

Follow the Rule

BOYD K. PACKER

I am very happy to be here, brethren and sisters, and to speak for Brother Hinckley and Brother Monson and our associates. It's overwhelming to see an audience such as this and I wonder if you can sense the deep interest, love, and affection we have for the youth of the Church.

I came with five or six pages of notes that I had put together over the last several weeks in both anticipation, I suppose, and worry for this assignment. Once again I learned a lesson that I've learned many times: that sometimes you have to be right here on the ground before the right inspiration will come. So during the night those six pages have been replaced with other notes and other thoughts—not, I think, without some prompting. I would appreciate greatly an interest in your faith and prayers (we sustain one another in the Church that way) as I talk to you about one or two things that somehow seem, in my mind, to be of foremost importance to you at this time in your lives.

I remember very vividly the first time I was here in Laie. It was more than thirty years ago, and I think I'll mention one or two of the circumstances surrounding it by way of illustrating something I learned from that experience. The date is easy to remember because it was a signal date in recent world history—August 14,

1945. Some time earlier than that I had been in military training in the United States. World War II was in full course. A few months earlier Germany had surrendered and shortly after that we left for California, heading into the Pacific theater of war.

While I was at a base in California I had my patriarchal blessing. I hadn't had one when I was home. I went to a patriarch that I had never seen before and would not see again for twenty years, and received what Brother Richards has described as "a page from your book of possibilities." That became a very important element in my life and in the experiences I had in the Pacific.

We sailed from Seattle at night, for security reasons. The ship was very crowded—there were 60 men on deck, besides all those who we accommodated below deck—moving, as we were then, large numbers of troops into the war zone. As we boarded that ship that night and as I went to my bunk, I felt it was

Boyd K. Packer was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 14 January 1977.

something of an end and a beginning in my life. I made a firm resolution that night that, should I come back from the war—and I expected that I would come back—I would know for sure that the gospel was true. I believed it was true; but I determined that, whatever awaited us, when I returned I would know. As part of the commitment to that, I began my first reading of the Book of Mormon. I had “read” it before, but this time I was determined to read it, and there is a difference.

We landed at Honolulu and then went to Kauai where, at Barking Sands near Kekaha, there was an airbase. We were there for some weeks and I desired greatly to see the temple. I didn’t have a recommend and I couldn’t go into the temple, but I wanted to be on the temple grounds. I was about 19 at the time and had just graduated from pilot training. A USO group, a group of entertainers—comedians and some other movie figures—had been to Kauai to entertain the troops. They were going back to Oahu by plane. I managed to get aboard that plane to Honolulu and hitchhiked here to Laie to spend part of a day on the temple grounds.

It was late that afternoon when I returned to Honolulu. I was in a little Chinese curio shop buying a small carved box for my sister when pandemonium broke loose. Someone came in and spoke in very great excitement to the proprietor of the shop, in Chinese, I assumed. He forthwith pushed me from the shop and pulled the blind down. Then I saw people pouring from the buildings into the streets and the cars all stopped. It had just been announced that the Japanese had surrendered—the war was over. I thought, “We can go home. It’s all over.” That, however, was not to be.

A few days later, on another ship, we set sail for the Philippines, to be part of the occupation forces. In the course of the next year we moved from the Philippines to Okinawa, then to Japan; and finally, more than a year later, returned home. During the interim I became

acquainted with the revelations and the scriptures. I read the Book of Mormon, and read it again—and again.

I would like to talk for just a moment about scriptures. By way of introduction I’d like to quote from the New Testament, from Timothy, words written by Paul to Timothy. They might have been taken from the front page of today’s newspaper; they’re that pertinent. It’s a familiar scripture that applies particularly to you who are young.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents [imagine reading that in the scriptures from ancient times !], trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God:

[And then, strangely enough,] Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. [2 Timothy 3:1–5]

That was the prophetic description of what our day would be—all of those things. It’s negative, as you contemplate it. Think that all of these things surround us.

It wasn’t until recently that I happened to glance down the page and make a connection I never had before. That’s often the case with scriptures, isn’t it? Though we think we have command of them, they’re a continued revelation. At the bottom of that page I read this:

But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

And then, here’s the answer for all of us to that which is ominous and negative and frightening.

