

Valiant Discipleship in the Latter Days

By Elder Jörg Klebingat
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Let us be confident, not apologetic, valiant, not timid, faithful, not fearful as we hold up the Lord's light in these last days.

Section I

Moral agency is God's precious gift to each of His children.¹ 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 God *won't* force us to do good, and the devil *can't* force us to do evil.³ Though some may think that mortality is a contest between God and the adversary, a word from the Savior "and Satan is silenced and banished. ... It is [our] strength that is being tested—not God's."⁴

In the end we will therefore reap what our lifelong choices have sown.⁵ So what does the sum total of our thoughts, desires, words, and works say about our love for the Savior, His chosen servants, and His restored Church? Do our baptismal, priesthood, and temple covenants mean more to us than the praise of the world or the number of "likes" on social media? Is our love for the Lord and His commandments stronger than our love for anything or anyone else in this life? The adversary and his followers have always sought to destroy the works of Christ and His prophets. The Savior's commandments, if not ignored altogether, have been rationalized into meaninglessness by many in today's world. Messengers of God who teach "inconvenient" truths are often dismissed. Even the Savior Himself was called "a man gluttonous, and a winebibber,"⁶ accused of disturbing public sentiment and being divisive. Weak and conniving souls "took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk,"⁷ and His "sect" of early Christians was "every where ... spoken against."⁸

The Savior and His early followers dealt with serious internal and external opposition, and we experience the same. Today it is almost impossible to courageously live our faith without occasionally attracting a few actual and virtual fingers of scorn from the worldly. Confidently following the Savior is rewarding, but at times we may get caught in the crosshairs of those advocating an "eat, drink, and be merry"⁹ philosophy, where faith in Christ, obedience, and repentance are substituted by the illusion that God will justify a little sin because He loves us so much.

Speaking "by [His] own voice or by the voice of [His] servants,"¹⁰ did the Savior not say about our day that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers" and that many "shall turn away their ears from the

truth, and shall be turned unto fables”?¹¹ Did He not lament that “in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”?¹² Did He not warn that “of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them”?¹³ Did He not foresee that “evil [would be called] good, and good evil”?¹⁴ and that “a man’s foes shall be they of his own household”?¹⁵

Antonia’s Thoughts:

2Nephi 28:7-9 Student Manual BOM

“False and Vain and Foolish Doctrines”

- Nephi exposed some of the “false and vain and foolish doctrines” that Satan professes and will continue to use ([2 Nephi 28:9](#)). Each of the phrases found in [2 Nephi 28:6–9](#)



conveys a spiritually dangerous philosophy. Modern prophets have identified these ideas and have spoken against them:

“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” ([verse 7](#)). Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles cautioned against this attitude:

“The philosophy of ritual prodigalism is ‘eat, drink, and be merry, ... [and] God will beat us with a few stripes’ ([2 Nephi 28:8](#)). This is a cynical and shallow view of God, of self, and of life. God never can justify us ‘in committing a little sin’ ([verse 8](#)). He is the God of the universe, not some night-court judge with whom we can haggle and plea bargain!

“Of course God is forgiving! But He knows the intents of our hearts. He also knows what good we might have done while AWOL [absent without leave]. In any case, what others do is no excuse for the disciple from whom much is required (see [Alma 39:4](#)). Besides, on the straight and narrow path, there are simply no corners to be cut (see [D&C 82:3](#))” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1988, 40; or [Ensign, Nov. 1988, 33](#)).

“God ... will justify in committing a little sin” ([verse 8](#)). The Doctrine and Covenants is clear: “For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance; nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven” ([D&C 1:31–32](#)).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles commented on the foolishness of thinking that we are better off for having sinned for the experience of it: “The idea that one is better off after one has sinned and repented is a devilish lie of the adversary. Does anyone here think that it is better to learn firsthand that a certain blow will break a bone or a certain mixture of chemicals will explode and sear off our skin? Are we better off after we have sustained and then healed such injuries? I believe we all can see that it is better to heed the warnings of wise persons who know the effects on our bodies” (“Sin and Suffering,” in *Brigham Young University 1989–90 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [1990], 151).

“Lie a little” ([verse 8](#)). President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) admonished us to resist the temptation to lie a little: “Nephi so describes the people of his day, as he also describes so many of our day. How easy it is for us to say, ‘We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent’ ([Articles of Faith 1:13](#)). But how difficult for so many to resist the temptation to lie a little, cheat a little, steal a little, bear false witness in speaking gossipy words about others. Rise above it. ... Be strong in the simple virtue of honesty” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1992, 74; or [Ensign, Nov. 1992, 52](#)).

“God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved” ([verse 8](#)). President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency spoke against this falsehood:

“[One deception] is what some erroneously call ‘premeditated repentance.’ There is no such doctrine in this Church. This may sound subtly appealing, but it is in fact pernicious and a false concept. Its objective is to persuade us that we can consciously and deliberately transgress with the forethought that quick repentance will permit us to enjoy the full blessings of the gospel, such as temple blessings or a mission. True repentance can be a long, painful process. This foolish doctrine was foreseen by Nephi:

“‘And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; ... there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God’ [[2 Nephi 28:8](#)].

“... All of our covenants must not only be received through ordinances but, to be eternal, must also be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise. This divine stamp of approval is placed upon our ordinances and covenants only through faithfulness. The false idea of so-called premeditated repentance involves an element of deception, but the Holy Spirit of Promise cannot be deceived” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 61; or [Ensign, Nov. 2000, 46](#)).

2 Timothy 4:3-4 NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT MANUAL

Paul described the evil conditions of the last days and encouraged Timothy to use the scriptures in his role as a priesthood leader. He wrote of his impending death and declared, “I have kept the faith” ([2 Timothy 4:7](#)). Paul testified that the Lord would deliver him to the “heavenly kingdom” ([2 Timothy 4:18](#)).

False Teachers

Paul's words in [2 Timothy 4:1–4](#) foreshadow the coming of the Great Apostasy, when people would “not endure sound doctrine” but instead would seek after false teachers who would say what their listeners’ “itching ears” wanted to hear. The reference to “itching ears” might be more easily understood as describing those who choose to listen only to those things that they wish to hear.

Matthew 15:9 NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT MANUAL

“Nigh unto Me with Their Mouth, ... but Their Heart Is Far from Me”

As recorded in [Matthew 15:8](#) the Savior quoted [Isaiah 29:13](#), applying it to people in His day. Though they professed God with their mouths, their hearts were far from Him. **President Dallin H. Oaks** of the First Presidency taught that in the Final Judgment it will not be enough for us to know and profess that the gospel is true:

“In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to *know* something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to *become* something. ...

“... [Jesus] told Simon Peter, ‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren’ ([Luke 22:32](#)). ...

“Jesus’ challenge shows that the conversion He required for those who would enter the kingdom of heaven (see [Matt. 18:3](#)) was far more than just being converted to testify to the truthfulness of the gospel. To testify is to *know* and to *declare*. The gospel challenges us to be ‘converted,’ which requires us to *do* and to *become*” (“[The Challenge to Become](#),” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32–33).

Acts 20:30 NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT MANUAL

Paul Warned of the Coming Apostasy

As he bade farewell to the Church leaders in Ephesus, Paul warned them that an apostasy was coming and that it would be the result of forces working both outside the Church (“grievous wolves”) and inside the Church (“of your own selves”) ([Acts 20:29–30](#)). The Greek word *apostasia*, which was translated as “falling away” in [2 Thessalonians 2:3](#), is closer in meaning to “rebellion” or “revolution.” Thus, Church members themselves contributed to the Great Apostasy by rebelling against Church leaders and doctrine (see the [commentary for 2 Thessalonians 2:3](#)). Priestcraft was an important element of this internal rebellion. Paul’s words in [Acts 20:30](#) provide a definition of priestcraft (see also [2 Nephi 26:29](#)).

Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles affirmed Paul’s message: “Not only would outsiders ingratiate themselves with the saints for purposes of selfish gain—wolves entering in, and not sparing the flock,—but schisms and divisions were imminent; and these dissensions were to come through some then present—men who would aspire to

leadership, and who would set up their own doctrines, thus drawing disciples away from the Church and unto themselves” (*The Great Apostasy* [1968], 28).

Discussing the origins of the Great Apostasy, **President Joseph Fielding Smith** declared that some of it was the result of evil men who moved in and displaced the authority of the Apostles: “In time all ordinances of the gospel were changed, commandments were broken, and the simple principles of the gospel were mixed with pagan philosophy by the ‘grievous wolves’ and apostate disciples who displaced the prophets and apostles who had divine communion with the heavens. Spiritual darkness set in, and unrighteous men took command and closed the heavens against themselves. Visions and contact with the heavens ceased, and the gifts of the spirit came to an end. The blessings and presence of the Twelve Apostles ceased, and the cry went forth that they were no longer needed” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. [1957–66], 5:177)

Isaiah 5:20 OLD TESTAMENT STUDENT MANUAL

Verse 20. They pervert righteousness and goodness, calling them evil, and try to pass off evil things as good. It is the nature of sinners to reject the reality of the consequences of their transgressions, and so they attempt to explain them away.

Matthew 10:36 NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT MANUAL

“He That Loveth Father or Mother More Than Me” (see also [Luke 14:26](#))

In these verses Jesus Christ declared that His message would not always bring peace. In fact, choosing to make God preeminent in one’s life might even result in divisions within a family. **President Ezra Taft Benson** (1899–1994), in commenting on this scripture passage, noted that one of the most difficult choices a person might make is choosing between God and a family member: “One of the most difficult tests of all is when you have to choose between pleasing God or pleasing someone you love or respect—particularly a family member.

“Nephi faced that test and handled it well when his good father temporarily murmured against the Lord (see [1 Nephi 16:18–25](#)). Job maintained his integrity with the Lord even though his wife told him to curse God and die (see [Job 2:9–10](#)).

“The scripture says, ‘Honour thy father and thy mother’ ([Exodus 20:12](#); see also [Mosiah 13:20](#)). Sometimes one must choose to honor Heavenly Father over a mortal father” (“[The Great Commandment—Love the Lord,](#)” *Ensign*, May 1988, 5).

A More Determined Discipleship

By Elder Neal A. Maxwell

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An address delivered at Brigham Young University, 10 October 1978

Speaking to student leaders in higher education, I have often used the analogy that in a university the faculty, staff, and administration are like the “natives,” and the students are like the “tourists.” In many ways, a recurring devotional speaker is more like one of the “natives.” Even so, I thank President Oaks for once again extending this precious privilege to me. You may conclude, however, that I am becoming more like a “tourist,” since today I will try to cover two topics in order to make the most of these fleeting moments.

Discipleship includes good citizenship. In this connection, if you are a careful student of the statements of the modern prophets, you will have noticed that with rare exceptions—especially when the First Presidency has spoken out—the concerns expressed have been over moral issues, not issues between political parties. The declarations are about principles, not people; and causes, not candidates. On occasions, at other levels in the Church, a few have not been so discreet, so wise, or so inspired.

Make no mistake about it, brothers and sisters, in the months and years ahead, events are likely to require each member to decide whether or not he will follow the First Presidency. Members will find it more difficult to halt longer between two opinions. (See [1 Kgs. 18:21](#).)

President Marion G. Romney said, many years ago, that he had “never hesitated to follow the counsel of the Authorities of the Church even though it crossed my social, professional or political life” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1941, p. 123). This is a hard doctrine, but it is a particularly vital doctrine in a society which is becoming more wicked. In short, brothers and sisters, not being ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ includes not being ashamed of the prophets of Jesus Christ!

We are now entering a time of incredible ironies. Let us cite but one of these ironies which is yet in its subtle stages: We will see a maximum, if indirect, effort made to establish irreligion as *the* state religion. It is actually a new form of paganism which uses the carefully preserved and cultivated freedoms of western civilization to shrink freedom, even as it rejects the value essence of our rich Judeo-Christian heritage.

M. J. Sobran wrote recently:

“The Framers of the Constitution ... forbade the Congress to make any law ‘respecting’ the establishment of religion, thus leaving the states free to do so (as several of them did); and they explicitly forbade the Congress to abridge ‘the free exercise’ of religion, thus giving actual religious observance a rhetorical emphasis that fully accords with the special concern we know they had for religion. It takes a special ingenuity to wring out of this a governmental indifference to religion, let alone an aggressive secularism. Yet there are those who insist that the First Amendment actually proscribes governmental partiality not only to any single religion, but to religion as such; so that tax exemption for churches is now thought to be unconstitutional. It is startling to consider that a clause clearly protecting religion can be construed as requiring that it be denied a status routinely granted to educational and charitable enterprises, which have no overt constitutional protection. Far from *equalizing* unbelief, secularism has succeeded in virtually *establishing* it. ... “What the secularists are increasingly demanding, in their disingenuous way, is that religious people, when they act politically, act only on secularist grounds. They are trying to equate *acting* on religion with *establishing* religion. And—I repeat—the consequence of such logic is really to establish secularism. It is in fact, to force the religious to internalize the major premise of secularism: that religion has no proper bearing on public affairs.” (*Human Life Review*, Summer 1978, pp. 51–52, 60–61.) Brothers and sisters, irreligion as the state religion would be the worst of all combinations. Its orthodoxy would be insistent and its inquisitors inevitable. Its paid ministry would be numerous beyond belief. Its Caesars would be insufferably condescending. Its majorities—when faced with clear alternatives—will make the Barabbas choice, as did a mob centuries ago when Pilate confronted them with the need to decide.

Your discipleship may see the time when such religious convictions are discounted. M. J. Sobran also said, “A religious conviction is now a second-class conviction, expected to step deferentially to the back of the secular bus, and not to get uppity about it” (*Human Life Review*, Summer 1978, pp. 58–59).

