

# *The Ten Commandments of a Peculiar People*

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Thank you, President Oaks. I am honored and delighted to have this opportunity to meet and worship with the student body and faculty of Brigham Young University on this occasion. I have pondered and prayed much to learn what the Lord wants me to say to the youth of Zion, to the young and rising generation of the Church. My prayer has been and is, “O God, manifest unto thy servant what thou wouldst have said to those who are a choice and a peculiar treasure unto thee above all the peoples of the earth.” In response, there has come into my heart the desire to consider our unique and peculiar status as members of the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth. If I may now be guided by the Spirit, I shall take up the doctrine that we are a peculiar people; show wherein that peculiarity lies; tell how it may be obtained and perfected; and draw some conclusions as to what is expected of us because of our unique status.

## **We Are a Peculiar People**

There is an old saying, “All the world is queer save me and thee, and sometimes I think even thee is a little queer.” This is used jocularly of those who set themselves apart from mankind and who profess to be or seemingly are different from other people. We do not

place ourselves in this category. We are not freaks, but normal, wholesome people who enjoy life. We work and play, engage in sports, mingle with other people, go to parties, and enjoy festive occasions. But we are, nonetheless, peculiar in the eyes of worldly people. We are a breed set apart. We are different from the world because we do not ape the practices and follow the fashions of worldly and carnal people. We glory in the things which set us apart by ourselves, and we hope and pray that we may maintain and increase the differences. Of the true saints, with whom we are numbered, Peter said: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” Having so announced, he told what is expected of them: “That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Query: “How shall we show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness

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into his marvelous light?" This is equivalent to asking "How do we worship the Lord?"

Answer: It is more than in song or sermon; perfect worship is emulation. Perfect praise is to do the things he would have us do. It is to keep the commandments of God.

To true saints, and we are they, Paul wrote:

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,*

*Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

*Looking for that blessed hope [the hope of eternal life], and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ;*

*Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. [Titus 2:11–14; emphasis added]*

Query: "How does the Lord purify unto himself a peculiar people?"

Answer: He does it when that people forsake ungodliness and worldly lusts, when they live "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." He does it when that people take counsel from him and keep his commandments.

To his chosen Israel, of whom we are a part, the Lord said: "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:5–6). Note the terms of the Lord's offer: "Obey my voice; keep my covenant." This covenant is the fulness of his everlasting gospel. It is the new and everlasting covenant in which we promise to forsake the world and in which he promises us an inheritance with him in his Father's kingdom. All those who keep the covenant, who live by gospel standards, receive this promise: "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the

Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deuteronomy 14:2). And I say to you, "You are that people—an holy people, a chosen and favored people, a people set apart, 'a peculiar people.'"

### **The Family of the Lord**

Now, with those principles before us, may I speak of the special family relationship enjoyed by those who so live that they become a peculiar people. Of them it is written: "Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hosea 1:10). That is, those who gain the high status of a peculiar people are adopted into the family of the Lord Jehovah. They become his sons and his daughters and have him as their father. Our best recitation of the doctrine here involved is found in these words of King Benjamin:

*And now, because of the covenant which ye have made [in the waters of baptism], 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. [Mosiah 5:7]*

This is a special family relationship reserved for the faithful. It is over, above, and in addition to the fact that all men are the spirit children of the Eternal Father.

King Benjamin continues:

*And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.*

*And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he*

*shall be called by the name of Christ.*  
[Mosiah 5:8–9]

This is a glorious and wondrous doctrine. We are the sons and daughters of the living God, the children of the great Jehovah, the adopted offspring of the Lord Jesus Christ. We bear the name of Christ. We are members of his family. He is our father. Now, how do we gain such a personal relationship with him who has bought us with his blood? He says:

*But to as many as received me gave I power to become my sons; and even so will I give unto as many as will receive me, power to become my sons.*

*And verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth my gospel receiveth me; and he that receiveth not my gospel receiveth not me.*

*And this is my gospel—repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom.* [D&C 39:4–6]

When we partake of the sacrament, we renew the covenants made in the waters of baptism. We agree again to take upon ourselves the name of the Son and to keep his commandments so we shall always have his Spirit to be with us.

