

## ELDER JOHN A. WIDTSOE

*Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles*

My dear brethren and sisters, I rejoice in having again the opportunity of attending one of the great General Conferences of the Church. I pray that I may be directed by the Holy Spirit of God, so that whatever I may say may be acceptable to Him and profitable to you.

## PRESIDENT GRANT'S COVENANTS

I listened with a great deal of interest to the sermon of the President of the Church yesterday, and ever since I have had in my heart the feeling to say to my assembled brethren and sisters that they would do well to memorize, or at least learn very carefully, the first extract that he read from his sermons, the one in which, when assuming the presidency of the Church, he made as it were a covenant with God and the people as to how his conduct would be. It would be well, I think, if every one of us, in our respective callings and activities, would make just such a covenant with the Lord and with those whom we are called to serve.

## THE CONFERENCE GATHERINGS REMARKABLE

I am always, on occasions like this, and many other occasions, made to marvel at the vitality and the steady growth of the restored Church of Christ. Two evenings ago I attended the Aaronic Priesthood pageant in this great building. It was filled to overflowing, and thousands were turned away. As announced by President McKay, in the four sessions of this Conference, all held on week days, the Tabernacle has been filled to capacity, with many standing. It is remarkable, an evidence of that which binds together this great kingdom of God on earth.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about these great gatherings is that there are so many men here. A friend, not of this State, nor of our faith, who has been visiting some of the meetings of this Conference, told me yesterday of the deep impression made upon him by these gatherings, and emphasized the fact that there were so many men present. It is a unique thing in the history of religion, at least in the history of modern religion. In this Church, at least, it seems that the men are catching up with the women, and that is some accomplishment!

## PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH

I have been thinking today, as I looked over this vast body of Priesthood, officers of the Church, that if Brigham Young and those associated with him, who laid the foundations of this structure could see, as I believe they do see, this building with its main floor chiefly filled with Bishops and their counselors and Stake Presidents with their counselors, they would and must feel the thrill that we feel. Their dreams are being realized. I really wish that all of you could be on this stand and see the faces of this vast assemblage of Latter-day Saints. Yet I suppose

none should be filled with marvel, or wonder, at the growth of the Church. After all, we have something precious to offer the world. Our traffic is in truth; and truth is the strongest cement for holding human organizations together. We offer the world truth; and truth so organized for human needs, and so brought within human understanding, that it becomes the answer to the deep questions which lie in every human heart, in every human soul. We answer these questions. We offer that for which humanity is hungering. I look forward to the time when this Church, because it is founded in truth, shall lead in all matters of righteousness throughout the world, until the very end, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord.

Now, whenever I think about the progress of the Church I think also about the devoted thousands who make our progress possible. The statement made by President McKay this morning was certainly thrilling to all of us, with respect to the progress of the Church. It has come about because thousands and thousands of Latter-day Saints have devotedly performed their duties, done their work, lived the law as they understood it. Consequently the Church is growing, and I believe is acceptable to our Heavenly Father, even though not all are doing the best they might do in behalf of the Lord's great cause.

#### PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

That leads me to a principle which I would like to lay before you,— a very simple one, known to all; but sometimes the simplest things are the most important; and sometimes, too, the simplest things are those which are most easily forgotten. Membership in this Church involves personal responsibility. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ presents the doctrine of individual salvation. There is no mass salvation in the Kingdom of God. One by one we enter into the glory of the Lord. I make my covenants alone. I go into the waters of baptism. No one can do that for me if I live on earth. Faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and all the things that pertain to the Gospel; I must accept myself. I cannot place the burden upon any one else. One of the simplest, as I have said, of all the principles of the Gospel, and one of the most important, is that we accept personal responsibility for the work of God's kingdom.

This is, I think, illustrated nowhere better than in our Temple work. We have thousands of names on our records, but we must do the work for them name by name, name by name; and even then, after that has been done, each one of the dead, having this work done for him here, must, upon his own volition, accept the work done, before it becomes effective.

We should all try to cultivate the feeling of personal responsibility for the work of these latter days. A church is but a collection of individuals. Any organization, a nation, is but a collection of individuals. The church is no greater than the sum total of the activities of the individuals belonging to it; the nation is no greater. We should accept this personal responsibility: This is my Church, not my Bishop's Church, my

Stake President's Church, President Grant's Church. In my field of activity, within my calling, I am just as responsible for the welfare of this Church as any one of the brethren who may preside over the different divisions of the Church. Only as we understand that principle and practice it are we going to make, really, this splendid organization into one fully acceptable to our Heavenly Father.

With respect to this great Conference the same principle applies. Are the instructions given from this stand for me or for my neighbor? There is a temptation, as we sit here and hear the old principles of the Gospel discussed over and over again to say to ourselves, "Why, that is for my neighbor. Brother Jones, just around the corner, needs this instruction. I will pass it on to him when I get home." But the counsel is meant for me. These Conference instructions have no virtue, no value, to me unless I accept them as if they were directed to me, to be built into my life, to be used by me in my daily work.

