

The Weightier Matters of the Law

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My dear and beloved brothers and sisters, it is a very great privilege for me this evening to have this opportunity. This is certainly a little larger congregation than we have at the Language Training Mission. I do, however, express my appreciation for the support that our missionaries give us. I express my great love for them and for all missionaries everywhere. It's a thrilling experience for me and for my wife and our family to be associated with the missionary program of the Church. Prior to the close of our mission in the Netherlands, we were anticipating our return, and our employment was secure. But a call to come to the Language Training Mission overwhelmed us with joy, for we would still be involved in this greatest of all work in the kingdom, the missionary effort. This evening I express gratitude to my Heavenly Father for his goodness and for the opportunities he has given me to serve in this great cause. I would like to discuss something with you tonight that I feel is especially applicable for those of you preparing for missions, for those of you who will not go on missions, for those of you who have been on missions, and I suppose that takes everyone into account.

I'd like to read just a few verses from Matthew:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Woe unto you, . . . for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness.

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. [Matthew 23:23–28]

Max L. Pinegar was president of the Language Training Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 28 September 1975.

I would hope that this evening for the time we're together that we could exchange some thoughts relative to weightier matters of the law. Now, in this exchange I'll be doing the speaking, the talking, and I hope some thinking. I hope you will be doing some thinking so that we might have an exchange. Think we must and pay attention we must if we're to receive the message of this hour. I'm not naïve enough to believe that everyone hangs on every word I say, so I prefer to use the scriptures, and we know what the scriptures say.

The Lord declares, if you'll permit me to paraphrase: "You pay tithes, you keep the Word of Wisdom, you attend twelve-stake firesides, you attend Sunday School, sacrament meeting, priesthood meeting, Relief Society, But do you know what is more important? It is to render a righteous judgment, to have mercy, and to have great faith. Don't leave the other undone. It is important to pay tithing; it is important to keep the Word of Wisdom; it is important to attend Church; it is important to do our home teaching." Let me, if you will, discuss these three important items: judgment, mercy, and faith.

Judgment

The great prophet Isaiah cautions us against making a man an offender for a word (see Isaiah 29:21). So often, brothers and sisters, we misjudge other people. On the basis of a few moments' experience, it isn't uncommon for us to, I wouldn't say condemn others, but to grossly misjudge them.

Several years ago I was attending an institute class at the University of Utah, and I heard Elder Marion D. Hanks, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve, tell of this experience. He said one afternoon about sunset he was traveling east on North Temple. As he approached the intersection of Main Street at North Temple, there was a car stopped at the traffic light. As he pulled up behind the car, his foot slipped from the brake and hit the accelerator, and he hit the car. Well, he was very

embarrassed about it and was about to get out of his car when there emerged from the automobile a mountain, a giant of a man. "So," he said, "I stayed in my own automobile. The next five minutes I received the most vulgar, most vile, the most wicked tongue-lashing I have ever received in my life. After he was through mauling me verbally, he got back in his automobile and sped away. I thought I had just met the worst man in the world. Certainly such vocabulary I'd never heard since my days in the service." Elder Hanks thought about this a great deal. And he was greatly concerned about such a person running loose in the streets of Salt Lake City.

About two or three weeks later Elder Hanks was at a stake conference in the Salt Lake Valley. Seated on the stand, he was looking down at the congregation. Lo and behold, there was his vulgar, vile friend. Well, after the stake conference this good brother came up to the stand and asked Elder Hanks if he could have a few words with him. They went into another room, just the two of them, and this good brother apologized, asked for Elder Hanks to forgive him. He said, "Do you know, two or three weeks ago there on the street I made this great scene. I'm very sorry and very embarrassed, and I apologize for the language I used and the embarrassment I caused you. But you know, I was sitting in my automobile, waiting for the light to change and contemplating the events that had just transpired in my life in the past hour or so. I was on the way home from the hospital to tell our four small children that their dear mother and my beloved wife and sweetheart had just passed away. My entire world had just caved in, and I was sitting there contemplating all of these things—the gloom and despair of my life—when you hit into the back of my car. So I ask your forgiveness."

"Well," Brother Hanks said, "if I could have found a crack I would have crawled into it." "There," Elder Hanks explained later, "I had made a man an offender for a word. On the

basis of a few moments' exposure or experience with this man I had literally condemned him. Indeed, I was the one who needed to plead for forgiveness." I wonder, brothers and sisters, how often you and I are guilty of misjudging others.

May I suggest another point in terms of judgment. In section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants we have revealed that great revelation known as the Word of Wisdom. Now, I may say some things in the next few minutes which hopefully will not offend anyone. If I do offend you, I ask your forgiveness in advance; and if you choose not to forgive, then the sin is not upon my head.

In my judgment members of the Church reduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to section 89. General Authorities of the Church traveling throughout the stakes and missions of the Church, the stake presidents who are sitting on the stand, and many of you may have had experiences with the Saints today who give great condemnation to those who do not see section 89 as they see it. For example, some who prefer to eat brown bread would condemn those who eat white bread. Those who would prefer white sugar would look at those who eat molasses as odd, as people to steer clear of, if I could put it that way. There are those among us who declare that it is not good for man to eat meat. There are those even who declare that by not eating meat one is living a higher law. I'm not about to condemn the person who so believes, but let me read section 49 to you: "And whoso forbiddeth to abstain from meats, that man should not eat the same, is not ordained of God" (D&C 49:18).

