

## Denver Snuffer Podcast 154: Completing God's Image, Part 1

This is part one of a series on Completing the Image of God, where Denver addresses listener-submitted questions relating to the rights, roles and privileges of women, including:

*Where do women stand in this movement?*

*What are the roles of women?*

*Is it possible for a woman to receive the same messages that men do?*

*And to see the Son and the Father as man can?*

*Will women be able to enter into the temple or partake of ordinances being performed?*

*Will they be able to see Christ face to face when He dwells with Zion?*

*Is salvation the same for men as it is for women?*

In this first installment, Denver considers the best way to frame these important questions, and then discusses women's participation in important events such as creating scripture, and witnessing Christ.

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DENVER: First, and foremost, the questions about the role of women arise from a misunderstanding of God's will and nature, and from mistrust of God's intentions. The first is because we teach poorly. The second is because we make the mistake of identifying God's intentions with men's behavior. The failure of men to live the ideals required by God do not alter God's intention. Therefore, you should not conflate these. You can overcome both without ever listening to anything I have to say. It is, or ought to be, between you and God. I loathe to put myself between you and Him. The understanding of these two principles is all you need to go forward and get an answer directly from Him. To overcome the second, you will need to repent of your idolatry. Do not make the church an idol, and do not judge God by that idol. Realize the church is an organization staffed by frail men trying hard, but with very difficult circumstances facing them in this fallen world. Be charitable.

With that in mind, your questions should not be viewed as a problem, but as an opportunity to learn more about (and from) God. These are wonderful concerns, and they deserve an answer. God does have answers. I cheat people when I say too much about a given subject. Particularly when the topic is so important and the answer ought to be given by God.

Ponder these questions:

-What if the "role" you occupy is not just your test, but also a test of your husband (and Mormon men generally)?

-What if the Lord has only allowed you and your husband to "suppose" he has "a little authority" when, in fact, he has nothing more than an invitation to arise and receive it from heaven? (D&C 121: 39.)

-What if the Lord intends to judge your husband (and all Mormon men) on the basis of how the man conducts himself to see if he uses the wrong kind of “authority” to impose and control and exercise dominion? (D&C 121: 37.)

-What if no authority can be claimed by virtue of the priesthood? (D&C 121: 41.)

-What if to prove the heart of the man, it is necessary to put you and your husband into this probationary relationship to see if he follows the Lord or is blinded by the craftiness of men who deceive among all sects, including our own? (D&C 123: 12.)

-What if the man chooses to ignore the Holy Spirit and proceed ahead on his own desire for patriarchal supremacy?

-What if the Lord intends for you to ultimately be his “judge” because you are now apparently “subject to” him and will learn best what is in his heart?

-What if, whether you want to show all the compassion of a saint toward mormon leaders (including your husband), you are nevertheless subjugated, controlled and exploited? Will they be left in such a position after this life when greater things are underway?

-What if the conditions for the salvation of man are different than the conditions for the salvation of women?

-What if the primary obligation of the man is to preserve correct doctrine, God’s approval to bestow ordinances, and practice correct faith? If it is, how well have men performed this obligation throughout history? How well do men perform this today?

-What if women have a primary (not exclusive) obligation to bring children into the world, care for and nurture them, and live chaste lives? In other words, what if women will be judged primarily in their role as mothers? How well have women performed this obligation throughout history? Unlike men, has there ever been a worldwide “apostasy” by women where children were no longer born or cared for in this world?

The illusion of man’s patriarchal and priesthood power allows them to put on display what is in their hearts. (D&C 121: 35.) When they begin to “exercise a little authority, as they suppose” in a way which gratifies their pride, or exercises control, dominion and compulsion over the soul of another, they “prove” who and what they are. The one most immediately affected (the wife) would be the one most able to judge the man’s performance. Therefore a wise man will seek to elevate his wife, and a fool will abuse and dominate her. A wise woman will trust in the Lord and know that He is the judge of the living and the dead, and He will always restore only what is right, pure, merciful, just, true and worthy. (Alma 41: 13.)

The focus of the question is wrong. It takes a topic which should be unifying and changes the it into something competitive. I do not fault anyone for having these questions. They are a product of the environment. However, marriage as intended by God should be cooperative. The relationship is intended to make of the two “one flesh.” (Gen. 2: 24; see also Matt. 19: 4-6.) It is in becoming “one” that both the man and woman become like God.

