

Disciples of Jesus Christ— Defenders of Marriage

RUSSELL M. NELSON

Thank you, President Worthen, for your gracious introduction. Wendy and I are grateful for the privilege of being here on this significant occasion. I bring love and greetings from President Thomas S. Monson, President Henry B. Eyring, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, my beloved Brethren of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and members of the board of trustees.

We are grateful for President Kevin J. Worthen and President Cecil O. Samuelson, who have presided over the studies of this graduating class. We thank the faculty and staff for their service and tireless striving for excellence. And today we congratulate every graduate, along with their families and friends who have provided encouragement along the way. We are very proud of each of you!

Some of you will continue your education and achieve graduate degrees. Some of you will enter the workforce on a full-time basis. Many of you have married or will marry and begin your families. Family life will provide your most enduring rewards. As partners, you and your spouse will work together to achieve mutual goals and enjoy the fruits of your labors. By the way, brethren, you might bear

this in mind: Behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law. I know mine was!

There is great power in a strong partnership. True partners can achieve more than the sum of each acting alone. With true partners, one plus one is much more than two. For example, Dr. Will Mayo and his brother, Dr. Charles Mayo, formed the Mayo Clinic. Lawyers and others form important partnerships. And in marriage, a husband and wife can form the most significant partnership of all—an eternal family.

Sustainable improvements in any endeavor depend on collaboration and agreement. Great leaders and partners develop the skill of sharing insights and efforts and the pattern of building consensus. Great partners are completely loyal. They suppress personal ego in exchange for being part of creating something larger than themselves. Great partnerships are dependent upon each individual developing his or her own personal attributes of character.

Russell M. Nelson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this commencement address was given on 14 August 2014.

Each of us was born as an individual and is educated as an individual. You have passed tests to meet standards imposed upon you by someone else. You have been jumping over educational high hurdles, all erected by other people. For years you have been primarily task-oriented, preparing for what you want *to do* in life.

That is essential. But now it is time for a significant shift. Now it is time for you to define your own goals and meet your own expectations. From now on, you decide! Instead of concentrating on what you are *to do*, now is the time to zero in on who you are *to be*—on that person you are yet *to become*, as President Worthen explained so well. Now is the time for you to focus on developing great attributes of character.

Now seems to be my time for attending funerals. I have witnessed many families saying good-bye, for a season, to those they love and to whom they are sealed. I often leave funerals wondering, “What would I like to have said about me at my funeral?”

It is not too early in your life to ask the same question. What would you like to have said about you at your funeral? Hopefully that you were a good husband and father or a good wife and mother.

That you were a person of integrity.

That you were kind and patient.

Or humble and hardworking.

Or a person of virtue.

The greatest guardians of any and all virtues are marriage and family. This is particularly the case with the virtues of chastity and fidelity in marriage, both of which are required to create enduring and fully rewarding marriage partnerships and family relationships.

Male and female are created for what they can do and become, together. It takes a man and a woman to bring a child into the world. Mothers and fathers are not interchangeable. Men and women are distinct and complementary. Children deserve a chance to grow up with both a mom and a dad.

As you go forth from BYU, you will likely encounter increasing debate about the definition of marriage. Many of your neighbors, colleagues, and friends will have never heard logical and inspired truths about the importance of marriage as God Himself defined it. You will have many opportunities to strengthen understanding of the Lord’s side of that argument by the eloquence of your examples, both as individuals and as families.

The Apostle Paul foresaw our circumstances when he said:

In the last days perilous times shall come.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, . . . despisers of those that are good, . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

Then he concluded, “From such turn away.”¹

After his remarkable prophecy of our time, Paul added this word of warning:

*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*²

Ponder that! It means that during these perilous times, life will not be comfortable for true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we will have His approval. He gave us this assurance:

*And blessed are all they who are persecuted for my name’s sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*³

In short, as disciples, each of us will be put to the test. At any hour of any day we have the privilege of choosing between right and wrong. This is an age-old battle that started in a premortal realm. And that battle is becoming more intense every day. Your individual strength of character is needed now more than ever before.

The day is gone when you can be a quiet and comfortable Christian. Your religion is not just about showing up for church on Sunday. It is about showing up as a true disciple from Sunday morning through Saturday night—24/7! There is no such thing as a “part-time” disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus invited anyone who wants to be His disciple to take up His cross and follow Him.⁴ Are you ready to join the ranks?

Or will you be ashamed of the gospel? Will you be ashamed of your Lord and His plan?⁵ Will you yield to voices of those who would have you join them on the popular side of contemporary history?

