

The Law of Consecration

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This is a wonderful sight to see so many of you here. I was thrilled with this musical rendition of our Lamanite brothers and sisters and am grateful to them.

I appreciate the opportunity this evening of spending a few minutes with you at this fireside. I pray that the Spirit of the Lord will be with us, as I have chosen a subject about which little is said and too little is known. I refer to the law of consecration, which is lived through the united order. In 1874, a year before this University was founded, President Brigham Young, who was spending the winter in St. George, organized the Saints there into a cooperative economic and spiritual union. His intent, evidently, was to help the people there do a better job of caring for the poor and to reverse a growing tendency toward worldliness. This movement or organization was legally incorporated and was called the United Order of Zion. The following rules of conduct were drawn up for those who entered the order:

We will not take the name of Deity in vain, nor speak lightly of his character, or of sacred things. We will pray with our families morning and evening and also attend to secret prayer. We will observe and keep the Word of Wisdom, according to the spirit and the meaning thereof. We will treat our families with due

kindness and affection, and set before them an example worthy of imitation. In our families and intercourse with all persons, we will refrain from being contentious or quarrelsome, and we will cease to speak evil of each other, and will cultivate a spirit of charity towards all. We consider it our duty to keep from acting selfishly or from covetous motives, and will seek the interest of each other and the salvation of all mankind. We will observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, in accordance with the revelations. . . . In our apparel and deportment we will not pattern after nor encourage foolish and extravagant fashions. . . . We will be simple in our dress and manner of living, using proper economy and prudence in the management of all intrusted to our care. . . . We will honestly and diligently labor and devote ourselves and all we have to the "order" and to the building of the kingdom of God.

[*Comprehensive History of the Church*, 4:485–86]

As President Young returned to Salt Lake City in the spring of 1875, he stopped in many of the settlements of southern and central Utah, encouraging them to establish united orders.

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Others of the Brethren visited settlements of northern Utah to encourage similar action.

United Orders in Orderville and Brigham City

Perhaps two of the better-known examples of these orders as practiced by the Saints in Utah in the 1870s and 1880s were located in Orderville and Brigham City. The Orderville united order began in 1875. The settlers deeded all their property to the community corporation, including

*several hundred acres of land, houses, cattle, horses and mules, sheep, hogs, chickens, agricultural machinery and equipment, sawmills, and a large variety of provisions and supplies. . . . The order operated a number of farms, gardens, and orchards, including a cotton farm, a poultry project, three dairies, a sheep enterprise, a steam sawmill, and water-powered gristmill, and several molasses mills. . . . Almost complete self-sufficiency was attained. . . . The order had its quota of blacksmiths, clerks, artists, musicians and teachers, and even an herb doctor. [Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, pp. 334–35]*

This particular order in southern Utah was probably the most communal of any of the orders ever established. During its first years of existence, the order was very successful. The financial statements that were produced in the order's third year indicated a remarkable self-restraint and discipline among the seven-hundred-odd members of the community. However, problems soon developed, caused partly by a lack of restrictions on new members, changing economic conditions in the surrounding communities, and a growing discontent among the young people. It seems that the young people began to envy those in surrounding prosperous mining towns, thinking that Orderville's ways were old-fashioned.

The story is told of a certain young man in Orderville who felt the need for a new pair of pants:

As he gained in stature, the pants he wore seemed to shrink, but as there were no holes in them, and no patches, his application for a new pair was denied. But where "there is a will, there is a way." There was a big crop of lambs that spring. When the lambs' tails were docked [or cut off], the young brother surreptitiously gathered them and sheared off the wool which he stored in sacks. When he was assigned to take a load of wool to Nephi, he secretly took the lambs' tail wool with his load and exchanged it for a pair of store pants. On his return, he wore his new pants to the next dance. His entrance caused a sensation. The story is that one young lady rushed up to him, embraced and kissed him. The president of the order demanded an explanation, and when it was truthfully given, he said: "According to your own story these pants belong to the order. You are requested to appear before the board of management tomorrow evening at half past eight, and to bring the store pants with you."

At the meeting, the young brother was commended for his enterprise, but was reminded that all pants must be made of cloth from the same bolt. However, to prove its good will, the board of management agreed to have the store pants unseamed and used as a pattern for all pants made in the future, and further, the young man in question would get the first pair.

The tailoring department was soon swamped with orders for pants. The elders of the order protested. The boys went to work, as usual, but loafed on the jobs. It was noticed that the everlasting pants worn by the boys were getting thin in spots, and even some holes had developed. These boys were often on their knees when at prayers or when weeding the garden, but not much time was spent sitting down. Why was this unusual wear on the seat of the pants? When the elders saw the boys going in groups to the shed where the grindstone was housed, they became suspicious and

investigated. Yes, the boys had been wearing out their pants on the grindstone. The elders protested and then capitulated. A load of wool was dispatched to Washington mills to trade for cloth. The tailor shop was a busy place. The boys were hard at work. The pants rebellion was over! [Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, p. 336]

In Brigham City, under the direction of Elder Lorenzo Snow of the Council of the Twelve, a cooperative developed in a much different direction. Rather than turning properties over to a community corporation as in Orderville, the members were invited to take shares in a cooperative venture that by 1874 included some forty branches covering almost every phase of industry and agriculture in the valley. The Saints in the community were urged to trade locally within the cooperative. Brigham City came to be known as one of the most prosperous, progressive cities in the territory. The cooperative was so successful that the Panic of 1873, which hit the rest of Utah, was virtually unnoticed in the Brigham City area. Eventually, however, for various reasons—including an influx of nonmembers, Brigham Young’s death, changing economic conditions, and the extreme pressure brought to bear by the federal government because of polygamy—the united order movement was generally short-lived. In the mid-1880s the First Presidency counseled the few remaining orders to disband.

Revelations About the United Order

As we look back over these noble experiments in Utah, we now see that the original law of consecration, revealed through the Prophet Joseph in the early 1830s, was never strictly followed in any instance, either in Utah or in Missouri. To better understand the history and doctrines behind the original united order, not the united orders practiced in Utah, but the order envisioned by the Prophet Joseph, we need to turn to the Doctrine and Covenants. This was sometimes referred to as the order of

Enoch and, more commonly, simply the united order. The united order described in these revelations will be the pattern to which we will someday return when Zion is redeemed—and this may not be very far off.

During the first year after the restoration of the Church, the Prophet Joseph received the revelation now recorded in section 42 of the Doctrine and Covenants, referred to by the Prophet as “embracing the law of the Church.” In this revelation the Lord said:

If thou lovest me, thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments.

And behold, thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support that which thou hast to impart unto them, with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken.

And inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me; and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors, two of the elders, or high priests, such as he shall appoint or has appointed and set apart for that purpose.

And it shall come to pass, that after they are laid before the bishop of my church, and after that he has received these testimonies concerning the consecration of the properties of my church, that they cannot be taken from the church, agreeable to my commandments, every man shall be made accountable unto me, a steward over his own property, or that which he has received by consecration, as much as is sufficient for himself and family.

And again, if there shall be properties in the hands of the church, or any individuals of it, more than is necessary for their support after this first consecration, which is a residue to be consecrated unto the bishop, it shall be kept to administer to those who have not, from time to time, that every man who has need may be amply supplied and receive according to his wants.

Therefore, the residue shall be kept in my storehouse, to administer to the poor and the needy, as shall be appointed by the high council of the church, and the bishop and his council;

And for the purpose of purchasing lands for the public benefit of the church, and building houses of worship, and building up of the New Jerusalem which is hereafter to be revealed—

That my covenant people may be gathered in one in that day when I shall come to my temple. And this I do for the salvation of my people. [D&C 42:29–36]

Somewhat later in the same revelation, the Lord said:

Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer. . . .

Thou shalt live together in love. . . .

Thou shalt stand in the place of thy stewardship.

Thou shalt not take thy brother's garment; thou shalt pay for that which thou shalt receive of thy brother.

And if thou obtainest more than that which would be for thy support, thou shalt give it into my storehouse, that all things may be done according to that which I have said. [D&C 42: 42, 45, 53–55]

In this revelation, given in February 1831, the Lord began to reveal the principles and procedures of the united order. From 1831 to April 1834, when section 104 of the Doctrine and Covenants was revealed, the Lord gave many instructions concerning the united order and the law of consecration. The Lord placed great emphasis on our obligation to care for the poor and the needy when he said:

I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine.

And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine.

But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.

For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.

Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment. [D&C 104:14–18]

As I mentioned earlier, we learn from the historical record that in addition to the Utah activities there were early attempts by the Saints in Ohio and Missouri to live the united order. Because of transgressions and because the people were not obedient in all things, the Lord on June 22, 1834, suspended the requirement that the Saints live the united order as of that time. This revelation is recorded in section 105 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., explained these early failures by saying that

in practice the brethren in Missouri got away, in their attempts to set up the united order, from the principles set out in the revelations. This is also true of the organizations set up here in Utah after the Saints came to the valleys. . . . This instrument is not in accordance with the principle laid down in the revelations touching upon the united order.

