

# Feminism in the Light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

*In its most basic form, feminism echoes eternal truths of the gospel, which affirms the equal worth of all people, the equal right to and capacity for spirituality, and the evils of abuse.*

B. Kent Harrison and Mary Stovall Richards

Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them . . . who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend.

—Dorothy Sayers<sup>1</sup>

For some people, an unbridgeable gap stands between the gospel of Jesus Christ and feminism. To them, a Christian feminist or a Mormon feminist is an oxymoron,<sup>2</sup> a person who has not thought seriously about either the gospel or feminism. However, there are devoted Latter-day Saints, both women and men, who consider themselves feminists. They declare that, far from being antithetical to the gospel, their feminism arises from their testimony of Christ and commitment to him. Through their personal experience with his love, example, and teachings, they affirm the reality of Christ's devotion to every person as individually significant. Hence, the message of Christ's gospel ordains equality and fairness in all human relationships, including those between the sexes.

While even among feminists there are widely varying interpretations of the meaning of *feminism*,<sup>3</sup> we think most feminists would agree on a basic definition, with which we hope readers will concur: feminism advocates the equal treatment of women

and men and states that discrimination, in particular against women, does exist and should be eliminated.<sup>4</sup> Far from promoting the reverse tyranny of women over men, such feminism simply affirms the equal importance of each individual, regardless of sex.<sup>5</sup> As scholars, we have tried to bring our academic interests to bear on issues of concern to our religious principles. Our purpose in this essay is to identify fundamental principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ that are consistent with this basic meaning of feminism and to draw certain practical conclusions that follow from those principles.

### **Valuing Others Equally and Divine Love**

In affirming the equal value of men and women, feminism, as defined above, echoes eternal truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches our eternal worth and supreme importance to God: “Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10). As Moses 1:39 declares, “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man [and woman].” In fact, it is only through love that God governs, for “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8); he does not govern through coercion or manipulation. And it is God’s supreme, all-encompassing love for us that draws us to him (D&C 121:41–46).

The scriptures show that this love encompasses all persons, who are equal before God regardless of gender, age, class, race, or nationality. Paul taught in his epistle to the Galatians that within the body of Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). In the Western Hemisphere, Nephi explained the same doctrine: God is no respecter of persons. All persons “are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden” for “all are alike unto God”—“black and white, bond and free, male and female . . . Jew and Gentile” (2 Ne. 26:28, 33). In practical terms, this doctrine means, as Alma taught those Zoramites who were poor and had been turned out of the synagogues of the wealthy, that the Lord “imparteth his word by angels unto men, yea, not only men but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times, which confound the wise and the learned” (Alma 32:23).



In his earthly ministry, the Savior exemplified concern for all persons. In fact, he flouted cultural and legal proscriptions regarding women's spiritual and social place in Jewish culture.<sup>6</sup> For example, although women were considered so spiritually inferior to men that they were not to read or study the scriptures and some rabbis would not even speak to a woman in public, Christ taught women the gospel. In his parables, he repeatedly paired female and male examples, such as juxtaposing the man who lost his sheep with the woman who misplaced her coin. By doing so, Christ not only couched his teachings in terms relevant to women's lives, but also underscored the eternal worth of women's souls.<sup>7</sup> Christ revealed himself as the Messiah to a woman (who was also an "unclean" Samaritan)—the first declaration by Christ of his identity that is recorded in the New Testament (John 4:25–26). Christ healed women and raised a woman from the dead (Matt. 15:22–28; Luke 8:49–56). Women were among his most devoted disciples, remaining at the cross and returning to the tomb to anoint his body (Luke 23:49; 24:1).

Further, while under Jewish law women were considered incompetent as legal witnesses, Christ chose to appear first after the Resurrection to a woman, whom he then charged to tell his apostles of the glorious event (John 20:11–17). Previously, he had sanctioned a woman's anointing him prior to his crucifixion (Mark 14:3–9; John 12:3–8), an act that, according to two Mormon authors, "may be seen as the prophetic recognition of Jesus as the Anointed."<sup>8</sup> Such actions by Christ appear to be deliberately chosen to contravene societal conventions that denied women's equality before God and full personhood. Christ desired to move his followers beyond their dehumanizing and constricting—but perhaps comfortably familiar—cultural mores to eternal truth.

Christ also ignored any sort of precedence that might be conveyed solely by categories, such as age or birth. Not only did he welcome and bless girls and boys during his ministries both in mortality and among the Nephites, but he specifically taught that all persons must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mark 10:13–16; 3 Ne. 17:11–12, 21–24). Christ was quick to point out that pedigree, meaning descent from Abraham, would not save a person if he or she were unrighteous (John 8:33–39).

