

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Elder Hugh W. Pinnock of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy has just spoken to us.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve will now address us.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton

"I am an adult now"

Some weeks ago a man holding a high office in the Church asked a special favor of me. "Would you be good enough to take the time to listen while a mother, father, and their teenage daughter, special friends of mine, try to talk to each other?"

As the four of us sat together, it immediately became obvious that all channels of communication were jammed with prejudice, threats, accusations, and resentment. As the verbal storms developed with bitter intensity, I found myself the only listener. Even though they had individually and collectively agreed I would be the counselor, judge, arbiter, or referee, if you please, I found myself waiting patiently for an opportunity to be heard. During the heated and emotional confrontation, the teenager repeatedly expressed her resentment with: "You can't talk to me like that. I am an adult now. You can't treat me like that. I am an adult now. You can't dominate my life anymore. I am an adult now."

Maturity is shown by conduct

Each time she said "I am an adult now," I cringed. By definition, an adult is a person who has attained the age of maturity—full grown. While it is true a person may be legally classified as an adult when he or she reaches a certain age, for our purposes today the kind of adult status we are talking about must be earned by actions and attitude.

I am not quite sure who has the right or responsibility to declare someone an adult, but I am quite certain that

often the least qualified to make the declaration would be the individual himself. If a person is mature, he or she will not need to announce it. Personal conduct is the only true measurement of maturity. Adult classification, when it pertains to behavior, does not come with age, wrinkles, or gray hair. Perhaps it is not too far off the mark to say adult conduct is a process. Mature conduct is generally developed through self-discipline, resilience, and continuing effort.

In fairness to the teenager, even though her declaration of "I am an adult now" didn't impress me favorably, there were times during the visit when I thought she showed more maturity than others in the room. When we who are more senior use an expression like "I am older than you" to clinch a point, I am not too sure it is very effective. How much better it is to gain respect and love through worthy parental conduct than to seek it through the means of the age differential.

Follow Christ's path

Young men and young women worldwide, you, as well as your parents, need not announce or proclaim your maturity. By your faith and works you will be known for what you are. By your fruits you will be known and classified. Those among us who use abusive arguments, temper tantrums, demeaning and painful criticism, fruitless counter-complaints, and disrespect will benefit no one. Let us put away petty malice, resentment, and retaliatory practices that are self-destructive and return to a path of safety well marked by the Good Shepherd.

It takes courage to flee from verbal contention. When maturity begins to set in, adult lives set in. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). It is alarming how many older people go through life without ever becoming real adults.

Jesus standing before Pilate

For many years I have had a very vivid picture in my mind of Jesus Christ standing before Pilate. While Jesus stood in front of an angry mob, who sneered and condemned, Pilate tried to get Him to respond and retaliate. He tried to get Him to declare himself a king. Jesus was silent. His life was his sermon. He was perfect in character, a worthy son, the Only Begotten of the Father. His maturity, if you please, would speak for itself.

"And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.

"And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

"Then said Pilate unto him, Hearst thou not how many things they witness against thee?

"And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly" (Matthew 27:11-14).

The Church provides opportunities to mature

There are many opportunities to acquire mature behavior in the organizations in the Church. The other day a charming teenager paid a deserving tribute to her Young Women's teacher. She said: "From her example and good lessons, we learned the importance of good grooming. We learned that

though each of us is different, each is equally important. She taught us to solve our differences by discussion, not by shouting."

The success of the Scouting program is that it teaches boys to stay on the trail. Boulders and hills don't stop the hike to the top of the mountain. Top awards are not given unless the difficult merit badges are earned as well as the easier ones. The boys' tenacity to continue on the Scouting path, not the honors awarded, is the maturing element of the program.

Scriptural examples of maturity and immaturity

"A certain man had two sons:

"And the younger . . . said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me [I am an adult now]. And he divided unto them his living" (Luke 15:11-12).

The prodigal son parable is well known to all of us. He left and wasted his substance with riotous living. "When he came to himself, he said, . . .

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

"And am no more worthy to be called thy son: [but I am more of an adult now] . . .

"And he arose, and came to his father. . . His father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (vs. 17-20).

I believe it appropriate to say the father, too, had become more mature during the separation. Think, too, of the maturing and the becoming of more of an adult on the part of the elder son when he witnessed and participated in the Christ-like example of his father (see vs. 25-32).

There is no doubt in my mind that one of the primary reasons Laman and Lemuel murmured and spoke harsh words to their brother Nephi and did smite him with a rod was because they were older and more adult than Nephi,

so they supposed. Can't you just hear Laman saying, "Nephi, you can't treat me like that. I am an adult now."

