

Standards of Standard-Bearers of the Lord

RUSSELL M. NELSON

Sister Nelson and I are happy to be with you. I convey love and best wishes for a happy New Year from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. We express our gratitude to Presidents Rex E. Lee and Kerry Romesburg, their companions, and members of their faculty and staff from both Brigham Young University and Utah Valley Community College for their marvelous service. And we express appreciation to our Regional Representative, stake presidents, and their partners here tonight.

We are especially delighted to be with you students. You recognize, as we do, that you are a fortunate few. Many more throughout the world would give anything to be where you are. Many have been called to military duty elsewhere in the world. They would gladly trade places with you. Surely our prayers are for peace and for each individual on assignment away from family and loved ones at this time.

We have so much for which we can be thankful. This is the first Sunday of a new year. Nineteen-ninety has been most historic. In what was known a few months ago as the German Democratic Republic, missionaries are now reaping a rich harvest in a unified Federal

Republic of Germany. Many new missions were created, including those in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Greece. And in lesser numbers, wonderful servants of the Lord labor as his representatives in Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Russia. None of this was so when I was here a year ago. The year 1991 promises to be equally exciting in this rapidly growing church (see D&C 65:2). Each of us, if properly prepared, can play an important part in fulfilling its divine destiny.

I hope my message tonight will help us and the Church to realize our remarkable individual and institutional potential. The title chosen for my message is "Standards of Standard-Bearers of the Lord." You will note there are three parts to the title. I would like to discuss the last mentioned first, because the Lord is the chief cornerstone on which this Church is based. Next, I should like to discuss his standard-bearers. Finally, I should like to discuss his standards.

Russell M. Nelson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 6 January 1991.

The Lord and His Atonement

Let us first contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ and his atonement. In a very real way, it affects each of our lives and the lives of every human being who ever lived. Understanding the significance of his atonement is fundamental to choices we make in all facets of our lives. The atonement of the Lord is central to our faith (see *Teachings*, p. 121).

We are scripturally bound to study it and to teach it. From the book of Moses, may I quote these words of God:

I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying:

That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the [atoning] blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory;

For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified;

Therefore it is given to abide in you. [Moses 6:58–61]

But before one can comprehend the *atonement* of Christ, one must first understand the *fall* of Adam. And before one can comprehend the fall of Adam, one must first understand the *Creation*. These three pillars of eternity relate to one another.

In the beginning God created the earth and all that was upon it. He created man in his own image, male and female created he them (see Genesis 1:27; 5:2; D&C 20:18; Moses 2:27; 6:9). Adam and Eve were first created with bodies of flesh and spirit, without blood, and were unable to die or beget children. Thus we might

describe this as a *paradisiacal creation*, one that initially equipped Adam and Eve to live in the Garden of Eden, which was in a state of everlasting paradise (see Moses 4:28).

Adam and Eve's subsequent fall effected a change upon their bodies. Although I don't understand completely the chemistry of that change, somehow it permitted blood to circulate in their veins. It provided for processes of aging and death to come upon their tabernacles of flesh. And in a marvelous manner, it allowed the blessing of procreation, so that myriads of awaiting spirits could be born and thus obtain mortal bodies. The fall was a necessary part of Heavenly Father's plan for his children. Indeed, "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). The so-called fall of Adam might thus be termed the *mortal creation*. It allowed mankind to attain and endure the mortal experience, to enjoy posterity, and then to leave this period of probation through the portal of death.

Adam and Eve's fall, however, and subsequent sins of their posterity, cut mankind off from the presence of God. An atonement, or reconciliation, had to be made. And only God could make it. Even before the Creation was completed, the premortal Jehovah understood the need for an atonement. Even before breath was put into the man Adam, the Christ knew that a Savior would be required. He understood his responsible role. He was to be born into mortality to suffer, to bleed, and to die.

Why?

That each of us might ultimately be *at one* (atoned) with God after our mortal experience, that we might be able to live with him once again, as we did as spirit beings before our birth. His atonement would allow our resurrection from the dead. Then our bodies would be changed to those of flesh and spirit and be able to dwell in the presence of God. The effects of the atonement might thus be expressed as the *immortal creation*, for "as in Adam all die, even

so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

No serious student of the life of Christ can fail to be deeply moved by the Lord’s own personal testimonies of his atoning experience. Even though he knew what was required, the record states that he felt “sore amazed, and to be very heavy” (Mark 14:33; see also verses 35–36).

