

# Obedience, Creation, and Freedom

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Brothers and sisters, when I was a graduate student in New York, there was a distinguished gentleman at the university named Morris Bishop, an emeritus professor of Romance languages. For many years he carried the great ceremonial mace in academic processions at the university. During the unrest of the sixties, he even used it once, playfully, to subdue a student who was trying to seize the mike. He was a noted scholar, but also a regular contributor of light verse to *The New Yorker*. In one of his poems he writes:

*Of all the kinds of lecturer  
The lecturer I most detest  
Is he who finishes a page  
And places it behind the rest.*

*I much prefer the lecturer  
Who takes the pages as he finishes  
And puts them on a mounting pile  
As the original pile diminishes.*

*But best of all the lecturer  
Who gets his papers in confusion  
And prematurely lets escape  
The trumpet-phrase: "And in conclusion . . ."*

["Lines Composed in Fifth Row Center," *The Best of Bishop: Light Verse from The New Yorker and Elsewhere*, ed. Charlotte Putnam Reppert (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 64]

I stand before you with a little stack of pages, intending to be at least the second kind of speaker. But given the way my hands are shaking, we may all get lucky and I'll turn out to be the third. I know that if I'm not done in thirty-six minutes, the trap door I'm standing on will open—and you will hear me no more.

I've chosen to speak today about a principle of the gospel I have struggled with over the course of my life to understand and to love—or even to feel positively about. That principle is obedience. I know that obedience is not among the most popular topics; it has certainly not been among my favorite. I have felt hesitation about it for at least two reasons: first, because obedience seems to restrict freedom, and second, because I have tended to let my view of it

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be colored by negative examples of misused authority. It may be that some of you have also had these reservations. What I hope to do today is to develop an argument for considering obedience in positive terms—not as something restrictive and confining, but as a dynamic force in our lives.

I suspect that all of us can summon from our experience and our reading images of abused authority, which may even operate hypocritically under the guise of religion or high principles. Among literary examples, we might think of the clergyman Theobald Pontifex in Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* who thrashes his little son Ernest for being "self-willed and naughty" because he continues to pronounce "come" as "tum," and who then returns, his hand still red from the beating, to call his household to prayer. Then there are grim examples of "benefactors" and schoolmasters like Mr. Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre*, who seeks to make the girls of Lowood School "children of Grace" through humiliation and mortification; the sadistic Wackford Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby*; or Mr. Treharne in Leslie Norris' story "Some Opposites of Good." Though the degree of malice varies, all of these insist first and foremost on being obeyed; all are quickly enraged and vindictive at the slightest challenge to their authority or will.

To use an example from my own experience, I remember the alarming inversion of much of what I valued as I entered basic training in the army after my freshman year at BYU. Our sergeant's manner was malevolent, his language foul and abusive. On the first day he asked the college graduates to raise their hands; there was one in the group. He then asked those who had attended college at all to raise their hands; a few of us did. He went on down the levels of education until he reached someone who had dropped out after sixth grade. He appointed this person as platoon leader and the next four dropouts as squad leaders. The graduate and the rest of us who

had attended college were put at once on KP duty. Over the next few weeks, he took particular pleasure in bullying and hounding the college students and others toward whom, for whatever reason, he had developed a disliking. We spent many hours at tasks like cleaning latrines and grease traps, to which were added patently absurd assignments like scrubbing the pavement with our personal toothbrushes. I do understand that basic training is not designed to be a picnic, and that an army requires discipline and obedience so that commands will be followed in extreme wartime circumstances, but the sadistic pleasure some took within this broader necessity disgusted me then and disgusts me now. As an antidote, I spent my few free periods reading—and relishing—Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*. And I have never since warmed to the hymn "We Are All Enlisted," with its repeated "Happy are we! Happy are we!" (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 250).

