

The Bond of Charity

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The text for my address this morning, "The Bond of Charity," comes from the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the 125th verse:

And above all things clothe yourselves with a bond of charity as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace.

I selected this topic because "The Bond of Charity" was the theme for the Annual University Conference this past year, a theme the administration believed should not only characterize that conference but serve as a guide to the university community throughout the year. I was assigned responsibilities in connection with that conference, one of which was to suggest possible themes. After weeks of searching for what I thought might be a possible theme and then an evening of going through many of my favorite books, sure that I would find exactly what would be the right theme for our conference, I lay down, no closer to coming to a suggested topic than I was when I began. As I lay on the bed, I felt prompted to read the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. If you have read that section lately, you know it is very long, and at one o'clock in the morning I did not

particularly want to read it. Themes for past conferences had been selected from the 88th section so as I was reading it, I kept saying to myself, "We're not going to take a theme from this section"—until I came to the 125th verse. As I read that, I was impressed that this verse should provide the theme. Ironically, that was the day Jeffrey R. Holland was appointed president of Brigham Young University. I met with him the following week, shared the experience I have shared with you, and asked him for his opinion. He replied, "That is a more inspired choice than you know. I have come to Brigham Young University with my own prayers for an administration characterized by unity and peace. 'The Bond of Charity' is exactly the right phrase."

Since that experience last August, I have felt this was an inspired choice for more personal reasons. As I began to think about the bond of charity, I realize how little I really knew about charity, so I made it a study topic for the year. I read about it, thought about it, and pondered

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about it. I also began to be aware of the kinds of love and charity that other people extended to me. As a result of those experiences, I have tried to pull together the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes I have had as I have sought to learn about charity during this past year, and today I want to explore four main ideas that have emerged. First, what is charity? Second, why is charity, or love, important? Third, what are the effects when we love? And finally, how do we show love toward other people?

What Is Charity?

First, what is charity? To answer this question, I want to turn to the scriptures for some definitions. In 2 Nephi 26:30 we read:

The Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love.

In that verse we learn that *charity* and *love* are used interchangeably. In the seventh and eighth chapters of Moroni, we find considerable writing on charity. Reading first from Moroni 8, verse 17:

And I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love.

In that verse we have the explanation that charity is, first of all, everlasting love and, secondly, perfect love.

As we turn back to Moroni 7, verse 47, we read:

Charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

The idea that charity is, in fact, the pure love of Christ is discussed in an article in the February 1979 *Ensign*, entitled, "Becoming a Zion Society." The author, Quinn Gardner, suggested that charity, the pure love of Christ, is

bestowed upon those of us who submit to the covenants and the powers of the atonement of Jesus Christ. This pure love is the kind of love that sustained a Zion society for four generations. You will remember in 4 Nephi it is recorded that the Nephites experienced no contention in the land "because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people" (4 Nephi 15). This is also the kind of love that produced the city of Enoch, that City of Holiness, even Zion, whose people, we are told by Moses, "were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them" (Moses 7:18).

I suppose the most classic and frequently referred to definitions of charity are those found in Moroni 7 and the almost identical words found in 1 Corinthians 13. Each time I read those scriptures, I have thought that Mormon and Paul were providing us with a definition of how we are to love other people. A book called "Love Is Now," by Peter Gillquist (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), suggests that, in addition to being that, it also is a definition of how our Heavenly Father loves us. Keep that in mind while I review 1 Corinthians 13. I have specifically chosen to read it not from the King James Version, but from the New English Bible because I think it gives some added insights not found in the King James Version.

Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offense. Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance.

Love will never come to an end. [vss. 4-8]

I don't have time this morning to talk about all of the characteristics of charity mentioned in 1 Corinthians, but I want to examine the first one: Love is patient, or, in the King James

Version, charity suffereth long. As I have thought about this, I have come to believe that our Heavenly Father is much more patient with us than we are with ourselves. We seem to have within us a drive for perfection, and sometimes we are not very patient with ourselves. I think the drive for perfection is as it should be, for we are counseled in Matthew:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. [Matthew 5:48]

But while there is nothing about a time limit in the perfection process, sometimes I find myself praying, "Lord, make me patient—right now!" I am beginning to understand and believe that perfection is a lifelong process and one that frequently is not easy, but painful. This idea is reinforced by some of the things C. S. Lewis wrote in his book *Mere Christianity*. Lewis talks about Christ's asking his disciples, his believers, to count the cost before becoming Christians.