This new irreligious imperialism seeks to disallow certain opinions simply because those opinions grow out of religious convictions. Resistance to abortion will be seen as primitive. Concern over the institution of the family will be viewed as untrendy and unenlightened.

In its mildest form, irreligion will merely be condescending toward those who hold to traditional Judeo-Christian values. In its more harsh forms, as is always the case with those whose dogmatism is blinding, the secular church will do what it can to reduce the influence of those who still worry over standards such as those in the Ten Commandments. It is always such an easy step from dogmatism to unfair play—especially so when the dogmatists believe themselves to be dealing with primitive

people who do not know what is best for them—the secular bureaucrats’ burden, you see.

Am I saying that the voting rights of people of religion are in danger? Of course not! Am I saying, “It’s back to the catacombs?” No! But there is occurring a discounting of religiously based opinions. There may even be a covert and subtle disqualification of some for certain offices in some situations, in an ironic irreligious test for office.

If people, however, are not permitted to advocate, to assert, and to bring to bear, in every legitimate way, the opinions and views they hold which grow out of their religious convictions, what manner of men and women would we be?

Our founding fathers did not wish to have a state church established nor to have a particular religion favored by government. They wanted religion to be free to make its own way. But neither did they intend to have irreligion made into a favored state church.

Notice the terrible irony if this trend were to continue. When the secular church goes after its heretics, where are the sanctuaries? To what landfalls and Plymouth Rocks can future pilgrims go?

If we let come into being a secular church which is shorn of traditional and divine values, where shall we go for inspiration in the crises of tomorrow? Can we appeal to the rightness of a specific regulation to sustain us in our hour of need? Will we be able to seek shelter under a First Amendment which by then may have been twisted to favor irreligion? Will we be able to rely for counterforce on value education aided in school systems which are increasingly secularized? And if our governments and schools were to fail us, would we be able to fall back upon and rely upon the institution of the family, when so many secular movements seek to shred it?

It may well be that as our time comes to “suffer shame for his name” ([Acts 5:41](#)), some of that special stress will grow out of that portion of discipleship which involves citizenship. Remember, as Nephi and Jacob said, we must learn to endure “the crosses of the world” and yet to despise “the shame of it” ([2 Ne. 9:18](#); [Jacob 1:8](#)). To go on clinging to the iron rod in spite of the mockery and scorn that flow at us from the multitudes in that great and spacious building seen by Father Lehi, which is the “pride of the world” ([1 Ne. 11:36](#))—is to disregard the shame of the world. Parenthetically, why, really why, do the disbelievers who line that spacious building watch so intently what the believers are doing? (See [1 Ne. 8:33](#).) Surely there must be other things for the scorners to do. Unless deep within their seeming disinterest. ... Unless. ... If the challenge of the secular church becomes very real, let us, as in all other relationships, be principled but pleasant. Let us be perceptive without being pompous.

Let us have integrity and not write checks with our tongues which our conduct cannot cash.

Before the ultimate victory of the forces of righteousness, some skirmishes will be lost. Even in these, however, let us leave a record so that the choices are clear, letting others do as they will in the face of prophetic counsel.

There will also be times, happily, when a minor defeat seems probable, but others will step forward, having been rallied to rightness by what we do. We will know the joy, on occasion, of having awakened a slumbering majority of the decent people of all races and creeds which was, till then, unconscious of itself.

Jesus said that when the fig trees put forth their leaves, “summer is nigh” ([Matt. 24:32](#)). Thus warned that summer is upon us, let us not then complain of the heat! Have I come today, however, only to add one more to the already long list of special challenges faced by you and me? Not really. I have also come to say to you that God, who foresaw all challenges, has given to us a precious doctrine which can encourage us in meeting this and all other challenges.

The combined doctrine of God’s foreordination is one of the doctrinal roads “least traveled by.” Yet it clearly underlines how very long and how perfectly God has loved us and known us with our individual needs and capacities. Isolated from other doctrines, or mishandled, these truths can stoke the fires of fatalism, impact adversely upon agency, cause us to focus on status rather than service, and carry us over into predestination. President Joseph Fielding Smith once warned:

“It is very evident from a thorough study of the gospel and the plan of salvation that a conclusion that those who accepted the Savior were predestined to be saved no matter what the nature of their lives must be an error. ... Surely Paul never intended to convey such a thought. ... This might have been one of the passages in Paul’s teachings which cause Peter to declare that there are in Paul’s writings, ‘some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction’” (*Improvement Era*, May 1963, p. 350; see [2 Pet. 3:16](#)).

Paul stressed running life’s race the full distance; he did *not* intend a casual Christianity in which some had won even before the race started!

Yet, though foreordination is a difficult doctrine, it has been given to us by the living God, through living prophets, for a purpose. It can actually increase our understanding of how crucial this mortal second estate is and can further encourage us in good works. This precious doctrine can also help us go the *second* mile because we are *doubly* called.

In some ways, our second estate, in relationship to our first estate, is like agreeing in advance to surgery. Then the anesthetic of forgetfulness settles in upon us. Just as doctors do not de-anesthetize a patient in the midst of authorized surgery to ask him again if the surgery should be continued, so, after divine tutoring, we agreed to come here and to submit ourselves to certain experiences; it was an irrevocable decision.

Of course, when we mortals try to comprehend, rather than accept, foreordination, the result is one in which finite minds futilely try to comprehend omniscience. A full understanding is impossible; we simply have to trust in what the Lord has told us, knowing enough, however, to realize that we are *not* dealing with *guarantees* from God but extra *opportunities*—and *heavier responsibilities*. If those responsibilities are in some ways linked to past performance or to past capabilities, it should not surprise us. The Lord said:

“There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

“And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” ([D&C 130:20–21](#)). This eternal law prevailed in the first estate as it does in the second estate. It should not disconcert us, therefore, that the Lord has indicated that he chose some individuals before they came here to carry out certain assignments; hence, these individuals have been foreordained to those assignments. “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world,” said the Prophet Joseph Smith, “was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council.” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 365.)

Foreordination is like any other blessing—it is a conditional bestowal subject to our faithfulness. Prophecies foreshadow events without determining the outcome, because of a divine foreseeing of outcomes. So foreordination is a conditional bestowal of a role, a responsibility, or a blessing which, likewise, foresees but does not fix the outcome.

There have been those who have failed or who have been treasonous to their trust, such as David, Solomon, and Judas. God foresaw the fall of David, but was not the cause of it. It was David who saw Bathsheba from the balcony and sent for her. But neither was God surprised by such a sad development.

God foresaw, but did not cause, Martin Harris’s loss of certain pages of the translated Book of Mormon; God made plans to cope with failure over 1,500 years before it was to occur! (See preface to [D&C 10](#) and [W of M](#))

Thus, foreordination is clearly no excuse for fatalism, or arrogance, or the abuse of agency. It is not, however, a doctrine that can be ignored simply because it is difficult. Indeed, **deep inside the hardest doctrines are some of the pearls of greatest price.**

The doctrine pertains not only to the foreordination of prophets, but to God's precise assessment, beforehand, as to each of those who will respond to the words of the Savior and the prophets. From the Savior's own lips came these words, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" ([John 10:14](#)). Similarly the Savior said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" ([John 10:27](#)). Further, he declared, "And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts" ([D&C 29:7](#)). This responsiveness could not be gauged without divine foreknowledge concerning *all* mortals and their response to the gospel—which foreknowledge is so perfect it leaves the realm of *prediction* and enters the realm of *prophecy*.

The foreseeing of those who will accept the gospel in mortality, gladly and with alacrity, is based upon their parallel responsiveness in the premortal world. No wonder the Lord could say, as he did to Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; ... and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" ([Jer. 1:5](#)). Paul, when writing to the Saints in Rome, said, "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" ([Rom. 11:2](#)). Paul also said of God that "he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" ([Eph. 1:4](#)).

The Lord, who was able to say to his disciples, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship" ([John 21:6](#)), knew beforehand that there was a multitude of fishes there. If he knew beforehand the movements and whereabouts of fishes in the little Sea of Tiberias, should it offend us that he knows beforehand which mortals will come into the gospel net?

It does no violence even to our frail human logic to observe that there cannot be a grand plan of salvation for all mankind, unless there is also a plan for each individual. The salvational sum will reflect *all* its parts.

Once the believer acknowledges that the past, present, and future are before God *simultaneously*—even though we do not understand how—then the doctrine of foreordination may be seen somewhat more clearly. For instance, it was necessary for God to know how the economic difficulties and crop failures of the Joseph Smith, Sr. family in New England would move this special family to the Cumorah vicinity where the Book of Mormon plates were buried. God's plans could scarcely have so unfolded if—willy-nilly—the Smiths had been born Manchurians and if, meanwhile, the plates had been buried in Belgium!

The Lord would need to have perfect comprehension of all the military and political developments in the Middle East—some of which are unfolding even now—which would combine to bring to pass a latter-day condition in which "all nations" will be gathered "against Jerusalem to battle" ([Zech. 14:2](#)).

It should not surprise us that the Lord, who notices the fall of each sparrow and the hair from every head, would know centuries before how much money Judas would receive—thirty pieces of silver—at the time he betrayed the Savior. (See [Matt. 26:15](#), [Matt. 27:3](#), [Zech. 11:12](#).)

Quite understandably, the manner in which things unfold seems to us mortals to be so natural. Our not knowing what is to come (in the perfect way that God knows it) thus preserves our free agency completely.

When, through a process we call inspiration and revelation, we are permitted at times to tap that divine databank, we are accessing, for the narrow purposes at hand, the knowledge of God. No wonder that experience is so unforgettable!

There are clearly special cases of individuals with special limitations in life, which conditions we mortals cannot now fully fathom. For all we now know, the seeming limitations may have been an agreed-upon spur to achievement—a “thorn in the flesh” ([2 Cor. 12:7](#)). Like him who was “blind from birth,” some come to bring glory to God ([John 9:1-2](#)). We must be exceedingly careful about imputing either wrong causes or wrong rewards to all in such circumstances. They are in the Lord’s hands, and he loves them perfectly. Indeed, some of those who have required much waiting upon in this life may be waited upon again by the rest of us in the next world—but for the highest of reasons!

Thus, when we are elected to certain mortal chores, we are elected “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” ([1 Pet. 1:2](#)). When Abraham was advised that he was “chosen before thou wast born,” he was among the “noble and great ones” ([Abr. 3:22-23](#)). Through the revelation given to us by the prophet Joseph F. Smith, we read that the Prophet Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, “and other choice spirits” were also reserved by God “to come forth in the fulness of times to take part in laying the foundations of the great latter-day work” ([D&C 138:53](#).) These individuals are among the rulers that Abraham had described to him centuries earlier by God. They were to be “rulers in the Church of God,” ([D&C 138:55](#)), not necessarily rulers in the secular kingdoms. Thus, those seen by Abraham were the Pauls, not the Ceasars; the Spencer W. Kimballs, not the Churchills. Wise secular leaders do much lasting and commendable good, but Paul observed to the saints in Corinth that (as the world measured greatness and wisdom) “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” ([1 Cor. 1:26](#)). President Joseph Fielding Smith said,

“In regard to the holding of the priesthood in the pre-existence, I will say that there was an organization there just as well as an organization here, and we there held authority. Men chosen to positions of trust in the spirit world held the priesthood.” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956, Vol. 3, p. 81.)

Alma speaks about foreordination with great effectiveness and links it to the foreknowledge of God and, perhaps, even to our previous performance (see [Alma 13:3-5](#)).

The omniscience of God made it possible, therefore, for him to determine the boundaries and times of nations (see [Acts 17:26](#); [Deut. 32:8](#)).

Elder Orson Hyde said of our life in the premortal world, “We understood things better there than we do in this lower world.” He also surmised as to the agreements we made there that “it is not impossible that we signed the articles thereof with our own hands,—which articles may be retained in the archives above, to be presented to us when we rise from the dead, and be judged out of our own mouths, according to that which is written in the books.” Just because we have forgotten, said Elder Hyde, “our forgetfulness cannot alter the facts.” (*Journal of Discourses*, 7:314–15.) Hence, the degree of detail involved in the covenants and promises we participated in at that time may be a more highly customized thing than many of us surmise. Yet, on occasion, even with our forgetting, there are inklings. President Joseph F. Smith said:

“But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil, that we might merit the reward of our own choice and conduct. But by the power of the Spirit, in the redemption of Christ, *through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul*, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home” (*Gospel Doctrine*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, pp. 13–14; italics added).

As indicated earlier, this powerful teaching of foreordination is bound to be a puzzlement in some respects, if we do not have faith and trust in the Lord. Yet if we think about it, even within our finite framework of experience, it shouldn’t startle us. Mortal parents are reasonably good at predicting the behavior of their children in certain circumstances. Of this Elder James E. Talmage wrote:

“Our Heavenly Father has a full knowledge of the nature and disposition of each of His children, a knowledge gained by long observation and experience in the past eternity of our primeval childhood; a knowledge compared with which that gained by earthly parents through mortal experience with their children is infinitesimally small. By reason of that surpassing knowledge, God reads the future of child and children, of men individually and of men collectively as communities and nations; He knows what each will do under given conditions, and sees the end from the beginning. His foreknowledge is based on intelligence and reason. He foresees the future as a state which naturally and surely will be; not as one which must be because He has arbitrarily willed that it shall be.” (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, p. 29.)

Another helpful analogy for students is the reality that universities can and do predict with a high degree of accuracy the grades entering students will receive in their college careers based upon certain tests and past performances. If mortals can do this with reasonable accuracy (even with our short span of familiarity and with finite data), God the Father, who knows us perfectly, surely can foresee how we will respond to various challenges.

