

and good friend, your refuge when the world appears to be closing around you, your hope when things are dark, your pillar of fire by night and your cloud by day as you thread the pathways of your lives. May the Lord be mindful of you and merciful and kind to you. May you find great joy in that which you do in His service is my humble prayer, with an ex-

pression of love and affection for each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

---

The choir sang "I Need Thee Every Hour."

Elder Donald L. Staheli offered the benediction.

---

## SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth general session of the 167th Semiannual General Conference commenced at 10:00 A.M. on Sunday, October 5, 1997. President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music, with Jerold Ottley conducting and John Longhurst at the organ.

To begin the session, the choir sang "Lead Me into Life Eternal." President Hinckley then made the following remarks.

### President Gordon B. Hinckley

We welcome you from the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah, to the fourth general session of the 167th semiannual conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the stations who are broadcasting this conference. We acknowledge the

presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders and members of the Church who have assembled to worship together.

We have with us the great Tabernacle Choir. Under the direction of Brother Jerold Ottley with Brother John Longhurst at the organ, they opened these services by singing "Lead Me into Life Eternal."

The choir will now sing "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee," following which Elder John B. Dickson of the Seventy will offer the invocation.

---

The choir sang "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee."

Elder John B. Dickson offered the invocation.

---

### President Hinckley

We will now be pleased to listen to President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency.

## President James E. Faust

### The "weightier matters of the law"

My beloved brothers and sisters and friends, I have prayed earnestly that you might understand my words this morn-

ing in the spirit which is intended. I therefore seek your faith and prayers in my behalf.

Jesus of Nazareth described His ultimate work: "This is my work and my

glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”<sup>1</sup> His work is accomplished through His gospel, which carries the impress of the Savior Himself. I humbly wish to speak of the essence of the gospel. The Savior taught that judgment, mercy, and faith are the “weightier matters of the law.”<sup>2</sup>

### The Savior gave us a higher law

I wish to state unequivocally that the commandments of God must be kept to receive the blessings and promises of the Savior. The Ten Commandments are still a vital thread in the fabric of the gospel of Christ, but with His coming came new light and life, which bring a fuller measure of joy and happiness. Jesus introduced a higher and more difficult standard of human conduct. It is simpler as well as more difficult because it focuses on internal rather than external requirements: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.<sup>3</sup> Love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>4</sup> When smitten, turn the other cheek.<sup>5</sup> When asked for a coat, give your cloak also.<sup>6</sup> Forgive, not just once but seventy times seven.<sup>7</sup> This was the essence of the new gospel. There was more emphasis on *do* than *do not*. More moral agency was given to each of us.

Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the dispensation of the fulness of times, established the Church by revelation as the receptacle of gospel truth. He brought more light, warmth, and joy into the Church through the numerous lofty revelations, such as how the priesthood should be exercised: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned.”<sup>8</sup> This high standard of conduct, if lived, will bring to fruition the promise: “Men are, that they might have joy.”<sup>9</sup>

Over the centuries dogmatism, coercion, and intolerance have too often pol-

luted the living water of the gospel, which quenches our spiritual thirst eternally.<sup>10</sup> The Savior observed this in His day:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

“Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.”<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Paul said, “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”<sup>12</sup>

We are not only to avoid evil, not only to do good but, most important, to do the things of greatest worth. We are to focus on the inward things of the heart, which we know and value intuitively but often neglect for that which is trivial, superficial, or prideful.

### Timeless laws of the gospel

The saving principles and doctrines of the Church are established, fixed, and unchangeable. Obedience to these absolutes is necessary to enjoy “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come.”<sup>13</sup> However, the manner in which the Church administers complex and varied worldwide challenges changes from time to time. Under guidance from living prophets, new guidelines and procedures are put in place. I welcome these inspired changes. They are proof of the truthfulness of the restored gospel.

I have some fear, however, that some members consider guidelines and procedures to be as important as the timeless, immutable laws of the gospel, such as “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”<sup>14</sup> Rather than some legalistic definition of adultery, the Savior’s more enlightened direction is that the thought is father to the deed: he that “looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”<sup>15</sup>

### Responsibility for moral judgments

Who decides what is right and wrong in given circumstances? Where does the responsibility for the making of moral judgments rest? With mature individuals, of course, it rests with each individual. In the case of children, the responsibility of giving moral guidance rests with the parents. They know the disposition, understanding, and intelligence of each child. Parents spend a lifetime seeking to establish and maintain good communications with each of their children. They are in the best position to make the ultimate moral decisions as to the welfare and well-being of their offspring. The higher principles of the gospel—justice, mercy, and faith—are very important in all family relationships.

Many years ago when I was a bishop, a conscientious father came to me for counsel. He felt that the many and frequent activities of the Church made it difficult to have as much family togetherness as he and his wife deemed necessary. The children had the idea that they were not loyal to the Church if they did not participate fully in every recreational activity. I told this caring father that Church activities were to help him and his wife rear their children. They as parents had not only the right but the duty to determine the extent of their family's involvement in social activities. Family unity, solidarity, and harmony should be preserved. After all, a family is the basic, permanent unit of the Church.

