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Second Counselor in the First Presidency

And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him.

And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?

And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.

And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. (Mark 10:2-5.)

SACREDNESS OF MARRIAGE TAUGHT BY JESUS

Recently, I heard President Grant express grave concern over the apparent increase of the number of applications for the severance of marital bonds. His concern and fears that there is a growing laxity in the minds of young people with respect to the importance and sacredness of the marriage covenant suggest the topic "Marriage and Divorce" to which I now invite your attention.

Adjustments to be made by newly married couples when young husbands now in the armed forces return to civilian life suggest another condition that makes such a consideration not wholly untimely.

In all the problems and perplexities of human existence, Jesus Christ is the one safe guide to whom we can go for guidance and comfort. Mark's account of Jesus' answer to the Pharisees on divorce sets forth the Savior's attitude toward this vital question.

A careful study of this text, and other references that he made to marriage and divorce, leave little doubt that Jesus set forth the lofty ideal that marriage is of divine origin and that the marriage bond should be held sacred.

This lofty ideal of marriage is confirmed by modern revelation, and is recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants as follows:

And again, verily I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man.

Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation;

And that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made. (Doc. and Cov. 49:15-17.)

When the Pharisees, seeking to justify the granting of divorce, cited the fact that "Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement and to put a wife away" on the ground of "some uncleanness," Jesus answered:

... For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh; so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Mark 10:5-9.)

In the light of scripture, ancient and modern, we are justified in concluding that Christ's ideal pertaining to marriage is the unbroken home, and conditions that cause divorce are violations of his divine teachings. Some of these are:

Unfaithfulness on the part of either or both, habitual drunkenness, physical violence, long imprisonment that disgraces the wife and family, the union of an innocent girl to a reprobate—in these and perhaps other cases there may be circumstances which make the continuance of the marriage state a greater evil than divorce. But these are extreme cases—they are the mistakes, the calamities in the realm of marriage.

On the other hand, to look upon marriage as a mere contract that may be entered into at pleasure in response to a romantic whim, or for selfish purposes, and severed at the first difficulty or misunderstanding that may arise, is an evil meriting severe condemnation, especially in cases wherein children are made to suffer because of such separation.

DANGERS THREATENING THE MARRIAGE RELATION

Marriage is a sacred relationship entered into for purposes that are well recognized—primarily for the rearing of a family. It is claimed by some careful observers that our present modern life tends to frustrate these purposes. Writes one:

Modern living conditions contribute to these frustrations. Formerly a married woman had a home to care for, often several children. Today, in many parts of our country, a married woman continues either to follow her vocation or to spend her time seeking new stimulations—no children to care for—no house to clean—no meals to cook. Under such a condition her leisure time activities become her all-absorbing interests—interests which often lead her away from her husband rather than to him.

Twenty-four years ago when the steamship *Marama* dropped anchor outside the coral reef that surrounds the island Rarotonga, a passenger desiring to go ashore asked the captain why he did not sail nearer to the wharf. In answer the experienced seaman mentioned treacherous waters and pointed to an engine of one ship, the *Maitai*, and to the bow of another, still protruding out of the water—both carrying mute evidence of the danger of anchoring too close to the shore of this coral-bound island. "We anchor here," said the captain, "because it is safer to avoid being dashed to pieces, as those two vessels, on those dangerous reefs."

A flippant attitude toward marriage, the ill-advised suggestion of "companionate marriage," the base, diabolical theory of "free sex experiment," and the ready-made divorce courts are dangerous reefs upon which many a family bark is wrecked.

An ever-decreasing birth rate and an increasing divorce rate are ominous signs threatening the stability of the American home, and the perpetuity of our present form of constitutional government. An

editorial in a weekly magazine, published in the capital of the nation, says:

Since 1890 the United States of America's national birth rate has dropped from 32.9 per 1,000 population to 17.4 per 1,000 population.

In those same years, the national average for divorces jumped from 5.7 per 100 marriages to 19.3 per 100 marriages.

A falling birth rate plus a rising divorce rate speak ill for individual faith in the future. Hence it speaks ill for the nation's future.

