

Why Adultery is of a Far Greater Concern than Polygamy

Prepared by
Dwight Burford
December 12, 2020

D&C 111

- 4a **All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled.**
- 4b *Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.*
- 4c *It is not right to persuade a woman to be baptized contrary to the will of her husband, **neither is it lawful to influence her to leave her husband.***

D&C 63:5

- 5a **And verily I say unto you, as I have said before, He that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery in their hearts, they shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear:**
- 5b *wherefore, I, the Lord, have said that the fearful, and the unbelieving, and all liars, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie, and the whoremonger, and the sorcerer, **shall have their part in that lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.***
- 5c *Verily I say, that **they shall not have part in the first resurrection.***

Polygamy or adultery? Which is a greater *crime*¹ in the sight of God? Answering this question honestly and responsibly requires recognizing that polygamy involves the making of marriage covenants, while adultery involves dishonoring and sinning against marriage covenants. Thus, adultery receives a far greater punishment from God than does polygamy.

Recognizing this difference is important when ministering the gospel to polygamists who 1) are initially part of religions and cultures in which polygamy has historically been considered *lawful*, and 2) have not sufficiently understood and/or obeyed *the fullness of the gospel* of Jesus Christ. This paper has been written to highlight why requiring such people to divorce prior to baptism is not *lawful* based on the established *law of marriage* recorded in the Doctrine & Covenants (D&C) and why it can lead to them suffering *the second death*.²

For clarification, once individuals initially involved in polygamy have heard and understood the gospel in its *fullness*, it is not *lawful* for them to begin new polygamous relationships.³ While all prior *legal* contracts of marriage *should be held sacred and fulfilled*, if such people

¹ For those who know the commandment not to practice polygamy, it is a gross crime (Jacob 2:45-66 with Alma 19:5-20 & I John 5:16). On the other hand, those who knew no such law, they will be judged less severely by God for practicing polygamy (Luke 12:56-58 with Alma 19:103 & Moroni 8:26).

² D&C 111:4a-4c with D&C 63:5a-5c

³ D&C 49:3a-3c with D&C 111:4a-4c

become involved in new polygamous relationships, they will be dealt with by the Lord as adulterers.⁴

If Any Shall Commit Adultery in Their Hearts

In 2008, I wrote two study letters on the topic of polygamy and adultery.^{5,6} Recently, when reviewing those articles, I again received the confirming testimony that God was and is pleased with what I wrote in those previous study letters.⁷ With this same assurance, the Lord continues to affirm to me that I have correctly and wisely followed His instruction given in these verses:

D&C 46

- 3b *... ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally, and that which the Spirit testifies unto you, even so I would that you should do in all holiness of heart,*
3c *walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men, for some are of men, and others of devils.*

Micah 6:8,9

- 8 *He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*
9 *The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name; hear ye the rod [the Word], and who hath appointed it.*

It is with this same assurance from the Lord that I have prepared this third study letter on how to deal wisely and honorably with polygamists, this time by contrasting polygamy directly with adultery. To make this contrast, I am again drawing chiefly upon the scriptures.

The Lord began teaching me in earnest in late 2007 and early 2008 about how to handle polygamy justly and mercifully among polygamous peoples new to the gospel. Concerns over the legalities of divorce among them were and continue to be greatly overshadowed by the far graver concern to the Lord, that of adultery. By His Spirit, the Lord continues to assure me that He judges adultery more severely than polygamy based on covenant considerations.⁸

Please allow me to clarify this understanding and the need to deal wisely with polygamy and adultery among converts new to the restored gospel. As outlined in my prior writings on polygamy, the Lord has taught me specific reasons why there is a heightened concern with adultery among divorced polygamists. This concern can be understood by reviewing the following portion of *the law* the Lord gave to His restored church in February of 1831:

D&C 42

- 7d *Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shall cleave unto her and none else; and he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her, shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not, he shall be cast out.*

⁴ D&C 42:7d,7e & D&C 63:3a-5c

⁵ https://www.hisworkmanship.net/index_files/StudyLetters/PolygamyAndDivorce20July08.pdf

⁶ <https://www.hisworkmanship.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/PolygamyAndLamanites20July08ARev.pdf>

⁷ cf. Hebrews 11:1-6 with D&C 63:3a-5c

⁸ Remembering John 7:24 with Alma 19:78 & II Nephi 12:77.

