

erful, clear, appealing. It was marvelous how the words of living light and fire flowed from him. . . . [When] the heart of President Smith was attuned to the Celestial melodies—he could hear, and [he] did hear.”<sup>10</sup>

Another who developed this great talent of spirituality was President David O. McKay, causing Elder Bryant S. Hinckley to write, “David O. McKay has done many good things and said many beautiful things but somehow he is finer than anything he has ever said or done.”<sup>11</sup>

The great battle of our premortal estate was a struggle for individual souls. It is the same battle we wage here, which is to become supremely spiritual beings. President McKay said, “Spirituality is the consciousness of victory over self.”<sup>12</sup> It is the sure knowledge that we are winning the struggle for the soul. Sensuality is the realm of self-indulgence. Spirituality is the realm of self-victory.

### Keep covenants and seek the Spirit

I attended a Church class in which the instructor asked what counsel we would give our children in the closing moments of life. I answered, “First, keep your covenants. God keeps His. It will mean much to stand before your Father in Heaven and report: ‘I am home. I am clean. I have done all I covenanted to do.’”

Second, seek the Spirit of God. The scriptures plead: “Quench not the Spirit.”<sup>13</sup> “Grieve not the . . . Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> It will not come to impure hearts or minds. It comes quietly and without drama. A listening ear can hear the faint rustle of a wing. If we do not listen, it will leave.

I testify that the workings of the Spirit are real and are found in this Church. I also testify of Christ, the Redeemer, and the work He has instituted in this dispensation. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. 2 Kings 2:9.
2. “The Sin against the Holy Ghost,” *Instructor*, Oct. 1935, 431.
3. Genesis 1:4, 31.
4. *Aurora Leigh*, 7:821–23.
5. *Deseret News Weekly*, 19 Apr. 1871, 125.
6. Quoted by Joseph L. Wirthlin, in Conference Report, Apr. 1947, 85.
7. *The Best Letters of Thomas Jefferson*, sel. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton (1926), 227.
8. Personal conversation with Elder LeGrand Richards on 1 July 1978.
9. Quoted in Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 524–25.
10. *Gospel Doctrine*, 522.
11. “Greatness in Men—David O. McKay,” *Improvement Era*, May 1932, 446.
12. *Gospel Ideals* (1953), 390.
13. 1 Thessalonians 5:19.
14. Ephesians 4:30.

## Elder Dallin H. Oaks

### The challenge to become

The Apostle Paul taught that the Lord’s teachings and teachers were given that we may all attain “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). This process requires far more

than acquiring knowledge. It is not even enough for us to be *convinced* of the gospel; we must act and think so that we are *converted* by it. In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to *know* something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to *become* something.

Many Bible and modern scriptures speak of a final judgment at which all persons will be rewarded according to their deeds or works or the desires of their hearts. But other scriptures enlarge upon this by referring to our being judged by the *condition* we have achieved.

The prophet Nephi describes the Final Judgment in terms of what we *have become*: "And if their works have been filthiness they must needs *be* filthy; and if they *be* filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God" (1 Nephi 15:33; italics added). Moroni declares, "He that *is* filthy shall be filthy still; and he that *is* righteous shall be righteous still" (Mormon 9:14; italics added; see also Revelation 22:11–12; 2 Nephi 9:16; D&C 88:35). The same would be true of "selfish" or "disobedient" or any other personal attribute inconsistent with the requirements of God. Referring to the "state" of the wicked in the Final Judgment, Alma explains that if we are condemned by our words, our works, and our thoughts, "we shall not be found spotless; . . . and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God" (Alma 12:14).

### Becoming what our Father desires

From such teachings we conclude that the Final Judgment is not just an evaluation of a sum total of good and evil acts—what we have *done*. It is an acknowledgment of the final effect of our acts and thoughts—what we have *become*. It is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. The commandments, ordinances, and covenants of the gospel are not a list of deposits required to be made in some heavenly account. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.

