

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Tolerance

Dear brothers and sisters, I join my brethren in extending Easter greetings to each of you, while expressing personal gratitude for the atonement of Jesus Christ, for His example, and for His teachings that have motivated my message today.

I have been impressed to speak on the subject of tolerance—a virtue much needed in our turbulent world. But in discussing this topic, we must recognize at the outset that there is a difference between *tolerance* and *tolerate*. Your gracious tolerance for an individual does not grant him or her license to do wrong, nor does your tolerance obligate you to tolerate his or her misdeed. That distinction is fundamental to an understanding of this vital virtue.

I attended a “laboratory of tolerance” some months ago when I had the privilege of participating in the Parliament of the World’s Religions. There I conversed with good men and women representing many religious groups. Again I sensed the advantages of ethnic and cultural diversity and reflected once more on the importance of religious freedom and tolerance.

I marvel at the inspiration of the Prophet Joseph Smith when he penned the eleventh article of faith: “We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.”

That noble expression of religious tolerance is particularly poignant in light of the Prophet’s personal persecution. On one occasion he wrote, “I am at this time persecuted the worst of any man on the earth, as well as this people, . . . and all our sacred rights are trampled under the feet of the mob.”¹

Joseph Smith endured incessant persecution and finally heartless martyrdom—at the hands of the intolerant. His brutal fate stands as a stark reminder that we must never be guilty of *any* sin sown by the seed of intolerance.

Two great commandments to love

Revealed to that revered prophet was the fulness of the gospel. He was tutored by the resurrected Christ, whom Joseph adored. He taught doctrines declared by the Lord, including these He gave in response to the question of an exacting lawyer:

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”²

Hence, our highest priorities in life are to love God and to love our neighbors. That broadly includes neighbors in our own family, our community, our nation, and our world. Obedience to the second commandment facilitates obedience to the first commandment. “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.”³

Parental love

That concept is easy for mothers and fathers to understand. Parental love includes gratitude for service extended to any of their children, especially in their time of need.

I was amused recently when one of our grown children confided that she

had always thought that she was her daddy's favorite daughter. She was surprised to discover later that each of her eight sisters harbored that same feeling. Only when they had become mothers themselves did they realize that parents hardly have favorites. (Incidentally, our only son never had to wonder who was our favorite son.)

Our Father in Heaven loves all of His children too. Peter taught that "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."⁴

Yet His children can be so intolerant with one another. Neighboring factions, whether they be identified as groups or gangs, schools or states, counties or countries, often develop animosity. Such tendencies make me wonder: Cannot boundary lines exist without becoming battle lines? Could not people unite in waging war against the evils that beset mankind instead of waging war on each other? Sadly, answers to these questions are often no. Through the years, discrimination based on ethnic or religious identity has led to senseless slaughter, vicious pogroms, and countless acts of cruelty. The face of history is pocked by the ugly scars of intolerance.

How different our world would be if all parents would apply this inspired instruction from the Book of Mormon:

"Ye will not suffer your children . . . that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another. . . .

"But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another."⁵

If such training occurred, children and parents around this globe would join in singing, "Fill our hearts with sweet forgiving; Teach us tolerance and love."⁶ Men and women would respect their neighbors and the beliefs held sacred by them. No longer would ethnic jokes and cultural slurs be acceptable. The tongue of the tolerant speaks no guile.

Independence and cooperation

While we strive for the virtue of tolerance, other commendable qualities need not be lost. Tolerance does not require the surrender of noble purpose or of individual identity. The Lord gave instruction to leaders of His restored church to establish and maintain institutional integrity—"that the church may stand independent."⁷

Meanwhile, its members are encouraged to join with like-minded citizens in doing good.⁸ We are grateful for the many examples of heroic service rendered in times of earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, or other disasters. Such cooperative efforts to help neighbors in distress transcend any barriers posed by religion, race, or culture. Those good deeds are latter-day love in action!

Humanitarian relief rendered by members of this church is extensive, multinational, and generally unpublicized. Even so, there are doubtless many who wonder why we don't do more to assist the innumerable worthy causes to which our hearts respond.

