

## PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS

Paul tells us that the Church organization was given to us, among other reasons, for the perfecting of the Saints. In spite of this commandment, and in spite of this statement of Paul, there are some people who believe that it is impossible for us to become perfect. Perfection is not for this life, they say, and so why try?

I would like to say that I believe with all my heart that if the Lord had any idea that we could not begin in mortality on the march toward perfection, he would never have given us that commandment; neither would he have given us a Church organization for the perfecting of the Saints.

## 100% PERFECT

I believe that in many ways, here and now in mortality, we can begin to perfect ourselves. A certain degree of perfection is attainable in this life. I believe that we can be one hundred percent perfect, for instance, in abstaining from the use of tea and coffee. We can be one hundred percent perfect in abstaining from liquor and tobacco. We can be one hundred percent perfect in paying a full and honest tithing. We can be one hundred percent perfect in abstaining from eating two meals on fast day and giving to the bishop as fast offering the value of those two meals from which we abstain.

We can be one hundred percent perfect in keeping the commandment which says that we shall not profane the name of God. We can be perfect in keeping the commandment which says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." (Ex. 20:14.) We can be perfect in keeping the commandment which says, "Thou shalt not steal." (*Ibid.*, 15.) We can become perfect in keeping various others of the commandments that the Lord has given us.

I am confident that one of the great desires of the Lord our God is that we shall keep that great commandment which says, "Be ye therefore perfect," (Mathew 5:48.) and that we may do so is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**President J. Reuben Clark, Jr.:**

On the program at this point the Tabernacle Choir and congregation will sing "For The Strength Of The Hills," after which we will hear from Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, of the Council of the Twelve.

Singing by the Choir and congregation, "For The Strength Of The Hills."

## ELDER JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH

*Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles*

For a number of years on the editorial page of *The Deseret News* this has appeared:

We stand for the Constitution of the United States with its three departments of government as therein set forth, each one fully independent in its field.

### THE CONSTITUTION

I thought it would not be amiss or out of order to say something about the Constitution, to give a little history of it perhaps briefly; for I am convinced that the people generally of the United States have not studied it. Many of them have never read it, and some know nothing concerning what it is all about.

At the close of the Revolution the several states of this American government became independent of Great Britain, but they were confronted with dangers of disintegration, or falling apart. They did not have a stable form of government. Some of the wiser statesmen among the patriots saw this danger and attempted to divert it. George Washington, in a circular letter to the state governors, wrote in June 1783, saying:

It is yet to be decided whether the revolution must ultimately be considered as a blessing or a curse.

This is the moment to establish or ruin [the colonies'] national character forever. There should be lodged somewhere a supreme power to regulate and govern the general concerns of the confederated republic, without which the Union cannot be of long duration.

### CRITICAL PERIOD

John Fisk, the historian, in treating of this period says that the period between 1783 and 1789 was the most critical in the history of the United States. John Fisk was right. That was a critical period. We are today facing another critical period, one which evidently the majority of the citizens of this country fail to realize exists, but nevertheless that is the situation.

At the time the war ended, as well as during the period of the Revolution, the states were joined by a very loose confederation. The war had held them together. After the war each state looked upon itself practically as an independent government. They were a number of small nations that had entered into an agreement to live together and act in concert in relation to their common welfare. The idea prevailed that this federation could be severed at any time. Each state reserved the right to withdraw at will from the union thus far created. From July 4, 1776, to March 1, 1781, when the confederation was adopted, the United States was governed by the Continental Congress under the "Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union between the States." This union had no president, no supreme court, and consisted of one house of congress made up of delegates elected by the legislatures of the states, and the jurisdiction was greatly limited. There were so many defects and restrictions in this confederation that the wise men of the nation, like Washington, readily perceived that something more nearly perfect, more powerful and binding upon the colonies was essential.

## CONVENTION IN PHILADELPHIA

It was with this object in view that in May 1787 a convention of delegates from all the states except Rhode Island met in Philadelphia. The number of delegates was fifty-five, but only thirty-nine of them signed the Constitution after it was framed. Most of these delegates were men in the prime of life, few of them were aged. Benjamin Franklin, the dean of the Convention was in his eighty-second year, but it is said of him that he was very active and alert. I think the names of these thirty-nine who signed the Constitution are worthy of our remembrance, and I am going to take the time to name them. They were:

