

Blights which kill

How like the mistletoe is immorality. The killer plant starts with a sticky sweet berry. Once rooted, it sticks and grows—a leaf, a branch, a plant. It never starts mature and full grown. It is always transplanted an infant.

Nor does immorality begin in adultery or perversion. Those are full-grown adults. Little indiscretions are the berries—indiscretions like sex thoughts, sex discussions, passionate kissing, pornography. The leaves and little twigs are masturbation and necking and such, growing with every exercise.

The full-grown plant is petting and sex looseness. It confounds, frustrates, and destroys like the parasite if it is not cut out and destroyed, for, in time, it robs the tree, bleeds its life, and leaves it barren and dry; and, strangely enough, the parasite dies with its host.

Each seemingly small indiscretion seems powerless as compared to the sturdy body, the strong mind, the sweet spirit of the youth who gives way to the first temptation and who might, like the majestic tree, say: "Ha, little weed, little bottle! I can take you between my lips without harm. I'll look smart and be a good fellow with the

crowd. Ha, little indiscretion! You are weak—I am strong. I can discard you at my pleasure."

But years later, I see him once again, and what a change! The strong has become weak; the master, the slave; his spiritual growth curtailed; he has isolated himself from the Church with all its uplifting influences. Has he not suffered a kind of spiritual death, leaving him like the tree—a mere skeleton of what he might have been?

If the first unrighteous act is never given root and the mistletoe never permitted to lodge, the tree will grow to beautiful maturity and life toward God, our Father.

May our youth and all others fortify themselves against the insidious evils of the world that overpower and destroy, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Hugh B. Brown

Elder Spencer W. Kimball of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us.

Elder Robert L. Simpson, first counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, will now address us. He will be followed by Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the First Council of Seventy.

Elder Robert L. Simpson

Of the Presiding Bishopric

During the past few weeks, most of us have either participated in or listened as some rather serious commitments were made. With a group of eager young Scouts, it was: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country." These boys were committing themselves to a better effort.

At a patriotic rally recently, a group of us earnestly vowed a pledge of allegiance to the flag of our country. Every citizen, whatever his nationality, makes strong commitments to uphold and honor his government. This is as it should be.

Few, if any, go through life without committing themselves to a sacred trust and promise of one type or another. In proper perspective and with lofty and worthy objectives, such covenants

can and should be stimulating, motivational, and indeed a most stabilizing influence among men.

But any and all social or civil promises, commitments, and oaths entered into by man with man fade into relative insignificance when compared with those promises and covenants between man and God, the Eternal Father. Could any commitment be more important than a sacred covenant between mortal man and his Maker?

A long, long time ago—yes, even before the foundations of this earth were laid—the plan was clear; the process for the successful undertaking of building souls for eternal purposes was established. The covenant procedure was decided upon as an essential element to that end.

Commitments to the righteous life

The Prophet Joseph has recorded this explicit observation from the Lord himself: "For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world." (D&C 132:5.)

Now, no one is suggesting that it is inappropriate for men to establish some mutual understandings and contracts from time to time, provided such agreements stimulate, motivate, and bind us more closely together in a good and worthwhile cause.

The Priesthood

It is expedient, however, that we place first things first, and any agreement that we make with the Lord through his Holy Priesthood takes precedence over all else, regardless of its source or its apparent value. Speaking further through the Prophet Joseph, the Lord declares that "all covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed [by proper authority] . . . are of no efficacy, virtue, or force . . . ; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead." (D&C 132:7.)

He then gives this reassuring promise: "Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion." (D&C 132:8.) Then, thinking in terms of eternity, he states:

"For whatsoever things remain are by me; and whatsoever things are not by me shall be shaken and destroyed." (D&C 132:14.) The sacred agreements that we have entered into with our Heavenly Father must be kept first and foremost and above all else.

Baptism

Most within range of my voice have taken upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ through the waters of baptism. By virtue of this sacred ordinance, we have come forth in a

spiritual birth, just as real and necessary as our birth into mortality. We be unto that child of God who would enter such a sacred covenant deceitfully or with ulterior motives. Little better is he who enters the waters of baptism without the intention of valiance or effort. Nothing is sadder in all this world than those who, after participating in this great blessing, regard it as of little or no consequence in their lives and then proceed to lose the possibility of life eternal by default. There can be no room for indifference in the wake of such an honor and blessing as that found in the sacred ordinance of baptism.

Indeed, it has been appropriately observed that where much is given, much is expected. All who have had the privilege of baptism in his appointed way and by his appointed authority are indeed richly endowed. Commitment of the highest order has been made. The obligation to bear his name worthily becomes paramount.

As man was being created, surely our Maker must have realized how short our memories and how weak the flesh in this temporal setting. Consequently, his great plan provided for a regular reminder to all who took upon them his name in the waters of baptism.

The Sacrament

The sacrament was revealed by the Savior himself, first of all to his very closest associates in the ministry with the specific instruction that "it is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus." (D&C 20:75.) It is, therefore, most important for members of his Church to recommit themselves every week.

Commitment No. 1: That they are willing to take upon them the name of his Son.

Commitment No. 2: And always remember him.

Commitment No. 3: To keep his commandments which he has given them.

These are not idle thoughts and words but rather sacred obligations and

promises entered into with God, the Father, as each worthy member partakes with contrite spirit and deepest reflections concerning the atoning sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father.