**I am commanded—therefore I am: obedience and creation.** But this talk did not have its beginning in negative instances like these, nor in a recent TV spot announcing the Western Regional Obedience Contest to be held in August (I think this has to do with dogs rather than with intercollegiate sports, but the ad wasn't entirely clear). Nor did my talk grow out of the positive example of President Hinckley's article in the July *Ensign*. The kernel of the idea came to me some time ago when I was thumbing through a book by the remarkable Jewish thinker Abraham Heschel, entitled *Who Is Man?* Toward the end of the book, I came upon a subheading that jarred me. It read: *I am commanded — therefore I am.*

I asked myself, Can this be true? What can Heschel mean by this revision of Descartes' "I think, therefore I am"?—That I exist to be bossed around? To endure servitude? To be the plaything of another's desire to exercise authority? I could think of people who, believing themselves born to rule, might say, "I command, therefore I am." But why cast this in the passive

voice: “*I am commanded, therefore I am*”? When I read further and thought more carefully, though, my view of obedience began to be transformed.

What Heschel argues is, “Over all being stand the words: Let there be!” Being is itself an obedient response to the commandment of creation. “To be is to obey,” Heschel writes. “What Adam hears first is a command”; “‘Thou art’ precedes ‘I am.’” “To the Greek mind, man is above all a rational being. . . . To the biblical mind, man is above all a commanded being, a being of whom demands may be made” (*Who Is Man?* The Raymond Fred West Memorial Lectures, 1963 [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965], pp. 97, 98, 107). Heschel continues:

*Do I exist as a human being? My answer is: I am commanded—therefore I am. There is a built-in sense of indebtedness in the consciousness of man, an awareness of owing gratitude, of being called upon at certain moments to reciprocate, to answer, to live in a way which is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living. [Ibid., p. 111; emphasis in original]*

These passages caused me to notice, as I had not really done before, how central the idea of obedience is to creation, especially in the account given in the book of Abraham. Over and again, at each stage of creation, the text says, “And the Gods saw that they were obeyed” (Abraham 4:10, 12). At the creation of the sun and the moon, we can almost see the outstretched, ordering hand as we read, “And the Gods *watched* those things which they had ordered *until they obeyed*” (Abraham 4:18; emphasis added). In the biblical account, God pronounces the work of each day “good” (Genesis 1:10, etc.); in the book of Abraham, this goodness is equated with obedience. For example, as the fishes and birds are created, we read, “And the Gods saw that they would be *obeyed*, and that their plan was *good* (Abraham

4:21, cf. 25; emphasis added). In Genesis, God pronounces the work of the sixth and last day “very good” (Genesis 1 :31); in the book of Abraham we read, “And the Gods said: We will do everything that we have said, and organize them; and behold, they shall be *very obedient*” (Abraham 4:31; emphasis added). *Very good* and *very obedient* are one and the same. The goodness of creation depends upon obedience.

But what does this have to do with us now? Wasn’t the Creation completed a very long time ago? Yes, in a sense it was. The world came into being at God’s command; it was populated by all manner of living forms that set about to fill the measure of their creation. But in another sense, creation is ongoing, since its aim has not been fulfilled. If it is God’s “work and [his] glory” to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (see Moses 1:39), creation is not complete until we have fulfilled the measure of our creation. To Abraham, God declared the central aim of our creation, saying, “We will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do *all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them*” (Abraham 3:24–25; emphasis added). *All things* goes beyond the single command “Let there be man.” For human beings, the obedience that creation requires extends until God’s purpose, the measure of our creation, is fulfilled.

**Ongoing creation 1: human work and creativity.** In a certain sense, the idea of ongoing creation is even richer and may imply the value of human work and creativity. Listen to a passage from the Jesuit theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s book *The Divine Milieu*:

*We may, perhaps, imagine that the creation was finished long ago. But that would be quite wrong. It continues still more magnificently, and at the highest levels of the world. . . . And we serve to complete it, even by the humblest work of our hands. That is, ultimately, the meaning and value of our acts. Owing to*

*the interrelation between matter, soul and Christ, we bring part of the being which he desires back to God in whatever we do. [The Divine Milieu, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1968), p. 62; emphasis in original]*

Arguing for the “divinisation of our activities,” Teilhard is suggesting that human work, however modest, is part of ongoing creation. The creation is not complete, it does not reach its plenitude without our collaboration, our laboring with the Lord in his work, without what we do and what we create. This includes not only the great works of the past like the tragedies of Sophocles, the Cathedral of Chartres, and Bach’s Mass in B Minor, but also all the products of *our* minds and hands, from the lowliest to the best: the gardens we plant, the trees we prune, the meals we prepare, the tools we sharpen—to say nothing of the hypotheses we prove or the poems or pottery we shape. If we were to view our work and our creativity as part of God’s ongoing creation, would we approach them in the same way? Would, for example, the papers we write be the same?

