

Wednesday, April 6

First Day

Ghost." Peter's rebuke stunned him: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." (Acts 8:19-20.)

Now, what I have been trying to say in a profusion of words—and I offer it as my witness—is this:

The basic testimony of a Latter-day Saint

I believe—"We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." (First article of faith.)

We believe in God the Father, the Planner, Elohim by name; Jesus the Son, the Creator, the Jehovah of the Old Testament; the Holy Ghost, the Testator, Revelator, Comforter.

The greatest gift God has bestowed upon us, his errant children, is the gift of his Only Begotten Son—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The next precious gift, I think, is the gift of the Holy Ghost. Following that I would rate priesthood—the great power of God.

Crowning these is the gift of eternal life.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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When the history of our time is written, it might well describe our generation as the one that has increased learning and scientific accomplishment to an extent far beyond the achievement of any preceding generation. We are constantly amazed at modern development, yet we have learned to expect the ever-expanding progress stemming from the mind of man and as the result of his genius.

"A little lower than the angels"

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

"For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." (Ps. 8:4-5.)

The evidence of man's accomplishments has firmly planted in the modern mind the conviction of man's greatness—just a little lower than the angels and crowned with glory and honor.

Men are free moral agents

Since the beginning, men have been born free moral agents with the freedom to choose between good or evil. Even in the preexistence the spirit children of the father had their choice.

"... for, behold, the devil was before Adam, for he rebelled against me, say-

ing, Give me thine honor, which is my power; and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency." (D&C 29:36.)

This same choice was given to the first man placed upon the earth, for after he was formed and placed amid the abundance that had been created, the Lord said: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself. . . ." (Moses 3:16-17.)

When the children of Israel stood on the threshold of the Promised Land, they faced the choice that was given to them. Israel was clearly told of the consequences of its decision. There was no neutral ground in the statement of the Lord to them:

"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse;

A blessing and a curse

"A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day:

"And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God. . . ." (Deut. 11:26-28.)

In the writings of Nephi we read of the instructions given by Lehi to his

sons regarding this same inherent agency: "Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all man might be miserable like unto himself." (2 Ne. 2:27.)

Without compulsion

There has never been a time when man has been forced to do good or forced to obey the commandments of God. He has always been given his free choice—his free moral agency. If one looks back through the events of history, there come into view the results of the greatness of men who kept the commandments of the Lord and made the choice on his side. One also sees strewn along the wayside the ruins that stand as silent reminders of those who chose otherwise. Both had their free moral agency.

In spite of the greatness of man and his accomplishments in the modern world, we observe the lack of faith in God and the absence of repentance, which has also been characteristic of those in the past who would not heed the commandments of God or the warnings of a prophet. Peace does not exist among men today. World leaders appear helpless to formulate a solution, and many of them have no regard for the principles of righteousness that would bring peace. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount have been set aside by those who formerly professed belief in them.

Offenses against morality

Morality appears to have been lost in the maze of human philosophies. We see it in the lives of individuals, people in high places in government, and even leaders of industry and labor. Many churches in the world are announcing compromises of their tenets so as not to offend the modern thinking of their membership. The cry has gone up from some pulpits that God is dead.

When God ceases to live in the minds and hearts of men and women, moral concepts collapse and only disaster can result.

In this community crime is increasing. It is on the increase in all states of the union and all over the world. There is a growing disregard for law and order, a turn toward riot and mob rule, and in some cases total defiance of man's basic rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. The crimes of our generation are not excelled by any of the past, although we may read history and cringe at the atrocities.

The loss of morality extends up to the great commanders of the earth as well as down to the single individual man. The stability of the family has been affected, as demonstrated by the upsurge of the divorce rate. Juvenile delinquency is accepted. It is not a matter of how it can be reduced, but how the acceleration can be held in moderation, as one authority has stated. The use of liquor and addiction to tobacco are on the increase; sexual morality is being scoffed at in many modern circles; free love is tolerated and even advocated; venereal diseases among teen-agers as well as others have taken a sharp upturn. In short, the will to resist evil seems to be vanishing. I have asked myself, and I ask you this question: What is the reason for these appalling circumstances in a world in which man has made such outstanding achievements in learning?

