

rather by the comforting, confirming witness of the Holy Spirit.

By that same Spirit I testify that God is our Father, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, and that he is the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind and each of us. Through his atoning sacrifice, redemption and exaltation are offered as a free gift to all who will accept by faith, repentance, and sacred covenants.

May each of us continue to learn and apply the eternal principles of the gospel, utilizing fully and appropriately the resources of the divine, restored Church.

In the words of the Nephite leader Pahoran "May [we] rejoice in the great

privilege of our church, and in the cause of our Redeemer and our God" (Alma 61:14). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang "The Lord Is My Shepherd" without announcement.

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### President Hinckley

We have listened to Elder Ronald E. Poelman of the First Quorum of the Seventy, followed by the choir singing "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker.

## Elder Boyd K. Packer

It is the Sabbath day, and outside is such a glorious day that all nature seems to bespeak the works of God. I can't refrain from saying with the poet:

O suns and skies and clouds of  
June,  
And flowers of June together,  
Ye cannot rival for one hour  
October's bright blue weather.  
(Helen Hunt Jackson, "October's  
Bright Blue Weather.")

### Doctrine based on convictions

I desire to share a few thoughts about a basic doctrine of the Church.

What I say is based on these convictions:

First: instruction vital to our salvation is not hidden in an obscure verse or phrase in the scriptures. To the contrary, essential truths are repeated over and over again.

Second: every verse, whether oft-quoted or obscure, must be measured against other verses. There are complementary and tempering teachings in the

scriptures which bring a balanced knowledge of truth.

Next: there is a consistency in what the Lord says and what He does, that is evident in all creation. Nature can teach valuable lessons about spiritual and doctrinal matters. The Lord drew lessons from flowers and foxes, from seeds and salt, and sparrows and sunsets.

Fourth: not all that God has said is in the Bible. Other scriptures—the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—have equal validity, and they sustain one another.

Fifth: while much must be taken on faith alone, there is individual revelation through which we may know the truth. "There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8). What may be obscure in the scriptures can be made plain through the gift of the Holy Ghost. We can have as full an understanding of spiritual things as we are willing to earn.

And I add one more conviction: there is an adversary who has his own

channels of spiritual communication. He confuses the careless and prompts those who serve him to devise deceptive, counterfeit doctrine, carefully contrived to appear genuine.

I mention this because now, as always, there are self-appointed spokesmen who scoff at what we believe and misrepresent what we teach.

### Go to his friends

As a young seminary teacher, I learned a valuable lesson from our principal, Able S. Rich. He told me, "If you really want to know what a man is, and what he believes, do not go to his enemies. Go to the man himself or to his friends. He does not confide the thoughts of his heart to his enemies. His friends know him best; they know his strengths and his weaknesses. They will represent him fairly. His enemies will *mis*represent him."

The doctrine I wish to discuss concerns the nature of man and of God.

### The question

There is a question in both the Old and the New Testaments: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8:4; see also Hebrews 2:5-7).

The answer is taught most simply in the song we sang together at the intermission of the meeting:

I am a child of God,  
And He has sent me here,  
Has given me an earthly home  
With parents kind and dear. . . .

I am a child of God,  
Rich blessings are in store;  
If I but learn to do his will  
I'll live with him once more.  
(*Sing with Me*, B-76.)

### Children of God

Those lyrics teach a basic doctrine of the Church. We *are* the children of God. That doctrine is not hidden away in an obscure verse. It is taught over

and over again in scripture. These clear examples are from the Bible:

"All of you are children of the most High" (Psalm 82:6).

And: "We are the offspring of God" (Acts 17:29).

Doctrinal truths are interrelated. There is an old saying that if you pick up one end of a stick, you pick up the other end as well.

If you concede that we are His children, you must allow that God is our Father.

### God, our Father

That, too, is repeated over and over again in the scriptures. There are so many references that I could not even begin to read them to you.

But I make this point: Christ did not speak only of *the* Father, or *my* Father; He spoke of *your* Father, and *our* Father. He even put them together in one sentence, saying, "*Your* Father, and *your* God, and *my* God" (D&C 88:75; italics added). God is addressed universally in the Christian world as Father. Were we not commanded to pray "Our Father which art in heaven"? (Matthew 6:9).

