

21. In Conference Report, Apr. 1952, 34; or *Improvement Era*, June 1952, 423.
22. Abraham 3:26.
23. *The Way to Perfection*, 10th ed. (1953), 202.
24. Alma 34:33–34.
25. Thomas J. Parmley, as quoted in R. Scott Lloyd, “Alumnus, 95, Returns to High School,” *Church News*, 12 June 1993, 13.
26. Jonah 4:11.
27. James 1:8.
28. Quoted by Hans B. Ringger, in Conference Report, Apr. 1990, 32; or *Ensign*, May 1990, 26.
29. John 7:17; see also verses 14–16.

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The chorus sang “Jesus, Lover of My Soul.”

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### President Hinckley

Bishop Richard C. Edgley of the Presiding Bishopric has spoken to us, and he was followed by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The Mormon Youth Chorus then sang “Jesus, Lover of My Soul.”

President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will now be our concluding speaker.

## President James E. Faust

My dear brothers and sisters and friends: I stand humbly at this pulpit, which for well over a hundred years has been sanctified by the word of God spoken in countless inspired messages which have spiritually filled the souls of those who have listened. Consistent with this legacy, I pray that our hearts may be open to all that is said in this conference.

### Blessings that flow from covenants

Today I wish to speak about the blessings that flow from covenants with the Lord. As a foundation, I begin with the covenant the Lord made with the house of Israel: “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”<sup>1</sup>

This covenant is universal for those of any race being “baptized into Christ.”<sup>2</sup> As Paul states, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”<sup>3</sup>

Covenants are not simply outward rituals; they are real and effective means of change. “Being born again, comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.”<sup>4</sup> We should always honor and keep sacred the saving covenants we make with the Lord. If we do, He has promised, “Thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.”<sup>5</sup>

Many covenants are indispensable to happiness here and hereafter. Among the most important are the marriage covenants made between husband and wife. From these covenants flow the greatest joys of life.

The covenant of baptism, with its attendant ordinance of confirmation, opens the gate for eternal life.

The oath and covenant of the priesthood contains the promise by which worthy elders of the Church shall receive “all that [the] Father hath.”<sup>6</sup>

Temple covenants are the basis for attaining the greatest blessings the Lord has for us.

### The law must be written in our hearts

We have the great privilege of partaking of the sacrament, the Lord's Supper. Renewing our baptismal covenants as we partake of the sacrament protects us against all manner of evil. As we worthily partake of the sanctified bread and water in remembrance of the Savior's sacrifice, we witness unto God the Father that we are willing to take upon us the name of His Son and always remember Him and to keep His commandments which He has given us. If we do these things, we will always have His Spirit to be with us.<sup>7</sup> If we partake of the sacrament regularly and are faithful to these covenants, the law will be in our inward parts and written in our hearts. Let me illustrate this with a story from the *Church News*:

"A group of religion instructors [were] taking a summer course on the life of the Savior and focusing particularly on the parables.

"When the final exam time came, . . . the students arrived at the classroom to find a note that the exam would be given in another building across campus. Moreover, the note said, it must be finished within the two-hour time period that was starting almost at that moment.

"The students hurried across campus. On the way they passed a little girl crying over a flat tire on her new bike. An old man hobbled painfully toward the library with a cane in one hand, spilling books from a stack he was trying to manage with the other. On a bench by the union building sat a shabbily dressed, bearded man [in obvious distress].

"Rushing into the other classroom, the students were met by the professor, who announced they had all flunked the final exam.

"The only true test of whether they understood the Savior's life and teaching, he said, was how they treated people in need.

"Their weeks of study at the feet of a capable professor had taught them a great deal of what Christ had said and done." In their haste to finish the technicalities of the course, however, they had failed to recognize the application represented by the three scenes that had been deliberately staged. They learned the letter but not the spirit. Their neglect of the little girl and the two men showed that the profound message of the course had not entered into their inward parts.<sup>8</sup>

We must at times search our own souls and discover what we really are. Our real character, much as we would wish, cannot be hidden. It shines from within us transparently. Attempts to deceive others only deceive ourselves. We are often like the emperor in the fairy tale who thought he was arrayed in beautiful garments when he was in fact unclothed.