His high commission he completed at Gethsemane and on Calvary’s cross. There he gave this last testimony: “It is finished” (John 19:30). The plan was consummated. He had fulfilled his earlier prophecy: “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world” (John 18:37).

It is not surprising that the Lord Jesus personally testified of this atoning experience in these latter days when the gospel was restored. He spoke these words and caused them to be recorded for *all of us* to comprehend:

Wherefore, I command you to repent, and keep the commandments which you have received by the hand of my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., in my name;

And it is by my almighty power that you have received them;

Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and 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. [D&C 19:13–19]

It seems almost beyond comprehension to think that he paid this enormous price for me and for each of you. And yet, as far as we are concerned individually, unless you and I do our part, his atonement will have been in vain. It is that covenant relationship—that mutual trust—that makes his atonement such a personal gift. It brings us protection, perennial hope, and the promise of joy.

Standard-Bearers

Standard-bearers march at the vanguard of a worthy cause. They represent that which is good and noble. They often carry flags or other symbols to express identity, purpose, and unity.

Speaking of such standard-bearers, I was told a tender account during the holiday season just past. While children reenacted the Christmas story, one child held high a star wrapped in aluminum foil, mounted on a broomstick. Later, someone commended the child for his stamina in holding that star so high for such a long period of time. The child, who had spoken no lines, joyfully replied, “I had the most important part in the play. I showed people how to find Jesus.”

As his standard-bearers, we are to help the honest in heart to find Jesus. We don’t wave flags. And generally we don’t carry stars mounted on broomsticks. Instead, as standard-bearers for Jesus the Christ, we willingly and gratefully take his sacred name upon us. We enlist in his cause by covenant.

Each standard-bearer has accepted this scriptural charge:

If ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, . . . by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water [of baptism], . . . then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; . . .

then can ye speak with the tongue of angels.
[2 Nephi 31:13]

So, standard-bearers first qualify by entering the covenant of baptism. They are thereby blessed with the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then they can speak effectively in leading others to the Lord (see D&C 11:21).

Standard-bearers of the Lord regularly renew their qualifying covenant of baptism. When the sacrament is administered, words of recommittal are offered in prayer to God in behalf of all who “are willing to take upon them the name of [his] Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them” (Moroni 4:3; see D&C 20:37, 77).

Standard-bearers of the Lord are the hope of Israel in Zion’s army. They are chosen children of the promised day. They are helping to hasten his work in his time, just as he has decreed (see D&C 88:73).

Meanwhile, the elect of the Lord are responding to personal promptings to seek and surely find him. Perhaps an example will serve to illustrate. A little more than a year ago, a “velvet revolution” occurred in the country of Czechoslovakia, in which a restrictive regime of forty years was overturned. Political prisoners were released from jail. One of them later became the current president of that country. Last summer a twenty-one-year-old medical student in Plzen, named Aleš, determined to use his new freedom and his vacation period to earn some money and to find God. In June 1990 he came to New York City. There he was offered a job driving an automobile for a rental agency. The agency needed a car to be driven to Salt Lake City.

Through an interpreter, he said, “I don’t want to go to Salt Lake City.”

They replied, “Do you want the job?”

He said, “Yes, I want the job.”

“Then you *will* drive to Salt Lake City,” they demanded.

So this he did. While there he went to Temple Square, where he first met standard-bearers of the Lord. He heard their message of the restored gospel. He studied intensively with missionaries in Salt Lake City and then at the Missionary Training Center here in Provo. In the process, this very bright young man also learned the English language. In August he was baptized, following which he was brought in to meet President Monson and me. It was then we learned that one of the two missionaries who had taught him the gospel in Utah was Elder Tobias Burkhardt, son of the president and matron of the Freiberg Temple in the former German Democratic Republic. Aleš has now returned to Plzen to resume his medical studies. He found his faith and now bears the holy priesthood. He also learned a new language and is in a position to make great contributions to the work as a standard-bearer for the Lord in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere.