Of course we are concerned with the need for ambulances in the valley below. But at the same time, we cannot ignore the greater need for protective guardrails on the cliffs above. Limited resources needed for the accomplishment of the higher work cannot be depleted in rescue efforts that provide only temporary relief.

The biblical prophet Nehemiah must have felt that same commitment to his important calling. When he was asked to divert attention away from his primary purpose, he replied, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"⁹

Fortunately, we in the Church rarely have to make such a decision. We consider love of neighbor an integral part of our mission. And while we serve one another, we continue to build a spiritual

house of refuge on the cliffs above. Such a sanctuary becomes a blessing for all mankind. We are but the builders; the architect is almighty God.

Missionary responsibilities

Latter-day Saints throughout the world work side by side with others—regardless of race, color, or creed—hoping to be good examples worthy of emulation. The Savior said:

“I give unto you a commandment, that every man, both elder, priest, teacher, and also member, . . . prepare and accomplish the things which I have commanded.

“And let your preaching be the warning voice, every man to his neighbor, in mildness and in meekness.”¹⁰

This we are to do with tolerance. While in Moscow in June 1991, in that spirit of preparation and with sincere respect for leaders of other religious denominations, Elder Dallin H. Oaks and I had the privilege of meeting with the presiding official of the Russian Orthodox Church. We were accompanied by Elder Hans B. Ringger and the mission president, Gary L. Browning. Patriarch Aleksei was most gracious in sharing a memorable hour with us. We perceived the great difficulties endured for so many years by this kind man and his fellow believers. We thanked him for his perseverance and for his faith. Then we assured him of our good intentions and of the importance of the message that missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would be teaching among his countrymen. We affirmed that ours is a global church and that we honor and obey the laws of each land in which we labor.¹¹

To those with an interest in thefulness of the restored gospel—regardless of nationality or religious background—we say as did Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “Keep all the truth and all the good that you have. Do not abandon any sound or

proper principle. Do not forsake any standard of the past which is good, righteous, and true. Every truth found in every church in all the world we believe. But we also say this to all men—Come and take the added light and truth that God has restored in our day. The more truth we have, the greater is our joy here and now; the more truth we receive, the greater is our reward in eternity. This is our invitation to men [and women] of good will everywhere.”¹²

Each of you with a testimony of the truth of the restored gospel has opportunity to share that precious gift. The Lord expects you to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness.”¹³

Baptism transcends background

On every continent and across isles of the sea, the faithful are being gathered into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Differences in cultural background, language, gender, and facial features fade into insignificance as members lose themselves in service to their beloved Savior. Paul’s declaration is being fulfilled:

“As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁴

Only the comprehension of the true Fatherhood of God can bring full appreciation of the true brotherhood of man. That understanding inspires desire to build bridges of cooperation instead of walls of segregation.

Our Creator decreed “that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another.”¹⁵

Intolerance seeds contention; tolerance supersedes contention. Tolerance is the key that opens the door to mutual understanding and love.

Risks of boundless tolerance

Now may I offer an important note of caution. An erroneous assumption could be made that if a little of something is good, a lot must be better. Not so! Overdoses of needed medication can be toxic. Boundless mercy could oppose justice. So tolerance, without limit, could lead to spineless permissiveness.

The Lord drew boundary lines to define acceptable limits of tolerance. Danger rises when those divine limits are disobeyed. Just as parents teach little children not to run and play in the street, the Savior taught us that we need not tolerate evil. "Jesus went into the temple of God . . . and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers."¹⁶ Though He loved the sinner, the Lord said that He "cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance."¹⁷ His Apostle Paul specified some of those sins in a letter to the Galatians. The list included "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, . . . wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like."¹⁸

To Paul's list I might add the regrettable attitudes of bigotry, hypocrisy, and prejudice. These were also decried in 1834 by early Church leaders who foresaw the eventual rise of this church "amid the frowns of bigots and the calumny of hypocrites."¹⁹ The Prophet Joseph Smith prayed that "prejudices may give way before the truth."²⁰ Hatred stirs up strife²¹ and digs beneath the dignity of mature men and women in our enlightened era.

