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**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
and the "Respect for Marriage Act"**

By Tal Davis

Recently we did a three part article series highlighting the fact that a new temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (formerly known as the Mormons or LDS) is being built in Tallahassee, Florida. Read the full article here:

Part 1:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/06/mormon-temples-part-1-introduction-and-the-history-of-mormon-temples-tal-davis/>

Part 2:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/06/mormon-temples-part-2-temple-endowments-tal-davis/>

Part 3:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/06/mormon-temples-part-3-baptisms-for-the-dead-and-celestial-marriage-tal-davis/>

In Part 3 of the article, we discussed at length the importance in the LDS system for what is called "Celestial Marriage." That distinctly LDS doctrine states that marriage is both temporal (this world) and eternal (in the Celestial Kingdom of heaven). A Celestial Marriage must be sealed in an LDS temple so that when an LDS couple is resurrected from the dead they will remain married for all eternity. They can then procreate spirit children and perhaps even become a god and goddess like their Heavenly Father (Elohim) and his eternal wife (or wives).

This doctrine has been a mainstay of LDS teaching since the time of Joseph Smith, Jr. Nonethe-

less, on September 23, 1995, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published a document stating clearly and concisely the church's official positions on marriage and the family. It was titled *The Family - A Proclamation to the World*. This statement was in response to the changing cultural and social mores on family life and marriage in the USA and other countries. The first two paragraphs of that proclamation read:

We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim 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.

All human beings – male and female – are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

The fourth paragraph reads:

The first commandment that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare 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.

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To read the proclamation in its entirety on the LDS website go here: <https://basic.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng>

So it's clear from the church's leadership that marriage and family are essential to the LDS theological system. Two key elements of that position is that "*Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose*" and that *marriage must "be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife."* Since that proclamation's release in 1995, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), on June 26, 2015, in a 5-4 ruling in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, declared any and all laws not recognizing same-sex marriage, passed at any governmental level, are unconstitutional. This decision essentially legalized same-sex marriage in all fifty U.S. states and D.C. Thus, it became clear that the LDS' stated position is now in conflict with the court's ruling (as is true with most evangelical Christian churches' positions as well).

In the time since that decision, just in case *Obergefell v. Hodges* might later be overturned by a later SCOTUS ruling (as happened in 2022 when SCOTUS overturned the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling regarding abortion), the U.S. Congress has strengthened same-sex legality. "The Respect for Marriage Act," as it was called, was passed by congress and signed by President Joseph Biden on December 13, 2022. That federal statute now requires all states to recognize as legitimate all legal marriages, including same-sex unions performed in any other state. It also repealed the previously passed Defense of Marriage Act of 1996 (signed by President Bill

Clinton) which defined marriage as between a man and woman.

Needless to say these developments have led to divisions among and within American religious groups. The Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and other conservative evangelical groups have issued statements opposing the Respect for Marriage Act on biblical grounds. On the other hand, historically liberal denominations like the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ, lobbied for it, have lauded it, and enthusiastically support it. Leaders in those denominations have justified their liberal LGBT positions by reinterpreting, or just ignoring, specific passages in the Bible condemning homosexual behavior.

The United Methodist Church is currently undergoing a major split over LGBT issues in their denomination. A large number of conservative local congregations have expressed their desire to withdraw from the UMC in light of the growing consensus in the denomination to endorse same-sex marriages and ministerial ordinations.

But what about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Their leadership's response was somewhat puzzling. On Tuesday, November 15, 2022, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints released the following statement in anticipation of the passage of the Respect for Marriage law:

The doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints related to marriage between a man and a woman is well known and will remain unchanged.

We are grateful for the continuing efforts of those who work to ensure the Respect for Marriage Act includes ap-

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appropriate religious freedom protections while respecting the law and preserving the rights of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters.

We believe this approach is the way forward. As we work together to preserve the principles and practices of religious freedom together with the rights of LGBTQ individuals, much can be accomplished to heal relationships and foster greater understanding.

In its statement the church reiterates its doctrinal position that marriage is between a man and woman (see above). The second paragraph commends those in congress who were working to maintain religious freedom while "...preserving the rights of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters." The third paragraph says this approach works "...together to preserve the principles and practices of religious freedom together with the rights of LGBTQ individuals...." This could be interpreted to mean that the LDS church would not publically oppose the law, but wanted some clear guarantees against being forced to legitimize such unions within their fellowship.

But what about the future? Will the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continue to stand by its stated doctrines on marriage? The LDS believes that its President, who is considered a living prophet, may receive new revelations from God that may even contradict old ones found in the church's canonized scriptures called the Four Standard Works (*the KJV Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price*). The church has a record of revising its positions in the face of cultural and legal changes in society. Twice in the church's 193 year history, strong legal and societal pressure led to two presidents conveniently getting just such divine revelations.

The first such revelation was announced on October 6, 1890, by then LDS President Wilford Woodruff. That revelation officially ended the Mormon practice of polygamy after the U.S. government ordered it stopped in its territories.

The second major new revelation was announced on June 1, 1978, by then President Spencer W. Kimball. That revelation revoked what had been the church's traditional doctrine that men of African descent were ineligible for the church's priesthood (which was opened to other "worthy" Mormon men). Again, the pressure from societal forces and from within the church itself obviously led to that historic proclamation that all "worthy LDS men," regardless of race, can be priests (but still not women).

So this LDS historical record leads us to ask a weighty question: How will the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints respond in the future if societal pressure is raised significantly to embrace same-sex marriage and homosexuality in general? We can foresee a future time when another LDS President may feel led to get another revelation changing the church's doctrines. The church has already shown that its "revealed truths" from God (as Mormons understand him) are not fixed and can be revoked or revised if and when necessary. That does not seem to attest well for the immutability of the God of Mormonism if he can change his mind on what were thought to be eternal truths. (To read a thorough explanation of the historic Mormon doctrine of God go here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2019/07/why-i-am-not-a-mormon-part-2>.)

Polls taken in the last few years already show that nearly 70% of Americans favor legal same-sex marriage. That percentage is much higher among younger groups surveyed. It is certainly probable that if that trend

continues, Christian Americans (and Mormons) may find themselves increasingly pressured to accept and follow the changing societal norms. We can only hope that all Bible believing Christians, biblically based churches, and theologically conservative denominations, will not bend to the growing pagan and secular mores present in American culture. Unlike the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we do not have a "living prophet" who can change things when necessary to take the heat off. The Bible must now and always stand as the absolute basis for our faith and moral standards, regardless of what society does or does not affirm.

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