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them;

And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. [2 Timothy 3:13–17]

On the one hand we have the ominous, frightening, prophetic declaration of what we face in our generation, and following it the antidote or the immunization from it in that we have the scriptures.

Last month I had an experience that was remarkable to me: I went to Sunday School. (I was regarded, of course, as a stranger in my ward since I am always somewhere else at Sunday School times.) The lesson there was directly from the scriptures. I also went to priesthood meeting that day and the lesson was directly from the scriptures. My wife was preparing a Relief Society lesson—directly from the scriptures. There has been great emphasis on scriptures in the Church. As general officers of the Church we urge all Church members to acquaint themselves with the scriptures.

I would like to take a phrase from what I've just read to illustrate something and then give you some specific counsel.

But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of [and this is the phrase I want to emphasize:] knowing of whom thou hast learned them.

I repeat: "Knowing of whom thou hast learned them."

I now read from the 42nd section of the Doctrine and Covenants this verse:

Again, I say unto you, that it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church.

[D&C 42:11]

In our day it's manifestly impossible on this earth for someone to get off a plane somewhere and represent themselves, for instance, as a member of the Council of the Twelve and proceed to give instruction or to perform ordinations. That would be counterfeit. This couldn't be done. We're too well known in a very interesting way.

I'd like to tell you of an experience that happened just a short time ago. My oldest son took his little family to tithing settlement. When they went to the bishop's office there was a picture of all of the General Authorities. Our tiny granddaughter noticed the picture and got all excited and said, "Oh, Grandpa, Grandpa!" My daughter-in-law lifted her up and she pointed to Brother McConkie!

Some time ago my wife and I were coming home from New Zealand. We had left Auckland about midnight and landed in Papeete, Tahiti, to change planes in the wee hours of the morning. We had an hour or two to spend and were waiting for our flight to come in. A Pan American plane landed and we were watching that plane taxi in. I didn't know where it was from or where it was going, but I said to my wife, "I will know someone on that flight." It was just a flight out in the Pacific in the wee hours of Monday morning.

I went out and stood by the gate. I knew one man as he got off. Four other people came up and said, "You're Brother Packer, aren't you?" That's a handicap sometimes to us

personally, but there's a great protection in that for the Church.

Some time ago I was with President Kimball in New York. We had gone to tape an interview that was going to go on the CBS nationwide broadcast. It was a beautiful Saturday morning in April and we decided to walk up 5th Avenue to the mission home. Thousands of people were out walking and President Kimball said, "Look at all of these people—and they're all ours. They all should have the gospel and not a one of them knows us. All of them are strangers to us," he said.

"I know how we can find someone we know," I said.

"How can we find them?" he asked.

We were passing a little French restaurant with tables sitting out on the sidewalk. I said, "We can just step over there and order coffee, and someone will find us in a hurry!"

Just as I said that, in a joking way, I heard the words, "Brother Kimball! Brother Kimball!" Out of the crowd came the wife of a stake president!

The point I make is that this phrase from Timothy strikes me as being monumentally important. "But continue thou in the things which thou has learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them." In the pattern of constituted authority in the Church we always know where revelation comes from. Revelation is always vertical. There is no horizontal revelation in the Church. It is all vertical. A bishop will get no revelation from a fellow bishop, or a stake president from a fellow stake president; but a bishop will receive it from the stake president, and his stake president from the general officers of the Church.

In your youth you can learn that the scriptures are powerful, that they're righteous; that in this Church we learn the scriptures, that we accept them, that we determine to live by them. Learn that there is a constituted authority—that our leaders are ordained by those

who are in authority, and it is known throughout the Church. Nothing is done in the corner where there might be room for doubt or confusion or misunderstanding. We all have the right to go before the Lord to appeal in prayer and to receive inspiration and revelation for ourselves, so that each of us will know.

One of the things the scriptures do is to make it very clear that we're to follow the prophets. In the Doctrine and Covenants section after section states, "I the Lord am speaking," or "It is I, God, who speaks," and so on. Those declarations show that there is no doubt who is speaking.

Now I would like to touch upon two subjects that have application to you, my young brethren and sisters. You who are here studying in this school have been gathered from all of Polynesia and from the Orient. I would like to read from a letter dated September 26, 1973, signed by President Harold B. Lee, President N. Eldon Tanner, and President Marion G. Romney.

