

Elder David B. Haight

Importance of Christian values

I have prayed for an interest in your faith and prayers, that I might say clearly what is in my heart.

James Peter Fugal was an honest man! He herded sheep much of his life in the rolling hills of Idaho—both his own sheep and sheep for others.

On one bitterly cold winter night, he was herding sheep for another man when a blizzard set in. The sheep bunched together, as sheep do, in the corner of a fenced area, and many died. Many other sheep on surrounding ranches also died that same night because of the weather.

Though the death of the sheep was no fault of his, James Fugal felt responsible and spent the next several years working and saving to repay the owner for his lost sheep.

This was the type of deep moral honor and accountability that was fostered by scripture-reading, God-fearing settlers on the early frontier.

This same desire to live Christian principles was evident in Aurelia Rogers, who was schooled on the plains and founded the Primary organization of the Church. She had a concern for the moral character and social development of children. Leaders of the Primary since Aurelia Rogers have proven to be worthy disciples and continue to teach wholesomeness, virtue, and love for one another as well as to instill a desire to understand and live by traditional values.

Recently, Sister Haight and I attended a ward sacrament meeting some distance from our home. After the sacrament, we found, to our delight, that the Primary would present the program, the theme being "We Believe in Being Honest."

I marveled at the eagerness and interest of these young children as they spoke about the fundamental principles they were learning in Primary of telling the truth, respecting the property of

others, being trustworthy, and standing for the right.

I thought of James Fugal, the humble shepherd, and how wonderful it was that these children were being taught the same values that made him a man of such noble character.

As we enjoyed the thoughtful and timely Primary presentation that emphasized these timeless moral and spiritual values, my thoughts seemed to concentrate on the similarity of two important heavenly directed events which we, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, have special reason to be grateful for: the framing of the Constitution of the United States of America and the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ—each, in a significant way, sustaining the other. In addition to heavenly direction, both would require a membership of honest, virtuous people if their divine purposes were to be realized.

Rise and survival of America

We attribute the rise of the American nation and its survival to two vital factors. First, God aided the efforts of those who established the republic. James Madison, who is considered the father of the Constitution and to whom President Benson referred this morning, wrote, "It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in [the Constitution] a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the [establishing of our republic]" (*The Federalist*, no. 37 [New York: Nal Penguin, Inc., 1961], pp. 230-31).

Second, the righteous conduct and example of its citizens. This is best expressed by Alexander Hamilton, a soldier turned statesman, who wrote that "it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the

important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force" (*The Federalist*, no. 1, p. 33).

Flourishing of the Restoration

The important human attributes needed for this new nation to really become a cooperating and workable republic of separate states would be manifested by a people who demonstrated by their lives a belief and desire to live in a society of justice for all mankind. Likewise, the Lord, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, also recognized that, like the new nation, the restored gospel would have difficulty enduring without men and women of similar integrity and conduct.

On March 1, 1842, Joseph Smith, at the request of Mr. John Wentworth, editor of a Chicago newspaper, composed thirteen brief statements known as the Articles of Faith, which summarize some of the basic doctrines of the Church. As the concluding statement, the Prophet wrote this inspired code of conduct:

"We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things" (Articles of Faith 1:13).

What an inspiring description of good people, God-fearing people, people committed to deal justly with mankind! These would be the type of people who could raise up a nation and help it survive, and the kind of people to comprehend the true gospel of Jesus Christ with the needed faith to proclaim it to the inhabitants of the earth.

We here today, and people throughout the nation and the free

world, are indebted to freedom-loving individuals everywhere who had the faith and integrity necessary to build the foundations of our societies upon fundamental moral values. Only in an atmosphere of freedom and trust could values like honesty and integrity truly flourish and thus encourage others to pursue their rights to liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Alarming decline in moral values

Therefore, it is with great alarm that we read newspaper accounts and hear daily media reports that describe the decline of moral decency and the erosion of basic ethical conduct. They detail the corrupting influence of dishonesty, from small-time, childish stealing or cheating to major embezzlement, fraud, and misappropriation of money or goods.

Headlines and feature stories dramatically demonstrate the need for honesty and integrity in family relationships, in business affairs, and in the conduct of government officials and religious ministries. Recent cover stories from major national publications with titles such as "Lying in America" (*U.S. News and World Report*, 23 Feb. 1987) and "What Ever Happened to Ethics" (*Time*, 25 May 1987) emphasize the need for public concern over the direction in which we are moving.

Public virtue, which expects men to rise above self-interest and to act in the public interest with wisdom and courage, was so evident in leaders like George Washington, who, we used to declare, could never tell a lie, and Abraham Lincoln, known as "Honest Abe." In the past few years we have seen "official after official—both on the national and the local political scene—put self-interest . . . above the larger public interest" (Charles A. Perry, "Religious Assumptions Undergird the Entire U.S. Constitution," *Deseret News*, 27 Sept. 1987, sec. B, p. 19).