While we often do not rise to our opportunities, God is neither pleased nor surprised. But we cannot say to him later on that we could have achieved had we just been given the chance! This is all part of the justice of God.

One of the most helpful—indeed, very necessary—parallel truths to be pondered when studying this powerful doctrine of foreordination is given in the revelation of the Lord to Moses in which the Lord says, “And all things are present with me, for I know them all” ([Moses 1:6](#)). God does not live in the dimension of time as do we. Moreover, since “all things are present with” God, his is not simply a predicting based solely upon the past. In ways which are not clear to us, he actually *sees*, rather than *foresees*, the future—because all things are, at once, present, before him! In a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord describes himself as “the same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes” ([D&C 38:2](#)). From the prophet Nephi we receive the same basic insight in which we likewise must trust: “But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men” ([1 Ne. 9:6](#)). It was by divine design that the marvelous Mary became the mother of Jesus. Further, Lucy Mack Smith, who played such a crucial role in the rearing of Joseph Smith, did not come to that assignment by chance.

One of the dimensions of worshipping a living God is to know that he is alive and living in the sense of seeing and acting. He is not a retired God whose best years are past—to whom we should pay a retroactive obeisance, worshipping him for what he has already done. He is the living God who is, at once, in the dimensions of the past and present and future, while we labor constrained by the limitations of time itself.

It is imperative that we always keep in mind the caveats noted earlier, so that we do not indulge ourselves or our whims simply because of the presence of this powerful doctrine of foreordination, for with special opportunities come special responsibilities and much greater risks.

But the doctrine of foreordination properly understood and humbly pursued can help us immensely in coping with the vicissitudes of life. Otherwise, time can play so many tricks upon us. We should always understand that while God is *not* surprised, we often are.

Life’s episodes may thus take on new meaning. For instance, Simon, the Cyrenian, wandered into Jerusalem on the very day of Christ’s crucifixion and was pressed into service by Roman soldiers to help carry the Savior’s cross. Simon’s son, Rufus, joined the Church and was so well thought of by the Apostle Paul that the latter mentioned Rufus in his epistle to the Romans, describing him as “chosen in the Lord” ([Rom. 16:13](#)). Was it, therefore, a mere accident that Simon “who passed by, coming out of the country,” was asked to bear the cross of Jesus? ([Mark 15:21](#)).

Properly humbled and instructed concerning the great privileges that are ours, we can cope with what seem to be very dark days, and with true perspective about “things as they really are,” we can see in them a great chance to contribute. Churchill, in trying to rally his countrymen in an address at Harrow School on 29 October 1941, said to them:

“Do not let us speak of darker days; let us speak rather of sterner days. These are not dark days: these are great days—the greatest days our country has ever lived; and we must all thank God that we have been allowed, each of us according to our stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race.” (*Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, p. 923.)

So should we regard the dispensation of the fulness of time—even when we face stern challenges and circumstances. “These are great days”! Our hearts need not fail us. We can be equal to our challenges, including the aforementioned challenge of the secular church!

The truth about foreordination also helps us to taste of the deep wisdom of Alma, when he said we ought to be content with things that God hath allotted to each of us (see [Alma 29:3–4](#)) If, indeed, the things allotted to each of us have been divinely customized according to our ability and capacity, then for us to seek to wrench ourselves free of our schooling circumstances could be to tear ourselves away from carefully matched opportunities. To rant and to rail could be to go against divine wisdom, wisdom in which we may once have concurred before we came here. God knew beforehand each of our coefficients for coping and contributing. President Henry D. Moyle said:

“I believe that we, as fellow workers in the priesthood, might well take to heart the admonition of Alma and be content with that which God hath allotted us. We might well be assured that we had something to do with our ‘allotment’ in our preexistent state. This would be an additional reason for us to accept our present condition and make the best of it. It is what we agreed to do.” (In Conference Report, Oct. 1952, p. 71.)

By the way, the things “allotted” do not include a bad temper or deficiencies of a developmental variety.

What a vastly different view Of life the doctrine of foreordination gives to us! Shorn of this perspective, others are puzzled or bitter about life. Without gospel perspective, life is like trying to play a game of billiards on a table with a ruffled cloth, with a crooked cue, and an elliptical billiard ball. Perhaps the moral of that analogy is that we should stay out of pool halls! In any event, pessimism does not see life or the universe as these things “really are.”

The disciple will be puzzled at times, too. But he persists. Later he rejoices and exclaims over how wonderfully things fit together, realizing, only then, that with God—*things never were apart!*

Jacob said the Spirit teaches us the truth “of things as they really are, and ... really will be” ([Jacob 4:13](#)) Centuries later Paul said, “The Spirit searcheth ... the deep things of God” ([1 Cor. 2:10](#)). Of some of these deep things we have spoken today and of how things really are.

Brothers and sisters, in some of those precious and personal moments of discovery, there will be a sudden surge of recognition of an immortal insight, a doctrinal *deja vu*. We will sometimes experience a flash from the mirror of memory that beckons us forward to a far horizon.

When, in situations of stress, we wonder if there is any more in us to give, we can be comforted to know that God, who knows our capacities perfectly, placed us here to succeed. No one was foreordained to fail or to be wicked.

When we have been weighed and found wanting, let us remember that we were measured before and were found equal to our tasks; and therefore, let us continue but with *a more determined discipleship*.

When we feel *overwhelmed*, let us recall the assurance that God will not *overprogram* us; he will not press upon us more than we can bear (see [D&C 50:40](#)).

The doctrine of foreordination is, therefore, not a doctrine of repose; it is a doctrine for the second-milers; it can draw out of us the last full measure of devotion.

It is a doctrine of perspiration—not aspiration. Moreover, it discourages aspiring, lest we covet, like two early disciples, that which has already been given to another (see [Matt. 20:20–23](#)).

It is a doctrine for the deep believer and will only bring scorn from the skeptic.

When, as President Joseph F. Smith said, we “catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul,” let us be quietly grateful. When of great truths we can say, “I know,” that powerful spiritual witness may also carry with it the sense of our *having known before!* With *rediscovery*, we are really saying “I know—*again!*” No Wonder so often real teaching is reminding.

God bless you and keep you, my special friends, to the end that you will carry out each and every assignment given to you so very long ago. You have been measured and found adequate for the challenges that will face you as citizens of the kingdom of God; of that you should have a deep inner assurance. Be true to that trust, as all of us must, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Christian Courage: The Price of Discipleship

Elder Robert D. Hales

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Answering our accusers in the Savior's way.

We have gathered together as one, we have taken upon us the name of Jesus Christ, and we are Christians. One of the questions we would ask: why then, if we have that love of the Savior, would someone want to be an antagonist or to attack us?

Recently a group of bright, faithful young Latter-day Saints wrote down some of the most pressing questions on their minds. One sister asked, “Why doesn't the Church defend itself more actively when accusations are made against it?”

To her inquiry I would say that one of mortality's great tests comes when our beliefs are questioned or criticized. In such moments, we may want to respond aggressively—to “put up our dukes.” But these are important opportunities to step back, pray, and follow the Savior's example. Remember that Jesus Himself was despised and rejected by the world. And in Lehi's dream, those coming to the Savior also endured “mocking and pointing ... fingers” ([1 Nephi 8:27](#)). “The world hath hated [my disciples],” Jesus said, “because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” ([John 17:14](#)). But when we respond to our accusers as the Savior did, we not only become more Christlike, we invite others to feel His love and follow Him as well.

To respond in a Christlike way cannot be scripted or based on a formula. The Savior responded differently in every situation. When He was confronted by wicked King Herod, He remained silent. When He stood before Pilate, He bore a simple and powerful testimony of His divinity and purpose. Facing the moneychangers who were defiling the temple, He exercised His divine responsibility to preserve and protect that which was sacred. Lifted up upon a cross, He uttered the incomparable Christian response: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” ([Luke 23:34](#)).

Some people mistakenly think responses such as silence, meekness, forgiveness, and bearing humble testimony are passive or weak. But to “love [our] enemies, bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which despitefully use [us], and persecute [us]” ([Matthew 5:44](#)) takes faith, strength, and, most of all, Christian courage.

The Prophet Joseph Smith demonstrated this courage throughout his life. Though he “suffer[ed] severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious” ([Joseph Smith—History 1:27](#)), he did not retaliate or give in to hatred. Like all true disciples of Christ, he stood with the Savior by loving others in a tolerant and compassionate way. *That is Christian courage.*

When we do not retaliate—when we turn the other cheek and resist feelings of anger—we too stand with the Savior. We show forth His love, which is the only power that can subdue the adversary and answer our accusers without accusing them in return. That is not weakness. *That is Christian courage.*

Through the years we learn that challenges to our faith are not new, and they aren’t likely to disappear soon. But *true disciples of Christ see opportunity in the midst of opposition.*

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Abinadi was bound and brought before the evil King Noah. Although the king vigorously opposed Abinadi and eventually sentenced him to death, Abinadi boldly taught the gospel and bore his testimony anyway. Because Abinadi took advantage of that opportunity, a priest named Alma was converted to the gospel and brought many souls unto Christ. The courage of Abinadi and Alma was Christian courage.

Experience shows that seasons of negative publicity about the Church can help accomplish the Lord’s purposes. In 1983 the First Presidency wrote to Church leaders, “Opposition may be in itself an opportunity. Among the continuing challenges faced by our missionaries is a lack of interest in religious matters and in our message. These criticisms create ... interest in the Church. ... This provides an opportunity [for members] to present the truth to those whose attention is thus directed toward us.”¹

We can take advantage of such opportunities in many ways: a kind letter to the editor, a conversation with a friend, a comment on a blog, or a reassuring word to one who has made a disparaging comment. We can answer with love those who have been influenced by misinformation and prejudice—who are “kept from the truth because they know not where to find it” ([D&C 123:12](#)). I assure you that to answer our accusers in this way is never weakness. *It is Christian courage in action.*

As we respond to others, each circumstance will be different. Fortunately, the Lord knows the hearts of our accusers and how we can most effectively respond to them. *As true disciples seek guidance from the Spirit, they receive inspiration tailored to each encounter. And in every encounter, true disciples respond in ways that invite the Spirit of the Lord.*

Paul reminded the Corinthians that his preaching was “not with the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” ([1 Corinthians 2:4](#)). Because that power resides in the Spirit of the Lord, we must never become contentious when we are discussing our faith. As almost every missionary learns,

Bible bashing always drives the Spirit away. The Savior has said, “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me” ([3 Nephi 11:29](#)). More regrettable than the Church being accused of not being Christian is when Church members react to such accusations in an un-Christlike way! May our conversations with others always be marked by the fruits of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance” ([Galatians 5:22–23](#)). To be meek, as defined in Webster’s dictionary, is “manifesting patience and longsuffering: enduring injury without resentment.”² Meekness is not weakness. It is a badge of Christian courage.

This is especially important in our interactions with members of other Christian denominations. Surely our Heavenly Father is saddened—and the devil laughs—when we contentiously debate doctrinal differences with our Christian neighbors.

This is not to suggest that we compromise our principles or dilute our beliefs. We cannot change the doctrines of the restored gospel, even if teaching and obeying them makes us unpopular in the eyes of the world. Yet even as we feel to speak the word of God with boldness, we must pray to be filled with the Holy Ghost (see [Acts 4:29, 31](#)). We should never confuse boldness with Satan’s counterfeit: overbearance (see [Alma 38:12](#)). True disciples speak with quiet confidence, not boastful pride.

As true disciples, our primary concern must be others’ welfare, not personal vindication. Questions and criticisms give us an opportunity to reach out to others and demonstrate that they matter to our Heavenly Father and to us. Our aim should be to help them understand the truth, not defend our egos or score points in a theological debate. Our heartfelt testimonies are the most powerful answer we can give our accusers. And such testimonies can only be borne in love and meekness. We should be like Edward Partridge, of whom the Lord said, “His heart is pure before me, for he is like unto Nathanael of old, in whom there is no guile” ([D&C 41:11](#)). To be guileless is to have a childlike innocence, to be slow to take offense and quick to forgive. These qualities are first learned in the home and family and can be practiced in all our relationships. To be guileless is to look for our own fault first. When accused, we should ask as the Savior’s Apostles did, “Lord, is it I?” ([Matthew 26:22](#)). If we listen to the answer given by the Spirit, we can, if needed, make corrections, apologize, seek forgiveness, and do better.

Without guile, *true disciples avoid being unduly judgmental of others’ views.* Many of us have cultivated strong friendships with those who are not members of our Church—schoolmates, colleagues at work, and friends and neighbors throughout the world. We need them, and they need us. As President Thomas S. Monson has taught, “Let us learn respect for others. . . . None of us lives alone—in our city, our nation, or our world.”³

As the Savior demonstrated with Herod, sometimes true disciples must show Christian courage by saying nothing at all. Once when I was golfing, I barely

brushed up against a large cholla cactus, which seems to shoot needles like a porcupine. Thorns from that plant stuck all over my clothing, even though I had barely touched the cactus plant. Some situations are like that plant: they can only injure us. In such instances, we are better off to keep our distance and simply walk away. As we do, some may try to provoke us and engage us in argument. In the Book of Mormon, we read about Lehonti and his men camped upon a mount. The traitorous Amalickiah urged Lehonti to “come down” and meet him in the valley. But when Lehonti left the high ground, he was poisoned “by degrees” until he died, and his army fell into Amalickiah’s hands (see [Alma 47](#)). By arguments and accusations, some people bait us to leave the high ground. The high ground is where the light is. It’s where we see the first light of morning and the last light in the evening. It is the safe ground. It is true and where knowledge is. Sometimes others want us to come down off the high ground and join them in a theological scrum in the mud. These few contentious individuals are set on picking religious fights, online or in person. We are always better staying on the higher ground of mutual respect and love.

