

# “Charity Never Faileth”

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I approach this assignment with great excitement. I love BYU, the Lord’s university.

Columnist George Will cited these as the three least credible sentences in the English language: first, “Your check is in the mail”; second, “Of course I will respect you as much in the morning”; and third, “I’m from the government; I’m here to help.”

As a nation, we are often like the old fellow who was sleeping on the couch and whose grandson came in, rubbed some Limburger cheese on his moustache, and then left. In a few minutes the old boy awakened with a snort. The living room smelled terrible. He went outside and found that the whole world smelled even worse. We live in that kind of a situation today, when constructive, destructive, and all kinds of criticism reach their highest levels.

How blessed we are to belong to the Church of Jesus Christ, which has been restored in these last days! Life is so beautiful, fulfilling, and filled with rich pleasures and treasures. This morning I would like to share with you a principle that, if followed in its pure form, will bring us the greatest depth of joy and fulfillment in this life and guide us safely to a state of exaltation with our families in the celestial kingdom. My text is taken from the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, verses one through eight, where the apostle Paul wrote:

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

*And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

*Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

*Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil:*

*Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;*

*Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

*Charity never faileth: but whether there will be prophecies, they shall fall; whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

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*For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.*

But again let me say, “Charity never faileth.”

Reiterating what Paul said—“Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels . . .”—does this imply that speaking as men and angels is a part of charity? I think it does. If so, that statement and all the other statements in these verses have some interesting implications that should be very significant to all of us. Is it possible to have charity in its full measure and not be a member of Christ’s true Church? The answer seems self-evident when we recall that the prophet Nephi said:

*Do ye not remember that I said unto you that after ye had received that Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels? And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost?*

*Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things that ye should do. [2 Nephi 32:2–3]*

Then, a few verses later, Nephi wrote the following:

*But I, Nephi, have written what I have written [and as I read this I would like you to consider again the subject of charity], and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.*

*And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known unto them of their fathers; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal. . . .*

*And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come.*

*And you that will not partake of the goodness of God, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my word, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day.*

*For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar; for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. [2 Nephi 33:3–4, 13–15]*

How beautiful are the words of Nephi! Can a man speak as men and angels and not have the Holy Ghost?

Paul continues: “Though I have the gift of prophecy . . .”. To some it is given to prophesy in beautiful words; yet this gift alone does not give one a fullness of charity. There are great deeds done in many small acts of life—obscure deeds performed where none but God can see. Many who speak and prophesy with such great power are found wanting because they do not provide love, service, and tender acts of kindness in their own homes to the members of their families, and to others that they do not know so well. I suppose many have not yet discovered what writer Lloyd Douglas has referred to as the “magnificent obsession.”

“Though I understand all mysteries and have all knowledge . . .”. Many very special priesthood leaders study the scriptures constantly, referencing and cross-referencing and cramming their minds with beautiful truths of the gospel. They can quote scripture, expound doctrine, and clarify the mysteries with great understanding. This is all good; however, the application of these truths is far greater than the knowledge. If we can quote and understand the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians but cannot reach out to the widow in her need

and fill her leaky, rusty old bucket, we fail. If we cannot, as Jacob Hamblin states,

*dip fingers without revulsion in the Indian sheep-gut stew, if grasshopper meal cannot be accepted as a food offering, if he cannot forget his own bed comforts as he shares the smoky wickiup or hogan, his acts and feelings become an affront to the people with whom he labors, and they view him with suspicion. Too many times, our brethren fill a mission call in the attitude of onerous duty rather than with a sincere and prayerful endeavor to honestly love and understand the dark and unwashed humanity he has pledged himself to serve. [Paul Bailey, Jacob Hamblin: Buckskin Apostle (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1948), p. 248]*

The teacher or leader must not only be first in knowledge, in prophecy, and in understanding the mysteries, but he must also be first in performance. I believe that it is not only an offense to the people but also an offense to God when priesthood leaders, teachers, and members of the Church never really get down and serve the people, do not do their duty, do not magnify their callings, and do not fill their stewardships. We ought to bend our backs in our callings in such a way that our words and teachings are always racing to keep up with our acts. In this way we will never become what the Savior referred to as “whited sepulchers” (see Matthew 23:27).

“Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” What is the point Paul is trying to make? I believe that he is affirming once again that, in addition to our faith, our works must qualify us. Let me give you a couple of examples relevant here at BYU.

Spring is coming. How often we see returned missionaries take off their garments and change into shorts to wash and wax their cars. Then they spend the rest of the day going on errands and playing in their shorts, cutoffs, or briefs. This is not charity; it is harmful to the

character of the individual, it is detrimental to all who may observe, and it leads to transgression. Please, fellow returned missionaries, do not trample the sacred covenants under the feet of apathy or ignorance.

We claim to have faith, but it is not charity that leads a young lady to accept a diamond ring from a young man just to add one more to her list of engagements. A girl’s announcement that she has been engaged two, three, or four times says nothing complimentary about her. Rather, it infers, I believe, that she is immature; that she does not know how to make a decision; that she did not give sufficient thought, prayer, and fasting to the matter; or simply that she feels it gives her a false feeling of importance. In the sacred marriage covenant, both the man and the woman ought to have made an absolute, unalterable decision to marry; and engagement should wait until they both feel this way. Would you consider that, please? Too many times, once an engagement takes place either the young man takes license or the young woman gives license to do things that have previously been denied or taboo in their courtship. The standard of conduct is always the same in the Church before engagement or after engagement.

I recently interviewed a young woman who had been totally pure before her engagement, but after the engagement had let herself go and committed fornication with her fiancé. A few months later things did not work out and the engagement was off. Even though a person may have great faith, who could say that their committing such acts represents charity?

I believe that we have here at BYU one of the great basketball teams in the nation. Things are going to happen; we may well be on the public television. I think it would be an offense to God if this great student body and the people who are the fans of this great basketball team and this institution did not conform to the statement made by Dallin Oaks: “We ought to be the best fans.” I am not certain that God would

want us on national or worldwide television if the fans did not represent the fine conduct of the players. I do not know how a player must feel who comes to any floor across the nation where—and I have seen this on television—a section of students stands up and all of them start pointing their fingers and shouting, “You, you, you!” when the poor fellow has only fouled and it is not all that serious. I suppose he feels like crawling off the floor, and I suppose that is what the intimidators want him to do. I hope this never happens at BYU.

I believe that there ought to be no greater fans—no more loyal or positive fans—than here at BYU; but the negative aspects ought not to be part of our conduct. I do not believe that it displays charity. I made a decision many years ago that I would try as desperately as ever I knew how never to do anything that might embarrass the Church. You see, our conduct reflects upon the Church as an institution, not upon us as individuals; no one will pin down, “Who was it?” or “Which group?” but will simply say, “the Church” or “the Mormons.”

“Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor . . .”. Apparently, this in and of itself is not charity, although it is a major part. I have known of people who have given great sums of money to charitable organizations to provide for the poor; and yet, as the following verse illustrates, some of these people may miss the mark. As this young boy says:

*We have the nicest garbage man;  
He empties out our garbage can.  
He’s just as nice as he can be;  
He always comes and talks with me.  
My mother doesn’t like his smell;  
But, then, she doesn’t know him well.*

I believe that maybe the boy understood a lot more about charity than his mother did; he could have taught her some things.

In his book *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo states, “The door of the physician should never

be closed, the door of the priest should always be opened.” Robert Ingersoll, the atheist, spoke a portion of truth when he said, “The hands that help are holier than the lips that pray.” We should not separate the lips that pray from the hands that help. I think Paul is trying to teach us that those who bestow their goods and give their bodies to be burned should also exercise the other dimensions of charity. Victor Hugo also suggested that “the shepherd should not recoil from the diseased sheep.” How often this happens in the Church! Many who give liberally of their means hold tight-fisted their time and their talents.