Sin alienates man from God

As I read the Old and New Testaments and also the Book of Mormon, I find that man has two theological concerns involving himself: his sins and his salvation. When man sins he suffers its painful effects. There are few chapters in these books that do not contain some reference to what sin is or does. The predominant conception of the nature of sin in these books is that of a personal alienation from God. We must conclude, therefore, that the vanishing resistance to evil in the world is caused by this personal alienation from our Heavenly Father.

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Follow the course of righteousness

Let us ask this question: What causes some men in a declining morality to shun evil and wrongdoing and to follow the course of righteousness in their temporal, moral, and spiritual lives? In my mind, there are three reasons for this phenomenon, and it is to these three points I would like to address my remarks.

The first is fear. It is said that man fears God, but such an emotion is ambiguous, for it may both repel and attract. I am mindful of the conclusion reached by the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes in the admonition: Fear God, and keep his commandments. (Ecc. 12:13.) The word fear and its synonyms occur several hundred times in the Bible, and I believe we would agree that a summary of scripture would indicate that the law is to love the Lord absolutely and exclusively. Many people, however, are compelled to do good because of fear—fear of the law, fear of the unknown, fear of the Almighty. In the book of Revelation, John catalogues fear with expressions of other evil doings in these words:

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. . . .” (Rev. 21:7-8.)

Love of God will drive out fear

To the restored Church the Lord has stated time and time again that fear is not of God and will not enter the hearts of those who love the Lord and live righteously: “Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you. . . .” (D&C 68:6.)

There are many people who live the so-called good life because of fear, but as Christians we must not serve for this reason. Fear must be banished from our hearts. In one of the epistles of John he wrote: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that

feareth is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18.)

The second reason for men to shun evil, pursue righteousness, and serve their fellowmen is duty. Often we hear men say they do certain things because it is their duty. One great writer has penned: “The duty of man . . . is plain and simple, and consists but of two points—his duty to God, which every man must feel; and, with respect to his neighbor, to do as he would be done by.” (Thomas Paine) Do we have a responsibility beyond that which it is our duty to perform? The parable Jesus gave of the farmer and his servant is a direct answer to this question:

“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

“And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

“Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.

“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” (Luke 17:7-10.)

Even though the servant had come in from the field tired and weary, it was his duty to gird himself and serve his master's meal. It was never supposed that the master would wait on the servant. The servant is expected to wait on the master. He does not expect a word of appreciation, because under his agreement he is only doing that which was his duty to do. Men who only carry out that which is within their duty and go no further have no claim to any reward beyond the scope of that duty and are unprofitable servants.

Love of God makes obedience easy and natural

The Lord requires obedience not because it is our duty nor because we

fear him. Let me read from the 58th section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

"For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

"Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

"For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.

"But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.

"Who am I that made man, saith the Lord, that will hold him guiltless that obeys not my commandments?" (D&C 58:26-30.)

Now I come to the third reason, which in my opinion ought to be the objective of all men everywhere. The greatest motivating influence for righteousness and for service to one's fellowmen is the divine principle of love. The answer Jesus gave to the scribe is a summary of the law:

Love of God and of man

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

"And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31.)

Jesus revealed the meaning of love by his life, and the perfect example of love was given to us by the Father in the offering of his divine Son:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.)

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he

hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

"And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." (1 John 4:20-21.)

The logic of this is simple, clear, and unequivocal: the proof of love of God is love of one's brother. This becomes the fundamental commandment of Christianity. This was the religion taught by the Master. How happy would society be were these two plain, rational precepts properly observed: Love me, and love thy fellows.

The way to peace and goodwill among men

The living of this commandment by all men would restore peace to the earth. It would cause them to love the Lord and thereby keep his commandments; thus the troubles of our age would vanish, and man's happiness in a moral world would result. The motivating influences generated within man through fear, his obligation to duty, or deep sense of love can turn the tide of the declining morality of our generation. The greatest of these is love. We must strive to obtain this virtue if we are to serve the Lord without faltering or growing weary in our pursuit of eternal life. We will do this not because of fear, nor merely because it is our duty, but because we have sought for and obtained the greatest of all virtues, love.

I know that God lives, that he is our Father, that he has given to each of his sons and daughters free moral agency, that his Son, the Redeemer of the world, through love, gave his life that each of us may have eternal life. I pray that we shall exercise that agency which we have been given by loving the Lord and our neighbor, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Joseph Fielding Smith:

Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve has been our concluding speaker.

The Brigham Young University Combined Choruses will now favor us