

DISCOURSE

On Celestial Marriage, delivered by Elder ORSON PRATT, in the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Oct. 7th, 1869.

[REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.]

It was announced at the close of the forenoon meeting that I would address the congregation this afternoon upon the subject of Celestial Marriage; I do so with the greatest pleasure.

In the first place, let us inquire whether it is lawful and right according to the Constitution of our country, to examine and practice this Bible doctrine? Our fathers, who framed the Constitution of our country, devised it so as to give freedom of religious worship of the Almighty God; so that all people under our Government should have the inalienable right,—a right by virtue of the Constitution,—to believe in any Bible principle which the Almighty has revealed in any age of the world to the human family. I do not think however that our forefathers, in framing that instrument, intended to embrace all the religions of the world. I mean the idolatrous and pagan religions. They say nothing about those religions in the Constitution; but they give the express privilege in that instrument to all people dwelling under this Government and under the institutions of our country, to believe in all things which the Almighty has revealed to the human family. There is no restriction nor limitation so far as Bible religion is concerned, or any principal or form of religion believed to have emanated from the Almighty; yet they would not admit idolatrous nations to come here and practice their religion, because it is not included in the Bible; it is not the religion of the Almighty. Those people worship idols, the work of their own hands, they have instituted rights and ceremonies pertaining to those idols, in the observance of which they, no doubt, suppose they are worshipping correctly, and sincerely, yet some of them are of the most revolting and barbarous character. Such, for instance, as the offering up of a widow on a funeral pile, as a burnt sacrifice, in order to follow her husband into the eternal worlds. That is no part of the religion mentioned in the Constitution of our country, it is no part of the religion of Almighty God.

But confining ourselves within the limits of the Constitution, and coming back to the religion of the Bible, we have the privilege to believe in the Patriarchal, in the Mosaic, or in the Christian order of things; for the God of the patriarchs, and the God of Moses is also the Christians' God.

It is true that many laws were given under the Patriarchal or Mosaic dispensations, against certain crimes, the penalties for violating which, religious bodies, under our Constitution, have not the right to inflict. The Government has reserved, in its own hands, the power, so far as affixing the penalties of certain crimes is concerned.

In ancient times there was a law strictly enforcing the observance of the Sabbath day, and the man or woman who violated that law was subjected to the punishment of death. Ecclesiastical bodies have the right, under our Government and Constitution, to observe the Sabbath day or to disregard it, but they have not the right to inflict corporeal punishment for its non-observance.

The subject proposed to be investigated this afternoon is that of Celestial Marriage, as believed in by the Latter-day Saints, and which they claim is strictly a Bible doctrine and part of the revealed religion of the Almighty. It is well known by all the Latter-day Saints that we have not derived all our knowledge concerning God, heaven, angels, this life and the life to come entirely from the books of the Bible; yet we believe that all of our religious principles and notions are in accordance with and are sustained by the Bible; consequently, though we believe in new revelation, and believe that God has revealed many things pertaining to our religion, we also believe that He has revealed none that are inconsistent with the worship of Almighty God, a sacred right guaranteed to all religious denominations by the Constitution of our country.

God created man, male and female. He is the Author of our existence. He placed us on this creation. He ordained laws to govern us. He gave to man, whom he created, a helpmeet,—a woman, a wife to be one with him, to be a joy and a comfort to him; and also for another very great and wise purpose,—namely, that the human species might be propagated on this creation, that the earth might teem with population according to the decree of God before the foundation of the world. That the intelligent spirits whom he had formed and created, before this world was rolled into existence, might have their probation, might have an existence in fleshy bodies on this planet, and be governed by laws emanating from their Great Creator. In the breast of male and female He established certain qualities and attributes that never will be eradicated,—namely, love towards each other. Love comes from God. The love which man possesses for the opposite sex came from God. The same God who created the two sexes implanted in the hearts of each love towards the other. What was the object of placing this passion or affection within the hearts of male and female? It was in order to carry out, so far