In doing so, we follow the example of the prophet Nehemiah, who built a wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s enemies entreated him to meet them on the plain, where “they thought to do [him] mischief.” Unlike Lehonti, however, Nehemiah wisely refused their offer with this message: “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” ([Nehemiah 6:2–3](#)). We too have a great work to do, which will not be accomplished if we allow ourselves to stop and argue and be distracted. Instead we should muster Christian courage and move on. As we read in Psalms, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers” ([Psalm 37:1](#)).

Evil will always be with us in this world. Part of mortality’s great test is to be in the world without becoming like the world. In His Intercessory Prayer, the Savior asked His Heavenly Father, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” ([John 17:15](#)). But even as the Savior warned of persecution, He promised peace: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” ([John 14:27](#)). I testify that with the mantle of His peace upon us, the First Presidency’s promise will be fulfilled: “The opposition which may seem hard to bear will be a blessing to the kingdom of God upon the earth.”⁴

To my inquiring sister and all who seek to know how we should respond to our accusers, I reply, we *love* them. Whatever their race, creed, religion, or political persuasion, if we follow Christ and show forth His courage, we must love them. We do not feel we are *better than* they are. Rather, we desire with our love to show them a *better way*—the way of Jesus Christ. His way leads to the gate of baptism, the strait and narrow path of righteous living, and the temple of God. *He* is “the way, the truth, and the life” ([John 14:6](#)). Only through Him can we and all our brothers and sisters inherit the greatest gift we can receive—eternal life and eternal happiness. To help

them, to be an example for them, is not for the weak. It is for the strong. It is for you and me, Latter-day Saints who pay the price of discipleship by answering our accusers with Christian courage.

I conclude by making the testimony of Mormon my own: “Behold, I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I have been called of him to declare his word among his people, that they might have everlasting life” ([3 Nephi 5:13](#)). I bear my special witness of Him—that our lives can be everlasting because His love is everlasting. That we may share His eternal, unconditional love with our brothers and sisters everywhere, is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Call to Be Christlike

By Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

From a CES devotional address, “Israel, Israel, God Is Calling,” delivered at Dixie State University in St. George, Utah, on September 9, 2012. For the full address, go to lds.org/broadcasts.

God is calling to Israel in these latter days to be more Christlike and to be more holy than we now are in our determination to live the gospel and establish Zion.

In the history of Israel down through the ages, when things got too sinful or society became too secular or life with the Gentiles began undermining the moral code and commandments God had given, the children of the covenant would be sent fleeing into the wilderness to start all over and reestablish Zion.

In Old Testament times, Abraham, the father of the covenant, had to flee for his life from Chaldea—literally Babylonia—in his quest for a consecrated life in Canaan, which we now call the Holy Land (see [Abraham 2:3–4](#)). But it wasn’t many generations before the descendants of Abraham lost their Zion and were in bondage in far-off, pagan Egypt (see [Exodus 1:7–14](#)). So Moses had to be raised up to lead the children of promise into the wilderness again.

Not many centuries later, a story of special interest to us unfolded when one of those Israelite families, headed by a prophet named Lehi, was commanded to flee Jerusalem because, alas, Babylon was again at the door! (See [1 Nephi 2:2](#).) Little did they know that they were going to an entirely new continent to establish a whole new concept of Zion (see [1 Nephi 18:22–24](#)). And little did they know that such an exodus had already happened with a group of their forefathers called the Jaredites (see [Ether 6:5–13](#)).

It is of interest to all who celebrate the Restoration of the gospel that the colonization of America was born of a group fleeing their former homelands in order to worship as they wished. A distinguished scholar of the Puritan settlement in America described this experience as Christianity’s “errand into the wilderness”—the effort of modern

Israelites to free themselves of Old World godlessness and once again seek the ways of heaven in a new land.¹

I remind you of one last flight. It was that of our own Church, led by our own prophets, leading our own religious ancestors. With Joseph Smith being hounded through the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Missouri, and finally being murdered in Illinois, we were to see the latter-day reenactment of Israel's children again seeking a place of seclusion. President Brigham Young (1801–77), the American Moses, as he has been admiringly called, led the Saints to the valleys of the mountains as those foot-weary Saints sang:

We'll find the place which God for us prepared,
Far away in the West,
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid;
There the Saints will be blessed.²

Zion. The promised land. The New Jerusalem. For more than 4,000 years of covenantal history, this has been the pattern: Flee and seek. Run and settle. Escape Babylon. Build Zion's protective walls.

Until this, our day.

Build Zion Where You Are

One of the many unique characteristics of our dispensation is the changing nature of how we establish the kingdom of God on earth. This dispensation is a time of mighty, accelerated change. And one thing that has changed is that the Church of God will never again flee. It will never again leave Ur in order to leave Haran in order to leave Canaan in order to leave Jerusalem in order to leave England in order to leave Kirtland in order to leave Nauvoo in order to go who knows where.

No, as Brigham Young said for us all, "We have been kicked out of the frying-pan into the fire, out of the fire into the middle of the floor, and here we are and here we will stay."³

Of course, that statement became a statement for members of the Church all over the world. In these last days, in our dispensation, we have become mature enough to stop running. We have become mature enough to plant our feet and our families and our foundations in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people *permanently*. Zion is everywhere—wherever the Church is. And with that change, we no longer think of Zion as *where* we are going to live; we think of it as *how* we are going to live. To frame this new task, I draw upon three incidents.

Three Incidents and Three Lessons

1. A few years ago a young friend of mine—a returned missionary—was on one of the college basketball teams in Utah. He was a great young man and a very good ballplayer, but he wasn't playing as much as he had hoped he would. His particular talents and skills weren't exactly what his team needed at that stage of its development or his. That happens in athletics. So, with the full support and best wishes of his coaches and teammates, my young friend transferred to another school, where he hoped he might contribute a little more.

Things clicked at the new school, and my friend soon became a starter. And wouldn't you know it—the team's schedule had this young man returning to play against his former team in Salt Lake City.

The vitriolic abuse that poured out of the stands that night on this young man—a newlywed who paid his tithing, served in the elders quorum, gave charitable service to the youth in his community, and waited excitedly for a new baby coming to him and his wife—should not have been experienced by any human being anywhere, anytime, whatever his sport or university or whatever his personal decisions had been about either of them.

The coach of this visiting team, something of a legend in the profession, turned to him after a spectacular game and said: "What is going on here? You are the hometown boy who has made good. These are your people. These are your friends." But worst of all, he then said in total bewilderment, "Aren't most of these people members of your church?"

2. I was invited to speak at a stake single-adult devotional. As I entered the rear door of the stake center, a 30-something young woman entered the building at about the same time. Even in the crush of people moving toward the chapel, it was hard not to notice her. She had a couple of tattoos, a variety of ear and nose rings, spiky hair reflecting all the colors now available in snow cones, a skirt that was too high, and a blouse that was too low.

Some questions leapt to my mind: Was this woman a struggling soul not of our faith, who had been led—or even better, had been brought by someone—to this devotional under the guidance of the Lord to help her find the peace and the direction of the gospel she needed in her life? Or was she a member who had strayed from some of the hopes and standards the Church encourages for its members but who was still affiliating and had chosen to attend this Church activity that night?

3. While participating in the dedication of the Kansas City Missouri Temple, Sister Holland and I were hosted by Brother Isaac Freestone, a police officer by profession and a high priest in the Liberty Missouri Stake. In our conversations he told us that late one evening he was called to investigate a complaint in a particularly rough part

of the city. Over the roar of loud music and with the smell of marijuana in the air, he found one woman and several men drinking and profaning, all of them apparently totally oblivious to five little children—about two to eight years of age—huddled together in one room, trying to sleep on a filthy floor with no bed, no mattress, no pillows, no anything.

Brother Freestone looked in the kitchen cupboards and in the refrigerator to see if he could find a single can or carton or box of food of any kind—but he could find nothing. He said the dog barking in the backyard had more food than those children had.

In the mother’s bedroom he found a bare mattress, the only one in the house. He hunted until he found some sheets, put them on the mattress, and tucked all five children into the makeshift bed. Then, with tears in his eyes, he knelt, offered a prayer to Heavenly Father for their protection, and said good night.

As he arose and walked toward the door, one of the children jumped out of bed, ran to him, grabbed him by the hand, and pled, “Will you *please* adopt me?” With more tears in his eyes, Brother Freestone put the child back in bed, found the stoned mother (the men had long since fled), and said to her: “I will be back tomorrow, and heaven help you if some changes are not evident by the time I walk in this door. And there will be more changes after that. You have my word on it.”⁴

What do these three incidents have in common? They give three tiny, very different real-life examples of Babylon—one as silly as deplorable behavior at a basketball game, one more cultural and indicative of one-on-one challenges with those who live differently than we do, and one a very large and very serious matter.

Lesson 1: Never Check Your Religion at the Door

First, let’s finish the basketball incident. The day after the game, when there was some public reckoning and a call to repentance over the incident, one young man said, in effect: “Listen. We are talking about basketball here, not Sunday School. If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. We pay good money to see these games. We can act the way we want. We check our religion at the door.”

“We check our religion at the door”? Lesson number one for the establishment of Zion in the 21st century: You *never* check your religion at the door.

That kind of discipleship cannot be—it is not discipleship at all. As the prophet Alma taught, we are “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in” ([Mosiah 18:9](#))—*not* just some of the time, in a few places, or when our team has a big lead.

Whatever the situation or provocation or problem, no true disciple of Christ can check his or her religion at the door.

Lesson 2: Be Compassionate but Be Loyal to the Commandments

That leads me to the young woman at the devotional. However one would respond to her, the rule forever is that our behavior has to reflect our religious beliefs and our gospel commitments. Therefore, how we respond in any situation has to make things better, not worse. We can't act or react in such a way that we are guilty of a greater offense than, in this case, she is.

That doesn't mean we don't have opinions, we don't have standards, or we somehow completely disregard divinely mandated "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." But it does mean we have to live those standards and defend those commandments in a righteous way to the best of our ability, the way the Savior lived and defended them. And He always did what should have been done to make the situation better—from teaching the truth to forgiving sinners to cleansing the temple.

So with our new acquaintance, we start, above all, by remembering she is a daughter of God and of eternal worth. We start by remembering that she is someone's daughter. We start by being grateful that she is at a Church activity, not avoiding one. In short, we try to be at our best in this situation in a desire to help her be at her best.

We keep praying silently: What is the right thing to do here? What is the right thing to say? What *ultimately* will make this situation and her better? Asking these questions and really trying to do what the Savior would do is what I think He meant when He said, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" ([John 7:24](#)).

This Church can never dumb down its doctrine in response to social goodwill or political expediency or any other reason. It is only the high ground of revealed truth that gives us any footing on which to lift another who may feel troubled or forsaken. Our compassion and our love—fundamental characteristics and requirements of our Christianity—must *never* be interpreted as compromising the commandments. When we face such situations, it can be very challenging and confusing. Young people may ask, "Well, we don't believe we should live or behave in such and such a way, but why do we have to make other people do the same? Don't they have their free agency? Aren't we being self-righteous and judgmental, forcing our beliefs on others, demanding that *they* act in a certain way?"

In those situations you are going to have to explain sensitively why some principles are defended and *some* sins opposed *wherever they are found* because the issues and the laws involved are *not* just social or political but eternal in their consequence. And while not wishing to offend those who believe differently from us, we are even more anxious not to offend God.

It is a little like a teenager saying, "Now that I can drive, I know I am supposed to stop at a red light, but do we really have to be judgmental and try to get everyone else

to stop at red lights? Does *everyone* have to do what we do? Don't others have their agency? Must they behave as we do?" You then have to explain why, yes, we do hope *all* will stop at a red light. And you have to do this *without* demeaning those who transgress or who believe differently than we believe because, yes, they do have their moral agency.

There is a wide variety of beliefs in this world, and there is moral agency for all, but no one is entitled to act as if God is mute on these subjects or as if commandments matter only if there is public agreement over them. In the 21st century we cannot flee any longer. We are going to have to fight for laws and circumstances and environments that allow the free exercise of religion and our franchise in it. That is one way we can tolerate being in Babylon but not of it.

I know of no more important ability and no greater integrity for us to demonstrate in a world from which we cannot flee than to walk that careful path—taking a moral stand according to what God has declared and the laws He has given but doing it compassionately and with understanding and great charity.

Lesson 3: Use Gospel Values to Benefit Communities and Countries

Not many of us are going to be police officers or social service agents or judges sitting on a legal bench, but all of us should care for the welfare of others and the moral safety of our extended community. In speaking of the need for us to influence society beyond the walls of our own home, Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said:

“In addition to protecting our own families, we should be a source of light in protecting our communities. The Savior said, ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.’ ...

“In our increasingly unrighteous world, it is essential that values based on religious belief be [evident in] the public square. ...

“Religious faith is a store of light, knowledge, and wisdom and benefits society in a dramatic way.”⁵

If we don't take gospel blessings to our communities and our countries, we will never have enough policemen—there will never be enough Isaac Freestones—to enforce moral behavior even if it were enforceable. And it isn't. Those children in that home without food or clothing are sons and daughters of God. That mother, more culpable because she is older and should be more responsible, is also a daughter of God. Such situations may require tough love in formal, even legal, ways, but we must try to help when and where we can because we are not checking our religion at the door, even as pathetic and irresponsible as some doors are.

