

## Divine Love in the Father's Plan

# Divine Love in the Father's Plan

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The purpose of the doctrine and policies of this restored Church is to prepare God's children for salvation in the celestial kingdom and for exaltation in its highest degree.

The gospel plan shows our Heavenly Father's love for all His children. To understand this, we must seek to understand His plan and His commandments. He loves His children so much that He gave His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior and Redeemer, to suffer and die for us. In the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have a unique understanding of our Heavenly Father's plan. This gives us a different way of viewing the purpose of mortal life, the divine judgment that follows it, and the ultimate glorious destiny of all of God's children.

I love you, my brothers and sisters. I love all of God's children. When Jesus was asked, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" He taught that to love God and to love our neighbors are the first of God's great commandments.<sup>1</sup> Those commands are first because they invite us to grow spiritually by seeking to imitate God's love for us. I wish we all had a better understanding of the loving doctrine and policies that our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, have established in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What I say here seeks to clarify how God's love explains that doctrine and the Church's inspired policies.

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A common misunderstanding of the judgment that ultimately follows mortal life is that good people go to a place called *heaven* and bad people go to an everlasting place called *hell*. This erroneous assumption of only two ultimate destinations implies that those who cannot keep all the commandments required for heaven will necessarily be forever destined for hell.

A loving Heavenly Father has a better plan for His children. The revealed doctrine of the restored Church of Jesus Christ teaches that *all the children of God*—with exceptions too limited to consider here—will finally wind up in a kingdom of *glory*.<sup>2</sup> "In my Father's house are many mansions,"<sup>3</sup> Jesus taught. From modern revelation we know that those mansions are in three different kingdoms of glory. In the Final

Judgment each of us will be judged according to our deeds and the desires of our hearts.<sup>4</sup> Before that, we will need to suffer for our unrepented sins. The scriptures are clear on that.<sup>5</sup> Then our righteous Judge will grant us residence in one of those kingdoms of glory. Thus, as we know from modern revelation, all “shall be judged ... , and every man shall receive according to his own works, his own dominion, in the mansions which are prepared.”<sup>6</sup>

The Lord has chosen to reveal comparatively little about two of these kingdoms of glory. In contrast, the Lord has revealed much about the highest kingdom of glory, which the Bible describes as the “glory of the sun.”<sup>7</sup>

In the “celestial” glory<sup>8</sup> there are three degrees, or levels.<sup>9</sup> The highest of these is exaltation in the celestial kingdom, wherein we may become like our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. To help us develop the godly attributes and the change in nature necessary to realize our divine potential, the Lord has revealed doctrine and established commandments based on eternal law. This is what we teach in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because the purpose of the doctrine and policies of this restored Church is to prepare God’s children for salvation in the celestial glory and, more particularly, for exaltation in its highest degree.

The covenants made and the blessings promised to the faithful in the temples of God are the key. This explains our worldwide building of temples, about which the choir has sung so beautifully. Some are puzzled at this emphasis, not understanding that the covenants and ordinances of the temple guide us toward achieving exaltation. This can be understood only in the context of the revealed truth of *three* degrees of glory. Because of our Heavenly Father’s great love for all of His children, He has provided other kingdoms of glory—as Elder Quentin L. Cook explained yesterday—all of which are more wonderful than we can comprehend.<sup>10</sup>

The Atonement of Jesus Christ makes all of this possible. He has revealed that He “glorifies the Father, and *saves all the works of his hands*.”<sup>11</sup> That salvation is granted in different kingdoms of glory. We know from modern revelation that “all kingdoms have a law given.”<sup>12</sup> Significantly:

“He who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.

“And he who cannot abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory.

“And he who cannot abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory.”<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the kingdom of glory we receive in the Final Judgment is determined by the laws we choose to abide by in our Heavenly Father’s loving plan. Under that plan there are multiple kingdoms so that all of His children can be assigned to a kingdom where they can “abide.”

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The teachings and policies of the Lord's restored Church apply these eternal truths in a way that can be fully understood only in the context of our Heavenly Father's loving plan for *all* of His children.

Thus, we honor individual agency. Most are aware of this Church's great efforts to promote religious freedom. These efforts are in furtherance of our Heavenly Father's plan. We seek to help *all* of His children—not just our own members—enjoy the precious freedom to choose.

Similarly, we are sometimes asked why we send missionaries to so many nations, even among Christian populations. We are also asked why we give enormous humanitarian aid to persons who are not members of our Church without linking this to our missionary efforts. We do this because the Lord has taught us to esteem all of His children as our brothers and sisters, and we want to share our spiritual and temporal abundance with everyone.

