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Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

I pray for the inspiration of our Heavenly Father during the few moments that I shall occupy this morning.

As I have looked into the faces of this great congregation and contemplated the other thousands to whom the message of this conference has been directed, I have had this question in my mind: From what kind of homes have we come this morning? How many of us knelt in family prayer before leaving to come to conference or to go to our various fields of endeavor? Do we come from homes where there is a spirit of love and unity—where there is the spirit of the gospel? Do we come from true Latter-day Saint homes?

THE HOME A DIVINE INSTITUTION

The Lord has implanted in every breast a desire for mating and home-building. The intimate associations of husband and wife, parents and children are among the sweetest and most soul-satisfying experienced in this life. The desire for home and family is a strong and natural impulse. What sweet memories surge up in our hearts at the mere mention of mother, father, brothers and sisters, home and family! The Lord has designed it so. The family is a divine institution established by our Heavenly Father. It is basic to civilization and particularly to Christian civilization. The establishment of a home is not only a privilege, but marriage and the bearing, rearing, and proper training of children is a duty of the highest order.

To Latter-day Saints the first and great commandment is a stern reality, second to none in importance. No one capable of performing this sacred duty is exempt, no matter what his station in life. Marriage, home, and family are established by God as part of his divine plan for the blessing of his children. The richest blessings and deepest joys of this life and the life to come are tied up with the performance of these sacred duties. In fact, our very exaltation in the celestial kingdom is directly related to the family and the eternity of the marriage covenant.

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

There are many people today in the Christian world, and possibly even among Latter-day Saints, who feel that they have done their duty when they have provided food, shelter, clothing, secular education, and accumulated wealth which their children will inherit later. However, this is not enough. According to the revelations which the Lord has given, it is not sufficient to provide all of these and even to send our children to Sunday School, to Primary, and to the Mutual Improvement Associations. There is still much to be done.

OBLIGATION OF PARENTS

The Church had only been organized a very short time when the Lord spoke regarding the important obligation of parents in the training of their children. May I read a few words from the Doctrine and Covenants, oftentimes quoted:

And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents. (D. & C. 68:25.)

The obligation to teach the principles of the gospel to the youth of Zion rests squarely upon the parents of the Church. Not only is there an obligation to teach these principles, but the Lord says further in this same revelation:

And their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands. (*Ibid.*, 68:27.)

It is an obligation of parents to see that these sacred ordinances are performed after the children have been properly taught. It is not the prerogative of parents to permit their children to grow up and choose for themselves. It is their duty and obligation to train them when they are yet young, and to see that these important ordinances are performed in their behalf.

In this same revelation the Lord indicates that it is the responsibility of parents to teach their children to pray. This does not mean secret prayers only. I am sure it means to teach by example through family prayers. We need the sanctifying influence which comes from devotion in the home—prayer as a family. The Lord indicates further that they should keep the Sabbath day holy, that they should remember their labors, that there should be no idleness, and he speaks very clearly regarding the matter of children growing up in idleness, for he says:

Now, I, the Lord, am not well pleased with the inhabitants of Zion, for there are idlers among them; and their children are also growing up in wickedness; they also seek not earnestly the riches of eternity, but their eyes are full of greediness. These things ought not to be, and must be done away from among them; . . . (*Ibid.*, 68:31, 32.)

This revelation given in Ohio something over a year after the Church was organized was also carried by Oliver Cowdery to the Saints in Zion by command of the Lord.

NO PARENT EXEMPT FROM RESPONSIBILITIES

We find also in the revelations that the Lord makes it very clear that no one is exempt from this obligation of properly training his children. I wish, my brethren and sisters, that as parents, we could

merit the commendation which the Lord directed to Father Abraham in these words:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, . . . (Genesis 18:19.)

If we could only merit that word of approval as husbands and fathers and as wives and mothers in Zion, what a glorious thing it would be!

The Lord also makes it clear, in one of the other revelations, that he expects men in positions of leadership to discharge this sacred obligation, and that when men are called to be bishops, presidents of stakes, or members of the General Authorities, this obligation does not cease. No matter how heavy the burden we are called upon to bear, no matter how great the activity, this obligation continues. In the Doctrine and Covenants, he tells of the contrast between the two powers that are at work in the universe, the power of evil and the power of truth and light.

The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth. Light and truth forsake that evil one. (D. & C. 93: 36, 37.)

And then he points out, that the

. . . wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men. . . . But I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth. (*Ibid.*, 93:39, 40.)

Then he refers to some of the leaders of the Church. He calls them his friends, and he chastizes them in the spirit of friendliness and love. He refers first to Frederick G. Williams who had recently been called into the highest council in the Church:

But verily I say unto you, my servant Frederick G. Williams, you have continued under this condemnation; You have not taught your children light and truth, according to the commandments; . . . And now a commandment I give unto you—if you will be delivered you shall set in order your own house, for there are many things that are not right in your house. (*Ibid.*, 93:41-43.)

