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The NEW AND EVERLASTING Covenant

As we understand and live according to the new and everlasting covenant, we will inherit eternal life.

The Purpose of Life

Each human being is a beloved son or daughter of heavenly parents.¹ Heavenly Father's plan of salvation provides to each the opportunity to receive eternal life, which is the life God leads.² There is no greater gift.³ Knowledge of the plan of salvation explains the purpose of life and, if we so choose, will inform our decision-making from an eternal perspective.

The plan and its relevance to mortality were explained powerfully in an October 2015 *Ensign* article on the subject by Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁴ As part of His plan, the Father established the new and everlasting covenant to enable His sons and daughters to return to His presence and inherit eternal life.

In His preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said: "Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, . . .

"That mine everlasting covenant might be established."⁵



This covenant, often referred to by the Lord as the “new and everlasting covenant,” encompasses the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, including all ordinances and covenants necessary for the salvation of mankind.⁶ Although establishing the Lord’s new and everlasting covenant on the earth is a primary purpose of the Restoration, some Latter-day Saints do not understand the covenant’s significance and the promise of good things to come for those who abide within it. The purpose of this article is to help each of us better understand and live according to the new and everlasting covenant so that we may inherit eternal life. It will also explain how one of the most important ordinances and covenants of the gospel—eternal marriage—fits within the new and everlasting covenant of the gospel.

The Meaning and Purpose of the New and Everlasting Covenant

A covenant in the gospel sense is a pact, a contract, or an agreement between God and a

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person (or persons) who receives priesthood ordinances performed by one with priesthood authority and who agrees to abide by the terms and conditions of the associated covenant. These terms and conditions are established by God.⁷

The new and everlasting covenant “is the sum total of all gospel covenants and obligations”⁸ given anciently⁹ and again restored to the earth in these latter days. This is explained in Doctrine and Covenants 66:2: “Verily I say unto you, blessed are you for receiving *mine everlasting covenant, even the fulness of my gospel*, sent forth unto the children of men, that they might have life and be made partakers of the glories which are to be revealed in the last days, as it was written by the prophets and apostles in days of old.”¹⁰ Because the covenant has been restored in the last dispensation of time, it is “new,” and because it spans all eternity,¹¹ it is “everlasting.”

In the scriptures the Lord speaks of both “the” new and everlasting covenant and “a”

new and everlasting covenant. For example, in Doctrine and Covenants 22:1, He refers to baptism as “a new and an everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning.” In Doctrine and Covenants 132:4, He likewise refers to eternal marriage as “a new and an everlasting covenant.” When He speaks of “a” new and everlasting covenant, He is speaking of one of the many covenants encompassed by His gospel.

When the Lord speaks generally of “the” new and everlasting covenant, He is speaking of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which embraces all ordinances and covenants necessary for the salvation and exaltation of mankind. Neither baptism nor eternal marriage is “the” new and everlasting covenant; rather, they are each parts of the whole.

Those Who Endure to the End in the New and Everlasting Covenant Receive Eternal Life

Great and eternal blessings are promised to those who receive gospel ordinances performed by proper priesthood authority and sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise,¹² and who then keep the sacred covenants associated with the ordinances. These blessings include forgiveness of sins,¹³ the power of godliness,¹⁴ and the companionship of the Holy Ghost,¹⁵ together with the guidance, inspiration, comfort, peace, hope, and sanctification that attend that gift.¹⁶

The greatest of all the blessings and gifts of God is eternal life—which is the life God lives!¹⁷ This gift is given only to those who receive all gospel ordinances and abide by the covenants encompassed within the new and everlasting covenant.¹⁸ In the Lord’s words: “The new and everlasting covenant . . . was instituted for the fulness of my glory.”¹⁹ Indeed, those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant and endure to the end “shall come forth in the first resurrection . . . and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths.”²⁰

The Lord emphatically declares that “it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods.”²¹

In summary, those who enter into the new and everlasting covenant and endure faithfully to the end

will (1) receive the fulness of the glory of God, (2) enjoy the power of godliness in time and eternity,²² (3) be exalted, (4) enjoy eternal marriage and increase, and (5) become gods. Taken together, these blessings culminate in the gift of eternal life.