Paul's list included "uncleanness." As members of the Church entrusted with its holy temples, we are commanded that "no unclean thing shall be permit-

ted to come into [His] house to pollute it."²²

That assignment requires great fortitude as well as love. In former days, disciples of the Lord "were firm, and would suffer even unto death rather than commit sin."²³ In latter days, devoted disciples of the Lord are just as firm. Real love for the sinner may compel courageous confrontation—not acquiescence! Real love does not support self-destructive behavior.

Tolerance and mutual respect

Our commitment to the Savior causes us to scorn sin yet heed His commandment to love our neighbors. Together we live on this earth, which is to be tended, subdued, and shared with gratitude.²⁴ Each of us can help to make life in this world a more pleasant experience. Not long ago the First Presidency and the Twelve approved a public statement from which I quote:

"It is morally wrong for any person or group to deny anyone his or her inalienable dignity on the tragic and abhorrent theory of racial or cultural superiority.

"We call upon all people everywhere to recommit themselves to the time-honored ideals of tolerance and mutual respect. We sincerely believe that as we acknowledge one another with consideration and compassion we will discover that we can all peacefully coexist despite our deepest differences."²⁵

That pronouncement is a contemporary confirmation of the Prophet Joseph's earlier entreaty for tolerance. Unitedly we may respond. Together we may stand, intolerant of transgression but tolerant of neighbors with differences they hold sacred. Our beloved brothers and sisters throughout the world are *all* children of God. He is our Father. His Son, Jesus, is the Christ. His church has been restored to the earth in these latter days to bless all of God's children. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 5:157.
2. Matthew 22:36–40; see also John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11–12; 2 John 1:5.
3. Mosiah 2:17.
4. Acts 10:34–35; see also D&C 38:16, 24–26.
5. Mosiah 4:14–15; see also Romans 12:18.
6. “In Humility, Our Savior,” *Hymns*, no. 172.
7. D&C 78:14.
8. See Articles of Faith 1:13.
9. Nehemiah 6:3.
10. D&C 38:40–41; see also D&C 88:81.
11. See Articles of Faith 1:12.
12. In Conference Report, Tahiti Area Conference 1976, p. 31.
13. 1 Peter 3:15; see also D&C 60:2.
14. Galatians 3:27–28.
15. Mosiah 18:21; see also Mosiah 23:15; 4 Nephi 1:13.
16. Matthew 21:12; see also Mark 11:15.
17. D&C 1:31.
18. Galatians 5:19–21.
19. Joseph Smith—History 1:71, footnote.

20. D&C 109:56; see also v. 70.
21. See Proverbs 10:12.
22. D&C 109:20.
23. Alma 24:19.
24. See Genesis 1:28; Moses 2:28; Abraham 4:28; D&C 59:15–21.
25. “Church Exhorts Ethnic, Religious Tolerance,” *Church News*, 24 Oct. 1992, p. 4.

The choir sang “Know This, That Ev’ry Soul Is Free.”

President Hinckley

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us, and the choir has sung “Know This, That Ev’ry Soul Is Free.”

Following my remarks the choir will conclude by singing “The Lord Be with Us.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Augusto A. Lim of the Seventy, and the conference will be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

President Gordon B. Hinckley**The greatest miracle in human history**

My beloved brethren and sisters, I add my testimony to the testimony of my brethren this Easter morning. For all of Christendom, for all of mankind, today is observed as the anniversary of the greatest miracle in human history. It is the miracle that encompasses all who have lived upon the earth, all who now live upon the earth, and all who will yet live upon the earth. Nothing done before or since has so affected mankind as the atonement wrought by Jesus of Nazareth, who died on Calvary’s cross, was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and on the third day arose from the grave as the Living Son of the Living

God—the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

As mortals we all must die. Death is as much a part of eternal life as is birth. Looked at through mortal eyes, without comprehension of the eternal plan of God, death is a bleak, final, and unrelenting experience described by Shakespeare as “the undiscover’d country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (*Hamlet*, act 3, scene 1, lines 79–80).

But our Eternal Father, whose children we are, made possible a far better thing through the sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This had to be. Can anyone believe that the Great Creator would provide for life and growth and achievement only to snuff it