Eternal doctrine also provides a distinctive perspective on children. Through this perspective we see the bearing and nurturing of children as part of the divine plan. It is a joyful and sacred duty of those given the power to participate in it. Therefore, we are commanded to teach and contend for principles and practices that provide the best conditions for the development and happiness of children under God's plan.

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Finally, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is properly known as a family-centered Church. But not well understood is the reality that our family-centeredness is not limited to mortal relationships. Eternal relationships are also fundamental to our theology. The mission of the restored Church is to help all the children of God qualify for what God desires as their ultimate destiny. By the redemption provided through the Atonement of Christ, all may attain eternal life (exaltation in the celestial kingdom), which Mother Eve declared “God giveth unto all the obedient.”<sup>14</sup> This is more than salvation. President Russell M. Nelson has reminded us that “in God's eternal plan, salvation is an individual matter; [but] exaltation is a family matter.”<sup>15</sup>

Fundamental to us is God's revelation that exaltation can be attained only through faithfulness to the covenants of an eternal marriage between a man and a woman.<sup>16</sup> That divine doctrine is why we teach that “gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”<sup>17</sup>

That is also why the Lord has required His restored Church to oppose social and legal pressures to retreat from His doctrine of marriage between a man and a woman, to oppose changes that homogenize the differences between men and women or confuse or alter gender.

The restored Church's positions on these fundamentals frequently provoke opposition. We understand that. Our Heavenly Father's plan allows for "opposition in all things,"<sup>18</sup> and Satan's most strenuous opposition is directed at whatever is most important to that plan. Consequently, he seeks to oppose progress toward exaltation by distorting marriage, discouraging childbearing, or confusing gender. However, we know that in the long run, the divine purpose and plan of our loving Heavenly Father will not be changed. Personal circumstances may change, and God's plan assures that in the long run, the faithful who keep their covenants will have the opportunity to qualify for every promised blessing.<sup>19</sup>

A uniquely valuable teaching to help us prepare for eternal life, "the greatest of all the gifts of God,"<sup>20</sup> is the 1995 proclamation on the family.<sup>21</sup> Its declarations are, of course, different from some current laws, practices, and advocacy, such as cohabitation and same-sex marriage. Those who do not fully understand the Father's loving plan for His children may consider this family proclamation no more than a changeable statement of policy. In contrast, we affirm that the family proclamation, founded on irrevocable doctrine, defines the kind of family relationships where the most important part of our eternal development can occur.

That is the context for the unique doctrine and policies of the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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In many relationships and circumstances in mortal life, each of us must live with differences. As followers of Christ who should love our fellow men, we should live peacefully with those who do not believe as we do. We are all children of a loving Heavenly Father. For all of us, He has destined life after death and, ultimately, a kingdom of glory. God desires all of us to strive for His highest possible blessings by keeping His highest commandments, covenants, and ordinances, all of which culminate in His holy temples being built throughout the world. We must seek to share these truths of eternity with others. But with the love we owe to all of our neighbors, we always accept their decisions. As a Book of Mormon prophet taught, we must press forward, having "a love of God and of all men."<sup>22</sup>

As President Russell M. Nelson declared in our last conference: "There has never been a time in the history of the world when knowledge of our Savior is more personally vital and relevant to *every human soul*. ... The pure doctrine of Christ is powerful. It changes the life of everyone who understands it and seeks to implement it in his or her life."<sup>23</sup>

May we all implement that sacred doctrine in our own lives, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. See Matthew 22:36–40.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:40–43.
3. John 14:2.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 137:9.
5. See 2 Nephi 9:10–12; Doctrine and Covenants 19:4, 15, 17; 138:57–59; Bible Dictionary, “Hell.”
6. Doctrine and Covenants 76:111.
7. 1 Corinthians 15:41; see also Doctrine and Covenants 76:96.
8. 1 Corinthians 15:40; see also Joseph Smith Translation (in 1 Corinthians 15:40, footnote *a*).
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:89.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 76:43; emphasis added.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 88:36.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 88:22–24.
14. Moses 5:11; see also Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
15. Russell M. Nelson, “Salvation and Exaltation,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 10.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–3; “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
17. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
18. 2 Nephi 2:11.
19. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 72–75; see also *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 38.1.4, ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
21. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
22. 2 Nephi 31:20.
23. Russell M. Nelson, “Pure Truth, Pure Doctrine, and Pure Revelation,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2021, 6.