No, we can't do everything, but we can do something. And in answer to God's call, the children of Israel are the ones to do it—not to flee Babylon this time but to attack it. Without being naive about it, we can live our religion so broadly and unfailingly that we find all kinds of opportunities to help families, bless neighbors, and protect others, including the rising generation.

Reflect Your Love of Jesus Christ

Latter-day Saints are called upon to be the leaven in the loaf, the salt that never loses its savor, the light set upon a hill never to be hidden under a bushel. So start presenting!

If we do right and talk right and reach out generously with our words and our deeds, then, when the Savior cuts short His work in righteousness, says time is no more in this last dispensation, and comes in His glory, He will find us doing our best, trying to live the gospel, trying to improve our lives and our Church and our society the best way we can.

When He comes, I *so* want to be caught living the gospel. I want to be surprised right in the act of spreading the faith and doing something good. I want the Savior to say to me: “Jeffrey, I recognize you not by your title but by your life, the way you are trying to live and the standards you are trying to defend. I see the integrity of your heart. I know you have tried to make things better first and foremost by being better yourself and then by declaring my word and defending my gospel to others in the most compassionate way you could.”

He will certainly add: “I know you weren't always successful with your own sins and with the circumstances of others, but I believe you honestly tried. I believe in your heart you truly loved me.”

I want to have something like that encounter someday as I want nothing else in this mortal life. And I want it for you. I want it for us all. “Israel, Israel, God is calling”⁶—calling us to live the gospel of Jesus Christ personally in small ways and large ways, to reach out to those who may not look or dress or behave quite as we do, and then (where we can) to go beyond that to serve in the widest community we can address. I love the Lord Jesus Christ, whose servant I am trying to be. And I love our Heavenly Father, who cared enough to give Him to us. Regarding that gift, I know that God is calling to Israel in these latter days to be more Christlike and to be more holy than we now are in our determination to live the gospel and establish Zion. I also know that He will give us the strength and the holiness to be true disciples if we plead for them.

Sin and Suffering

By Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

From a fireside address given at Brigham Young University, 5 August 1990.

We are concerned that some people have a very lax attitude toward sin. Some young people say, “I’ll just have a few free ones, and then I’ll repent quickly and go on a mission [or get married in the temple], and everything will be all right.”

Young people are not the only ones with a lax attitude toward sin. We know of mature members of the Church who commit serious transgressions knowingly and deliberately, relying on their supposed ability to repent speedily and be “as good as new.” Such persons want the present convenience or enjoyment of sin and the future effects of righteousness, in that order. They want to experience the sin but avoid its effects.

The Book of Mormon describes such persons: “And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.” ([2 Ne. 28:8](#).)

The attitudes and positions of such persons are exactly opposite those of the Savior, who never experienced sin, but whose atoning sacrifice subjected him to all of its anguish.

To minimize misunderstanding, I will give some illustrations of the kinds of things I mean when I refer to sin or transgression. In its widest application, *sin* includes every irregularity of behavior, every source of uncleanness. But many things that are sins under this widest definition are just grains of sand that do not block our progress on the path toward eternal life. The *sins* I refer to, however, are the serious transgressions, the boulder-size obstacles that block the path and cannot be removed without prolonged repentance.

During one week last month, a knowledgeable observer listed some of the crimes reported in a Utah newspaper and then struck off those where the accused was not a member of the Church. The remaining list provides illustrations of the kinds of sins in which Latter-day Saints are involved:

- Fraud

- Sale of illegal drugs
- Aggravated assault
- Aggravated kidnapping
- Sexual abuse
- A professional having sexual relations with a client

Church disciplinary records make us aware of other serious transgressions rarely reported in the press: adultery, fornication, polygamy, and apostasy.

To the people of this continent, the Savior spoke of the final judgment, when he would “be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages.” ([3 Ne. 24:5.](#)) Those are some illustrations of serious transgressions. Others could be given.

Basic Principles

As background, let us review some familiar principles.

1. One of the principal purposes of this life is for God to test his children, to see whether we will keep his commandments. (See [Abr. 3:25.](#))
2. Therefore, this life is “a probationary time,” as Alma called it, “a time to repent and serve God.” ([Alma 42:4.](#))
3. The breaking of a commandment of God is sin.
4. In the final judgment, we will stand before God to be judged according to our works. (See [Alma 11:41](#); [3 Ne. 26:4](#); [D&C 19:3.](#))
5. For every sin there is “a punishment affixed.” ([Alma 42:18](#); see also [Amos 3:1–2.](#))
6. Those who have broken the commandments of God and have not repented in this life will “stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God.” ([Jacob 6:9.](#)) They will have “an awful view of their own guilt and abominations.” ([Mosiah 3:25.](#)) The scriptures describe this as “a lively sense of ... guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.” ([Mosiah 2:38.](#))
7. The awful demands of justice upon those who have violated the laws of God, the “state of misery and endless torment” ([Mosiah 3:25](#)) described in these scriptures, can be mediated by the atonement of Jesus Christ. This is the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What do these basic principles mean in the case of a lax Latter-day Saint who deliberately commits a serious transgression in the expectation that he or she will

enjoy the effects or benefits of the sin now and then make a speedy and relatively painless repentance and soon be as good as new?

The Book of Mormon teaches that the Savior does not redeem men “in their sins.” ([Alma 11:34, 36, 37](#); [Hel. 5:10](#).) “The wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death.” ([Alma 11:41](#).) The Savior came to redeem men “*from* their sins because of repentance” and upon the “conditions of repentance.” ([Hel. 5:11](#); italics added.)

One of those conditions of repentance is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, including faith in, and reliance upon, his atoning sacrifice. As Amulek taught: “He that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.” ([Alma 34:16](#).)

Personal Suffering for Sin

Another condition of repentance is suffering or punishment for the sin. In the words of Alma, “Repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment.” ([Alma 42:16](#).)

Where there has been sin, there must be suffering.

Perhaps the greatest statement of this principle in all the scriptures is the revelation the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith in March 1830. (See [D&C 19](#).) Here the Lord reminds us of “the great day of judgment” when all will be judged according to their works. ([D&C 19:3](#).) He explains that the “endless” or “eternal” torment or punishment that comes from sin is not punishment without end. It is the punishment of God, who is endless and eternal. (See [D&C 19:10–12](#).)

In this setting, the Savior of the world commands us to repent and keep his commandments. “Repent,” he commands, “lest ... your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

“Which 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.

“Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken.” ([D&C 19:15–20](#).)

As we consider these sobering words of the Savior, we realize that there is something very peculiar about the state of mind or “heart” of the person who deliberately commits sin in the expectation that he or she will speedily and comfortably repent and continue as a servant of God, preaching repentance and asking others to come unto Christ. I will illustrate the peculiarity of this attitude with an analogy.

The mother of a large family is burdened almost past the point of endurance. Every waking hour is spent serving the needs of her large family: meals, mending, transporting, counseling, caring for those who are sick, comforting those who mourn, and administering to every other need a mother can understand. She has committed herself to do everything within her power to serve the needs of her children.

She is giving her life for them. The children know she will attempt to carry whatever load is placed upon her. Most of them are considerate and do all they can to minimize her burden. But some, knowing of her willingness to serve, heedlessly pile more and more tasks on the weary mother. “Don’t worry about it” is their attitude; “she’ll carry it. She said she would. Drop it on Mom, and we’ll just have a good time.”

In this analogy, I am obviously likening the heedless children to those who sin in the expectation that someone else will bear the burden of suffering. The one who bears the burden is our Savior.

Am I suggesting that the benefits of the Atonement are not available for the person who heedlessly sins? Of course not. But I am suggesting that there is a relationship between sin and suffering that is not understood by people who knowingly sin in the expectation that all the burden of suffering will be borne by Another, that the sin is all theirs but that the suffering is all His. That is not the way. Repentance, which is an assured passage to an eternal destination, is nevertheless not a free ride.

Let us recall two scriptures: (1) “Repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment” ([Alma 42:16](#)); and (2) the Savior said that he had suffered these things for all, “that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” ([D&C 19:16–17](#)).

This obviously means that the unrepentant transgressor must suffer for his own sins. Does it also mean that a person who repents does not need to suffer at all because the entire punishment is borne by the Savior? That cannot be the meaning because it would be inconsistent with the Savior’s other teachings. What is meant is that the person who repents does not need to suffer “even as” the Savior suffered for that sin. Sinners who are repenting will experience some suffering, but because of their

repentance and the Atonement, they will not experience the full, “exquisite” extent of eternal torment the Savior suffered.

President Spencer W. Kimball, who gave such comprehensive teachings on repentance and forgiveness, said that personal suffering “is a very important part of repentance. One has not begun to repent until he has suffered intensely for his sins. ... If a person hasn’t suffered, he hasn’t repented.” (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, pp. 88, 99.)

The Savior taught this principle when he said that his atoning sacrifice was for “all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.” ([2 Ne. 2:7](#).) The repentant sinner who comes to Christ with a broken heart and a contrite spirit has been through a process of personal pain and suffering for sin. He understands the meaning of Alma’s statement that “none but the truly penitent are saved.” ([Alma 42:24](#).)

Bruce C. Hafen has described how some people look “for shortcuts [to repentance] and easy answers, thinking that quick confessions or breezy apologies alone are enough.” (*The Broken Heart*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989, p. 150.)

President Kimball said, “Very frequently people think they have repented and are worthy of forgiveness when all they have done is to express sorrow or regret at the unfortunate happening.” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p. 87.) There is a big difference between the “godly sorrow [that] worketh repentance” ([2 Cor. 7:10](#)), which involves personal suffering, and the easy and relatively painless sorrow for being caught, or the misplaced sorrow Mormon described as “the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” ([Morm. 2:13](#)). Alma the Younger certainly understood that easy and painless sorrow was not a sufficient basis for repentance. His experience, related in detail in the Book of Mormon, is our best scriptural illustration of the fact that the process of repentance is filled with personal suffering for sin.

Alma said that after he was stopped in his wicked course, he was “in the darkest abyss” ([Mosiah 27:29](#)), “racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

“Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell.” ([Alma 36:12–13](#).)

He tells how “the very thought of coming into the presence of ... God did rack [his] soul with inexpressible horror.” ([Alma 36:14](#).) He speaks of being “harrowed up by the memory of [his] many sins.” ([Alma 36:17](#).) After three days and three nights of what he called “the most bitter pain and anguish of soul,” he cried out to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy and received “a remission of [his] sins.” ([Alma 38:8](#).)

All of our personal experience confirms the fact that we must endure personal suffering in the process of repentance—and for serious transgressions, that suffering can be severe and prolonged.

In the August 1990 issue of the *Ensign*, a repenting transgressor who was excommunicated describes his personal feelings: he speaks of “tearful hours,” “wish[ing] to be covered by a million mountains,” “crushed by the shame,” “dark blackness,” and “anguish . . . as wide as eternity.” (Pp. 22–24.)

Why is it necessary for us to suffer on the way to repentance for serious transgressions? We tend to think of the results of repentance as simply cleansing us from sin. But that is an incomplete view of the matter. A person who sins is like a tree that bends easily in the wind. On a windy and rainy day, the tree bends so deeply against the ground that the leaves become soiled with mud, like sin. If we focus only on cleaning the leaves, the weakness in the tree that allowed it to bend and soil its leaves may remain. Similarly, a person who is merely sorry to be soiled by sin will sin again in the next high wind. The susceptibility to repetition continues until the tree has been strengthened.

When a person has gone through the process that results in what the scriptures call a broken heart and a contrite spirit, the Savior does more than cleanse that person from sin. He also gives him or her new strength. That strengthening is essential for us to realize the purpose of the cleansing, which is to return to our Heavenly Father. To be admitted to his presence, we must be more than clean. We must also be changed from a morally weak person who has sinned into a strong person with the spiritual stature to dwell in the presence of God. We must, as the scripture says, “[become] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord.” ([Mosiah 3:19](#).) This is what the scripture means in its explanation that a person who has repented of his sins will “forsake them.” ([D&C 58:43](#).) Forsaking sins is more than resolving not to repeat them. Forsaking involves a fundamental change in the individual.

King Benjamin and Alma both speak of a mighty change of heart. King Benjamin’s congregation described that mighty change by saying that they had “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.” ([Mosiah 5:2](#).) Alma illustrated that change of heart when he described a people who “awoke unto God,” “put their trust in” him, and were “faithful until the end.” ([Alma 5:7, 13](#).) He challenged others to “look forward with an eye of faith” to the time when we will “stand before God to be judged” according to our deeds. ([Alma 5:15](#).) Persons who have had that kind of change in their hearts have attained the strength and stature to dwell with God. That is what we call being saved.

Heed the Warnings

Some Latter-day Saints who wrongly think repentance is easy maintain that a person is better off after he has sinned and repented. “Get a little experience with sin,” one

argument goes, “and then you will be better able to counsel and sympathize with others. You can always repent.”

I plead with you, my brothers and sisters, my young friends and my older friends, avoid transgression! The idea that one can deliberately sin and easily repent or that one is better off after sinning and repenting are devilish lies of the adversary. Would anyone seriously contend that it is better to learn firsthand that a certain blow will break a bone or a certain mixture of chemicals will explode and burn off our skin? Are we better off after we have sustained and been scarred from such injuries? It is obviously better to heed the warnings of wise persons who know the effects of certain traumas on our bodies.

Just as we can benefit from someone else’s experience in matters such as these, we can also benefit from the warnings contained in the commandments of God. We don’t have to have personal experience with the effects of serious transgressions to know that they are injurious to our souls and destructive of our eternal welfare.