In a very real way, everything I said above, even if entirely appropriate and justified, is merely adding to the problem. The real value of the man and the woman is to be found in their unity, not in their disunity. Therefore, we must look to what the unity should include to know the real answer to the questions that alienate, divide spouses from one another, and make women feel subjugated.

QUESTION: “Why are there no female writers in the Scriptures? Why are there no accounts of women receiving their Second Comforters? Thank you for the opportunity to ask questions.”

Well, number one, we don't always know who wrote down the Scriptures. We don't know who the scribes were. In fact, it's likely, in particular in the Book of Judges, that some of the accounts are clearly reliant upon women to provide the information. And in the Book of Luke, the only source that could have provided information about the private contact between Mary and the angel—that is the source that Luke relied upon for his account—would have been Mary. And so, did Luke have access to an account written by Mary? Did Luke interview her? There's a lot we don't know about the generation of Scripture and who the scribes were. So, the question assumes something about which we don't have enough information to say Scriptures aren't the product of a woman's effort or a woman's writing.

You see, it was by faith and the power of the Holy Ghost that Melchizedek did all that he did. And if someone gets possession of any or all of these priesthoods, the way in which the priesthood proceeds is in accordance with the power of the Holy Ghost. Joseph just said: it's by the power of the Holy Ghost.

So, let me ask you the question, and you answer it yourself: Let us assume the case that a woman is filled with the Holy Ghost—rather like Anna in the temple when Christ was brought; and Anna, by the power of the Holy Ghost, prophesies concerning the young boy, the babe, that was brought to the temple. Given the fact that the authority by which priesthood is to become operative (as Joseph just explained) is the Holy Ghost, what possible difference does it make if the prophetess Anna, standing in the temple, prophesying concerning the child who is brought in, cannot grab a knife and go over to the place they tied the animals and cut the throat of the sheep? And then divide it up and carry part of its carcass over and drop it on the iron at the top of the ramp on the altar where they burned? And can't take the bowl and hyssop and walk around and splatter the four corners of the altar at the bloodline of the altar? Why would it be more significant that Anna was deprived of the outward ordinance performance than that she, as a prophetess, filled with the Holy Ghost, spake and prophesied concerning the Son of God on the day that He was brought to the temple, for the offering of the cleansing of Mary, having completed her day? You see, the Holy Ghost is God's messenger to administer in all these priesthoods.

Well, you envy the unenviable, and you focus on the irrelevant because, quite frankly, given the fact that the purpose of that Aaronic priesthood is to pour out judgments and destructions, and its purpose is to seal people up to condemnation, I can't imagine... Well, I take that back—I can imagine why a woman would want to possess that. I have a partner who does divorce work. So, I can imagine. And she's a female too.

Jesus Christ is the heir of this Kingdom—the Only Begotten of the Father according to the flesh, and holds the keys over all this world. Men have to suffer that they may come [up unto] Mount Zion and be exalted above the heavens. I know a man that has been caught up to the third heavens and can say, with Paul, that we have seen and heard things that are not lawful to utter. (Ibid)

Well, I believe that the purpose of the heavenly association is to accomplish two things: One is to have valid ordinances, and the second is to obtain answers or direction.

The Lord, however, clearly showed His high regard for women. Before the three witnesses were shown the plates of the Book of Mormon, an angel showed them to a woman. In June 1829, just prior to when the plates were shown to Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris, Joseph moved from Harmony to Fayette. During the move the plates were given to an angel for transport. Here is how the events then unfolded:

“Whitmer later recounted that during their journey to Fayette, he, Cowdery, and JS briefly encountered a ‘pleasant, nice looking old man’ whom JS identified by revelation as a heavenly messenger transporting the plates. Whitmer also recalled that soon after their arrival in Fayette, his mother, Mary Mussleman Whitmer, was met ‘by the same old man, ‘who showed her the plates.’” (Joseph Smith Papers, Documents Vol. 1: July 1828-June 1831, p. 67.)

This same volume published by the LDS Church Historian’s Press goes on to report: “Though he did not become a witness of the plates for weeks, he [David Whitmer] reported years later that soon after their arrival, his mother was shown the plates by a heavenly messenger.” (Id. at p. 83.)

At that time, as in Christ’s, culture had little regard for a woman’s testimony. But in both of these cases, the Lord chose to first give a witness to women.

