

Cast Your Burden upon the Lord

ROBERT L. SIMPSON

My wonderful young friends of Brigham Young University, I greet you this morning in the attitude of love. I am grateful for this opportunity. I feel lifted up in your presence, and I pray that the Lord will bless us that we might communicate well here for these few moments. I am always pleased to see Women's Week come to BYU, and I want to promise you that there are no finer women in all the world than attend this University. During this past week I have had repeated in my mind very forcibly the wonderful admonition of the Lord—you see, Sister Simpson is now in New Zealand, eight thousand miles away—and I declare to all of you young men that it is not good for man to be alone.

Importance of Eternal Companionship

I don't know what I would do without my sweetheart and companion, and certainly in terms of eternity this companionship is what the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about. I had something happen a few years ago that was quite important to me. Sitting at my desk in southern California, I heard the telephone ring. I reached over to pick up what I thought was another routine telephone call, when the voice on the other end of the line said, "Brother Simpson, this is President David O. McKay

speaking." I couldn't believe my ears; I couldn't believe that a prophet would be calling an ordinary member of the Church seven hundred miles away. During the next couple of minutes, he proceeded to call Sister Simpson and me to preside over the New Zealand Mission.

As I hung up the telephone in total shock, my first thought was the same as most of you have had as you have been called to Church positions—"Why me?" I then proceeded to think of dozens of others who might have been called instead. I thought to myself, "The prophet probably looked for someone who knew the Maori language," but immediately I jotted down a dozen names of other missionaries who knew how to speak the Maori language as well as or better than I. Then I thought to myself, "He probably needs someone who has had administrative experience in the Church, such as in a bishopric or high council." Then I proceeded to jot down another list of returned New Zealand missionaries who had had this experience. Then this thought came to

Robert L. Simpson was an Assistant to 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 12 February 1974.

my mind—indelible, sharp, and clear—“But of all these men, you’re the only one married to Jelaire Chandler, and that’s why the Lord has called you.” Now, young people, that’s how important it is to find a sweetheart and companion to be at your side who can supplement you in your priesthood and share with you the dream of exaltation and eternal life together.

You young men who are over twenty-five, you young bachelors, this should be a great week for you! I am sure you feel very comfortable in your life-style of peanut butter, TV dinners, and another young lady to date next Friday night. This syndrome of peanut butter, TV dinners, and another date next Friday night sounds like going around in circles. I want to promise you that too much circling can be a deterrent to eternal progression. Don’t allow yourselves to fall into a “convenient” rut or to become involved in a life-style that is too easy and brings you only momentary happiness. I want to encourage you to reach out and think seriously about all that the Lord has in store for you, but those things must be done in proper sequence and in proper time in order for you to remain on schedule for the maximum blessing.

I was so grateful to hear this lovely women’s chorus sing today. Their song, “Cast Thy Burden upon the Lord,” fits exactly into what I’d like to say this morning. How many people we have who attempt to struggle through life with great problems, unable to do all that the Lord has in mind for them, simply because they refuse to cast their burdens upon the Lord through his appointed representatives.

Motivations for Doing Right

We do right for various reasons. Some people do right simply because they don’t want to be punished for doing wrong. When we do right for fear of retribution, I think our foundation is very shaky. Another might say, “I want to do right because I have always been taught that this is the thing to do.” Well, such reasoning is based on hearsay, on the

testimony of others, and I think we need to mature beyond that point. I think we need to have our own testimonies instead of the advice of others on a perpetual basis. Others have been heard to say, “I want to do right just to please my parents,” and although we all should have a desire to please our parents, that reason alone is not sufficient to sustain us throughout eternity. Perhaps you have heard people who have indicated that they are doing the right thing simply because they want to be obedient to God’s commands; this, too, is a very high and noble purpose—provided, of course, that that obedience is not blind obedience, without personal conviction. But to me the best reason of all is illustrated by the person who feels the desire to do right because he wants to add glory to his Father in heaven. Whatever stage of motivation we find ourselves in, I think we must eventually reinforce this with our own personal testimony which has been built on a foundation of gospel scholarship and understanding—a testimony which leads us to the life of unselfishness and service, one which finds its highest sanctification in the supreme thought that we are living gospel principles because we desire to glorify his great name.

