Marriage in the Lord’s Way, Part One

By Elder Cree-L Kofford
Of the Seventy
Ensign, June 1998, pp. 7-12

The promised blessings that come from being married in the temple benefit us in both time and eternity.

Dear Kerstyn and Tom, I was delighted to receive the announcement of your upcoming wedding. I was even more delighted to see that you have chosen to start your life together in the temple of the Lord. Congratulations! You have made the right choice.

You’ll love it in the temple—it’s like no other place you have ever been. Just think, you have been invited into the Lord’s house—His house upon the earth! His house of prayer, His house of fasting, His house of faith, His house of learning, His house of glory, His house of order—yes, the house of God (see D&C 88:119).

Physical Beauty
You will be impressed by the understated elegance of His house. I have always felt that the magnificent simplicity of the temple tells a lot about its owner. The feeling there reminds me of how I feel when I sit in the mountains and watch a beautiful stream tumble over the rocks above, winding its way to the valley below. It’s a feeling you sense more than see. That’s the way you’ll feel as you experience the physical beauty of the temple.

Spiritual Beauty
But as architecturally beautiful as is His house, it is not in the physical beauty that you will find your greatest sensation. Rather, it is in the emotion you will experience as you visit His house. Everything there will awaken your senses to a deeper feeling of love and reverence—for each other, for your respective families, for other people, for your Heavenly Father, and for His Son, Jesus Christ.

You will find yourself saying, “Now I know why the Prophet Joseph and the early Saints gave all that they had—and more—to build a temple.”

As the spirit of His house touches your soul, you will wonder, “Where have I felt this before?” You will search your memory, and in your search you will recall the love you felt as a child. You will remember the first time you were able to say, “I know the Book of Mormon is true,” and the first time you began to glimpse the genuine love the Savior has for each of us.

But as you search, you will come to realize that this time the feeling is even deeper. It will touch the very depths of your being. Kerstyn and Tom, I wish I had the ability to describe how you’ll feel in the temple, but I don’t. Perhaps it’s because I’m limited to man’s words in trying to describe the Lord’s way.

The Lord’s Way
Know this: your feelings will be greatly different than those you have seen in evidence at marriages conducted in country clubs, wedding parlors, cathedrals, or even Latter-day Saint chapels. You’ll quickly realize that the temple is the real thing.

Once in a while, I’ll talk to a young Latter-day Saint couple who think it’s more important to “walk down the aisle” or “have a big wedding” or be surrounded by human symbols of beauty—my heart aches for them. They simply do not understand. You cannot improve on the Lord’s way. It was planned by Him. The ordinance is His. The authority is His. The words are His, and the house is His. Who would dare to compare the tinsel of the temporal with the gold of God? I commend you for understanding the difference.

How Is Temple Marriage Different?
Kerstyn, you asked the question, “How is being married in the temple different?” First, let me say I prefer to call the Lord’s way of marriage the “sealing ordinance” or “being sealed” rather than just “being married in the temple.” All too often, our young men and women form the erroneous conclusion that the only difference from a civil marriage is the location. While marriage in a chapel allows you to be married for time only, the sealing ordinance makes you eligible to have your marriage last forever. To compare a civil marriage to one performed in the Lord’s way is like comparing a big flashlight to the sun.

A civil marriage has two basic ingredients:
1. The bride and groom make certain promises to each other.
2. The bride and groom can then legally live together under the laws of the land.
Of course, the one officiating will dress it up as much as possible. There will be counsel about the role of the husband and the wife and the need for love. There will also be sage comments about the institution of marriage.

But no matter how it’s packaged, that’s all a civil marriage will ever be. The addition of words from scriptures, so often incorporated into civil ceremonies, such as “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6), does not change that fact. Just as the baptisms conducted without authority in the meridian of time (see Acts 19:2–5) were eternally powerless, so too is a civil marriage powerless to do anything but qualify the man and the woman to live together under the laws of the land. Adorning the ceremony with a minister or even an LDS bishop, a beautiful church or other building, tuxedos, limousines, music, and all of the other trappings will not change that. An empty box is not given substance by the most beautiful gift wrapping. So it is with a civil marriage. It is not the Lord’s way, and no amount of rationalizing will ever change that unchangeable fact.