We should overcome whatever reluctance we have to listen to women’s voices. Women have been able to vote since 1869. The state legislatures have allowed them to own property post-marriage since the 1840’s. More importantly than those milestones, however, is the Lord’s clear preference to have women as witnesses of His great work. We should take note of this.

Since the days of Adam, the greatest single event was the Lord’s resurrection. And a woman was the first to witness the risen Lord. From the close of the New Testament, the greatest event has been the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Again a woman was chosen to be the first (after Joseph) to witness the plates in the hands of an angel.

The Lord trusts women and wishes we would do likewise.

At the time of the First Vision the Lord says to Joseph: "This is my beloved son, hear ye him." And then you have the Father and the Son, and a pause. "No sooner had I collected myself than," Joseph writes; he goes on and asks his question. You have the controlling power of

the Universe on standby, waiting for Joseph to formulate and ask the question. That ought to tell you something.

“What things?” Christ asks, although He clearly knows. The Lord clearly prefers a dialogue with us. He doesn’t pontificate. He talks, He communicates, He wants it to be... He insists upon prayer for a reason; He’d like to hear from you, because in the process of hearing from you, you expose something to Him and you expose something to yourself about yourself. He almost insists on treating us like we’re equals, even though clearly we’re not, and that ought to tell you something about yourself as well. All of these things are extraordinary revelations that the Lord is giving to us about whom we are and who He is.

...And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:

20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.

21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

22 Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;

23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.

That’s not what happened. That’s not what happened. This is a stranger they’re talking with, and this is what they’re willing to say to the stranger that they’re talking with about what happened. Now, I don’t know if they’re filtering the story because they don’t want to come right out with it, or if, in fact, the way they heard it omitted the appearance of the Lord Himself, or if they heard the version that was told about the Lord Himself appearing but just couldn’t bring themselves to believe that. But in this account they admit that certain women went, that they made at least these two astonished. They were early at the sepulchre, no body was found, and they had a vision. That’s all the further they’ll go. But the vision, the “angel”, said He was alive.

I have to assume that what Luke is setting out in this story is the version that Luke got from these people. It’s also possible—in fact, this is a good text to go to, to answer one of the criticisms about Joseph Smith. One of the criticisms is that he wrote multiple versions of the First Vision. Yeah, he did, and they’re all instructive, and they’re all useful, but we’ve canonized only one of them. But there are multiple versions of what went on, on the very first day of the Lord having risen from the dead. In one account we know that the Lord Himself appeared, and that among other things He told Mary not to hold Him. The King James version says, “Don’t touch me,” but Joseph changes that in the Inspired Version to “Don’t hold me.” I think implicit in the Joseph Smith change is that she did touch Him. She was not just a witness but she was someone who felt free to embrace Him, and He said, “Don’t hold me, I have to go appear to my Father and your Father,” which is different than the version we’ve got here where women are seeing the vision of angels and they omit the

Lord. Well, Joseph gave a version of the First Vision in which he discusses angels but he omits the Lord. Now, is Luke lying? No more so than Joseph was. But we ought to be consistent in our treatment of scripture anciently and modern and as fair with Joseph as we are with Luke.

The first witnesses of the resurrection were women. This is another confirmation that the Second Comforter is not inhibited by priestly office or limited in His ministry to the brethren. The first witnesses were women and that should tell us something. I am constantly amazed, however, at our ability to ignore the obvious. We tend to read into texts things that aren't there and we tend to read out of texts things that are glaringly apparent. We have encumbered ourselves with a trailer hitch to the Catholic legacy of what it means to have a priestly class among you. We tend to say, well there's been a restoration and that means something new is going on, while at the same time, putting on the same spectacles that cripple all of those in historic Christianity that needed the restoration to occur. So we ought to feel required to read the text and let it inform us without any predisposition. In verse 24:

24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

Sure enough, the tomb was empty, He wasn't there any more but they didn't say anything. So far you see the men have only the witness of an empty tomb and the testimony of the women. I would suggest that if law governs all blessings, and it does, the statement isn't just some, the statement is all. We probably ought to read it: "There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated." (D&C 130:20-21). If there is a law, and if it is inviolate and it governs, then perhaps there were those who needed to grow more in their faith before they could encounter this experience, and the Lord was working to furnish witnesses who were already predisposed or prepared in order to help others come along as well. Perhaps faith needed to grow in the brethren before they could get what the sisters had already themselves witnessed.