“Charity envieth not . . .”. It has come to our attention that many homosexuals who hide their perversion in public cry out when among their “gay” groups, “God made us this way. We are still children of God. He understands; He knows our hearts. We faithfully hold family home evenings, we pray, we attend Church. Why don’t the Brethren understand? Why will they not listen? We were just made different. It is not our fault. God will surely judge us differently from our brethren.” And so they envy the “normal” member of the Church who lives an upright and circumspect life, saying, “If only the Brethren understood.”

To condone homosexuality is not an act of charity. Perversion is perversion. All the reasoning of the greatest minds in the world cannot change the seriousness of the transgression. Worlds without end, the homosexual cannot be exalted. That is it—as plainly, simply, and clearly as one can state. It matters not whether it be the adultery, the homosexual, the fornicator, or the felon—no man ever has or ever will, worlds without end, be saved in his sins. There can be no compromise; the truth is absolute. Other churches who have adjusted their standards and compromised their principles can do so because they are not the true church of Jesus Christ. The Savior’s standard of morality will everlastingly be the same. It is not charity to

give hope where no hope exists. Man cannot be saved in his sins.

“Charity thinketh no evil . . .”. Every homosexual who has been affiliated with or knows about the Church knows that what I am saying is true, and yet it is a hard doctrine to accept. When the Savior taught hard doctrine, oftentimes the people abandoned him; on one such occasion, he asked the disciples,

*Will ye also go away?*

*Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

*And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. [John 6:67–69]*

I believe with all of my heart and soul that the Church reaches out to the diseased sheep. We will reach out and do all we can, with our arms extended to the very limit. President J. Reuben Clark said, “I believe when the Lord metes out punishment, he will mete out the least possible punishment that it is possible to mete out and satisfy the demands of justice; and when he metes out rewards for the good things we have done, for keeping the commandments, he will mete out the greatest possible number of blessings for that which we have done that is right” (J. Reuben Clark, Jr., “As We Sow, So Shall We Reap” [recorded talk delivered at Brigham Young University, May 3, 1955]).

I sense charity when President Kimball speaks. Listen carefully to this beautiful quote from his speech given to the seminary and institute students in Long Beach, California, on April 9, 1978:

*Sex involvement outside of marriage locks the door to temples and thus bars the way to eternal life. We extend to every listener a cordial invitation to come to the watered garden, to the shade of trees, to unchangeable truth. Come with us to sureness, security, consistency. Here the cooling waters flow; the spring does not dry . . .*

*Come, listen to a prophet’s voice and hear the word of God.*

Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own.” I am impressed that Paul refers to charity in the feminine gender. Why? He does so, I suppose, because a mother’s love comes nearer charity than anything else does. An unknown mother wrote a poem entitled “Mothers Are People”:

*Mothers are people who cook things,  
Like breakfast or lunch or a snack;  
Dexterous people who hook things  
Which button or zip up the back.  
Mothers are people who blow things,  
Balloons and kisses and noses;  
Green-thumbish people who grow things,  
Like ivy and puppies and roses.  
Mothers are people who send things,  
Like letters and strawberry tarts;  
Magical people who mend things,  
Like blue jeans and elbows and hearts.  
Mothers are people who find things,  
Like mittens and homework and germs;  
Fussbudget people who mind things,  
Like cusswords and snowballs and worms.  
Mothers are people who sweep things,  
Like porches and cobwebs and rugs;  
Softhearted people who keep things,  
Like artwork, report cards, and hugs.  
Mothers are people who nurse things,  
A boy or a girl or a spouse;  
And, all in all, there are worse things  
Than mothers to have in your house.*

I think perhaps the author understood all the things a mother does.

I have a great friend named Jay Mitton, who is the secretary of the First Quorum of the Seventy of the Church. I also knew his mother as the Relief Society president of the Boise Ninth Ward. I was the finance chairman for the ward, and I remember going around to visit every

single family to see if they needed assistance or if they could contribute financially to the Church. I went to the house of an old man who must have been in his eighties, and as he welcomed me in he said, "My wife isn't here, and as you know I am not a member of the Church."

