

The Plan and the Proclamation

October 2017 General Conference

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The family proclamation is the Lord's reemphasis of the gospel truths we need to sustain us through current challenges to the family.

As is evident in our family proclamation, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are blessed with unique doctrine and different ways of viewing the world. We participate and even excel in many worldly activities, but on some subjects we forgo participation as we seek to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Apostles, ancient and modern.

I.

In a parable, Jesus described those who "[hear] the word" but become "unfruitful" when that word is "choke[d]" by "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Matthew 13:22). Later, Jesus corrected Peter for not savoring "the things that be of God, but those that be of men," declaring, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:23, 26). In His final teachings in mortality, He told His Apostles, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, ... the world hateth you" (John 15:19; see also John 17:14, 16).

Similarly, the writings of Jesus's early Apostles frequently use the image of "the world" to represent opposition to gospel teachings. "Be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2), the Apostle Paul taught. "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians 3:19). And, "Beware," he warned, "lest any man spoil you ... after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). The Apostle James taught that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God[.] Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

The Book of Mormon often uses this image of the opposition of "the world." Nephi prophesied the ultimate destruction of "those who are built up to become popular in the eyes of the world, and those who seek ... the things of the world" (1 Nephi 22:23; see also 2 Nephi 9:30). Alma condemned those who were "puffed up ... with the vain things of the world" (Alma 31:27). Lehi's dream shows that those who seek to follow the iron rod, the word of God, will encounter the opposition of the world. The

occupants of the “great and spacious building” Lehi saw were “mocking and pointing” the “finger of scorn” (1 Nephi 8:26–27, 33). In his vision interpreting this dream, Nephi learned that this ridicule and opposition came from “the multitudes of the earth, ... the world and the wisdom thereof; ... the pride of the world” (1 Nephi 11:34–36).

What is the meaning of these scriptural cautions and commandments not to be “of the world” or the modern commandment to “forsake the world”? (D&C 53:2). President Thomas S. Monson summarized these teachings: “We must be vigilant in a world which has moved so far from that which is spiritual. It is essential that we reject anything that does not conform to our standards, refusing in the process to surrender that which we desire most: eternal life in the kingdom of God.”¹

God created this earth according to His plan to provide His spirit children a place to experience mortality as a necessary step toward the glories He desires for all His children. While there are various kingdoms and glories, our Heavenly Father’s ultimate desire for His children is what President Monson called “eternal life in the kingdom of God,” which is exaltation in families. This is more than salvation. President Russell M. Nelson has reminded us, “In God’s eternal plan, salvation is an individual matter; [but] exaltation is a family matter.”²

The restored gospel of Jesus Christ and the inspired family proclamation, which I will discuss later, are essential teachings to guide mortal preparation for exaltation. Even as we must live with the marriage laws and other traditions of a declining world, those who strive for exaltation must make personal choices in family life according to the Lord’s way whenever that differs from the world’s way.

In this mortal life, we have no memory of what preceded our birth, and we now experience opposition. We grow and mature spiritually by choosing to obey God’s commandments in a succession of right choices. These include covenants and ordinances and repentance when our choices are wrong. In contrast, if we lack faith in God’s plan and are disobedient to or deliberately refrain from its required actions, we forgo that growth and maturity. The Book of Mormon teaches, “This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32).

II.

Latter-day Saints who understand God’s plan of salvation have a unique worldview that helps them see the reason for God’s commandments, the unchangeable nature of His required ordinances, and the fundamental role of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our Savior’s Atonement reclaims us from death and, subject to our repentance, saves us from sin. With that worldview, Latter-day Saints have distinctive priorities and practices and are blessed with the strength to endure the frustrations and pains of mortal life.

Inevitably, the actions of those who try to follow God’s plan of salvation can cause misunderstanding or even conflict with family members or friends who do not believe

its principles. Such conflict is always so. Every generation that has sought to follow God's plan has had challenges. Anciently, the prophet Isaiah gave strength to the Israelites, whom he called "ye that know righteousness, ... in whose heart is my law." To them he said, "Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings" (Isaiah 51:7; see also 2 Nephi 8:7). But whatever the cause of conflict with those who do not understand or believe God's plan, those who do understand are always commanded to choose the Lord's way instead of the world's way.