Nephi displayed real maturity when he declared, "I, Nephi, said unto my father: I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them."

"And it came to pass that when my father had heard these words he was exceedingly glad, for he knew that I had been blessed of the Lord" (1 Nephi 3:7-8). Lehi was adult enough to know which son was the most mature and who would be blessed of the Lord accordingly.

True maturity is maintained consistently

Too many of us fail to realize adult conduct is a process, not a status. To become a disciple of Jesus Christ, we must continue in righteousness and in His word. When someone shares with enthusiasm his joy in now being an active member of the Church, the thought crosses my mind, "Wonderful, but for how long will you stay that way?" Incidentally, some years ago I was contacted by an insurance agent. When he started his sales approach with "I am an active member of the Church," the first thought that crossed my mind was, "Who said so?"

When someone overcomes the drug habit, and thankfully many have, less time should be spent on announcing the present status and more on staying away from bad habits. Those who are morally clean will conduct themselves in a more adult fashion if they will spend less time declaring it and more time living and teaching others the blessings of chastity. Full-tithe payers will receive more joy and reward from being obedient to the principle of tithing than from being so classified or recommended.

Making and keeping commitments

Some will chide and belittle leaders and students of higher education for participating in code of conduct guidelines, but those appropriately involved in the wholesome process of mature behavioral discipline welcome the environment. Responsible student conduct on any campus is applauded. A pledge of "on my honor I will do my best," either in writing or when self-enforced, can make the difference in character development. Making and keeping commitments may seem restrictive and outdated in a today world where "play it loose" is the pattern, but the benefits are clear to the mature.

The mature welcome counsel

Those who are immature resent counseling or having to report in. They may feel that such interviews are juvenile. Those who strive for continual growth realize that counselors can help one analyze himself and find solutions to personal problems. In our church, counselors are a source of great strength for the prophet as well as for all of us.

Beware of those seeking excuses for conduct with "I am an adult now. You can't treat me like that." Moral maturity and scholastic maturity must be blended to produce a truly adult person. A commitment to improve on a daily basis should be a high priority in the lives of those who would move in the right direction.

Church activity should foster maturity

There is real purpose and power in the First Presidency's continuing invitation to all Church members to come back. Strength, growth, and happiness result from analyzing the direction our lives are taking. Those who have been lost, misunderstood, or offended and those totally involved in the Church are invited to come and fellowship together

within the framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not enough. Participation in priesthood, Relief Society, Young Women, Young Men, Primary, and Sunday School opportunities is necessary if we are to move forward anxiously in personal development that is adult, real, and eternal. Perhaps all of us would do well to realize that as we promote personal activity and involvement in the Church, it might be much better to be classified a member of "good coming" instead of a member in good standing. It is our responsibility and privilege to encourage the immature and give them opportunities for growth and development.

Maturity measured by endurance

Joseph Smith declared to the world he was like a rough stone shaped and polished by the stream of life. Bumps, disappointments, and the unexpected helped him gain the status of being wise beyond his years. Oftentimes maturity can best be measured by our endurance. "If the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

"The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (D&C 122:7-8).

Avoid placing self-labels

My young friends, in a spirit of love I make the suggestion that we avoid the placing of self-labels. For you to classify yourself as all-state, all-American, or even all-world doesn't mean anything if you alone determine the winner and present the trophy to yourself. By the same token, who

among us has the right to label himself as a loser, no good, a dropout, or a failure? Self-judgment in any direction is a hazardous pastime. It is a fact of life that the direction in which we are moving is more important than where we are. I have never heard the best-educated ever declare, "I am educated now." Some of the most potentially wise people in the world forfeit that classification when they spend their time advertising their abilities and knowledge rather than using their wisdom to improve themselves and help those with whom they associate.

Patience brings eternal maturity

Mothers, fathers, and family members, maturity does not necessarily come with age. Let us communicate in words and deeds our concern and love for each other. Threats, ears that do not hear, eyes that do not see, and hearts that do not feel will never bring joy, unity, and growth. Patience with others, self, and God brings eternal maturity. Let God and our daily actions determine the authenticity of the statement "I am an adult now."

God is our Father. Jesus is the Christ. May our knowledge of them on a continuing basis give us Christ-centered adult conduct, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Faith of Our Fathers" without announcement.

President Hinckley

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve has just addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Faith of Our Fathers."

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker.