

Unity in the Faith

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It is a pleasure to be with you this morning. The BYU campus has changed greatly over the last one hundred years. As I sat and looked out at this audience and thought of some of the changes that we have experienced, it has really been a remarkable thing to see the progress, growth, and development of this school.

As was mentioned, I did graduate from this institution, and from that day to this, although we have lived in a number of different places, I've never felt embarrassed about the fact, nor have I felt want to be critical about Brigham Young University and what it stands for.

As everyone knows, this year marks the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Church. I would like to center my remarks today on unity in the Church and how this unity comes as the end result of keeping the commandments and thereby receiving the converting and healing influence of the Spirit.

In defining conversion as it is was used in the scriptures, President Marion G. Romney, in an October 1963 general conference address, said the following:

It would appear that membership in the Church and conversion are not necessarily synonymous. . . . Being converted . . . and having a testimony are not necessarily the same either. A testimony comes

when the Holy Ghost gives the earnest seeker a witness of the truth. A moving testimony vitalizes faith; that is, it induces repentance and obedience to the commandments. Conversion, on the other hand, is the fruit of, or the reward for, repentance and obedience.

Elder Romney goes on to say:

Conversion is effected by divine forgiveness, which remits sins. [That's important.] The sequence is something like this. An honest seeker hears the message. He asks the Lord in prayer if it is true. The Holy Spirit gives him a witness. This is a testimony. If one's testimony is strong enough, he repents and obeys the commandments. By such obedience he receives divine forgiveness which remits sins. Thus he is converted to a newness Of life. His soul is healed. [The Spirit has healed him.]

The answer to the question "How can one know when he is converted" is simple. He may be assured of it when by the power of the Holy Spirit his soul

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is healed. When this occurs he will recognize it by the way he feels, for he will feel as the people of Benjamin felt when they received a remission of their sins. The record says, “. . . The Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience” (Mosiah 4:3). [In Conference Report, Oct. 1963 pp. 24–25]

This definition of Conversion brings us to the realization that being converted is not necessarily the same as receiving a testimony. A person can have a testimony and not be converted. A person can be baptized and not be converted. Conversion comes through obedience to the laws of the gospel, which bring a remission of sins and the healing influence of the Spirit.

In missionary work we see this process over and over again: the proper teaching of the gospel; the prayer of faith that brings a glimpse of the truthfulness of the gospel, or, in other words, a testimony; the desire to repent and become obedient to the commandments, which leads to baptism; and finally the conferring of the gift of the Holy Ghost, which truly brings a healing spirit to the newly baptized person. He then is walking in a newness of life. He feels different. Quite often he looks different. His appearance reflects peace and joy. There is a change for the better, and everyone is aware of it.

According to those who study communications, it is almost impossible to achieve what is called permanent attitude change. In other words, it is very difficult to change a person's attitude and then have that change last. To me, one of the miracles of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that men and women and children from all walks of life, from all ethnic backgrounds, can come to a “unity of the faith,” as Paul calls it (see Eph. 4:13). What a remarkable gift is this gift of the Holy Ghost, which can touch the heart of one who has been baptized and is a worthy seeker and, without robbing that

person of his free agency, can bring him to a unity with the Church and with its leaders and with his fellow members, as well as with good men and women everywhere.

Now the world cannot understand that. Unity is probably the greatest evidence of conversion. This oneness has been a fundamental characteristic of the gospel of Jesus Christ in all ages. In Romans we read: “So we, being many, are one body in Christ . . . of the same mind one toward another” (Rom. 12:5, 16). During the persecutions in Missouri and Illinois, the early Saints of this dispensation stood together; and when they were united in this spirit and bond of unity, they were blessed and protected. When they began to draw away from this spirit, there began to be troubles, and the Lord told them in 1834, “[Ye] are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 105:4). When individual dissenters began to pull away from the Church, they seemed to follow a similar pattern. First, they violated one or more of the basic commandments, and usually their sins included pride. Second came the gradual withdrawal of the Spirit that is always associated with such actions. Third, they developed feelings of disharmony and disunity, eventually followed by outright criticism. This was not the kind of criticism that tries to draw attention to something that may need correction, which can be done within the framework of the gospel; but it was a criticism that cannot be satisfied, a criticism that knows no bounds, a criticism that feeds upon itself. Says Peter of this kind of person: “He . . . is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Pet. 1:1–9). Such a person has given up the healing influence of the Holy Spirit. He no longer feels the bond of brotherhood and unity that is a gift of the Spirit and the endowment of the Saints of God in all ages.

Just before his betrayal and arrest, the Savior urged his disciples to love one another and to be united. He also promised that the

Comforter, whom he identified as the Holy Ghost, would come. He then offered the great intercessory prayer that spoke of one of the gifts of the Spirit, and this gift is unity and oneness:

Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. . . .

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

That they all may be one. [John 17:11, 20–21]

Not only does this scripture clearly point out that unity and oneness must be a characteristic of those in the Lord's Church, but it also points out that the Father and Son are two separate beings and that the oneness they enjoy is that which they would have for all the Saints.

The ancient Saints understood that the sanctifying spirit of the Holy Ghost would create this unity among the faithful. In his epistle to the Hebrews, Paul makes this clear when he says, "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11). Sanctification comes from the Savior through the Holy Ghost.

Following the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were baptized and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, the record says: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. . . . And all that believed were together" (Acts 2:42, 44).

Prior to its being taken up into heaven, we read the following about the city of Enoch: "And 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).

In Book of Mormon times, after the Savior had appeared to the Nephites and had given them the fulness of the gospel, and as they were living in peace and in the light of the

Spirit, "There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God" (4 Ne. 17). And what does the Lord say in this generation? "I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified for the sins of the world, even as many as will believe on my name, that they may become the sons of God even one in me as I am one in the Father" (D&C 35:2).

Can you catch the spirit of these inspired words? In all dispensations—and this generation is no different—the Lord would have his followers embrace the spirit of oneness and peace and unity that has always been a part of the kingdom of God; a unity that characterizes the relationship between the Father and Son; a unity that is always characteristic of the gospel of Jesus Christ; a unity exemplified by the body of Saints who follow the same leaders, live the same doctrines, oppose the same evils, uphold the same virtues, and move in the same direction, with each member being guided by the light that is within him or her, which light, coming from the Holy Ghost, will create a perfect bond of unity and determination among all the Saints.

One who cultivates the gift of the Spirit comes to the unalterable realization that the Lord is governing his Church through the continuous spirit of revelation, that our leaders are being inspired by the exact same spirit that we are endeavoring to follow. "Whether by mine own voice or the voice of my servants it is the same," the scripture tells us (see D&C 1:38).

Such unity is born of the Spirit and is a natural thing for Church members. Listen to the words of Heber J. Grant on this subject:

You will always be blessed and benefited in following the advice and counsel of those whom God has chosen to preside over the Church. When you honor the man God has chosen, God will honor and bless you. And as you individually do your duty, you will grow and increase in the light and inspiration

of the Spirit of God. As we grow and increase individually, so will the Church grow and increase. [In Conference Report, Oct. 1903.]

Those who watch us cannot understand this concept, especially in this day and age when the world has put great emphasis on each person following his own desires, his own interests. Some may say, “You say that you believe in individual freedom, yet the great body of the Church follows its leaders, stands for the same principles, upholds the same things.” To the world this course appears to be blind faith, but quite the opposite is true. It is a oneness born of the Spirit. It is a unity inspired by the spirit of testimony that lies within the hearts of all who have been converted.

President David O. McKay said:

This testimony has been revealed to every sincere man and woman who has conformed to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, obeyed the ordinances and become entitled to and has received . . . the Holy Ghost, to guide him. Every individual stands independent in his sphere in that testimony, just as [the thousands of lights do that light up a city] at night, each one which stands and shines in its own sphere, yet the light in it is produced by the same power, the same energy, from which all the other lights receive their energy. So each individual in the Church stands independently in the knowledge that God lives, that the Savior is the redeemer of the world, and that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. [In Conference Report, Oct. 1912, pp. 120–121]

No discussion of oneness and unity in the Church would be complete without some mention of the united order. This order is a part of the law of consecration. Righteous members of the Church in all ages have consecrated their time, talents, and means to the building up of the Lord’s kingdom in their respective days.

The united order, we are told, rests upon three basic principles. First, the earth is the

Lord’s. Men are only stewards of their possessions. Therefore, all that man has should be used in accordance with the Lord’s expressed will. Second, all men and women are children of God, and together they constitute a divine family. Therefore, the Lord requires that we must help one another as needs arise, provided that he who will not work shall have no claim upon his brother. Third, every man must be respected as a free agent. He may enter the order at his pleasure. Once in the order, he must be allowed to use, fully and as he pleases, any properties placed in his hands. And he may choose to leave the order at any time.

These principles of the united order reflect, again, the divine standards of unity among the Saints, while at the same time preserving free agency. We are told that the time will come when, as Saints, we will be required to live the law of consecration more perfectly, and this, of course, will include living the united order.

Up to this point, I have endeavored to point out the following things:

1. That a person cannot receive a fulness of the gospel unless he is converted.
2. That conversion may not be the same as receiving a testimony or even being baptized.
3. That conversion, as President Romney has defined it for us, involves having our sins remitted and being healed by the Spirit. The words *peace* and *joy* are used in this context.
4. That one of the clearest manifestations of the true gospel of Jesus Christ in all ages is the oneness and unity of its righteous members — unity between the individual and the Savior, unity among its leaders, unity and loyalty among the entire membership.
5. That the Spirit naturally creates this unity and oneness, especially among those who have been converted, and that unity and oneness among the members also bring the Spirit.
6. That the world cannot always understand this unity because it cannot understand the workings of the Spirit that bind the Church together.

Why do I choose this particular subject? Because, my young friends, in every age there are voices challenging that unity—voices from within, voices from without. Perhaps they challenge your unity with the Savior. Perhaps they challenge your unity with your Church leaders. Perhaps they challenge your unity with the Church itself. My friends, if you are to stand unitedly with the Church, then you need to seek the kinds of experiences that will put you on a firm footing so that outside voices will not detract you.

A number of years ago, when we were living in Boston, I had just finished a particularly bad week. You know what a bad week is, don't you? It's seven bad days in a row. By the end of the week I was feeling down and a bit sorry for myself. Finally, one night, after my family had gone to bed, I decided to stay up longer and really go before the Lord in a more determined way than when I said my regular night and morning prayers. As I knelt in the downstairs study of the darkened house, my circumstances made it easy for me to approach the Lord in the depths of humility, and I poured out my heart. As I prayed I felt a need for a confirmation that he was there and that he cared. From past experiences I knew these things, but there are times when one needs the strength of reconfirmation.

As I prayed and made this specific request I had a most remarkable experience. I had had spiritual experiences before, but this, to me, was more. There was an outpouring of the Spirit so real that I could feel it. This Spirit filled my whole soul; and this was not just a single experience, but it came again and again in the space of just a minute or two. I came out of the room that night with a reconfirmed and absolute knowledge, borne of the Spirit, that not only does the Savior live but that he knows me and cares for me with a truly divine love.

The influence of that experience lingered with me for days and caused me to have a feeling of genuine concern and love for everyone,

even people on the street whom I did not know. While previously I had passed them with hardly a thought, I now felt a concern for and interest in them. My family, if it were possible, was more dear to me. I felt a bond with the Saints everywhere and wanted to serve my fellow men.

I can't remember the trials I was facing at that particular time. They passed as trials usually do. But I will always remember the experience of that evening when the Spirit healed me. It confirmed to me that if our hearts are right, we can go before the Lord, and, in one degree or another and in one way or another, he will send the healing influence of the Spirit, which Spirit not only heals but also unites. This need not be a singular experience, for it can happen and should happen over and over again.

Heber C. Kimball, speaking to those who would have liked to have lived at the time of the Prophet Joseph, said this:

You imagine that you would have stood by him when persecution raged and he was assailed by foes from within and without. You would have defended him and been true to him in the midst of every trial. You think you would have been delighted to have shown your integrity in the days of mobs and traitors. Let me say to you, that many of you will see the time when you will have all the trouble, trial and persecution that you can stand, and plenty of opportunities to show that you are true to God and his work. This Church has before it many close places through which it will have to pass before the work of God is crowned with victory. To meet the difficulties that are coming, it will be necessary for you to have a knowledge of the truth of this work for yourselves.

And then he added these words:

If you have not got the testimony, live right and . . . call upon the Lord and cease not til you obtain it. . . The time will come when no man or woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to

be guided by the light within himself. [Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), pp. 449–450]

A few years ago, Elder Harold B. Lee used that quotation in a talk given at this institution, and he used it in such a way as to apply it to us today.

What, then, can a person do to help the healing and uniting influence of the Spirit come into his or her life? The scriptures and writings of the Brethren are filled with helps and aids. Let me list just a few things that have been helpful to me.