"Is your wife in town?" I asked.

"Well, she's in the hospital, and she's been there for four weeks."

I looked around his house and saw that it was immaculate and spotless—the dishes were all done instead of being piled up in the sink for four weeks. I remarked, "I'm certainly impressed with the way you keep house."

He said, "You know, I'm not a member of your church, but you have one of the greatest women I have ever met in my life. Her name is Claudia Mitton. Do you know, she comes over here every other day or so, and she'll do the dishes, and then she'll get down on her hands and knees and scrub my floor. No one knows she comes. She just slips in and quietly leaves." It is acts such as these that constitute true charity.

Let me share with you a few other things that may enlarge our understanding of charity. I read, in a great book that I have, the story of two ambassadors, Spinola and Richardet, who were sent by the King of Spain to The Hague to try to effect a treaty. As they performed their duties and inspected all that they could, they saw a little boat floating down the river. The boat stopped, and the eight or ten men on the boat disembarked, sat down in the grass, and proceeded to make a simple lunch of brown bread, cheese, and drink. Seeing a peasant walking by, Spinola and Richardet called to him and asked, "Who are these men?"

The peasant looked at the men for a moment and said, "Oh, these are our worshipful masters; they are the deputies of the states."

Spinola then turned to Richardet and said, "We had better let these men alone; these are not men to be conquered."

If we went to President Kimball's home tonight, do you know what we would see him eating? Probably a bowl of milk with broken bread in it. Men of such simple strength are not to be conquered. I tell you that the Church is standing up and putting on its beautiful garments because of men like President Kimball.

I attended a training director's seminar in Anaheim some time back, where Mike Vance, director of training for Disneyland Corporation, told of an interesting incident. The Disneyland people had invited a number of those veterans who had been injured or lost limbs during the war in Vietnam to spend the day at Disneyland. The Disneyland Corporation sent its airplane—I think it is called *Mickey Mouse 1*—up to an air-base near San Francisco to pick up all these men to fly them down, and then took them out to Disneyland, where they spent the whole day. Then, said Mike Vance, "as they were about ready to part—all these military men, standing there with out any arms, but just hooks hanging down—there was a sudden feeling of uneasiness, and no one knew what to say. Then, all at once, Sasha, one of the guides, went over to them and said, 'Men, before you leave, do you mind if I just shake your hooks?' And she shook hooks with each one of them." As you know, metal conducts warmth and heat; and I am sure that as she grabbed hold of their hooks and shook them her warmth extended right into their hearts.

The men were flown back to their base, and several weeks later the Disneyland people received a letter from their commanding officer saying what a great experience it had been for all of them to go down to Disneyland and spend the entire day there. It continued, "My men were terribly impressed with everything that was done, but do you know what they remember most? A young woman by the name of Sasha, who shook all of our hooks." That, you see, is charity.

Sir Walter Scott, the gentleman's gentleman was admired by all who met him. When little

children came into a room where Sir Walter Scott was, they were instantly attracted to him and sat on the floor around him as he carried on a conversation. They felt his warmth. When a woman came into the room, whether homely or beautiful, she was attracted to him. Men of great renown or of little renown could approach Sir Walter Scott and feel totally at ease. One of his friends once remarked to him, "You must have had a terribly impressive mother who taught you all of these things."

Sir Walter replied, in effect, "No; I did have a wonderful mother, but actually that is not where I learned the lesson. When I was a boy of about eight or nine, I was out in the street playing. Seeing a dog down the street, I picked up a big rock and, not knowing whether I would hit it or not, I threw it at the dog to scare it. It did hit the dog and broke its leg. The dog fell down on its front legs, crawled up to me, and licked my boots." That is where Sir Walter Scott learned charity. That is where he learned the kind of humility the Savior exemplified when he washed the feet of his disciples one by one.