What, in the long run, is the point of vast new public programs if the individual, continually fearful of tomorrow, flutters from mate to mate and deliberately robs the nation of his, or her, own good qualities in the next generation? A nation's permanency is entirely dependent on the permanency of its individual homes, the family pride of its citizens and the reproduction of those families, generation by generation.

Ex-president Taft on one occasion said:

Our state rests upon our homes. And if we cannot keep our homes from this constant demoralizing breaking up, we had better go out of the business of government entirely.

In some states of the union, it is almost as easy to get a divorce as it is to get married. As a result of this laxity, one out of every five marriages ends either in divorce or annulment.

DIVORCE INCREASING IN CIVIL AND CHURCH MARRIAGES

Though statistics indicate that there is a much lower divorce rate in the Church than in the nation, yet there is cause for concern over the number of marriages annulled annually in the divorce courts.

With the assistance of the Presiding Bishop's office and Professor Roy A. West, I have before me a comparison of marriages and divorces in the Church from 1920 to 1944. It sets forth the fact that though there are fewer divorces among couples married in the temples and by stake and ward authorities than by civil officers and other churches, yet divorces are increasing even in the Church.

For example, during the period 1920-1922 there was one divorce for every 38.24 marriages among couples married in the temples and by stake and ward authorities, but there was, during those same years, one divorce for every 13.20 marriages among couples married by civil officers. Comparatively, that ratio continues throughout the twenty years, as you will note by the following taken at random: (The first figure will be the Church marriage; the second, the civil marriage.)

1923 to 1925—one divorce to every
33 marriages; one divorce to every
15 marriages.

1935 to 1937—one divorce to every
28 marriages; one divorce to every
12.52 marriages.

1938 to 1940—one divorce to every
26.61 marriages; one divorce to
every 10.13 marriages.

Last year there was one divorce for every seventeen marriages among couples married in temples and by stake and ward authorities, and one divorce for every 6.9 (we will say seven) marriages among couples married by civil officers. There is cause for concern over the increase of divorces in this country and even in our Church.

DIVORCE RATE IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE UNITED STATES

The ratio of divorce to marriage in the United States is three times higher than in the Church. In 1920 there were 7.5 marriages to every divorce in the United States; while in the Church there were 24.8 marriages to every divorce. In 1935, the United States had a ratio of 6.1 marriages to every divorce; during the same year the Church had a ratio of 17.9 marriages to each divorce.

The real source of security of our nation rests in the well ordered, properly conducted homes. The character of a child is formed largely during the first twelve years of his life. It is estimated that in that period the child spends approximately 3,240 hours in school; 416 hours in Sunday School and church, but 52,560 hours in the home, not counting twelve hours a day for sleep. In other words, he spends sixteen times as many waking hours in the home as in school, and one hundred twenty-six times as many hours in the home as in the Church.

In the homes of America are born the children of America, and from them go out into American life American men and women. They go out with the stamp of these homes upon them, and only as these homes are what they should be, will children be what they should be.

Luther Burbank, the great plant wizard, most impressively emphasizes the need for constant attention in the training of a child. He says:

Teach the child self-respect. Train it in self-respect just as you train a plant in better ways. No self-respecting man was ever a grafter. Above all, bear in mind repetition—the use of an influence over and over again, keeping everlastingly at it. This is what fixes traits in plants, the constant repetition of an influence until at last it is irrevocably fixed and will not change. You cannot afford to get discouraged. You are dealing with something far more precious than any plant—the precious soul of a child!

There are three fundamental things to which every child is entitled: (1) a respected name, (2) a sense of security, (3) opportunities for development.

The family gives to the child his name and standing in the community. A child wants his family to be as good as those of his friends. He wants to be able to point with pride to his father, and to feel an inspiration always as he thinks of his mother. It is a mother's duty so to live that her children will associate with her everything that is beautiful, sweet, and pure. And the father should so live that the child, emulating his example, will be a good citizen, and, in the Church, a true Latter-day Saint.

SECURITY

A child has the right to feel that in his home he has a place of refuge, a place of protection from the dangers and evils of the outside world. Family unity and integrity are necessary to supply this need.