### Three sources of guidance

There are three sources of guidance for making moral judgments. First is the guidance of the Holy Ghost. This is always a sure compass for those who have been baptized and received this supernal gift. The second source is the wise counsel of priesthood leaders whom the Lord has put in place to guide us. Third, the constant demonstration of love should

temper all our judgments. Sometimes this means discipline.

The Prophet Joseph Smith was once asked how he governed so diverse a people. His answer was, "I teach the people correct principles and they govern themselves."<sup>16</sup> This statement is just as true today as it was in Joseph's time. There must be listening ears and obedience to the living prophet of the Church. President Marion G. Romney stated it well:

"It is an easy thing to believe in the dead prophets, but it is a greater thing to believe in the living prophets. I will give you an illustration.

"One day when President Grant was living, I sat in my office across the street following a general conference. A man came over to see me, an elderly man. He was very upset about what had been said in this conference by some of the Brethren, including myself. I could tell from his speech that he came from a foreign land. After I had quieted him enough so he would listen, I said, 'Why did you come to America?'

"'I came here because a prophet of God told me to come.'

"'Who was the prophet?' I continued.

"'Wilford Woodruff.'

"'Do you believe Wilford Woodruff was a prophet of God?'

"'Yes,' said he.

"'Do you believe that his successor, President Lorenzo Snow, was a prophet of God?'

"'Yes, I do.'

"'Do you believe that President Joseph F. Smith was a prophet of God?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"Then came the 'sixty-four dollar question.' 'Do you believe that Heber J. Grant is a prophet of God?'

"His answer: 'I think he ought to keep his mouth shut about old age assistance.'"<sup>17</sup>

Today we have a living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, whom we sustain as the prophet of our day. He has

warned us “to speak up for moral standards in a world where filth, sleaze, pornography, and their evil brood are sweeping over us as a flood.” His counsel to us in our day is: “Stand up for integrity in your business, in your profession, in your home, in the society of which you are a part.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Justice cannot be separated from mercy**

Indeed, moral standards must be maintained. In large measure, those who are disobedient punish themselves. As the Lord said through Jeremiah: “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee.”<sup>19</sup> Those entrusted with judicial responsibility in the kingdom of God must see that the Church remains clean so that the living waters of life flow unimpeded.

However, true religion is not looking primarily for weaknesses, faults, and errors. It is the spirit of strengthening and overlooking faults even as we would wish our own faults to be overlooked. When we focus our entire attention on what may be wrong rather than what is right, we miss the sublime beauty and essence of the sweet gospel of the Master.

Judgment, the weightier matter of the law mentioned by the Savior, cannot be separated from the other two: mercy and faith. Shakespeare wrote of “the quality of mercy.” Speaking through Portia, he said, “We do pray for mercy; / And that same prayer doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy.”<sup>20</sup> I am frank to admit that when I say my prayers, I do not ask for justice; I ask for mercy.

### **The Prophet Joseph’s mercy**

One of the great examples of mercy in our time was extended by the Prophet Joseph to W. W. Phelps during the troubles of the Saints in the state of Missouri. Elder Phelps fell into apostasy. After suffering buffetings, on June 29,

1840, while in Dayton, Ohio, W. W. Phelps wrote to the Prophet Joseph:

“I have seen the folly of my way, and I tremble at the gulf I have passed. . . . I will repent and live, and ask my old brethren to forgive me, and though they chasten me to death, yet I will die with them, for their God is my God. The least place with them is enough for me, yea, it is bigger and better than all Babylon. . . .

“ . . . I have done wrong and I am sorry. . . . I have not walked along with my friends according to my holy anointing. I ask forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ of all the Saints, for I will do right, God helping me. I want your fellowship; if you cannot grant that, grant me your peace and friendship, for we are brethren, and our communion used to be sweet.”<sup>21</sup>

To this the Prophet Joseph replied:

“It is true, that we have suffered much in consequence of your behavior—the cup of gall, already full enough . . . , was indeed filled to overflowing when you turned against us. One with whom we had oft taken sweet counsel together, and enjoyed many refreshing seasons from the Lord—‘had it been an enemy, we could have borne it.’ . . .

“However, the cup has been drunk, the will of our Father has been done, and we are yet alive. . . . And having been delivered from the hands of wicked men by the mercy of our God, we say it is your privilege to be delivered from the powers of the adversary, . . . and again take your stand among the Saints of the Most High, and by diligence, humility, and love unfeigned, commend yourself to our God, and your God, and to the Church of Jesus Christ.

“Believing your confession to be real, and your repentance genuine, I shall be happy once again to give you the right hand of fellowship, and rejoice over the returning prodigal. . . .

“Come on, dear brother, since the war is past,

“For friends at first, are friends again at last.”

“Yours as ever, Joseph Smith, Jun.”<sup>22</sup>

W. W. Phelps remained true and faithful and wrote the words to the marvelous hymn “Praise to the Man,” affirming his great love and admiration for the Prophet Joseph:

Praise to the man who communed  
with Jehovah!