Some years ago, one of our sons asked me why it wasn’t a good idea to try alcohol or tobacco to see what they were like. He knew about the Word of Wisdom, and he also knew the health effects of these substances, but he was questioning why he shouldn’t just try them out for himself. I replied that if he wanted to try something out, he ought to go to a barnyard and eat a little manure. He recoiled in horror. “Ooh, that’s gross,” he reacted.

“I’m glad you think so,” I said, “but why don’t you just try it out so you will know for yourself? While you’re proposing to try one thing that you know is not good for you, why don’t you apply that principle to some others?” That illustration of the silliness of “trying it out for yourself” proved persuasive for one sixteen-year-old.

When we are young, we sometimes behave as if there were no tomorrow. When we are young, it is easy to forget that we will grow up, marry, raise a family, and—note this significant point—continue to associate with some of the same people who are witnesses to, or participants in, our teenage pranks or transgressions.

Young men, the girl you are dating may be your wife in a few years, but probably she will not. Possibly she will turn out to be the wife of your bishop or your stake president. Young women, the fellow you are dating may turn out to be your husband, but more likely he will not. He may turn out to be the husband of your sister or your best friend. He may even be a counselor in your bishopric or an employee you supervise at your place of work. Conduct your life today so your tomorrows are not burdened with bad or embarrassing memories.

“He Who Has Repented”

Most of what I have said here has been addressed to persons who think that repentance is easy. At the opposite extreme are those who think that repentance is too hard. Those souls are so tenderhearted and conscientious that they see sin everywhere in their own lives, and they despair of ever being able to be clean. A call for repentance that is clear enough and loud enough to encourage reformation for the lax can produce paralyzing discouragement for the conscientious. This is a common problem. We address a diverse audience each time we speak, and we are never free from the reality that a doctrinal underdose for some is an overdose for others.

I will conclude with a message of hope that is true for all, but especially needed for those who think that repentance is too hard.

Repentance is a continuing process, needed by all because “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” ([Rom. 3:23.](#)) Repentance is possible, and then forgiveness is certain.

Elder Spencer W. Kimball said: “Sometimes ... when a repentant one looks back and sees the ugliness, the loathsomeness of the transgression, he is almost overwhelmed and wonders, ‘Can the Lord ever forgive me? Can I ever forgive myself?’ But when one reaches the depths of despondency and feels the hopelessness of his position, and when he cries out to God for mercy in helplessness but in faith, there comes a still, small, but penetrating voice whispering to his soul, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee.’” (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969, p. 344.)

When this happens, how precious the promise that God will take “away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.” ([Alma 24:10.](#))

How comforting the promise that “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” ([Isa. 1:18.](#))

How glorious God’s own promise that “he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.” ([D&C 58:42](#); see also [Jer. 31:34](#); [Heb. 8:12.](#))

These things are true. I testify of Jesus Christ, who made it all possible and who gave us the conditions of repentance and the pathway to perfection provided by his atoning sacrifice.

Emotions and Feelings, by Doug Fryer

Christ in Gethsemane, by William Henry Margetson

Micah’s Thoughts:

I love the summary statement- his contrasting of confident vs apologetic is exactly why I have issues with and would never call myself an “apologist” for the Church of Jesus of Latter-day

Saints, for the doctrine etc. Apologists refer to themselves as one “who speaks or writes in defense of someone or something else.”

“We don’t need to defend the doctrine. We need to declare it. In the simplicity of the doctrine there’s nothing to defend. It stands for itself. Others may choose to reject it but our responsibility is to declare it, do our best to explain it, but we never need to be on the defensive” Elder Bednar (Face to Face, September 2021).

I believe when we become apologetic, when we become defensive, when we become an apologist we acknowledge our lack of confidence that the doctrine, the Lord’s light, etc. has the ability to stand on its own.

Going into his talk, people should realize he has 50 references. After this talk was given there was a fireside that he did that was being passed around on Discord so I watched that as well. After watching it I said, “this man reads Hugh Nibley”. Breaking this talk down, I realize that reference #4 is Hugh Nibley.

I want to take a moment to talk about this simple line “In the end we will therefore reap what our lifelong choices have sown.” This is a subject that has been hitting me a lot recently and really hit home again this Sunday listening to our High Councilman speak. These are the scriptures that he referenced here:

Doctrine and Covenants 6:33

33 Fear not to do good, my sons, for whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap; therefore, if ye sow good ye shall also reap good for your reward.

2 Corinthians 9:6

6 But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

When 99% of members read these scriptures it gives peace to the hearts of the righteous but far too often we don’t expect or realize or teach that the reason why it gives peace to the righteous is because we live in a world in which we call the proud happy, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered (3 Nephi 24:15) and those who have feared the Lord, keeping his ordinances and walking mournfully before the Lord can see this and these scriptures give peace that the Lord will make all things right. “But Micah, we teach that all the time in the Church, what are you talking about?!” That my friend, wasn’t my point. My point was this, what makes things fair in the next life? The Lord answered this in the parable of the beggar Lazarus.

Luke 16:19-26

19 ¶ There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

What makes things fair is not simply the righteous being rewarded, it is the wicked being punished. It is those who have sown sour grapes having to drink their own sour juice.

I listened to a full-grown man today cry over the pulpit because he was able to do the temple work for his grandparents who died right before COVID hit. He was so glad that "his family can be together forever". Nobody who had a real understanding of "you reap what you sow" would ever spew such nonsense. President Nelson not even three years ago shared the story of a man who said he didn't need to do anything in this life because his loved ones would simply do the temple work for him when he died. President Nelson reminded us "the temple is for the living and for those who died who had not the opportunity." The doctrine of "you reap what you sow" is a doctrine that is sweet in the mouth but bitter in the belly. Do we take "our lifelong choices that we are sowing" seriously? When we teach of exaltation without repentance we show just how unserious or insignificant we really believe our actions are.

His line "The Savior's commandments, if not ignored altogether, have been rationalized into meaninglessness by many in today's world" made me think of the last Approaching Zion chapter in which Hugh Nibley wrote, "A religion to be embraced by large segments of humanity must be before all else capable of simplification to the point of nullity. ... to be blessed [by such] one must be simple-minded even to the point of near idiocy... Why bother with this hopelessly unpopular doctrine? Because there are always some who do accept it... [and] For their sake it [is] worth it."

We of Zion or Bust! are teaching the "inconvenient truths" and will be often dismissed, but we need to remember so was the Savior and so are all righteous men and women who fear God. Weak and conniving souls will continue to take counsel on how they might entangle us and as Hugh Nibley said, most will reject it, but some will accept it, repent and save their souls, and for them it will be worth it.

"...God will justify a little sin because He loves us so much" is one of my favorite things I have heard spoken over the General Conference pulpit in my lifetime. I love how he ends this section reminding us of all the things the Lord has warned us of. Something that we should all remember is that the Lord loves effort and that when speaking of sins of weakness the Lord always show compassion but sins of rebellion are different. What is the only time we have recorded of the Savior's righteous anger? What were the cases in which the Savior's teachings the most poignant in their delivery? The only time the Savior we have recorded getting visibly upset was with

people making money at the temple in which the Savior threw over the tables in disgust “ye have made my Father’s house a den of thieves.” Priestcraft. The time the Savior got the most upset of priestcraft, people making money off of God- selling God. They were not using their priesthood, they were taking advantage of people religiously to make a buck. That is what they were doing. Period. The most aggressive things the Savior ever taught in which he said “it would be better if you had not been born- that a millstone be hung around your neck and that ye be cast into the depths of the sea” than to do this thing. And what was the thing? To teach false doctrine, to hurt the “young ones in the gospel” and cause them to die spiritually. Joseph Smith echoes that same doctrine, “Do Not Betray the Brethren- O ye Twelve! and all Saints! profit by this important Key—that in all your trials, troubles, temptations, afflictions, bonds, imprisonments and death, see to it, that you do not betray heaven; that you do not betray Jesus Christ; that you do not betray the brethren; that you do not betray the revelations of God, whether in the Bible, Book of Mormon, or Doctrine and Covenants, or any other that ever was or ever will be given and revealed unto man in this world or that which is to come. Yea, in all your kicking and floundering, see to it that you do not this thing, lest innocent blood be found upon your skirts, and you go down to hell. All other sins are not to be compared to sinning against the Holy Ghost, and proving a traitor to the brethren.” (TPJS p. 156)

In conclusion I would echo my warning do not heap to yourself teachers that spin unto you fables so that you can avoid the truth. Do not give them of your time or substance and if this is you personally, I beg you to stop right now so as not to risk even the remote possibility of becoming a son of perdition yourself.

Helaman 13:24-29

24 Yea, wo unto this people, because of this time which has arrived, that ye do cast out the prophets, and do mock them, and cast stones at them, and do slay them, and do all manner of iniquity unto them, even as they did of old time.

25 And now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them, and cast them out.

26 Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.

27 But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.

28 Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him.

29 O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind guides? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light?

Section II

So what about us? Should we be intimidated or afraid? Should we live our religion at periscope depth? Surely not! With faith in Christ, we need not fear the reproach of men or be afraid of their revilings.¹⁶ With the Savior at the helm and living prophets to lead and guide us, “who can be against us?”¹⁷ Let us be confident, not apologetic, valiant, not timid, faithful, not fearful as we hold up the Lord’s light in these last days.¹⁸

The Savior made clear that “whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father. ... But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father.”¹⁹

Consequently, while some would prefer a God who comes without commandments, let us boldly testify, in the words of Elder D. Todd Christofferson, that “a God who makes no demands is the functional equivalent of a God who does not exist.”²⁰

While some would prefer to be selective in the commandments they follow, let us joyfully accept the Savior’s invitation to “live by *every* word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God.”²¹ While many believe the Lord and His Church condone doing “whatsoever [our] heart desireth,”²² let us valiantly proclaim that it is wrong to “follow a multitude to do evil,”²³ because “crowds cannot make right what God has declared to be wrong.”²⁴ “O remember, remember ... how strict [yet liberating] are the commandments of God.”²⁵ Teaching them clearly may at times be seen as an act of intolerance. Let us therefore respectfully demonstrate that it is not only possible but essential to love a child of God who embraces beliefs different from our own.

We can accept and respect others without endorsing their beliefs or actions that do not align with the Lord’s will. There is no need to sacrifice truth on the altar of agreeableness and social desirability.

Josline’s Thoughts:

Elder Klebingat in his talk refers to 2 Nephi 8:7 which reads

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart I have written my law, fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

This is to emphasize as followers of Christ we should not be afraid of what the world can do to us. I am so in agreement with that, whether we have people in our lives that revile against us, it shouldn’t matter. We are not here to gain reputation from the world. To me any reputation from the world is a disgrace if we are true followers of Christ. They have done worse to our Savior, and He endured it, we are not better than He, we are no better than the criminal who was on the cross next to Him. He did not deserve for people to spit on Him, they slapped His face, ripped off His clothes, tortured Him and hit Him with stripes and the worse is the magnitude of His anguish in the garden of Gethsemane, as He knew there will be many that will reject Him, His sacrifice will mean nothing to them and they would continue to rebel against Him. He sweated blood, He

didn't want to suffer, but because He loved us, and most of all He Loved and wanted to obey His Father, so He accepted to suffer, to satisfy the demand of justice in order for us to be reconciled with God, to have the ability to repent, obtain forgiveness and gain eternal life. In our rebellions, we do worse than slapping Him on the face than those soldiers who persecuted him.

As Disciples of Christ we need to be bold in declaring His gospel to the world, to show our appreciation to Him. Fear of men is synonymous to rejecting the Lord's Gospel. Many Disciples of Christ in old and new dispensations suffered, denied themselves of all worldly possessions and even were martyred in many occasions for the Gospel.

When the Prophet Joseph Smith was suffering for the Gospel's sake, This is what the Lord told him:

D&C 122:9

9 Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever

"Fear Not" these are words of encouragement for those who are true followers of Christ they have great desires to share what they know to be true to the world. They want to teach His Gospel with all their hearts. If God has put in our hearts to share the gospel with others and we heed that prompting, it's because we want to show our love for our Savior by being obedient.

On the church website love definition is deep devotion and affection

Love for God includes devotion, adoration, reverence, tenderness, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, grace, service, gratitude, kindness. The greatest example of God's love for His children is found in the infinite Atonement of Jesus Christ.

When we share the Gospel with others, it is because we also love God's Children, we want to feed His sheep as He has asked Peter if you love me feed my sheep. We want them to partake the goodness of the joy we receive from His words

John 21:

15 ¶ So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

We also want to teach others because it is a commandment, if we refuse, God will withhold His blessings from us as punishment, disobeying His commandment is a way to show Him that we don't value His words, it doesn't matter to us. If we are afraid to share what we are taught with others because we value their friendship and worried about what they would think of us, it

becomes idolatry, we are worshiping our friends and family more than God, thereby deny the divinity and power of God Who is our creator. He said that we should not have any other God before Him. We should recognize God's power in our lives and all the miracles He had performed in the present and in the past. Why is then that we fear friends and family more than God Himself? Men are nothing without God, just empty shells whatever we do is because of Him. Why do we always think we know better? As long as we are obeying the Lord's commandments, there is nothing significant they can do to our soul. Obedience is the first law of Heaven in that, God is testing us to see if we truly love Him as we say we do. There is no point in going to church if we are not willing to heed His Voice in all things. The greatest commandment Said Jesus is to Love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

In John 14:

"21. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

"23. If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Elder Klebingat also refers to

3 Nephi 18:24

24 Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do. Behold ye see that I have prayed unto the Father, and ye all have witnessed.

And

Matthew 10:32–33

32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

We Are Disciples of Christ, we are witnesses to His Goodness, We need to confess His name as the one who has come as the Messiah of the world and will come in the great and dreadful day to claim those that are His, and burn the tares, those that are the proud and the rebellious of the

world. So we must hold our light high and courageously to warn the world, we should not be silent.

