

General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We also welcome those seated in the Assembly Hall where Elders Robert L. Simpson and Bernard P. Brockbank preside and in the Salt Palace where Elders Gene R. Cook and Hugh W. Pinnock preside.

We send our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio and to those who are gathered in approximately four hundred and fifty stake centers to which the proceedings of the conference are fed via satellite. A survey taken during the noon recess indicated that there were more than a quarter million members in these various stake centers this morning.

The Tabernacle Choir with Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger conducting and John Longhurst at the organ is providing the music for this session.

The Choir will begin this service by singing "In Hymns of Praise." The invocation will be offered by

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

---

The Choir sang "In Hymns of Praise."

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle offered the invocation.

---

### President Hinckley

The Tabernacle Choir will now sing "Turn Back O Man." Following the singing, we shall hear from Elder Marvin J. Ashton, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

---

The Choir sang "Turn Back O Man."

---

### President Hinckley

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now address us. He will be followed by Elder Neal A. Maxwell, also of the Council of the Twelve.

## Elder Marvin J. Ashton

### An encounter

A few weeks ago as I approached these temple grounds where I was to meet a friend, a young woman—a stranger to me—stepped up and said, "Would you like to know what kind of people these Mormons really are?"

I responded with, "I think I already know a little bit about what they really are."

To this the heckler retorted, "They surely don't live the teachings of Jesus Christ as they should."

My concluding comment was, "Who does?"

As I continued my walk to the

visitors' center, I began to ponder the actions of those persons who are giving time and money to discredit, embarrass, ridicule, and shame those who have religious views that differ from their own. Sometimes such actions can unify and strengthen those who are attacked. However, in some few instances they plant seeds of discord, and at times righteous people are hurt by their slander.

### Look for the good

I doubt that such actions can be called Christlike. At no time did Jesus Christ encourage us to spend time participating in damaging,

destructive criticism. His message was to encourage us to seek, learn, and share all that is praiseworthy and of value as we associate with our fellowmen. Only those who are vindictive and cantankerous participate in ferreting out and advertising the negative and unsavory.

I will be forever grateful for the wise counsel my mission president gave me as I arrived in England to serve as a missionary. He said, "Elder Ashton, these people in this land have been at it a long time. If you will keep your eyes, ears, and mind open, you can learn much while you are here. Look for the good and overlook that which is different from your ways."

The longer I stayed in England, the more I appreciated his advice. Day by day I grew to love and appreciate that great country and its people. For example, instead of freezing in the raw winter weather, I did as the English did—I put on another sweater rather than wasting time murmuring and complaining.

### **Refuse to become anti-anti-Mormon**

Robert West wrote, "Nothing is easier than faultfinding; no talent, no self-denial, no brains . . . are required to set up in the grumbling business" (*Richard L. Evans' Quote Book*, Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1971, p. 221).

Whether accusations, innuendos, aspersions, or falsehoods are whispered or blatantly shouted, the gospel of Jesus Christ reminds us that we are not to retaliate nor contend. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

"For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness to God" (James 1:19-20).

No religion, group, or individual can prosper over an extended period of time with faultfinding as their foundation. To the world, and

especially to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we declare there is no time for contention. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26).

The poet Robert Frost once defined education as "the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." Probably we will never be free of those who are openly anti-Mormon. Therefore, we encourage all our members to refuse to become anti-anti-Mormon. In the wise words of old, can we "live and let live"? (Johann Schiller, in *The Home Book of Quotations*, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935, p. 1119.)

### **Practice pure religion**

Certainly one of our God-given privileges is the right to choose what our attitude will be in any given set of circumstances. We can let the events that surround us determine our actions—or we can personally take charge and rule our lives, using as guidelines the principles of pure religion. Pure religion is learning the gospel of Jesus Christ and then putting it into action. Nothing will ever be of real benefit to us until it is incorporated into our own lives.

It seems to me there has never been a period in history when it has been more important for us to be engaged in pure religion as taught by the Savior. This religion is not to retaliate, or to exchange in kind, evil actions or unkind statements. Pure religion encompasses the ability to cherish, to build up, and to turn the other cheek in place of destroying and tearing down. Blessed are they who strive to serve Him without wasting time faulting Him or those who serve Him.

The discerning realize that it is not realistic to expect perfection in others when none of us is perfect.

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

"Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"

"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (Matthew 7:3-5.)

Meaningful progress can be made only when all of us can cast the motes out of our own eyes, leave judgment to our Father in Heaven, and lose ourselves in righteous living.

As we reflect upon actions that do not fit the definition of pure religion, perhaps we should contemplate the nature of this term: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep . . . unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

The words are simple, but a basic formula is revealed—namely, help those who are in need, build your life around the gospel of Jesus Christ, and avoid yielding to worldly temptations.

As with most simple formulas, all of us must analyze our own lives and use wisdom and free agency as we apply the basic principles. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do" (3 Nephi 27:21). The doing is always more difficult than the knowing.

### Assume responsibility

We were visiting some friends this past summer. A very young son with a new tricycle was disturbed

because his parents were giving us their attention and all of us were ignoring him. He rode his trike as fast as his little legs could pedal, calling, "Look at me!" The inevitable happened as he looked at us instead of where he was going. He rode directly into a lawn chair. To try to stem the tears and take his mind off the hurt, his mother said, "That naughty chair hurt you. Let's spank the chair."

I suppose her response momentarily distracted the boy, but the mother was letting her son blame something else for the accident rather than himself.

How many times do we look for something external on which to place blame for our actions? It hurts to look inward and assume responsibility for our situations.

