

in the whirlwind, yea, and when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of

the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall." (He. 5:12.)

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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One of our hymns we sing most frequently and with great fervor is:

"We thank thee, O God, for a prophet
To guide us in these latter days.
We thank thee for sending the gospel
To lighten our minds with its rays.

"We thank thee for every blessing
Bestowed by thy bounteous hand.
We feel it a pleasure to serve thee,
And love to obey thy command."

(*Hymns*, No. 196.)

One of the most important features of the last line is, "We love to obey thy command." The members of the Church have listened to the counsel of their leaders and followed it quite implicitly from the very organization of the Church. Those who did not heed the counsel of the brethren and were disobedient to the laws of the gospel usually apostatized and left the Church.

Although there have been periods of great trial among the people in the history of the Church, the revelations of the Lord, through the counsel of his leaders, have guided the people constantly in both their material and spiritual lives.

Guidance for the Church

The guidance for the Church continues to come through the President, the prophet, seer, and revelator, to the present day. The basic principle of the restored gospel is that God reveals his mind and will to his established Prophet on earth for the guidance of the Church. The Church is founded on revelation. On the day of the organization of the Church, the Lord gave a revelation to the Church:

"Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his [the President of the Church] words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

"For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

"For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory.

"For thus saith the Lord God: Him have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good, and his diligence I know, and his prayers I have heard." (D&C 21:4-7.)

Today, more than ever before, we have need for implicit faith in God and his appointed leaders and their inspired counsel. In this day, when many doubt the very existence of God and the divinity of Christ, as we learn of the "new morality," see a general breakdown in moral standards, witness common use of drugs and disregard for parents and home, see increase in juvenile delinquency and the tendency to break marriage vows, riots, violence, and great disturbances everywhere, there is justification for great concern.

Man's free agency

Yet, no matter how sure the dangers and how great the need for counsel and guidance, there can be no coercion in the Church. Man's free agency is held by the Church to be his first right. Every man must be free to act for himself. The Lord has declared: "For the power is in them,

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wherein they are agents unto themselves." (D&C 58:28.)

Brigham Young said: "All rational beings have an agency of their own. . . . The volition of the creature is free; this is a law of their existence. . . ." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 1943 ed., p. 62.)

Commenting on this, John A. Widtsoe has said: "Coercion, which is in direct opposition to free agency, must not be applied in any form" in the Church. This is the plan of the adversary.

". . . There must be no attempt to force even a needed gift upon another. It is better that one live in darkness than to be forced into light. There is ample place among men for teaching but none for compelling others to accept what is taught. Every person is under obligation to respect the free agency of every other individual. . . ."

He states further: "The application of these principles to daily affairs sometimes leads to misunderstandings. Certain Church members may feel that a Church official is invading their personal liberties when he gives counsel. . . . Advice on . . . matters of conduct by the constituted leadership of the Church may be questioned by those who are affected by the advice.

"The first answer to such a person is that all advice is given for the good of the individual concerned, and that it is wise to follow those who have had experience and are unselfishly giving help to others. . . . The Church which exists for the welfare of man, would be derelict to its divinely imposed obligations did it not exercise its responsibility as a guardian against all evil and for all good.

"The second answer is that under the law of free agency no one is obliged to obey . . . the counsel given. Man is always free to act for himself. But, to members of the Church, this answer may be misleading. They are under the necessity of acknowledging that consistency requires them to conform to counsel given and regulations set up.

". . . Every member of the Church upon terms of faith and repentance, has entered the waters of baptism. By this

ordination he has pledged acceptance of the doctrine and practice of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The divinity of the work of the Church has become his settled conviction. Upon this foundation he henceforth regulates his life. Among the basic principles [we accept as members] are the inspiration and authority residing in the living priesthood. When, therefore, the President of the Church speaks, authoritatively, and we disobey, we are repudiating one of the foundation principles of the gospel. . . ." (John A. Widtsoe, *Gospel Interpretation*, pp. 70-72.)

Need for guidance

With our freedom of agency in the Church, we need the constant guidance of our leaders to help us in our decisions. It seems to me that no member of the Church can risk becoming involved in any questionable activity or association with extreme, radical groups, whose teachings and actions run counter to the gospel, without seeking advice from his spiritual leader. Your bishop or branch president, stake president or mission president has been duly appointed as your spiritual adviser and has the right of inspiration to give you counsel and guidance you might need.

In a letter to all stake leaders in September of 1966 the First Presidency said: "The Lord has so organized His Church that there is accessible to every member—man, woman, and child—a spiritual advisor, and a temporal counselor as well, who knows them intimately and who knows the circumstances and conditions out of which their problems come, and who, by reason of his ordination, is entitled to an endowment from our Heavenly Father of the necessary discernment and inspiration of the Lord to enable him to give the advice which the one in trouble so much needs. We refer to the bishop or branch president in the first instance and to the stake or mission president if the bishop or branch president, for any reason, feels the need of assistance in giving his counsel." (Letter from the First Presidency, September 22, 1966, to

stake presidents, bishops, mission presidents, and branch presidents.)

Responsibility in following counsel

How should we regard and interpret counsel in the Church? Is there a distinction between the law of the gospel and counsel? Does the counsel of the priesthood differ from that which emanated from secular fields? Do we have a responsibility in following the counsel of the brethren?

President Stephen L. Richards answers these questions in this manner: "... a moment's reflection will convince you of the rather serious regard in which we hold counsel. While it is true that we characterize infractions of the law as sin and we do not apply quite that drastic a terminology to failure to follow counsel, yet in the Church, under the priesthood, counsel always is given for the primary purpose of having the law observed, so that it does occupy a place of standing and importance, almost comparable to that law of the gospel." (Address at Brigham Young University, February 26, 1957, p. 1.)

As we believe, there is at the head of the Church today a living prophet, to whom the Lord reveals his mind and will for the guidance of the Church, and we sustain the Council of Twelve as prophets, seers, and revelators who are also divinely chosen and inspired to watch over the Church and keep it in order and to be special witnesses of Christ; when you sustain your stake president and bishop, your mission president and branch president as God's divinely appointed representatives to preside over you in your respective area and then fail to obey their counsel, you deny yourself the blessings of the gospel and personal blessings and direction. The counsel of the leaders of the Church usually is but a repetition of the laws of the gospel, encouragement to follow the teachings of the Church, to keep

the covenants we made as we entered the waters of baptism, and in the house of the Lord.

Obedience brings happiness

The following of this counsel can only bring eventual happiness. Disobedience to counsel can only accrue to our detriment. It often leads to fault-finding, lack of activity in the Church, breaking the commandments, and even loss of faith.

Some most sincere counsel was given the members of the Church by Oliver Cowdery when he came before the Church at Pottawatamie and requested that he be restored to the Church. He said: "Follow the Twelve: they are the men with whom the Priesthood rests. If you follow the main channel of the stream, you will go right; but if you run into a bayou, you will find yourselves among snags." (From a talk by Elder George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 7, p. 117.)

I can think of no better counsel for us today than to follow the main channel of the stream, to keep from extremes to the right or the left, through obedience to the continual direction of the Lord for the guidance of the Church.

This testimony I leave with you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Joseph Fielding Smith

Elder Delbert L. Stapley of the Council of the Twelve will be our concluding speaker.

The sessions tomorrow morning, Saturday, will be broadcast direct by numerous radio and television stations, and recorded for transmission on Sunday morning to many television stations in the eastern and central part of the United States.

A video tape of Saturday morning's session of the conference will be flown from the Mainland and televised Sunday morning in all the islands of the Pacific. . . .