

Elder James A. Cullimore

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

I would like to direct your attention, my brethren and sisters, to the principles of mercy and justice. I have taken my text today from the Proverbs of Solomon: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction:

"For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." (Prov. 3:11-12.)

Corrections of Lord

The Lord found it necessary to call to the attention of some of the brethren in the early days of the Church their negligence in doing all that they should. To the Prophet Joseph, he said: ". . . I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth.

"But verily I say unto you, my servant Frederick G. Williams, . . . You have not taught your children light and truth, according to the commandments; and that wicked one hath power . . . over you. . . .

"Verily, I say unto my servant Sidney Rigdon, that in some things he hath not kept the commandments concerning his children; therefore, first set in order thy house. . . .

"My servant Newel K. Whitney also . . . hath need to be chastened, and set in order his family, and see that they are more diligent and concerned at home, and pray always, or they shall be removed out of their place." (D&C 93:40-42, 44, 50.)

Reproof of Prophet Joseph

When the Prophet Joseph reluctantly permitted Martin Harris to take part of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon, and they were lost, the Lord reproved the Prophet for his disobedience. He said, "The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God can-

not be frustrated, neither can they come to naught.

"For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

"Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men;

"For although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him. . . .

"For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words—

"Yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble. . . .

"But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work." (D&C 3:1-4, 7-8, 10.)

Repentance and forgiveness

One of the basic concepts of forgiveness is that one must be truly repentant, having satisfied justice before forgiveness can take place. The Prophet Joseph said: "There should be no license for sin, but mercy should go hand in hand with reproof." (*Documentary History of the Church*, vol. 5, p. 24.)

President Kimball has said: "There are many people who seem to rely sole-

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ly on the Lord's mercy rather than on accomplishing their own repentance. . . . The Lord may temper justice with mercy, but he will never supplant it. Mercy can never replace justice. God is *merciful*, but he is also *just*." (Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, Bookcraft, 1969, p. 358.)

Gospel founded on law

An eternal aspect of justice has been decreed by divine law, that ". . . God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal. 6:7.)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is founded on law for the salvation and blessing of its people. For every law the Lord gives us, there is also a penalty for its violation. The prophet Alma explained this very plainly: "Now," he said, "how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?" (Al. 42:17.)

President Stephen L. Richards said: "The Savior himself declared that he came to fulfill the law, not to do away with it, but with the law he brought the principle of mercy to temper its enforcement, and to bring hope and encouragement to [the] offenders for forgiveness through repentance." (CR April 1954, p. 11.)

Church courts

God's laws, as given for the government of the Church, must be supported and endorsed to win salvation and respect of those within the Church and without. The bishops of the Church have been designated as common judges and, together with their counselors, are authorized to deal with cases of serious transgression coming under their jurisdiction. Other cases go before the high council court under the direction of the stake president. These judges are expected to deal with all

cases of infraction against the laws of the Church mercifully and justly.

Mercy and justice

I'm sure the most difficult problem for the priesthood leaders to determine and for the transgressor to understand is: When does repentance become effective? When are the demands of justice satisfied? When does the principle of mercy take over? I suppose there is no answer as clear as that given by Alma:

"For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved.

"What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God." (Al. 42:24-25.)

How plain, then, is the logic as to the necessity of taking appropriate action in case of serious transgression. The need is to cleanse the Church and to help to bring about full repentance to the individual.

President Lee said as he spoke to the Brethren in 1972: "Now, this doesn't mean when we have to take action that we turn our backs on him who has sinned, . . . we don't do [that]—we should try not to do it. But we have to be like fathers—sometimes we have to discipline. . . . we have to spank them, then we have to love them. It is the doctrine of the Lord, and we should do that in kindness. It seems to me, that there comes a time in the lives of those who have sinned so seriously that, short of disciplinary action, I think some men can't repent until they are turned over to the buffetings of Satan by the loss of the Spirit of the Lord." (Priesthood Board Meeting, March 1, 1972, p. 12.)