The basic principle of all the revelation on the united order is that everything we have belongs to the Lord; therefore, the Lord may call upon us for any and all of the property which we have, because it belongs to Him. This, I repeat, is the basic principle. [Conference Report, October 1942, p. 55]

Righteous Stewardships

It is most important that we remember the united order is based on the underlying principle that the earth and all things therein belong to the Lord and that men hold their temporal positions as stewards accountable to the Lord. According to the revelations, each man entered the united order by consecrating to the Church

all that he had. This was done, as we have read, “with a covenant and a deed which could not be broken” (D&C 42:30), whereupon the bishop, in consultation and after reaching agreement with the donor, deeded back to the donor sufficient for his and his family’s needs. This, then, became his stewardship.

President Clark has cautioned us:

One of the places in which some of the brethren are going to stray is this:

There is continuous reference in the revelations to equality among the brethren, but I think you will find only one place where that equality is really described, though it is referred to in other revelations. That revelation affirms that every man is to be “equal according to his family, according to his circumstances and his wants and needs.” Obviously, this is not a case of “dead-level” equality. It is “equality” that will vary as much as the man’s circumstances, his family, his wants and needs, may vary. [Conference Report, October 1942, p. 55]

This procedure, the bishop deeding back to the individual his stewardship, preserved in every man the right to private ownership and management of property. Private ownership of property was basic to the united order. The intent was that each man would improve his stewardship—that is, use the property to produce a living for himself and his family. Any surplus that he might produce above the wants and needs of his family was consecrated to the Church. This surplus went into a bishop’s storehouse, from which the needs of the poor, the orphan, and the widow were met; from which stewardships were given to others; and from which the activities of the Church were financed

Joseph Smith, in a letter to Bishop Edward Partridge in 1883, wrote:

The matter of consecration must be done by the mutual consent of both parties; for to give the

Bishop power to say how much every man shall have, and he be obliged to comply with the Bishop’s judgment, is giving to the Bishop more power than a king has; and upon the other hand, to let every man say how much he needs, and the Bishop be obliged to comply with his judgment, is to throw Zion into confusion and make a slave of the Bishop. The fact is, there must be a balance or equilibrium of power between the Bishop and the people, and thus harmony and good will may be preserved among you. [Documentary History of the Church, 1:364]

From this letter we can see how important it is for each member to keep all the commandments in order to be in tune with the Spirit of the Lord sufficiently to live the united order.

Some have erroneously thought that consecration and the united order resembled either communism or socialism. This is incorrect. In 1942 the First Presidency of the Church issued this statement:

Communism and all other similar isms bear no relationship whatever to the united order. They are merely the clumsy counterfeits which Satan always devises of the gospel plan. Communism debases the individual and makes him the enslaved tool of the state to whom he must look for sustenance and religion; the united order exalts the individual, leaves him his property, “according to his family, according to his circumstances and his wants and his needs,” (D&C 51:3) and provides a system by which he helps care for his less fortunate brethren; the united order leaves every man free to choose his own religion as his conscience directs. Communism destroys man’s God-given free agency; the united order glorifies it. Latter-day Saints cannot be true to heir faith and lend aid, encouragement, or sympathy to any of these false philosophies. They will prove snares to their feet. [Conference Report, April 1942, p. 90]

The results of socialism and communism are far different from the results of living the

law of consecration. In Moses we read, “And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). In the Book of Mormon we read of the marvelous experiences the Nephites had during the two-hundred-year period following the Savior’s visit to this continent:

And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.

And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. . . .

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. [4 Nephi 2–3, 15–16]

Wouldn’t it be a glorious experience to live in such a society? In actual fact, this is the society to which those will belong who are prepared to live the law of consecration when the Lord sees fit to ask it of us. Some would say that this is fantasy, considering that human beings are what they are. Perhaps this is true. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that, when we reach the point of self-mastery and become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ sufficiently to keep all of his commandments, we will reach a plane of human happiness and peace which does not exist in the world today.

Preparation to Live the United Order

It is my conviction that we cannot begin too early in life to prepare to live the law of consecration. We know of the second coming of the Savior. We do not know the day nor the hour, but we know he will come again. We also know that, although there is still much to be done prior to his coming, many prophecies are being fulfilled today. We also know that we must be prepared to live the law of consecration prior to his coming. The question is—what do we do to properly prepare ourselves to live this law? I suppose the point of beginning is our conversion to the principle that everything we have really belongs to the Lord. Until we feel in total harmony with this, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for us to accept the law of consecration. As we prepare to live this law, we will look forward with great anticipation to the day when the call will come. If, on the other hand, we hope it can be delayed so we can have the pleasure of accumulating material things, we are on the wrong path.

In other words, do we really accept the scripture found in Matthew 6:33, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”? I suppose another way of saying it is that we need to set our priorities or our goals of life now, and then conform our lives to those principles that will permit us to reach them.