as this world was concerned, His great and eternal purposes pertaining to the future. But He not only did establish this principle in the heart of man and woman, but gave divine laws to regulate them in relation to this passion or affection, that they might be limited and prescribed in the exercise of it towards each other. He therefore ordained the Marriage Institution. The marriage that was instituted in the first place was between two immortal beings, hence it was marriage for eternity in the very first case which we have recorded for an example. Marriage for eternity was the order God instituted on our globe; as early as the Garden of Eden; as early as the day when our first parents were placed in the garden to keep it and till it, they, as two immortal beings, were united in the bonds of the New and Everlasting Covenant. This was before man fell, before the forbidden fruit was eaten, and before the penalty of death was pronounced upon the heads of our first parents and all their posterity, hence, when God gave to Adam his wife Eve, He gave her to him as an immortal wife, and there was no end contemplated of the relation they held to each other as husband and wife.

By-and-by, after this marriage had taken place, they transgressed the law of God, and by reason of that transgression the penalty of death came, not only upon them, but also upon all their posterity. Death, in its operations, tore asunder, as it were, these two beings who had hitherto been immortal, and if God had not, before the foundation of the world, provided a plan of redemption, they would perhaps have been torn asunder forever; but inasmuch as a plan of redemption had been provided, by which man could be rescued from the effects of the Fall, Adam and Eve were restored to that condition of union, in respect to immortality, from which they had been separated for a short season of time by death. The Atonement reached after them and brought forth their bodies from the dust, and restored them as husband and wife, to all the privileges that were pronounced upon them before the Fall.

That was eternal marriage; that was lawful marriage ordained by God. That was the divine institution which was revealed and practiced in the early period of our globe. How has it been since that day? Mankind have strayed from that order of things, or, at least, they have done so in latter times. We hear nothing among the religious societies of the world which profess to believe in the Bible about this marriage for eternity. It is among the things that are obsolete. Now all marriages are consummated until death only; they do not believe in that great pattern and prototype established in the beginning; hence we never hear of their official characters, whether civil or religious, uniting men and women in the capacity of husband and wife as immortal beings. No, they marry as mortal beings only, and until death does them part.

What is to become of them after death? What will take place among all those nations who have been marrying for centuries for time only? Do both men and women receive a resurrection? Do they come forth with all the various affections, attributes and passions that God gave them in the beginning? Does the male come forth from the grave with all the attributes of a man? Does the female come forth from her grave with all the attributes of a woman? If so, what is their future destiny? Is there no object or purpose in this new creation, save to give them life, a state of existence? or is there a more important object in view, in the mind of God, in thus creating them anew? Will that principle of love which exists now, and which has existed from the beginning, exist after the resurrection? I mean this sexual love. If that existed before the Fall, and if it has existed since then, will it exist in the eternal worlds after the resurrection? This is a very important question to be decided.

We read in the revelations of God that there are various classes of beings in the eternal worlds. There are some who are kings, priests, and Gods, others that are angels; and also among them are the orders denominated celestial, terrestrial, and telestial. God, however, according to the faith of the Latter-day Saints, has ordained that the highest order and class of beings that should exist in the eternal worlds should exist in the capacity of husbands and wives, and that they alone should have the privilege of propagating their species,—intelligent immortal beings. Now it is wise, no doubt, in the Great Creator to thus limit this great and Heavenly principle to those who have arrived or come to the highest state of exaltation, excellency, wisdom, knowledge, power, glory and faithfulness, to dwell in His presence, that they by this means shall be prepared to bring up their spirit offspring in all pure and holy principles in the eternal worlds, in order that they may be made happy. Consequently He does not entrust this privilege of multiplying spirits with the terrestrial or telestial, or the lower order of beings there, nor with angels. But why not? Because they have not proved themselves worthy of this great privilege. We might reason, of the eternal worlds, as some of the enemies of polygamy reason of this state of existence, and say that there are just as many males as females there, some celestial, some terrestrial, and some telestial; and why not have all these paired off, two by two? Because God administers His gifts and His blessings to those who are most faithful, giving them more bountifully to the faithful, and

taking away from the unfaithful that with which they had been entrusted, and which they had not improved upon. That is the order of God in the eternal worlds, and if such an order exists there, it may in a degree exist here.

