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As I have listened to the various speakers during this conference, I have been impressed with the persistence of one theme. Every speaker has urged us all to greater fidelity to principles and a closer conformance in practice to the teachings of our belief. Now I come to think of it, I can't remember any time when this was not so. I have no remembrance of sermons in our religious services which did not exhort the congregation to live in closer harmony with gospel teachings. Always the admonition is to do better.

ADMONITION TO DO BETTER

So characteristic is this feature that I am led to wonder if listeners might not sometimes be tempted to ask, "Aren't you ever satisfied?" "Can you not tell us for once that we are doing well enough?" I cannot remember ever having heard such complacency expressed. I have heard plenty of commendation for the good done and encouragement for the advancement made. I have heard recitals of incidents evidencing individual deeds of great sublimity wherein men have risen to lofty heights of spiritual and moral grandeur. These have been acknowledged as benefactors of mankind and extolled as exemplars of what is praiseworthy. But always such men and deeds are held forth as exhibitions of the inherent human capacity to rise above baser instincts and climb to higher standards of goodness. Their attainments, it will be noted, are rehearsed for their admonitory value—as a basis for enticing others, in emulation, to improve themselves by struggling upward to the high plane achieved by their exemplars. So always the same exhortation, whether expressed in direct terms or by manifest implication, is there, urging us on to do better, to conform to the standards of our high ideal.

Moreover, I am persuaded on reflection that such will and should always be the case. There can be no end to importunings for improvement because improvement, growth, progress, self-betterment is a concept basic to our creed. It is a cardinal principle going to the depths and bottomed on the meaning and purpose of life.

THE GOSPEL PLAN

The gospel is the revelation of God for the salvation of man. Coming from God it is perfect, the authentic plan for right living. If observed in its completeness, it will make men perfect, and ultimate individual perfection, according to gospel teachings, is the goal of life, its real purpose. When men attain it they will be saved, which is the ultimate of all hopes and aspirations, the inspiration for all

striving. In that matchless sermon delivered from the mountainside, Jesus admonished his listeners:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:48.)

And Paul and Timothy, writing to the Philippians said of the Savior that he,

... being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. (Phil. 2:6.)

HUMAN FRAILTIES

But men are mortal and beset by human frailties. They are enticed by the pressures of immediate carnal desire to depart from the high standards of the perfect law. When they are under the influence of an exalted occasion, they make high resolves. They firmly determine to avoid past mistakes and to do better. But gone out from under the spell of that influence and absorbed in the complicated pursuits of life, they find difficulty in holding fast to their noble purposes. In competition with their fellows they are influenced by the natural instinct to play a winning game. An opportunity presents itself to turn a good deal, to outsmart a fellow man, or profit at another's expense by suppressing some facts or misrepresenting others, or practising some other form of deception. Or it may be that they see a chance to gain advantage by evil speaking about a rival or to gratify a debasing appetite or a lustful passion, and under the pressure of the immediate impulse the high resolve is dimmed, the noble determination submerged, and they slip below the standard of their ideal. So it is essential that they come again, and frequently, under the influence which kindles anew the warmth of spirit in which good resolutions are begotten, that they may go out fortified to withstand the pressures of temptation which lure them into false ways. Happily, if they refresh themselves frequently enough under ennobling influences, the spirit of repentance will be at work with them, and they will make conquest of some temptations—rise above them—and advance thus far toward their final goal.

RESOLUTION TO DO GOOD

That is one reason why, when we congregate together, we must always and forever be admonished and urged and inspired to renew and strengthen our good determinations, by degrees to correct our imperfections and advance in the scale of goodness. So long as men are subject to be lured by ignoble desires from the perfect law of life, they need constant reminders to bring them back and fortify them against repeated departures. So long as that condition obtains, which is throughout mortality, just so long will it be needful that

religious services be devoted to admonition and persuasion and, if may be, to inspiring with the resolution to withstand evil and cleave to the good—to conquer even the desire to yield to debasing appetites or passions or to lower themselves to the level of ignoble deeds.

I trust, therefore, that none of us shall feel that admonitions and exhortations and even reprovings are offered in the spirit of complaining or of chastisement, but rather as reminders of the necessity in our own self-interest of moving forward to higher planes. It is one of the prime offices of religion and of worshiping assemblies that interest should be centered on the grandeur of purity and perfection of life. It has ever been so, and is not something peculiar to our day. It is a practice as old as history and must endure to the end of time.

EARLY CHRISTIAN EXHORTATIONS

If you go back to the early history of the Christian Church, you will find it there. The epistles of Paul, for example, are full of chidings for transgressions, pleadings to forsake evil ways and exhortations to live righteously.

Know ye not,

he wrote to the Corinthians,

that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, . . .

Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10.)

He also pleaded with them to put away envyings and strife and dissensions, which he denounced as carnal and not compatible with the spirit which belonged to those who had accepted the Christ. The things he warned against are such as reveal blemishes in human behavior and make manifest its imperfections.

So Peter in his epistle addressed to the saints in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia urges

. . . laying aside all malice, and all guile, hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings. (1 Peter 2:1.)

He reminded them that in times past, before Christ had been preached to them, they had walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries and admonished them that they must now make an end of these things. He exhorted them to patience in persecution, long-suffering, endurance of scorn, if need be, because of forsaking former ways to humility, charity, and steadfastness in the faith, husbands and wives respecting and fortifying each other. (See 1 Peter 3.)