It has come to our attention that many Church members from [and it names the specific areas] are migrating to Hawaii and the mainland USA.

Now that stakes of Zion have been established in [this land], we encourage you to remain there and to learn and teach the gospel in your own tongue. By doing this and by organizing and building upwards, branches, and stakes in [your homeland], you will be entitled to all of the blessings promised to the faithful Saints.

As you serve among your people, you can be assured that the Lord will bless you greatly; and by doing so you will be helping to build the Church and kingdom of God here upon this earth.

And then this:

No necessary blessing will be withheld from you as you follow this counsel of the First Presidency.

We extend to you our love and appreciation for your devotion in the work of the Lord.

*Sincerely yours,
The First Presidency*

There, then, comes some counsel from those who are ordained (and it is known to the world that they are ordained). This counsel has application to you who have come from your homelands to learn and then to face the question: "Where can I serve?" The counsel has been, and the counsel is, that you're to serve among your people, to bless your people now. Can everyone do that? There may be exceptions, of course. Some will not find their way back.

But I'd like to talk about exceptions. On one occasion when I was president of the New England Mission we were holding a Relief Society conference of several hundred women. Our Relief Society president was a convert. We were trying to get our sewing circles and gossip festivals turned into Relief Societies. We were setting standards for Relief Society, and this lovely sister was told to teach the sisters what a Relief Society should be.

At this Relief Society conference she was explaining that the Relief Society would no longer be held on Sunday, that they would hold it on weekdays so that they could have sewing and activities and so on. A woman stood up in the audience and defied her and said, "You don't understand. Things are different up in Vermont. This is different, we are an exception. We can't do that. You must make an exception."

The Relief Society president was quite puzzled at this confrontation. She turned around and looked at me, pleading for help. I thought she was doing pretty well, so I motioned for her to proceed. She did, and what she said next was so profound that I told her after the meeting I would be quoting that across the world, since I was sure it came by inspiration. For she stood there, frightened and puzzled, for a few minutes while that defiant woman, who was something of a ring-leader representing a faction, kept talking for a minute, re-emphasizing

that they were an exception. Then sister Baker quietly, but firmly, said, "Dear sister, we'd like not to take care of the exception first. We'll see to the rule first and then we'll take care of the exception."

Now, what are you to do in your lives? Accommodate the rule first! If you're to be an exception, or if others are to be an exception, that will become obvious in the inspiration that comes. But there is great power and great safety in holding to the scriptures and having an abounding obedience to our constituted priesthood authority. We are able to pray and receive revelation on our own, then to consider something like this letter from the First Presidency and to obediently say, "Lord, I don't ask to be an exception."

I quote from the general conference talk of President Kimball of April 4, 1975.

The "gathering of Israel" is effected when the people of the faraway countries accept the gospel and remain in their native lands. The gathering of Israel for Mexicans is in Mexico; in Scandinavia, for those of the northern countries; the gathering place for the Germans is in Germany; and the Polynesians in the islands; for the Brazilians, in Brazil; for the Argentines, in Argentina. [Ensign, May 1975, p. 4]

You are here at a Church school and you have the opportunity to learn. You have the opportunity to test and to understand counsel, and then be willing to be obedient to it.

President George Albert Smith was showing visitors from the East around the Salt Lake Valley in the earlier days, when it looked a little more deserted than it does now. This man said, "Well, Mr. Smith, it must have been quite a trial for your people to leave the lush, beautiful eastern part of the United States and migrate out into this forsaken desert. That must have been quite a trial."

President Smith's answer was, "Oh, no, not at all. We came here willingly—because we had

to!" There's some of that kind of obedience in all of our lives.

I was in Tonga not too long ago. I have an assignment, incidentally, that I've had for as long as I've been a General Authority, that puts me in close ties with the so-called minorities in the Church—Americans living in Brussels, Belgium, for instance. They're Americans living abroad, and they're a minority, so they are part of our worry. Part of our concern is for the Tongans in the United States, and for the Samoans and all of the minorities. I have worked in this assignment for many years with President Kimball and with others of the senior Brethren.

