

Elder Hartman Rector, Jr.

Of the First Council of the Seventy

● "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble," and as disposed to evil "as the sparks fly upward." (Job 14:1; 5:7.)

These words of the prophet Job are not particularly flattering to man, but they are truthful. They represent only too vividly what the natural man is like. King Benjamin added his testimony to this when he said:

The natural man

"For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord. . . ." (Mosiah 3:19.)

This is strong testimony borne against man, but a perusal of the pages of history leaves little doubt as to its truthfulness. Man's inhumanity to man has always been and is now everywhere in evidence.

How can fallen human nature be changed from evil to good? Basically, this must be the most important question confronting mankind. All other questions seem to pale into insignificance when compared to *this* one, because man cannot be saved in his sins. And yet there are those who say, "You can't change human nature." This claim is very frequently and flippantly made. Of course it is false. President David O. McKay taught something completely different from this in 1945 when he said: "Human nature will have to be changed on an enormous scale in the future or the world will be drowned in its own blood."

Feeding evil desires

On the one hand, man wants to keep the commandments of God and serve his fellowman; on the other, he can't forget what he wants to do for himself. He wants to pay his tithing, but he keeps thinking about what he could buy himself with the money. If he

stops considering what he could buy with the Lord's money, the temptations will cease to exist. When he stops feeding the evil desire, it dies. But of course, what usually happens is that we feed the evil desire just enough to keep it alive and so we keep ourselves in constant turmoil.

I presume that each one of us has certain weaknesses that keep us from being as spiritually in tune as we would like to be. You are no doubt familiar with the way we kneel each day and ask the Lord to forgive us of our "weaknesses and imperfections." We call them weaknesses—I don't know why we don't call them what they really are. Of course, we are really asking the Lord to forgive us of our sins. But somehow we don't like to associate ourselves with sin, so we call them weaknesses. As a matter of fact, we do have weaknesses. Every one of us has them, things that cause us to desire that which is not good for us.

Source of weaknesses

Where do you suppose we get these weaknesses? If you pose this question to a group of Saints, it will astound you how many different answers you get to this particular question. Some will say that *they* are responsible for their own weaknesses; well, if you *keep* your weaknesses, that's true, but that is not where they came from. Another will say weaknesses come from heredity or environment; in either instance, we are passing the responsibility to someone else, either our parents or our neighborhood. Both of these sources have great influence upon us, but they do not give us our weaknesses. Still another may blame Lucifer, the devil, for their weaknesses; surely he is always on the job, but this is not where we get our weaknesses, either. Where do they really come from?

The Lord tells us the answer to this question very plainly in the Book of Mormon. He says:

"And if men come unto me I will

show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them." (Eth. 12:27.)

So where do we get our weaknesses? We get them from the Lord; the Lord gives us weaknesses so we will be humble. This makes us teachable. Now don't misunderstand me—the Lord is not responsible for the sin; he is only responsible for the weakness. It seems that all men have weaknesses in one form or another, character traits that make one more subject to a particular temptation than another. Lehi states that God "hath created all things, both the heaven and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon.

Opposition in life

"And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.

"Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other." (2 Ne. 2:14-16.)

Therefore, what you do with the weakness is up to you.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "There are three independent principles; the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and the spirit of the devil. All men have power to resist the devil." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 189.) But when our weaknesses are exposed to Satan, he is quick to take advantage of us by tempting us in our selfishness.

Weakness makes us humble

Giving us weakness, however, is one of the Lord's ways of getting our atten-

tion. He says this is the means he uses to make us humble, but he also says that if we will come unto him and have faith in him, he will make us strong wherein we were weak. I know this is the truth. There are numerous examples in the scriptures that vividly illustrate this principle—Alma and the sons of Mosiah in the Book of Mormon, Peter and Paul in the Bible, to name just a few. Alma was going about tearing down the church until he met an angel who turned him around and made him one of the greatest missionaries we have any record of in the Book of Mormon. Paul was out persecuting the saints when he met the Lord on the road to Damascus. After this experience, Paul became one of the greatest missionaries we have record of in the Bible. In his own words, he declared: "I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me." (Phil. 4:13.)

Addiction to tobacco overcome

I have witnessed this same truth in force today. While I was serving as a stake mission president at one time, the missionaries were meeting with a very good man who was not a member of the Church but who was married to a fine Latter-day Saint sister. This good brother wanted to join the Church, but he was addicted to tobacco. He had tried to quit many times but he said he couldn't; he was just too weak.

There were six stake missionaries who had met with him over a considerable period of time but who were unable to help him develop the strength to quit smoking. Finally, under the influence of the Spirit, we asked him if we could fast with him that he might overcome this weakness. He considered the offer and agreed to our proposal. We asked him then if he would carry out the fast for *two days*. He agreed, so the fast went forth. Six stake missionaries, the smoking brother, and his wife fasted.

At the completion of the fast, we all met in his home and knelt with him in his living room, each praying in turn. The prayers were essentially the same; they were, that the Lord would take from this brother his desire to smoke.

He was the last to pray and then he arose and announced, "I have no desire to smoke." He hasn't smoked unto this day. Since that time he has served in the bishopric of his ward and even now is serving in a stake MIA superintendency. He is today a stalwart in the faith, a real servant of the Lord. The Lord literally took from him his weakness and made him a tower of strength instead.

So, if we have a weakness, we should not despair; we shouldn't neglect it, but we shouldn't worry about it. Rightly understood, it merely points out where the Lord expects us to excel. And we will excel, too, because the Lord will make us strong; our weakness will become the strongest part of our personality when we come unto the Lord in humility and exercise faith in him. He not only forgives us, but he doth immediately bless us. There is new confidence, new vision, new horizons—a new birth.

Qualification to perform miracles

The prophet Mormon stated very plainly what I like to call the qualification for the performance of miracles. It is recorded in 3 Nephi, the eighth chapter, and the fifth verse: "And now it came to pass that according to our record, and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man who did keep the record—for he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus; and there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every whit from his iniquity."

So this is the qualification: we must be cleansed every whit from our iniquity. When I first read this passage of scripture, I felt to say "Hurray for repentance!" for if it were not for repentance, there would be no miracles performed.

But repentance is granted unto man by the Lord. I am convinced that

repentance is about 90 percent from the Lord and about 10 percent from man. Nephi goes still further and says, "... for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do." (2 Ne. 25:23.) However, man's part is the most urgent and vital part because it must be first, and full, and sincere. An ancient Hebrew writing declares, "There must be a stirring below before there is a stirring above." This means that repentance must begin with us, with mortals. Many times we say we are waiting on the Lord, when as a matter of fact, the Lord is waiting on us.

Confess and forsake sins

"By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them." (D&C 58:43.)

When this happens, the Lord forgives and doth immediately bless him. How gracious and kind he is. I bear testimony to you, my brothers and sisters, that God, our Heavenly Father, does live, and that he hears and answers our prayers. I bear testimony that Jesus is the Christ and that he lives. I know he lives, and that he has made possible the forgiveness of sins to those who come unto him through repentance, that through repentance and obedience he turns our weaknesses into strengths, and the time is *now*.

In the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen. ○

President Harold B. Lee

Elder Hartman Rector, Jr. of the First Council of Seventy has just spoken to us.

Elder Eldred G. Smith, Patriarch to the Church, will now speak to us, and he will be followed by Elder LeGrand Richards of the Council of the Twelve.