

Without Prejudice, Without Bigotry

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I am very grateful to be here and am pleased to be present at the moment when this basketball team is honored. I am deeply sincere in expressing appreciation for what they did during the season that brought great honor and distinction to this school and to all of us. Nothing but the highest praise should be given them for their actions and their representation of this school.

There are two things with which I have been preoccupied for a long time and which I have found myself teaching in whatever class by whatever name and from whatever forum or pulpit as I have addressed or taught Church people. Moved as I am by what I just heard, I am almost unwilling to be facetious, but I would like to be, deliberately, for a moment, and tell you a story that I resurrected this morning as I drove here. It is one I haven't thought of for a long time.

It is the story of two very good friends in a small town who were practical jokers and who expressed this interesting facet of personality on the other, or at his expense, quite frequently. These two men happened to be the mayor and the undertaker. As I get the story, one day repeated telephone calls came to the mayor's home and into the night, telling him that there was a dead donkey on a certain street and

that as mayor it was his responsibility to take care of the matter. The phone calls came so frequently that the mayor thought he had better see, although he suspected that there was some skulduggery afoot. In fact, when he went there, there was a dead jackass in the street. He had a city truck come and pick it up, and feeling sure now who was the perpetrator of this interesting experience, he had the animal deposited on the undertaker's front porch, saying, "It's your responsibility to take care of the dead." This the undertaker did, then sent the bill to the mayor with the message that where there were no immediate family survivors, "we always bill the next of kin."

I was a little reluctant to tell that for fear you might make too good an application in terms of what I am going to say. I had better tell you the other thing I thought of on the way, too. This was expressed by Dr. George Harper, a wonderful young Methodist minister with whom I teamed up at a Religious Emphasis Week in another part of the country some time ago.

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It was a very interesting experience. Dr. Harper was very young and vigorous, and I was a little younger then; and because only five people showed up at the first joint meeting we held, we decided we had better stir up a little enthusiasm. So we challenged their handball champions and beat them, whereupon several hundred students came to subsequent meetings to look over the old fellows who could do this. We had a very interesting Religious Emphasis Week from that time on. People are inclined to listen a little more interestedly to those who do something else besides preach religion.

The two ideas that I have been thinking about and talking about for as long as I can remember are these:

First, the Latter-day Saint has a relationship with other men that is important in its meaning. It is not a relationship of superiority. It is not one of smugness. It is not one of withdrawal from the active brotherhood that the world must have if the world is to be what it can be. No Latter-day Saint who understands his religion, if I understand it correctly, could appropriately withdraw from the active scene to a kind of a chimney corner of self-congratulation and snuggle to his bosom the great blessings God has given him, feeling that there is some inherent superiority in him because he is a member of the Church. He could not with any validity look upon his fellow men with any sense of personal arrogance or smugness, because he is committed to the religious truth that all men are literally the children of Almighty God, that each of us is the spirit child of a Heavenly Father who loves us and by whom we are esteemed as one, who is as concerned and interested in the least of men as He is in the most seemingly righteous of men, who establishes and preserves laws which when lived produce blessings, which when broken result in sad consequences; but a God who, though He will not protect men from the effects of their own bad choices,

unceasingly, unremittingly, unreservedly, unconditionally loves the individual.

If this is true, and I testify that it is, then no member of a church believing itself to be the true Church of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, would ever be found derogating or casting bad light upon or impugning the worthwhileness or the virtue or the value of other individuals. In other words, there are in this world vast numbers of choice human beings—children of God whom He loves and to whom our responsiveness as their brothers and sisters should be directed. There are around us—in our own neighborhoods, in this school, in every community of Latter-day Saints—choice, wholesome, wonderful people who are not like us, not of us, who sometimes know very little about us (and often know much that isn't so), and yet who are persons of integrity, honor, commitment, kindness, compassion, consideration, and all the other wholesome virtues that we would seek to develop in ourselves. Sometimes I think that our young people occasionally get the notion—and they must get it from some who are a little older—that if people are different, they are less important or virtuous. If they are not like us, there must be something a little bit suspicious about them. If this notion exists—and to some small measure I believe it does—we should eradicate it. We should begin to accept the implications of our relationship with God and our fellow men and rejoice in them and recognize that there is not and will not be a complete unanimity of human opinion in matters of spiritual importance. This I believe.

