

# Mormon Scripture: The Articles of Faith, Part XXXIII

by Marvin W. Cowan

The Thirteenth LDS Article of Faith declares, “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and we hope to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” Joseph Fielding Smith, the 10th LDS Prophet wrote, “*We are, not withstanding our weaknesses, the best people in the world*” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. I, p. 236).

LDS leaders are very “image conscious” and often talk about how good Mormons are. LDS often quote Matthew 7:16, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” as evidence that they are the true church. But that verse tells how to recognize *false prophets*, not how to recognize the true church! Christians also believe in living good, moral lives, but they don’t claim that as proof that they belong to the true church.

We previously discussed honesty and truth, the first two things mentioned in this Article of Faith, and we showed that some Mormon leaders have not always exemplified those characteristics. “Chaste, benevolent and virtuous” are the next three words in this Article. “Virtuous” is one of the definitions of the word “chaste,” so we will discuss those words together too. Both words involve moral purity or chastity, decency, goodness and uprightness. Many Mormons today try to live that kind of lifestyle but Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism who wrote this Article, didn’t live up to it.

Mormon historians say that Joseph Smith first considered polygamy in February 1831, less than a year after organizing the LDS Church. And historical records show that Smith was practicing polygamy by 1833, just three years after founding the Mormon Church and six years after he married his first wife, Emma. But it was over 13 years after founding the Mormon Church, on July 12, 1843, that Smith claimed he received his revelation about “having many wives and concubines” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 132:1).

Some of that “revelation” was for the benefit of Joseph’s wife. It said, “And let mine handmaid, Emma Smith, receive all those (wives) that *have been given* unto my servant Joseph, and who are virtuous and pure before me; and those who are not pure, and have said they were pure, shall be destroyed, saith the Lord... And I command mine handmaid, Emma Smith, to abide and cleave unto my servant Joseph, and to none else. But if she will not abide this commandment she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord; for I am the Lord thy God, and will destroy her if she abide not in my law...And again, verily I say, *let mine handmaid forgive my servant Joseph his trespasses...*” (vs. 51, 53 & 56).

Notice that Emma is commanded to receive *the wives that Joseph already has*, but she is to cleave *only to Joseph* or she would be *destroyed*. She is also commanded to forgive Joseph his

“trespasses,” but if Joseph was obeying the Lord in taking many wives, what *trespasses* (sins or wrongs) had he committed for which he needed her forgiveness?

Joseph was killed on June 27, 1844 when he was 38, which was *less than a year* after he received this “revelation.” Three years after Joseph’s death and on his birthday, December 23, 1847, Emma married Lewis Bidamon and lived with him until her death on April 30, 1879 when she was 75 years old. Emma never accepted Joseph’s polygamous wives, yet she wasn’t “*destroyed*.” And even though some of Smith’s polygamous wives were married once or twice *after* they married him, none of them were “*destroyed*”. Was this revelation from God if the predictions in it failed to come true?

*Doctrine & Covenants*, Sec. 132:61-63 also says, “And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if any man espouse a *virgin*, and desire to espouse another, *and the first give her consent*, and if he espouse the second, and *they are virgins*, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him *and to no one else*. And if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore is he justified. But if one or either of the ten virgins, *after she is espoused, shall be with another man, she has committed adultery, and shall be destroyed....*”

Notice that Smith’s “revelation” says that the polygamous man is to marry a *virgin* and then get her consent before he marries another *virgin*. Smith did *not* do that. He secretly married his plural wives *without even asking permission* from his first wife, Emma. He even married sisters without telling either one that he married her sister. In 1833 when he was 27, Joseph married Fanny Alger who was 16 and probably a *virgin*. Fanny lived in Smith’s home as a maid until Emma Smith saw that she was pregnant and threw her out of the house. Three years later in 1836 when Fanny was 19, she married Solomon Custer, who was not a Mormon. She lived with him as a non-Mormon for more than 40 years until his death. According to Smith’s “revelation” she should have been *destroyed*, but she died like all other older people.

At least 11 of Joseph’s wives were *already married* to other men when he married them and they continued to live with their first husbands without divorcing them after Joseph married them. Such marriages show the fallacy of the Mormon argument that polygamy was introduced to provide homes and care for women who didn’t have husbands! Neither Joseph nor these 11 wives met the standard of Smith’s “revelation” because they weren’t *virgins* when he married them and they weren’t *destroyed* when they continued to live with their other husbands.

Todd Compton, author of *In Sacred Loneliness, The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, verified that Smith had at least 33 wives while others claim that he had 48 or more wives. Several of Smith’s wives said their marriage to him was *temporal and sexual* as well as spiritual or eternal. Smith married at least 31 wives and maybe as many as 39 between 1841 and 1843. He might not want to call that adultery, but the Bible, the dictionary, and the U. S. Government all call it adultery.

For those who want more information on this subject we suggest *In Sacred Loneliness, The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, by Todd Compton, published by Signature Books in Salt Lake City, UT in 1997. We will continue our discussion of this Article of Faith next time.