Indeed, several Gentiles in the New Testament were especially blessed because of their righteousness: the centurion whose servant Christ healed, the Ethiopian whom Philip baptized, and Cornelius, who was baptized by Peter (Matt. 8:5-13; Acts 8:26-40; Acts 10). Prior to Cornelius's baptism, Peter had assumed that the gospel was mainly for the Jews or that it would be necessary for a Gentile to become a Jew before he or she could become a Christian. But after a marvelous vision, Peter learned that "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35).

Christ's emphasis on individuals, not categories of people,<sup>9</sup> is instructive to those seeking to follow him. In following his example, one should emulate the same equality of love as that shown by Christ for all humans, since any denigration of another's eternal worth or capacity is an affront to Christ's love. Christ's pattern is therefore not just prescriptive, but should be descriptive of behavior. President Howard W. Hunter counseled:

We are at a time in the history of the world and the growth of the Church when we must think more of holy things and act more like the Savior would expect his disciples to act. We should at every opportunity ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" and then act more courageously upon the answer.<sup>10</sup>

Thus following Christ's example, we should be kind, considerate, loving. It is important to listen, as did Christ in his response to the Canaanite woman who wished her daughter healed. Despite her cultural status as a woman and a Gentile, Christ listened to her plea and forthwith granted her request (Matt. 15:21-28).<sup>11</sup>

Christ's and God's love has even more profound implications for all of humankind. *Lectures on Faith* explains that if God were a biased god, favoring certain persons over others, we "could not exercise faith in him. . . . [We] could not tell what [our] privileges were, nor how far [we] were authorized to exercise faith in him, or whether [we] were authorized to do it at all. All must be confusion."<sup>12</sup> Brigham Young University political scientist A. Don Sorensen affirms, "If inequality infected divine love—if it singled out any person from others by excluding her from all concern or by not caring for her total welfare or by taking a weakened interest in her well-being—then love ceases to be perfect, and life cannot be full."<sup>13</sup>



In other words, if we could not trust God to love us equally, we could not depend on the efficacy of the plan of salvation—of faith, of repentance, of baptism, of keeping the commandments, or of the Atonement in our lives, since if God were partial in his love toward certain of his children, he could choose those for whom these principles would work.<sup>14</sup> Others would simply be lost, eternally outside the circle of divine love and esteem. The gospel of Christ rejects such doctrines of election. Because we can trust the Lord implicitly, we know that we can come unto him with full confidence that we will not be turned away but will be enfolded in his love. A favorite saying of Elder Marion D. Hanks is, “To believe in God is to know all the rules will be fair and that there will be wonderful surprises.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Equal Right to Spiritual Observances**

In response to God’s love, which encompasses all humans, every able person has the agency and the capacity, both spiritually and intellectually, to understand and accept the gospel of Christ and to participate fully in its blessings. Those who die before the age of accountability or who lack sufficient mental or emotional development to achieve accountability are saved through the atonement of Christ (Mosiah 3:16; 15:25; D&C 137:10). The rest of humankind, however, are moral agents, individually responsible to God for their choices. Thus, it follows that women’s conversions and spiritual lives must be immediate and individual, not derivative. To anchor their testimonies, women must have the witness of the Holy Ghost, must receive personal revelation and possess spiritual gifts, and become, in the words of President Spencer W. Kimball, “scholars of the scriptures.”<sup>16</sup> Salvation is a matter for each person, male or female, who comes to Christ as an individual.

To come to Christ, one must be able to commune with God. All women, men, and children have an equal right to receive answers to their prayers. They have the right to revelation for themselves and for any area of stewardship they have. They may have spiritual gifts (D&C 46:7–33; 1 Cor. 12; and Moro. 10:8–30). Elder Dallin H. Oaks, using the scriptures just cited and other references, stated, “The gift of the Holy Ghost is conferred on both men and women. So are spiritual gifts. . . . The receipt of spiritual

gifts is predicated upon faith, obedience, and personal righteousness.”<sup>17</sup> Men and women have an equal right to attend the temple.<sup>18</sup> Both sexes may pray, speak, and give lessons in church. The youth of both sexes should be taught about the importance of chastity, preparation for marriage, education, service, missions, and the importance of mutual respect and partnership after marriage.