He needs parents who are happy in their adjustment to each other, who are working hopefully toward the fulfilment of an ideal of living, who love their children with a sincere and unselfish love; in short, who are well-balanced individuals, gifted with a certain amount of insight, who are able to provide the child with a wholesome emotional background which will contribute more to his development than material advantages.

Divorce almost invariably deprives children of these advantages.

HOW TO LESSEN THE BREAKING UP OF HOMES

1. Substitute the present tendency toward a low view of marriage by the lofty view which Jesus the Christ gives it. Let us look upon marriage as a sacred obligation and a covenant that is eternal, or that may be made eternal.

2. Teach the young of both sexes in the responsibilities and ideals of marriage so that they may realize that marriage involves obligation, and is not an arrangement to be terminated at pleasure. Teach them that pure love between the sexes is one of the noblest things on earth, and the bearing and rearing of children the highest of all human duties. In this regard it is the duty of parents to set an example in the home that children may see and absorb, as it were, the sacredness of family life and the responsibility associated therewith.

3. The number of broken marriages can be reduced if couples realize even before they approach the altar that marriage is a state of mutual service, a state of giving as well as of receiving, and that each must give of himself or herself to the utmost. Harriet Beecher Stowe wisely writes:

No man or woman can create a true home who is not willing in the outset to embrace life heroically, to encounter labor and sacrifice. Only to such can this divinest power be given to create on earth that which is the nearest image of heaven.

4. Another condition that contributes to the permanence of the marriage covenant is marriage in the temple. Before such a marriage is consummated, it is necessary for the young man and young woman first to obtain a recommend from the bishop. They should go to him in person, and the bishop who does his duty will instruct the couple regarding the sacredness of the obligation that they are as young people going to assume, emphasizing all the safeguards that have been named before. There in the presence of the priesthood the young people receive, before they take upon themselves the obligation, instruction upon the sacredness of the duty which is before them; and, furthermore, whether or not they are prepared to go in holiness and purity to the altar of God and there seal their vows and love.

5. Finally, there is one principle which seems to me to strike right at the base of the happiness of the marriage relation, and that is the standard of purity taught and practiced among the Latter-day Saints. It is a common saying throughout the world that young men may sow their wild oats, but that young women should be chaperoned and guarded. In the Church of Christ there is but one standard of morality. No young man has any more right to sow his wild oats than has a young girl. She is taught that second only to the crime of taking human life is that of losing her virtue. And that is the ideal among young men. That young man who comes to the bishop and asks for a recommend to take a pure girl to the altar is expected to give just the same purity that he expects to receive.

CONCLUSION

For the proper solution of this great problem we may turn with safety to Jesus as our guide. He declared that the marriage relation is of divine origin, that "marriage is ordained of God," that only under the most exceptional conditions should it be set aside. In the teaching of the Church of Christ, the family assumes supreme importance in the development of the individual and of society. "Happy and thrice happy are they who enjoy an uninterrupted union, and whose love, unbroken by any complaint, shall not dissolve until the last day."

The marriage ceremony when sealed by the authority of the Holy Priesthood endures, as do family relationships, throughout time and all eternity.

What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

God bless these young couples who must make new adjustments, some under trying circumstances, when the boys and husbands come home from war, and God bless us all to look more earnestly and prayerfully and sincerely upon the sacredness of home and the marriage covenant, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Clark:

The choir will now sing, under the direction of J. Spencer Cornwall, with Alexander Schreiner at the organ, the "Hallelujah Chorus" (from "The Messiah"), by Handel.

The closing prayer will be offered by President Stanley A. Rasmussen, of the Mount Jordan Stake, after which this Conference will be adjourned until 2 o'clock this afternoon. We will meet here in the Tabernacle, not in the Assembly Hall. The afternoon session will be broadcast over KSL, at Salt Lake City, and KSUB at Cedar City.

The Choir sang "Hallelujah Chorus," after which the benediction was pronounced by Elder Stanley A. Rasmussen, President of the Mount Jordan Stake.

Conference adjourned until 2 p.m.