

# The Peace of Christ Abolishes Enmity

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When love of Christ envelops our lives, we approach disagreements with meekness, patience, and kindness.

My dear brothers and sisters, during an exercise stress test, the heart's workload is increased. Hearts that can handle walking may struggle to support the demands of running uphill. In this way, the stress test can reveal underlying disease that is not otherwise apparent. Any issues identified can then be treated before they cause serious problems in daily life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly been a global stress test! The test has shown mixed results. Safe and effective vaccines have been developed.<sup>1</sup> Medical professionals, teachers, caregivers, and others have sacrificed heroically—and continue to do so. Many people have displayed generosity and kindness—and continue to do so. Yet, underlying disadvantages have been manifest. Vulnerable individuals have suffered—and continue to do so. Those who work to address these underlying inequalities are to be encouraged and thanked.

The pandemic is also a spiritual stress test for the Savior's Church and its members. The results are likewise mixed. Our lives have been blessed by ministering in a "higher and holier way,"<sup>2</sup> the *Come, Follow Me* curriculum, and home-centered, Church-supported gospel learning. Many have provided compassionate help and comfort during these difficult times and continue to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in some instances, the spiritual stress test has shown tendencies toward contention and divisiveness. This suggests that we have work to do to change our hearts and to become unified as the Savior's true disciples. This is not a new challenge, but it is a critical one.<sup>4</sup>

When the Savior visited the Nephites, He taught, "There shall be no disputations among you. ... He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another."<sup>5</sup> When we contend with each other in anger, Satan

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true—everyone knows that we are not His disciples when we do not show love one to another. His latter-day work is compromised when contention or enmity<sup>9</sup> exists among His disciples.<sup>10</sup> Second, contention is spiritually unhealthy for us as individuals. We are robbed of peace, joy, and rest, and our ability to feel the Spirit is compromised.

Jesus Christ explained that His doctrine was not “to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but [that His] doctrine [is] that such things should be done away.”<sup>11</sup> If I am quick to take offense or respond to differences of opinion by becoming angry or judgmental, I “fail” the spiritual stress test. This failed test does not mean that I am hopeless. Rather, it points out that I need to change. And that is good to know.

After the Savior’s visit to the Americas, the people were unified; “there was no contention in all the land.”<sup>12</sup> Do you think that the people were unified because they were all the same, or because they had no differences of opinion? I doubt it. Instead, contention and enmity disappeared because they placed their discipleship of the Savior above all else. Their differences paled in comparison to their shared love of the Savior, and they were united as “heirs to the kingdom of God.”<sup>13</sup> The result was that “there could not be a happier people ... who had been created by the hand of God.”<sup>14</sup>

Unity requires effort.<sup>15</sup> It develops when we cultivate the love of God in our hearts<sup>16</sup> and we focus on our eternal destiny.<sup>17</sup> We are united by our common, primary identity as children of God<sup>18</sup> and our commitment to the truths of the restored gospel. In turn, our love of God and our discipleship of Jesus Christ generate genuine concern for others. We value the kaleidoscope of others’ characteristics, perspectives, and talents.<sup>19</sup> If we are unable to place our discipleship to Jesus Christ above personal interests and viewpoints, we should reexamine our priorities and change.

We might be inclined to say, “Of course we can have unity—if only you would agree with me!” A better approach is to ask, “What can I do to foster unity? How can I respond to help this person draw closer to Christ? What can I do to lessen contention and to build a compassionate and caring Church community?”

When love of Christ envelops our lives,<sup>20</sup> we approach disagreements with meekness, patience, and kindness.<sup>21</sup> We worry less about our own sensitivities and more about our neighbor’s. We “seek to moderate and unify.”<sup>22</sup> We do not engage in “doubtful disputations,” judge those with whom we disagree, or try to cause them to stumble.<sup>23</sup> Instead, we assume that those with whom we disagree are doing the best they can with the life experiences they have.

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Even former enemies can become united in their discipleship of the Savior.<sup>24</sup> In 2006, I attended the dedication of the Helsinki Finland Temple to honor my father and grandparents, who had been early converts to the Church in Finland. Finns, including my father, had dreamed of a temple in Finland for decades. At the time, the temple district would encompass Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, and Russia.

At the dedication, I learned something surprising. The first day of general operation had been set aside for Russian members to perform temple ordinances. It is difficult to explain just how astonishing this was. Russia and Finland had fought many wars over the centuries. My father distrusted and disliked not only Russia but all Russians. He had expressed such feelings passionately, and his feelings were typical of Finnish enmity toward Russia. He had memorized epic poems that chronicled 19th-century warfare between Finns and Russians. His experiences during World War II, when Finland and Russia were again antagonists, did nothing to change his opinions.

A year before the dedication of the Helsinki Finland Temple, the temple committee, consisting exclusively of Finnish members, met to discuss plans for the dedication. During the meeting, someone observed that Russian Saints would be traveling several days to attend the dedication and might hope to receive their temple blessings before returning home. The committee chairman, Brother Sven Eklund, suggested that the Finns could wait a little longer, that Russians could be the first members to perform temple ordinances in the temple. All committee members agreed. Faithful Latter-day Saint Finns delayed their temple blessings to accommodate Russian Saints.