Both women and men have free agency to decide matters for themselves and the knowledge to enable them so to do. Nephi, speaking of “the children of men,” notes that “because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon” (2 Ne. 2:26). Mormon, quoted by his son Moroni, says, “For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man [woman], that he [she] may know good from evil; wherefore, I show you the way to judge” (Moro. 7:16).

### **Equal Spiritual Affinity of Both Genders**

It is well to remember that the transgression in the Garden of Eden was the result of conscious decisions by both partners (Moses 5:10–11). Keeping both Adam’s and Eve’s decisions in mind precludes any tendency to adopt the view from some cultures that women are inferior or innately sinful because of Eve’s transgression.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the principle of individual agency and accountability strikes at the diabolical<sup>20</sup> notion that one gender (either female or male) has less capacity or affinity for spirituality and thus must be manipulated, coaxed, or pushed by the other. While culture can cloud spiritual insight, the assumption that God would send half of humanity to earth with an inherently diminished ability to perceive spiritual matters undercuts God’s equal love for all individuals and collides with a key component of the plan of salvation.

Throughout most of Christian history, women have been viewed as the lesser creation, the supposed inheritors of Eve’s susceptible nature, who must be under subjection to men.<sup>21</sup> Since the nineteenth century, however, American men have been condemned as spiritually suspect as their workplace moved outside the home. Moralists argued that the world contaminated men and



that women had to save them. Women, ensconced in the “sacred sanctuary” of the home, became guardians of their husbands’ and sons’ souls.<sup>22</sup>

### **Priesthood and Gender**

In the twentieth century, some Latter-day Saints have greatly broadened this “environmental contamination” thesis to an “inherently deficient male” thesis (our terms). They argue, for example, that spiritually superior women do not “need” to hold the priesthood but defective men do. Such reasoning contradicts itself; according to this logic, those who qualify for godhood—who have all priesthood power (D&C 132:20)—must be the most spiritually impaired of all. This contention also denies the justice and mercy of the gospel by condemning half of humankind as innately flawed. If attempts to explain women’s lack of ordination to priesthood have led to the castigation of the male, they have also led to the patronization of the female. The notion that for mortal women motherhood is the parallel to priesthood is equally spurious, since all women are not mothers; fatherhood, not priesthood, is the male counterpart to motherhood. Furthermore, motherhood and fatherhood are bestowed on the righteous and the wicked alike.

Perhaps the most helpful insight into the issue of priesthood and women has been given by President Gordon B. Hinckley, who, in a powerful address to the 1985 general women’s meeting, refrained from citing dubious folk doctrines as reasons for not ordaining women to priesthood. Instead, he simply said:

A few Latter-day Saint women are asking why they are not entitled to hold the priesthood. To that I can say that only the Lord, through revelation, could alter that situation. He has not done so, so it is profitless for us to speculate and worry about it.<sup>23</sup>

### **Partnership in Marriage**

While we come to Christ as individuals, the paradox is that women and men who have endured to the end and overcome the world must be exalted jointly as wives and husbands, following the pattern of our heavenly parents (D&C 131:2). The scriptural

promise of exaltation to husbands and wives contained in Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20 is also a description of the current life of our heavenly parents, who are explicitly characterized as sharing “a fulness” (D&C 132:19):

Then shall *they* be gods, because *they* have no end; therefore shall *they* be from everlasting to everlasting, because *they* continue; then shall *they* be above all, because all things are subject unto *them*. Then shall *they* be gods, because *they* have all power, and the angels are subject unto *them*. (D&C 132:20; italics added)

From this scripture, one may extrapolate that Heavenly Mother is a full and equal partner to Heavenly Father even though our knowledge of her is incomplete.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, General Authorities have repeatedly spoken of the eternal relationship between husbands and wives as that of “equal partners.” President Spencer W. Kimball has noted:

Marriage is a partnership. Each is given a part of the work of life to do. . . . When we speak of marriage as a partnership, let us speak of marriage as a *full* partnership. We do not want our LDS women to be *silent* partners or *limited* partners in the eternal assignment! Please be a *contributing* and *full* partner.<sup>25</sup>

This injunction has recently been reaffirmed by Elder Boyd K. Packer and President Howard W. Hunter in the 1994 general conferences and by the First Presidency and Council of Twelve’s proclamation on the family in 1995.<sup>26</sup>

To specify the practical implications of full partnership, President Kimball remarked on another occasion:

Our sisters do not wish to be indulged or to be treated condescendingly; they desire to be respected and revered as our sisters and our equals. . . . We will be judged, as the Savior said on several occasions, by whether or not we love one another and treat one another accordingly and by whether or not we are of one heart and one mind. We cannot be the Lord’s if we are not one!<sup>27</sup>

