

ELDER JOSEPH F. MERRILL

Of The Council of The Twelve Apostles

Brethren, we were informed that these meetings, except this one, would be on the air, so I prepared accordingly. But since this meeting is off the air I shall speak extemporaneously rather than from notes prepared on another topic.

A number of thoughts have passed through my mind during the sessions of this conference. There are two or three of them that I would like to speak about, extemporaneously. They have been suggested by things that were said here. When I attend a conference out in the stakes, and am the senior authority, I always ask to speak last; then I do not have to think about what I am going to say, because there have been so many good things and so many inspiring things said, that all I need to do is to say amen to what has preceded, and perhaps proceed to elaborate a little on some phase of what has gone before.

So I am doing that at this meeting. I can say a hearty amen to what has preceded. But the thought I have in mind is that we have had called to our attention the teaching of the gospel. I think the teaching of the gospel as we proclaim it goes forward under two great divisions, precept and example. Our missionaries go out into the world. They represent both divisions. They teach by precept, they teach by example.

MYSTERIES DEFINED

Now as to precept, I believe it is extremely important to confine our teaching to fundamentals. On this matter may I say I am strongly influenced, have been influenced for a considerable number of years, by the attitude of the late President A. W. Ivins. When we teach by precept, he said, we should confine our attention to things that are fundamental and leave mysteries alone. And, on asking what he would call a mystery, he said:

Suppose I read a passage of scripture; suppose you read it; suppose other brethren read it, and then we are asked what we think it means?

If our understanding is not essentially in agreement, that passage belongs to the realm of the mysteries. We should leave it alone, because the Lord has not revealed it in sufficient clearness and detail that we all understand it alike.

And therefore, it is your duty, the First Presidency ask you to make it your duty, to see that in our Church system of education, within the field of religion, at any rate, that mysteries be left alone.

He used to give me these admonitions when I was in the office of Commissioner of Education.

So in our meetings, in our circulars, and whenever we had opportunity to contact our teachers, we delivered that message. And in our lessons also we tried to confine them to those things that were fundamental, those things that are necessary for us to understand while here, in order that we may properly govern our lives to comply with the commandments of the Lord, as they effect us, both in our faith and in our daily conduct.

I have carried that message ever since, to all the teaching groups that

I have contacted, and to the missionaries in the field. I never meet a group of missionaries engaged in any religious teaching without in some form or another conveying that message to them.

President Ivins said, with respect to mysteries :

You know, as I know, that even our high priests' classes sometimes get to the hairpulling stage because each insists that his particular interpretation is the right interpretation. The result is that by delving into the realm of mysteries an immense amount of damage is done in this Church all the time.

I think I know something about the truth of that, because I have known cases where such has been true. It is something that has been, I think, a handicap to the development of our faith, and it is still a handicap.

TEACHING OF FUNDAMENTALS ESSENTIAL

Now, of course we have many classes in the Church. We have a number of organizations that carry forward classwork, and that classwork relates to our principles, to our doctrine, and to our practices. We are inclined, greatly inclined, my brethren, to leave the fundamental things, the essential things alone, or pass over them lightly because we think if we have an opportunity to exhibit some type of superior intelligence, or superior wisdom, or we have a clearer insight than our brethren, it is therefore a privilege for us to enlighten these brethren from our points of view. Well, those points of view, I tell the missionaries, are not applicable in teaching the gospel to the world.

I am asked a question: "What does this mean? How do you interpret it?" And I proceed, if I do as some of our people attempt to do, to tell what I think, and the questioner is not satisfied. He then asks another missionary and still another elder. But he is not satisfied with the answers because they do not agree. So he comes to the conclusion, "None of you know what you are talking about," and instead of having his faith developed in the fundamentals and essentials of our religion, he is cooled toward us.

I am a strong believer and advocate of the admonition that in our classwork, in our quorums, in our Sunday Schools, in our M. I. A. classes, and in all other gospel teaching classes, we confine our teachings to the essential things, the things that we understand, because the Lord has revealed them, either in our standard works, or through the mouths of the First Presidency of this Church, so plainly and clearly that we can accept and understand them alike. These things we may call fundamentals. But when we get beyond them I think we are getting on dangerous ground.

IMMORTALITY FOLLOWING PRESENT LIFE

Now, brethren, we are going to live a long, long time. We are not born to die. Of course in this state of our existence we shall not tarry long, but we are going beyond. We are immortal. We came from an immortal parentage, and we shall continue on and on and on.

In this connection, I remember something that President William R. Harper of the University of Chicago said at one of the commencement

Saturday, October 2

Second Day

exercises—though there they call them convocations—in the month of June, 1897. I do not know what led him to say it, but I remember that in effect he said:

I do not want to go to the Christian heaven. I do not want to sit around the throne of grace with a crown on my head and sing praises forever to my Redeemer. I want to go to a sphere where I can continue my work, where I can continue to grow in knowledge and understanding and intelligence.

“Well,” I thought, “brother, you want to go to the Mormon heaven.”

Well, yes, we are going to live a long, long time, and many of the things, that we would like to know, we will have an opportunity to learn, when we pass beyond this sphere, if we are willing to comply with the conditions for advancement. Now, of course, we are not going to come into the possession of knowledge and greater wisdom and understanding without effort. We are not made that way. That is not the way the Lord has planned. Yet we are taught that “as God now is, man may become.” How may man become like God? By working, advancing, growing, increasing, by his efforts, and he will have a long, long time in which he can continue those efforts.