7e *Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that committeth adultery and repenteth not, shall be cast out; but he that hath committed adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsaketh it, and doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive; **but if he doeth it again, he shall not be forgiven, but shall be cast out.***

At that time, the members of the church did not sufficiently heed the Lord's warning about adultery. Therefore, He addressed this sin even more vigorously a second time in a revelation given in August of the same year. Here, the Lord connected adultery to *the second death* – not just to unrepentant adulterers and adulteresses being *cast out* of the church:

D&C 63

5a *And verily I say unto you, as I have said before, He that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery **in their hearts, they shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear:***

5b ***wherefore**, I, the Lord, have said that the fearful, and the unbelieving, and all liars, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie, and the whoremonger, and the sorcerer, **shall have their part in that lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.***

5c *Verily I say, that they **shall not** have part in the first resurrection.*

These words of instruction and clarification are still a part of *the law* by which the Lord governs His church today. Therefore, it is essential that we seriously heed the warnings outlined in **D&C 42:7d,e** and **D&C 63:5a-c**. Why? Adultery is a pervasive problem in our society and among many members of the church today, especially spiritual adultery, due in part to the widespread availability of pornography and related content on the Internet. Rules and resolutions of the church cannot address this issue more appropriately or powerfully than can God's word. To correctly handle polygamy and adultery, then, takes a disciplined effort to humbly walk with the Lord according to His grace and the instruction He has given in His scriptures.^{9,10}

Dealing Justly and Mercifully with Polygamous Peoples

In my 2008 study letter on the advisability of legislating divorce to address polygamy among people new to the gospel,¹¹ I included a series of concerns about men and women who divorce to join the church by leaving polygamous relationships. A significant concern exists when a man divorces a woman but continues to interact with her to help care for their children, for example. They will be sorely tempted with adultery, especially when in the prime of their lives – no matter their stated resolve or convictions.

This temptation will be much greater than had they never known each other intimately by being married and conceiving children together before they divorce and are baptized. This can be especially true for people new to the faith who live in remote settings and/or in close quarters as examples. Consequently, it would be far wiser for them to fulfill their lawful marriage contracts per **D&C 111:4a** than it would be for them to divorce and then be sorely

⁹ https://www.hisworkmanship.net/index_files/Books/Healed/Healed070406P.pdf

¹⁰ cf. **D&C 46:1a-4b** & **Micah 6:8,9** with **D&C 42:7d,7e** and **D&C 63:5a-5c**

¹¹ https://www.hisworkmanship.net/index_files/StudyLetters/PolygamyAndDivorce20July08.pdf

tempted with adultery.¹² If they succumb to this temptation, they will not have the Lord's Spirit as He has stated in [D&C 42:7d,e](#) and [D&C 63:5a-c](#). Even more seriously, if they fail to repent and forsake their adulterous affair(s), they will be in jeopardy of *the second death*.¹³

Keeping polygamy and adultery in their proper perspectives in all such cases is greatly helped by remembering the faithfulness of the Lord and how He is currently in the process of keeping His covenants with the House of Israel, a family born of polygamy. Our God is doing so by *setting His hand a second time* to restore these, His ancient covenant people, to their covenant lands in the latter days as one people and one family.¹⁴

Jacob, the polygamist whom God gave the covenant name Israel, blessed his family by and according to the Lord's Spirit and His covenants with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac.¹⁵ When these blessings are fully realized, his household, the house of Israel, will be filled with the Spirit of the Lord.¹⁶ Great care must therefore be taken in how we minister to the children of Israel in light of God's covenants so we do not jeopardize this promised blessing. Thus, *all legal contracts of marriage*¹⁷ should be fulfilled even as God is faithfully keeping His covenant with the polygamous house of Israel – as evidenced by His bringing them back into their covenant lands as one family.¹⁸

In stark contrast to this move of God's Spirit to restore the house of Israel in these latter days, the passages of scriptures from [D&C 42:7d,e](#) and [D&C 63:5a-c](#) quoted above make it abundantly clear that unrepentant adulterers and adulteresses who die in their sin will suffer *the second death*, notwithstanding their entering into a covenant with God through baptism! In fact, entering into a baptismal covenant makes adultery an even greater offense before God.¹⁹ At the same time, not being baptized means a person cannot enter the kingdom of God, let alone see it.²⁰ Therefore, it is essential that all cases of adultery be handled with great care by God's commandments and established church law under the governance of the Holy Spirit and the scriptures that He has inspired.²¹

