

President Joseph Fielding Smith

We have just listened to a report from the clerk of the conference, Elder Joseph W. Anderson, giving statistical data; from Elder Orval W. Adams, who read a statement by the Church Finance Committee; and from President Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency, who presented for your

sustaining vote the General Authorities, General Officers, and General Auxiliary officers of the Church.

We thank you, brethren and sisters, for this sustaining vote.

Elder Delbert L. Stapley of the Council of the Twelve will be our first speaker this afternoon. He will be followed by Elder Victor L. Brown of the Presiding Bishopric.

Elder Delbert L. Stapley Of the Council of the Twelve

Recently, I read a talk, given by a doctor to a convention of medical men, entitled "The Pangs of Unlearning." He called attention to the discoveries through research of new drugs and improved treatments that require much unlearning by physicians and surgeons, because many former practices and medicines do not best serve the interests of today's patients. A doctor friend of mine significantly stated that the majority of medical services practiced ten years ago are obsolete today. This talk challenged my interest, as I envisioned updated learning, reorienting, and retraining as applying to the pattern of our own lives.

I should like to share with you some of my thoughts on this subject of unlearning and the possible personal improvement each individual can attain by living strictly within the framework and spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Learning anew from research and revelation

The word *unlearn* as here used does not mean a casting aside of eternal truths and everlasting knowledge. Rather, it means altering our habits of behavior so as to live more in harmony with God's will. It reflects a desire and a willingness to keep pace with up-to-date knowledge gained through research (as well as inspiration and revelation), which provides advanced learning, new methods, and techniques to replace the less effective or obsolete. Are we faithful and obedient enough in the Church to accept authorized changes that represent improvement and growth?

The wonderful, complex instrument for registering our experiences that we call the mind gathers a maze of data to be sifted, analyzed, and appraised. In such a process some data will be found useful and some without value. In the latter case, what shall be done with such material?

It would be well, of course, if it could be thrown away, like refuse, and forgotten altogether. That, however, is quite out of the question, as the Master so clearly illustrated in his parable of the wheat and the tares. And no way has, as yet, been discovered by which we may press a button or turn a switch and have that which is of no value to our learning cast aside automatically. That which is learned, the useful and the seemingly useless alike, memory retains.

What, then, can be done as our learning process grows and expands and memory retains the good and the not good that have been accumulated there? The simplest answer to such a question would be "unlearn the not good." We are then faced with the next question, "How can that be done?"

Exercise free-agency

The answer is not so simple nor so easy. It involves many matters and requires earnest, prayerful consideration. In the first place, the primary law of intelligent life, free agency, or the personal power to exercise judgment should be made operative. With that power set in motion, the good and the not good may be determined. Yet even here man on his own may not be perfect in judgment. One needs to be humble in spirit, contrite of heart,

ready in prayer, as was the Master, even though he was perfect. By such means one is entitled to the promptings and guidance of the Holy Ghost, so necessary when one is on the road of perfectness, yet needing to "unlearn" that which is not good.

Creative attitudes

Another factor important in the process of learning and unlearning is that of attitude. Some of us need to unlearn personal attitudes that are contrary and resistant to gospel teachings and requirements. Certain attitudes are destructive to true character. They inhibit growth. If allowed to develop, they may produce disastrous consequences. Negative, cynical, and other kindred attitudes are dangerous to faith, hope, humility, righteous desires, and high purpose, which virtues are essential to the discovery and retention of that which is best in the learning process and of "unlearning" the undesirable in life. One should, therefore, be well aware of the many types of attitudes present in daily living.

We sometimes wonder why people behave as they do. Perhaps it is because they are unwilling to unlearn the reasons for their unwarranted behavior. Now, I do not want you to think I am advocating the unlearning of eternal truths, principles, standards, ideals, and ordinances, because these gospel verities never change. God's laws are immutable and endure forever. By increasing our learning, however, we become acquainted with additional truths and higher laws referred to in scripture as truth, light, spirit, and the mysteries of godliness. A scientist frequently forsakes theory he has learned because research uncovers advanced knowledge that changes or makes obsolete some former concepts but does not eliminate basic principles. The sciences are subject to constant change. This is true also in technological advances, where we forsake the old and accept the new improved methods of performance that have advanced our civilization tremendously.

Cherish the word of God

While all this advancement takes

place in our modern world, we cannot afford to forsake or discard the teachings and revelations of God. People brought up in a religious faith that does not teach the true doctrines of Christ, regardless of how sincere they may be, must unlearn much of what they were taught and accept the new light and way to obtain salvation and glory. Because the children of Israel had gone astray and were so steeped in the faith and tradition of their fathers, they were unable to unlearn the law given for their temporal benefit, for the higher spiritual law brought to them personally by the Christ. They thus failed to recognize the Christ when he was sent of God, the Father, to live among them. It was Christ who came to fulfill the lesser law and to reveal to them the higher law of his gospel. Jesus was put to death because his own people of the house of Israel could not unlearn and prepare themselves to receive him, their Jehovah, Savior, and God.