“For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). This tremendous scripture summarizes in one sentence the sum and substance, the purpose of all creation. When I was young, I always assumed it would be impossible for God to participate further in the great process of eternal progression. After all, he was perfect. All knowledge was his. He had indeed overcome all things. But understanding this scripture, I now know that he is capable of further glorification or exaltation. Indeed he is added upon through the success of his children. Your failure or my failure diminishes his possibilities. Our success in righteous endeavors adds further glory to his name.

Should not that be the perfect motivation? It is perfect because it is without selfish interest.

The Necessity of Repentance

You and I have been taught all of our lives that this mortal span is to overcome—to overcome those attributes that would not be compatible with his presence. The thought has often crossed my mind that we will each be capable of our own judgment. We will want to seek our own kind, to be in the presence of that life-style that we have grown accustomed to. Wouldn't you like to feel at home in the presence of the father and the mother who gave birth to your spirit? To feel obligated to go someplace else would be the greatest disappointment of all time, in my opinion. The plan is clear. God the Father, whom you and I seek, is at the top, and our most urgent task here is to overcome every thought and every act that might prevent us from regaining his holy presence. Without the great principle of repentance, I doubt that any of us would have a chance to achieve exaltation or eternal life.

When the plan of salvation was formulated, when it was decided that there would be opposition in all things, and when it was further decided that free agency would be available to all men, God knew then and there that there would be of necessity a procedure by which corrections could be made, whereby the burdens of sin, bad habits, wrong choices could be compensated for. He called this procedure repentance and associated with it a companion piece called the miracle of forgiveness. Pride, arrogance, and selfishness are all tools of the adversary. Pride, arrogance, and selfishness are prime barriers to repentance and to our ability to forgive one another.

All great concepts have simple equations, something like Einstein's theory of relativity, which is simply stated $E=mc^2$. the simple formula for repentance is found in the Doctrine and Covenants: "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess

them and forsake them" (D&C 58:43). "Confess and forsake"—both so difficult to achieve in the negative climate of pride, arrogance, selfishness, and fear; both so possible in the framework of faith, love, humility, and courage.

The Process of Repentance

I think you will find that the great majority of problems taken before a bishop are handled quietly, confidentially, and unobtrusively by the bishop alone. Most frequently he will not deem it necessary to convene a bishop's court. Of course, here on this campus we talk about branch presidents, but these brethren carry the same authority: they are common judges; they are your bishops.

Forgiveness would likely follow a period of probation, depending of course on the magnitude of the problem. Also, the bishop would likely request a periodic check to make certain that everything was proceeding as agreed. Then, eventually, the member finds new security in his new-found freedom, in his ability to put that problem behind him. Another burden has been unloaded; another barrier to exaltation has been removed. New peace of mind can now replace a troubled heart, and that old feeling of hypocrisy is replaced by a clear conscience. Where serious transgression requires a court hearing, may I promise you, my dear young friends, that the procedure is kind, and it is gentle. The Church court system is just. As has been stated on many occasions, these are courts of love with the singular objective of helping Church members to get back on a proper course. There is no plan in Heavenly Father's realm to put his children down. Everything is designed to aid our progress, not to impede it. I wish I could introduce you to scores of people that I know personally who have been excommunicated from this Church but who have come back through the waters of baptism, who have found their way and who have had a restoration of all their blessings. They now stand on more firm ground than they

have ever been on during most of their lives. Without appropriate priesthood discipline, I am doubtful that they could ever achieve the position of renewed confidence they stand in today.