A similar statement is attributed to Elder Packer. When calling a stake president, he advised:

I don’t want you treating your wife like you do the stake. . . . In the stake when a decision is to be made, you will seek the opinion of your counselors and other concerned individuals. Then you will prayerfully reach a decision on the matter, and they will all rally round and support you because you are the president and you have



the mantle of authority. In your family when there is a decision to be made that affects everyone, you and your wife together will seek whatever counsel you might need, and together you will prayerfully come to a unified decision. If you ever pull priesthood rank on her, you will have failed in your leadership.<sup>28</sup>

Peremptorily to *order* another person to obey, or especially to threaten her with harm or to wield tyranny in the home, exhibits unrighteous dominion or abuse (D&C 121:41-46). President Ezra Taft Benson spoke of “family government where a man and woman enter into a covenant with God” as a term equivalent to “patriarchal order.”<sup>29</sup> This partnership will continue through the eternities, for, as noted above, both men and women may be exalted to godhood status (D&C 132:19-20).

### **Righteous Leadership**

While we may guide, teach, and seek to persuade others, no person has the right to force another’s action or even to attempt it. To so do is unrighteous dominion: “We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men [women], as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion” (D&C 121:39).<sup>30</sup> The neighboring verses often are taken to refer to men, as ordained priesthood holders:

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile. (D&C 121:41-42)

Perhaps holders of the priesthood are specifically mentioned in this part of Doctrine and Covenants 121 because the authority of the priesthood is so easily misunderstood and wrongly transformed into authoritarianism.

Church leaders may appropriately assume, as a first approximation, that members make decisions about their lives correctly with the Spirit of the Lord. It is not one’s place to force, control, or circumscribe another’s thinking, but rather to allow every soul the freedom to search out his or her destiny. If, for example, a woman is working outside the home, she may be regarded as having made

that decision prayerfully. It is not necessary to assume that she is going against the interests of her family. As Chieko N. Okazaki has reminded us,

Not all situations are ideal. Not all women are mothers, and not all mothers have children at home. Furthermore, not all mothers can make the choice to be home with their children all of the time. Often circumstances constrain their choices. At other times, other responsibilities and opportunities require that difficult decisions be made.<sup>31</sup>

Where there are situations in the Church in which men have a larger voice or role than women—as in general priesthood administration and discipline—efforts to insure fairness are in order. Procedures and policies should be clear to everyone. In general stake and ward councils, both men's and women's advice may be sought and considered, as has been recently emphasized.<sup>32</sup>

In order to follow the Savior's example, all members should be as sensitive and believing to one sex as to the other, treating actions by both sexes equally and not regarding behavior by a member of one sex as permissible and the same behavior by the other sex as reprehensible. Statements by both sexes, for example, in marital disputes, generally should be given equal credibility. Accusations of abuse must be taken seriously and not be dismissed because of the alleged perpetrator's church calling or status in the community. Nor should victims be accused of culpability for another's abusive behavior ("What did you do to provoke him?").<sup>33</sup>

### **Elimination of Abuse**

It should go without saying that abuse of anyone is wrong. Women are more at risk than men for physical abuse, rape, child sexual abuse, and sexual harassment, although abuse of both sexes and by both sexes does occur. Accordingly, a major concern for feminism is eradicating spouse and other types of physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse. Such abuse has been soundly and repeatedly condemned by Church leaders in general conferences and elsewhere. Elder James E. Faust noted:

Any form of physical or mental abuse to any woman is not worthy of any priesthood holder. President Gordon B. Hinckley has stated, "I feel likewise that it ill becomes any man who holds the priesthood of God to abuse his wife in any way, to demean or injure or take undue



advantage of the woman who is the mother of his children, the companion of his life, and his companion for eternity if he has received that greater blessing.” This, of course, means verbal as well as physical abuse.<sup>34</sup>

President Howard W. Hunter has stated categorically, “Any man who abuses or demeans his wife physically or spiritually is guilty of grievous sin and in need of sincere and serious repentance.”<sup>35</sup> The *General Handbook of Instructions* makes it clear that such abuse may result in Church disciplinary action.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, proper conduct toward members of one’s family, as well as payment of alimony and child support as required in divorce settlements, are appropriately reviewed in temple recommend interviews. As the apostle Paul taught, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8).<sup>37</sup>

The attitudes of those men who presume superiority to women, however, may beget beliefs about shirking responsibilities or tolerating many sorts of abuse, including rape, where such men may believe that they know better than a woman what she wants. Wives may also abuse husbands (although such abuse happens more often verbally than physically). Such behavior is just as reprehensible as husbands’ abuse of wives. *Any* abuse is destructive to the relationship and to the family and is demeaning to the individuals involved.

