

"the hands of the members shot heavenward in an enthusiastic vote of approval."

The word of the Lord to the prophet Samuel at the time David was designated to be a future king of Israel provided a fitting label for the occasion. It certainly was the thought of each faithful member: "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Like a golden thread woven through the tapestry of life is the message on the label of a humble heart. It was true of the boy Samuel, it was the experience of Jesus, it was the testi-

mony of Gustav Wacker, it marked the calling of James Womack. May it ever be the label which identifies each of us: "Lord, here am I." In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Benson

Elder Thomas S. Monson, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder Marion D. Hanks, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

He will be followed by Elder Charles Didier, also a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

## Elder Marion D. Hanks

I desire to speak this morning of the value of our free agency and of the love that preserved it for us and which should motivate and direct our use of it.

### Suppose civilization were about to end

Many years ago I was introduced to an idea which at first seemed only an exercise in imagination, or perhaps a peg on which to hang a story. But I have thought of it occasionally since as I have traveled the earth, often separated from family and other loved ones.

Suppose that everyone in the world received simultaneously the word that the inconceivable was about to occur: civilization as we know it was about to end.

What would happen?

Well, for one thing, the streets would be a maelstrom of frantic people trying to get to a telephone to talk with someone. Every line would be jammed and every telephone booth besieged by people trying to reach someone to say "I love you." There would be other messages also. "I'm so sorry," would be one of them, or "How foolish I have been."

### God loves us and believes in us

The condition of the world about us assures us that the unthinkable could happen; but it is not of such a cataclysm that I am thinking, but of our daily walk and our everyday relationships. They who love should manifest their love while there is a chance to do so. If we are waiting for some later time, some period when all imperfections are corrected and when all frustrations pass away, we are not wise. Resentment or pride or selfishness or impatience can lead us to miss what life is meant to be, and can be, and is for those who love and serve. To postpone loving and giving until some time of perfect freedom from distress or discomfort is a great mistake; it will not happen. It is not for this world.

But we should be earnestly seeking and striving to correct and improve our own attitude and our own behavior. God has so ordained it. He loves us and believes in us and has done and will do anything he can to help us, but he will not impose on our free agency. "We love him," says the scripture, "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). He does not love us because we love him;

he loves us unconditionally. But his love does not take the course of negating or smothering our privilege to choose, or our responsibility to account for what we choose and to experience the consequences. Indeed, it is written that he weeps for the bad judgment of some of his willful and disobedient children:

"Behold these thy brethren . . . are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency" (Moses 7:32).

"And . . . the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept" (Moses 7:28).

### Lucifer wanted forced salvation

We had that agency with God before this world was. In the heavenly council of which the scriptures teach, there was another plan than God's presented: Lucifer was permitted to offer his program. It is vital for us in our leadership and our relationships to remember that God so loved that he would not shield us from the perils of freedom, from the right and responsibility to choose. So deep is his love and so precious that principle that he, who was conscious of the consequences, required that we choose. Lucifer had no love in his heart, no real concept of freedom or respect for it. He had no confidence in the principle or in us. He argued for forced salvation, for imposed survival, for an agencyless round trip to the earth and back again. None would be lost, he insisted. But he seemed not to understand that none would be any wiser, either, or any stronger or more compassionate or humble or grateful or more creative, under his plan.

### Still choosing

We understood before we left that premortal state that freedom is precarious, difficult. We knew that to love would make us vulnerable to heart-

break and pain and disappointment. But we had learned that the alternatives to love and freedom of choice cannot provide the climate for growth and creative capacity that can eventually lead us to a stewardship like our Father's. The unselfish love of our Father's First-born in the spirit helped us understand when he, knowing the personal cost ahead for him but also the eternal significance for all of us, volunteered for his role of redemption.

We chose then, and we are, in consequence, on this earth still choosing.

### "He died for me"

Recently I listened to a lovely young lady just leaving her teens as she spoke in a stake conference, her first address ever. She had never known a true family of her own. She had experienced many temporary homes, made many mistakes, had much heartache and hopelessness. Then an older Church couple found her, and loved her, and taught her. Her prepared talk was witty and interesting, but when she laid it down and bore witness through tears, it became magic:

"No one ever helped me to understand that I was worth anything," she said, "that I was special in any way. And then the missionaries taught me about Jesus Christ and his love and the God who sent him. They taught me that Jesus died for me—for *me*. I am valuable! I am valuable! He died for me."