First, keep the commandments as a means of receiving the Spirit. As President Joseph Fielding Smith said,

We have the right to the guidance of the Holy Ghost, but we cannot have that guidance, if we wilfully refuse to consider the revelations that have been given to help us to understand and to guide us in the light and truth of the everlasting gospel. [*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:43]

Second, learn to identify the impressions of the Spirit. The Lord has told us that “I will tell you in your heart and in your mind and ye shall feel that it is true.” He also tells us that we must study it out in our minds. (See D&C 8:2 and D&C 9:8.) These impressions of truth are usually associated with peace, warmth, and assurance. You will find that such impressions will be in harmony with the scriptures, with the Church, and usually with good common sense. If you are unsure about your promptings, discuss them with your priesthood leaders. I have come to the realization that the Lord prompts most of us far more than we sometimes think. For many, the challenge lies not in receiving promptings from the Spirit, but in following them.

Third, pray. President Joseph F. Smith gave, I think, one of the greatest statements on this subject when he said,

It is not such a difficult thing to learn how to pray. It is not the words we use, particularly, that constitute prayer. True, faithful, earnest prayer consists more in the feeling that arises from the heart and from the inward desire of our spirits to supplicate the Lord in humility and in faith that we may receive his blessings. It matters not how simple the words may be, if our desires are genuine and we come before the Lord with a broken heart and a contrite spirit to ask him for that which we need. [*Gospel Doctrine* 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1939) p. 219]

Fourth, keep the Sabbath day holy. The new consolidated meeting schedule will help us catch the spirit of this day. While growing up in my home, my family kept the Sabbath day holy. No sports. No everyday activities. There is a spirit about this day that will truly heal the soul. The day should center around the partaking of the sacrament, during which we can shed harmful thoughts and actions and receive an increase of the Spirit. The Sabbath can heal us for the week ahead. Don’t just keep the Sabbath, but catch the spirit of the Sabbath.

Fifth, observe the law of tithing. This law brings both spiritual and temporal blessings and is designed to prepare us so that we can live more unitedly in the future.

Sixth, be careful of too much scheduling and long-range planning because they can shut out inspiration. Sometimes our schedules are so tight that the Lord can’t get through. Sometimes they are so loose that when he does get through there is no discipline to carry out what we need to do. A balance is needed.

Seventh, be an example of the believer. Don’t damage your faith and the faith of others by constantly taking the role of the “devil’s advocate.” There are ways to clarify issues and bring up questions. Become known as a person

who sheds light on a matter and not as the professional dissenter.

Eighth, get a basic testimony. A person who has received the promptings of the Spirit that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith was a prophet, and that Spencer W. Kimball is a prophet of God today will have faith sufficient to meet the everyday issues until that time when the Lord provides all the “hows” and “whys.” “For ye shall receive no witness,” says Moroni, “until after the trial of your faith” (Eth. 12:6).

Ninth, don’t compartmentalize. Seek the Spirit and take the principles of the gospel into every avenue of your life. The gospel embraces all truth. Allow it to do so.

Tenth, get an early witness of the divine calling of each of your leaders. Do not decide, in advance, who you are and are not going to follow or what leader you like or don’t like. Seek an early witness of that person’s calling.

Eleventh, develop charity. A person who is basically forgiving has an easier time cultivating the Spirit than one who finds it hard to forgive.

Twelfth, study daily the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon. This need only be for a few minutes, but you will feel the difference.

May the Lord bless us all that we might have his healing Spirit to be with us, that by the power and peace of that Spirit we might be one—one in purpose, one in unity, one in the sustaining of each other—that we might, as

Paul says, “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

If there are any at this time who for one reason or another have found themselves running contrary to that unity and that peace, with all the energy of my soul I invite you back—back to the Lord’s Church, back to the peace of the gospel, back to the healing influence of the Spirit, back to those who will stand with you and to those who really care.

To those who have not yet tasted of this tree, we invite you to come and be one with us. Receive the commandments. Join with the Saints, and let the Spirit heal you.

At this time I would like to add the witness that I have of this work, which has been borne of that same Spirit. There are many things in this life we know and there are many things in this life we don’t know, and I would like to share with you what I do know. I bear to you my witness that I know God lives. I want you to know that. I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw. And I know Spencer W. Kimball is a prophet of God today. This church is true. The Book of Mormon is true. The spirit of the gospel will heal you. It will bind you together in the kingdom of God and with your fellow Saints, if you will allow it to do so. May the Lord bless us that we may catch this vision and this spirit of unity that comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.