Make no mistake, [Christ would say] if you let Me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect—until My Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with Me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.

God's demand for perfection need not discourage you in the least in your present attempts to be good, or even in your present failures. Each time you fall He will pick you up again. And He knows perfectly well that your own efforts are never going to bring you anywhere near perfection. On the other hand,

you must realize from the onset that the goal toward which He is beginning to guide you is absolute perfection; and no power in the whole universe, except you yourself can prevent Him from taking you to that goal. That is what you are in for. [New York: Macmillan, 1960, pp. 172, 174]

Lewis goes on to quote the analogy by George McDonald, comparing life to a house:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting up an extra floor there, running up towers, and making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage, but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself. [p. 176]

Heavenly Father is always patient. Love is patient; it is long-suffering.

As we look at what charity is, it is equally important and instructive to look at the kind of love Heavenly Father has for us, the kind of love for which we should strive in our own lives. It is a love that is unconditional, one of total acceptance. Our Heavenly Father does not say, "I love you if you do thus and so," but rather "I love you—period." Our Heavenly Father accepts us for who we are—his spirit children created in his image. And he accepts us where we are, even with all our weaknesses.

In the book *Fully Human, Fully Alive* the author, John Powell, explores this idea.

Wherever you are in your development, whatever you are doing, with a strong affirmation of all your goodness and good deeds, with a gentle

understanding of your weakness, God is forever loving you. You do not have to change, grow, or be good in order to be loved. Rather [and this is the key] you are loved so you can change, grow, and be good. [Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1976, p. 178–79]

Then he reminds us of some of the people we read about in the scriptures. He describes Peter the Rock as a sandpile, a loudmouth, and a man who denied even knowing the One who had loved him most. He talks of Zachaeus as the runt who offered to collect taxes from his own people for a kickback of the take. He recalls to our minds Thomas, the all-star bullhead, and Martha, who was a worrier and a complainer. Then there is the prodigal son, who was pretty heartless but who came home into his father's open arms and open heart when he became hungry. And last, we are reminded of Saul of Tarsus, who was bent on destroying Christianity until he took that road to Damascus and found the loving Lord. Then Powell says:

Heavenly Father was loving them, affirming them, forgiving them, encouraging them, challenging them all the way into greatness, peace, and the fullness of life. [p. 179]

I would suggest that our Heavenly Father does the same for us; for, indeed, his love is unconditional; he has that perfect ability to separate each of us, as a person, from our behavior. Charity is many things, but it is always patient and unconditional. I single out those two aspects only because they have specific meaning in my life as I seek to understand God's love for me and as I seek to love other people.

Before I move on, I want to touch on what charity is *not*. It is not always sweet and nice and agreeable and accommodating. It is, however, always honest and truthful. Love—true love—requires that we ask hard questions and

sometimes do hard things. Parents who really love their children do not indulge them; rather they help them see what they can become and then present them with the process of growth.

I recall a time I was babysitting my younger brother Mark, who was three years old. It was quiet, which meant trouble, so I went into the kitchen. There I found him, simply sitting on the floor playing with a long, sharp, butcher knife he had pulled from the top of the cabinet. It was bright and shiny and obviously attractive to him. I knew that potential danger, and, of course, I took it away from him. He didn't understand. I had taken away something that was very attractive to him and something that he wanted, so he cried. When I reflect on that experience, I think of how much more infinite our Heavenly Father's knowledge is of those things which can be hurtful to us. Truman Madsen expands on that idea in his book, *Four Essays on Love*. He says:

You and I can only grow with stress and distress. There is no muscle without strain and no character without the fiery trials of action and affliction. "There must needs be opposition" not only implies an eternal resistance in the nature of things, it implies that man needs opposition in order to become what he has in him to become.

Life is an obstacle course. And sometimes a spook alley. But the before was a time of visioning the after. And some of our prayers are like the gambler's "Give me the money I made you promise not to give me if I asked for it." What does a true friend do in such a case? God will honor our first request, to let us go through it; and He will provide you with (let Him) the way to make it bearable. More, to make it productive. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978, pp. 58, 59]

In retrospect I find myself grateful for friends who loved me enough to tell me that truth even when it was difficult and who withheld from me those things that would have weakened rather than strengthened me, for

now I have come to understand that to do so is a manifestation of true love, the pure love of Christ—in fact, charity.

Why Is Love Important?

Now to the second question—why is love important? We know that love is one of our basic needs. Without it, people cannot develop normally. We are beginning to understand that many bodily ills are directly tied to the absence of love and that loved and loving people are healthier and, interestingly enough, better able to cope with pain. Simply put, love is necessary for life, for survival, for growth, and ultimately for perfection.

What Are the Effects of Love

The third idea I want to explore deals with what happens when we either receive love from others or give love? What are the effects of love? A number of years ago at a professional conference a friend of mine had a little pin—a number 3 attached to her lapel. I asked, “What does the number 3 stand for?” She replied, “I’m glad you asked. It means Heavenly Father is first in my life, others are second, and I am third.”

I have thought about that idea often. I don’t want to wear a number 3 on my lapel because I don’t think that’s the message we receive from the scriptures or what I’ve come to understand. I believe first of all, Christ loves us. And because he loves us, we are able to love ourselves, to accept ourselves. Once we are able to do that, we are free to love other people, to reach out to them. This idea is supported scripturally in 1 John 4:19:

We love him, because he first loved us.

No matter how much we want to follow the commandments of loving others or forgetting self or serving others, first we must love ourselves and feel good about who we are. Part

of that process involves coming to understand and to appreciate Christ’s love for us.

At one time in my life, I reached a point of personal discouragement when I questioned my abilities and was filled with self-pity. I went to my office one night. It was dark, and I lay on the floor sobbing. I stopped crying because I finally became physically exhausted. As I lay there in the quiet, in the dark, by myself, the scripture “Love thy neighbor as thyself” came to mind. That message could not have come more strongly if the Savior himself had stood before me and spoken the words. The emphasis was not on “love thy neighbor”; it was on loving thyself. Before we can love our neighbors we must love ourselves and see ourselves as God sees us. If we cannot love ourselves, we will find it difficult to love our Heavenly Father and our neighbors. Loving oneself is, for me, an essential key to loving God, life, and others.

The Prophet Joseph Smith touched on this when talking to a congregation in Nauvoo. He compared life to a wheel around which each of us moves. He said there are times when we are up at the top of the wheel and someone else is down. In due time, he suggested, it will be the other way around. Then he added:

*Every man [and woman] will fail sometime.
[Truman Madsen, *The Highest in Us* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), p. 26]*

He was quick to add that this is the very reason we need others in our lives. There are times when we are on the top of the wheel, when we are alive and high, when we can lift others who are more or less barren or numbed or deadened. But our turn to be lifted by others will inevitably come.

When we love ourselves, we have a positive self-image. It allows us to love and to reach out to other people, not because we have to in order to meet a quota or because someone has

told us to, but because we want to, and so we respond in a loving way to someone else.

How Do We Show Love?

The last question I want to explore—and the most important—is, How do we show love? We typically use the parable of the good Samaritan to answer this question. You will remember that a lawyer had asked Christ what he needed to do in order to inherit eternal life. The Savior said, "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." The lawyer then asked, "Who is my neighbor?" In response to that question the Lord told the story of the good Samaritan and concluded by saying, "Go and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37; 25–37).

I don't know about you, but I've not seen anyone lying by the side of the road. I've heard people say that if they ever did see someone by the side of the road, they would stop and bind up their wounds and help them. We don't often see that in our society, but we do see people in our apartments or classes, at work, in church, perhaps in our own families who are lonely and discouraged and depressed, who feel hopeless and unwanted. These are the people lying by the side of the road, who need us to love them and accept them and care about them. It is easy, I think, to give money to a good cause or to bake cookies or make something for others, but I believe one of the most important things we have to give is our time and a listening ear. Some people simply need someone to hold them and to care about them.

Remember the baptismal covenant and what we covenanted to do. It is nowhere else stated as clearly as in the 18th chapter of Mosiah. The people had gathered at the waters of Mormon, and Alma spoke to them, saying:

Behold, here are the waters of Mormon . . . and now, as ye are desirous to come unto the fold of God,

and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort. . . . [Mosiah 18:8–9]

Those three requirements—to be willing to bear one another's burdens, to mourn with those that mourn, and to comfort those that stand in need of comfort—to me suggest loving others and really caring about them.