When the sons and daughters of the most High God come forth in the morning of the resurrection, this principal of love will exist in their bosoms just as it exists here, only intensified according to the increased knowledge and understanding which they possess; hence they will be capacitated to enjoy the relationships of husband and wife, of parents and children in a hundred fold degree greater than they could in mortality. We are not capable, while surrounded with the weaknesses of our flesh, to enjoy these eternal principles in the same degree that will then exist. Shall these principles of conjugal and parental love and affection be thwarted in the eternal worlds? Shall they be rooted out and overcome? No, most decidedly not. According to the religious notions of the world these principles will not exist after the resurrection; but our religion teaches the fallacy of such notions. It is true that we read in the New Testament that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven. These are the words of our Savior when He was addressing himself to a very wicked class of people, the Sadducees, a portion of the Jewish nation, who rejected Jesus, and the counsel of God against their own souls. They had not attained to the blessings and privileges of their fathers, but had apostatized; and Jesus in speaking to them, says that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as the angels of God.

I am talking, to-day, to Latter-day Saints; I am not reasoning with unbelievers. If I were, I should appeal more fully to the Old Testament Scriptures to bring in arguments and testimonies to prove the divine authenticity of polygamic marriages. Perhaps I may touch upon this for a few moments, for the benefit of strangers, should there be any in our midst. Let me say, then, that God's people, under every dispensation since the creation of the world, have, generally, been polygamists. I say this for the benefit of strangers. According to the good old book, called the Bible, when God saw proper to call out Abraham from all the heathen nations, and made him a great man in the world, He saw proper, also, to make him a polygamist, and approbated him in taking unto himself more wives than one. Was it wrong in Abraham to do this thing? If it were, when did God reprove him for so doing? When did He ever reproach Jacob for doing the same thing? Who can find the record in the lids of the Bible of God reproving Abraham, as being a sinner, and having committed a crime, in taking to himself two living wives? No such thing is recorded. He was just as much blessed after doing this thing as before, and more so, for God promised blessings upon the issue of Abraham by his second wife the same as that of the first wife, providing he was equally faithful. This was a proviso in every case.

When we come down to Jacob, the Lord permitted him to take four wives. They are so called in Holy Writ. They are not denominated prostitutes, neither are they called concubines, but they are called wives, legal wives; and to show that God approved of the course of Jacob in taking these wives, He blessed them abundantly, and hearkened to the prayer of the second wife just the same as to the first. Rachel was the second wife of Jacob, and our great mother; for you know that many of the Latter-day Saints by revelation know themselves to be the descendants of Joseph, and he was the son of Rachel, the second wife of Jacob. God in a peculiar manner blessed the posterity of this second wife. Instead of condemning the old patriarch, He ordained that Joseph, the first-born of this second wife, should be considered the first-born of all the twelve tribes, and into his hands was given the double birthright, according to the laws of the ancients. And yet he was the offspring of plurality,—of the second wife of Jacob. Of course, if Reuben, who was indeed, the first-born unto Jacob, had conducted himself properly he might have retained the birthright and the greater inheritance; but he lost that through his transgression, and it was given to a polygamic child, who had the privilege of inheriting the blessing to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills; the great continent of North and South America was conferred upon him. Another proof that God did not disapprove of a man having more wives than one, is to be found in the fact that, Rachel, after she had been a long time barren, prayed to the Lord to give her seed. The Lord hearkened to her cry and granted her prayer; and when she received seed from the Lord by her polygamic husband, she exclaimed, "the Lord hath hearkened unto me and hath answered my prayer." Now do you think the Lord would have done this if he had considered polygamy a crime? Would he have hearkened to the prayer of this woman if Jacob had been living with her in adultery? and he certainly was doing so if the ideas of this generation are correct.