We Must Obey Each Covenant within the New and Everlasting Covenant

The Lord unequivocally declared that we receive these supernal blessings only as we obey His laws as set forth in the new and everlasting covenant: “The new and everlasting covenant . . . was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God.”²³ He also declared, “For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.”²⁴ In the same section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord echoed this point: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory.”²⁵

The straightforward requirement that we must obey the laws of God in order to receive the glory He offers the faithful applies to all the ordinances and covenants within the new and everlasting covenant. For example, if I do not

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receive the ordinance and keep the covenant of baptism, I will be damned, meaning that I cannot progress—I cannot inherit the fulness of His glory. Likewise if I do not receive the ordinances of the temple and keep the associated covenants or, indeed, if I refuse to receive any of the ordinances of the gospel or if I refuse to abide by any of the associated covenants, I cannot be exalted. Instead, I will be damned, meaning that my progress will be stopped. In short, I must receive every ordinance of the gospel and abide by every associated covenant if eternal life is my desire.

The terms of the covenants we as Latter-day Saints agree to live can be grouped into four categories: (1) to take upon us the name of the Savior, to remember Him always, and to follow His example; (2) to keep all His commandments; (3) to willingly serve God’s children as part of His work of salvation, even at personal sacrifice; and (4) to consecrate ourselves and our means to the Lord’s work.

According to God’s law, the gospel (and the glories it offers) is received through specified ordinances administered by the authority of the priesthood. It is through the priesthood ordinances that the power of godliness is manifest in our lives—but only to the extent that we keep the associated covenants. The covenant activates, or gives life to, the ordinance, just as an engine activates a car and enables it to transport its occupants from one place to another. In short, to the degree we thoughtfully and faithfully keep the covenants associated with the ordinances we receive, we will grow in our knowledge of God and experience the “power of godliness”²⁶ by the grace of God through the Atonement of Christ.²⁷

The Place of Marriage in the New and Everlasting Covenant

In Doctrine and Covenants 132:4, the Lord stated that He was going to reveal “a” new and everlasting covenant and

added, “If ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.” These words refer to the covenant of eternal marriage²⁸ performed by proper priesthood authority,²⁹ which is a central and essential part of “the” new and everlasting covenant (the fulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ).³⁰ The Lord emphasized the great importance of the covenant of eternal marriage by telling us that those who reject this covenant will not receive eternal life.³¹

Some people, including some Church members, inaccurately read Doctrine and Covenants 132:4 to mean that plural marriage is necessary for exaltation, leading them to believe that plural marriage is a necessary prerequisite for exaltation in the eternal realm. This, however, is not supported in the revelations. As recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 131 and 132, the Lord introduced the law of eternal marriage by expressly referring to the sealing of one man and one woman (see Doctrine and Covenants 132:4–7, 15–25).

By setting forth the law of eternal marriage in the context of a monogamous marriage, the Lord makes plain that the blessings of exaltation, extended to each man and each woman who worthily enters into the covenant of eternal marriage performed by proper priesthood authority, are independent of whether that marriage is plural or monogamous.³²

Doctrine and Covenants 132:19 makes it clear that eternal life is promised to a monogamous couple who are sealed by the authority of the priesthood and who abide in the covenant—with no additional condition or requirement. Any man and woman who are sealed in this way and who abide within the covenant will be exalted.³³ Historical practice is consistent with the doctrine of eternal marriage as explained here.³⁴ The ordinance that seals couples for eternity includes identical covenants and blessings for monogamous marriages and for the authorized plural marriages performed

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in the past. These same covenants and blessings will be made available after this life to the faithful who did not have the opportunity to be sealed in mortality.³⁵

