

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 131

As was the case with D&C 130, this section is a composite of subjects.

1 IN the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; **2** And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; **3** And if he does not, he cannot obtain it. **4** He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.

v1-4 These verses state within the Celestial Kingdom there are three major divisions, the topmost of which must be achieved by Eternal Marriage.

That v. 1 is referring to the Celestial Kingdom in specific and not the Three Degrees of Glory in general (as the word "celestial" means "heavenly" some questions arise as to whether this is not simply a restate of the substance of D&C 76 where three degrees of glory are presented as opposed to the new revelation of additional divisions in the Celestial Kingdom in particular) is necessarily implied by the substance of v. 2. Verse 2 states that in order to enter into the highest degree one must have an eternal marriage. But, this is not necessary to gain access to the Celestial Kingdom alone as unmarried ministering angels will be present there also, cf. D&C 132:16-17. Thus, this passage must be referring very specifically to three additional degrees within the Celestial Kingdom proper.

While the topmost degree is defined, and the lowest degree can be inferred as relating to celestial quality persons who were not eternally married, there remains the question as to what the middle degree of the celestial kingdom is composed of.

5 (May 17th, 1843.) The more sure word of prophecy means a man's knowing that he is sealed up unto eternal life, by revelation and the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy Priesthood. **6** It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.

v5-6 The making of one's calling and election sure. For the KJV on 2 Peter 1:19 "more sure word of prophecy" modern translations typically render it something like "the word of prophecy made sure". What Peter is referring to is the making the promises from the scriptures (i.e., the word of prophecy) sure for one's self by maintaining an ever more godly walk and ultimately the personal revelation that makes the promise offered in the Scriptures certain and sure. Participating in the various ordinances administered by the Priesthood are obviously required, and these various ordinances make certain conditional promises which echo and are based upon the various Scriptural promises.

v6 The reference to not being saved in ignorance uses the term ignorance in the sense of deliberate ignorance and not any kind of honest or inadvertent lack of knowledge. For example, consider Smith's use of the term in the following:

There are a great many wise men and women too in our midst who are too wise to be taught; therefore they must die in their ignorance, and in the resurrection they will find their mistake. Many seal up the door of heaven by saying, So far God may reveal and I will believe.

All men who become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ will have to receive the fulness of the ordinances of his kingdom; and those who will not receive all the ordinances will come short of the fullness of that glory, if they do not lose the whole. (Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith, page 309)

7 There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; 8 We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter.

v7-8 Spirits are composed of matter, only the matter is of a finer nature than that which composes our physical bodies.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 131

Excerpt from History of the Church

Except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity, while in this probation, by the power and authority of the Holy Priesthood, they will cease to increase when they die; that is, they will not have any children after the resurrection. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 5, page 391)

Excerpt from Journal of Discourses

The increase of those who are exalted in that kingdom will endure for ever; and the bringing forth of children will not be attended with sorrow, pain and distress as it is here: these evils have come in consequence of the fall of man and the transgression by him of God's holy laws. (Orson Pratt, Journal of Discourses, volume 15, page 320.)

Excerpt from Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith

Section 131 consists of a variety of doctrinal statements made by Joseph Smith while visiting members of the Church in Ramus, Illinois. The Prophet's personal scribe, William Clayton, accompanied him on this occasion and preserved Joseph Smith's remarks in his personal diary

On 16 May 1843 Joseph Smith, William Clayton, George Miller, Eliza Partridge, Lydia Partridge, and Lorin Walker traveled to visit the Saints in Ramus. The Prophet and William Clayton spent the evening with Benjamin F. Johnson and the others at the home of William G. Perkins. Before retiring, the Prophet gave Benjamin F. Johnson and his wife some instructions on priesthood, which included verses 1-4 of section 131. Putting his hand on the knee of William Clayton, the Prophet said, "Your life is hid with Christ in God, and so is many others." Addressing Benjamin F., Joseph said: Nothing but the unpardonable sin can prevent him [Clayton] from inheriting eternal glory for he is sealed up by the power of the priesthood unto eternal life having taken the step which is necessary for that purpose." The Prophet continued,

Except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity while in this probation by the power and authority of the Holy priesthood they will cease to increase when they die (ie. they will not have any children in the resurrection, but those who are married by the power & authority of the priesthood in this life & continue

without committing the sin against the Holy Ghost will continue to increase & have children in the celestial glory. The unpardonable sin is to shed innocent blood or be accessory thereto. All other sins will be visited with judgement in the flesh and the spirit being delivered to the buffetings of satan untill the day of the Lord Jesus.... Prest J. said that the way he knew in whom to confide, God told him in whom he might place confidence. He also said that in the celestial glory there was three heavens or degrees, and in order to obtain the highest a man must enter into this order of the priesthood and if he dont he cant obtain it. He may enter into the other but that is the end of his kingdom he cannot have increase.

The following morning, 17 May 1843, the Prophet preached from the first chapter of 2 Peter, when verses 5-6 were recorded,

At 10 [a.m.] Prest. J. preached on 2nd Peter ch 1. He shewed that knowledge is power & the man who has the most knowledge has the greatest power. Also that salvation means a mans being placed beyond the powers of all his enemies. He said the more sure word of prophecy meant, a mans knowing that he was sealed up unto eternal life by revelation & the spirit of prophecy through the power of the Holy priesthood. He also showed that it was impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance. Paul had seen the third heavens and I more. Peter penned the most sublime language of any of the apostles.

In the evening of the same day, the Prophet went to hear Samuel A. Prior, a Methodist preacher. At the close of the preacher's remarks, Joseph Smith offered some corrections that included verses 7-8:

P.M. pres. J. attended the City council & afterwards rode out with B.F. Johnsons family. In the evening we went to hear a Methodist preacher lecture. After he got through Pres. J. offered some corrections as follows. The 7th verse of C[hapter] 2 Genesis ought to read God breathed into Adam his spirit or breath of life, but when the word "ruach" applies to Eve it should be translated lives. Speaking of eternal duration of matter he said. There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter but is more fine or pure and can only be discerned by purer eyes We cant see it but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it

is all matter. The gentleman seemed pleased & said he should visit Nauvoo immediately.

(Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith)

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