Standards

Standards of the Lord may be tangible or intangible. In Old Testament days, the children of Israel were told to “pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard” (Numbers 1:52).

More frequently cited, both in ancient and in modern scripture, are spiritual standards.

One week after Solomon had dedicated the first house of the Lord built on Mount Moriah, the Master personally came to that temple and accepted it as his holy house. Then and there he taught the importance of abiding by his standards of personal righteousness. He said:

If thou wilt walk before me, . . . and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments;

Then will I [establish] the throne of thy kingdom. [2 Chronicles 7:17–18]

By way of reinforcement, the Master Teacher then added this warning:

But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, . . .

Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight. [2 Chronicles 7:19–20]

But the ability of the people to hear and obey was stunted by their lack of conviction. Jeremiah recorded this stern reprimand of the Lord:

How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?

For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. [Jeremiah 4:21–22]

Protective standards of righteousness were similarly stressed in New Testament times. Paul recorded this charge:

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. [Ephesians 6:14–17; see D&C 27:15–18]

Book of Mormon prophets likewise emphasized the importance of correct standards. One so wrote:

I have spoken plainly unto you, that ye cannot misunderstand. And the words which I have spoken

shall stand as a testimony against you; for they are sufficient to teach any man the right way; for the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not; for by denying him ye also deny the prophets and the law.

And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel. [2 Nephi 25:28–29]

This loving Lord again came to the earth in the latter days to teach standards of light and truth to children of this generation. Our Redeemer said:

I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, . . . to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me. [D&C 45:9]

The Church and its membership are standards for the world. The Lord said:

For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations. [D&C 115:4–5]

For the Strength of Youth

With this background in mind, let us study the fundamental standards expected of us as standard-bearers of the Lord today. At general conference time last fall, announcements were made of the publication of a booklet entitled *For the Strength of Youth*. If your copy is handy, you may wish to refer to it as I continue. Within its pages are summary statements of certain vital standards. These statements were prepared by the Lord's anointed, mindful of this scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants:

It is an imperative duty that we owe to all the rising generation, and to all the pure in heart —

For there are many yet on the earth . . . who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it. [D&C 123:11–12; see also Jeremiah 50:2; 1 Nephi 21:22]

The scriptural statement then continues:

These [standards] should then be attended to with great earnestness.

Let no [one] count them as small things; for there is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things. [D&C 123:14–15]

The booklet reviews, in an abbreviated way, specific standards. Although much is included, much more could have been and is not. Sufficient detail is included to allow each of you to know what the Lord expects of you. In addition, you may studiously and prayerfully consult with parents, teachers, and advisors when additional guidance is deemed necessary.

You know in a very real way the prevalence of immorality. You are aware that drugs, alcohol, steroids, and other harmful substances are readily available.

As you live in the midst of much that would harm you, heed this verse of warning that closes chapter four of the Book of Mosiah. A prophet of the Lord is speaking:

If ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard. . . , even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, . . . remember, and perish not. [Mosiah 4:30]

No prophet, no parent, no loving partner or person wants you to “perish.” If you are to be preserved, you must take the responsibility to *watch yourself*, precisely as the scripture commands.

For your protection, this little publication lists twelve standards. May I review them briefly and offer a comment about each of these important standards.

1. *Dating.* Begin with the end in mind, and let your beginnings be bright. The end you seek is a celestial family, enabled by your being sealed in the temple to one you love. So for now, choose companions who make you better when you are with them—those who are willing to take upon themselves the sacred name of the Lord, live his commandments, and join with you in being one of his standard-bearers.

2. *Dress and Appearance.* This topic concerns the importance of personal choice. As you clothe yourself modestly and groom yourself attractively, your ability to make wise choices will be enhanced. Please pre-think your decisions. Your body is a temple of God; honor it. Don’t get caught in the squeeze of opposing pressures. Downward pressure to be worldly is contrary to the uplifting pressure to live in accord with the Lord’s standards. Step aside from the squeeze and let the elevating power of the Lord lift you without restraint to your loftiest heights.