In the temple you make covenants and promises to Heavenly Father. The authority for the promises in a celestial marriage comes from God, and the consequences of your failure to honor those promises also will come from God. In a civil marriage, the authority for the promises between bride and groom is the integrity of the two people. It rises no higher than that. It cannot. Its authority comes from man and not from God.

Even the counsel you hear in the temple takes on more significance when received within the confines of His sacred house in the context of an eternal priesthood ordinance.

What Does Being “Sealed” Mean?

Some of your friends may have a misunderstanding about the phrase “being sealed.” Sometimes the word “sealed” is visualized as attaching or bonding a man and a woman together. While that is one of the results of being sealed, it is much too restrictive to be accurate. It has always seemed to me that the word “sealed” refers much more to the act of conferring the blessings of God upon the husband and wife individually and jointly (and upon their children) than it does to just “uniting” a man and a woman.

The word “sealed” also indicates that God is putting His seal or stamp of approval upon the ordinance in which you will participate. The term “celestial marriage” is also appropriate to describe what occurs in the sealing ordinance. That is because the two words together constitute a title which describes not only the joining of a man and a woman together in marriage but also all of the other elements of the sealing ordinance.

The Sealing Ordinance

You see, Kerstyn and Tom, the sealing ordinance isn’t a marriage in the way that word is commonly used. When you go to the temple to become man and wife, you are really going to participate in a sacred and divinely appointed ordinance called the “sealing ordinance.” It is an ordinance established by God and is the same as that ordinance by which Adam and Eve were joined together as husband and wife in the Garden of Eden. Oh, it’s true that one result of being sealed in a celestial marriage is that you are authorized to live together as husband and wife under the laws of the land and you do make certain promises to each other, but that is the beginning and end of any similarity between a civil marriage and the sealing ordinance.

As you have already learned from your seminary and institute classes, a religious ordinance in the Church is a specific rite or ceremony performed under the power of the holy priesthood. In the sealing ordinance, a major requirement has been added: the one officiating must hold the power to perform the sealing ordinance. This power is referred to as the sealing authority—the power by which, conditioned upon obedience to the covenants made, eternal family units are formed.

As President Boyd K. Packer, now Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has observed: “In the Church we build other buildings of many kinds. In them we worship, we teach, we find recreation, we organize. We can organize stakes and wards and missions and quorums and Relief Societies in these buildings or even in rented halls. But, when we organize families according to the order that the Lord has revealed, we organize them in the temples. Temple marriage, that sealing ordinance, is a crowning blessing that you may claim in the holy temple” (The Holy Temple [1980], 8).

To help you understand just how different it is from a civil marriage, let’s review what is encompassed in the sealing ordinance.

Elements of the Sealing Ordinance

Having already received your individual endowment and dressed in appropriate temple
clothing, both of you will kneel on opposite sides of an altar in the sealing room and there you will receive good and proper counsel. Then, under the direction of the officiator—one of those few men on the earth upon whom the prophet of the Lord has authorized the sealing power to be conferred—you will participate in the ordinance of celestial marriage.

1. **Individual covenants and blessings.** Each of you will individually and separately make promises, commitments, and covenants with your Heavenly Father and will individually receive promises of blessings conditioned on your individual worthiness. The individual nature of these promises is such that even if one of you were to cease being obedient following your participation in the sealing ordinance and so lose the promises made to you, the other partner who remained faithful would continue to be eligible to receive the promised blessings.

2. **Joint covenants and blessings.** The two of you jointly will make promises, commitments, and covenants with your Heavenly Father and will make covenants to receive each other as husband and wife. You then will jointly receive promises of blessings conditioned upon your joint faithfulness. The continued faithful obedience of both of you is essential if the promised blessings are to be received jointly. This is because the promises are made to you as one—that is, as a single unit consisting of two halves.

3. **Joining in celestial marriage.** This element qualifies you to live together as husband and wife under the laws of the land. It is here that you are united forever, becoming one flesh before the Lord and forming a new family unit that, if you are faithful and obedient, will last forever.

4. **Blessings for children born in the covenant.** All children born to the two of you are born under the blessings of the sealing covenant; thus, it is common to say that your children are “born in the covenant.” They are entitled to blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, including:

   a. The gospel
   b. The priesthood
   c. Celestial marriage
   d. Eternal life

(see Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 13).