Way to repentance

President Stephen L. Richards has said: "What good to the Church, what real benefit to erring members, can

come from ignoring this obligation, and as we sometimes say, winking at and 'white-washing' the offenders? Can the judges thus help in setting people on the way to repentance and forgiveness?" (CR, April 1954, p. 11.)

Many who have violated the laws of the Lord feel unjustly dealt with if they are called before proper Church courts and appropriate action is taken in reference to their transgressions. Many priesthood leaders, whose responsibility it is to watch over the Church and take action in cases of serious transgression, are remiss in convening courts and taking action that one might be put in a position where he can be forgiven. What might be thought to be a kindness in not taking proper action may really be the most unkind thing that could have been done.

President Lee has said: "Never must we allow supposed mercy to the unrepentant sinner to rob the justice by which the true repentance from sinful practices is predicated." (*Strengthening the Home*, 1973, p. 5.)

How then, does forgiveness become operative? When is repentance recognized?

Confession of sins

True godly sorrow, which the scriptures tell us "worketh repentance to salvation . . .," is the first step in repentance. (2 Cor. 7:10.) Confession of sins logically follows godly sorrow, prompted by an earnest desire for relief from the suffering brought about by positive realization of wrongdoing. Confession should be made to demonstrate one's humility and his determination to make restitution for the transgressions.

To whom should confession be made? To quote President Richards, "To the Lord, of course, whose law has been violated. To the aggrieved person or persons, as an essential in making due retribution if that is necessary. And then certainly to the Lord's representa-

tive, his appointed judge in Israel, under whose ecclesiastical jurisdiction the offender lives and holds membership in the Kingdom." (CR, April 1954, pp. 11-12.)

Period of probation

Closely associated with confession is the matter of probation—of demonstration. The Lord said: "By this may ye know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them." (D&C 58:43.)

How may the judge know when repentance is adequate? The individual might become impatient as he demonstrates his repentance. But it has been said that "sufficient time [should] elapse to permit a period of probation for the one seeking forgiveness. This probation serves a double purpose: First, . . . it enables the offender to determine for himself whether he has been able to so master himself as to trust himself in the face of ever-recurring temptation; and secondly, to enable the judges to make a more reliable appraisal of the genuineness of repentance and worthiness for restored confidence." (CR, April, 1954, p. 12.)

Yes, "for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." (Prov. 3:12.)

Atonement of Christ

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.)

Were it not for the atonement of Jesus Christ, in which he assumed our sins on condition of our repentance, man could not be forgiven. Even though we were offered mercy, yet justice must be satisfied for he cannot save us in our sins.

Alma explained to his son Corianton God's role in the principle of mercy and justice:

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"But there is a law given," he said, "and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; and if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.

"But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.

"For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved.

"What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God." (Al. 42:22-25.)

The prophet Alma said, in recounting the words of Amulek, ". . . If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son;

"Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest." (Al. 12:33-34.)

May we so enjoy the blessings of the gospel. I leave you my testimony of the divinity of this great work in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Spencer W. Kimball

We have just listened to Elder James A. Cullimore, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve.

Bishop H. Burke Peterson, first counselor in the Presiding Bishopric of the Church, will now address us. He will be followed by Elder William H. Bennett, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve.

Bishop H. Burke Peterson

First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric

A few years ago there appeared in a large city newspaper a true story of a young boy, then fourteen years old. The story was titled "The Evolution of a Delinquent." After rehearsing the many serious involvements the boy had had with the law, the reporter posed the question, "What twisted paths of childhood lead to the tortuous road of delinquency?" Interviews with the boy's neighbors began to supply at least part of the answer.

Children left alone

One neighbor lady said, "I try not to think of him the way he is now, but how he was when he came to our home

and played with our children years ago." Tears filled her eyes as she recalled one afternoon when the young boy, then a small child, rushed to her home after his father had picked him up at a day nursery. As the little boy held on to her hand, she asked, "Why do you always come running to our house when you come home from the nursery?" The tot replied sorrowfully, "Because there is no mommy at my house."

The woman said that this answer almost broke her heart. There was a mommy at his house and a father also, but many times the children were left at home alone to care for themselves. Often the children would go to the neighbors' homes because there was not light