And of Sidney Rigdon in similar vein:

. . . that in some things he hath not kept the commandments concerning his children; therefore, first set in order thy house. (*Ibid.*, 93:44.)

And then even to the Prophet Joseph:

And now, verily I say unto Joseph Smith, Jun.—You have not kept the commandments, and must needs stand rebuked before the Lord; Your family must needs repent and forsake some things, and give more earnest heed unto your sayings, or be removed out of their place. (*Ibid.*, 93:47, 48.)

Then the Lord also comments regarding Newel K. Whitney, a bishop in the Church, and adds this as though to include us all:

What I say unto one I say unto all. . . . (*Ibid.*, 93:49.)

HOME EVENING INAUGURATED

This is a serious obligation, my brethren and sisters. Down through the years the First Presidency of the Church and other leaders have counseled and have admonished us regarding the sacred obligation of parenthood and the teaching of children in the home. It was during the ministry of President Joseph F. Smith that a new project was organized and announced in the Church, and a letter directed to presidents of stakes, bishops of wards, and parents in Zion from which I quote the following:

. . . we advise and urge the inauguration of a "Home Evening" throughout the Church, at which time fathers and mothers may gather their boys and girls about them in the home and teach them the word of the Lord. . . . (*The Improvement Era*, June 1915, p. 733.)

And then the First Presidency made, in that same letter, one of the greatest promises that has ever been made to parents in Israel, as follows:

If the Saints obey this counsel, we promise that great blessings will result. Love at home and obedience to parents will increase. Faith will be developed in the hearts of the youth of Israel, and they will gain power to combat the evil influences and temptations which beset them. (*Ibid.*, p. 734.)

Shortly thereafter the Mutual Improvement Associations, with the approval of the First Presidency, used as their slogan, "We stand for a weekly home evening."

Subsequently, President Heber J. Grant reaffirmed the instructions previously given and officially endorsed the holding of a family hour in the home as an effective means through which the gospel might be taught to our children and the bonds of love and affection strengthened between parents and children. And then on January 4, 1936, the First Presidency said further:

As an aid to parents in discharging this most sacred obligation and duty there has been established . . . a "Home Evening" at which time parents and children gather around the family hearth in social and religious communion. In this day when socials, parties, dinners, business interests, etc., all tend to lead away from home associations the adoption of a Home Evening is highly advisable. It furnishes an opportunity for the parents to become better acquainted with their children and for children to know and appreciate their parents. . . .

We commend the wards and the stakes that are making special efforts to make home life what it should be—a haven of peace, in which faith in God, respect and deference for one another and loyalty for truth and righteousness are pervading virtues. (Claude Richards, *Home Evening Handbook*, pp. 2, 3.)

REVIVAL OF HOME EVENING

During the past few months, the Council of the Twelve, under the direction of the First Presidency, has given further consideration to the powerful influences which tend to destroy the home and weaken

the relationship between parents and children. As a result, a letter has been directed by President George F. Richards to presidents of stakes and bishops of wards recommending a revival and further motivation of this project inaugurated under the leadership of President Joseph F. Smith many years ago. The Council has called to its aid the Presiding Bishopric, heads of the Church auxiliaries and of course the local priesthood in the stakes and the wards. A major responsibility has been delegated to the Relief Society, and through this great organization of women—mothers in Israel—those who play such an important part in the training of our children—has been given the responsibility for the preparation of certain materials, as helps to parents. This material will be carried into the homes by the Relief Society teachers and the ward teachers. There will be talks and demonstrations as a means of stimulating interest in this worthwhile project.

And so, my brethren and sisters, this morning may I appeal to you to give attention to this project as it is inaugurated and sponsored by these agencies mentioned.

There can be no genuine happiness separate and apart from the home. The sweetest influences and associations of life are there. We cannot be successful no matter what goals we attain in the material world, no matter what honors of men come to us; we will not be successful in our lives if we fail as fathers and as mothers. May we have no regrets. May we heed the counsel that has been given us. May we realize that even in this great land of America, endowed so richly as President Smith mentioned this morning, there can be no enduring prosperity and happiness in non-religious homes. The integrity of the home must be maintained. The spiritual foundation of our homes must be strengthened. Our homes must receive more attention; otherwise the outcome will be disappointing to all of us. More recreation and more devotion in the home will result in greater family solidarity. This is a great obligation. Our happiness here and hereafter is tied up with our successful discharge of this great responsibility. It merits, my brethren and sisters, our prayerful planning and attention, and I am confident in my own heart that great dividends will result, that great joy and satisfaction will come if we heed this as all other counsels given to us by the Presidency of the Church. And I promise you, as your humble servant this morning, that if you will obey this counsel as parents in Zion, love at home and obedience to parents will increase; faith will be developed in the hearts of the youth of Israel, and they will gain power and strength to combat the evil influences and temptations which beset them, which I pray for on behalf of the homes of Israel, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.