

Those Things of Greatest Worth

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

It is with considerable pleasure and appreciation that I again voice my welcome to all of you as we honor and commend those being recognized as graduates and honorees in the program of the day. As many of us will emphasize in these exercises today and tomorrow, the achievements we celebrate are not solo acts. That is, virtually no one being honored has been able to reach the heights of accomplishment alone. Therefore we commend spouses, children, parents, friends, mentors, teachers, advisors, and all others who have contributed to the remarkable attainments we acknowledge in these ceremonies.

Today we are especially honored to have as our presiding authority and commencement speaker Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Virtually all here know him well, and we are grateful that he and Sister Perry are with us as two of the most avid and loyal supporters of Brigham Young University.

I hope all of you heard Elder Perry's general conference address earlier this month. I advise you to read it again in the *Ensign* in the coming May edition or listen to it again online. I will

not say more except to commend it to you and confess that his assessment about the increasing casualness in our society today about the Ten Commandments brought to my mind a favorite commencement address given twenty-six years ago next month at Duke University by Ted Koppel. He was a very popular news anchor on ABC for many years—before most of you graduates were born. Time does not permit me to share most of what he said, but I would like to share parts of his message that are still extremely relevant for all of us today.

We have spent 5,000 years as a race of rational human beings . . . searching for truth and moral absolutes. In the place of Truth we have discovered facts; for moral absolutes we have substituted moral ambiguity. We now communicate with everyone—and say absolutely nothing. . . .

Our society finds Truth too strong a medicine to digest undiluted. In its purest form Truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder; it is a howling reproach.

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 25 April 2013.

What Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions—they are Commandments. **Are, not were.**

The sheer brilliance of the Ten Commandments is that they codify, in a handful of words, acceptable human behavior. Not just for then—or now—but for all Time. Language evolves; power shifts from nation to nation; messages are transmitted with the speed of light; Man erases one frontier after another; and yet we and our behavior—and the Commandments which govern that behavior—remain the same.

. . . What a huge, gaping void there would be in our informational flow and in our entertainment without the routine violation of the Sixth Commandment: “Thou shalt not murder.”

[And think of how often we now see violations of] the Seventh Commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

Mr. Koppel continued with energy and conviction. Said he:

Relevant? Of course the Commandments are relevant. Simply because we use different terms and tools, the Eighth Commandment is still relevant to the [various financial scandals in the world]. The Commandments don't get bogged down in methodology. Simple and to the point: “Thou shalt not steal.” Watch [television interviews] and keep the Ninth Commandment in mind: “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” . . .

When you think about it, it's curious, isn't it? We've changed in almost all things—where we live, how we eat, communicate, travel—and yet in our moral and immoral behavior we are fundamentally unchanged.

Maimonides and Jesus summed it up in almost identical words: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” So much for our obligations toward our fellow men. That's what the last five Commandments are all about.

*The first five are more complex in that they deal with figures of moral authority. The Fifth Commandment requires us to honor our father and mother. . . . Which brings me to the First and, in this day and age, probably the most controversial of the Commandments, since it requires that we believe in the existence of a single supreme God—and then, in the Second, Third, and Fourth Commandments, **prohibits** the worship of any other gods, **forbids** that His name be taken in vain, [and] **requires** that we set aside one day in seven to rest and worship Him. [Ted Koppel, commencement speech at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 10 May 1987, 5–8; emphasis in original]*

Well, Ted Koppel said even more than the extensive words that I have just related to you. I was impressed when I first read his talk many years ago after hearing on the news that he had said that the Ten Commandments are not the Ten Suggestions. Even in 1987 it took considerable courage to say what he said on that impressive but largely secular campus. Today, if possible, his words ring even more relevant and important.

As so many of you complete this wonderful phase of your BYU experience, we hope and expect that you will always remember the most important things that you have learned or solidified in your time here. God does live and loves us as the Eternal Father He is. Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer, and His effectuation of the Atonement makes all things possible for those who fully take upon themselves His name, make and keep sacred covenants, and do their very best to keep and obey the commandments. Like Ted Koppel, I remind you that those things of greatest worth are not suggestions but requirements to meet the full potential of a BYU graduate.

I invoke the blessings of heaven upon you, upon your families, and upon all that you do as you go forth to serve, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.