

## BISHOP VICTOR L. BROWN

### *Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric*

I was invited to speak to a group of high school students recently. They are members of a service club, the motto of which is "Fulfil Freedom's Challenge." I suppose there is no subject discussed more frequently today than that of freedom. There are many approaches to this topic.

As I stood before this group of eager young men and looked into their faces, I couldn't help feeling that if they could catch the full significance of the meaning of this motto and put it into practice, their success in life would be assured.

"Fulfil Freedom's Challenge." Freedom means many things to many people. May I illustrate one kind of freedom that came to my mind as I visited with these young men by telling you of a friend of mine who sold his freedom for a social custom. This young man had started up the ladder of success, and it appeared that nothing could stop him. I don't know of anyone who had brighter or more promising prospects for a successful career.

Then, one day, he made the decision that if he were really to succeed, he must accept social drinking as a part of his life, and so he did. I am sure that to begin with, he found the taste unpalatable. However, it wasn't long before he began to look forward to the cocktail hour, and then the cocktail hour couldn't come soon enough. Finally, he became a slave to alcohol, losing his wife, his friends, and his job. The last time I saw him, though still a young man, he looked twice his age. He was without work. He was finding it necessary to ask for a handout from his friends. He had lost everything that was worth living for.

The day I was called to be a bishop of a ward several years ago, I received a telephone call, asking if I could come to help dissuade a woman from taking her life. I wish every young woman in this Church could have been by my side during that interview. This woman, the daughter of a bishop, the former wife of another leader in the Church,

and the mother of two teen-age youngsters had sold her soul for a bottle. During her more or less sober moments, when she reflected upon what she had done with her life, she could see no purpose for living.

Now, my young friends, don't think for one moment that these problems came on this man and this woman overnight. They found themselves in these situations after many weeks, months, and even years of merely being "one of the gang," of succumbing to the pressures of their neighbors, friends, and associates, of not wanting to be different. In all of my experience, I have never seen anyone more in bondage, with less freedom than these two individuals.

You don't give up your freedom all at once—this kind of freedom at any rate. You give it up a little at a time, and all it takes is a start. If there is never a start, there is no concern about giving it up.

Each of you would gladly give your life, if necessary, to keep your country free. What are you willing to give to remain free from this so-called social custom that destroys so many boys and girls, men and women?

"Fulfil Freedom's Challenge." As I stood before those students, how I hoped they would recognize that they would have to determine in their own minds and hearts what kind of men they were going to be, how susceptible they would be to the accepted practices and habits of the world.

Many millions of dollars are spent by tobacco companies in an effort to entice the young people of this nation into taking up the habit of smoking. Medical science today is substantiating the claims which have been made for many years, that the use of tobacco is injurious to one's health, but it is not from this viewpoint that I wish to discuss it.

Just last week I had occasion to be driving with a man who took a cigaret out of his pocket, put it in his mouth,

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lighted it, and then threw it away. He turned to me, and said, "Did you see what I just did? I didn't want a cigaret. I have stopped smoking, but look what I did."

Why, I have known some men who have stopped smoking every Monday morning for weeks.

One of the most common social practices in this country—and I suppose in many countries of the world—is the use of tobacco.

If you young men and women will ask an honest person who is a confirmed smoker whether or not he has denied himself a freedom by the use of tobacco, he will tell you he is enslaved to this habit.

We, as a Church, are not infrequently accused of being narrow-minded and fanatical because we feel it is important, among other things, for our members to abstain from the use of tobacco and liquor. Sometimes in an effort to avoid this implied stigma, we relent, and go along with our critics. Then if we aren't careful, we find that we have developed habits which sometimes seem almost impossible to overcome. How necessary are these things really in achieving success?

The other day a man came to our offices to discuss a business proposition. At the conclusion of our meeting, we learned that he had recently been elected executive vice-president and treasurer of his company. Now, this company is international in scope. It does over four hundred million dollars worth of business each year.

In discussing his rise to such an important position in the business world, he quietly and humbly said, "You know, I have never found it necessary to smoke a big cigar or indulge in cocktails. I have just followed what my father taught me when I was a boy and tried to live the way my mother wanted me to live. And I haven't found that it has hurt me a bit."