Baptism and the sacrament are the ordinances which open the door so that as a people, peculiar and set apart from the world, we have power to become sons and daughters of God. Obeying and conforming, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, living soberly and righteously and godly in this present world—such a way of life is the course whereby the power is exercised and the desired eventuality obtained.

In my father's family we had a saying, "Remember who you are and act accordingly." I adopted this same motto for my family. My wife tells me that her father did precisely the same thing. Our family motto meant to us,

"First, you are a McConkie; you have been taught the truth; you know what is expected of you at all times; you are to live by the standards of the family and avoid anything that would stain the family name. Second, you are a Christian; Jehovah is your shepherd; the Lord Jesus is your father; you are to live by gospel standards and not do anything which would bring disrepute upon him whose name you bear; you are to keep his commandments."

Now, in the light of the principle that we are a peculiar people who have become the sons and daughters of him who is our Lord, may I suggest some specific things that will help us overcome the world and make the doctrines here involved live in us. I shall do this by presenting what we may term the ten commandments of a peculiar people. First the commandments and then a brief commentary about them.

### **Be Virtuous**

The first commandment: *Thou shalt be morally clean and conform to every standard of virtue and chastity.*

The commentary: People who live after the manner of the world are immoral and unclean—so much so that we sometimes wonder whether there are any moral standards left among men. People speak of a new morality, which is, in fact, immorality under a new name. We are confronted on every hand—on radio, on television, in the movies, and in the so-called literature that is available—with a recitation of standards that are contrary to gospel principles. They are inherent in the course that the world pursues.

But the true Saints still adhere to the divine decree, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). We still believe "that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Our proclamation still is "thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else. And

he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the spirit" (D&C 42:22–23). Immorality is the crying evil of our day. It ranks next to murder in the category of personal sins. We must shun it, avoid it, flee from it. It destroys men spiritually in this life and sends them to an endless hell in the life to come. The word of the Lord given to the world through us still is "For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts" (Jacob 2:28).

### **Bridle Your Passions**

The second commandment: *Thou shalt bridle thy passions and abstain from all manner of lasciviousness.*

The commentary: We are here in mortality to be tried and tested; we are on probation. The great test is whether we overcome the lusts of the flesh, flee from that which is lewd, and live by gospel standards. We are to overcome the world. If we get involved in necking and petting, if we go to pornographic movies, if we read trashy and vulgar books or magazines, if we tell or enjoy vulgar stories, if we profane and are unclean in thought or word, we are living after the manner of the world. Then there is nothing peculiar about us. We are as the generality of mankind. We are outside the family circle. We lose our status as the sons and daughters of our Lord. Oh that it might be said of us, as it was of them of old:

*There was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.*

*And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. [4 Nephi 15–16]*

What an accolade that is! Surely there could not be a "happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God." True happiness is found only in righteous conduct. No one can live after the manner of the world and be truly happy. "Wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10).

### **Be Modest**

The third commandment: *Thou shalt be modest in dress and appearance.*

Commentary: It may come as a surprise to some people to learn that modesty in dress and grooming is related to salvation. I left the Missionary Executive Committee meeting this morning to come here, and the last item approved was a document to go to mission presidents, stake presidents, and bishops instructing each to counsel all returned missionaries to conform to the dress and grooming standards that had prevailed in their missions.

The Bible has a great deal to say about covering our nakedness, about costly and ornate apparel, about excessive use of jewelry, about garish and worldly costumes, and yes, about hair styles. Women are told to avoid "plaiting" the hair and not to wear "broided hair." I suggest you figure out what those things mean in the context where they were used by Peter and Paul. The Holy Book approves long hair for women and short hair for men: "Doth not even nature itself teach you," Paul says, "that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" (1 Corinthians 11:14). I noted in the church section of the *Deseret News* that within the month President Spencer W. Kimball, speaking before a similar group, quoted that sentence from Paul with the same application that we're making here.

