



On byu's honor code, eternal marriage, and degrees of glory

## Introduction

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*Today's post is perhaps not so much homily as satire, mingled with testimony. And before you complain, if you are inclined to complain, that satire and testimony are incompatible, I suggest that you study a little more closely the Hebrew Bible with its prophetic literature. And, before you complain, if you are inclined to complain, that I am no prophet, let me assure you, no, I am not.*

Alrighty then. Now seems as good a time as any to re-interview/ interrogate every one of the tens and tens of thousands of BYU, BYU-I, BYU-Hawaii, etc. students to be sure their thoughts and behaviors are truly in line with the school's high-falutin honor code as the Commissioner of Education has most recently interpreted it.

“Same sex romantic behavior cannot lead to eternal marriage and is therefore not compatible with the principles included in the Honor Code” [yes “Honor Code” is capitalized, a telling bit of punctuation].

Now, it is their church and their school. If they don't want “same sex romantic behavior” at their school, then, I suppose its leaders can do whatever they want, exclude however they want. Homophobia, while more than regrettable, is, sadly, common place and, to a degree, I suppose, understandable. We do not much like what we do not understand. But, really, now, we have to draw the line somewhere. When they make specious appeals to principles found in scripture—and make such a mess of it—it is time to speak up and say, “Woe, Nelly. Slow

down there. Stop. Think. Be exclusionary if you must, but not on this basis, please. This borders all too closely on using the name of the Lord in vain.”

I will not inundate the reader with all my wonderment at the bit of pseudo-theology/ eschatology contained in the commissioner’s press release, but I will ask a few questions and make a few observations. By engaging in a discussion of policy and especially theology/ eschatology, I am, I suppose, following the example of the Apostle Paul, who did not think himself above a little “foolishness” here and there, now and again.<sup>1</sup>

## honor code and eternal marriage

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First, let me just repeat this short piece of policy/ theology/ eschatology.

“Same sex romantic behavior cannot lead to eternal marriage and is therefore not compatible with the principles included in the Honor Code”

As I understand it, the Commissioner’s interpretation of the “honor code” is that only “behavior” that “leads to eternal marriage” is “compatible” with the code. Yes?

As only those whose “behavior” is “compatible” with the code may remain at BYU, anyone not behaving in a way that is compatible with “eternal marriage” or that “leads to eternal marriage” is in violation of the code and thus subject to expulsion.

Wonderful. Now, let’s see... while at this august institution, I had a totally heterosexual housemate, who, by choice, for one reason or another, never dated—not in the nearly two years in which we interacted, anyway. This “behavior” could in no way be understood to be one that would or could “lead to eternal marriage.” This non-dating behavior was, “therefore not compatible with the principles included in the Honor Code.” By the commissioner’s logic, then, my housemate was in violation of the honor code and should have been banished from the premises.

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<sup>1</sup> See 2 Corinthians 11.<sup>21ff</sup>

While at BYU, I knew some who were uncertain about marriage in general—civil or eternal. I knew others who were uninterested in “eternal” marriage. Too long, I guess? No doubt there are many there now with similar uncertainties and concerns. I assume that the commissioner would have ecclesiastic leaders be more “searching” in their interviews so as to ferret out individuals who are unlikely to behave in ways that do not lead to eternal marriage due to their uncertainties about and/or aversion to marriage. After all, we do as we think.

Likely, the commissioner would not have my friend or the individuals with uncertainties banished for their non-eternal-marriage-leading behaviors and the thoughts that lead to the undesirable, eternal-marriage-defying behaviors.

Likely, the commissioner’s press release simply represents just the sort of sloppy policy and theologizing that comes with single-minded homophobic territory.

Three degrees of glory (or is it six?)

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Now, for a bit of theology/ eschatology.

In an almost certain oversimplification, Mormon doctrine divides eternity or heaven into three levels, classifications, kingdoms, or glories: telestial, terrestrial, and celestial.<sup>2</sup> The highest, or celestial glory is, itself, subdivided into three levels,<sup>3</sup> meaning, one might conclude, that there are actually six kingdoms, not three—still, likely a serious oversimplification. Parenthetically, I’ve always thought it would have been better to end up with seven, somehow, as seven is the number of perfection and completeness in Hebrew. But, oh well. One shouldn’t expect perfection, I suppose, in the here and now.

Anyway, the “lowest” glory, the telestial, is for really, really bad people—people who

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<sup>2</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants (DC, hereafter) 76

<sup>3</sup> See DC 131

temporarily suffer the pains of hell because of the badness of their badness, but are, nevertheless, eventually “saved” in a “kingdom of glory,” dim though it may be.

The middle glory, the telestial, is for “honorable,” but not “valiant” people.

The “highest” glory, the celestial, is for people who are spiritually born again and faithfully or valiantly endure in their new life to their final mortal breath. In this “kingdom,” there is a “highest of the high” that is reserved for married couples. In the two “lower kingdoms” of the Celestial glory, are other groups including single people and angels.