Last night as I pondered what I would say to you, I realized the counsel for us to gather to our own people was counsel from the prophets, who are known as the constituted authority, having been ordained and known to the Church. Now, there's great importance in your young lives in following that counsel. Sometimes when we are an exception and that there are so many more opportunities available in other lands.

I remember from my college days the report of an eminent historian. He had gone to southern Utah to gather some of the local historical facts. He had looked up the oldest man in the community—a man in his nineties. In the interview he suggested to the man that he was living in what might be termed "a forsaken little place on the desert." He asked him, "How did you get here?"

The man told him that he had been called there on a mission.

He said, "Who called you here on the mission?"

The man said, "The President of the Church." (I think it was probably John Taylor or Wilford Woodruff.)

The historian said, "But you've stayed here all your life. Why didn't you ever go back?" The old man did not have much of an answer

and the historian pressed the point, asking, "Why didn't you go back to a better place?"

Then tears came to the old man's eyes and he said, "No, I could not go back. I was called on a mission and I have not been released." And then from the porch of this humble little house he pointed over to a sage brush hill where there were headstones and said, "I'll go there before I'll go back."

I thought of the young couple out in Samoa in those early days who were sent on a mission—a young man and his wife. This young married couple had arrived in Samoa on a ship and as they were being put ashore in a small boat the hardened seamen stood at the rails and wept over the young couple going to what they termed a "god-forsaken place." There are graves in Samoa, you know, as there are on the other South Pacific islands, of missionaries who were "forgotten," but not by the Lord. There is a conviction and a dedication that we can have, and that we ought to have, to be obedient.

We can do as Samuel did. Remember the story of Eli and Samuel? Eli, the old prophet, had the boy Samuel to train. The little boy came to him and said, "Somebody keeps calling to me at night."

The old prophet said, "What do they say?"

The boy said, "They just call my name: Samuel. I get up and look around, but there's nobody there."

The wise old prophet, teaching this young lad who himself would be a prophet one day, said, "When that happens again, your answer should be, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth'" (see Samuel 3:3–10).

If we could build that in our lives—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth"—then we would find ourselves among our own people doing what we ought to do, living as we ought to live. The glitter of the enticements of other places would not persuade us.

I have a lingering, sensitive, prophetic idea that as you obediently follow the prophet you

will live to know a stability and a fulness and a plenty in your own lands that by comparison now seem deprived economically. You will have far more of what matters most than you would have if you should go elsewhere seeking your fortune. When you come to find that which matters most, you will always find in the long run that to be the rule and not the exception is to see the fulness of life. Should there be exceptions, the Lord will designate those in an unmistakable way.

Now, one other subject. It's been the policy of the Church—and it's been spoken on many occasions—that as the gathering of Israel is in Mexico for the Mexicans, in Tonga for the Tongans, in China for the Chinese, and so on, so has been our counsel as it relates to marriage.

We've always counseled in the Church for our Mexican members to marry Mexicans, our Japanese members to marry Japanese, our Caucasians to marry Caucasians, our Polynesian members to marry Polynesians. The counsel has been wise. You may say again, "Well, I know of exceptions." I do, too, and they've been very successful marriages. I know some of them. You might even say, "I can show you local Church leaders or perhaps even general leaders who have married out of their race." I say, "Yes—exceptions." Then I would remind you of that Relief Society woman's near-scriptural statement, "We'd like to follow the rule first, and then we'll take care of the exceptions."

I was with President Kimball once some years ago when, in a small group, he told the story of his courtship and marriage to Camilla Eyring. They only knew one another for a short time. I'm even hesitant to say how short the time was before their marriage. He told of meeting this beautiful young schoolteacher who had come to the community, and in the course of a few weeks they were married. After hearing this, one young man in the group later said, "Well, if President Kimball can find some-

body and be sure in that short of a time, I guess I can do that."

Someone else replied, "My boy, before you think that applies to you, you ought to be very sure you have the inspiration and power that is present in the beginnings of an apostle."

You may not be the exception. We counsel in the Church, for instance, that we ought to be old enough before we marry and we ought to know one another before we're married. Our courtships ought to be adequate. You may pick out a couple—he was 18 and she was 17 when they married—and see how happy and successful they've been. Yes, an exception! For every exception we can show you tens and hundreds, and I suppose thousands, who were not happy. Plan, young people, to marry into your own race. This counsel is good, and I hope our branch presidents are listening and paying attention. The counsel is good.