Following Christ's death He was buried and rose on the third day. I know He lives for I have seen Him. He showed me the morning of His resurrection. I testify as a witness that He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, as the Gospels declare. Like those who wrote the New Testament, I am also a living witness the Lord rose from the dead:

When I saw His resurrection, I was surprised to see it was still dark. I had always thought it occurred at sun up, as the return of daylight symbolized the return of life. But it was dark. The Gospel of John is the only one that mentions the darkness of that morning. Even so, it never registered to me that Christ rose in the darkness of that early morning. ... He did rise from the dead. We rejoice because it is true. As so many others have done before, I can add my own witness that He rose from the dead. I was shown it. It happened. He who died on the cross rose from the dead and He lives still. (Snuffer Jr., Denver C., 2010-12-24. Come, Let Us Adore Him, pp. 249, 257)

All four Gospels give accounts of Christ's resurrection:

Matthew: tells of two women, both named Mary, who were first to come to the grave, where an angel informed them of the resurrection, and told them to go tell others.

Mark: states it was also two women, both named Mary, who arrived first to the grave where an angel informed them Christ was resurrected. Other disciples did not believe their testimony.

Luke: tells of several women who saw the empty grave, were told He had risen by two angels, and then went to testify to the apostles. But the apostles thought the testimony "seemed as idle tales, and they believed them not."

John: wrote that Mary Magdalene saw, even embraced the risen Lord, and related to the others her testimony of having seen Him returned to life, resurrected from the dead!

[These] accounts differ in the details. [They have] similarities and differences. They are universal in the fact that Christ was seen by the women (or [a] woman) first, and not by His Apostles. [John's account] records that Christ told Mary: 'Touch me not.' In the Joseph Smith Translation the words are changed to read: 'Hold me not.' (JST-John 20: 17.) Joseph's change of the text was warranted. [I tell you that] when Mary realized it was Jesus, she embraced Him joyfully. She did not timidly reach out her hand, but she readily greeted Him with open arms, and He, in turn, embraced her. It is difficult to describe what I saw of the incident, apart from saying [that] the Lord was triumphant, exultant, overjoyed at His return from the grave! She shared His joy. I was shown the scene and do not have words to adequately communicate how complete the feelings of joy and gratitude were which were felt by our Lord that morning. As dark and terrible [as] were the sufferings through which He passed, the magnitude of which is impossible for man to put into words, these feelings of triumph were, on the other hand, of equal magnitude in their joy and gratitude. [He had attained to the resurrection of the dead! Just as He had seen His Father do, He likewise held the keys of death and hell!] I do not think it possible for a mortal to feel a fullness of either. And, having felt some of what He shares with His witnesses, I know words are inadequate to capture His feelings on the morning of His resurrection. He had the deep satisfaction of having accomplished the most difficult assignment [to be] given by the Father, knowing it was a benefit to all of His Father's children, and it had been done perfectly. Mary and Christ embraced. There was nothing timid about the warm encounter she had with Him. Then He said to her, 'Hold me not' because He had to ascend, return and report to His Father. Joseph Smith was correct when he [changed] this language. I then saw Him ascend to heaven. I saw the golden heavenly light glowing down upon Mary as she watched His ascent. All this happened while it was yet dark on the morning He rose from the dead. He has shown this to me and I can testify to it as a witness. (ibid, pp. 256-7.)

The Lord's public execution was designed to humiliate Him. Onlookers were expected to have contempt for anyone executed that way. He foretold that "the world shall rejoice" (John 16:20) at His disciples' sorrow.

In contrast, His triumphant resurrection was private. He appeared only to a few and initially only to women. He endured public shaming, reserving His greatest triumph to quiet privacy between confidants. Our Lord is meek, and although greater (see D&C 19:18) and more intelligent than us all (see Abr. 3:19), yet He condescends to speak with us in plain humility (see Ether 12:39.).

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The foregoing excerpts were taken from:

- Denver's blog post titled "Role of Women," published August 26, 2012
- Denver & Stephanie's Youth Q&A session at the Heavens are Open Conference in Hurricane, UT on March 22, 2020
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #5 titled "Priesthood" given in Orem, UT on November 2nd, 2013
- Denver's blog post titled "Women Witnesses," published June 23, 2014
- Denver's talk titled "Christ's Discourse on the Road to Emmaus", given in Fairview Utah on April 14, 2007; and
- His conference talk titled "The Doctrine of Christ", given in Boise, ID on September 11th, 2016