A parable illustrates this understanding. A wealthy father knew that if he were to bestow his wealth upon a child who had not yet developed the needed wisdom and stature, the inheritance would

probably be wasted. The father said to his child:

"All that I have I desire to give you—not only my wealth, but also my position and standing among men. That which I *have* I can easily give you, but that which I *am* you must obtain for yourself. You will qualify for your inheritance by learning what I have learned and by living as I have lived. I will give you the laws and principles by which I have acquired my wisdom and stature. Follow my example, mastering as I have mastered, and you will become as I am, and all that I have will be yours."

This parable parallels the pattern of heaven. The gospel of Jesus Christ promises the incomparable inheritance of eternal life, the fulness of the Father, and reveals the laws and principles by which it can be obtained.

### Conversion requires us to *do* and *become*

We qualify for eternal life through a process of *conversion*. As used here, this word of many meanings signifies not just a convincing but a profound change of nature. Jesus used this meaning when He taught His chief Apostle the difference between a testimony and a conversion. Jesus asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matthew 16:13). Next He asked, "But whom say ye that I am?"

"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:15–17).

Peter had a *testimony*. He knew that Jesus was the Christ, the promised Messiah, and he declared it. To *testify* is to know and to declare.

Later on, Jesus taught these same men about *conversion*, which is far more than testimony. When the disciples asked

who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, "Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be *converted*, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:2-4; italics added).

Later the Savior confirmed the importance of being converted, even for those with a testimony of the truth. In the sublime instructions given at the Last Supper, He told Simon Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32).

In order to strengthen his brethren—to nourish and lead the flock of God—this man who had followed Jesus for three years, who had been given the authority of the holy apostleship, who had been a valiant teacher and testifier of the Christian gospel, and whose testimony had caused the Master to declare him blessed still had to be "converted."

Jesus' challenge shows that the conversion He required for those who would enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 18:3) was far more than just being converted to testify to the truthfulness of the gospel. To testify is to *know* and to *declare*. The gospel challenges us to be "converted," which requires us to *do* and to *become*. If any of us relies solely upon our knowledge and testimony of the gospel, we are in the same position as the blessed but still unfinished Apostles whom Jesus challenged to be "converted." We all know someone who has a strong testimony but does not act upon it so as to be converted. For example, returned missionaries, are you still seeking to be converted, or are you caught up in the ways of the world?

### **Gospel is the plan by which we become**

The needed conversion *by* the gospel begins with the introductory experience the scriptures call being "born again" (see Mosiah 27:25; Alma 5:49; John 3:7; 1 Peter 1:23). In the waters of baptism and by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, we become the spiritual "sons and daughters" of Jesus Christ, "new creatures" who can "inherit the kingdom of God" (Mosiah 27:25-26).

In teaching the Nephites, the Savior referred to what they must become. He challenged them to repent and be baptized and be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, "that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Nephi 27:20). He concluded: "Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the plan by which we can become what children of God are supposed to become. This spotless and perfected state will result from a steady succession of covenants, ordinances, and actions, an accumulation of right choices, and from continuing repentance. "This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God" (Alma 34:32).

### **Conversion and family relationships**

Now is the time for each of us to work toward our personal conversion, toward becoming what our Heavenly Father desires us to become. As we do so, we should remember that our family relationships—even more than our Church callings—are the setting in which the most important part of that development can occur. The conversion we must achieve requires us to be a good husband and father or a good wife and mother. Being a successful Church leader is not enough. Exaltation is an eternal family experience,

and it is our mortal family experiences that are best suited to prepare us for it.

### Focus on what others are becoming

The Apostle John spoke of what we are challenged to become when he said, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2; see also Moroni 7:48).

I hope the importance of conversion and becoming will cause our local leaders to reduce their concentration on statistical measures of actions and to focus more on what our brothers and sisters *are* and what they are striving to *become*.

### Adversity can help us become converted

Our needed conversions are often achieved more readily by suffering and adversity than by comfort and tranquility, as Elder Hales taught us so beautifully this morning. Father Lehi promised his son Jacob that God would “consecrate [his] afflictions for [his] gain” (2 Nephi 2:2). The Prophet Joseph was promised, “Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high” (D&C 121:7–8).