Having this contrast in mind, consider anew a polygamous man who is taught the gospel and then divorces all but one of his wives before being baptized into the church. If he then commits adultery through lust in his heart for one or more of his former polygamous wives, this man is now under the strict condemnation recorded in [D&C 42:7d,e](#) and [D&C 63:5a-c](#) and will be dealt with accordingly by the Lord. For priesthood to ignore or mishandle the

¹² cf. I Corinthians 7:1-5 with I Corinthians 7:25-40

¹³ Helaman 5:73,74, D&C 63:5a-c, Revelation 21:8 & D&C 42:7d,e with Luke 12:56,57 & John 8:2-12

¹⁴ Isaiah 11:11, Jeremiah 31:10-36, Ezekiel 37:1-28 & II Nephi 7:12-16 with Genesis 35:22-26 & Exodus 1:1-5

¹⁵ cf. Genesis 46:2-30, Genesis 47:28-31, Genesis 48:1-28, Genesis 49:1-33, etc. with Genesis 50:34-36 & Alma 21:54-60; see also Genesis 12:1,2, Genesis 13:12-15, Genesis 14:40, Genesis 15:1-22 with Genesis 22:20-22 & Genesis 26:1-6

¹⁶ Ezekiel 37:1-28 & Joel 2:23-32 with Jeremiah 31:10-37

¹⁷ D&C 111:4a-4c

¹⁸ cf. Isaiah 50:1,2 with Isaiah 11:1-16

¹⁹ cf. Luke 12:50-57 with II Peter 2:9-22, Hebrews 6:4-8, Hebrews 10:26-39, Alma 14:58, etc.

²⁰ John 3:3-7 & Mark 16:15 with D&C 17:7a-d & D&C 17:18a-c

²¹ cf. John 8:2-12 & Luke 7:36-50 with Matthew 5:29-36

strict words of the Lord in these and the many related scriptures can only lead to further condemnation for all involved.²²

No Greater Burden Than These Necessary Things

Each time I have asked the Lord for understanding and guidance from His Spirit and the scriptures on how to avoid the condemnation discussed at the close of the prior section, He has referred me to the following passage as being wise counsel in this matter:

Acts 15

28 *For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you **no greater burden than these necessary things**;*

29 *That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.*

This counsel is especially important given the fact that the apostles who participated in setting this instruction in place are the same ones who will judge all Israel,²³ God's ancient covenant people,²⁴ when our Lord returns in glory to reward every person according to their works.²⁵

In conjunction with **Acts 15:28,29**, the Lord also impresses upon me the following instruction from Paul's first letter to Timothy.

I Timothy 3

2 *A bishop then must be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach;*

3 *Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*

4 *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;*

5 *(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*

6 *Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

...

12 *Let the deacons be **the husbands of one wife**, ruling their children and their own houses will.*

This passage of scripture plainly reveals that polygamous men are not to bear priesthood responsibilities in the church. In telling Timothy priesthood members should only have one wife, Paul revealed he recognized that polygamy existed in his day, including potentially among members of the church. For while Paul made it clear that priesthood are not to be polygamists, he does not say the same about men who do not hold a priesthood office.

Ultimately, Paul's writings do not show that he legislated or commanded that new converts among polygamous people divorce all but their first wife. Neither did James nor did the other apostles legislate divorce among polygamists new to the gospel – even though polygamy

²² cf. D&C 2:1a-2b with D&C 58:6i & D&C 116:2a,2b

²³ See D&C 28:3a,b with I Nephi 3:115,116 & Mormon 1:82-84; Revelation 22:11-14 & II Corinthians 5:9-11

²⁴ cf. II Nephi 12:74-78 with I Nephi 5:132

²⁵ Alma 19:64-71 with D&C 28:3a,b

evidently existed among Gentile converts at the time. We would be wise, then, to follow their lead by taking care not to place any further prescribed *burden*²⁶ on new converts from polygamous societies and cultures other than what is clearly written in the scriptures. This includes the instruction that has been given to us in these latter days in the Book of Mormon and in the Doctrine & Covenants regarding polygamy and adultery.²⁷

For They Watch for Your Souls, as They That Must Give Account

Back in 2008, when I was first led to write on the topics of polygamy and adultery, the Lord impressed upon me that He holds priesthood and church legislative bodies accountable for 1) the legislation they enact, and 2) how that legislation impacts other people, especially those new to the gospel. The following scripture is directly relevant to priesthood:

Hebrews 13

17 *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.*

Each priesthood member must keep this in mind. For he will be required to give an account of both his ministry and care of the Lord's people before Him. For priesthood to place new or prospective church members at a greater risk of adultery, as described in the prior sections, has a potentially severe eternal consequence for both the priesthood member(s) and the polygamists involved.