May I illustrate it with a statement or two from the best sources I know beyond the scriptures themselves—and they would illustrate it very well if we were to turn to them.

From the pen of Joseph Smith:

We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them

worship how, where, or what they may. [Articles of Faith 1:11]

The Saints can testify whether I am willing to lay down my life for my brethren. [And not long after, he did.] If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a "Mormon." I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves. [HC 5:498]

I believe he meant it, and because I believe he was a prophet of God, I am very anxious to be considerate of what he said.

One other which I believe to be as fine a statement as has been made, from the same source:

We ought always to be aware of those prejudices which sometimes so strangely present themselves, and are so congenial to human nature, against our friends, neighbors, and brethren of the world, who choose to differ from us in opinion and in matters of faith. Our religion is between us and our God. Their religion is between them and their God.

There is a love from God that should be exercised toward those of our faith, who walk uprightly, which is peculiar to itself, but it is without prejudice; it also gives scope to the mind, which enables us to conduct ourselves with greater liberality towards all that are not of our faith, than what they exercise towards one another. [HC 3:303–4]

Isn't that wonderful?

Yes, there is a special feeling of brotherhood when you go into a little island that the enemy had held just a few hours before and you find a little handful of choice youngsters who have survived a terrible bloodletting—you find that they are meeting as Latter-day Saints. You

join them, and you testify with them and take the sacrament and sing and pray and rejoice in their brotherhood. Yes, there is a special feeling, but it is without prejudice. It ought to move us to treat others who are not of us with greater love than they exercise toward each other.

I conceive myself to be committed to that program; and to the extent that I do not understand it or fail to comport my life with it, I am not representing the truths of the gospel.

Now, what is the other big point I want to testify about? In the light of what I have said, and believing it with all my heart, I know that there are certain wonderful truths that God has given us and expects us to share with our fellow men which will bless the life of the finest human being who does not have them and who will learn them and live them. Those are my two great convictions, and they fit together. They are meaningful. They permit me—if I am somewhere nearly as big as my concepts—not alone to tolerate but to love and accept and find virtue and goodness in other men.

A choice man of the Pentecostal faith aboard my ship taught me more about our relationship with the Savior than I taught him. There was also the wonderful Christian Scientist whose mouth and mind were clean and who was like a beacon in the middle of a lot of dirt and darkness. This concept permits me to love them and respect them and wish I were more like them in many ways and yet to share with them some great truths they did not know and to watch their lives change.

Oh, this is a solemn, sweet blessing and one that all of us could enjoy if we would. You see, there is no room in it for hypocrisy, bigotry, unkindness, ungraciousness, lack of compassion, or lack of respect. All of these are implicit in the ability to share. You cannot touch the heart of a man over whose head there hovers the sense of your prejudice and your closed mind and your unfriendly, unfeeling, unkind response to him. You cannot possibly lift or

heighten the vision of anyone who sees in you so narrow and senseless a bigotry that he doesn't want to be like you or listen to anything you have to say. This does not mean that only perfect people can teach the gospel or else none of us would ever try, but it means that with an appropriate understanding of our relationship to God and other men we are ready to start. We are ready to share whatever good things we have, and say to those who have so much that is so good (and sometimes superior to some things some of us represent): "Keep every good thing you have, and then listen to the additional word of the Lord in our time for our good."

Let me take just a few minutes to mention an idea or two of particular value that we as individuals may seek to share. We just came from England a few months ago where we had the joyful blessing of meeting other multitudes of choice children of God. We discovered that there are certain basic truths the Church represents almost uniquely as an institution, though there are many wonderful individuals who believe with all their hearts these things that are of vital, indispensable importance in this world.

Let me illustrate one of them by a quotation from a Church of England magazine. I read it objectively and with no sense of criticism. It is written by an Anglican about an Anglican bishop, and I only extract a sentence or two to give you the sense of what he is saying:

*What should happen to an Anglican bishop who does not believe in God? This, I hold, is the condition of the Bishop of Woolwich, as revealed in his paperback, Honest to God, and it raises, I maintain, a question of Church discipline which cannot be shirked. [C. S. Lewis, "Must Our Image of God Go?" *The Observer*, 24 March 1963, 14]*

He talks about the degenerative process by which faith in Almighty God has become unspeakable in a sense.