George Washington, President and Deputy from Virginia  
 John Langdon and Nicholas Gilman, New Hampshire  
 Nathaniel Gorham and Rufus King, Massachusetts  
 William Samuel Johnson and Roger Sherman, Connecticut  
 Alexander Hamilton, New York  
 William Livingston, David Brearley, William Paterson, and Jonathan Dayton, New Jersey  
 George Read, Gunning Bedford, Jr., John Dickson, Richard Bassett, and Jacob Broom, Delaware  
 James McHenry, Daniel of St. Thomas Jenefer, and Daniel Carroll, Maryland  
 John Blair, James Madison, Jr., and George Washington, Virginia  
 William Blount, Richard Dobbs Spaight, and Hugh Williamson, North Carolina  
 Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Mifflin, Robert Morris, George Clymer, Thomas Fitzsimmons, Jared Ingersoll, James Wilson, and Gouverneur Morris, Pennsylvania  
 John Rutledge, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Charles Pinckney, and Pierce Butler, South Carolina  
 William Few and Abraham Baldwin, Georgia\*

These delegates, after a stormy period of nearly four months in which some of the delegates almost despaired of ever coming to a peaceful agreement, brought forth the Constitution of the United States. As you have heard, some of the delegates refused

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\*The following were appointed as delegates to the convention but never took their seats: John Pickering and Benjamin West, New Hampshire; Francis Dana, Massachusetts; John Nelson and Abraham Clark, New Jersey; Patrick Henry (declined), Virginia; Richard Caswell (resigned), Willie Jones (declined), North Carolina; George Walton and Nathaniel Pendleton, Georgia.

The following delegates were absent at the time of signing: Caleb Strong, Massachusetts; Oliver Elsworth, Connecticut; Robert Yates and John Lansing, New York; William Churchill Houston, New Jersey; John Francis Mercer and Luther Martin, Maryland; George Wythe and James McClurg, Virginia; Alexander Martin and William Richardson Davie, North Carolina; William Pierce and William Houston, Georgia.

The following refused to sign: Eldridge Gerry, Massachusetts; Edmund Randolph and George Mason, Virginia.

to sign; some absented themselves at the time of signing. After the document was prepared and approved came the struggle for ratification. Washington, Franklin, Madison, Hamilton, and Marshall, we understand, took the leading part in drafting the Constitution, and after it was adopted by the convention, Madison and Hamilton used their untiring efforts to have it ratified by the various states. Some of the states ratified at an early date; others delayed. Rhode Island and North Carolina delayed for some months but finally joined with their sister states in ratification.

The Constitution went into operation March 4, 1789, and thus became the vital and basic law of the United States. George Washington was elected President of the United States April 6, 1789, and was inaugurated on the thirtieth day of that same month.

### WE THE PEOPLE

Now in this statement from *The Deseret News* we read: "We stand for the Constitution of the United States with its three departments of government as therein set forth, each one fully independent in its own field." I hope that every member of the Church subscribes to that declaration—also to *The Deseret News*. The preamble to the Constitution does not begin, "I, the king"; nor does it begin, "I, the President of the United States." It reads:

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

It is "*We the people.*"

It was understood that the people would govern; of course, it would have to be by representation, but the control of government would be in the hands of the people. As we read in the Book of Mormon, when the righteous rule, everything is well. King Mosiah gave up his throne with the idea that the people would have a republic, and he called attention to the dangers of a kingdom and a centralized government and the dangers that would arise should the wicked rule. The Lord has taught us to choose wise men and just men, and that was the understanding on the part of these men who formed the Constitution of the United States.

### THREE GOVERNMENTAL DEPARTMENTS

The three forms of government spoken of in the strip and referring to our government are: the legislative, the judicial, and the executive. Channing, in *A Students' History of the United States*, has this to say of these three branches in our government:

Each is given power to defend itself against the encroachments of the other two, and each acts as a check on the others. The Constitution framers had good reason to attempt the accomplishment of this difficult purpose; in the old colonial days, which most of them remembered, the

governor of the royal provinces had exercised all three functions, greatly to the dissatisfaction of the colonists; and the legislative body of Great Britain had held the supreme power. To avoid establishing a government which would develop into either of these forms, the framers of the Constitution sought to give each department its due share of power, and prevent any one department from making itself supreme. For instance, the executive power is vested in the President; but he also exercises important legislative functions in his veto, and judicial power in his right to pardon. The legislative power is lodged in Congress, but the Senate acts as an advisory council to the President—without its consent no important appointment can be made and no treaty ratified. The judicial power is entrusted to the Supreme Court and inferior courts; but, as no law can be enforced which the Supreme Court declares to be unconstitutional, the Supreme Court, in fact, exercises supreme legislative functions. Finally, the House of Representatives, by means of its initiative in taxation, exercises a most effectual control over the executive department.