Conformity to dress and grooming standards is one of the tests the Lord imposes upon us to see if we will take counsel and to see if we can stand up against the pressures of the world. There is, of course, an underlying reason for all the counsels and commands relayed from the

Lord by the Brethren to the Saints. Immodesty, for instance, leads toward immorality. Long hair and grubby grooming open the door to rebellion against the established order and to associations which lead away from the Church. Surely those who are so adorned are not living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. But even if we are not sufficiently in tune to recognize the valid reasons behind the dress and grooming standards, we are still expected to abide by them. We might well hark back to the counsel given Adam to offer sacrifices. He, not knowing the underlying reasons, did so in order to conform to the counsel that the Lord gave. And in due course the angel from heaven explained what was involved.

### **Be Honest**

The fourth commandment: *Thou shalt be honest and manifest integrity in all thy doings.*

The commentary: The devil whispers to men, "Lie a little; there is no harm in a little dishonesty; a little stealing won't matter; everybody cheats on an exam and you have to in order to get by; don't search out the true owner of lost property; learn to get along in the world by living the way worldly people live." We are living in a day when evil is on the increase. Shoplifting, crime, and dishonest practices prevail in increasing measure throughout the world. In my judgment this will continue until the day of the coming of the Son of Man when the wicked will be destroyed, the earth will be regenerated, and we will have a new way of life. I think also that in the midst of these worldly circumstances the Church itself, at least the faithful portion of it, is being perfected. We are living by higher standards, and we are preparing ourselves to be that people who will be ready for the Lord when he comes again. As to these matters, the Lord our God has never rescinded that which is written: "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15). No amendment has ever been appended to the decree "Wo unto the liar, for he shall be

thrust down to hell" (2 Nephi 9:34). The honor code is still in force. Neither a dishonest man nor a man lacking in integrity can be saved in the kingdom of God.

### **Pay Your Offerings**

The fifth commandment: *Thou shalt pay thy tithes and offerings unto the Lord.*

The commentary: Tithes and offerings divide the faithful from the unfaithful. All men will give an accounting before the judgment bar for the manner in which they used the moneys and properties that came into their hands while in mortality. "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). And that includes the inordinate attachment to money that is legally and properly your own. The Lord said to Martin Harris, "And again, I command thee that thou shalt not covet thine own property, but impart it freely to the printing of the Book of Mormon" (D&C 19:26). Speaking of making our money and property available for building up the kingdom, Paul says, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). Well might we remember the revelation which says, "For he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming" (D&C 64:23). Some people say tithing is pretty good fire insurance.

### **Keep the Sabbath**

The sixth commandment: *Thou shalt go to sacrament meeting and keep the Sabbath day holy.*

The commentary: We live in an age when almost the whole world is rushing about madly in search of pleasure. Nearly everyone sets the weekend apart for recreational purposes, and this means for Sabbath violation. The generality of mankind fish, play golf, go to movies, or otherwise (as they suppose) seek surcease from the toil of the week. There are

churches which conduct their worship services on Friday evening or Saturday morning to free their adherents for recreational pursuits on the Lord's day. The law of the Lord, given anew in our day, counsels us:

*That thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day;*

*For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High. [D&C 59:9–10]*

### **Keep the Word of Wisdom**

The seventh commandment: *Thou shalt keep the Word of Wisdom.*

The commentary: We have received from the Lord a law of health which, if kept, will assure us not only of physical well-being, but also of great outpourings of spiritual enlightenment. This law is divided into affirmative counsel, telling us what we may properly eat, and negative counsel, which forbids the use of certain things which are injurious to the body. While the great hosts of men—of people in the world—reel and stagger through life in an alcoholic stupor; while they immerse themselves in the stinking fumes of tobacco; while they drown themselves in gallons of semi-poisonous tea and coffee; while they inhale the smoke of marijuana or otherwise afflict themselves with mind-destroying drugs; the Saints of the Most High, in all their peculiarity, avoid these things for the plague that they are.

Theirs is this promise:

*And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;*

*And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;*

*And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.*

*And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. [D&C 89:18–21]*

Now note what was involved: First, “walking in obedience to the commandments,” for the World of Wisdom is more than a law of health; and second, those keeping it “shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures.” These hidden treasures include such things as a testimony of the truth and divinity of the work, personal revelation to guide us in all our affairs and to provide us with the constant companionship of the Holy Spirit. And the eternal decree is that the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle.