After revealing the law and covenant of eternal marriage between one man and one woman, the Lord taught Joseph Smith that a man can in righteousness marry more than one wife within the covenant of eternal marriage when authorized or commanded by the Lord through His duly ordained prophet (who holds the relevant priesthood keys).³⁶ The authorization and command to practice plural marriage, given by the Lord to Abraham and other prophets of antiquity,³⁷ was likewise given to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph, an appointment, and restore all things.”³⁸

Years later, the Lord rescinded His authorization and command for Church members to enter the practice of plural marriage (in other words, be sealed to more than one living spouse) when President Wilford Woodruff

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(1807–98) issued the Manifesto of 1890.³⁹ This led to the end of the practice of plural marriage, meaning no member of the Church could be married or sealed to more than one living spouse. Notably, the Manifesto does not preclude any worthy man who has been sealed to a wife now deceased from being sealed to another, living spouse. The foregoing is consistent with the revealed doctrine that monogamy is the Lord’s standard for marriage unless He declares and authorizes otherwise through His duly appointed representative, meaning the President and prophet of the Church.⁴⁰

On behalf of the First Presidency and in response to the question “Is plural or celestial marriage essential to a fulness of glory in the world to come?” President Charles W. Penrose (1832–1925) wrote: “Celestial marriage is essential to a fulness of glory in the world to come, as explained in the revelation concerning it; but *it is not stated that plural marriage is thus essential.*”⁴¹



In 1933 the First Presidency declared: “Celestial marriage—that is, marriage for time and eternity—and polygamous or plural marriages are not synonymous terms. Monogamous marriages for time and eternity, solemnized in our temples in accordance with the word of the Lord and the laws of the Church, are Celestial marriages.”⁴²

Consistent with these statements, Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote: “*Plural marriage is not essential to salvation or exaltation.* Nephi and his people were denied the power to have more than one wife and yet they could gain every blessing in eternity that the Lord ever offered to any people. *In our day, the Lord summarized by revelation the whole doctrine of exaltation and predicated it upon the marriage of one man to one woman. (D&C 132:1–28.)* Thereafter he added the principles relative to plurality of wives with the express stipulation that any such marriages would be valid only

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if authorized by the President of the Church. (D&C 132:7, 29–66.)”⁴³

Today, as directed by the Lord through His prophet, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints no longer practices plural marriage, and individuals who do practice it are not allowed to join the Church or remain members of it. The Church affirms that monogamy is God’s standard for marriage except when He authorizes or commands otherwise through His prophet. The Church does not teach that participation in plural marriage is necessary for exaltation.

Conclusion

There is much that we do not know about life in the hereafter; however, we do know that receiving and abiding within the new and everlasting covenant is necessary to inherit eternal life. We also know that for such, the “same sociality which exists among us here”—in mortality—“will exist among us there”—in the afterlife—“only it will be coupled with eternal glory.”⁴⁴

The supernal blessings available through the new and everlasting covenant are central to the grand purpose of the Father's plan and the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days. The "perfect brightness of hope"⁴⁵ this glorious covenant inspires in the faithful provides "an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God."⁴⁶ For all who abide the terms of the new and everlasting covenant, the reward is joy and peace in this world and eternal life in the next.⁴⁷ ■