Again, what says the Lord in the days of Moses, under another dispensation? We have seen that in the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He approved of polygamy and blessed His servants who practised it, and also their wives and children. Now, let us come down to the days of Moses. We read that, on a certain occasion the sister of Moses, Miriam, and certain others in the

great congregation of Israel, got very jealous. What were they jealous about? About the Ethiopian woman that Moses had taken to wife, in addition to the daughter of Jethro, whom he had taken before in the land of Midian. How dare the great law-giver, after having committed, according to the ideas of the present generation, a great crime, show his face on Mount Sinai when it was clothed with the glory of the God of Israel? But what did the Lord do in the case of Miriam, for finding fault with her brother Moses? Instead of saying "you are right, Miriam, he has committed a great crime, and no matter how much you speak against him," He smote her with a leprosy the very moment she began to complain, and she was considered unclean for a certain number of days. Here the Lord manifested by the display of a signal judgment, that He disapproved of any one speaking against His servants for taking more wives than one, because it may not happen to suit their notion of things.

I make these remarks and wish to apply them to fault-finders against plural marriages in our day. Are there any Miriams in our congregation to-day, any of those who, professing to belong to the Israel of the latter-days, sometimes find fault with the man of God standing at their head, because he not only believes in, but practices this divine institution of the ancients? If there be such in our midst, I say, remember Miriam the very next time you begin to talk with your neighboring women, or anybody else against this holy principle. Remember the awful curse and judgment that fell on the sister of Moses when she did the same thing, and then fear and tremble before God, lest He, in His wrath, may swear that you shall not enjoy the blessings ordained for those who inherit the highest degree of glory.

Let us pass along to another instance under the dispensation of Moses. The Lord says, on a certain occasion, if a man have married two wives, and he should happen to hate one and love the other, is he to be punished,—cast out and stoned to death as an adulterer? No; instead of the Lord denouncing him as an adulterer because of having two wives, He gave a commandment regulating the matter, so that this principle of hate in the mind of the man towards one of his wives should not control him in the important question of the division of his inheritance among his children, compelling him to give just as much to the son of the hated wife as to the son of the one beloved; and, if the son of the hated woman happened to be the first-born, he should actually inherit the double portion.

Consequently, the Lord approved, not only the two wives, but their posterity also. Now, if the women had not been considered wives by the Lord, their children would have been bastards, and you know that He has said that bastards shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, until the tenth generation, hence you see there is a great distinction between those whom the Lord calls legitimate or legal, and those who were bastards,—begotten in adultery and whoredom. The latter, with their posterity, were shut out of the congregation of the Lord until the tenth generation, while the former were exalted to all the privileges of legitimate birthright.

Again, under that same law and dispensation, we find that the Lord provided for another contingency among the hosts of Israel. In order that the inheritances of the families of Israel might not run into the hands of strangers, the Lord, in the book of Deuteronomy, gives a command that if a man die, leaving a wife, but no issue, his brother shall marry his widow and take possession of the inheritance; and to prevent this inheritance going out of the family a strict command was given that the widow should marry the brother or nearest living kinsman of her deceased husband. The law was in full force at the time of the introduction of Christianity,—a great many centuries after it was given. The reasoning of the Sadducees on one occasion when conversing with Jesus proves that the law was then observed. Said they, "There were seven brethren who all took a certain woman, each one taking her in succession after the death of the other," and they inquired of Jesus which of the seven would have her for a wife in the resurrection. The Sadducees, no doubt, used this figure to prove, as they thought, the fallacy of the doctrine of the resurrection, but it also proves that this law, given by the Creator while Israel walked acceptably before Him, was acknowledged by their wicked descendants in the days of the Savior. I merely quote the passage to show that the law was not considered obsolete at that time. A case like this, when six of the brethren had died, leaving the widow without issue, the seventh, whether married or unmarried, must fulfill this law and take the widow to wife, or lay himself liable to a very severe penalty. What was that penalty? According to the testimony of the law of Moses he would be cursed, for Moses says "cursed be he that doth not all things according as it is written in this book of the law, and let all the people say Amen." There can be no doubt that many men in those days were compelled to be polygamists in the fulfilment of this law, for any man who would not take the childless wife of a deceased brother and marry her, would come under the tremendous curse recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, and all the people would be obliged to sanction the curse, because he would not obey the law of God and become a polygamist. They were not all Congressmen in those days, nor Presidents, nor Presbyterians, nor Method-