On one occasion, the chairman of the board of directors of a large corporation, the largest of its kind in the United States with retail outlets from coast to coast and border to border, called one of his vice-presidents on the

telephone and said, "Will you please come to my office right away, and bring your two boys." These two boys were also associated with this company.

As the three men entered the chairman's office, he introduced them to a man who they learned was one of the great financiers from New York City. As the chairman of the board introduced these three men, he said to this financier, "These are the kind of men we want to build our company around."

Now, why do you suppose he would make such a statement, because these three men neither use tobacco or liquor? I doubt it. I am confident that many of the men in this company use tobacco and liquor. Then, why? Because they are Latter-day Saints? They are, but I doubt this was the reason. I think this business executive wanted to build his great company around men such as these three because they are men of character. They have personal standards, and they have the backbone to live these standards no matter where they are or whom they are with. These men are strong enough to resist the pressures of social customs rather than compromise their own principles, and this man knew they could be relied upon.

From these two examples, you can see that successful people have fulfilled freedom's challenge without compromising the principles of the gospel.

There were many other thoughts that went through my mind as I visited with these young students and contemplated their ambitions and desires to fulfil freedom's challenge. In my mind's eye, I could see among them future doctors, attorneys, educators, businessmen, engineers, scientists, and so forth.

The thought I wish to conclude with, however, has reference to yet another group who were not present at this meeting. As a matter of fact, I am afraid the motto, "Fulfil Freedom's Challenge," would have little interest for them. They are known as dropouts. They are the ones who for one reason or another leave high school without obtaining their diplomas. It is my feeling that this group of young men and young women are choosing to be-

come enslaved to a life of mediocrity, and the tragic fact about this is that not only are they entering into this deplorable condition, but they are probably going to take many of their children with them. If they could only foresee the opportunities and rewards that will pass them by because of their decision to be satisfied with a minimal preparation for life! It is essential that each person recognize that the responsibility for these decisions rests with himself. John Oxenham has written:

"To every man there openeth  
A Way, and Ways, and a Way,  
And the High Soul climbs the High way,  
And the Low Soul gropes the Low;  
And in between, on the misty flats,  
The rest drift to and fro.  
But to every man there openeth  
A High way and a Low,  
And every man decideth  
The Way his soul shall go."

It is my earnest prayer that young men and young women everywhere will consider carefully before choosing their highway of life.

What a wonderful thing it would be if all young people of this generation decided that mediocrity would not touch their lives but rather that excellence in all things would be their ambition. John W. Gardner, president of the Carnegie Corporation, spoke of excellence in this way:

"The most important moral of all is that excellence is where you find it. I would extend this generalization to cover not just higher education but all education from the vocational high school to the graduate school. . . . We must learn to honor excellence (indeed to demand it) in every socially accepted human activity, however hum-

ble the activity, and to scorn shoddiness, however exalted the activity. . . . An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity, and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water."

Freedom of choice is a basic principle of the gospel. This was true even before the earth was created. Each one of us has the divinely granted right to choose for himself. In choosing, we have the responsibility to use our intellect, which also has been given to us by our Heavenly Father. He has shown us the way; now it is our responsibility to choose which way we will go.

I bear you my testimony that God lives, that Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, gave his life that we might live, and that he gave us the teachings which, if properly lived, will permit us to return to his presence. I also bear witness that President David O. McKay is a prophet of God, just as surely as Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, the instrument in the hands of the Lord in restoring the gospel in this latter day, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### President David O. McKay:

Bishop Victor L. Brown of the Presiding Bishopric has just spoken to us.

Elder S. Dilworth Young of the First Council of Seventy will be our next speaker. He will be followed by our concluding speaker, Elder Marion G. Romney.

### ELDER S. DILWORTH YOUNG

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

About a year ago I was reading in the Doctrine and Covenants and came upon a verse of one of the sections. I suppose everybody has an experience of the type I had as I read. I think the Prophet had such an experience the day he read, "If any man lack wisdom let him

ask of God" (See James 1:5), for that scripture leaped at him; and so this one leaped at me. For a year or so I have been reading it off and on, contemplating it. Now I should like to read it to you, but first I should like to give it its framework.