Now, someone may say, "Well, I've never heard that in general conference." I remember once that Brother Lee gave a talk at BYU, and he told me that he felt some unusual inspiration in that talk and gave emphasis to a point that he had not intended to discuss. A few days later one of the professors from BYU called at his office and interviewed him and said, "Brother Lee, I was very interested in your talk. I was very interested in one point particularly."

Brother Lee said, "Yes, I was quite interested too."

The professor said, "Would you mind citing the reference and the authority for that?"

Brother Lee thought for a few minutes and said, "Yes, the reference for that is Elder Harold B. Lee of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, speaking at a devotional assembly at BYU," and then he gave the date of his sermon. The point I make, simply, is this: It isn't a question of who said it or when; the question is whether it is true.

Of course, we always have the test. Somebody said, "No matter how tall your grandpa is, we've all got to do our own

growing." Everybody in this Church may go to his own sacred grove to ask what is true. That is what happened to me in the Pacific. I came back a different man because I came to know that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. I know that there are great powers intervening in our lives.

I think I will mention a personal experience. I'm not sure I have told this publicly except once a few weeks ago in Tonga. While stationed in Tokyo, on one occasion we were assigned to take a B-17 bomber and go down to Saipan Island and then on to Guam, if necessary, to get a beacon light. I was an operations officer and we needed a beacon light at the base. We left Tokyo heading south into the Pacific. Because the war was just over, air flight safety was not put together as it is now. We did not know that there was forming, out in the central Pacific, a typhoon of major proportions.

Now, Pacific islands from airplanes are very difficult to see; clouds look like islands and vice versa. I remember the navigator said, "If we're on course, we should be over Iwa Jima soon." He began counting: "Ten, nine, eight," and so on and when he counted "zero," we tipped the plane and looked down through broken clouds and directly below us was Iwa Jima. We were right on course. We kidded him about being an expert.

Several hours later he said, "We're off course. Something's wrong!" We dropped down through the cloud cover. There were terrible winds. The ocean was white with waves. He said, "I don't know where we are." Then, of course, to add melodrama to the drama, the radios went out. There we were!

We began flying a "square search." Lost pilots don't just fly around aimlessly. They fly a definite pattern so that they know they're covering new territory and not just flying in circles. We flew a long course on compass. The other pilot said, "Let's turn." For some reason I said, "Hold it just a minute." We were just a few thousand feet above the water. Suddenly

I could see a long line of white waves and we pulled up over some rocks sticking out of the ocean. We knew then that somewhere nearby was an island. We had no idea whether we were over the rocks south of it or north of it. We made a prayerful turn and in about five or ten minutes on our short range radio we could hear voices. Soon we pulled over Tinian Island where there was an airfield. As we landed the B-17 and were taxiing down the runway, one by one the engines went off. We were out of gas.

During the last hour of that flight, when I sat there wondering if we would or if we wouldn't make it, my patriarchal blessing kept coming to my mind. It said, "You will be warned of danger, and if you heed those warnings you will be privileged to return to your loved ones." I thought, "Well, I've tried." I sat there thinking, "The gospel's true and what else matters? That prophetic declaration will see us safely through this, and if it doesn't, we're in the hands of the Lord now."

Things are not always easy when we receive counsel, whether the counsel is to return to serve among our own people or whether it is counsel to marry among our own culture and racial backgrounds. Always there is a decision. Always we can say, "We're an exception." But I say, in the words of that Relief Society sister, "As for me, I'm going to follow the rule first; and then, should there be an exception, perhaps that will be made known."

I came back from that first journey out here in the Pacific some thirty years ago with a testimony that the gospel is true. I knew then and I yet know.

Brother Romney said once, "I don't know any more certainly right now that God lives than I knew when I was a missionary boy in Australia." There was one difference though, he said: "Then I came to know that the Lord lives. Since then I have come to know the Lord."

I bear witness that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ. I bear witness that Spencer W. Kimball is the prophet of God and that

prophetic, apostolic powers are on this earth. That power rests upon this Church and kingdom. You and I have the privilege and the obligation of bearing this kingdom away in

such fashion that all mankind will be served by it. God grant that we might be worthy and able and inspired, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.