A beautiful statement that suggests what such an idea might imply for our immediate BYU context is from President Kimball, in the address he gave at President Holland’s inauguration in 1980:

*This university shares with other universities the hope and the labor involved in rolling back the frontiers of knowledge, but we also know that, through divine revelation, there are yet “many great and important things” to be given to mankind which will have an intellectual and spiritual impact far beyond what mere men can imagine. Thus, at this university among faculty, students, and administration, there is, and there must be, an excitement and an expectation about the very nature and future of knowledge. [“Installation of and Charge to the President,” Inaugural Addresses, 14 November 1980 (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1980), p. 9]*

This passage sends chills up and down my spine. Its antithesis is found in D&C 93: “And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience” (D&C 93:39).

**Ongoing creation 2: laboring with the Lord in his vineyard.** I have mentioned laboring with the Lord in his ongoing work of creation. It seems to me that the allegory of Zenos in Jacob 5 suggests the Lord’s ongoing effort to restore creation when its goodness is diminished or lost. You remember that over a very long period of time, the Lord and his servant labor in the vineyard, tending and nurturing the olive trees, returning over and again to observe, to test, to graft, and to cultivate. The trees seem intractable; they incline toward uncreation as they bring forth wild fruit. The labor is long and often disheartening—so much so that at one point we read, “It came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard wept, and said unto the servant: What could I have done more for my vineyard?” (Jacob 5:41). But at those times when the work succeeds, we can hear an echo of Genesis, and it is as if the goodness of the original creation has been restored: “And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard looked and beheld the tree . . . and it had sprung forth and begun to bear fruit. And he beheld that it was good” (v. 17; emphasis added). And later, “He beheld . . . that it had brought forth much fruit; and he beheld also that it was good” (v. 20). Finally, the Lord says, “I have preserved the natural fruit, that it is good, even like as it was in the beginning,” and the Lord blesses his servant(s), “because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in my vineyard” (v. 75; emphasis added). It is true that the allegory is, at one level, historical, representing the work of the Lord in different dispensations, but it also can represent our own laboring with him in the vineyard of his kingdom. And it is obedience to the voice of creation that again produces the “natural fruit [which] is good” (v. 61; emphasis added) and “most precious unto him from the beginning” (v. 74; emphasis added).

**Man alone is free not to obey the Lord of creation.** The idea of incomplete creation should be understood most importantly in the context of obedience to God's commandments, to the principles and ordinances of the gospel. Of all creation, only human beings have the freedom *not* to obey. Over all else, the Lord of creation exercises dominion. As he tells Abraham:

*I am the Lord thy God; I dwell in heaven; the earth is my footstool; I stretch my hand over the sea, and it obeys my voice; I cause the wind and the fire to be my chariot; I say to the mountains—Depart hence—and behold, they are taken away by a whirlwind, in an instant, suddenly.* [Abraham 2:7; emphasis added]

Nephi, son of Helaman, agonizing over the awful cost of human agency, contrasts the willful disobedience of human beings with the responsiveness of all the rest of creation to the majestic voice of the Lord. He writes:

*O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth.*

*For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God.*

*Yea, behold at his voice do the hills and the mountains tremble and quake.*

*And by the power of his voice they are broken up, and become smooth, yea, even like unto a valley.*

*Yea, by the power of his voice doth the whole earth shake;*

*Yea, by the power of his voice, do the foundations rock, even to the very center.* [Helaman 12:7–12; emphasis added]

The catalog of the Lord's power over nature continues for several verses, then Nephi concludes with the one source of hope: "Therefore, blessed are they who will repent and *hearken unto the voice* of the Lord their God; for these

are they that shall be saved" (Helaman 12:23; emphasis added).