The avowed object of the exercise is to make religion acceptable to the irreligious—to prove that it is possible to be in reality a Christian without believing in the teachings of the Church, and to accept God without using the word.

Much else is so very good, but let me read his conclusion:

It is one thing to restate the eternal truths of religion in contemporary language and quite another expressly to repudiate fundamental truths which were believed by those who learned Christianity from the lips of Christ. It is not always clear indeed whether the Bishop's aim is to convince agnostics that they can conscientiously go to church or to persuade Christians that there is no real need to do so. At the lowest he seems to me to be violating the principles of honest commerce by trying to sell as Christian a commodity that bears no relation to the historical and accepted meaning of that word.

I want to tell you there is need in the world for a simple expression of conviction about God—the same kind of conviction that every prophet who wrote expressed and that the Lord Jesus Christ represented in its fulness in His teachings and in His life. The God of the scriptures, the God who lives, the Almighty, Eternal Father of mankind whom we do not in large measure comprehend because His ways are not our ways, but who has Himself revealed Himself to us in a modern day to reaffirm and reassert the reality of His personal nature—that we are made in His image, that we are in His likeness, that we have in us the rudimentary qualities which He represents in their fulness.

Oh, maybe this is just Mormon talk that you have heard all your lives, to some of you, but I want to tell you that I have been to some places where they don't have it, and I have seen what they have instead, and I want to share with them—those who are willing to love and understand and worship the God that all

the prophets knew and that we have a right to know.

This is a truth that will lift the lives of the finest human beings who do not know it. The truth about the Savior, the truth about man and the nature of man, is so brutally demeaned in historical Christianity, and now in contemporary offshoots. Yet we belong to a Church that teaches that man was in the beginning with God, and that far from imposing upon humankind, “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

It is a Church that teaches us that this body of ours, so much with us, is an eternal component of our soul, that it is a non-evil eternal component of our soul: “And the spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15).

We are committed to a concept of ecclesiastical organization established by Jesus Christ Himself. There is much to be said, and I leave it unsaid; but I tell you it is important, and it is good for men to know, who seek something to give allegiance to and something to serve and share, because men must have this privilege if they are going to enjoy the growth toward godhood that God wants them to have. We believe in the truth about the plan of salvation, the perpetuity of human personality, the long and marvelous march toward spiritual maturity that life ought to involve, with its roadblocks and its side trips and its sad follies.

In these and so many other wonderfully basic important ways we have something to give good people. I want to mention also that in addition to answers to some very important problems, the Church really does have direction and strength to offer good human beings who want to walk with joy in this world.

I want to read a few verses of scripture and ask you to listen with great care from the fifth chapter of the book of Alma. I might have prefaced it with the statement of the Savior, “What manner of men ought ye to be?” (3 Nephi 27:27)—we who profess this great wonderful message. Let me read this:

Have ye walked, keeping yourselves blameless before God? Could ye say, if ye were called to die at this time, within yourselves, that ye have been sufficiently humble? [I skip a few lines to emphasize significant questions. This, the prophet is asking us.]

Behold, are ye stripped of pride? I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. . . .

Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared. . . .

And again I say unto you, is there one among you that doth make a mock of his brother, or that heapeth upon him persecutions?

Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved! [Alma 5:27–31]

There is one other note I want to mention in conclusion about that which is useful to other men. Good men want it. Honest men, when they see it or sense it or feel its presence, often recognize it and comment about it.

Let me read to you a note I received a little time ago, after a war had concluded and a man was seeking to settle something he had felt and questioned:

Dear Sirs:

I am writing this letter in accordance with my will and a desire which was a result of a few hours in an army hospital. There I met a soldier who was a Mormon. I became interested in his religion. Through him I received words that have lived. Since then I have read a Book of Mormon. I would like to receive information as to where I may purchase other books on the Mormon religion so I may find understanding and find wisdom.

I have a great desire burning within my heart to learn of this religion, even to partake of it. This Mormon soldier, he had something far greater than any other man I ever met. Where is the nearest Mormon Temple to me?

I would like to tell you that there are a lot of marvelous people in this world who are just as fine and just as commendable in their integrity and honor as the best of us, but that there is in the Church of Jesus Christ and in the restored

gospel that which can lift and strengthen and ennoble and exalt the finest life that does not have it, that will consider and hearken to the revealed word of God. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.