You may respond, "Every Christian knows that." Perhaps every Christian does, but so-called Christians, with the help of clergymen, belittle in most unchristian ways our teaching that we are the literal sons and daughters of God.

Other ideals flow from that great truth. Once you know that, you know that all men are *brothers*. That realization changes you. Thereafter you cannot willingly injure another. You could not transgress against them in any way.

### Self-respect

That simple, profound doctrine is worth knowing for another reason as well. It brings a feeling of self-worth, dignity, self-respect. Then self-pity and depression fade away. We then can yield to the discipline of a loving Father

and accept even the very hard lessons of life.

Christ taught us to be "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), to take on His attributes, to follow the pattern of our parentage.

A little girl taught me a profound lesson on this subject. Surely you are not above learning from little children. Much of what I know that really matters I have learned from being a father.

### The chicks

Some years ago I returned home to find our little children were waiting in the driveway. They had discovered some newly hatched chicks under the manger in the barn. When they reached for them, a protective hen rebuffed them. So they came for reinforcements.

I soon gathered a handful of little chicks for them to see and touch.

As our little girl held one of them, I said in a teasing way, "That will make a nice watchdog when it grows up, won't it?" She looked at me quizzically, as if I didn't know much.

So I changed my approach: "It won't be a watchdog, will it?" She shook her head, "No, Daddy." Then I added, "It will be a nice riding horse."

She wrinkled up her nose and gave me that "Oh, Dad!" look. For even a four-year-old knows that a chick will not be a dog, nor a horse, nor even a turkey. It will be a chicken. It will follow the pattern of its parentage. She knew that without having had a course in genetics, without a lesson or a lecture.

### After their own kind

No lesson is more manifest in nature than that all living things do as the Lord commanded in the Creation. They reproduce "after their own kind." (See Moses 2:12, 24.) They follow the pattern of their parentage. Everyone knows that; every four-year-old knows that! A bird will not become an animal nor a fish. A mammal will not beget

reptiles, nor "do men gather . . . figs of thistles" (Matthew 7:16).

In the countless billions of opportunities in the reproduction of living things, one kind does not beget another. If a species ever does cross, the offspring cannot reproduce. The pattern for all life is the pattern of the parentage.

This is demonstrated in so many obvious ways, even an ordinary mind should understand it. Surely no one with reverence for God could believe that His children evolved from slime or from reptiles. (Although one can easily imagine that those who accept the theory of evolution don't show much enthusiasm for genealogical research!) The theory of evolution, and it is a theory, will have an entirely different dimension when the workings of God in creation are fully revealed.

Since *every living thing* follows the pattern of its parentage, are we to suppose that God had some other strange pattern in mind for *His* offspring? Surely we, His children, are not, in the language of science, a different species than He is?

### Like God

What is in error, then, when we use the term *Godhood* to describe the ultimate destiny of mankind? We may now be young in our progression—juvenile, even infantile, compared with Him. Nevertheless, in the eternities to come, if we are worthy, we may be like unto Him, enter His presence, "see as [we] are seen, and know as [we] are known," and receive a "fulness" (D&C 76:94).

This doctrine is not at variance with the scriptures. Nevertheless, it is easy to understand why some Christians reject it, because it introduces the possibility that man may achieve Godhood.

### One God

Their concern centers on certain verses of scripture, for there are many

references (at least twenty in the Bible alone) which speak of *one* God. For example, Ephesians 4:6: There is "one God and Father of all."

But if you hold strictly to a too rigid interpretation of those verses, you create serious theological problems for yourself.

### Plural terms

There are many other verses of scripture, at least an equal number in the Bible, that speak in plural terms of "lords" and "gods." The first chapter of Genesis states:

"And God said, Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness" (Genesis 1:26; italics added).

Such references are found from Genesis to Revelation. (See Revelation 1:6.)

The strongest one was given by Christ Himself when He quoted that very clear verse from the Eighty-second Psalm:

"Is it not written in your law, *I said, Ye are gods?* [See Psalm 82:6.]