In this Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, why do we continue to judge those who do not eat as we eat? In my judgment it makes not one bit of difference. Let me refer you to the fourteenth chapter of Romans. (You know, it's a great advantage to the speaker to be able to select those scriptures which support his point of view.) Paul, a great

apostle, had those in his congregation who apparently did not eat meat and those who did eat meat, those who thrived on herbs and those who did not eat herbs, those who ate brown bread only and those who ate white bread, those who ate only the whites of eggs and those who ate only the yolks, and so on. He said, "For one believest that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth" (Romans 14:2–3). Did you understand that? In other words, I think he's saying, "Please eat as you please." He declares forcefully, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Romans 14:17–19). Judgment? I don't know. Personally I prefer brown bread over white bread. If you come to our home and would like to eat white bread, please bring your own! I prefer honey over white sugar, but on occasion while my wife's not looking, I slip some white sugar in. In other words, in my judgment it does not make any difference. All I'm suggesting, brothers and sisters, is that we reserve judgment. Let him judge whose right it is to judge. If I read the scriptures correctly, it is not my right to judge another.

Mercy

One definition of mercy is "a disposition to be kind, to forgive." We could talk about this as it relates to roommates here at school—a disposition to be kind in the apartment, a disposition to forgive. We could talk about this as it relates to parents and children, as it relates to husbands and wives, as it relates to missionaries and companions.

Now, sisters, you good sisters on this campus, stop having so much mercy with these

missionaries. There is too great a disposition to be kind to them. I think this is my opportunity to tell you that these young men and women are in the mission field; they're *not* students on this campus. We have a tough enough time convincing them of that fact, especially when they meet Mable or Lulu or Joan or Sarah or someone else at the St. Francis School or down at Allen Hall or at the men's gym. Sisters, listen carefully. We implore you—repent! Leave these young men alone! We're trying to prepare them; we're trying to channel their efforts right down this narrow channel. When they receive all that attention, yea, verily, it doth distract them!

Look at the situation in your apartment. How often do you roommates get irritated with one another, and what is it that irritates you? What is it that's bothering you? Well, if it's that serious, then go to your branch president. But is it possible, roommate, that you are the principal cause? You who would find fault, are you the principal source of the contention, of the frustration within your apartment? Husbands and wives (although the greater number here are unmarried), it is not uncommon for a husband, if there is frustration, if there is contention, to look to his wife as the source of his contention or frustration. Nor is it uncommon for the wife to look to her husband as the source of the frustration or contention. I wonder if it wouldn't be wise on our part to show mercy, to demonstrate a greater disposition to be kind and to be forgiving, to be patient with those with whom we reside—our roommates, our spouses, our parents, our children. At the feast of the Passover the Savior said, "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." Each in his turn said, "Lord, is it I? Is it I?" (Matthew 26:21). They were not pointing an accusing finger. All of them did not point to Judas Iscariot and say, "There he is. There's the betrayer." No, each asked himself, "Lord, is it I?" I would suggest to you that you and I could very fittingly ask ourselves this

question whenever, in any personal relationship with others, there is contention or frustration or what we estimate to be failure. We should ask ourselves this question: "Lord, is it I?"

Let me quote a statement here from Dr. Ken Higbee. He suggests that we ask ourselves this question: "To what defect in myself do I attribute this failure?" If there is a lack of communication between husband and wife, let the husband ask himself, "to what defect in myself do I attribute this failure?" Let the wife ask herself, "To what defect in myself do I attribute this failure?" Let each roommate ask of himself or herself, "To what defect in myself do I attribute this failure?" Someone wrote, "Each of us is part of the problem or part of the answer." I would submit to you this evening that each of us *is* part of the problem and therefore responsible for the solution, responsible for the answer.

I do not think it is possible for me to change the behavior of another, but it is totally within my power to change my own behavior. As I look at myself in relationship to others and identify that the source of the problem is not there but here, then I ought to fall on my knees and thank God Almighty that I have finally found the cause of my problem to be right here with myself. Then I have at my command all the powers of heaven to change, to solve the problem. If we will look to ourselves, my dear brothers and sisters, as the major cause of the problems we face, as well as the major source for the solution to these problems, we will have a far great disposition to be kind and to be forgiving.

Faith

May I discuss briefly with you this great principle of faith—the third of the group judgment, mercy, and faith. There are many things we could discuss. First of all, let me just suggest that we ought to have faith in the leaders of the Church. I'm going to say something

that perhaps will influence some for good but undoubtedly will not win me any friends. On this campus during the last school year Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Council of the Twelve spoke in this building at a Tuesday devotional. He made an appeal to all former missionaries to return to their missionary grooming standards. I'm not going to be guilty of misjudging, but as I observe with the naked eye, it is fairly obvious that this counsel is to a great extent ignored. It is a weightier matter to consider the counsel of the prophets of God than to consider following the council of cherished friends.