### Godly love and free agency

The lesson of God's great love and wisdom seems lost on many who are on this earth because of their choice but we do not understand. Our responsibility is to help them. But we must ourselves pray and strive earnestly that we do not obscure its meaning. If we do not really love and really believe in free agency, we may be inclined to impose our will on others for what we think is their best good. If we love enough, we will not do that, even at the risk of failure. Instruction and rules and training and disci-

pline are essential, of course. From our Father's example of godly love and patience, we should be motivated to stretch to any lengths to teach, to persuade, to encourage, to help.

But in matters of conscience and faith, if we truly love we will never seek to impose our will and deprive others of their agency. That is, after all, Satan's way. He is still permitted in this world to pursue his own rebellious approach. Since his encounter with earth's first family, he has waged war unceasingly upon God's children.

A scene to give us pause is portrayed in the book of Moses:

"Satan . . . had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced."

But it is written also:

"And . . . angels descend[ed] out of heaven, bearing testimony of the Father and Son; and the Holy Ghost fell on many" (Moses 7:26-27).

### Choose life and good

The contest for the souls of men continues. We go on choosing.

The loving Father who at such great cost has preserved our agency in and out of this world has made every effort to help us use it well, but he has made it plain where the responsibility now lies:

"I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;

"In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply. . . .

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:15-16, 19).

It is written that "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). That holy Son died for us and gave us the wonderful example of his life, and nothing in that life touches my heart with greater impact than the manner in which he chose to live among us:

"Forasmuch," it is written, "as the children [that is, we] are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same. . . .

"For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but . . . took on him the seed of Abraham.

"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:14, 16-18).

Through that love it now is that "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

### God and Christ love us

He has the feeling of our infirmities; he understands our temptations. He came not as an angel but in flesh and blood that he might be a merciful and faithful advocate for us with the Father.

Would we improve our individual performance in relationship with others if we truly had the "feeling of their infirmities" and truly sought to be a faithful and merciful high priest, or Relief Society teacher, or friend, or wife, or husband?

The intensity and integrity of God's love and Christ's love are beyond our comprehension, but we are here to learn, and we must try.

### Love as the heart of agency

Only Christ was sinless in this world, and this is why repentance must

always company with faith as first principles. God's plan and Christ's sacred gift prepared the way for us to improve, to grow, to change, to learn wisdom and mercy and forgiveness. Out of the wise use of our free agency proceeds every other wholesome quality and every blessing.

It is my deep conviction that any act or program or rule planned or performed without love at its heart, love as the spirit of it, or which curtails the agency of our Heavenly Father's children, is not worthy of God's kingdom or of his leaders or people.

Repeatedly He has protected our eternal agency, thus helping us to qualify through opposition and in the face of alternatives for the sweet blessing of eternal creative service. But we must choose—and be held accountable.

All of this came together for me in a very personal way a year or so ago in Manila in the Philippines when a telephone call from my wife reached me in the middle of the night in a hotel room telling me that our only son had suffered a severe accident that threatened his mobility and perhaps his life. He was being flown home to be operated on.

About the time of his anticipated arrival home, I telephoned. There was

a brief delay, then the sound of my wife's voice, quiet and subdued. "Your four sons-in-law are standing around your son administering to him," she said. "Paul has anointed him, and John is about to give him a blessing. He was worried because you're not here. This will be the first administration he's had from anyone but his father—but he's comforted now." I joined them in that prayer of blessing on my knees in a lonely hotel room half a world away, a room suddenly made sweet and warm.

Whether or not that day ever occurs in our lifetime when the telephone lines may be especially busy, we should be thinking of the love we have and should express, and manifest it for those nearest us and for those round about, and for all others, and for our holy Savior and his father.

Well may we sing, "I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me." In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Benson**

We have just listened to Elder Marion D. Hanks, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

Elder Charles Didier, also a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, will now address us.

## **Elder Charles Didier**

### **Friend or foe**

Since the beginning of humanity, man has divided his world into two camps, friends and foes, with the purpose of gratifying his pride and ambition and exercising power, dominion, or compulsion over the other camp.

Military leaders have canonized the expression "friend or foe" and have devised different ways to quickly identify who was who. Early biblical stories tell us about this selection process. At the end of a battle, the Ephraimites

were trying to escape through the passages of the Jordan. Unfortunately, these escape routes were already occupied by their enemies, the Gileadites, who had to know who was friend or foe. They asked the fugitives: "Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

"Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right" (Judges 12:5-6).

And that mispronunciation meant death. Forty-two thousand perished that day. Apparently the process was