Three Principles of MARRIAGE

BY MATTHEW O. RICHARDSON

Husbands and wives would do well to consider the counsel given to Adam and Eve.

In 1995 prophets, seers, and revelators unflinchingly proclaimed to the entire world that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God.” President Gordon B. Hinckley explained that the content of this proclamation was not new but a “reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices relative to the family which the prophets, seers, and revelators of this church have repeatedly stated throughout its history.” In fact, Elder Orson Pratt (1811–81) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reminded the Saints that the “heavenly and eternal form” of marriage “was administered to Adam and Eve in the beginning.” The marital counsel given Adam and Eve is sparse in comparison to the ever-growing body of information available today. Yet it provides a simple framework in establishing a form of marriage that is “essential to [God’s] eternal plan.”

In Genesis 2:24 we are taught, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” In a single verse, we find sound marital counsel that is just as applicable today as it was when Adam and Eve received it. This verse focuses on three important interrelated principles of marriage: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one.

Leaving

The first step in obtaining the heavenly form of marriage is for a man to “leave his father and his mother.” President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught that “couples do well to immediately find their own home, separate and apart from that of the in-laws on either side.” While this step can be difficult for some new couples to take, allowing married children to leave is also difficult for some parents. President Kimball counseled, “Parents who hold, direct, and dictate to their married children and draw them away from their spouses are likely to regret the possible tragedy.” Some may wonder what possible “tragedy” awaits such couples. While it could be something as severe as divorce, perhaps the real tragedy is forfeiting a form of marriage the couple might have had, had they only enjoyed the opportunity to leave appropriately.

This necessary step should in no way be interpreted as abandoning one’s parents and family. While leaving established surroundings and relationships can be difficult and painful, it is necessary and serves a greater overall need. In fact, leaving has always been part of Heavenly Father’s plan. Consider our premortal existence, for example.
President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, described our premortal relationship with God by saying: “He knew you there. Because he loved you, he was anxious for your happiness and for your eternal growth. He wanted you to be able to choose freely and to grow through the power of correct choice, so that you may become much as he is.” President Packer then explained: “To achieve this, it was necessary for us to leave his presence. Something like going away to school. A plan was presented, and each agreed to leave the presence of our Heavenly Father to experience life in mortality.” God’s requirement for us to leave His presence did not diminish His love for us, nor did it diminish our love for Him. In truth, this act accentuated the deep bonds of our love. Leaving the premortal estate was necessary for our development and growth.

As we understand this concept better, we begin to see that we must leave more than father and mother. We might need to leave the familiar patterns of former friendships and sharing personal feelings with those who were once our confidants. Some married individuals have never left the single lifestyle to which they became accustomed before marriage. As a result, they are unable to enjoy the depth of a marriage relationship that otherwise might have been theirs. All couples can review their relationships, regardless of how long they have been married, to see if they have left or are allowing others to leave appropriately. Our personal hobbies, the choice of how we use our discretionary time, the people we choose to spend time with, or our quest and love for things may be dampening our relationships.

Perhaps the best outcome of appropriately leaving is that it allows a couple to practice cleaving to one another.
Cleaving

As one “leaves,” one is also expected to “cleave unto his wife.” The term *cleave*, as used in Genesis, is derived from the Hebrew *dawbak*, meaning “cling, adhere, stick, catch by pursuit” or “follow close.” When the Savior speaks of cleaving to one’s wife in Matthew 19:5, the source word of *cleave* is from the Greek *poskallab*, meaning “glue or join.” By scriptural definition, then, we find that God expects us to “cling” to our spouse or to “stick” with him or her. But it should also be understood that this is not a one-time event but a condition that lasts throughout a couple’s marriage.

In 1831 the Lord revealed the law of the Church to the newly gathered Saints and commanded, “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22). This is the only place in scripture where the Lord asks us to love anything or anyone with all our hearts besides Himself. This scripture augments our understanding of cleaving. It is apparent that cleaving is empowered by genuine love. President Hinckley has taught on several occasions that one’s spouse should be treated in special regard. He said that a husband should regard his wife “as the greatest treasure of his life.” President Kimball taught, “it allows for no sharing nor

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dividing nor depriving.”9 Obviously, if our whole heart is “joined” or “glued” to our spouse, we cannot share our treasured feelings with another. In this spirit, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) warned to “avoid flirtations of any kind.”10 Sharing our hearts, even in the smallest degree, violates the command of loving a spouse with all our heart.