To quote again from Heschel:

*All that exists obeys. Man alone occupies a unique status. As a natural being he obeys, as a human being he must frequently choose. . . . His acts do not emanate from him like rays of energy from matter. Placed in the parting of the ways, he must time and again decide which direction to take.* [Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Young, 1951), p. 207]

If ongoing creation depends upon obedience and if, of all creation, only we human beings have the freedom not to obey, what happens when we choose not to obey? We thwart, deform, and undo God's creation.

**Conformed to Christ: Augustine's doctrine of reform.** I've mentioned the effort to restore creation in the allegory of Zenos. Consider with me for a moment an idea from the early Christian thinker Augustine of Hippo, on whose autobiography, the *Confessions*, I am currently working. (Augustine is the one who said in his youth, "Lord, give me virtue, but not yet.") Beginning with the formation of man in the image of God, which he often refers to as the "form of God" (*forma Dei*), Augustine suggests that through the Fall and through our disobedience the image of God in us is *deformed*, that the goodness of creation is deprived of its goodness. *Deformity* is, therefore, the condition of fallen man or, in Book of Mormon terms, of "natural man" (Mosiah 3:19). Images of deformity abound in the *Confessions*. How is this deformity to be remedied? Augustine writes:

*We . . . must after a fashion resculpt [the image of God in us] and reform it. But, who would be able to do this, except if he were the artist who shaped it? We could deform the image . . . , but we cannot reform it.* [Sermon 43.34, in Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 194; emphasis added]

Augustine’s doctrine of reform is centered in Christ. The image of God in which we were originally created can only be *re*-formed through faith in Christ and through the ongoing process of repentance under the influence of his grace. The relationship between creation and repentance is clearly marked out. Note how the language of Genesis pervades Augustine’s writing:

*We were covered over by the darkness of ignorance. . . . But because your Spirit was borne over the water, your mercy did not abandon our misery, and you said, “Let there be light. Repent. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent. Let there be light.”* [*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 343 (13.12.13); emphasis added and translation slightly adjusted with an eye both to the Latin and to the King James Version]

And in another passage:

*But first “wash yourselves, be clean” . . . so that the dry land may appear. “Learn to do good, judge for the fatherless, defend the widow,” so that the earth may bring forth the green herb and the tree yielding fruit. Come, let us discuss it, says the Lord, so that lights may be made in the firmament of the heaven.* [*Confessions*, p. 350 (13.19.24); emphasis added]

For Augustine, the full reformation of the image of God is foreshadowed in the original creation, to which he returns at the end of his autobiography. He expresses his deep longing and hope for its restoration in such passages as:

*I will not be turned away until out of this scattered and [deformed] state you gather all that I am into the peace of [the Heavenly Jerusalem], and you*

*conform and confirm me into eternity, my God, my mercy.* [*Confessions*, pp. 317–18 (12.16.23); emphasis added]

In the word *conform* (meaning to form according to the pattern of) we can hear an echo from Paul’s letter to the Romans:

*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.* [Romans 8:28–29; emphasis added]

Through faith in him, through repentance, through following his example, we are *conformed* to Jesus Christ, our Savior. But for Latter-day Saints the goal is not only, as it was for Augustine, to recover the condition of Adam and Eve before the Fall. The doctrine of the restored gospel is clear; our Heavenly Father’s desire is for us to become more fully his sons and daughters, heirs of his kingdom, kings and queens, gods and goddesses. To this end, Christ is the way and obedience the key.

**The obedience of Christ.** Consider with me now the idea of obedience in relation to Christ. Though Son of God, creator of the world, and Jehovah of the Old Testament, Christ subjected himself to lowly birth. As Paul writes, he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). In this humble state he learned line upon line and precept upon precept; “he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace” (D&C 93:12) as he was obedient to each level of knowledge he received. Found in the temple, where the doctors who heard him “were astonished at his understanding,” he nevertheless returned with his parents, who “understood not,” and was, as Luke writes, “subject unto them” (see Luke 2:47, 50–51; emphasis added).

At the beginning of his ministry, he allowed himself to be baptized, not for the remission of sins, for he was sinless, but as Nephi writes, to show “unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and *witnesseth* unto the Father that he *would be obedient* unto him in keeping his commandments” (2 Nephi 31:7; emphasis added). During his ministry he obeyed the Father’s will so closely that he could say toward the end, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (John 14:9).