The Area President who was present at that temple committee meeting, Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander, later wrote: “I have never been prouder of the Finns than I was at this moment. Finland’s difficult history with its eastern neighbor ... and their excitement of finally having [a temple] constructed on their own soil were put aside. Permitting the Russians to enter the temple first [was] a statement of love and sacrifice.”<sup>25</sup>

When I reported this kindness to my father, his heart melted and he wept, a very rare occurrence for that stoic Finn. From that time until his death three years later, he never expressed another negative sentiment about Russia. Inspired by the example of his fellow Finns, my father chose to place his discipleship of Jesus Christ above all other considerations. The Finns were no less Finnish; the Russians were no less Russian; neither group abandoned their culture, history, or experiences to banish enmity. They did not need to. Instead, they chose to make their discipleship of Jesus Christ their primary consideration.<sup>26</sup>

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If we are not one, we are not His.<sup>29</sup> My invitation is to be valiant in putting our love of God and discipleship of the Savior above all other considerations.<sup>30</sup> Let us uphold the covenant inherent in our discipleship—the covenant to be one.

Let us follow the example of Saints from around the world who are successfully becoming disciples of Christ. We can rely on Jesus Christ, who “is our peace, who ... hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his [atoning sacrifice] the enmity.”<sup>31</sup> Our witness of Jesus Christ to the world will be strengthened, and we will remain spiritually healthy.<sup>32</sup> I testify that as we “shun contention” and become “like-minded with the Lord in love and united with Him in faith,” His peace will be ours.<sup>33</sup> In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. 1. See “The First Presidency Urges Latter-day Saints to Wear Face Masks When Needed and Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19,” Newsroom, Aug. 12, 2021, [newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org); “Vaccines Explained,” World Health Organization, [who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/covid-19-vaccines/explainers](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/covid-19-vaccines/explainers); “Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Sept. 27, 2021, [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html); “COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness and Safety,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [cdc.gov/mmwr/covid19\\_vaccine\\_safety.html](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/covid19_vaccine_safety.html).
2. 2. Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 69.
3. 3. See Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
4. 4. Many apostles and prophets have addressed unity and contention over the years. See, for example, Marvin J. Ashton, “No Time for Contention,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 7–9; Marion G. Romney, “Unity,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 17–18; Russell M. Nelson, “The Canker of Contention,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 68–71; Russell M. Nelson, “Children of the Covenant,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 32–35; Henry B. Eyring, “That We May Be One,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 66–68; D. Todd Christofferson, “Come to Zion,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 37–40; Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 77–79; Quentin L. Cook, “Hearts Knit in Righteousness and Unity,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 18–22; Gary E. Stevenson, “Hearts Knit Together,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 19–23.

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6. 6. See Moses 7:26, 28, 33. This does not suggest that the Savior's atoning sacrifice is ongoing or that He is continuing to suffer; Jesus Christ has completed the Atonement. However, His infinite and perfect empathy and compassion that He claimed as a result of completing His atoning sacrifice allow Him to feel disappointment and sadness.
7. 7. 2 Nephi 2:8.
8. 8. John 13:34, 35.
9. 9. *Enmity* is the state or feeling of being actively opposed to someone or something; it connotes hostility, antagonism, animosity, rancor, and deep-seated dislike or ill will. The Greek word translated as "enmity" is also translated as "hatred." It is the opposite of *agape*, which is translated as "love." See James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (2010), Greek dictionary section, number 2189.
10. 10. See John 17:21, 23.
11. 11. 3 Nephi 11:30.
12. 12. 4 Nephi 1:18.
13. 13. 4 Nephi 1:17.
14. 14. 4 Nephi 1:16.
15. 15. President Russell M. Nelson has said, "The Lord loves effort" (in Joy D. Jones, "An Especially Noble Calling," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2020, 16).
16. 16. See 4 Nephi 1:15. There are those who have achieved this kind of unity. In Enoch's day, "the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7:18).
17. 17. See Mosiah 18:21.
18. 18. See Acts 17:29; Psalm 82:6.
19. 19. See 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.
20. 20. See Moroni 7:47–48.
21. 21. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:30–31.
22. 22. Dallin H. Oaks, "Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,"

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24. 24. The Savior criticized His “disciples, in days of old, [who] sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened. Wherefore,” Jesus admonished His latter-day disciples, “I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another” (Doctrine and Covenants 64:8–9).
25. 25. Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander, personal communication.
26. 26. In a typical Finnish fashion, when Brother Eklund discussed this decision, he said it was simply logical. Instead of praising the Finns’ magnanimity, he expressed appreciation for the Russians. The Finns were grateful for the significant contribution of the Russians to the work being done in the Helsinki Finland Temple. (Sven Eklund, personal communication.)
27. 27. See Helaman 13:2, 5.
28. 28. See 3 Nephi 5:13, 20.
29. 29. See Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
30. 30. See Luke 14:25–33.
31. 31. Ephesians 2:14–15.
32. 32. See Ephesians 2:19.
33. 33. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Canker of Contention,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 71.

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