It is revealing to know that even if the two of you cease to be faithful in keeping the covenants you make in the temple, these blessings will still flow to your children. It is equally comforting to know the Lord has provided that adopted children and children born to a couple before they are sealed in the temple (as with new converts to the Church) may be sealed to their parents, and upon such sealing they also become entitled to these same promises and blessings.

In the temple all of the promises, commitments, and covenants you make will be witnessed by two Melchizedek Priesthood holders of your choosing and will be recorded in heaven as well as on earth.

**Importance of the Sealing Ordinance**

We learn from a revelation received by the Prophet Joseph Smith that the sealing ordinance, which eternally unites man and woman, is a requirement for exaltation, which means living with God our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ His Son in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, where the power for continuing to extend the family throughout eternity is present. That revelation, found in section 131 of the Doctrine and Covenants, reads as follows:

“In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

“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];

“And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

“He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase” (D&C 131:1–4).

Many people reading this section of the Doctrine and Covenants do not grasp its full import. Accordingly, I thought both of you might benefit [page 12] from a brief comment or two about its meaning. The gospel, which is called “the new and everlasting covenant,” includes many specific covenants, one being called “the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.” This title, or name, is simply another way of saying “patriarchal order.” Thus, that portion of section 131 could read: “And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into the patriarchal order of the priesthood.”

The patriarchal order refers to priesthood government by family organization. It originated in the time of Adam and extended down to the days of Moses, when that order was withdrawn (see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* [1956], 3:83–84). It has been restored in our day and time (see
D&C 110). You will want to know that the city of Enoch, which because of its righteousness was taken into heaven, was also established on the patriarchal order (see Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* [1974], 271).

Furthermore, we learn that “the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood is patriarchal authority” and that “the patriarchal order of the priesthood is the right of worthy priesthood-holding fathers to preside over their descendants through all ages; it includes the ordinances and blessings of the fulness of the priesthood shared by husbands and wives who are sealed in the temple” (in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. [1992], 3:1067, 1135).

The Lord has told us that the patriarchal order will be the order of things in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom; thus, without participation in the sealing ordinance, you simply cannot qualify for admission to that high and holy place. Of course, some individuals, through no fault of their own, may not have the opportunity to marry in this life; they will yet have that opportunity (see Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde G. Williams [1996], 256–57).

Perhaps now you can see why I prefer to use the term “sealing ordinance”; it is more—so much more—than what the term marriage suggests to most.

I hope you have both begun to grasp the tremendous depth of the sealing ordinance and the significance attached to it. Can you now begin to understand why my heart weeps for those people who say they can’t see much difference between this magnificent ordinance and the “fool’s gold” of a civil marriage?

**The Holy Spirit of Promise**

There is one more thing pertaining to your upcoming sealing I really want you to think about. Don’t forget that every blessing promised to you in the temple, whether individually or jointly, is conditioned upon your faithful obedience to the covenants you make in the temple. If you cease to be obedient to those covenants, you lose blessings associated with the covenants. Of course, the repentance process may requalify you for those blessings.

The principle of obedience is outlined specifically in section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which essentially teaches:

1. The ordinance must be performed by someone who possesses the sealing power. As we’ve already discussed, the authority to confer the sealing power rests with the President of the Church and is conferred by the laying on of hands, either by the President or as he may direct by other members of the First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

2. The covenants, commitments, and promises that each of you make (verse 7 calls them “covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations”) must be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.

The Holy Spirit of Promise is another way of saying the Holy Ghost. What the scriptures mean when they say that something must be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is that it must receive the approval of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost can see into the heart of each of us and can consequently discern deceit, half-truths, or misrepresentations. Thus, when a sealing ordinance is “sealed by the Holy Spirit,” the Holy Ghost is satisfied that the parties to the sealing ordinance have been obedient in order to enter into the sealing ordinance and afterward obedient to the covenants they have made.

There is much more that needs to be said, so I’ll write you again as soon as I am able. Remember, some of what I have written will require careful reading, pondering, and prayer to fully understand. I urge you to do so.

Your friend,

Elder Cree-L Kofford