Now may I suggest some specific steps that everyone here can take in preparing to live this great law. First, tithes and offerings. Some years ago I was a member of a stake presidency. One day, as we were reviewing the tithing record of some of the officers in our stake, we noted the tithing of a member of the branch presidency of our Spanish-American branch. He lived in humble circumstances, had a large family to provide for, and was sustaining a son in the mission field. He had his own business, digging ditches with a ditch-digging machine. His tithing seemed excessive for his circumstances. In an interview with him we

questioned him as to his understanding of the law of tithing. His response was, he knew he was expected to pay 10 percent of his personal income. But he said, “The Lord has been so good to me and my family, I can never repay him. I pay 10 percent of the income of my business, not my personal income.” This wonderful brother is already prepared to live the law of consecration. The amount is of no consequence. The spirit and attitude of being honest with the Lord are what is important. President Harold B. Lee once said, “I have had difficulty understanding how a people who are not able to sacrifice to a point where they can pay a tenth of their interest annually are more than ten percent ready for the united order” (*Conference Report*, October 1941, pp. 110–15).

Now as to fast offering. Fast offering funds are used for the care of the poor. President Kimball has recently said, “I think we should be very generous and give instead of the amount we save by our two meals of fasting, perhaps much, much more—ten times more where we are in a position to do it. I know there are some who couldn’t” (*Welfare Services Meeting*, April 1974, p. 12). We realize that as students you are not yet particularly affluent. Notwithstanding this, when I visited one of your stakes here on campus some years ago, I was thrilled at the per capita fast offerings. As I recall, it was a stake of married folks, and the fast offerings were higher than in many off-campus stakes. This tells me that many of you are well along the road in preparing to live the law of consecration.

Another important experience in this preparation is the living of the second great commandment: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” I should like to relate to you two inspiring stories having to do with this law. Each of them has to do with students who were on this campus. Bob and Shauna were newlyweds who lived off campus in a humble ward in Provo. During his second year of graduate school and while Shauna was

carrying their first child, Bob lost his part-time job. Shauna became very despondent, uncertain of how they would properly care for their expected baby. One evening while Bob was away at class, Shauna spent the evening on her knees, tearfully pleading for the Lord’s help. Her prayer was interrupted by a soft knock on the back door. She opened the door cautiously and peered out, encountering a large box of groceries neatly overlaid with used but clean and serviceable baby clothing. Bob and Shauna never found out who their thoughtful neighbors were. Several struggling young couples in the ward were preparing themselves to live the law of consecration by silently gathering and sharing part of their surplus, even though it was very meager, with those in need.

One very special situation involved a young man who had cerebral palsy—and I know this young man. He came to BYU with a stranger as a companion. His father had asked for help so his son, virtually helpless in a wheelchair, could come to BYU. One young man, hearing the plea for help, volunteered to live with and care for this palsied student. The story’s a long one, filled with love, frustration, optimism, and despair. The results are very special. Today this young man still is in a wheelchair. He still is afflicted with cerebral palsy, but far from helpless. He is an attorney, specializing in Russian, is married and the father of two lovely children. It is safe to say that his unusual talents and strengths might never have been developed without the consecrated service of his roommate and others. Again, someone was preparing to live the law of consecration.

In conclusion, may I suggest that we seriously reflect on the words of Jacob in the Book of Mormon:

Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you.

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.
[Jacob 2:17–19]

My dear, wonderful brothers and sisters, I'm so grateful to see you here tonight and pray the Lord will touch your hearts. I know he's touched many. I bring the greetings and the love of a prophet of God to you, President Spencer W. Kimball. As we go out to our various responsibilities, he constantly reminds us that he loves us. It's so wonderful to have a prophet to lead us. The heavens are opened. Our Heavenly Father is so close.

The other day I was in a small meeting at which President Kimball presided. One of those in the meeting who has a heavy load of responsibilities said, "You know, I can't sleep after 3:00 in the morning." Another said he had the same experience, whereupon

President Kimball said, "There is no need for you to waken at 3:00; 3:30 will do."

There's an urgency, my brethren and sisters, about our relationship with our Heavenly Father, an urgency such as I have never felt before in my life. I feel that urgency primarily through the urgency expressed by President Kimball. May we be blessed to understand our relationship with our Heavenly Father. May we understand that we are preparing the world for the second coming of the Savior. No man knows the day nor the hour, but it isn't very far off.

I bear my witness that God truly lives. This is his kingdom; this is his Church. He is the head of this Church and is constantly involved in directing the affairs of the Church through his servant and our President, Spencer W. Kimball. I bear this witness to you, and leave my blessing that you may feel that sweet spirit of peace that comes from keeping his commandments; for he said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.