"Men and women have . . . been removed from federal office and even

gone to jail in our times because they exceeded the limits set by the framers [of our Constitution and God's commandments]" (Charles A. Perry, "Religious Assumptions," p. 19).

"Situational ethics"

One reason for the decline in moral values is that the world has invented a new, constantly changing and undependable standard of moral conduct referred to as "situational ethics." Now, individuals define good and evil as being adjustable according to each situation; this is in direct contrast to the proclaimed God-given absolute standard: "Thou shalt not!"—as in "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

Teach children values

A recent Gallup Poll indicates that the vast majority of Americans want schools to do two things: teach our children to speak, think, write, and count; and help them develop standards of right and wrong to guide them through life. However, some teachers avoid questions of right and wrong or remain neutral or guide children into developing their own values, which is leaving many children morally adrift.

Many of our youth have either lost the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong or were never taught these basic values. President Harold B. Lee's classic statement that "the most important of the Lord's work that you will ever do will be the work you do within the walls of your own home" is most certainly true today. "Ours is the responsibility as parents to teach our children chastity . . . [and not only to be morally clean but to be] faithful [and] valiant, striving to live [all of] the Lord's commandments" (*Strengthening the Home* [pamphlet, 1973], pp. 4, 8).

Problem of secret sin

Some adults, including public officials and civic leaders, have also

been led astray by longings for luxury and leisure.

The devastation that comes to the families and loved ones of those convicted of crimes such as stealing, fraud, misrepresentation, child abuse, sexual transgression, or other serious crimes is immeasurable. So many sorrows, heartaches, and even broken homes result from a false belief that people can set their own rules and do what they want to do as long as they don't get caught.

Individuals may deceive and even go undetected or unpunished, but they will not escape the judgments of a just God. No man can disobey the word of God and not suffer for so doing. No sin, however secret, can escape retribution and the judgment that follows such transgression.

Obeys to be free and to be saved

We declare: "There is only one cure for the evils of this world, . . . and that is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and . . . obedience to [His] commandments" (Mark E. Petersen, in Conference Report, Oct. 1963, p. 122; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1963, p. 1110).

We run the risk of losing both our domestic freedom and eternal salvation if we circumvent by greed and avarice the ethical and moral strictures inherent in the Constitution of this land and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The continued survival of a free and open society is dependent upon a high degree of divinely inspired values and moral conduct, as stated by the Founding Fathers. People must have trust in their institutions and in their leaders. A great need today is for leadership that exemplifies truth, honesty, and decency in both public and private life.

Honesty is not only the best policy, as stated by Benjamin Franklin, it is the only policy!

Someone said, "We have committed the Golden Rule to memory. May we now commit it to life." The Savior's

teaching, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12), should be the basis for all human relationships.

The Lord is very clear about the conduct he expects from the inhabitants of this earth. Nephi declared:

"And again, the Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; . . . should not lie; . . . should not steal; . . . should not take the name of the Lord . . . in vain; . . . should not envy; . . . should not have malice; . . . should not contend one with another; . . . should not commit whoredoms; . . . for whoso doeth them shall perish.

"For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; . . . and . . . inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of, his goodness" (2 Nephi 26:32-33).

Rededicate ourselves

The time is now to rededicate our lives to eternal ideals and values, to make those changes that we may need to make in our own lives and conduct to conform to the Savior's teachings.

From the beginning to the end of His ministry, Jesus asked His followers to adopt new, higher standards in contrast to their former ways. As believers, they were to live by a spiritual and moral code that would separate them not only from the rest of the world but also even from some of their traditions. He asks nothing less of those who follow Him today.

Do we really believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, and virtuous? On this test may hinge the survival of our society, our constitutional government, and our eternal salvation.

I so declare, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "Praise to the Man" without announcement.

President Hinckley

Elder David B. Haight has just spoken to us, and the chorus has sung "Praise to the Man."

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

Elder Boyd K. Packer

The Balm of Gilead

Some years ago, I spoke at this pulpit and entitled my talk "The Balm of Gilead." The response was surprising. That very day two lawsuits were settled. One or both of the litigants decided that what they might gain materially was not worth the cost spiritually.

I wish to repeat much of what I said then.

In ancient times there came from Gilead, beyond the Jordan, an ointment made from the gum of a tree. It was a major commodity in trade. The Ishmaelite traders who purchased Joseph from his brothers were carrying this

balm of Gilead to Egypt (see Genesis 37:25).

It became symbolic for the power to soothe and to heal.

*There is a Balm in Gilead,
To make the wounded whole,
There is a Balm in Gilead,
To heal the sin sick soul.*

(Recreational Songs [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1949], p. 130)

My message was then, and is now, an appeal to those who are not at peace, those whose lives are touched with bit-