3. *Friendship.* Cultivate the companionship of good friends. But also seek to broaden your circle. Reach and teach widely without fear. Enjoy opportunities to learn more from others. Share your testimony often and be a good friend to all you know. Don’t forget to take advantage of choice friendship moments with parents, adults, advisors, and bishops. They will welcome your conversation. Surely, silent treatment is beneath the dignity of those who have taken upon themselves the name of Christ. And play your own part in helping to make your home a place of partnership, prayer, and peace.

4. *Honesty.* Personal standards should honestly govern every action. The honest person needs to remember only one version of an event. Those who don’t obey standards they profess are called “hypocrites.” While the

world will always be full of them, recognize them for what they are and resolve to avoid their dishonest pattern of behavior. And remember, the payment of tithing will help discipline your mind to be an honest one.

5. *Language.* Language has the power to inspire and edify. You have the potential to speak with the tongue of an angel. Speak kindly of others. Don't be vulgar or profane. And for exciting new opportunities in life, study the language of people in lands other than your own.

6. *Media.* This topic pertains to movies, television, radio, videocassettes, books, magazines, and all other means that compete for the attention of your precious sight and hearing. Purveyors of pornography would enslave you by making their addicting snares seem desirable. But don't put all the blame on the media. The person who patronizes smut must bear ultimate accountability.

7. *Mental and Physical Health.* I have lived long enough now to witness the demise of classmates and colleagues who unwisely chose to disobey the Word of Wisdom (see D&C 89) and other divine counsel regarding the care of their bodies. I promise that as you keep the commandments of your Heavenly Creator and follow instructions that he has decreed for your benefit, you will be blessed in this life now and forever more.

8. *Music, Dancing, and Other Recreation.* The Lord expects us to seek after things that are "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" (Articles of Faith 1:13). Enjoy them and discern between uplifting influences and those that might lead you away from standards of the Lord.

9. *Sexual Purity.* What does that mean? It means you take upon yourself the name of the Lord and reserve use of his gift of procreative powers exactly as he has decreed. These powers are not to be abused in lust, adultery, fornication, or perverted behavior. The purpose of the Lord's atonement is to qualify you for eternal marriage and everlasting joy with your

predecessors and posterity. Satan would like to destroy the family and all that holds it together. While the world descends to the level of concern for "safe sex," your standard is sacred sex—within the bounds of holy matrimony as intended by the Lord.

General terms used in the booklet such as "moral cleanliness," "sexual purity," and "high standards" will become personally applicable only when you literally take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ and do as he would have you do.

10. *The Sabbath Day.* I plead with you to do more than passively follow lists of do's and don'ts compiled by others. Generate your own policies and live by them. Follow the standard of the Lord, who centuries ago said: "My sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a *sign* between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you" (Exodus 31:13, italics added; see also Ezekiel 20:20).

Additional guidance has been given in our dispensation, recorded in section 59 of the Doctrine and Covenants (verses 9–13).

Questions regarding appropriate behavior on the Sabbath are easily resolved when you study these scriptures and then determine what sign you choose to give to God of your regard for him.

11. *Spiritual Help.* Standard-bearers of the Lord have qualified by covenant to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. There can be no greater guide to assure spiritual help through all your days.

12. *Repentance.* We all make mistakes. They are an important part of our maturing experience. But there is a real difference between a mistake and sin. Verses from modern revelation help distinguish the two:

And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known. . . .

And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;

And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. [D&C 1:25–28]

The humble and prayerful person can be blessed with discernment and be made strong. And through the atonement of Jesus Christ, we can repent and be forgiven. For serious wrongdoing, or sin, confession to one's bishop is necessary. And remember, repentance is not repentance until sins are forsaken and repeated no more (see D&C 58:42–43).

Living in accord with these twelve standards will help us be worthy standard-bearers of the Lord. Then we can be his means of serving our fellowmen (see John 13:35; Mosiah 2:17).

Recognize the reality of the Redeemer and the power of the Lord's atonement in your life. Ponder this thought, phrased first as a question then as a testimony: "Did he do all this—for me? Yes, he did all this—for me!"

*I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me,
Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me.
I tremble to know that for me he was crucified,
That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died.
Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me
Enough to die for me!
Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!*
["I Stand All Amazed," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 193]

His atonement is real. He has established standards by which each of us can become standard-bearers of the Lord. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.