### Overcoming Cultural Limitations

The restoration of the gospel reaffirmed these truths of our equality before God, even though we as a culture do not fully understand them even yet. Two months after the June 1978 revelation on blacks and the priesthood, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in a talk to religious educators, bravely admitted that he, and perhaps most of the Church, had not comprehended some scriptural passages: “Many of us never imagined or supposed that they [particularly 2 Nephi 26:33] had the extensive and broad meaning that they do have.”<sup>38</sup> These scriptures speak not only of racial but of gender equality as well as an “equality of esteem” for all humankind.<sup>39</sup> To what extent have we discerned “the extensive and broad meaning” of this verse in relation to the equality of women and men?

To some, it may be reassuring to continue in accustomed cultural patterns, many of which are based on the assumptions of a fallen world, not on those of eternity. One may take great comfort in feeling like a favorite child if a culture has designated preferential status based on particular characteristics; yet, the logical extension of this belief is that those for whom life is differently situated in gender, class, or race are somehow less valiant or even defective in some fashion. We thus pass judgments on each other and ourselves with disastrous spiritual results.<sup>40</sup>

To the contrary, the gospel of Christ requires that we transcend erroneous cultural assumptions to view eternal truth. Recurrent in the Book of Mormon is the warning of the dangers of believing the false traditions of one's culture—the “traditions of [the] fathers, which are not correct” (Mosiah 1:5)—in preference to the full gospel (see also Alma 9:16; 17:9; Hel. 15:7). From a secular perspective, feminism also demands that we reexamine assumptions, particularly those traditions that inhibit our ability to see beyond gender stereotypes and that prescribe and proscribe one's development solely on the basis of sex. Such “assumed truth[s],” according to Lawrence W. Levine, “become so deeply ingrained, so taken for granted, that they do not seem like ideas at all but part of the natural order. Thus when someone comes along who both perceives and *treats* them as ideas, subject to the challenges all ideas should be exposed to, it is as if reason itself were being challenged.”<sup>41</sup>

Although one may disagree, feminism argues that inequality is socially constructed and thus can be changed. While women have received the preponderance of the fallout from cultural systems designed to restrict their movement to narrow areas and to limit their access to social, political, and economic power, men too have suffered from narrow definitions of masculine behavior. As an important book on the history of fatherhood in the United States makes clear, men have indeed gained status and power from their role as family breadwinners,<sup>42</sup> but they have lost in their emotional development as nurturers. According to Robert Griswold, fathers “wedded themselves to a division of labor and a vision of the good life that made father-child closeness problematic. What men gained in the world of power they may have lost in the world of sentiment.



Such was the trade-off at the heart of male breadwinning.”<sup>43</sup> The stakes involved in a fundamental transformation of society along equity lines are high for both women and men. Feminism envisions a world in which both sexes are able to achieve full personhood as individuals rather than being rendered as stereotypes.

### **Gender-Inclusive Language**

The weaknesses of language may also need to be overcome. Scholars have determined that using the generic *he* and *man* (one example of gender-exclusive language) affects perceptions—the way women and men read themselves and others into the text.<sup>44</sup> Gender-exclusive language builds needless cultural walls, whereas gender-inclusive expressions in contemporary discourse are appropriate and desirable, reflecting not only God’s inclusive love for all his children, but also the comprehensive nature of the gospel. Following Christ’s example, both women and men should be included in classroom discussions, and illustrations from both women’s and men’s lives ought to be used in talks and lessons.<sup>45</sup> Many of Christ’s parables draw lessons from the experiences of women. Moreover, scriptures that speak of “men” often refer to both sexes; that inclusiveness may be pointed out when these scriptures are used, or the scripture can be read to include women explicitly. To cite only one of numerous examples from recent general conferences, Elder Neal A. Maxwell emended 3 Nephi 27:27 to read, “What manner of men [and women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, Even as I am.”<sup>46</sup> By specifically including references to women, one not only reaffirms women’s eternal identity and worth, but one also follows the pattern established by Christ in his mortal ministry.