No! The youth of Zion will not falter! I believe you will be courageous and proclaim God’s truth with clarity and kindness, even when His truth is politically unpopular! Paul set that pattern when he declared:

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*⁶

Disciples of the Lord are defenders of marriage. We cannot yield. History is not our judge. A secular society is not our judge. God is our judge! For each of us, Judgment Day will be held in God’s own way and time.⁷

The future of marriage and of countless human lives will be determined by your willingness to bear solemn witness of the Lord and live according to His gospel. Great protection is available to us as we enter the waters of baptism and take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ. King Benjamin so explained:

*And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.*⁸

I appreciate a statement made by Sister Sheri L. Dew at the recent BYU Women’s Conference. She said:

*At the heart of becoming disciples is **doing** what we promise to do every time we partake of the sacrament—which is to “always remember” the Lord (see Moroni 4:3; 5:2). This means remembering Him when we choose what media we’re willing to expose our spirits to. It means remembering Him in how we spend our time and when choosing between a steady diet of pop culture or the Word of God. It means remembering Him in the middle of conflict or when temptation looms. It means remembering Him when critics attack His Church and mock truth. It means remembering that we have taken His name upon us (Mosiah 5:7).⁹*

Sister Dew’s message is consonant with a message from President Howard W. Hunter (1907–1995), who said:

*If our lives and our faith are centered upon Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. . . . If our lives are not centered on the Savior and his teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right.*¹⁰

Wherever we go, you and I as disciples of the Lord bear a solemn responsibility to proclaim the will of God to all people. And one of the more demanding opportunities of our time is to stand up for the truth regarding the sacred nature of marriage.

Our message is shaped by divine doctrine, canonized in the Bible:

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*¹¹

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*¹²

*And God blessed them, and . . . said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.*¹³

*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*¹⁴

*And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.*¹⁵

God is the Father of all men and women. They are His children. It was He who ordained marriage as the union of a man and a woman. Marriage was not created by human judges or legislators. It was not created by think tanks or by popular vote or by oft-quoted bloggers or by pundits. It was not created by lobbyists. Marriage was created by God!

The Ten Commandments forbade adultery and covetousness.¹⁶ Those ancient commandments were given later to people of New Testament¹⁷ and Book of Mormon¹⁸ times. In modern revelation the Lord has reaffirmed:

*Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.*¹⁹

True intimacy, as planned by our Creator, is experienced only within the sacred union of a husband and wife because it is enriched by truth and ennobled by the honoring of covenants a husband and wife make with each other and with God. It is crucial to note that full fidelity to those covenants forbids pornography, lust, or abuse in any form.

Social and political pressures to change marriage laws are resulting in practices contrary to God's will regarding the eternal nature and purposes of marriage. Man simply cannot make moral what God has declared to be immoral. Sin, even if legalized by man, is still sin in the eyes of God.

Brothers and sisters, undergirded by incontrovertible truth, proclaim your love for God!

Proclaim your love for all human beings "with malice toward none, with charity for all."²⁰ They as children of God are our brothers and sisters. We value their rights and feelings. But we cannot condone efforts to change divine doctrine. It is not for man to change.

God loves His children. And if they love Him, they will show that love by keeping His commandments,²¹ including chastity before marriage and total fidelity within marriage. Scriptures warn that behavior contrary to the commandments of the Lord will not only deprive couples of divinely approved intimacy but will bring about the stern judgments of God.²²

The noblest yearning of the human heart is for a marriage that will endure beyond death. Complete fidelity to covenants made in holy temples will allow husband and wife to be sealed together throughout all eternity.²³

Dear graduates, families, and friends, the burden of discipleship is heavy. As disciples of the Lord you will stand as defenders of marriage. And as you are true and faithful, not only will He help you and protect you,²⁴ He will bless your families.²⁵

You are beneficiaries of the infinite Atonement of the Lord. Because of Him all of you will eventually be rewarded with immortality. And because of Him you may enjoy the blessing of eternal life with Him and your families.

Now, invoking the keys of the holy apostleship in me vested, I bless you with a fervent desire to feast on the words of Jesus Christ and to apply His teachings in your daily lives. I bless you with success in your continuing educational and occupational pursuits. I bless you with joy as you keep the commandments of Almighty God. And I bless you with protection, peace, and continual growth as you stand as disciples and defenders of the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel.

God lives! Jesus is the Christ! He stands as the Head of His Church, restored in these

latter days to accomplish its divine destiny. I so testify, with my expression of love and gratitude for each of you, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 2 Timothy 3:1–5.
2. 2 Timothy 3:12.
3. 3 Nephi 12:10; see also JST Matthew 5:12.
4. See Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; D&C 56:2; 112:14.
5. See Mormon 8:38.
6. Romans 1:16, see also 2 Timothy 1:8.
7. See Romans 2:5; Alma 33:22; Ether 11:20; D&C 88:104; 133:38.
8. Mosiah 5:7; see also verse 8.
9. Sheri L. Dew, “Sweet Above All That Is Sweet,” BYU Women’s Conference address, 1 May 2014; emphasis in original; ce.byu.edu/cw/womensconference/pdf/archive/2014/sheri_dew.pdf.

10. Howard W. Hunter, “Fear Not, Little Flock,” BYU devotional address, 14 March 1989.

11. Genesis 1:1.
12. Genesis 1:27.
13. Genesis 1:28.
14. Genesis 2:24.
15. Genesis 3:20; see also Moses 4:26.
16. See Exodus 20:14, 17; Deuteronomy 5:18, 21.
17. See Matthew 5:27; 19:18; Romans 13:9.
18. See Mosiah 13:22, 24; 3 Nephi 12:27.
19. D&C 42:22.
20. Abraham Lincoln, second inaugural address, 4 March 1865.
21. See John 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:2; D&C 46:9; 124:87.
22. See Leviticus 26:15–20; Psalm 89:31–32; Matthew 5:19.
23. See D&C 132:7, 19.
24. See D&C 84:88.
25. See Isaiah 49:25; D&C 98:37; 105:14.