To keep ourselves unspotted from the world requires taking charge of and ruling our lives from within, accepting responsibility for our own actions, and choosing the role of peacemaker rather than retaliator when those around us are critical or spread false propaganda. It includes being aware that God's work on earth is done by human beings, all of whom have some weaknesses. It encompasses the ability to look for the good accomplished rather than being disillusioned when human failings surface. It includes resisting the urge to proclaim such weaknesses so adamantly that the basic good is overshadowed and testimonies waver.

### Extend mercy and care

Pure religion is maintaining a balance between sophisticated, intellectual information and the basic "bread and butter" principles of the gospel. Latter-day Saints are encouraged to pursue learning in all areas. However, superior knowledge and academic achievements need to be enhanced by wisdom, good judgment, and spiritual guidance in order

to use all that is learned for the benefit of the individual and his fellowman.

Some think they can learn of God only by appreciating his handiwork. Mountains, streams, flowers, birds, and animals are to be enjoyed and admired; but this is not enough. In the formal Church setting, gospel truths are shared, new concepts are internalized, and new experiences are offered—all of which can result in enriched feelings about oneself and in learning better methods of helping others.

One who practices pure religion soon discovers it is more rewarding to lift a man up than to hold him down. Happiness is bound up with helpfulness. Those who fail to protect someone's good name, who take advantage of the innocent or uninformed, who build a fortune by pretending godliness to manipulate others, are missing the joy of practicing pure religion.

Many have found joy by extending mercy and tender care to those around them. What a strength it is to witness friends visiting nursing homes to comfort patients who don't even have the capacity to express appreciation. There are some who would question God's motives when he allows many to linger in pain and hopeless physical and mental deterioration. While this process is taking place, others teach us by their compassionate service and patience. One who has served in many leadership positions in the Church, even in missions and temples, now without specific assignment, meets each month with those confined in a nursing home and often says, "What satisfaction I get each month as I visit these precious souls."

### **Be patient and long-suffering**

Pure religion is showing concern and affection for those who, because they have lost their companions, are

experiencing feelings of loneliness and neglect. Recently I visited with a bishop who has in his ward more than sixty widows. He beamed, "I love them all!" At least once a week he and his counselors visit them, in addition to the calls made by their home teachers. "They are the joys of our lives," he repeated. He might have said, "Don't you think that is more than our share?"

Another worthy practice in pure religion is a daily telephone call to each housebound person in a neighborhood. A loving, older, widowed lady said, "If I telephone each day, it gives them a lift, and if they don't answer the phone, it lets me know they probably need a personal visit from me." One of these friends could not afford a telephone, so this same sister had a phone installed and took care of the monthly bill.

Pure religion encompasses patience and long-suffering. A father recovering from the wounds of alcoholism has often said, "I am making my way back because my family would not give up on me. Everyone had written me off except my wife and children." How sweet are those words: "I am making my way back because my family would not give up on me."

Pure religion is practiced when we lift the unfortunate and unusual children. Some of God's choicest earthly spirits are those without meaningful parental care. Many are given family relationships by foster parents on a part-or full-time basis.

### **Be sensitive**

Pure religion is having the courage to do what is right and let the consequence follow. It is doing the right things for right reasons. To be righteous or serving or loving or obedient to God's laws just to earn praise or recognition is not pure religion. It is being able to withstand ridicule and even temporary

unpopularity with some peer groups when you know who you are and for what goals you are reaching. So many of our young people, and older ones also, have developed just such inner strength. They have a great influence for good on others with whom they associate.

Loving those around us includes being sensitive to feelings of others. As is often done, a conducting officer announced that when the deacons were through passing the sacrament, they were invited to go and sit with their families. One father noticed a boy walk out and sit in the foyer. The next week he invited that deacon to sit with his family rather than go through the embarrassment and loneliness caused by not having his own family in attendance. This parent responded to the need of the boy rather than criticizing the leaders for the policy. The actions of this father can be enlarged on and put into practice by every member.

### **Have sincere love for self and fellowmen**

The safety and protection of each person, especially children, should be a concern for all of us. We can be instrumental in assisting in the protection of each other by being aware of potential dangers and being willing to do our part to thwart those who would injure, steal, or abuse any person, young or old.

Another example of pure religion can be practiced in today's political election processes by those who explain and debate the issues and avoid pettiness and slander. Real political winners are those who would accept defeat rather than participate in character assassination.

Examples of pure religion can be found on every hand. At a funeral about a month ago, I learned of a valiant young lady on a mission in a distant land who, after much prayer and many tears, wrote to her dying

mom just before the terminal illness took its toll, and told her that even though she would like to be at her bedside, she would follow her mother's teachings and stay in the mission field to finish her assignment and search out those who wanted to hear the gospel.

From the simple scripture that defines pure religion comes great guidelines. To be unspotted from the world, one must avoid all of Satan's evil plans for the inhabitants of the world. Retaliation, faultfinding, deceit, pettiness, hypocrisy, judging, and destroying one another do not belong in the definition of pure religion.

Empathy is sincere love for self and our fellowmen. Henry David Thoreau said, "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?" If this were possible, I'm sure we could visit and help the widowed and fatherless and all who need our help with the pure love of Christ and thus be responsive to the needs of those around us.

May God help us to learn and live the principles of pure religion. The business of lifting each other is a full-time occupation. Pure religion can never be taught or lived by those who are petty, prejudiced, contentious, or unresponsive to the needs of their fellowmen. Pure religion is following the teachings of our Savior. Jesus Christ does live. This is his Church. To this I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Hinckley**

Elder Marvin J. Ashton, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Neal A. Maxwell, also a member of the Council of the Twelve. He will be followed by Elder Robert E. Wells of the First Quorum of the Seventy.