### **Equality in Education**

Brigham Young spoke extensively about the appropriateness of education for both sexes. Louisa Greene Richards, first editor of the *Woman’s Exponent*, commented:

President Young proves himself [the] most genuine, impartial and practical “Woman’s Rights man” upon the American continent, as he has ever done; his counsels, instructions and advice to women being

always directed toward their progress and advancement in usefulness and the possession of valuable knowledge.<sup>47</sup>

Karen Lynn, at the time director of the Honors Program at Brigham Young University, remarked, “No child of our Father in Heaven can afford, in all conscience, to ignore the responsibility of learning about the world and dealing with it.”<sup>48</sup>

The importance of women’s education has personal implications for the authors of this article. Neither of us ever considered not pursuing learning; such a course was simply unthinkable. For each of us, education is of great benefit directly, both personally and economically. That one of us is male and the other female is irrelevant to education’s significance in our lives. Juliaetta Bateman Jensen, the maternal grandmother of the male author, wrote of her mother’s education with Dr. Ellis Shipp to become a midwife. Her mother, Marinda Allen Bateman, saved the little five-dollar gold pieces she earned from delivering over seven hundred babies, and in later years some of that money helped finance the education of her last daughter, Juliaetta.<sup>49</sup> Juliaetta later earned normal, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees and taught English literature in the extension divisions at Brigham Young University and the University of Utah for thirty years. She founded the Browning Society in both Provo and in Salt Lake City. Her example influenced thousands of women, as well as her descendants, both male and female. Other Church members have similar stories.

### **Equality in Employment**

Similarly, since all laborers are worthy of their hire (D&C 31:5), one should render to all workers according to their due (Mosiah 4:13) in the culture of the workplace. Such statements prescribe that all employees, whether women or men, should receive equal pay for equal work and should be treated fairly in hiring and promotion. On the surface, equality in employment is merely an economic issue, but it relates to Church matters if Latter-day Saint employers deny employment to women on the basis of marital or familial status, particularly on the belief that the woman is not following the prophet or that she is taking a job away from a man. Questions in job interviews about family situations are not only inappropriate,



but illegal. Similarly, the gospel principle of equal opportunity for mortal experience would require that neither males nor females should be counseled categorically out of “nontraditional” occupations on the basis that such work is not “proper” for their sex or that such occupations for one gender or the other are somehow against Church policy.

Likewise, in employment, school, and church, supervisors, colleagues, and teachers can be of either sex. One may not assume that a leader’s or colleague’s ideas are bad or trivial just because of gender. Men and women have ideas of comparable quality; ideas can be good, no matter the sex of the originator. A woman’s recommendations should not be denigrated because she is not a priesthood holder, nor should a man’s suggestions be dismissed because he is a man or because he is not a bishop or a stake president. Respect for true ideas is appropriate independent of their source. Patronization is demeaning; every individual has as much right to be treated equally and to be heard as anyone else.

## Conclusion

We are all children of God. The gospel, in which Christ was one with his father and with the Holy Ghost, clearly proscribes unequal, unrighteous treatment of anyone, by anyone. “Feminism,” as defined and discussed here in the context of our own deeply felt beliefs, simply espouses fair and equal treatment for all of our heavenly parents’ children as wonderful, holy, potentially divine beings.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 47, quoted in Kathryn H. Shirts, “Women in the Image of the Son: Being Female and Being Like Christ,” in *Women Steadfast in Christ: Talks Selected from the 1991 Women’s Conference Co-sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Marie Cornwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 97.

<sup>2</sup>Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has also, independently, used this term to describe Mormon feminism in her essay, "Border Crossings," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27 (summer 1994): 1.

<sup>3</sup>*Feminism* is an umbrella word, encompassing many disparate approaches to defining and to solving the problem of gender inequity. A helpful analogy is the political party. The terms *Democrat* and *Republican* both contain a wide range of political philosophies so that, on certain issues (civil rights in the 1960s, for example), right-wing Democrats may be far more conservative than liberal or moderate Republicans. In other words, one can no more predict definitively someone's opinion on a specific question by knowing that she is a Democrat than by knowing he is a feminist.

<sup>4</sup>See Mary Stovall Richards, "Feminism," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:506-7; and Elouise Bell, "The Implications of Feminism for BYU," *BYU Studies* 16 (summer 1976): 527-39.

<sup>5</sup>The modern feminist movement, as a coalition of various individuals and groups, includes numerous points of view, some of which contradict gospel principles. Many persons, unfortunately, dismiss the entire movement because of its more radical elements and, in the process, fail to perceive many of its beneficial features.