### Service from a pure heart

In my lifetime I have seen the faithfulness of Church members increase. Measured by fixed standards, there are greater manifestations of faithfulness than ever before. On any given Sunday, percentagewise more than twice as many people partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper worldwide than when I was growing up.

We are trying to care for the poor and the needy among us through the generosity of faithful Church members who observe the law of the fast and participate in the inspired welfare program. Humanitarian aid of many kinds worth millions of dollars has been sent to many countries to relieve hunger and suffering. This is administered according to need and without regard for race, color, or religious creed.

More of our people enjoy blessings from living the ancient law of tithing. They voluntarily return to the Lord one-tenth of the increase He has given them.

Hundreds of thousands more of our faithful Saints enjoy the privilege of temple worship. We now have 58,000 missionaries serving in the field. I rejoice in this, and I am sure the Lord is pleased. But I wonder if we have become proportionately more Christlike. Does our service come from a pure heart?

### **Covenants protect us**

I speak of the importance of keeping covenants because they protect us in a world that is drifting from time-honored values that bring joy and happiness. In the future this loosening of moral fiber may even increase. The basic decency of society is decreasing. In the future our people, particularly our children and grandchildren, can expect to be bombarded more and more by the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Too many families are being broken up. Good is called evil, and evil is called good.<sup>9</sup> In our present "easiness of the way,"<sup>10</sup> have we forgotten the elements of sacrifice and consecration that our pioneer forebears demonstrated so well for us? It may be that, as Wordsworth suggested:

The world is too much with us; late  
and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste  
our powers: . . .  
We have given our hearts away, a  
sordid boon! . . .  
For this, for everything, we are out  
of tune.<sup>11</sup>

### **Our personal values must not erode**

Perhaps in our day and time it is more difficult to maintain moral strength and stand against the winds of evil that blow more fiercely than ever before. It is a sifting process. Today the modern counterparts of Babylon, Sodom, and Gomorrah are alluringly and explicitly displayed on television, on the Internet,

and in movies, books, magazines, and places of entertainment.

In the last general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley warned us about moving too far toward the mainstream of society in some areas such as Sabbath day observance, family disintegration, and other matters. He said: "We have moved too far toward the mainstream of society in this matter. Now of course there are good families. There are good families everywhere. But there are too many who are in trouble. This is a malady with a cure. The prescription is simple and wonderfully effective. It is love."<sup>12</sup>

In our society many sacred values have been eroded in the name of freedom of expression. The vulgar and the obscene are protected in the name of freedom of speech. The mainstream of society has become more tolerant, even accepting of conduct that Jesus, Moses, the Prophet Joseph Smith, and other prophets have warned against since the beginning of human history.

We should not allow our personal values to erode, even if others think we are peculiar. We have always been regarded as a peculiar people. However, being spiritually correct is much better than being politically correct. Of course, as individuals and as a people we want to be liked and respected. But we cannot be in the mainstream of society if it means abandoning those righteous principles which thundered down from Sinai, later to be refined by the Savior and subsequently taught by modern prophets. We should only fear offending God and His Son, Jesus Christ, who is the head of this Church.

All forms of evil are being masked. I speak of sexual immorality. I speak of wagering for money, which in many places is called gaming rather than gambling. This is typical of how many other evils are masked to make them more acceptable. There is a masking of other conduct which has been condemned

throughout the history of mankind, conduct which is destructive to the family, the basic unit of society. In "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," the First Presidency and Twelve stated: "We . . . solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children."<sup>13</sup>

The breakdown of parental authority erodes the most indispensable institution of society—the family.