Most of us experience some measure of what the scriptures call “the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10; 1 Nephi 20:10). Some are submerged in service to a disadvantaged family member. Others suffer the death of a loved one or the loss or postponement of a righteous goal like marriage or childbearing. Still others struggle with personal impairments or with feelings of rejection, inadequacy, or depression. Through the justice and mercy of a loving Father in Heaven, the refinement and sanctification possible through such experiences can help us achieve what God desires us to become.

### Do things for the right reason: charity

We are challenged to move through a process of conversion toward that status and condition called eternal life. This is achieved not just by doing what is right, but by doing it for the right reason—for the pure love of Christ. The Apostle Paul illustrated this in his famous teaching about the importance of charity (see 1 Corinthians 13). The reason charity never fails and the reason charity is greater than even the most significant acts of goodness he cited is that charity, “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47), is not an *act* but a *condition* or state of being. Charity is attained through a succession of acts that result in a conversion. Charity is something one becomes. Thus, as Moroni declared, “except men shall *have* charity they cannot inherit” the place prepared for them in the mansions of the Father (Ether 12:34; italics added).

### Parable of the laborers in the vineyard

All of this helps us understand an important meaning of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, which the Savior gave to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like. As you remember, the owner of the vineyard hired laborers at different times of the day. Some he sent into the vineyard early in the morning, others about the third hour, and others in the sixth and ninth hours. Finally, in the eleventh hour he sent others into the vineyard, promising that he would also pay them “whatsoever is right” (Matthew 20:7).

At the end of the day the owner of the vineyard gave the same wage to every worker, even to those who had come in the eleventh hour. When those who had worked the entire day saw this, “they murmured against the goodman of the house” (Matthew 20:11). The owner did not yield but merely pointed out that he

had done no one any wrong, since he had paid each man the agreed amount.

Like other parables, this one can teach several different and valuable principles. For present purposes its lesson is that the Master's reward in the Final Judgment will not be based on how long we have labored in the vineyard. We do not obtain our heavenly reward by punching a time clock. What is essential is that our labors in the workplace of the Lord have caused us to *become* something. For some of us this requires a longer time than for others. What is important in the end is what we have become by our labors.

Many who come in the eleventh hour have been refined and prepared by the Lord in ways other than formal employment in the vineyard. These workers are like the prepared dry mix to which it is only necessary to "add water"—the perfecting ordinance of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. With that addition—even in the eleventh hour—these workers are in the same state of development and qualified to receive the same reward as those who have labored long in the vineyard.

### Never give up hope

This parable teaches us that we should never give up hope and loving associations with family members and friends whose fine qualities (see Moroni 7:5-14) evidence their progress toward what a loving Father would have them become. Similarly, the power of the Atonement and the principle of repentance show that we should never give up on loved ones who now seem to be making many wrong choices.

Instead of being judgmental about others, we should be concerned about ourselves. We must not give up hope. We must not stop striving. We are children of God, and it is possible for us to become what our Heavenly Father would have us become.

### Ways to measure our progress

How can we measure our progress? The scriptures suggest various ways. I will mention only two.

After King Benjamin's great sermon, many of his hearers cried out that the Spirit of the Lord "has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). If we are losing our desire to do evil, we are progressing toward our heavenly goal.

The Apostle Paul said that persons who have received the Spirit of God "have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). I understand this to mean that persons who are proceeding toward the needed conversion are beginning to see things as our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, see them. They are hearing His voice instead of the voice of the world, and they are doing things in His way instead of by the ways of the world.

I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Redeemer, whose Church this is. I testify with gratitude of the plan of the Father, under which, through the Resurrection and Atonement of our Savior, we have the assurance of immortality and the opportunity to become what is necessary for eternal life. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Monson

Elders Ronald A. Rasband and Douglas L. Callister of the Seventy have just spoken to us, followed by Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting which will commence here in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 P.M. mountain daylight time.

Prior to the nationwide Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning, there will be a brief cornerstone ceremony for