Show me the man, woman, or child who truly and sincerely covenants to take upon himself the name of Jesus Christ, and I will show you a person who is upright and honest in all of his dealings.

Show me the man, woman, or child who truly commits himself to always remember, and I will show you a child of God who is without guile, one who is understanding and quick to forgive.

Show me the man, woman or child who makes it a matter of daily and hourly endeavor to keep God's commandments that he has given them and lives that pledge in his every act, his every word, to the very best of his ability, and I will show you one who radiates the true Spirit of Christ and who, if unwavering to the end, will inherit eternal life, which is, according to the Lord, "the greatest of all the gifts of God." (D&C 14:7.)

Unfortunately, there are those who choose to commit themselves by covenant to the adversary. Conspiring men have formed secret combinations all through the ages to promote wickedness and evil. Immediately preceding the advent of the Savior on this continent 2,000 years ago, we are told of such a group who "did enter into a covenant one with another, yea, even into that covenant which was given by them of old, which covenant was given and administered by the devil, to combine against all righteousness.

"Therefore they did combine against the people of the Lord, and enter into a covenant to destroy them. . . ." (3 Ne. 6:28-29.)

Times have not changed. Less than two months ago, most of you read the disturbing article in our newspapers about a group of individuals who have established a so-called Satanic church, with the sole purpose to participate only in the realms of evil and darkness. They are in open defiance of and diametrically opposed to all of His holy purposes that bring us together

in this great conference. Without a goodly number of God-fearing men committed to the cause of truth, these societies of evil could well take over our society.

The only effective tool against evil and darkness is truth and light, particularly truth and light held in the hands of those bearing God's Holy Priesthood; worthy, dedicated men such as I see before me here today.

No man or boy who has accepted the commitment of priesthood can stand idly by, for if we do not abide in this covenant with the Lord, if we are less than anxiously engaged in doing something about it, he says: ". . . ye are not worthy of me." (D&C 98:15.)

The oath and covenant of Priesthood

The oath and covenant of the priesthood stands singularly supreme among God's covenants with his children. The Spirit of the Lord is companion to the priesthood. ". . . all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord; . . .

"And he that receiveth me receiveth my father." (D&C 84:35, 37.) These reassuring promises from the Lord, as though there were not enough, are climaxed by what has to be the most generous reward ever accorded to mortal man. He confirms his part of the contract as repayment for complete faithfulness in these words: "And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.

"And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood." (D&C 84:38-39.)

Oh, my dear brothers and sisters, can't we see the folly of any course except it be that course which is priesthood-centered and pointing toward eternal life? The yoke is easy, the burden is light, the Savior tells us. (Matt. 11:30.) The only difficult way is the cobblestone byway of periodic indifference, broken covenants, and half-hearted effort.

If ours has been the commitment of baptism, then stand up tall and bear his name with honor and dignity, for the promise is that as we prove faithful over a few things, he shall make us

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rulers over many things. (See D&C 52:13.)

If our commitment is in the form of the sacrament, may we partake each time worthily, that we may always have his Spirit to be with us. (See D&C 20:77.) Such is the unqualified promise from our Heavenly Father.

If ours is the commitment to honor the priesthood, may we do so nobly, using it for the blessing of mankind, that our inheritance may indeed be "all that the Father has."

The commitment we make through our covenants with the Lord is serious business. All else is secondary. His rewards are certain, for he has declared for all to hear: "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise." (D&C 82:10.)

Let every father stand fearlessly at the head of his family and accept Joshua's challenge that has stood through the ages: "... choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:15.)

May we commit ourselves without reservation. May ours be the whole armor of God, that our calling and election may be made sure, I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Hugh B. Brown

Elder Robert L. Simpson of the Presiding Bishopric has just spoken to us.

We shall now be glad to hear from Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the First Council of Seventy.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie

Of the First Council of the Seventy

We have received from the Lord—in this day and age in which we now live—a commission to proclaim his divinity and to invite all men to come and worship him as Lord and King.

To most people now living, God is unknown and unknowable. Some consider him to be a mystical spirit essence that fills the immensity of space; others feel that the laws of nature and the forces that govern the universe are God; while yet others are not sufficiently concerned with spiritual things to give any serious thought to matters pertaining to Deity.

Even the religious creeds of almost the whole body of modern Christendom state flatly that he is uncreated and incomprehensible, that he is a spirit without body, parts, or passions, and that in some inexplicable way he is three gods and yet one God.

"We are the offspring of God"

We know him, however, as a living and real being, a personage of tabernacle in whose image man is created. He is our Father in heaven, meaning, as Paul expressed it, that "we are the offspring of God" (Acts 17:29); that he is "the Father of spirits" (Heb.

12:9); that he is the parent of the intelligent, sentient beings who dwell with him during their pre-mortal or first estate.

The gospel restored

When the Beloved Disciple John, as the last of our Lord's ancient apostles to minister among men, saw in vision the latter-day restoration of "the everlasting gospel," he recorded that this proclamation would then go forth "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

" . . . Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water." (Rev. 14:6-7.)

It is of this God—the only true and living God, the God whom Jesus said it was life eternal to know, the God who is the Creator of all things, who made heaven and earth and the sea and the fountains of waters—it is of him we now desire to speak and testify.

The proclamation we now make, and the testimony we now bear, is that God our Father has revealed himself anew in this day and age of the earth's history, and that he has commissioned us