The peoples of the world must unlearn the idea that all churches are acceptable unto God. Some teach that it doesn't matter which road one takes (meaning which church one belongs to), since all roads, it is claimed, lead back to the presence of God. This premise does not accord with the teachings of the scriptures.

No "new wine in old bottles"

Christ did not accept any of the churches of his day to supply the framework for his earthly kingdom. He taught, "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, . . . but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved." (Matt. 9:17.) For the same reason the organization of his Church and the gospel of his kingdom could not fit into the framework of the existing churches. They were false and unsuited to Christ's needs and purpose. The identical condition was also true in this dispensation when God restored the gospel and his kingdom through his divinely called servant, Joseph Smith.

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism"

Man must unlearn the idea that any and all baptisms are acceptable unto

God. There is only one true mode of baptism, and that is immersion. Only men who hold the appropriate priesthood office and are divinely called and ordained can efficaciously perform this holy ordinance in the gospel and know that it is acceptable to God and that a record will be made of it on earth as well as in heaven.

I sincerely testify that as all members of Christ's Church progress toward perfection they will enjoy increased knowledge and clearer vision of God's plans and purposes. They will also have some unlearning to do, not because basic truths, standards, and principles change, but because new methods and techniques are employed to achieve greater and more widespread improved performance and spiritual results.

Now, to support this thought, I quote from the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "We consider that God has created man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect; and that the nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin; and like the ancients, arrives at that point of faith where he is wrapped in the power and glory of his Maker, and is caught up to dwell with him. But we consider that this is a station to which no man ever arrived in a moment; he must have been instructed in the government and laws of that kingdom by proper degrees, until his mind is capable in some measure of comprehending the propriety, justice, equality, and consistency of the same. . . . [and] that it is necessary for men to receive an understanding concerning the laws of the heavenly kingdom, before they are permitted to enter it: we mean the celestial glory." (*Documentary History of the Church*, Vol. 2, page 8.)

Vigorous renewal for "the perfecting of the Saints"

Nevertheless, people become too complacent and satisfied with what they have. It is most difficult for them

to unlearn and accept the better way. It is also difficult for some members of the Church to unlearn and give up less effective methods of doing things for greatly improved programs planned to build increased spirituality, faith, and testimony to perfect the Saints of God. The Church programs are constantly being strengthened and perfected to meet the challenge of the growing, progressive needs of its members.

Church correlation

We hear much these days about Church correlation, which is an important step forward in promoting a rounded-out educational understanding of all that pertains to God's latter-day kingdom. The lesson outlines are prepared by the Church correlation committee and are adapted to meet the needs of the members of each Church organization. This prevents any overlapping in study courses, which produce well-informed doctrinal and Church history students who can intelligently give an answer and reason for the hope within them. Correlation of Church organizations, lesson material, and coordination of activities will increase effectiveness and strength in the lives of members, both young and old.

Rededication of parents

Parents must unlearn the leaving of all gospel teaching to the organizations of the Church, when the prime responsibility for the teaching of children rests upon the home. If home evenings are not held or are poorly planned, children and parents are denied the wholesome association and companionship of one another. This condition requires a change of attitude and an up-dated learning to enjoy the blessings of this choice family experience. The Church program planned for these occasions is ideal and can, with some imagination, be adapted to every family need. Parents should unlearn the ineffective methods of dealing with their children, finding more effectual ways; then children will feel free to discuss and counsel with parents about the intimate, delicate, and confidential matters that concern them.

Renewal of loyalty to God's laws

Do some of us need to reevaluate what constitutes proper observance of the Word of Wisdom? Are we becoming too liberal in our personal interpretation and application of this law? The Apostle Paul counseled: "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thess. 5:22.) Here again, we can unlearn and resolve to stay strictly on the Lord's side of this law and be safe and at peace with ourselves.

Can we justify a partial payment to the tithing fund as an honest accounting with the Lord on his law of the tithe? Shouldn't we be honest with him and unlearn any wrongful practices to fully meet the obligation and conditions of this law?

Man must unlearn his changing liberal attitude toward sex that minimizes the sacredness of sex behavior and opens the way for licentious living. I proclaim with all the power of my being that God's seventh commandment to the children of Israel through Moses, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," is a law as binding upon man today as then. Adultery is one of the most abominable sins in the sight of the Lord (Alma 39:5), and forbidden by our God. (See D&C 42:24; Exod. 20:14.) Those who willfully violate this law must pay God's penalty, which is denial to the celestial kingdom. (1 Cor. 6:9-10.)

