

## Elder James A. Cullimore

*Assistant to the Council of the Twelve*

As I look out over this vast audience, I am conscious that the greatest number on the main floor are priesthood leaders and of that group likely the largest number are bishops.

### Responsibilities of bishops

I have great respect for the bishops of the Church and for their many responsibilities. A bishop is the father of the ward, the presiding high priest of the ward, and a common judge in Israel. One of the areas in which he sits in judgment is when he must determine one's worthiness to hold office in the Church, to officiate in Church ordinances, to hold temple recommends, etc.

It is the bishop's duty to counsel the members of his ward, assist them in their problems, listen to the confessions of the transgressors and assist them in their repentance. Unfortunately, many in the last category, because of their transgressions, are quite inactive and need much attention. Because of their sins, they feel they are lost—that there is no use trying. It is to these members throughout the Church that I would particularly like to direct my remarks today. These are all wonderful sons and daughters of our Father who, in a weak moment or because of circumstances possibly not of their own liking, have slipped. Now in their despair and guilt of conscience, they feel lost. An attitude prevails of "What's the use? There's no hope for me now; I can never be forgiven." Through the devotion of a wonderful bishop who never gives up in working with these individuals, they can be helped. When they learn that there is

hope, that God is merciful, that there is forgiveness for sin, a beam of light can begin to shine through the heaviness and depression of transgression.

### Assurance of forgiveness

Listen to a letter received by a bishop from one in such a circumstance. There had been a beautiful interview in which the young lady poured out her heart to the bishop. He had given her the assurance that all was not lost and that there is forgiveness for sin, providing there is complete repentance. After a few days she wrote:

"Somehow you don't realize how bad it has been until the weight begins to be lifted. I know it takes time to make up for wrong done, and maybe the best way I can express my thanks to you and my Father in heaven is to become the person you think I am and the person God knows I can become. In kind of a funny way, I'm scared inside—not scared exactly, just a feeling of how important what we do in this life is. Life has always had so much to offer me, like being able to see and touch and taste and enjoy; like seeing a sunset, hearing a baby's laugh, watching two children playing, or seeing someone overcome an obstacle in his life. But there is always the baby's cry, the children arguing, and someone not quite making it. I don't know where I got this thought, but it seems to be just right.

"I ask no dream, no prophet's ecstasies,

No sudden rending of the veil of day,  
No angel visitant—no opening skies,  
But take the dimness of my soul  
away." (Author unknown)

President Spencer W. Kimball has described just such a situation as I have referred to:

"Sometimes a guilt consciousness overpowers a person with such a heaviness that when a repentant one looks back and sees the ugliness, the loathsomeness of the transgression, he is almost overwhelmed and wonders, 'Can the Lord ever forgive me? Can I ever forgive myself?' But when one reaches the depths of despondency and feels the hopelessness of his position, and when he cries out to God for mercy in helplessness but in faith, there comes a still, small, but penetrating voice whispering to his soul, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'" (*Miracle of Forgiveness* [Bookcraft, 1969], p. 344.)

### Comfort from scriptures

The scriptures give us great comfort. In First John we read: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.)

And again we read: "For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

"Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven." (D&C 1:31-32.)

Possibly one of the most soul-satisfying scriptures to the transgressor is this: "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more." (D&C 58:42.)

### The call to repentance

President Kimball has used some sound logic as he explains this matter. He said: ". . . the call to repentance from sin is to all men . . . the call promises forgiveness of sin to those who respond. What a farce it would

be to call people to repentance if there were no forgiveness, and what a waste of the life of Christ if it failed to bring the opportunity for salvation and exaltation!" (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 344.)

One of the most beautiful scriptures comes from Isaiah, in which is given the promise of forgiveness to all who repent:

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isa. 55:6-7.)

Repentance isn't always easy. It takes great humility. It often requires superhuman courage, especially in major transgression. But the Lord has told us plainly how we can tell if a man or woman has repented of his sins. He said: "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them." (D&C 58:43.)

### Confession and forsaking

Confession and forsaking, then, are the two important elements of repentance. After one has been brought to realize his transgression and made his determination to turn from it, he must humble himself to make his confession. It would be much easier to simply cease doing the wrong, in the case of serious sin, and say nothing to anyone. But to humble himself to confess it to the ones offended and to the bishop is a more sobering matter and takes real humility.