Who could forget the story of Abram and Zimri, brothers who worked side by side in the field? Abram had a wife and seven sons, and Zimri had none. When harvest time came, they divided the harvest equally; but that night, as Abram sat in his house, he thought, "I have a wife and seven sons, and Zimri has none. It isn't fair that we divide the harvest equally." So he slipped out into the night, removed a generous third of the sheaves from his harvest, and placed them on Zimri's pile. Then he went back to his home and sat by the fire with seven sons.

As Zimri sat alone by his fire in his home, he thought, "It isn't fair that we share alike. My brother Abram has seven sons and a wife, and I have none." And so he slipped out into the night, carefully removed a generous third of the sheaves from his harvest, and he placed them on Abram's pile. Then he returned to his home.

The next morning, when they went out to the fields, both brothers noticed that the harvests were exactly as they had been the day before, and neither one of them could understand. So that night again, after it got dark, Abram crept out into the night and repeated his work of the night before. This time he went to a nearby ditch, crouched down in it, and waited. In a few moments, he saw his brother Zimri come out of his home and begin to remove a generous third of the sheaves from his harvest. Jumping up from his hiding place, Abram ran to his brother and fell on his neck and kissed him, his joy so full he could not speak.

How often we misunderstand charity? We cannot possibly get into the Lord's debt. The Lord has said, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." In the book *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, Irving Stone describes Michelangelo's first piece of sculptured marble, a bust. It was nearly completed when his professor walked over to look at it. He picked it up, examined it, then put it back on the workbench and without a word turned and walked away. As he did, he carelessly brushed against the bust with his arm. It fell to the floor, breaking into a thousand pieces, Michelangelo stood with his mouth open, aghast at what had happened. Then the professor looked back over his shoulder and said, "It wasn't worthy of you."

Had that little act not taken place, we may never have heard of Michelangelo. It is those who are terribly tough on us and who make us stretch beyond the limit of what we think we can stand that raise us.

Coming back to the modern day, I recently heard of a woman who wrote to one of the national columnists—whose name you would know if I shared it with you—and said, "I am a nurse working at a hospital in the child abuse section. Every time they bring children in, it just about breaks my heart; I can't stand to see these little children beaten, mutilated, bruised, and hurt. I guess the straw that broke the camel's back came the other day when they

brought in a little five-year-old girl. As I held her in my arms, her mother said, 'I didn't think I was hitting her that hard.'"

The nurse said, "The little girl passed away in my arms. Just before she passed away, she opened her eyes and said, 'My mommy says I'm a bad girl.'"

I would have given anything to have been the national columnist responding to that letter. It would have said something like this: "No, sweetheart, you are not a bad girl; your mommy is a bad mommy."

It really is time that men of charity, women of charity, and a church of charity stood up and reached their full stature. Things exist in our society that are too abominable to be allowed to remain—drugs, abortion, child abuse, and perversions of every kind. And yet, as we put on our beautiful garments and become a charitable people, I tell you that Jacob has come of age, and that we will make a profound impact on this world. But we must do it unitedly. We cannot have just a few members of the Church; we need to move four million people in that direction, and then things will really begin to happen.

In a speech on business and morality David Linowes quoted the following:

*To whom can I speak today?  
The gentle man has perished  
The violent man has access to everybody  
To whom can I speak today?  
The iniquity that smites the land  
It has no end.*

*To whom can I speak today?  
There are no righteous men  
The earth is surrendered to criminals.*  
[David W. Linowes, "International Business Morality Integrity and Ethics," in *Vital Speeches of the Day* 43 no. 15 (May 15, 1977): 477]

This quote, delivered in a modern-day speech, was written by a man over four thousand years ago in Egypt as he prepared to commit suicide. It sounds so like today.

Is it not time that we took a stand? It is vital that we let the world know that there is such a thing as unacceptable conduct; that we as a church put on our beautiful garments and become a standard for all nations; that we have charity, which is the pure love of Christ, reflected in every word, act, and deed, so that through our lives the whole world might see a true pattern and model for a modern-day man of Christ. May we do this I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.