

# Liabona



A Witness that the Everlasting Gospel has been Restored to the Earth; that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints possesses the Authority, Gifts and Blessings enjoyed by the Primitive Church

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## The Significance and Importance of the Marriage Covenant

By Elder Sylvester Q. Cannon of the Council of the Twelve

*From an Address at the 111th Semi-Annual General Conference, October 5, 1940*

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ELDER SYLVESTER Q. CANNON

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HERE ARE MANY PRINCIPLES revealed and many covenants made by the Lord with His children who have taken upon them His name to serve Him. There are other agreements or covenants made by men one with another which have to do with civil affairs, and are intended to be honorably complied with. We call these agreements or covenants. The agreements or promises made to mankind by the Lord are in the nature of divine covenants, or divine understandings, and these the Lord has made to His children, through His faithful servants. To the extent that mankind has fulfilled the conditions they have received the blessings and the promises the Lord has made.

In this dispensation the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph many things and gave him instructions, and among other instructions which were given and blessings which he received was the restoration of the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper; and in like manner the eternal covenant of marriage,—one of the greatest promises made to men in earlier days which has been restored again in these days.

How sacred and important it is that men and women should qualify—those who have accepted the truths of this Gospel of Jesus Christ, and have received authority of the holy Priesthood by divine restoration—to partake of the spirit of this responsibility and this covenant, and to enter into that promise and that blessing. We and our children are entitled to receive these blessings if we live for them, and observe them with all our hearts, in love and kindness, in justice and righteousness.

#### *The Covenant of Eternal Marriage*

Now my brethren and sisters, I consider this quite important. I felt I would like to talk briefly about this particular covenant the Lord has given. In earlier days, in the early history of mankind, we are told that for this cause should a man leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they twain should be one flesh. We are intelligent beings. We are eternal beings, and inasmuch as we try to do the will of the Lord and keep His commandments He will bless us and fulfill His promises to us. And so, in this latter day, He has given this covenant through the authority of the holy Priesthood, restored again in these days, whereby His sons and daughters who have observed to do His will and have received the authority and fulfilled the covenants shall be entitled to go forward and be united for time and for eternity, and that that covenant should be binding upon them to the extent that they live for it throughout all time. It is a remarkable thing to think about, to realize what eternity means. It sobers one considerably when one thinks of entering into a covenant of this kind, not only for this life, but for the life to come. It justifies very careful consideration on the part of those who enter into it. The man and the woman should be worthy; they should

exemplify in their lives every principle of the Gospel to the very best of their ability, and they should strive to grow in patience and in kindness, in good-will and love towards each other, and especially try to exemplify the finest and highest principles of the Gospel and of the Priesthood they have received.

#### *Marriage and Divorce*

With regard to the matter of marriage and divorce, not only in this nation, but in all the nations of the world, I would like to say that scandalous conditions prevail to a large extent. People have neglected eternal marriage; they have done away with the eternal covenant and have substituted therefor civil covenants which endure only until death.

Conditions throughout the nations referred to are far from what they should be. Instead of marriage being recognized as a sacred covenant, as given by the Lord to mankind, it is too often a temporary tie between man and wife, subject to divorce. Such conditions I say are too prevalent in the world. Men and women are too illy situated to sense the seriousness and the vitality, importance and righteousness of the eternal covenant.

The Latter-day Saints generally believe whole-heartedly, thoroughly, loyally, truly and eternally, in the principle of eternal marriage—marriage for eternity as well as for time—and yet there are many young people in the Church who are not subscribing to this condition—this eternal covenant. They are missing a great opportunity. Too many hasty marriages are very often the occasion for hasty divorces. But those who enter into the covenant of eternal marriage, in my judgment, are those who carefully consider what they are doing, wisely, prayerfully, and earnestly striving to be led and guided into righteousness,\* so that they resist hasty marriage and every influence that is not in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord.

As an example of what has been achieved by the Latter-day Saints in overcoming this condition of hasty marriages and divorces, and the tendency to disregard the covenants that are made, I want to call your attention to the records, because the Church has kept a record for years with regard to these statistics which are of concern to us. They have been

kept as accurately as they could be obtained.

#### *Statistical Comparisons*

I should like to refer you to certain results which indicate some of the comparisons of marriage and divorce in the nation of the United States as compared with those of the Latter-day Saints. The last year of which we have records was in 1938. The marriage rate of the United States as a whole was 10.41 per thousand population, as compared with 17.5 per thousand population of the Latter-day Saints, which is 70% greater. The divorce rate was 1.71 per thousand population as against 1.04 for the Latter-day Saints. This was about 40% less. But that result was obtained from the record of civil marriages, and not from those performed in the temples of the Lord. In the Latter-day Saint Temples where such ordinances are performed the result was, for those who entered into marriage for eternity .28 per thousand population, or about 83% less. That indicates something of the difference where people observe this covenant that the Lord has given for our eternal welfare.

It is a matter of great importance to every Latter-day Saint. Worthy parents sense the importance of teaching their children this eternal principle. Stake Presidencies, Bishoprics, and all the officers throughout the Church realize that in teaching this divine principle they are instructing worthy young people in the proper observance of an eternal principle of great promise and blessing to all who righteously observe it.

This is one of the great things to think about, that the covenants they make in this life will endure for eternity, if they live in harmony therewith. The blessings of God will attend those bonds if worthily observed. The conclusions are that those who do these things through their willingness and righteous desires to observe these commandments, grow in virtue and regard the sacredness of the covenants and generally are more faithful and dependable and worthy than those who marry for time only.

#### *What Others Say About Us*

Now I would like to say another word. Some time ago I noticed a newspaper

article coming from the Coast with regard to eugenics and marital conditions among Christian peoples of this nation. This briefly states that Dr. Paul Popenoe, social expert and director of the Institute of Family Relations, addressing the California division of the American Eugenics Society, referred to an investigation made by Dr. Ellsworth Huntington of Yale University in the following words:

Dr. Ellsworth Huntington at Yale University has calculated the number of great grandchildren likely to represent the present day leaders in the United States. This is based on a study of persons listed in "Who's Who," and therefore represents the fertility only of eminent persons, not of the rank and file. He finds the Mormons have a prospective advantage of more than 400 per cent over their nearest competitors.

From the sample in "Who's Who," 1000 leading adherents of the Mormon faith at the present day will be represented by 10,200 great grandchildren.

A thousand Lutherans will have only 1950 great grandchildren; Baptists 1560; Methodists 1458; Roman Catholics 1310; Congregationalists 1125; Unitarians 1025; Episcopalians 910; Jew 755; and Universalists 500.

Now, that is a challenge to mankind as to what the Latter-day Saints, who are faithful in the observance of this eternal covenant, represent in comparison with mankind generally. Prominent people in other churches, because they have not observed to do these things which make for greater stability, greater love, greater patience, greater consideration, and every other quality, are not able to measure up to the same standards as the Latter-day Saints have achieved.

May the Lord bless us and help every one of us to strive to harmonize our desires with our families to these fine standards that we have referred to that the Lord has established. He is blessing mankind to the extent that we live and keep His commandments, and I testify to you that these principles are true. The Lord is very kind to His people. May His blessings continually attend us. I testify to you that this is His work, the restoration of the Gospel in these days. These brethren who preside over us are men who are guided by the inspiration and power of the Lord. I pray that we may desire to live in such a way that we may be worthy of the trust vested in us, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.