Elder Klebingat continues by quoting Elder D. Todd Christofferson saying

Free Forever, to Act for Themselves

October 2014 general conference

Misunderstanding God's justice and mercy is one thing; denying God's existence or supremacy is another, but either will result in our achieving less—sometimes far less—than our full, divine potential. A God who makes no demands is the functional equivalent of a God who does not exist. A world without God, the living God who establishes moral laws to govern and perfect His children, is also a world without ultimate truth or justice. It is a world where moral relativism reigns supreme.

God's love for us is exactly the reason why He gave us laws to follow, so we can get more freedom from the tight grip of Satan who would bind us in infinite misery, he is enticing his victims with the worldly treasures then trap them once they fell for those things and when that happens, he won't let go. It is harder to give up Babylon than when entered into it

Elder L. Tom Perry, from Obedience to Law is Liberty:

“We must not pick and choose which commandments we think are important to keep but acknowledge all of God's commandments, we must stand firm and steadfast, having perfect confidence in the Lord's consistency and perfect trust in His promises.”

[Face the Future with Faith \(churchofjesuschrist.org\)](http://churchofjesuschrist.org) President Nelson

Teach of faith to keep *all* the commandments of God, knowing that they are given to bless His children and bring them joy.⁴ Warn them that they will encounter people who pick which commandments they will keep and ignore others that they choose to break. I call this the cafeteria approach to obedience. This practice of picking and choosing will not work. It will lead to misery. To prepare to meet God, one keeps *all* of His commandments. It takes faith to obey them, and keeping His commandments will strengthen that faith.

Obedience allows God's blessings to flow without constraint. He will bless His obedient children with freedom from bondage and misery. And He will bless them with more light. For example, one keeps the Word of Wisdom knowing that obedience will not only bring freedom from addiction, but it will also add blessings of wisdom and treasures of knowledge.⁵

Section Six 1843-44, p.306

"Add to your knowledge, temperance." As Paul said he had to become all things to all men, that he might thereby save some, so must the elders of the last days do; and, being sent out to preach the Gospel and warn the world of the judgments to come, we are sure, when they teach as directed by the Spirit, according to the revelations of Jesus Christ, that they will preach the truth and prosper without complaint. Thus we have no new commandment to give, but admonish elders and members to live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God, lest they come short of the glory that is reserved for the faithful. (May 22, 1843.) DHC 5:404.

Continuing with Elder Klebingat talk referencing

Doctrine and Covenants 98:11

11 And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God.

While many believe the Lord and His Church condone doing “whatsoever [our] heart desireth,”²²

He also refers to

Helaman 13:27

27 But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.

And

Exodus 23:2

2 ¶ Thou shalt not follow a multitude to *do* evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest *judgment*:

This is about priescraft, those who are teaching in a way to lead others to hell. We have been warned in the scriptures of those who will be clothes in sheep clothing to lead the children of God astray. We are living it now; it's not in the future. We do have those who are broadcasting with no reservation telling people to disobey the prophet of God. Yet many are heeding those voices when the scriptures specifically warned us about those wolves. There is no other way to obtain salvation and exaltation then through the priesthood of God and that is through His prophet, whom, He will always justify, unless the church of God is no longer on this earth, and

we are damned. Following our own way or any other apostates, is to deny ourselves the power that would bind us to Christ, cutting ourselves from the only link that can lead us to Him.

Apostates Excluded from Fellowship
Section Two 1834-37, p.66

Our Lord said, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." And again, many are called, but few are chosen. Paul said to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, after he had labored three years with them, that he knew that some of their own number would turn away from the faith, and seek to lead away disciples after them. None, we presume, in this generation will pretend that he has the experience of Paul in building up the Church of Christ and yet, after his departure from the Church at Ephesus, many, even of the elders turned away from the truth; and what is almost always the case, sought to lead away disciples after them. Strange as it may appear at first thought, yet it is no less strange than true, that notwithstanding all the professed determination to live godly, apostates after turning from the faith of Christ, unless they have speedily repented, have sooner or later fallen into the snares of the wicked one, and have been left destitute of the Spirit of God, to manifest their wickedness in the eyes of multitudes. From apostates the faithful have received the severest persecutions.

This tells us that the worse persecution of the saints of God will come from the apostates, and if any of us want to follow them the blood of the saints will be in your hands as well as it will be in their hands, even if we have not participated in the acts we will be one of those who condone those type of teachings and are taking part in preparing the ground that leadsto the persecution of the saints. As elder Klebingat said we are the ones to courageously raise our voices to proclaim truth even if the world is opposed to it.

He also quoted

Neil A Maxwell- title Answer me"

Why do some of our youth risk engaging in ritual prodigalism, intending to spend a season rebelling and acting out in Babylon and succumbing to that devilishly democratic "everybody does it"? Crowds cannot make right what God has declared to be wrong. Though planning to return later, many such stragglers find that alcohol, drugs, and pornography will not let go easily. Babylon does not give exit permits gladly. It is an ironic implementation of that ancient boast, "One soul shall not be lost." (Moses 4:1.)

The philosophy of ritual prodigalism is "eat, drink, and be merry, ... [and] God will beat us with a few stripes." This is a cynical and shallow view of God, of self, and of life. God never can justify us "in committing a little sin." (2 Ne. 28:8.) He is the God of the universe, not some night-court judge with whom we can haggle and plea bargain!

He also quoted

Alma 37:13

13 O remember, remember, my son Helaman, how strict are the commandments of God. And he said: If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land—but if ye keep not his commandments ye shall be cut off from his presence.

He emphasized that we can respectfully love others without endorsing their beliefs. Many like the saying “do not judge” which means to them that we should accept others as they are. Yes we love them, true, we wouldn’t want any harm to come to them that is the reason we want to warn them of their errors so they can repent. We cannot in good conscience accept people’s behaviors without telling them of their sins, that’s what is called hypocrite. If we can’t and they won’t accept any righteous judgments then we stay away from them, plain and simple.

As Elder Klebingat said “There is no need to sacrifice truth on the altar of agreeableness and social desirability”

I stole the post of Daniel Fletcher on Discord from

Leviticus 19:15

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

Our friends/family may not like us when we tactfully point out or warn them of things that they do that are opposite to our beliefs, but it is to our condemnation if we stay silent or condone what we know to be evil. We must choose. To know or to discern good from evil we must seek knowledge from the scriptures and listen to our prophet.

Micah’s Thoughts:

I love the scriptures he references here because it absolutely obliterates “preach the gospel...and open your mouth when you have to”, the concept being that we are to use our example for the bulk if not the entirety of missionary work before men.

Matthew 10:27

27 What I tell you in darkness, ***that speak ye in light***: and what ye hear in the ear, ***that preach ye upon the housetops***.

Who can doubt what the Lord is really saying here? He is saying “open your mouth and speak, preach upon the rooftops, keep not silence!”

Isaiah 62:6-7

6 I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence,

7 And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make [New] Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

And then the Lord answers those, “but Lord I am too scared to open my mouth! I’m too scared to confess thee openly! Can’t my example and temple work be enough?”

Matthew 10:32-33

32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

But then the Lord gets told, “But Lord! That will make me so unpopular! My friends and family will hate me! Don’t we want to be friends with everyone? Isn’t unity our greatest strength?!”
And the Lord continues,

Matthew 10:34-40

34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

36 And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.

37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

40 ¶ He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Another good quote to add to the following paragraph to the Elder D. Todd Christofferson quote is from Joseph Smith when he said “a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has the power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.”

The rest of what he has here is so good that I have nothing to add to or expand upon, he cut all the fat away from this with precision. There were over a half dozen references in this section alone and what he shares here can simply stand on it own; I’ll just simply add an “amen” and share my testimony that I know what he says here is true.

Section III

Zion and Babylon are incompatible. “No man can serve two masters.”²⁶ Let’s all remember the Savior’s penetrating question, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do *not* the things which I say?”²⁷

Let us demonstrate our love for the Lord through wholehearted, voluntary obedience.

If you feel caught between your discipleship and the world, please remember that your loving Savior “sendeth an invitation . . . , for the arms of mercy are extended [to you], and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you.”²⁸

President Russell M. Nelson taught that Jesus Christ “will perform some of His mightiest works between now and when He comes again.”²⁹ But he also taught that “those who choose the Lord’s way will likely endure persecution.”³⁰ Being “counted worthy to suffer shame for his name”³¹ may at times be our lot as we “allow His voice to take priority over any other.”³² “Blessed is he,” the Savior said, “whosoever shall *not* be offended in me.”³³ Elsewhere we learn that “great peace have they which *love* thy law: and *nothing* shall offend them.”³⁴ Nothing! So let’s ask ourselves, “Am I enduring for a while, but when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by am I offended?”³⁵ Am I firmly built on the rock of Jesus Christ and His servants?”

Moral relativists advocate that truth is merely a social construct, that there are no moral absolutes. What they are really saying is that there is no sin,³⁶ that “whatsoever a man [does is] no crime,”³⁷ a philosophy for which the adversary is claiming proud authorship! Let us therefore beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing, who are always recruiting and “[often use] their intellectual reservations to cover their [own] behavioral lapses.”³⁸

Laura’s Thoughts:

The phrase “Zion and Babylon are incompatible” basically sums up the entire book club over the last handful of months. The striking contrasts between the ways of the world and the ways of God are glaringly evident in our world today. When Elder Bednar was president of BYU-Idaho, he asked Elder Holland if he could teach the students just one thing, what would it be. Elder Holland warned that the days of comfortably having one foot in the restored Church and one foot in the world were vanishing quickly. He answered—

“We are witnessing an ever-greater movement toward polarity. The middle-ground options will be removed from us as Latter-day Saints. The middle of the road will be withdrawn.

“If you are treading water in the current of a river, you will go somewhere. You simply will go wherever the current takes you. Going with the stream, following the tide, drifting in the current will not do. Choices have to be made. Not making a choice is a choice. Learn to choose now.”

Elder Holland made that prophetic statement 24 years ago. We have all been first-hand witnesses of the middle-ground being removed. Have we learned to choose? Have we made our choice? As we recently studied in Come Follow Me, can we be those who answer affirmatively the call-- “Who is on the Lord’s side?” Elder Klebingat reminds us that we need to be confident, valiant, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and not to be caught between discipleship and the world.

We can apply the only question needed as described by Sister Nelson in the fireside earlier tonight... THE QUESTION... What would a Holy Disciple do?

The Church News recently released an article that summarized the Utah Area presidency’s vision and concerns for its members. Quoting Elder Kevin W. Pearson, the article states -- “I worry that not only are we casual about the prophet, but that leads to being casual about our membership in the Savior’s Church.” He discussed the need to be intentional about putting our sacred covenants at the center of our lives and warned us of being distracted. And I don’t know how many more times President Nelson needs to plead with us to put God first in our lives. As

Elder Klebingat stated in this talk, we need to “demonstrate our love for the Lord through wholehearted, voluntary obedience.”

Elder Klebingat quotes from a few different talks from President Nelson in this section and references the Saints enduring persecution. I’ve put together a few additional quotes from President Nelson that also point to this period of tribulation and persecution. President Nelson has stated--

“During these perilous times of which the Apostle Paul prophesied, Satan is no longer even *trying* to hide his attacks on God’s plan. Emboldened evil abounds.”

“In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”

“You will have days when you will be discouraged. So pray for courage not to give up! Sadly, some who you thought were your friends will betray you. And some things will simply seem unfair.”

“Why do we need such resilient faith? Because difficult days are ahead. Rarely in the future will it be easy or popular to be a faithful Latter-day Saint. Each of us will be tested. The Apostle Paul warned that in the latter days, those who diligently follow the Lord “shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). That very persecution can either crush you into silent weakness or motivate you to be more exemplary and courageous in your daily lives.”

Thankfully, Elder Klebingat reminded us that President Nelson has also taught that Jesus Christ “will perform some of His mightiest works between now and when He comes again.” And I’m also reminded of one of my favorite quotes from President Nelson—“Remember that the fulness of Christ’s ministry lies in the future. The prophecies of His Second Coming have yet to be fulfilled. We are just building up to the climax of this last dispensation—when the Savior’s Second Coming becomes a reality.”

President Nelson ended his talk to earlier tonight with a promise that our future will be more exhilarating than anything we can presently believe.

One last line I wanted to point out from this section is this – “Let us therefore beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing, who are always recruiting.

Don’t we see this everywhere we turn these days.

In the fireside earlier today, President Nelson warned that we should not be led astray by those whose doubts may be fueled by things we cannot see in their lives” not to feed our testimonies with teachings from wolves in sheep’s clothing...and as Elder Klebingat said...they are always recruiting.

I’ll end with quoting from Sister Nelson from her recent interview with the Church News podcast. She also shared similar sentiments in both of her talks in the recent firesides to the Saints in Europe and the members of the church in CA...both times right before the prophet was going to speak. She provides the best way to counteract wolves in sheep’s clothing.

“I can’t imagine that there has been a more important time in the history of the world or the Church, nor a more important time to follow the prophets than right now, because prophets speak the truth, and when we follow the prophets, we can be safe. Following the prophets is the key to safety — spiritual, physical, emotional safety. One of the most distinctive features of the Savior’s restored Church is the presence of prophets, and today we sustain 15 men in The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as prophets, seers and revelators. Each one has been called by God, to testify of Christ and teach the truth. Where can God's children turn for truth? To the words of the prophets of God."