So, we needn't be discouraged if we don't learn everything here. It is impossible, of course.

TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

Now, there is another phase of this teaching I want to speak about, and that is the teaching by example. So far as we are concerned—those of us who are in this meeting—I think we ought to hold that method of teaching constantly in our minds: We teach by example.

You know it is said, and I think truthfully by many people, “I'd rather see a sermon any day than hear one.” I think that is true, and we are called upon to teach—and that is what I tell nearly every returned missionary whom I interview in my office—we are called upon to teach every day of our lives by this method of example. I tell the returned missionaries whom I interview that they are released for the moment from the precept method. When will they be released from the method of example? Of course they say, “Never.” That is true, not as long as they are fellowshipped in this Church, at any rate.

For most of us, I think, the example method is a far more effective teacher than our precept method. We are called upon, therefore, to live in harmony with our faith, with the principles of the gospel, with the teachings that the Lord has revealed to our understanding, which, if we will follow, will eventually lead us back into His presence.

Yes, brethren, we do know that we should love one another, we do know that we should teach the two great commandments by example as well as by precept, and we cannot effectively teach the second great commandment unless we live the Golden Rule. We must do unto others as we would have others do unto us. And a test of whether we are doing it or not, is just to imagine that we are in the other fellow's shoes and he is in ours. When we are in his shoes, how would we like to be treated?

Well, if we can reason and practice it in fairness, I think we can adopt a method of living that will not be very far from living the Golden Rule. Of course, we cannot live it completely, I think, because we are in a world of temptations, we are in a world of evil, and we are strongly influenced by what other people do and what they say, what they think, how they act, behave, and so on.

Again, we all inherit weaknesses from our forebears, to indulge some of which, from our point of view, from the Lord's way of life, is definitely sinful. Well, by reason of these weaknesses, the influence of the world, and the temptations of the Evil One, all of us find it so difficult to live fully and completely according to our teachings and standards, that we do not quite succeed. But anyhow, we are obligated to do our best to do it, particularly all of us who are here. I think perhaps every man in this meeting could stand on his feet and say, "Yes, I do know that the Lord lives; I do know that this is His work; I do know that the Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ has been given to us."

Well, if we can speak that positively—and certainly if we speak positively we are speaking according to our knowledge—we are obligated, brethren, to pay particular attention, I think, to the method of teaching by example.

It is so easy to be misunderstood that we must avoid the very appearance of evil, because if we do not, what will some of our people do? What will some not of us do? Well, they will charge us with delinquency, and while of course our principles and the Lord's way of life are absolutely independent of what I do, or what anyone of you does, the fact is that what I do and what you do, by reason of our positions of leadership, has great influence upon our brethren and our sisters, upon our fellow men.

I feel, therefore, that we are obligated, whether we like it or not, to deny ourselves some indulgences that, perhaps are not particularly sinful, but the example of which would be bad. We must remember our obligations. We have these brethren and sisters, some of whom are weak. They are ours. We are our brothers' keeper, and they are looking to us for guidance. They are looking to us as examples. I think we might remember continually that we are obligated to teach by example, and therefore we must deny ourselves of what many indulge in.

THE GOLDEN RULE A DAILY GUIDE

Now, among the greatest of these things that we need to keep in mind is this matter of the Golden Rule, this matter of the second great commandment. And so there must be love in our hearts, not only for one another whom we contact daily, but love for all our fellow men, because we are all children of our Father in Heaven, both in the spirit and in the flesh; and therefore the members of the human family are one hundred percent brothers and sisters, and I think a proper interpretation of loving our neighbors extends to the entire human family. Therefore we are obligated to love them, we are obligated to serve them to the extent of our opportunities; and we can serve them greatly, not by words of mouth alone, but by the example that we set.

The Lord help us, brethren, to be true to our obligations, to live according to our teachings, and to seek his guidance, because without it we shall make mistakes, serious mistakes, we shall fail many times, but if we can only enjoy the companionship of the Holy Spirit, which we may obtain if we fulfil the conditions necessary to get it, then we can teach acceptably, both by precept and by example, which may the Lord help us to do, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

PRESIDENT DAVID O. McKAY

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

In your behalf, brethren, I express to the members of the Tabernacle Choir Male Chorus appreciation for their inspirational selections. They have, with the speakers, contributed to a very upbuilding and instructive session.

After the singing and benediction, this Conference will be adjourned until ten o'clock tomorrow morning. You will have only from 9 a.m. to about 9:50 a.m. to get into your places in the tabernacle. The broadcast will begin promptly at 10 o'clock, and all members should be in their seats if possible ten minutes before that hour—no later than 9:55 a.m. Admission as usual will be by ticket. Please bring your Song Folders with you.

We have had a number of messages sent up to us during these sessions, and undoubtedly there will be some tomorrow. Will you please call at the Bureau of Information if you are anticipating any messages, or call there if you have any indication, either from this pulpit or otherwise, that you have messages awaiting you. We shall not have much opportunity and shall not have the time to make many announcements.

The congregation and Tabernacle Choir male chorus joined in singing the hymn, "Abide With Me."

Elder Carl D. Greenhalgh, President of the Santaquin-Tintic Stake offered the closing prayer.

Conference adjourned until Sunday morning, October 3, 10 a.m.

THIRD DAY MORNING MEETING

Sunday morning, October 3.

TABERNACLE CHOIR AND ORGAN BROADCAST

During the period from 10:00 to 10:30 a.m., the regular Sunday morning nationwide broadcast of choral and organ music and brief spoken comment was presented. This program was presented by the Taber-