"If he called them *gods*, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;

"Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the *Son of God?*" (John 10:34-36; italics added).

The acceptance of this truth does not mean accepting the multiple gods of mythology nor the polytheism of the pagans, which was so roundly condemned by Isaiah and the other prophets.

There is *one* God, the Father of all. This we accept as fundamental doctrine.

There is only *one* Redeemer, Mediator, Savior. This we know.

There is *one* Holy Ghost, a personage of spirit, who completes the Godhead.

I have emphasized the word *one*, in each sentence, but I have used it three times. Three is plural.

Paul used the plural *many* and the singular *one* in the same verse:

"For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many.)

"But to us there is but one God, the Father" (1 Corinthians 8:5-6).

Anyone who believes and teaches of God the Father, and accepts the divinity of Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, teaches a plurality of Gods.

### Relying on reason

When the early Apostles were gone, those who assumed the leadership of the Church forsook revelation and relied on reason. The idea of three separate Gods offended them, for it appeared to contravene those scriptures which refer to one God.

To reconcile that problem, they took verses here and there and ignored all else that bears on the subject. They tried to stir the three *ones* together into some mysterious kind of a composite *one*. They came up with creeds which cannot be squared with the scriptures. And they were left with a philosophy which opposes all we know of creation, of the laws of nature. And that, interestingly enough, defies the very reason upon which they came to depend.

The Apostle Paul understood this doctrine and wrote to the Philippians:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Philippians 2:5-6).

Lorenzo Snow, a modern Apostle, wrote a poem to his ancient counterpart Paul, from which I quote only one verse:

A Son of God, like God to be,  
Would not be robbing Deity,  
And he who has this hope within,  
Will purify himself from sin.  
(*Improvement Era*, June 1919,  
p. 661.)

## Purity

What could inspire one to purity and worthiness more than to possess a spiritual confirmation that we are the children of God? What could inspire a more lofty regard for oneself, or engender more love for mankind?

This thought does not fill me with arrogance. It fills me with overwhelming humility. Nor does it sponsor any inclination to worship oneself or any man.

The doctrine we teach has no provision for lying or stealing, for pornography, immoralities, for child abuse, for abortion, or murder. We are bound by the laws of His church, *as sons and daughters of God*, to avoid all of these and every other unholy or impure practice.

We did not invent this doctrine. Much of it was preserved in the Bible as it was revealed to prophets in ancient times. And as they foretold, further light and knowledge was revealed.

With the restoration of the fulness of the gospel came the Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ. Other revelations were given and continue to be given, and verses which seemed to oppose one another have harmony.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1938], p. 345).

And that knowledge is given us.

## Literal relationship with God

The Father *is* the one true God. *This* thing is certain: no one will ever ascend above Him; no one will ever replace Him. Nor will anything ever change the relationship that we, His literal offspring, have with Him. He is Elohim, the Father. He is God. Of Him there *is* only one. We revere our Father and our God; we *worship* Him.

There is only one Christ, one Redeemer. We accept the divinity of the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh. We accept the promise that we may become joint heirs with Him. Paul wrote to the Romans:

"The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:16-17).

There are those who mock our beliefs in the most uncharitable ways. And we will bear what they do with long-suffering, for it does not change truth. And in their own way they move our work along a little faster. We will send our missionaries abroad to teach that we are the literal sons and daughters of God.

We will strive with every exertion to teach what Christ taught, to live as He lived, to endure as He endured.

We began with this question: "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" Christ, our Redeemer, our Elder Brother, asked, "What manner of men ought ye to be?" And then He answered, "Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

I bear solemn witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh; that He is our Redeemer, our Savior; that God is our Father. This we know through the gift of the Holy Ghost. And I humbly but resolutely affirm that we will not, we cannot, stray from this doctrine. On this fundamental truth we will *never* yield! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## President Hinckley

Thank you, Elder Packer. As we conclude this service, we express appreciation to the owners and operators of the many radio and television stations and cable systems who have provided facilities as a public service to make the proceedings of this conference available to a large audience throughout many areas of the world.