Following confession, the transgressor should demonstrate with good

works his repentance, keeping faithfully the commandments of the Lord. Restitution is also an important part of repentance. Restitution, to the degree possible, should be made to restore that which has been taken or to repair the damage that has been done, demonstrating to those offended by his actions his remorse and determination to make amends.

### Steps in repentance

President Harold B. Lee has expressed this so beautifully:

"That confession must be made first to him or her who has been most wronged by your acts. A sincere confession is not merely admitting guilt after the proof is already in evidence. If you have 'offended many persons openly,' your acknowledgment is to be made openly and before those whom you have offended that you might show your shame and humility and willingness to receive a merited rebuke. If your act is secret and has resulted in injury to no one but yourself, your confession should be in secret, and your Heavenly Father who hears in secret may reward you openly. Acts that may affect your standing in the Church, or your right to privileges or advancement in the Church, are to be promptly confessed to the bishop whom the Lord has appointed as a shepherd over every flock and commissioned to be a common judge in Israel. He may hear such confessions in secret and deal justly and mercifully, as each case warrants. . . . Following confession, one in sin must show forth the fruits of his repentance by good deeds that are weighed against the bad. He must make proper restitution to the limit of his power to restore that which he has taken away or to repair the damage he has done." (*Youth*

and the Church [Deseret Book Co., 1970], p. 99.)

### Extent of forgiveness

After one has confessed his transgression and started in motion the processes of repentance, by demonstrating with good works his sincere desire to be completely forgiven, how do we know when to forgive? When do we know he has truly repented?

In a revelation to the Church in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831, the Lord said:

". . . verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death.

"Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.

"I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men." (D&C 64:7, 9-10.)

### Penalties imposed

In these explicit instructions to the Church—that we are to forgive all men their trespasses—it doesn't mean that after the bishop hears the confessions of one of his members, he immediately absolves them of all responsibility for their transgressions by his forgiveness. Surely he is forgiving. He puts his arm around them, is kind and understanding, and does everything possible to help them back to complete activity. But in spite of his love and understanding, he may have to impose a penalty, a "time of forsaking" in which the individual is denied certain church privileges for a period of time, depending on the seriousness of the transgression.

Someone is reputed to have asked one of the Brethren, "When is one forgiven of his transgressions?" and he replied, "When he has repented." He was then asked, "How do you know when he has repented?" His answer was, "If you could look into the heart of the individual you could tell. Possibly repentance was at the time of confession, but since we don't know, there must be a time in which the person can demonstrate his repentance through faithfulness to the gospel."

### The time of forsaking

The time of forsaking will likely be determined by the seriousness of the transgression and the repentant attitude of the transgressor. A letter from the First Presidency to a stake president, who was assisting one of the members of his stake to receive forgiveness for a serious moral transgression, included the following enlightening paragraph:

"Confession and forsaking are elements of genuine repentance and must be coupled with restitution, so far as possible, for whatever wrong has been done, and the living of all the commandments of the Lord. There is a question as to whether or not sufficient time has elapsed to determine compliance with the forsaking element. We feel more time should be required to prove this person can live righteously in the future."

The *General Handbook of Instructions of the Church* indicates a certain time of waiting, after serious transgression, before individuals can be given full Church or priesthood privileges.

But whatever the penalties, however long or arduous the process, even humbling in sackcloth and ashes, repentance is the only course.

### Atoning blood of Christ

Through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ our sins can be washed clear. In the words of Amulek: ". . . he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins.

"And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance." (He. 5:10-11.)

Now one final bit of assurance that the repentant one may be forgiven: "Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am." (D&C 93:1.)

It may not be easy—the road may be long, but I leave you my witness it is the way the Lord has provided in his mercy to us. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

### President N. Eldon Tanner

Elder Cullimore, Assistant to the Twelve, has just addressed us.

The congregation and chorus will now join in singing, "Now Let Us Rejoice."

After the singing, Bishop Victor L. Brown of the Presiding Bishopric of the Church will speak to us.

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The congregation and chorus sang the hymn, "Now Let Us Rejoice."

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### President Tanner

Bishop Victor L. Brown of the Presiding Bishopric will now address us. He will be followed by Elder A. Theodore Tuttle of the First Council of Seventy.