<sup>6</sup>For an enlightening discussion of Jesus' break with the cultural taboos of his time, see Leonard Swidler, "Jesus Was a Feminist," *Catholic World* 212 (January 1971): 177-83; and the very excellent book from a Mormon perspective by Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, *Sisters at the Well: Women and the Life and Teachings of Jesus* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993).

<sup>7</sup>Luke 15:3-10; and Jolene Edmunds Rockwood, "Choosing the Good Part: Women from Christ to Paul," in *Women Steadfast in Christ*, ed. Anderson and Cornwall, 110; see also Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Sisters at the Well*, chapter 7.

<sup>8</sup>Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Sisters at the Well*, 139.

<sup>9</sup>For this point, see Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Sisters at the Well*, 4.

<sup>10</sup>Howard W. Hunter, "Follow the Son of God," *Ensign* 24 (November 1994): 87.

<sup>11</sup>Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Sisters at the Well*, 113-14.

<sup>12</sup>Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr., eds., *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 69, lecture 3, paragraph 23. Eugene England discusses the implications of this quote in "Are All Alike unto God? Prejudice against Blacks and Women in Popular Mormon Theology," *Sunstone* 14 (April 1990): 21.

<sup>13</sup>A. D. Sorensen, "No Respector of Persons: Equality in the Kingdom," in *As Women of Faith: Talks Selected from the BYU Women's Conferences*, ed. Mary E. Stovall and Carol Cornwall Madsen (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 57.

<sup>14</sup>See England, "Are All Alike unto God?" 21.

<sup>15</sup>Marion D. Hanks, "Equality of Esteem," in *As Women of Faith*, ed. Stovall and Madsen, 35.

<sup>16</sup>Spencer W. Kimball, "Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters," *Ensign* 8 (November 1978): 102. See also Alma 19:9-10; Alma 32:23; Alma 56:47-48; Luke 2:36-38; and Joel 2:28. On spiritual gifts, see Dallin H. Oaks, "Spiritual Gifts," *Ensign* 16 (September 1986): 68-72; and Linda King Newell, "Gifts of the Spirit: Women's Share," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and*



*Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 111-50.

<sup>17</sup>Oaks, "Spiritual Gifts," 69.

<sup>18</sup>President Howard W. Hunter has asked all Latter-day Saints "to look to the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of your membership [in the Church]." Howard W. Hunter, "Exceeding Great and Precious Promises," *Ensign* 24 (November 1994): 8. See also Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Mormon Women and the Temple: Toward a New Understanding," in *Sisters in Spirit*, ed. Beecher and Anderson, 80-110, for an important discussion of the historical significance of the temple to women.

<sup>19</sup>Jolene Edmunds Rockwood, "The Redemption of Eve," in *Sisters in Spirit*, ed. Beecher and Anderson, 3-36. See also "I Have a Question," *Ensign* 24 (February 1994): 63.

<sup>20</sup>"Diabolical" has been used deliberately since to demean, belittle, or to trivialize another and his or her eternal worth is to play on the devil's turf.

<sup>21</sup>For a discussion of the origins of this view, see Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988).

<sup>22</sup>See James Wallace Milden, "The Sacred Sanctuary: Family Life in Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1974); Kirk Jeffrey Jr., "Family History: The Middle-Class American Family in the Urban Context, 1830-1870" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1972); and Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), especially 168-69.

<sup>23</sup>Gordon B. Hinckley, "Ten Gifts from the Lord," *Ensign* 15 (November 1985): 86.

<sup>24</sup>See Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in *Sisters in Spirit*, ed. Beecher and Anderson, 64-77.

<sup>25</sup>Spencer W. Kimball, *My Beloved Sisters* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 31; italics in original.

<sup>26</sup>Boyd K. Packer, "The Father and the Family," *Ensign* 24 (May 1994): 21; Howard W. Hunter, "Being a Righteous Husband and Father," *Ensign* 24 (November 1994): 50; First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," September 23, 1995; printed in *Ensign* 25 (November 1995): 102.

<sup>27</sup>Spencer W. Kimball, "Our Sisters in the Church," *Ensign* 9 (November 1979): 49.

<sup>28</sup>Boyd K. Packer, quoted in Carlfred Broderick, *One Flesh, One Heart* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 31-32.

<sup>29</sup>Ezra Taft Benson, "What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple," *Ensign* 15 (August 1985): 9.

<sup>30</sup>This particular verse refers to both men and women, since a person of either sex may try to dominate another.

<sup>31</sup>Chieko N. Okazaki, "Rowing Your Boat," *Ensign* 24 (November 1994): 92-93.