The other night a missionary came to my office about eleven o'clock and had an urgent problem he had to discuss. At the close of his class that evening his teacher had borne his testimony. The student said, "Everyone in the class was thrilled with his testimony, but I felt terrible inside because my teacher said he knew the gospel is true. Before I came on my mission my best friend told me no one can know the gospel is true, so I'm just filled with gloom. I'm filled with discouragement, for my best friend, one in whom I have great confidence—he is a member of the Church—told me I could not know."

I asked this young man, "Would you rather believe your friend or the prophets of God?"

"Well," he said, "he's my best friend!"

"Well," I said, "what is your best friend compared with a prophet of God?" If anyone, a cherished friend, a parent, a brother, a sister, anyone, counsels us to go contrary to a prophet of God, he is *wrong*. You former missionaries are derelict in your sustaining and your support of the prophets of God if you do not return to your former standards of grooming as a missionary.

Next point: I would hope that you and I would develop the faith that brings constructive, concrete action. Some years ago there lived in the South, in fact in the state of Mississippi, a teenage Negro boy. This young

boy was Len Hope. I'm sure many of you are familiar with this story. Len Hope read the Bible, and he believed it. He read in the Bible that one could receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. He went to his minister and said, "I want you to give me the gift of the Holy Ghost."

His minister said, "Len, I'm sorry, but I don't know how to give this great gift." He went to another minister. This minister tried to persuade him that there was no such thing as the gift of the Holy Ghost. He said it was only available in the times of the apostles of old. Well, Len Hope was determined to receive this gift, so one morning early he left the shack of his sharecropper family and walked some miles distant, where he found an old abandoned farm house. He went down into the basement. The windows were broken out, it was very dirty, but he was alone. And there this young man knelt in humble prayer, pleading with God Almighty to shed forth upon him this great gift. He prayed all through the day—you're familiar with the experience of Enos—and when the night came he still prayed. He cried unto God that he would bless him with this gift of the Holy Ghost. He prayed through the night, and during the night there was a great rainstorm in that area. The water descended upon that house, poured in the broken windows of that basement, and Len Hope knelt waist deep in mud and water, pleading for God to bless him with the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then there came a voice to this young boy telling him, "Len, this isn't how you receive the Holy Ghost, but if you will return home and remain true and faithful, the way will be opened for you to receive this gift." So he started his trek back home.

The previous afternoon, when Len had been engaged in prayer, two young representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were walking along a dusty country road. At a given point one elder said to his companion, "I feel strongly impressed that we

should go down this road here." His companion wanted to know why, but he didn't know why. They went down the road and saw in the middle of a field this old shack, and they approached the shack. As I understand the story, Len Hope's mother came out onto the porch. She wanted to know what these two white boys wanted. She hadn't seen white boys out in that area before. The one elder said, "Do you have a young teenage son? Is he at home?"

"No, he isn't here."

"When he returns," the elder said, "give him this." (He handed her a pamphlet.) They left.

The next morning when Len Hope returned home, his mother was worried sick about him. She saw him muddy and wet and wanted to know where he had been. She asked him to change clothes, and after he had done so, she said, "While you were gone yesterday two white boys came. They asked me to give you this." She handed him a pamphlet entitled "The Gift of the Holy Ghost." The name of the Church was written on the tract, as were the names and address of the Elders. Len Hope contacted those missionaries, was taught the gospel, and was baptized. Some years later he converted his girl friend, and she was baptized. They moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, and there raised their family. Finally they moved to Salt Lake City. This is the faith that causes something to happen. Lack of faith brings blindness and hardness of heart, so said Moroni, but the demonstration of great faith enables one to tap the very power of God (see Ether 4:14-15).

Well, my dear and beloved brothers and sisters, these are some of the weightier matters of the law: judgment, mercy, and faith. If lived in righteousness, these qualities will indeed bring

to one true happiness. Kin Hubbard said, "It's pretty hard to tell what does bring happiness. Poverty an' wealth have both failed." I would hope that tonight each of us would carefully examine our life, get a sense of direction. Richard L. Evans said, "If we don't change direction, we will arrive at where we are going." We want to make certain that we're going in the right direction, and I submit to you that *this is your decision*. It's also my decision. Our great prophet, Spencer W. Kimball, has said, "Your destiny is in your hands, and your important decisions are your own to make."

Bearing these things in mind, I would submit to you that it is a weightier matter of the law to ponder righteously one's future course regarding intimate and personal relationships with the opposite sex than to prepare one's Sunday School lesson well. It is a weightier matter to return home from a date undefiled than it is to be in church on Sunday morning. It is a weightier matter to confess honesty and forthrightly wrongdoing to one's bishop or stake president than it is to attend a stake meeting. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23). I bear my witness to you this night that these are divine principles, that this is the gospel of Jesus Christ, this is his Church, that God our Father reigns in the heavens above, and that his Son is Jesus the Christ, the very Savior of the world. Of this I bear witness in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.