It follows then that all priesthood members must come to understand why the Lord deals with polygamists differently than adulterers and adulteresses. They must also understand why legislating divorce as a prerequisite to baptism among polygamous people new to the gospel is not in keeping with the wisdom which is from above²⁸ or with *the law* of the church on marriage recorded in D&C 111:4a-4c with D&C 42:7d-7e.

Most importantly, priesthood members must understand that mandating divorce between polygamous peoples before they are offered baptism places them at a much greater risk of *the second death* compared to encouraging them to faithfully keep their established marriage contracts. A lack of such understanding, particularly of how God deals with adultery (both spiritually and physically) versus polygamy, holds potential to not only compromise a priesthood member(s) and his ministry, but to also put him in jeopardy of God's judgments.

Please remember the importance of these statements. All priesthood and church members involved in church councils and conferences must know that they will be required to give an account unto the Lord for how the legislated requirements they enact impacts others, especially new converts. If a position or ruling by a given priesthood and/or legislative body leads to the loss of souls in *the second death*, I am compelled to state again, and emphatically so, that the Lord fully intends to strictly take up the matter with those priesthood and

²⁶ Acts 15:28,29

²⁷ e.g. Jacob 2:30-65, D&C 42:7d-7e & D&C 49:3a-3c

²⁸ cf. James 3:13-18 with D&C 3:9d

members of those church councils and conferences. For they are to be judged by how they have judged their fellowmen according to His words.²⁹ God is not a respecter of persons.³⁰

In no way am I condoning or advocating condoning polygamy. The fact that adultery is a much greater concern than polygamy, however, makes it imperative that priesthood and the members of all legislative bodies in the church who take up the task of dealing with polygamy must do so with great care. It is my understanding that the Lord is calling upon His church to better understand His judgments so they may more appropriately deal with these subjects in full cooperation with His Spirit.³¹ His objective and thus the objective of His church is to bring people everywhere, especially the children of the house of Israel, to a sound understanding and working knowledge of His covenants and commandments.³²

Such a discussion on polygamy and adultery as this may seem like a minor or remote concern to many church members. However, these two issues have impacted the overall work and progress of the church since its organization and will continue to hinder the church until both issues are addressed correctly before the Lord.³³ Just keeping the church free of polygamy is not sufficient to address God's commands regarding marriage, that a man shall have but one wife and no concubines.³⁴

If the methods used to free the church of polygamy actually increase the incidents of adultery (imagined or physically) among church members and the surrounding communities, then such methods are in error and must be corrected. For, until adultery and polygamy are successfully and consistently dealt with, *the work of preparation and perfection* of church will continue to move forward *slowly*.^{35,36}

Briefly Concluded

When ministering to polygamous people new to the gospel, members of the priesthood and members of the church must take great care not to place polygamous husbands and wives in jeopardy of *the second death* (due to adultery) by requiring them to divorce before allowing them to be baptized. At the same time, we must warn all who are baptized into the church that if they break their baptismal covenant by beginning new polygamous relationships, they will be treated as adulterers and adulteresses by the Lord.³⁷ Children raised in polygamous families must also be warned that it is not lawful for them to enter into polygamous marriages.³⁸ While marriage is ordained of God, according to the Lord's commands and church law in the scriptures, it is only lawful for a man and a woman to have but one spouse.³⁹

²⁹ D&C 1:2e, II Nephi 6:36,37 & III Nephi 6:14 with Hebrews 13:17 & John 8:1-12

³⁰ D&C 1:6a with D&C 38:4c

³¹ cf. D&C 43:3e with II Peter 3:9,10

³² Matthew 28:17-19

³³ <https://www.hisworkmanship.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/PolygamyAndLamanites20July08ARev.pdf>

³⁴ Jacob 2:31-38 with Jacob 2:44

³⁵ cf. D&C 140:5c with D&C 1:5f,g & D&C 63:9a-9c

³⁶ Mosiah 11:129-202 with Alma 2:8-23

³⁷ D&C 42:7d,7e & D&C 63:5a-5c with D&C 49:3a-3c

³⁸ cf. D&C 68:4a-4d with Deuteronomy 6:1-9

³⁹ See qualifications included in D&C 111:4b with Matthew 5:35,36 & Matthew 19:7-11.