The legislative power is confined to certain subjects enumerated in the Constitution and is further restricted by the first ten amendments, especially by the tenth, which declares that "the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States, respectively, or to the people." The Supreme Court is the authorized interpreter of the fundamental law, and has construed the Constitution in the broadest possible way; following these decisions Congress has exercised powers, many of which were probably never dreamed of by the framers of that instrument or by the members of the ratifying conventions, whose votes gave it the force of law. Acts of Congress are "the supreme law of the land," unless the Supreme Court declares them unconstitutional, and hence null and void (Channing, *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241.)

The people should, with jealous care, guard against the time ever coming when any one of these three branches may surrender its rights to any other or be swallowed up and overcome by some other branch of the government. Today there are many who advocate the destruction of these safeguards given us by the framers of the Constitution who were men inspired to make this document as near to the fundamental doctrines of the kingdom of God, as it was possible under the circumstances for it to be. (*The Progress of Man*, p. 297.)

#### The Constitution proclaims the following:

This Constitution and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof, and all treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land; and the judges in every State shall be bound thereby, anything in the Constitution or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding.

The senators and representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.

#### CONSTITUTION DESERVES VENERATION

There is much more that could be said, and I wish to read another statement. The English statesman, James Bryce, in his excellent work, *The American Commonwealth*, has said:

The Constitution of 1789 deserves the veneration with which the Americans have been accustomed to regard it. It is true that many

criticisms have been passed upon its arrangement, upon its omissions, upon its artificial character of some of the institutions it creates, . . . Yet after all deductions it ranks above every other constitution for the intrinsic excellence of its scheme, its adaptation to the circumstances of the people, the simplicity, brevity, and precision of its language, its judicious mixture of definiteness in principle with elasticity in detail. (*The American Commonwealth*, vol. 1, p. 25.)

What is the stand that is taken by the Church in regard to this great document? We have the word of the Lord:

And now, verily I say unto you concerning the laws of the land, it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them.

And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me.

Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land;

And as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil. (D. & C. 98:4-7.)

In Section 101, the Lord has said:

According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles:

That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood. (*Ibid.*, 101:77-80.)

Here is a statement that this document should be maintained, that every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which the Lord has given him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

#### STATEMENTS OF JOSEPH SMITH

If I may be permitted, I would like to quote the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith on this subject:

The Constitution of the United States is a glorious standard. It is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner; it is to all those who are privileged with the sweets of its liberty, like the cooling shades and refreshing waters of a great rock in a thirsty and weary land. It is like a great tree under whose branches men from every clime can be shielded from the burning rays of the sun. . . .

We say that God is true; that the Constitution of the United States is true; that the Bible is true; that the Book of Mormon is true; that the Book of Covenants is true; and that Christ is true. (*History of the Church* 3:304.)

It is one of the first principles of my life and one that I have cultivated from my childhood, having been taught it by my father, to allow

everyone the liberty of conscience. I am the greatest advocate of the Constitution of the United States there is on earth. In my feelings I am always ready to die for the protection of the weak and the oppressed in their just rights. (*Ibid.*, 6:56-57.)

I must not take more time but to add this: The statement has been made that the Prophet said the time would come when this Constitution would hang as by a thread, and this is true. There has been some confusion, however, as to just what he said following this. I think that Elder Orson Hyde has given us a correct interpretation wherein he says that the Prophet said the Constitution would be in danger. Said Orson Hyde:

I believe he said something like this—that the time would come when the Constitution and the country would be in danger of an overthrow; and said he: "If the Constitution be saved at all, it will be by the Elders of this Church." I believe this is about the language, as nearly as I can recollect it. (*Journal of Discourses*, 6:152.)

Now I tell you it is time the people of the United States were waking up with the understanding that if they don't save the Constitution from the dangers that threaten it, we will have a change of government.

The Lord bless you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### ELDER A. RICHARD PETERSON

*Former President of the Norwegian Mission*

I am delighted, my brethren and sisters, to have the privilege of assembling here on this glorious, hallowed Sabbath day, to commemorate the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and this is as real to me as life itself. I only wish that the world could understand the great mission of our Redeemer, when he gave his life for the sons and daughters of God.

I have been thrilled during the sessions of this conference, to be home and to listen to the wonderful testimonies that have been borne and the counsel and advice that have been given. After spending four years in a war-torn country, it is indeed good to be home.

I would like to say that I have stood in the homes and in the offices of the government of Norway, and been belittled, but I was happy because I was in the service of God. They refused us the privilege of staying in Norway and for eighteen months, Sister Peterson and I were living there without permission. I finally told them, when they said: "We'll give you a few hours now," "How can I leave when I have been called by a prophet of God. The only way I will go out of Norway, unless I receive a release from the Presidency of the Church, is if you come down and move us out. Then of course we will have to go.

They did not come and move us out, but we were up against a stone wall for these many months. We were not able to do anything and we were also denied the rationing cards, and if it had not