III.

The gospel plan each family should follow to prepare for eternal life and exaltation is outlined in the Church's 1995 proclamation, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World."³ Its declarations are, of course, visibly different from some current laws, practices, and advocacy of the world in which we live. In our day, the differences most evident are cohabitation without marriage, same-sex marriage, and the raising of children in such relationships. Those who do not believe in or aspire to exaltation and are most persuaded by the ways of the world consider this family proclamation as just a statement of policy that should be changed. In contrast, Latter-day Saints affirm that the family proclamation defines the kind of family relationships where the most important part of our eternal development can occur.

We have witnessed a rapid and increasing public acceptance of cohabitation without marriage and of same-sex marriage. The corresponding media advocacy, education, and even occupational requirements pose difficult challenges for Latter-day Saints. We must try to balance the competing demands of following the gospel law in our personal lives and teachings, even as we seek to show love for all.⁴ In doing so we sometimes face, but need not fear, what Isaiah called "the reproach of men."

Converted Latter-day Saints believe that the family proclamation, issued nearly a quarter century ago and now translated into scores of languages, is the Lord's reemphasis of the gospel truths we need to sustain us through current challenges to the family. Two examples are same-sex marriage and cohabitation without marriage. Just 20 years after the family proclamation, the United States Supreme Court authorized same-sex marriage, overturning thousands of years of marriage being limited to a man and a woman. The shocking percentage of United States children born to a mother not married to the father came more gradually: 5 percent in 1960,⁵ 32 percent in 1995,⁶ and now 40 percent.⁷

IV.

The family proclamation begins by declaring "that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children." It also affirms that "gender is an essential characteristic

of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." It further declares "that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife."

The proclamation affirms the continuing duty of husband and wife to multiply and replenish the earth and their "solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children": "Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity." It solemnly warns against the abuse of spouse or offspring, and it affirms that "happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ." Finally, it calls for the promotion of official "measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society."

In 1995 a President of the Church and 14 other Apostles of the Lord issued these important doctrinal statements. As one of only seven of those Apostles still living, I feel obliged to share what led to the family proclamation for the information of all who consider it.

The inspiration identifying the need for a proclamation on the family came to the leadership of the Church over 23 years ago. It was a surprise to some who thought the doctrinal truths about marriage and the family were well understood without restatement.⁸ Nevertheless, we felt the confirmation and we went to work. Subjects were identified and discussed by members of the Quorum of the Twelve for nearly a year. Language was proposed, reviewed, and revised. Prayerfully we continually pleaded with the Lord for His inspiration on what we should say and how we should say it. We all learned "line upon line, precept upon precept," as the Lord has promised (D&C 98:12).

During this revelatory process, a proposed text was presented to the First Presidency, who oversee and promulgate Church teachings and doctrine. After the Presidency made further changes, the proclamation on the family was announced by the President of the Church, Gordon B. Hinckley. In the women's meeting of September 23, 1995, he introduced the proclamation with these words: "With so much of sophistry that is passed off as truth, with so much of deception concerning standards and values, with so much of allurements and enticement to take on the slow stain of the world, we have felt to warn and forewarn."⁹

I testify that the proclamation on the family is a statement of eternal truth, the will of the Lord for His children who seek eternal life. It has been the basis of Church teaching and practice for the last 22 years and will continue so for the future. Consider it as such, teach it, live by it, and you will be blessed as you press forward toward eternal life.

Forty years ago, President Ezra Taft Benson taught that "every generation has its tests and its chance to stand and prove itself."¹⁰ I believe our attitude toward and use of the

family proclamation is one of those tests for this generation. I pray for all Latter-day Saints to stand firm in that test.

I close with President Gordon B. Hinckley's teachings uttered two years after the family proclamation was announced. He said: "I see a wonderful future in a very uncertain world. If we will cling to our values, if we will build on our inheritance, if we will walk in obedience before the Lord, if we will simply live the gospel, we will be blessed in a magnificent and wonderful way. We will be looked upon as a peculiar people who have found the key to a peculiar happiness."¹¹

I testify of the truth and eternal importance of the family proclamation, revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ to His Apostles for the exaltation of the children of God (see Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4), in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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