The Lord also emphasized that couples must cleave unto their spouse and “none else.” In an effort to help the Saints understand what “none else” means, President Kimball taught: “The words none else eliminate everyone and everything. The spouse then becomes pre-eminent in the life of the husband or wife and neither social life nor occupational life nor political life nor any other interest nor person nor thing shall ever take precedence over the companion spouse.”11 This concept helps us avoid having multiple “masters.” The Savior warned about having competing interests when He said: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24).

While some may feel this perspective is excessive, unrealistic, or doesn’t really apply to their type of relationship, the point is, it does apply to the form of marriage ordained by God. Cleaving is about making choices that reflect our priorities. Without appropriately leaving and appropriately cleaving, a couple can never expect to fully become one.

Becoming One

While the world seems to emphasize behavioral differences between men and women and leads some to conclude that such differences are insurmountable, prophets have taught that through marriage men and women can become whole. Differences in communication patterns, reasoning, emotions, and even personal preferences may actually benefit a couple. “In the Lord’s plan,” Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “it takes two—a man and a woman—to form a whole.”12 When a man and a woman fully understand that they can be complete only with each other, they learn to appreciate their differences and adjust their behavior as required in the Lord’s plan of happiness. This type of acceptance and adjustment is characteristic of followers of Christ. Oneness or unity is often spoken of in the scriptures as a characteristic of discipleship. For example, the Lord taught Joseph Smith, “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27).

Unity in marriage is not achieved simply by kneeling at an altar and accepting a spouse. It requires effort for a couple to become one. Marital unity doesn’t mean that spouses agree on everything. It also doesn’t mean they have to spend every minute of every day together, think the same thoughts, and order the same meal at restaurants. Rather than relying on our interpretation of what “one flesh” means in marriage, it would be well to consider this divine concept as taught in the scriptures.

One Flesh

Paul taught the concept of unity to the Corinthians by using the body as an illustration. “For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Corinthians 12:14). Paul taught that in spite of obvious differences in the various parts of the body, “the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (v. 21). In summary, he taught “that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (v. 25). It is easy to see the application of this metaphor to marriage. Neither spouse is more important than the other. Undoubtedly, individuals bring varying talents into their marriage, just as they each have differing roles, tasks, and functions. But using Paul’s perspective, one can say, “For marriage is not one member, but two. And the husband cannot say unto the wife, I have no need of thee: nor the wife again to the husband, I have no need of thee.” We may likewise conclude that there
should be no schism in marriage but that husband and wife should have the same care one for another.

To create such a relationship, President Kimball suggested, couples should realize that “each must accept literally and fully that the good of the little new family must always be superior to the good of either spouse.” While this does not remove individual plans, preferences, talents, and goals, it does place both partners on a shared path where they can accommodate and care for each other.

President Kimball taught that individuals involved in marriage are to “eliminate the ‘I’ and the ‘my’ and substitute therefor ‘we’ and ‘our.’ ” He then concluded: “Every decision must take into consideration that now two or more are affected by it.” Couples who understand and emphasize this mindset avoid selfishness and nurture a deepening unity that makes them one. In other words, they begin to experience what Christ meant when He said “they are no more twain, but one flesh” (Matthew 19:6).

New Creatures

Eventually, every disciple of Christ comes to understand that gospel principles are, in reality, transforming principles. This transformation requires a change of heart, a change of mind, and even a change of living. Paul taught that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Today we find that too many people are trying to change the Church, the scriptures, or gospel principles to match their designs rather than changing themselves to match the message of the Savior. How many couples try to shape marriage to fit their own perspective rather than undertaking the process of trying to shape themselves to the type of marriage God has ordained?

According to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Marriage is the highest and holiest of all human relationships—or at least it ought to be.” It is obvious that merely repeating marriage vows is insufficient for us to obtain that heavenly and eternal form of marriage administered to Adam and Eve. Couples must follow the counsel given in the scriptures and by living prophets to achieve a divine form of marriage. Husbands and wives who desire to renew, improve, and fortify their marital relationship would do well to consider the counsel given to Adam and Eve. They can find hope, peace, fulfillment, and progress in their marriage as they leave, cleave, and work toward becoming one. Regardless of how the world portrays marriage, this type of relationship between husband and wife is divinely ordained and is the only way to achieve the complete happiness and fulfillment marriage is intended to bring.

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NOTES
5. The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball (1982), 304.
11. The Miracle of Forgiveness, 250.
15. However Long and Hard the Road (1985), 99.