

Spirit can confirm the truths of the gospel to them.

My plea to the teachers of the Church is to study, ponder, and pray for guidance in your preparation. Use the scriptures and the approved curriculum materials, teaching with the objective to bless and inspire the lives of those assigned to you. Let us also remember that some of the most effective activation work in the Church is

accomplished by those teachers who reach out to the inactive, loving and teaching them until they are once again in full fellowship with the Saints.

To the Master Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose resurrection we celebrate at this Easter time, I say: I thank thee, oh Lord, for teaching us that there is no greater call than to be an effective teacher. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Theodore M. Burton

Association with disfellowshipped or excommunicated

I would like to confine my remarks today to the principle of forgiveness as it applies to a person who has been disfellowshipped or excommunicated. By applying this principle we can "succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees" (D&C 81:5). The most loving action the Church can take at times is to disfellowship or excommunicate a person. This statement may seem incongruous to someone who does not understand the true nature of repentance and forgiveness. And even within the Church, members sometimes have difficulty knowing how they should relate to such a person.

Should I limit my association to protect myself in case the sin is contagious? Should I show my disgust that he or she would commit such a serious transgression, and take my business and friendship elsewhere? Should I act as if nothing had happened, or should I show forth increased interest in that person to demonstrate my love and concern? These are important questions which deserve genuine answers.

Teach principle of forgiveness

I am concerned about this matter, for whatever actions are taken have serious consequences both for the

transgressor and for his well-meaning but sometimes ill-informed associates who may be members of the Church in good standing. I am even more concerned about the attitudes of the victims of transgressions—those who were hurt by the transgressor's actions.

For an appropriate example, I look to my own grandchildren. Occasionally they quarrel or speak harshly one to another. But I am amazed and pleased when I observe how quickly the victim of a harsh word or action forgives and forgets. I am delighted that the offender is soon welcomed back into the fold of love by his brothers and sisters. Mother and father teach the offending child not to give offense again. So the family grows in affection.

If we are going to teach our children the principle of forgiveness, we need to begin with our own lives. We must set our children a good example. In dealing with family or friends, we hurt them when we are selfish or thoughtless. But if we change our ways to avoid giving offense in the future, it is easier to receive forgiveness. Repentance is a change of behavior which invites forgiveness. If father and mother forgive each other quickly and afterward show increased love and consideration for each other, their children will quickly learn to act likewise. Repentance and forgiveness will become standards within that family.

Forgiveness begins in the home

If we learn to forgive one another within the family, we will be able to forgive more readily within the Church and within the community. Like many good things, forgiveness begins in the home. We must remember to teach our children that even if others fail to be kind and considerate, we ought to be slow to condemn and very quick to forgive. We need not be tolerant of sin, but we must become tolerant and forgiving of the sinner. Jesus Christ gave his life to reconcile us to God so that through his atonement we can repent and receive forgiveness of our sins. We owe our Savior a great debt. Part of that debt is the obligation we have to forgive one another.

When Jesus taught the Nephites, he told them: "For, if ye forgive men their trespasses your Heavenly Father will also forgive you;

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (3 Nephi 13:14-15). That forgiveness which comes from our Heavenly Father is so complete that he will not even call to mind the sins we have committed. His forgiveness is so all-inclusive that the Lord will not even remember those sins. But there is a condition attached to that forgiveness:

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

As we plead for mercy, we need to show mercy to others. The injury people do us may appear at the moment to be very great. Yet, just as time heals the wounds of the body, so time also heals the wounds of the soul. As we apply disinfectants to aid in healing the wounds of the body, we need to apply love and understanding in disinfecting the wounds of the soul. To the extent we give forgiveness to others, we can expect to receive forgiveness for ourselves. It is all part of the process of repentance.

Church discipline—a teaching process

My special assignment as a General Authority is to assist the First Presidency in bringing people who have committed serious sins back into the Church. I receive, organize, and summarize information for the First Presidency to use in making decisions. I must read the background material to make certain that all pertinent information is available to them. As I read the heartbreak contained in letters of people pleading for forgiveness, I realize the truth of Alma's statement: "Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). My heart goes out to those sufferers in a spirit of forgiveness. And instead of dwelling on the wickedness and grief of those who have sinned, I rejoice to read how many have abandoned their sinful practices and are now on the road back to righteousness and happiness. People can and do change.

When people are disfellowshipped or excommunicated from the Church, it is done not to punish but to help them. Church discipline requires this action, but we should remember that the word *discipline* has the same root as the word *disciple*. A disciple is a student or follower—one who is learning. Church discipline, then, must become a teaching process. When a person is disciplined, he should not be thrust out and abandoned by his associates. It is exactly at that time that we need to show increased love for such people, to teach and show them the way back to God. It is wicked to reject a child of God simply because he made an error. We need to teach him how to start anew, to change evil practices into righteous deeds, and thus to transform his life. With repentance through service to others, he can be reinstated into fellowship or washed clean in the waters of baptism and brought back into the family of God.

An unforgiving attitude not from Christ

To teach people to overcome sin and change their lives for the better is the sum and substance of Christian service. We must do everything in our power to help sinners to change their lives for the better. Otherwise, as the scriptures warn us, we will have to shoulder their sins ourselves. Our obligation is to teach and help them, and the sinner's obligation is to listen and learn. He will have to bear the whole burden himself if he refuses. But regardless of his present attitude, we must never abandon him nor think his reformation is hopeless. There is hope for everyone, and we must never cease trying to help people understand that through the atonement of Jesus Christ not only the sins of mankind in general but also their personal sins can be forgiven.

One thing causes me great concern as I read letters from those who have been injured. I am concerned with the feeling of resentment and hatred some individuals have expressed against the spouse that betrayed or abused them and their children. Occasionally a wife, for example, in a spirit of revenge may attempt to get even with her spouse by sinning in the same manner. But all she does by that tragic action is to destroy herself. Some individuals have expressed such resentment against a former spouse that they write that nothing that spouse could ever do could right the wrong he or she committed. They insist they can never forgive a spouse for the pain and suffering that spouse has caused.

A person with that attitude can hardly be called a follower of Jesus Christ. Even of those who were so wicked they crucified their Savior, he said: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). So, when Peter asked the Lord how often he should forgive a person who sinned against him, "Till seven

times?" Jesus answered, "I say unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). People can and do change, and our duty is to forgive them.

Rejoice in spirit of forgiveness

Many people bring troubles and difficulties upon themselves by an unforgiving attitude. Hence, in a modern revelation Jesus Christ revealed this great truth:

"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" (D&C 64:9). I take that to mean that it is a greater sin to refuse to forgive a person than it is to commit the sin for which that person was disfellowshipped or excommunicated. The Lord went on to say, "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men" (D&C 64:10). We must be willing to forgive others and even to forgive ourselves.

As we struggle toward that perfection which Jesus Christ holds out for us, let us give emphasis to forgiveness. Let us cultivate that aspect of our character and rejoice in the spirit of forgiveness, which is the comforting message of the Atonement. I pray that we may all cultivate that spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Benson

Elder Theodore M. Burton, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, has just addressed us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Ted E. Brewerton, also a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. Following Elder Brewerton's address, the Choir and congregation will join in singing "Come, Come, Ye Saints."