### **Believe True Doctrines**

The eighth commandment: *Thou shalt believe true doctrines and reject the false educational theories of the world.*

The commentary: We are saved or damned by what we believe. If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and the saving truths of his everlasting gospel, we have a hope of eternal life. If our beliefs embrace the philosophies of men and the vagaries of the world, they may lead to destruction. Nearly the whole educational world goes blithely along, espousing the false theories of organic evolution, which rule out the fall of man and the atonement of Christ. Men worship at the shrine of intellectuality without ever realizing that religion is a thing of the Spirit and that “the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 1:11). Our schools teach some principles of socialism, of communism, of so-called women's liberation, of curtailing population growth and the like—much of which runs counter to revealed gospel truths.

How grateful we should be for the revealed knowledge we have of the eternal saving truths of the gospel. We know the verities that must be comprehended, understood, and applied to our lives to give us joy and peace in

this life and eternal life in the world to come. These things pertain to the nature and kind of being that God is and to the great plan of salvation which he ordained to enable his spirit children to advance and progress and become like him. The fact that Adam fell, bringing temporal and spiritual death into the world, and the fact that God sent his Only Begotten Son into the world to ransom men from the effects of the temporal and spiritual death brought upon all mankind through the fall of Adam—these are eternal verities. Other eternal verities are these—that God has spoken in our day; that the fulness of his everlasting gospel has been restored; that the church and kingdom of God has been set up on earth anew; that it administers the gospel by the power of the holy priesthood; and that there are had among us the gifts, signs, miracles, and all the wonders, blessings, and graces that were ever had in any day when the Lord had a people on earth.

#### **Serve Your Fellowmen**

The ninth commandment: *Thou shalt serve thy fellowmen and sacrifice for the building up of the kingdom.*

The commentary: Service and sacrifice are essential to salvation. Jesus said, “I am among you as he that serveth” (Luke 22:27). King Benjamin said, “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). Joseph Smith taught that “a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary to lead unto life and salvation.”

#### **Pray**

The tenth commandment: *Thou shalt pour out thy soul to the Lord in mighty prayer.*

The commentary: We are a praying people—not giving lip service only, not reciting mere words, not repeating memorized phrases—but praying with all the energy and power we possess, praying until the heavens open and the

Lord rains down righteousness upon us. No one can pray with perfect faith unless he keeps the commandments. An immoral man can never generate the faith to raise the dead. A person who does not keep the Word of Wisdom will be hindered in healing the sick, and so on right down to the dress and grooming standards.

#### **God’s Kingdom on Earth**

Such, I suggest, are the ten commandments of a peculiar people. If we live by the principles set forth in them we shall have peace in this life and be inheritors of eternal life in the world to come. If any of us now fall short in any degree, the door is open for repentance. The Lord’s arm is not shortened that he will not hear, but he invites all men to come to him and partake of his goodness and grace.

There is an organization in his kingdom whereby we can receive the counsel and direction that we need. All of us have power to set our lives in order to the full so that we do “live soberly, godly, and righteously” in this present world and thereby gain the promised peace and the promised hope of an eternal reward in what we’re talking about.

“What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they?” The inspired answer is “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:13–14). No one ever said or claimed that life was intended to be easy. The Lord deliberately has left us in a situation where the world is all around us and where we have to make the choices. If we choose to follow him and take the counsel that is given, we reap the blessings. And if we choose otherwise, we follow the course that the world follows and the destruction promised to them will be heaped upon us also. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21). “He that

overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his god, and he shall be my son" (Revelation 21:7).

What a glorious and wondrous thing it is to be a member of the church and kingdom of God on earth, to have the revelations of heaven, and to know what is meant by the prophetic utterances and the counsels written by prophets and apostles. We are so blessed. This Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God's kingdom on earth. It is led by the spirit of inspiration. If we follow the counsel

and direction that we receive, then these principles about which we have talked will live in our lives. They will live because they are true and because the Lord wants to operate by these standards. Out of that kind of a course we shall get the joy and the peace "that passeth all understanding" while we are here in mortality, and we'll have a guaranteed inheritance of glory, honor, immortality, and exaltation in the realms ahead. Of this I testify and for these things I pray for all of us, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.