Micah's Thoughts: Once again, if it wasn't clear that he is a student of Hugh Nibley, "Zion and Babylon are incompatible" should cement it. The line of being caught between discipleship and the world made me think of a line from President Brigham Young's talk that we did this week in which he said if we don't have time for our discipleship and breakfast then let the breakfast go. One of my favorite scriptures dealing with the Lord's extended arms is found in 2 Nephi 28:

2 Nephi 28:32

32 Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts! For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of Hosts.

The next paragraph he really gets to the heart of the parable of the sower, specifically seeds cast on stony ground. I highly recommend those who would like to freshen up on this parable to see my video/paper "From Seed to Fruit". Here is a portion from the paper about the seeds cast on stony ground:

On stony ground meaning: (Luke 8:13, Mark 4:15, Matthew 13:19)

And they that received the seed into stony places, the same are they that heareth the word and readily with joy receiveth it, yet they have not root in themselves, and so endureth in belief but for a while; for when in a time of temptation or weakness, tribulation or persecution or affliction arise against them, because of the word or for the word's sake, by and by they are offended and fall away.

In the last paragraph he quotes Neal A Maxwell but omits the first line of the quote which I believe is crucial in understanding the intent of the quote. "In later years, *I saw a few leave the Church who could then never leave it alone*. They used often their intellectual reservations to cover their behavioral lapses." We need to understand that people who behave like this have either left the Church, are in the process of leaving the Church or who have left the Church spiritually but are sitting in the pews purely as wolves ready to pounce on the weakest and sickest lamb in the flock.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught,

Disharmony of some members

Sometimes we hear someone refer to a division in the Church. In reality, the Church is not divided. It simply means that there are some who, for the time being at least, are members of the Church but not in harmony with it. These people have a temporary membership and influence in the Church; but unless they repent, they will be missing when the final membership records are recorded.

It is well that our people understand this principle, so they will not be misled by those apostates within the Church who have not yet repented or been cut off. But there is a cleansing coming. The Lord says that his vengeance shall be poured out "upon the inhabitants of the earth . . . And upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord; First among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me" D&C 112:24-26 I look forward to that cleansing; its need within the Church is becoming increasingly apparent.

The Lord strengthened the faith of the early apostles by pointing out Judas as a traitor, even before this apostle had completed his iniquitous work John 13:21-30 So also in our day the Lord has told us of the tares within the wheat that will eventually be hewn down when they are fully ripe. But until they are hewn down, they will be with us, amongst us D&C 86:6-7 The hymn entitled "Though in the Outward Church Below" contains this thought:

Though in the outward Church below
Both wheat and tares together grow,
Ere long will Jesus weed the crop
And pluck the tares in anger up . . .
We seem alike when here we meet;
Strangers may think we are all wheat;
But to the Lord's all-searching eyes,
Each heart appears without disguise.
The tares are spared for various ends,
Some for the sake of praying friends,
Others the Lord against their will,
Employs, his counsels to fulfill.
But though they grow so tall and strong,
His plan will not require them long;
In harvest, when he saves his own,
The tares shall into hell be thrown.

(1969–A:10, Ezra Taft Benson, To the Humble Followers of Christ)

Section IV

If we really want to be valiant disciples of Christ, we will find a way. Otherwise, the adversary offers enticing alternatives. But as faithful disciples, “we need not apologize for our beliefs nor back down from that which we know to be true.”³⁹

In conclusion, a word about the 15 servants of God seated behind me. While the worldly “say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not,”⁴⁰ the faithful are “crowned with blessings from above, yea, and with commandments not a few, and with revelations in their time.”⁴¹

Not surprisingly, these men frequently become the lightning rods for those unhappy with the word of God as the prophets proclaim it. Those who reject the prophets don’t realize that “no

prophecy of the scripture is [to be] of any private interpretation” or the result of the will of man “but [that] holy men of God [speak now] as they [are] moved by the Holy Ghost.”⁴²

Like Paul, these men of God are “not ... ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” and are His “prisoner[s]”⁴³ in the sense that the doctrine they teach is not theirs but His who called them. Like Peter, they “cannot but speak the things which [they] have seen and heard.”⁴⁴ I testify that the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve are good and honest men who love God and His children and who are loved by Him. Their words we should receive as if from the Lord’s own mouth “in all patience and faith. For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against [us]; ... and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before [us].”⁴⁵

“No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing”;⁴⁶ it will march on triumphantly with or without you or me, so “choose you this day whom ye will serve.”⁴⁷ Don’t be fooled or intimidated by the loud adversarial noises emanating from the great and spacious building. Their desperate decibels are no match for the serene influence of the still, small voice upon broken hearts and contrite spirits.

I testify that Christ lives, that He is our Savior and Redeemer, and that He leads His Church through the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, thus assuring that we are not “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”⁴⁸

“True disciples of Jesus Christ,” President Nelson taught, “are willing to stand out, speak up, and be different from the people of the world. They are undaunted, devoted, and courageous.”⁴⁹ Brothers and sisters, it’s a good day to be good! In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Lisa’s Thoughts: In this 4th section I feel like Elder Klebingat is pleading with us to stand tall and push forward in our discipleship. He uses many scriptures and quotes to express this to us.

If we really want to be valiant disciples of Christ, we will find a way. Otherwise, the adversary offers enticing alternatives.

These first two sentences are stating there are only two options of thought. Either we choose to be valiant or we will be easily trapped by the enticing of Satan. Gone are the days where we can coast along enjoying our summer house in Babylon. Today we need to choose to be valiant otherwise we will be swallowed up by the adversary. Satan is combing the streets looking for those who are weak in their faith, striving to find and entice them to join his army. If we are not actively strengthening our knowledge and testimony he will find a way to turn our focus away from Christ and destroy all that we once held dear.

In discord the past week we have lamented all those who were once strong active members but since covid have become lost.

In Matthew 1:22 states in the last days even the very elect will be deceived, this is happening right before our eyes. Just because we have been through the temple and made covenants with the Lord is not enough. We need to keep those covenants with a precision we have never done

before. Our covenants bind us to the Saviour and give us power. As Lehi was shown, we need to hold tight to the iron rod keeping our eyes on the fruit of the tree of life, (which is eternal life with the love of God). We also need to have an awareness of the mists of darkness swirling around us (which is Satan's tactics) but being laser focussed on where we are going and how to get there. Do you know where you are going? Having that big picture in our minds of where this is all leading to is paramount to our success. Breaking that journey down into detailed progression is knowing how to get there. You will want to be converted to this map if you want to stay on the path. Draw it out, see it, visualise it, get a testimony of your role in making it happen. Make sure you include the redemption of Zion on the map, God has promised we will build it, I have prayed and learnt for myself that this is true. This is part of our generation's journey. It is exciting and will take much commitment.

We have been taught that the iron rod is the word of God, I have a personal testimony that daily feasting on the BoM is how we can be valiant disciples. I have learnt from Alma in chapter 32 that the word of God can be compared to a seed and must be planted in our breast and nourished. This then grows into the tree from which the fruit of eternal life is picked. There is a direct link between increasing in gospel knowledge and increasing in faith, we cannot increase in faith any other way. We exercise our faith by obedience to the Lord but we increase our faith by study and prayer. When we study the word of God, we gain knowledge and as the HG testifies to us the truthfulness of this knowledge our understanding of the ways of the Lord and our faith in Him increases. As a result our faith, hope and trust in our Saviour is fortified and our ability to act in that faith becomes instinctive.

Just last conference Pres Nelson taught us "Thus, the antidote to Satan's scheme is clear: we need daily experiences worshipping the Lord and studying His gospel. I plead with you to let God prevail in your life. Give Him a fair share of your time."

Therefore I submit, that just a couple of minutes of reading CFM before we roll over and go to sleep at night is no longer enough. If we really want to be valiant disciples and avoid the adversaries enticing tactics then giving the Lord a fair share and spending that time studying is how we will achieve this.

Sometimes we can let fear of men hold us back from being valiant in our obedience and Elder Klebingat is reassuring us that we need not apologise for our standards.

But as faithful disciples, "we need not apologize for our beliefs nor back down from that which we know to be true."

This line is linked to Elder Ballard in April 2000 who shared:

"Brothers and sisters, the Lord expects us to do something. I believe we are expected to increase our own faith, shake off any possible feelings of apathy, and by the power of the Holy Ghost reaffirm our commitment and intensify our service to the Lord. Then, when we seek to clarify someone's understanding of the Church, our lives—well and faithfully lived—can serve as a magnifying glass through which others can examine the impact of gospel living. Under the light

of our good example, the Spirit can enlarge understanding of the Church and its mission to all with whom we have contact.

We need not apologize for our beliefs nor back down from that which we know to be true. But we can share it in a spirit of loving understanding—boldly and confidently, with an eye single to the glory of God—without pressuring our listeners or feeling that we have failed in our duty if they do not immediately accept what we believe."

Part of our mission as church members is to share what we have learnt. To share our knowledge and conversion about where we are going and how to get there. To help strengthen others in their testimonies and help them stay on the covenant path. As we enjoy valiant discipleship we will be as the sons of Mosiah and due to our love of God and mankind we will naturally have the desire to help others have that same courage to be valiant in their discipleship.

One of my favourite BoM scriptures is Ammon glorying in the mercy and love of the Lord despite the hardships they went through when sharing with those who had been taught by their parents to hate and despise them. I know as we give our fear of mankind, of what others may think of us to the Lord, He will replace this fear with courage and love. We then can act in faith as valiant disciples and be willing to "stand out, speak up and be different from the people of the world"

Elder Klebingat winds up his talk by imploring us to listen and obey our Prophets. He says "Their words we should receive as if from the Lord's own mouth "in all patience and faith. For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against [us]; ... and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before [us]."

This is an amazing promise taken from D&C 21:5-6. How grateful I am that as we obey the words of the Prophet that we can receive this type of shield of protection.

I love this quote shared in our discord group this past week by Harold B Lee from his book written in 1974 "Ye Are the Light of the World"

"There are some who look upon the leaders of this church and God's anointed as men who are possessed of selfish motives. The words of our leaders are always twisted by them to try to bring a snare to the work of the Lord. Mark well those who speak evil of the Lord's anointed, for they speak from impure hearts. Only the pure in heart see the divine in man and accept our leaders as prophets of the living God.

I bear you my testimony that the experiences I have had have taught me that those who criticize the leaders of this church are showing signs of a spiritual sickness which, unless curbed, will bring about eventual spiritual death. I bear testimony as well that those who in public seek, by their criticism, to belittle our leaders or bring them into disrepute bring more hurt upon themselves than upon those whom they seek thus to malign. I have watched over the years, and I have read of the history of many of those who fell away from this church, and I bear testimony

that no apostate who ever left this church ever prospered as an influence in his community thereafter.”

Elder Klebingat then throws a powerful punch with this voice of warning that now is the time to choose followed by words of comfort that despite the deafening noise of the world, it is no match for those who are humbly striving to adhere to the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. He states,

“No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing”; it will march on triumphantly with or without you or me, so “choose you this day whom ye will serve.” Don’t be fooled or intimidated by the loud adversarial noises emanating from the great and spacious building. Their desperate decibels are no match for the serene influence of the still, small voice upon broken hearts and contrite spirits”

I think this is my favourite paragraph from his whole talk, there is SO much noise from the great and spacious building, it can feel overwhelming if we give it too much attention. So many are being fooled and sucked in by the world's philosophies, it can be intimidating when it becomes our family members and friends who are yelling it's precepts at us and demanding us to change our values for the so-called 'good of mankind'. I know it's hard and I've no doubt its going to get harder still. I'm grateful for the still small voice, for the sanctification of the HG who has the power to change our hearts and fortify our minds if we choose to receive it.

Elder Klebingat then states that if we follow our Prophets we are assured that we will not be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine”. This scripture is taken from Ephesians 4:14 which reads

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive".

Elder Klebingat's final comment ,“True disciples of Jesus Christ are willing to stand out, speak up, and be different from the people of the world. They are undaunted, devoted, and courageous.” is taken from Pres Nelson's amazing talk in 2017 titled Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ Into Our Lives. This powerful talk is worth re reading and is exactly what we will want to study when we feel overcome and intimidated by the loud adversarial false doctrines coming from the great and spacious building.

For example, quote"When the Savior knows you truly want to reach up to Him—when He can feel that the greatest desire of your heart is to draw His power into your life—you will be led by the Holy Ghost to know exactly what you should do. When you spiritually stretch beyond anything you have ever done before, then His power will flow into you." Close quote. Isn't this a wonderful promise. I know it to be true.

I would love to close with using another quote from this same talk of Pres Nelson’s; "There is nothing easy or automatic about becoming such powerful disciples. Our focus must be riveted on the Savior and His gospel. It is mentally rigorous to strive to look unto Him in every thought. But when we do, our doubts and fears flee".

I know when we choose to be valiant disciples we are accessing this power given by our Saviour and delivered by the Holy Ghost and I am so grateful for this knowledge. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ Amen.

Micah's Thoughts: His conclusion is solid with non-existent fat. I would simply add my response to the call and my pledges to my God.

“The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”

— **Joseph Smith Jr.**

“I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished and down with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need prominence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my Guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing me - my banner will be clear.”

— **Avery T. Willis Jr.**

I pledge to leave Babylon and follow the Savior, Jesus Christ

I pledge to make myself temporally independent and prepared

I pledge to make myself mentally sharp and know the doctrine

I pledge to make myself socially connected to others with the same goals

I pledge to follow the keys of God; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

I pledge myself, both body and spirit, for the Redemption of Zion

I pledge to be ready for when the call comes to Redeem Zion

I pledge to open my mouth, to be a watchman, to be Israel, to be a Savior on Mt Zion

- Joseph's Boys Pledge

In the name of Jesus Christ Amen.