NOTES

1. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129; see also *God Loveth His Children* (pamphlet, 2007), 1.
2. See Robert D. Hales, "The Plan of Salvation: A Sacred Treasure of Knowledge to Guide Us," *Ensign*, Oct. 2015, 24–31.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
4. See Robert D. Hales, "The Plan of Salvation: A Sacred Treasure of Knowledge to Guide Us," 24–31.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 1:17, 22.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 66:2.
7. See Bible Dictionary, "Covenant."
8. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 1:156.
9. See Jeremiah 32:40; Doctrine and Covenants 22:1.
10. Emphasis added; see also Doctrine and Covenants 39:11; 45:9; 49:9; 88:131, 133; 101:39.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:7.
12. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) taught: "*The Holy Spirit of Promise is the Holy Ghost who places the stamp of approval upon every ordinance: baptism, confirmation, ordination, marriage. The promise is that the blessings will be received through faithfulness. If a person violates a covenant, whether it be of baptism, ordination, marriage or anything else, the Spirit withdraws the stamp of approval, and the blessings will not be received. Every ordinance is sealed with a promise of a reward based upon faithfulness. The Holy Spirit withdraws the stamp of approval where covenants are broken*" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:45; see also Doctrine and Covenants 76:52–53; 132:7).
13. See Acts 2:38; 2 Nephi 31:17; Moroni 8:25.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21; see also Moroni 10:32–33.
15. See John 14:26; Doctrine and Covenants 121:45–46.
16. See 2 Nephi 32:5; 3 Nephi 27:20; Moroni 8:26; Doctrine and Covenants 11:13; Moses 6:59–61.
17. "Eternal life is God's life, or life with God" (Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Oct. 1956, 61). "Those who are married in the temple for all time and eternity obtain the blessing of *eternal lives*. I put stress on *eternal lives*. Eternal life is God's life, that is, to be like him" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. [1957–66], 4:197).
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 132:6.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 132:6.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 132:5.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 132:21.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20–21.
27. See Moroni 10:32–33.
28. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:4, 15.
29. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:7, 18.
30. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:6–7; see also Doctrine and Covenants 66:2.
31. Please note that eternal life is denied those who "reject" this covenant. Those who, in contrast, did not have the opportunity for eternal marriage in this life will be given the opportunity for eternal marriage in the next life. Please see also footnote 35 below.
32. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:15–25.
33. For an additional example affirming that monogamous couples who are sealed for eternity and keep the associated covenants merit exaltation, see Doctrine and Covenants 131.
34. See Gospel Topics, "Plural Marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," topics.lds.org.
35. "There is no Latter-day Saint who dies after having lived a faithful life who will lose anything because of having failed to do certain things when opportunities were not furnished him or her. In other words, if a young man or a young woman has no opportunity of getting married, and they live faithful lives up to the time of their death, they will have all the blessings, exaltation, and glory that any man or woman will have who had this opportunity and improved it. That is sure and positive" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* [2011], 130).
36. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:34–35, 37–39.
37. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:34–39.
38. Doctrine and Covenants 132:40.
39. See Official Declaration 1.
40. See Jacob 2:27–30. Although the Lord has not explained all the reasons for commanding or authorizing the practice of plural marriage, in Doctrine and Covenants 132 the Lord offers two reasons: (1) to fulfill promises pursuant to the Abrahamic covenant, and (2) "to multiply and replenish the earth" (D&C 132:63; see also verse 34). Jacob 2:30 offers perhaps the most succinct statement of why at times the Lord has commanded the practice of plural marriage: "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." See also Gospel Topics, "Plural Marriage in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," topics.lds.org.
41. Charles W. Penrose, "Peculiar Questions Briefly Answered," *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1912, 1042; emphasis added.
42. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 5:329.
43. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (1966), 578–79; emphasis added. See also the following statement by Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "Those who are denied endless increase cannot be what God is, because that in connection with other things, makes him God. *The eternity of the marriage covenant ought to be understood by Latter-day Saints clearly to be the sealing of at least one woman to one man for time and for all eternity. Then do not get confused on that point and imagine that it necessarily means more than one woman.* It may be, certainly, but it does mean at least that one man and one woman are sealed together by the power of the holy priesthood and by the sealing approval of the Holy Ghost for time and for all eternity, and then that they keep their covenants, before they will be candidates for the highest degree of celestial glory, and unto them only of all these groups of our Father's children is the promise made of endless or eternal increase" (*The Three Degrees of Glory: A Discourse by Melvin J. Ballard*, Sept. 22, 1922, 10; emphasis added).
44. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.
45. 2 Nephi 31:20.
46. Ether 12:4.
47. See Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.