These expounders of the early Christian faith, it is to be observed, were not content to deal in abstractions or to gloss over evil doings lest some might take offense. They particularized to the degree that no one could be left in doubt as to what they meant. They neither compromised principles nor softened their censure of wrong. Thus, Paul, after the sweeping generalization that the "unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God," proceeds to tell specifically some of the things which make men unrighteous and unfit for the kingdom. The unrighteous include thieves, the covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, as well as those whose hearts are so eaten out with envy that they become breeders of strife and dissensions. Peter expands the list of things that belong to the qualities of unrighteousness to include malice, guile, hypocrisies, evil speaking, lasciviousness, lusts, revelings, and abominable idolatries. These no doubt were practices indulged by the particular congregations to whom Paul and Peter wrote.

If you will take the trouble to go through the gospels and the letters and epistles and narratives of the men whom Jesus commissioned to carry his message and perpetuate it in the world, you cannot help noting the striking sameness of evil things they exhorted against with the deeds and habits which fall under censure today. The catalogue of vices seems to have been fairly complete way back in that remote period. There hasn't been very much added, and there isn't much to subtract from the list. After all the intervening centuries of teaching, we still need the same admonitions against the same vices. Neither has there been any virtue added to Christ's teaching. These facts perhaps ought not to prove so startling as they may seem when recognition of them first bursts upon our consciousness.

STRUGGLE FOR PERFECTION

The persistence of these human frailties from the beginning of the race till now is but an indication of the heritage of mortality rooted down deep in it. The age-old urging to conquer them attests that mortal imperfections are antagonistic to other instincts native to the human family. There is then set up in the individual a conflict between the opposing forces of good and evil. We should accordingly expect the vices and the virtues respectively, to be essentially of the same nature till the conflict is over, though there may be differences of degree and of manifestation. The conquest of evil by the good is the struggle of life. It is the struggle for perfection and the attainment of salvation which is supremacy over evil. We must not be too discouraged because progress is slow, for it involves working changes in human desires and inclinations. Perfection has to be achieved; salvation has to be won. They do

not come as free bestowals. The process seems to be through winning the struggle for supremacy between human imperfections and the mandates of the God-given perfect law. It is by meeting adversities, battling down obstacles, rising triumphant over opposing forces that man builds muscle and moral and intellectual fibre and spiritual stamina. It is the process by which he has built up his amazing mastery in the physical world and the forces that operate in it reducing them to servitude and ordering them to his bidding. There is no such thing in this world as getting something for nothing. Everything has its price. Every step forward in the realm of human progress, in the amazing advance of man in his mastery in the physical world has come out of grueling toil and sweat, heartbreaking disappointments and failures and, after failure returning again to the struggle.

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

The Ladder of St. Augustine
Henry W. Longfellow

PRACTICE OF VIRTUES

That inexorable law is operative in the spiritual realm as well as in the temporal domain. It is the law of life operative in all its aspects that progress, growth, advancement are the result of struggle and conquest. In the spiritual realm the struggle is between good and evil, a struggle for the supremacy of righteousness. There is only one way to win in that struggle, and that is to practise the virtues and cease to practise evil. The formula is simple. It consists in adopting as habitual behavior that set of principles and teachings which collectively we call the gospel. There is no other way. Our lives are patterned, our natures formed, our characters established by the things we do and not by theoretical professions of principles or abstract contemplations. If you want to overcome envy, you have to practise rejoicing in the good fortune and successes and attainments of your fellows; if you want to purge yourself of covetousness, you have to practise generosity and contentment in seeing others prosper as you would like yourself to prosper; if you want to be rid of reviling, you must practise reverence and respect for worthy things; if you want to avoid drunkenness, you have to practise sobriety; if you want to be cleansed of lasciviousness, you have to practise continence and purity of thought; if you want to conquer thieving, you must practise honesty; if you want to be free of the vice of extortion, you must practise benevolence and fairness toward others, and so on we might go till we have enumerated every vice and its opposing virtue throughout the whole catalogue of gospel precepts. Obey them in practice, make them the governing feature in your lives and you will win perfection, and hence salvation.

FIDELITY TO GOSPEL LAW

It is easy to conceive that greater progress might have been made if those entrusted with the teaching of the gospel law had maintained a greater fidelity to its principles. I have already called attention to the practice during apostolic times of naming the evil practices which must be done away and recommending conformance to the saving principles of the Christian teaching. But in the interest of winning converts and spreading power this practice was relaxed to suit the temper of the world. As Macaulay observed, the surest and easiest way to win converts is to lower standards. In an early century a great deal of effort was expended in an attempt to reconcile Christian teaching with pagan philosophy. This was an impossible task, but an apparent harmony was achieved by bending Christian doctrines into conformity which resulted in its adulteration and the consequent weakening or destruction of its saving power. It did win a more universal favor, facilitate the drawing in of greater numbers, but at a devitalizing cost which always flows from compromising principles of right. It was even brazenly taught by men in places of power, entrusted with guidance, in the interest of perpetuating and extending their sway, that certain Christian principles were to be suppressed because not congenial to people given over to contrary indulgences, so that, as Macaulay declared: ". . . instead of toiling to elevate human nature to the noble standard fixed by divine precept and example," the standard was lowered "till it was beneath the average of human nature."

Thus was sacrificed the true office of divine worship and guidance. Instead of holding up before men the ideal of the God-given and perfect gospel law and fortifying them for the struggle incident to the conquest of evil, they were seduced into deadening compromises with sin, and progress toward the ultimate triumph of righteousness was immeasurably retarded. In this contemplation it ought to be clear to us that in all our worshiping assemblies it should be accepted as established usage, to be received without resentment, but gratefully, that the law of God should be reiterated and emphasized and exhortation given for conformance of life thereto. You leaders cannot discharge your duties as such unless you see that this is done. Only thus can we be regenerated by the gospel's saving power and through obedience to it rise triumphant above our mortal imperfections, which may God grant us power to do, I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

President George Albert Smith:

While the brethren are analyzing the rules of our Heavenly Father for happiness, as they have done, I am reminded that the missionary field of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is