Jesus anointed that Prophet and  
Seer.

Blessed to open the last dispensation,  
Kings shall extol him, and nations  
revere.<sup>23</sup>

### Childlike faith

The childlike faith of a follower of the divine Christ is a choice spiritual gift. It can be enjoyed by young and old. In the early days of the Church, a young boy by the name of Will Cluff, 10 years of age, living in Nauvoo, had a remarkable, pure faith. He had an experience to which many of us can relate.

His family was poor and had only one cow, which they depended on for food. In the spring of 1842 the cow strayed off. One evening in August his father came home very weary and discouraged. He and Will's brothers had spent much of the summer looking for the cow. Will said, “Father, if you will let me take Charley (an old horse) I will go and find the cow.” His father reluctantly said he could.

Early next morning Will rode to the Big Mound, three miles east and in the prairie country. Here he had often herded cows with other boys from Nauvoo. He got off the horse and, holding it by the bridle, knelt down and fervently prayed the Lord to direct him which way to go to find the cow. He climbed back on the horse and rode south, a course he was impressed to take even though there were numerous bunches of cattle in every direction.

After traveling a few miles in the open prairie and passing hundreds of cattle, Will came to a fence. He dismounted and let down the stake, led his horse in, put up the fence, then rode three miles across the field. He again found himself in the open prairie with numerous bunches of stock in every direction. When he had gone about a quarter of a mile from the field, he rode right on to the cow, feeding alone some distance from any other animals.

Will started to drive the cow in the direction of the city. He arrived late in the evening, full of joy and thankful to his Father in Heaven.<sup>24</sup>

### Sins of omission

I fear that some of our greatest sins are sins of omission. These are some of the weightier matters of the law the Savior said we should not leave undone. These are the thoughtful, caring deeds we fail to do and feel so guilty for having neglected them.

As a small boy on the farm during the searing heat of the summer, I remember my grandmother Mary Finlinson cooking our delicious meals on a hot woodstove. When the wood box next to the stove became empty, Grandmother would silently pick up the box, go out to refill it from the pile of cedar wood outside, and bring the heavily laden box back into the house. I was so insensitive and interested in the conversation in the kitchen, I sat there and let my beloved grandmother refill the kitchen wood box. I feel ashamed of myself and have regretted my omission for all of my life. I hope someday to ask for her forgiveness.

### Higher gospel requires us to look inward

We are directed into the pathway to the kingdom of God by the Savior's own words. Said He, “The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you,”<sup>25</sup> and “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”<sup>26</sup> We are

shown the way into the kingdom of God on earth in the same way.

Those who extend judgment, mercy, faith, and forgiveness exhibit a greatness of soul and mind consistent with the spirit of the Lord's teachings and example. This higher gospel requires that we look inward to our own souls, for we cannot deceive the Lord. We are told that "the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there."<sup>27</sup> Those of us who hold the holy apostleship always wish to fulfill our responsibility by testifying of the divinity of the Savior. I feel compelled to do so. I have had a testimony all of my life. Recently, however, there has come into my soul an overpowering witness of the divinity of this holy work. This sure witness is more certain than ever before in my life. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. Moses 1:39.
2. Matthew 23:23.
3. See Matthew 7:12.
4. See Matthew 22:37-39.
5. See Luke 6:29.
6. See Matthew 5:40.
7. See Matthew 18:21-22.
8. D&C 121:41.
9. 2 Nephi 2:25.
10. See John 4:14.
11. Matthew 23:23-24.
12. 2 Corinthians 3:6.
13. D&C 59:23.
14. Exodus 20:14.
15. Matthew 5:28.
16. Quoted by John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:57-58.
17. In Conference Report, Apr. 1953, 125.
18. "Stand Up for Truth," *Brigham Young University 1996-97 Speeches* (1997), 24.
19. Jeremiah 2:19.
20. *The Merchant of Venice*, act 4, scene 1, lines 184, 200-202.
21. *History of the Church*, 4:142.
22. *History of the Church*, 4:163-64.
23. *Hymns*, no. 27.
24. Adapted from W. W. Cluff, "A Boy's Faith," Stan and Sharon Miller, comps., *Especially for Mormons*, 5 vols. (1971-87), 2:115-16.
25. Luke 10:9.
26. Matthew 4:17.
27. 2 Nephi 9:41.

---

The choir sang "The Iron Rod."

---

#### President Hinckley

President James E. Faust of the First Presidency has just spoken to us. The choir has sung "The Iron Rod."

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Twelve will now address us.

## Elder L. Tom Perry

### Importance of studying the gospel

The scriptures have recorded, "And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come" (D&C 130:19).

The acquisition of knowledge is a fundamental part of the Lord's eternal plan for His children. To make certain

that there are resources available for those who seek this knowledge, He has instructed His prophets through the ages to make a record of His dealings with them. The first earthly family, even the family of Father Adam, followed these instructions:

"And then began these men to call upon the name of the Lord, and the Lord blessed them;