

We Are His Children

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Of the Seventy

We have the same divine origin and the same limitless potential through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Do you recall the experience the prophet Samuel had when the Lord sent him to Jesse's house to anoint the new king of Israel? Samuel saw Eliab, Jesse's firstborn. Eliab, it seems, was tall and had the appearance of a leader. Samuel saw that and jumped to a conclusion. It turned out to be the wrong conclusion, and the Lord taught Samuel: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; ... for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."¹

Do you recall the experience the disciple Ananias had when the Lord sent him to bless Saul? Saul's reputation had preceded him, and Ananias had heard about Saul and his cruel, relentless persecution of the Saints. Ananias heard and jumped to a conclusion that perhaps he should not minister to Saul. It turned out to be the wrong conclusion, and the Lord taught Ananias, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."²

What was the trouble with Samuel and Ananias in these two instances? They saw with their eyes and heard with their ears, and as a result, they passed judgment on others based on appearance and hearsay.

When the scribes and the Pharisees saw the woman taken in adultery, what did they see? A depraved woman, a sinner worthy of death. When Jesus saw her, what did He see? A woman who had temporarily succumbed to the weakness of the flesh but could be reclaimed through repentance and His Atonement. When people saw the centurion whose servant was sick with palsy, what did they see? Perhaps they saw an intruder, a foreigner, one to be despised. When Jesus saw him, what did He see? A man concerned for the welfare of a member of his household, who sought the Lord in candor and faith. When people saw the woman with an issue of blood, what did they see? Perhaps an unclean woman, an outcast to be shunned. When Jesus saw her, what did He see? A sickly woman, lonely and alienated due to circumstances she did not control, who hoped to be healed and to belong again.

In every case, the Lord saw these individuals for who they were and accordingly ministered to each one. As Nephi and his brother Jacob declared:

"He inviteth them all to come unto him ... , black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God."³

"The one being is as precious in his sight as the other."⁴

May we likewise not let our eyes, our ears, or our fears mislead us but open our hearts and minds and minister freely to those around us as He did.

Some years ago, my wife, Isabelle, received an unusual ministering assignment. She was asked to visit an elderly widow in our ward, a sister with health challenges and whose loneliness had brought bitterness into her life. Her curtains were drawn; her apartment was stuffy; she did not want to be visited and made it clear that “there is nothing I can do for anyone.” Undeterred, Isabelle responded, “Yes, there is! You can do something for us by allowing us to come and visit you.” And so Isabelle went, faithfully.

Some time later, this good sister had surgery on her feet, which required her bandages to be changed every day, something she could not do for herself. For days, Isabelle went to her home, washed her feet, and changed her bandages. She never saw ugliness; she never smelled stench. She only ever saw a beautiful daughter of God in need of love and tender care.

Over the years, I and countless others have been blessed by Isabelle’s gift to see as the Lord sees. Whether you are the stake president or the ward greeter, whether you are the king of England or live in a shack, whether you speak her language or a different one, whether you keep all the commandments or struggle with some, she will serve you her very best meal on her very best plates. Economic status, skin color, cultural background, nationality, degree of righteousness, social standing, or any other identifier or label is of no consequence to her. She sees with her heart; she sees the child of God in everyone.

President Russell M. Nelson has taught:

“The adversary rejoices in labels because they divide us and restrict the way we think about ourselves and each other. How sad it is when we honor labels more than we honor each other.

“Labels can lead to judging and animosity. Any *abuse* or *prejudice* toward another because of nationality, race, sexual orientation, gender, educational degrees, culture, or other significant identifiers is offensive to our Maker!”⁵

French is not who I am; it is where I was born. White is not who I am; it is the color of my skin, or lack thereof. Professor is not who I am; it is what I did to support my family. General Authority Seventy is not who I am; it is where I serve in the kingdom at this time.

“First and foremost,” as President Nelson reminded us, I am a “child of God.”⁶ So are you, and so are all other people around us. I pray that we may come to a greater appreciation of this wonderful truth. It changes everything!

We may have been raised in different cultures; we may come from different socioeconomic circumstances; our mortal heritage, including our nationality, skin color, food preferences, political orientation, etc., may vary greatly. But we are His children, all of us, without exception. We have the same divine origin and the same limitless potential through the grace of Jesus Christ.

C. S. Lewis put it this way: “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. ... There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—

these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.”⁷

Our family has been privileged to live in different countries and cultures; our children have been blessed to marry within different ethnicities. I have come to realize that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the great equalizer. As we truly embrace it, “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”⁸ This amazing truth frees us, and all labels and distinctions that may otherwise afflict us and our relationships to each other are simply “swallowed up in ... Christ.”⁹ It soon becomes clear that we, as well as others, “are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”¹⁰

I recently heard the branch president of one of our multicultural language units refer to this, as Elder Gerrit W. Gong has done, as *covenant belonging*.¹¹ What a beautiful concept! We belong to a group of people who all try to place the Savior and their covenants at the center of their lives and to live the gospel joyfully. Hence, rather than our seeing each other through the distorted lens of mortality, the gospel raises our sights and allows us to see each other through the flawless, unchanging lens of our sacred covenants. In so doing, we begin to eliminate our own natural prejudices and biases toward others, which in turn helps them minimize their prejudices and biases toward us,¹² in a wonderful virtuous cycle. Indeed, we follow our dear prophet’s invitation: “My dear brothers and sisters, how we treat each other really matters! How we speak to and about others at home, at church, at work, and online really matters. Today, I am asking us to interact with others in a higher, holier way.”¹³

This afternoon, in the spirit of that invitation, I wish to add my pledge to that of our wonderful Primary children:

If you don’t walk as most people do,
Some people walk away from you,
But I won’t! I won’t!
If you don’t talk as most people do,
Some people talk and laugh at you,
But I won’t! I won’t!
I’ll walk with you. I’ll talk with you.
That’s how I’ll show my love for you.
Jesus walked away from none.
He gave his love to ev’ryone.
So I will! I will!¹⁴

I testify that He whom we address as our Father in Heaven is indeed our Father, that He loves us, that He knows each of His children intimately, that He cares deeply about each one, and that we are truly all alike unto Him. I testify that the way we treat each other is a direct reflection of our understanding of and appreciation for the ultimate sacrifice and Atonement of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. I pray that, like Him, we may love others because that is the right thing to do, not because they are doing the right thing or fitting the “right” mold. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 1 Samuel 16:7.

2. Acts 9:15.
3. 2 Nephi 26:33.
4. Jacob 2:21.
5. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), Gospel Library.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity.”
7. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (1949), 14–15.
8. Romans 8:16.
9. Alma 31:38.
10. Ephesians 2:19.
11. See Gerrit W. Gong, “Covenant Belonging,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 80–83.
12. See Dale G. and Ruth L. Renlund, *The Melchizedek Priesthood: Understanding the Doctrine, Living the Principles* (2018), 112.
13. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 99.
14. “I’ll Walk with You,” *Children’s Songbook*, 140–41.