is lopsided, not taking corrective action, soon enough.

6. Use of coercion

When things are not going well, using coercion to get one's needs met. Lack of respect, manipulation, excessive criticism or nagging, pressure, force, abuse.

7. Lack of Righteous Priesthood Leadership

Insufficient teaching and leadership. Not being a good example of Christ-like behavior.

Russ Seigenberg, Ph.D.
pensio7@comcast.net

Marital Research

Self esteem support is tied to marital satisfaction (Acitelli, 1996; Cunningham & Barbee, 2000; Vaux, 1988).

Wives' daily marital satisfaction was correlated with positive conversation including sharing feelings. Husbands' satisfaction was correlated with social activities and pleasing affectionate behaviors. Jacobson, Waldron, and Moore (1980)

Perceived partner affirmation of the individual's ideals is strongly associated with ongoing relationship stability. Rusbult et al.(2001)

Husbands' probability of divorcing their spouses was lower if their wives had affectively affirmed them in their daily interactions. (the correlation did not hold true for wives.) Orbuch, Veroff, & Hassan, (2002)

John Gottman tracked hundreds of couples as they discussed contentious issues such as sex and finances in videotaped 15-minute conversations. He found that the ratio of positive to negative responses during conflict discussions, and four specific negative patterns (criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling) was highly predictive of divorce (93% accuracy within 4 years). In successful marriages, positive interactions such as laughing and joking during the interviews outnumbered negative ones by a 5-to-1 ratio. Gottman(1994)

Spousal hostility and lack of warmth predicted with 80% accuracy which couples would divorce within a year. Matthews et al.(1996)

Troubled families or couples are mainly more negative and more likely to reciprocate negativity than well-functioning families. Gottman (1979)

Positive affect was the only predictor of both stability and happiness in a sample of newlyweds. Coan, Carrere, & Swanson (1998)

Wives maintained a negative affect state longer than husbands. Griffin (1993), Gottman & Levinson (1986)

Women start 80% of all marital conflict discussions. Ball, Cowan, & Cowan (1995) Gottman (2002) cited this statistic as "well-known."

Gottman & Levenson (1998) Only soothing of the male during arousal (mostly self-soothing) predicted positive marital outcome.

Principles of Celestial Marriage

Covenant-based marriage

Conduct is based upon God's commandments and is not dependent upon the behavior of one's spouse. The husband as a priesthood holder has agreed to obey every word out of the mouth of God (D&C 84:44). He is to teach his family celestial principles and also listen to their counsel. The wife has covenanted with the Lord to obey her husband in righteousness. However, if she disagrees and feels something is not true or right, she has the power to veto the idea. The couple must be one as led by the Spirit of the Lord and be equal partners.

Positive reinforcement

Each spouse accepts the responsibility of living all the laws of God pertaining to marriage. This attitude causes each partner to bless the other by his or her good works. This helps create a positive cycle of interaction. Also the couple will experience a celestial spirit in their home and taste of the greatest joy possible on earth. It is the desire to maintain this celestial spirit that will motivate each person to continue to work at a high level of motivation.

Zero contention

Contention arises when one person seeks to pressure another to accept his point of view. However, conflict is seen as counterproductive and offensive to the Spirit of God. When there are disagreements, the couple works together to discover the correct principle involved. The scriptures and words of the General Authorities can serve as a research base. Once the correct principle is agreed upon, it is relatively easy to find a solution or compromise that will work. The Holy Spirit will also help the couple know what is right.

Agency

Agency, the right to choose, is the supreme celestial principle. Change must come voluntarily through a desire to be obedient to the Lord and to enjoy the blessings of a celestial relationship. Any attempt to pressure, manipulate, or force one's partner to change is unrighteous and will immediately cause the Holy Spirit to withdraw. Respecting others' agency often requires "patience and long-suffering,"

Change of Heart

There is a tendency for the natural man to be judgmental, angry, or rejecting when others do not practice desired behavior. Negative feelings, even when not directly expressed, can greatly diminish the love in a marriage. We all want to feel loved, valued, and appreciated despite our imperfections.

Demonstrating Christ-like love and positive regard helps to create a supportive atmosphere where one's mate feels free to grow. Additionally, we would do well to pay attention to our own attitudes toward values such responsibility, sacrifice, cheerfulness, kindness, and cooperation. The more we become like the Savior, the better our marriage can be. Our hearts can be changed through the influence of the Holy Ghost and by continual efforts to keep our thoughts right.

Hope

There is greater hope for a fulfilling marriage when there is a positive attitudes based about change. Perfection is not required. However, each spouse tries to demonstrate in word and deed that he or she is willing to work on those specific behaviors that are especially important to the partner. This healthy attitude toward change helps each partner to remain patient and encouraging.

Accountability and balance

If one person clearly demonstrates an unwillingness or inability to live within the covenant program, there must be a dialogue about the direction and goals for the marriage. The person who is resisting the process may need individual attention from a bishop or counselor to discuss attitudes, underlying fears or misperceptions, or special problems. Issues of control, abuse, serious sin, selfishness, or profound lack of responsibility must be dealt with. Love is not always enough. A covenant marriage is not a unilateral process. Limits should be set quickly when the marriage is on the wrong course.