No person can accept full responsibility, personal responsibility, as he should, for the welfare of this work, unless he learns the great secret art of self-forgetfulness. We must learn to forget ourselves in a great cause, to submerge ourselves in that great cause, to surrender to that great cause. The soul of man never grows to its full stature if the individual stands up before us while we are thinking: What am I getting out of this thing? Only those who have learned to give themselves to a cause enable their souls to grow to full stature. That also is of important consideration for us here.

#### VISIT TO THE CANADIAN MISSION

I have just returned from the Canadian Mission, a splendid Mission, in good condition, presided over by our colleague and good friend, David A. Smith. I met the missionaries there, and over and over again they said: "This is the happiest time of our lives. We never had as good a time." The reason is, of course, that they were practicing the very art of self-forgetfulness. They were giving themselves to a cause. After we return from our missions if we give ourselves to the great cause of the Lord at home, we shall have equal satisfaction, equal joy. There is no reason why our missionary service should be any happier than any other Church service, if we but learn the great principle of self-forgetfulness, or surrendering to a great cause.

#### RESPONSIBILITY OF CITIZENSHIP

I wonder if I dare to say that if we dig down into the motives of humanity we shall find that the horrors of this day, the war, and all the troubles that surround us at this time, both at home and abroad, are rooted in the failure of men to assume personal responsibility for the organization to which they belong. In democratic governments, at least—and all the European nations now at warfare have a democratic basis, though they have departed from it—if every man in those countries had sensed his personal responsibility for his nation, I doubt whether this

warfare, these bloody horrors, would be upon the world as they are at the present time.

We are too prone, I think, to look for complex causes, for things far away, when in fact the issues strike home into our firesides within the simplicity of life and action. Life is not very complex, after all, if we analyze it thoroughly and well. This is not President Roosevelt's country. It is my country, and I must help to make it what it should be. This is not President Grant's Church. It is mine, and I have to help make it what it should be. That is my message to you here today.

#### LOVE FOR THE LORD SHOWN IN KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS

Now, in the minute or two left for me let us just bring these thoughts together by saying that to be personally responsible for the welfare of this Church we must do what President Grant has told us to do, to keep the commandments, to speak well of the Church, to find no fault, to look for the good, and to perform the duties assigned to us. In our little field of labor, whatever it may be, let us do our work as faithfully as President Grant does it in his field. Then all together we shall be able to build a marvelous institution, one acceptable to our Father in heaven, the Kingdom of God on earth.

Keeping the commandments has been President Grant's message to this Church from the beginning. I jotted down here, as I thought of this subject, that the Lord said to the Prophet Joseph Smith: "If thou lovest me"—and this morning we had a marvelous sermon on love as against hate, one that will linger long in our memories—"If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep my commandments." Then we have the promise given through the same latter-day Prophet:

"He that is faithful, the same shall be kept."—That means a great deal: "He that is faithful, the same shall be kept and blessed with much truth." And then the saying of the ancient prophet comes back to me, that if we do all these things, brethren and sisters, men and women of the Church, accepting our responsibility as individual members of the Church, the promise by the prophet of old will come true:

One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God,  
he it is that fighteth for you.

#### NEPHI'S WORDS TO HIS BRETHREN

I think perhaps I can take one minute more, then I am through. Nephi had his difficulties. His brothers did not support him, did not support their father, Lehi, were in rebellion against the Lord. Then, one day their brother Nephi took them in hand and tried to remedy the situation, to convert them:

And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?  
And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no  
such thing known unto us.

Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the com-  
mandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of  
the hardness of your hearts?

Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said? If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you.

This is the simplest of all formulas to win the Lord's favor handed down from ancient days—to reach out to the Lord, to trust Him, to keep His commandments. If we do this, all that we need shall be given us, and all shall be well with us, as individuals and as builders of the Lord's latter-day kingdom.

God bless us and make us faithful in these things, and help us to understand more fully the meaning of the Gospel, I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

### ELDER RUFUS K. HARDY

#### *Of the First Council of the Seventy*

My brethren and sisters, I think I have felt just as you have felt during this Conference, but particularly so during the remarks of President Grant, for I have watched him as long as I have memory, and as he was talking there kept occurring and recurring to me an incident that I want to pass on.

#### INCIDENTS FROM PRESIDENT GRANT'S EARLY LIFE

It has been my privilege, during the last few days, to examine the records of the Thirtieth Quorum of Seventy, and in my examination of this quorum of Seventy I discovered that it is the quorum to which President Grant belonged, and that sixty-six years ago, when he was but nineteen years of age, he joined this quorum of Seventy, and then one of the first things that President Grant said I copied down, and I want to read to you just what he did say. This was on June 16, 1876.

President Grant stated he was pleased to meet with the brethren; bore an excellent testimony in regard to paying tithing, and felt well in the work of God, and felt to do his duty in the kingdom.

Then again this statement: March 29th, 1877—and remember now, President Grant was but twenty years of age.

He was gratified at being present; realized that the consideration of religion should be uppermost in our minds; desired means and wealth to do good, and not to use in damning himself; wished always to have this spirit with him.

There are many other things that were said by him that I shall not read, but that, in and of itself, is enough to give to us the real, true insight of this great man. It seems to me that God has continued His method of appointing leaders. You recall how David was called. God seems to have had His desires answered, in putting His fingers on the youth who He knew would go forward with the work in a way that would please Him.