If prayers are not a regular practice in the home and personal prayers uttered daily, isn't it wise for us to be more faithful in keeping in contact with our God? Wouldn't it be wise to unlearn some of our feelings, habits, and doings that prevent us from enjoying the sweet companionship of the Holy Ghost to guide and direct us in our personal lives? Many brethren endowed with the Holy Priesthood should unlearn a complacent approach to the duties and responsibilities attendant to this holy power. The Lord has counseled that every priesthood bearer is to "learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence." (D&C 107:99.) Slothfulness in one's duty isn't acceptable to the Lord. He further requires that men must "do many things of their own free

will, and bring to pass much righteousness." (D&C 58:27.)

There is unlearning to do to adjust from the previous ward teaching program to the present home teaching plan to Church families. The new plan is much superior to the older method and has far greater potential for effective results.

This can also be said of new programs in other fields of church service, such as genealogy, temple work, stake missions, education of youth.

Failure to accept and follow wholeheartedly the counsel and example of our leader in moral, ethical, and spiritual matters does not produce harmony but disharmony. It also places one in the position of pitting one's knowledge and learning against that which God has inspired or revealed through his anointed servant. Some question the right of the Church through its leader to speak up and let the world know and understand the position of the Church on ethical, moral, and political principles or standards that have to do with the rights and welfare of man. Who is able to speak more clearly and authoritatively on such matters? If man loses his God-given right of agency, freedom, and ethical practices by unrighteous interference and unjust controls, his religious life will suffer, because the climate in which religion should flourish becomes restricted and untenable.

Re-education for spiritual growth

The Savior taught many truths during his ministry upon the earth; but men were offended by his teachings and reviled against him, for their hearts were not right, and their spirits were not attuned to his. Although many stood against him, he was right and they were wrong. Was not his atoning sacrifice for the purpose of helping man to *unlearn* his sinful ways, which grow up within us like the tares among the wheat? We must unlearn all dross, that we might be more like our Redeemer and our Eternal Father.

In this present day many need to unlearn unorthodox teachings and improper standards and to humble themselves, as it were, in sackcloth and

ashes. All of us should make a personal evaluation and determine where we can profitably unlearn false opinions and erroneous teachings. Our duty is to condition ourselves to be more valuable in promoting the work of God's kingdom. Freedom does not license contention nor approve non-conformists to supplant God's ways with their own. The Lord proclaimed to Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:8-9.)

Perhaps this statement will cause us to remember how small we are in comparison to our God, who is all-knowing and all-powerful. The Lord taught Moses a great lesson in this regard. After he had shown Moses by vision the workmanship of his hands, he withdrew from Moses, and his glory was not upon him. Moses was left unto himself, and he fell unto the earth exhausted. It was many hours before he again received his natural strength, and when he did, he humbly said: "Now for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed." (Moses 1:10.) This counsel should remind all of us to be meek and contrite of spirit.

Repentance, the way to perfection

As we advance toward perfection, there will be higher laws revealed to our understanding and benefit that will replace those of a lower order. This truth was first taught to Adam

and Eve in the garden of Eden, when the Lord gave them two choices: (1) not to partake of the forbidden fruit; and (2) to multiply and replenish the earth, which choices call for obedience to a lesser law or a higher one. They chose to fulfill the higher law. Again, when the Savior sojourned among men, he replaced a lesser law, which Moses, his servant, had given to the children of Israel, with the higher law of the gospel, his plan of life and salvation. Therefore, as we progress in righteousness and truth, we will come in contact with higher laws previously unknown that, when revealed, all of us must accept and obey to perfect ourselves and become more like our God and his Son, Jesus Christ. When that goal is achieved, we will again be in their presence and glory. God bless us with the Holy Ghost to help us choose wisely and with faithful assurance, that we, without question, are always on the Lord's side of every question.

I leave you my witness and my testimony, brothers and sisters, to the truthfulness of this work. I know this is God's restored kingdom and that it is here for the blessing and for the salvation of his children. God bless us to so live, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Joseph Fielding Smith

We have just heard from Elder Delbert L. Stapley of the Council of the Twelve.

We will now hear from Bishop Victor L. Brown, second counselor in the Presiding Bishopric.

Elder Victor L. Brown Of the Presiding Bishopric

In recent days, it has been my privilege to walk on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus, speaking to two fishermen, Simon and Andrew, said: "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." (Mark 1:17.)

As I stood on the Mount of Olives, looking toward Jerusalem, I recalled that on this same mount, the Master

instructed Peter, James, John, and Andrew as to the future of the world, even as to his second coming. He told them of wars and rumors of wars, of terrible calamities that would befall nations, kingdoms, and peoples before the Son of Man would come in clouds of great power and glory.

Another statement Mark attributes to the Savior on this same occasion