But it is in his suffering at Gethsemane and on the cross through which, as Paul writes, “he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death” (Philippians 2:8) Jesus showed most clearly his obedience to the Father, because it is here that we see, for a brief, sacred moment, a divergence of wills before Christ surrendered himself wholly to his Father’s will: “And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36). To Joseph Smith, Christ later revealed that the suffering

*caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—*

*Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. [D&C 19:18–19]*

Christ’s obedience at this moment was so great that Abinadi, who foresaw it just before his own death by fire, says that “the will of the Son [was] *swallowed up* in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7; emphasis added).

And yet Christ was the freest being ever to have lived on earth. Though of lowly station, he showed glimpses during his ministry of the Lord of creation that he was. He had power

over the elements; people marveled and asked, “What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him” (Luke 8:25). He had power over disease, power over life and death—not only in the raising of Lazarus but in his own freedom to choose whether to subject *himself* to death. But, paradoxically, he was never freer than when he said to the Father, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42) and allowed—yes, allowed—his will to be “swallowed up” in his Father’s.

It is he who, having set before us the example of his own obedience, commands us to obey. As we read in Hebrews:

*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;*

*And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*

[Hebrews 5:8–9]

**The paradox: obedience the means to freedom.** Does obedience limit our freedom? Christ says to each of us, “Follow thou me” (2 Nephi 31:10). One of his greatest followers, the apostle Paul, desired so strongly to do Christ’s will that he sometimes referred to himself as “the prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:1), “the prisoner of the Lord” (Ephesians 4:1), or as “an ambassador in bonds” (Ephesians 6:20), “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). But this language is essentially paradoxical and contrasts with the real bondage of becoming subject to Satan, which is described as “being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them, which is damnation” (Mosiah 16:11). As Nephi writes, we “are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27).

In a talk given at BYU in 1971 (maybe some of your parents were students here then), Elder

Packer, who had been an apostle for a little over a year, discussed in personal terms the paradoxical relationship between obedience and freedom. He writes:

*I would expose you this morning to some tender, innermost feelings on this matter of agency. Perhaps the greatest discovery of my life, without question the greatest commitment, came when finally I had the confidence in God that I would loan or yield my agency to Him—without compulsion or pressure, without any duress, as a single individual alone, by myself, no counterfeiting, nothing expected other than the privilege. In a sense, speaking figuratively, to take one’s agency, that precious gift which the scriptures make plain is essential to life itself, and say, “I will do as thou directs,” is afterward to learn that in so doing you possess it all the more. [Boyd K. Packer, “That All May Be Edified”: Talks, Sermons and Commentary (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), pp. 256–57]*

“Strangely enough,” Elder Packer writes, “the key to freedom is obedience” (ibid., p. 256).

**God will not compel us.** God will never compel our obedience; to do so would thwart the purpose of our creation. Maybe this analogy will help: Six years ago we moved to our present house east of the campus. One of the things that attracted us to it was that it has aspen trees in various parts of the yard, including a cluster along our bedroom window (we like to watch the play of shadows in the moonlight). A couple of months after we moved in, a windstorm came up during the night, and we listened to the trees being blown about, sometimes striking against the eaves of the house. The next morning our daughter Bronwen came in to say that one of the trees had blown over. When we went out to look at it, thinking it broken, we discovered that it was not broken at all—the trunk had no split in it—the tree was simply drooping to the ground like a wet noodle. The trunk was four or five inches in diameter—the same as (maybe bigger than) other aspens in the yard—but it hadn’t

the strength to bear the weight of its foliage. Early on it had been tied to the house and had grown with that continual support for years. To all appearances it was no different from other freestanding aspens in the yard. But when the wind came and tore the support away, it hadn’t developed the strength to stand on its own, to move in the wind without toppling. The measure of its creation was thwarted; all we could do was push it back up and cinch it again to the eaves of the house.