### **"We will serve the Lord"**

Paul spoke of those in his day who demonstrated that "the work of the law [was] written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness."<sup>14</sup> For members of this Church to enjoy the blessings of a covenant people, the law of the Lord must be written in their hearts. How can they do this when so many voices tell our children and grandchildren that evil is good and good is evil? We would hope that all fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers would be better examples in keeping the commandments of God. We ask husbands and wives to try a little harder to be loving and kind with each other. If both parents will insulate their family as far as they can from the many influences that prey upon us, their children are more likely to be safeguarded. Daily scripture study, daily prayer, regular family home evening, obedience to priesthood authority in the home and in the Church constitute a great insurance policy against spiritual deterioration.

Joshua spoke unequivocally when he said:

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. . . .

"And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey."<sup>15</sup>

### **Follow the true Shepherd**

We are free to accept or reject the counsel of the Lord and His prophets. Often those who do not choose to follow the prophets are voices that criticize those who do.

Some of our critics call those who follow their spiritual leaders "mindless sheep." Jesus said:

"And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

"And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."<sup>16</sup>

All of this, of course, did not begin with our generation. Since the beginning, the influences and forces of Satan have constantly warred with God. Satan, the great deceiver, said, "I am also a son of God."<sup>17</sup> Satan urged the children of Adam not to believe in the things of God, "and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish."<sup>18</sup> The justification seems to be that everyone does it. It is the "in thing" to do.

### **Learn to live by covenants**

Ordinances and covenants help us to remember who we are and our duty to God. They are the vehicles the Lord has provided to conduct us into eternal life. If we honor them, He will give us added strength.

Elder James E. Talmage affirmed that the true believer "with the love of God in his soul, pursues his life of service and righteousness without stopping to ask by what rule or law each act is prescribed or forbidden."<sup>19</sup>

In a world where we and our families are threatened by evil on every side, let us remember President Hinckley's counsel: "If our people could only learn to live by these covenants, everything else would take care of itself."<sup>20</sup>

Faithful members of the Church who are true to their covenants with the Master do not need every jot and tittle spelled out for them. Christlike conduct flows from the deepest wellsprings of the human heart and soul. It is guided by the Holy Spirit of the Lord, which is promised in gospel ordinances. Our greatest hope should be to enjoy the sanctification which comes from this divine guidance; our greatest fear should be to forfeit these blessings. May we so live that we may be able to say, as did the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart."<sup>21</sup> I pray that this may be so, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. Jeremiah 31:33.
2. Galatians 3:27.
3. Galatians 3:29.
4. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 162.
5. D&C 42:61.
6. D&C 84:38.
7. See D&C 20:77, 79.
8. "Viewpoint: Too Hurried to Serve?" *Church News*, 1 Oct. 1988, 16.
9. See Isaiah 5:20.
10. Alma 37:46.
11. William Wordsworth, "The World."
12. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69.
13. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
14. Romans 2:15.
15. Joshua 24:15, 24.
16. John 10:4-5; see also verses 11, 14-15, 27.

17. Moses 5:13.
18. Moses 5:13.
19. In Conference Report, Apr. 1905, 78.
20. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 147.
21. Psalm 139:23.

#### President Hinckley

President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has been our concluding speaker this morning.

We express gratitude to the Bonneville International LDS Radio Network and the owners and operators of the many other television and radio stations and cable systems for offering their facilities as a public service to bring the proceedings of this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world.

We express our deep appreciation to the Mormon Youth Chorus for the beautiful music they have provided this morning. They will now sing "How Gentle God's Commands." The benediction will then be offered by Bishop Keith B. McMullin, Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric. The conference will then be adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.

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The chorus sang "How Gentle God's Commands."

Bishop Keith B. McMullin offered the benediction.

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## SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The second session of the 168th Annual General Conference convened in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, April 4, 1998, at 2:00 P.M. President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Brigham Young University combined choirs, under the direction of Brothers Mack Wilberg and Ronald Staheli with Sister Bonnie Goodliffe at the organ.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.