## honor code and degrees of glory

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Now then, back to the “honor code.” Let’s just be clear about the “policy” and “pseudo-doctrine” the commissioner has taught, and the implications that flow therefrom.

1. Only those working toward the highest degree of the Celestial Kingdom are compatible with the code and thus “worthy” to enjoy BYU’s educational resources!

Just let that sink in a minute.

This is a startling presumption itself. How many past or present BYU students have understood or do understand this? How accurate is this presumption, anyway? How many thousands upon thousands of students past and present have had and now have no business whatsoever being at the institution because they did not and do not abide such a high-falutin “principle.”

2. Now add this to the astounding presumption of #1: by the commissioner’s logic, those whose behavior is “honorable” enough for the middle glory—a glory in which occupants bask eternally in the presence of Jesus himself—are not compatible with BYU’s code and thus of the benefit of its educational resources because they are not behaving in a way that leads to “eternal marriage.” You see where the commissioner’s interpretation of the honor code would take us? Why in the world, or out of it, would you not want the ear of

such honorable individuals? Oh, but it gets better.... or worse, depending upon your perspective.

3. Since these “honorable” people are excluded, the “honor code,” excludes honorable individuals. Individuals with whom Jesus is perfectly comfortable associating with for eternity need not apply at the BYU. What kind of “honor code” excludes the honorable who will live with Jesus in Terrestrial glory?
4. “Therefore,” the term “honor code” should be retired and replaced with something like, oh, I don’t know, “the valiant code.”
5. But, wait. Lo and behold, even “valiant code” will not work, because there are individuals who *are* valiant who obtain the Celestial glory but don’t enter into an eternal marriage. Even these “valiant,” celestial individuals—individuals who can abide the presence and glory of the Father in eternity—don’t pass the commissioner’s muster. As it turns out, even angels, who inherit celestial glory but are not married, for God’s sake, couldn’t pass the commissioner’s “code”! This would all be very funny if it weren’t so damned stupid, self-righteous, and ungodly.

Indeed, the self-righteousness of such a ridiculous educational code is truly astounding. Why it is, itself, Celestial-glory-defying, eternal-marriage-stifling.

Or, then again, maybe it’s just sloppy public relations—something we have witnessed repeatedly from the church’s public relations department.

Maybe it’s sloppy theologizing—something we have come to expect from the Education System.

Whatever it is, like everything else that American Christianity has said and done in relation to same-gender attraction, one senses that it is simply a manifestation of “flying by the seat of one's pants.” Having made a mess of their response to same-gender attraction from the get-go, fundamentalist “Christianity” simply cannot dig itself out of the hole it dug for itself.

Now, much of this has been somewhat tongue in cheek, if a tad sarcastic. But I would like to be serious for a moment and resort to a bit of testimony.

the glad tidings

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In the same section of the Doctrine and Covenants that depicts heaven with its multiple “degrees of glory,” we have this testimony of Christ served up.

“And this is the gospel, the glad tidings,  
which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—  
That he came into the world, even Jesus,  
to be crucified for the world,  
and to bear the sins of the world,  
and to sanctify the world,  
and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;  
That through him all might be saved  
whom the Father had put into his power and made by him;  
Who glorifies the Father,  
and *saves all the works of his hands*,  
except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him.”<sup>4</sup>

“Glad tidings,” indeed. These “tidings” are, in fact, something far more than “glad.” They are simply astounding. Almost unbelievable. They are in stark contrast with the puny imagination that is reflected in the latest interpretation of the BYU “honor code.”

Jesus “saves *ALL* the works of his hands” except for a puny little number of the very worst of the very bad—those who love darkness rather than light and so are given their wish of living in “outer darkness.”

Now, this is a God to be honored! A God who never, ever, ever gives up on anyone. Who

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<sup>4</sup> DC 76.<sup>40-43</sup>

searches and searches, works and works, labors and labors until every living soul is “saved” and “glorified.” When it is all said and done, when God looks out at the wide expanse of eternity with its innumerable worlds and populations, scripture’s claim is that this is what He will see: a universe of beings that He, Himself, names “saved.” Beings living in eternal glory. Essentially, every living human being!

How expansive! How unlike BYU’s small-minded “honor code,” which, contrary to the character of God, seems to actively seek after, hunt for reasons to exclude, expel, disenfranchise, and excommunicate.

### Conclusion

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Honestly. As I contemplate the commissioner’s interpretation of the honor code, my mind travels to a place called Antionum. I think I can almost see that famous stand, Rameumptom. I think I can almost hear the unhallowed prayer offered there.

“We believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children... and thou hast elected us that we shall be saved, whilst all around us are elected to be cast by thy wrath down to hell; for the which holiness, O God, we thank thee; and we also thank thee that thou hast elected us... And again we thank thee, O God, that we are a chosen and a holy people. Amen.”<sup>5</sup>

Amen, indeed. We can only hope that an final and hearty “Amen,” is pronounced over the sophistry reflected in the commissioner’s sloppy, self-righteous, ungenerous, and ungodly doctrine found in his interpretation of the “honor code.”

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>5</sup> See Alma 31.<sup>15-18</sup>