We cannot become the beings God has created us to be if we are tied and constrained as our aspen tree has been, if we are “compelled in all things” (D&C 58:26). Our fuller creation requires our free obedience. Listen to President Hunter describe the way God acts as he works, eliciting our obedience and our love, to bring about the ends of his creation:

*God’s chief way of acting is by persuasion and patience and long-suffering, not by coercion and stark confrontation. He acts by gentle solicitation and by sweet enticement. He always acts with unfailing respect for the freedom and independence that we possess. He wants to help us and pleads for the chance to assist us, but he will not do so in violation of our agency. . . .*

*To countermand and ultimately forbid our choices was Satan’s way, not God’s, and the Father of us all simply never will do that. He will, however, stand by us forever to help us see the right path, find the right choice, respond to the true voice, and feel the influence of his undeniable Spirit. His gentle, peaceful, powerful persuasion to do right and find joy will be with us “so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved.” (Moro. 7:36.) [“The Golden Thread of Choice,” *Ensign*, November 1989, p. 18]*

**Natural consequences: obedience is for our good.** Some commandments, like the *ordinances*, teach us exactitude through strict observance of “the letter of the gospel”

(D&C 107:20). Others require us to reason and to ponder and to seek inspiration in order to apply *principles* of the gospel. Others require a willingness to accept the counsel of the Lord's chosen servants. To each of us may also come tests that may seem as hard as Abraham's, tests to see whether we, too, will say, "Thy will be done." But in all these contexts, obedience is for *our* good, not to satisfy the arbitrary and sanctionious will of some cosmic Mr. Brocklehurst.

The consequences of disobedience are, in a sense, natural, attached to eternal laws. To illustrate this in a mundane way, let me tell you a joke: There are two guys driving along in a truck. On the dashboard is a sticker giving the truck's height and weight specifications. The sticker reads "13 feet, 4 inches." The truck is approaching an underpass. In front of it is a series of warning signs, including a large one that says, "Danger! Low Clearance! Maximum Height 11 Feet, 10 Inches." Seeing the sign, the driver looks around furtively and asks his companion, "D'ya see any cops?" Most of the commandments are like this, signposts of warning for our good. We can laugh at the stupidity of the truck driver, but is his judgment really different from this man's in the book of Job?: "The eye . . . of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face" (Job 24:15). The point is not whether someone is watching but that personal disaster will follow. Both the truck and the man in Job are cruising toward serious uncreation.

**Three propositions: a dynamic force, a noble gift, an expression of love.** In several passages the D&C makes a connection between principle and theory. For example: "Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, [and] in doctrine" (D&C 88:78, cf. 97:14). What I have tried to do is to develop a theoretical framework that might allow us to think more positively about obedience. I know there are *many* aspects concerning the application of this principle that I haven't dealt

with. Nor have I addressed the examples of misused authority with which I began; that would require a different talk. Here I will only say that I think an answer lies in the contrast between the exquisite beauty of the revelation contained in D&C 121 on the principles by which authority should be exercised and the extraordinary abuse of authority which led to, and attended, Joseph Smith's imprisonment at Liberty Jail. That contrast is central to the message, and I am grateful to Darren Watts for evoking that occasion as he sang for us the setting of Joseph's prayer.

In conclusion (yes, here is that trumpet phrase), I would like to state three propositions about obedience that I think emerge from what I have said:

1. Obedience is a dynamic force; it is the force by which creation comes about and by which we can participate with the Lord in the ongoing creation of the world.
2. Obedience is a gift, the noblest gift we can give to God. In laying this gift before him, we give what is truly our own—that which he has the power to coerce from us but never will, else all creation were lost.
3. Obedience is the highest expression of our faith and of our love. Christ says to us, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Through obeying, we declare our love and express our gratitude—we say to him, "[I will] keep [thy commandments] in the midst of [my] heart" (Proverbs 4:21; emphasis added) and "I will keep thy commandments with all my heart" (Alma 45:7).

In the course of preparing this talk, I've read many insightful statements about obedience, not only in the scriptures, but also in the works of figures ranging from Aristotle to C. S. Lewis. But one of the wisest statements I've encountered is from a student. As a teacher, I'm always learning things from my students, and as a parent, from my children. This student also happens to be a son. Talking recently with his mother about obedience, our son Doug said

that he used to think of obedience primarily as a *means*—if I obey I will get a certain blessing—but that he had now come to feel that *obedience is itself the blessing*.

May we recognize and cherish this blessing in our lives I pray in the name of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.