This kind of charity is not better exemplified by anyone than by Mother Teresa, a Roman Catholic nun who founded the Sisters of Charity and who was subsequently awarded the Nobel Prize for peace. In an address to a group of sisters at Notre Dame, she talked about the hungry ones in today's society—not just those who hunger for bread, but those who are literally hungering for understanding love, for being wanted, for being somebody to somebody. This kind of poverty, said Sister Teresa, is all over the world.

She talked about the homeless ones, not people who are homeless because they have no houses of bricks or stone, but homeless, again, for understanding love—helpless, hopeless people who have forgotten how to smile. "There is so much suffering," she said, "and we seem to have so little time for each other and for works of love. Love begins in living reality at home." Then Sister Teresa gave what I think is an interesting challenge. She challenged people to try to make their homes a place where Christ can come and rest for awhile—a worthy challenge for each of us. This woman preaches Jesus Christ without using words; rather, she puts his love and her own into a loving action of serving people in their needs. An example worthy of emulation.

When I talked with a friend about charity she said, "It is very closely tied to compassionate service." Then she added, "You know, compassionate service is not just a loaf of bread." I believe that. Sometimes it is a loaf of bread,

and sometimes that bread opens the door for many other things to happen. But charity, that about which we have spoken and that which is exemplified by Mother Teresa, is the kind of love that allows us to give of ourselves, to reach out to other people, to build them, and to really love them. The real gifts are gifts of listening and caring and sharing, those things spoken of in the eighteenth chapter of Mosiah.

One Heart and One Mind

In closing, I want to share an experience that Wid Tolman, who offered our opening prayer this morning, shared with me. Brother Tolman is a good friend and for many years has taken youth, members and nonmembers, into the mountains for special experiences. I have been with him on some of these trips and know they are unique. He shared with me an experience he had last summer. He was with such a group. They had had several days of hard hiking; they had gone without meals. On the third day, after the youth had been by themselves for about two hours, they came together to share testimonies and other things of importance. They were in a beautiful spot in the mountains, a place where I had been. There were tall pine trees and green grass, with a slight knoll surrounding the area where they sat.

Brother Tolman shared with me that this group of youth had become very close on this trip. They expressed concern about each other; they shared with others; there was a unity among that group that frequently isn't found among young people of 12 to 16 years of age. During this period of sharing, Brother Tolman happened to glance up and see a deer put her head over the top of the knoll, sample the air, and look at what was happening below. Then she backed down and was invisible. Brother Tolman kept watching that knoll. The deer would move about 15 feet, come up over the top and look around. She kept doing that until she came all the way around, back to where

she had started. Then the deer walked slowly down the hill and moved in among the youth. Nobody moved, nobody yelled, "Hey, there's a deer!" to frighten her; they simply went on with their sharing. The deer lingered with them for a period of time, and some of the youth asked if this might be what we mean as we sing of the day when "the lamb and the lion shall lie down together." Eventually, the deer wandered back over the knoll and left the group. There was, in that group, no contention. They were of one heart and one mind, and perhaps in some lesser sense they were at that moment dwelling in righteousness as did the people of Enoch. They were united by a bond of perfectness and peace. As Brother Tolman related that to me, we both mused on whether or not the deer had, in fact, sensed that all was safe, that there was nothing to be afraid of, because you will remember in 1 John we are told that "perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18).

It is very similar to the kind of thing that President Spencer W. Kimball spoke of in the closing session of general conference in April of 1978. He talked about his own vision of the future, his aspirations to establish Zion, and then said:

Let us unite and pray with all the energy of heart, that we may be sealed up by this bond of charity; that we may build up this Latter-day Zion, that the kingdom of God may go forth, so that the kingdom of heaven may come. ["Becoming Pure in Heart," Ensign, May 1978, p. 81]

I pray that each of us might do our part in seeking to establish Zion, that we might reread and ponder and think about those things which Moroni taught. That we will, in fact, pray with all the energy of our hearts that we may be filled with his love so that when he appears we may be like him and be purified even as he is pure. Such is my prayer in the

name of our Savior and Redeemer, even Jesus Christ. Amen.