<sup>32</sup>M. Russell Ballard, "Counseling with Our Councils," *Ensign* 24 (May 1994): 24.

<sup>33</sup>See B. Kent Harrison, "How Can I Help? Concepts and Cautions for Ecclesiastical Leaders and Others," in *Confronting Abuse*, ed. Anne L. Horton, B. Kent Harrison, and Barry L. Johnson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 215-27; for

the quote, see 217. For personal accounts of abused women, many of whom were not believed by ecclesiastical leaders, see the essays on domestic violence and sexual abuse in *Exponent II* 14, no. 1 (1987).

<sup>34</sup>James E. Faust, "The Highest Place of Honor," *Ensign* 18 (May 1988): 37; Gordon B. Hinckley, "Reach Out in Love and Kindness," *Ensign* 12 (November 1982): 77. See also, for example, Gordon B. Hinckley, "Our Solemn Responsibilities," *Ensign* 21 (November 1991): 51; H. Burke Peterson, "Unrighteous Dominion," *Ensign* 19 (July 1989): 6-11; the essays in Horton, Harrison, and Johnson, eds., *Confronting Abuse*.

<sup>35</sup>Howard W. Hunter, "Being a Righteous Husband and Father," *Ensign* 24 (November 1994): 51; see also Judy C. Olsen, "The Invisible Heartbreaker," *Ensign* 26 (June 1996): 22-27.

<sup>36</sup>"Members who abuse or are cruel to their spouses, children, or other family members violate the laws of both God and man. . . . Church members who abuse their family members are subject to discipline by the Church. Such members should not be called to positions in the Church and should not be allowed to hold or receive a temple recommend." "Abuse and Cruelty," *General Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 11-14.

<sup>37</sup>See Hunter, "Being a Righteous Husband and Father," 51; and also Doctrine and Covenants 75:28 and 83:4.

<sup>38</sup>Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike unto God," in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 152.

<sup>39</sup>The term "equality of esteem" is quoted in Hanks, "Equality of Esteem," 30.

<sup>40</sup>Edward Gardiner has argued that imputing sin to innocent persons may be the reason for Mormon's severe castigation of infant baptism, as discussed in Moroni 8. See Edward Gardiner, "Spiritual Abuse," in *Confronting Abuse*, ed. Horton, Harrison, and Johnson, 170-71.

<sup>41</sup>Lawrence W. Levine, "Clio, Canons, and Culture," *Journal of American History* 80 (December 1993): 866; italics in original. Feminist scholars have argued that the definition of gender is one of these "assumed truths." Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart found in their study of support for and opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment in North Carolina that proponents and opponents differed on this basic definition: "What historians or anthropologists understand as historically produced and conditioned patterns of behavior and therefore malleable by human action may be understood by fundamentalists to be absolutely normative if thought to be similar to Biblical patterns." *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 178.

<sup>42</sup>The beginnings of industrialization in the early 1800s in the United States transformed the self-sufficient households of the previous centuries into units of consumption rather than production. Fathers increasingly left the home for work, while mothers became the guardians of the "sacred sanctuary," as domestic moralists termed the home. What many twentieth-century persons have assumed was a timeless system of male breadwinner and domestic spouse is not quite two hundred years old and for much of that period has been true for white middle-class families only. Even then, there was significant variation across regions.



Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg summarize the literature on this development in *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 49-51.

<sup>43</sup>Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 33.

<sup>44</sup>See Barrie Thorne, Cheri Kramarae, and Nancy Henley, eds., *Language, Gender, and Society* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1983).

<sup>45</sup>For a humorous, but pointed, examination of how gender can marginalize persons in an academic setting, see [Elouise Bell], "The Tables Turned: An Exercise in Consciousness-Raising," *Dialogue* 11 (summer 1978): 113-18.

<sup>46</sup>Neal A. Maxwell, "Settle This in Your Hearts," *Ensign* 22 (November 1992): 65.

<sup>47</sup>Louisa Greene Richards, "Work for Women," *Woman's Exponent* 1 (April 15, 1873): 172, quoted in Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Voices in Print: *The Woman's Exponent*, 1872-1914," in *Women Steadfast in Christ*, ed. Anderson and Cornwall, 72.

<sup>48</sup>Karen Lynn, *BYU Daily Universe*, March 26, 1981, 4.

<sup>49</sup>Juliaetta Bateman Jensen, *Little Gold Pieces: The Story of My Mormon Mother's Life* (Salt Lake City: Stanway Printing, 1948), 88-98, 178-180.