The Church Court System

Relatively few Church members really understand the Church court system, and that's why I have chosen to share with you this morning a few of these thoughts so that you might feel confidence in the Lord's way. There is an unjustified fear of Church courts in the hearts of many, and this is exactly the way the adversary wants it to be. Anytime he can keep someone from making things right, he scores a victory. He scores a victory for his cause. Unfortunately, many in the Church regard the bishop's court and the high council court as courts of retribution. Such is not the case; these courts provide a necessary procedure without which many will never really achieve the lofty and eternal goals that you and I have in mind.

Let us take a quick look at the bishop's court. If the initial confidential interview with the bishop reveals a serious irregularity, he may decide to convene a bishop's court. The court consists of the three members of the ward bishopric. They may consider the matter of excommunication for any member of the church living in the ward except for a member who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood. The bishop's court, however, may render a decision of disfellowshipment or probation for any member of the ward, including Melchizedek Priesthood holders. The high council court, on the other hand, is under the direction of the stake president and consists of the stake presidency and members of the high council. This court has the authority to conduct hearings for any member of the church residing in that stake, and they have jurisdiction over both Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood holders and may impose a decision of excommunication where appropriate.

All Church courts usually convene in the attitude of fasting and prayer. Total justice and harmony with the revealed word of the Lord become the prime objectives of a Church court. Judgment that is too light or too harsh often defeats the purposes of the Lord. No case should be prejudged. Only after hearing the facts and judging the spirit of the individual can proper justice be administered. A fair hearing and a final decision of the court, ratified by the gifts of the Spirit, will always be in the best interest of the member being tried.

It has been truly stated that far more important than the transgression is what is in the heart of the individual who seeks repentance. It is unfortunate indeed when people who have committed serious violation try to avoid confrontation with the priesthood authority in their ward or stake. Such people are seldom sorry for what they have done. They are only sorry that they have been caught. In the words of President Kimball, "Blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled."

Even excommunication from the Church need not be the end of all hope. Although the mistake has been a grievous and serious violation of God's commandments, a person who really loves the Lord and has the desire and the fortitude to submit himself to priesthood authority can reestablish his life and in due process qualify himself for the lofty and ultimate blessings of eternity, including exaltation. Even the gross offender will be welcomed back by the Lord: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18)—what a great promise, what a great redemption! But this cannot happen without complete repentance, and complete repentance involves the formula we talked about before: that we confess, that we forsake.

Causes of Excommunication

There are very few reasons for excommunication in this Church. I can think of only about three. Let me enumerate for you. First, Church

members can become candidates for excommunication as they involve themselves in gross iniquity. Second, Church members become candidates for excommunication as they become involved in or advocate plural marriage. There is no place for this doctrine in the Church today. Third, Church members become candidates for excommunication as they apostatize from the teachings of the Church.

What about this thing we call gross iniquity? In my opinion, gross iniquity would involve such transgressions as murder, adultery, sexual perversion, or any serious offense against society that has resulted in conviction by the civil courts. A good example would be a felony.

On the subject of apostasy, it should be made clear that an apostate is not an indifferent or an inactive member of the Church, but rather one who flatly denies the divine nature of the Church or who is antagonistic against or unresponsive to his priesthood authority. We do not excommunicate people from this Church for indifference or for inactivity. Some of the unhappiest people that I know are members of the church who are attempting to live with a habit that is contrary to their basic belief. They love the Lord and feel that they are betraying him. This is an untenable situation. Left unsolved, the conflict causes rationalization to set in. Satan lulls us into a sense of false security. We lie to ourselves as we attempt to justify rather than to change, and thus the adversary leads us quietly down to a life of unhappiness and regret.

I remember a prisoner whom I talked to on one occasion. This prisoner was deeply embarrassed about being in prison. I talked to him about repentance; and, not knowing what he was there for, I said, "My good brother, are you in here for stealing?"

"Oh, no. My mother taught me not to steal. I wouldn't steal anything from anybody. I am

in here for forgery." Well, rationalization can do some odd things to people.

We talked about great concepts and simple formulas for solution. James had this to say to those in need of help: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). I believe this. I have seen it happen. The bishop is your advocate with God by ordination; and so, as you decide to submit yourselves to God, you must submit yourselves to his priesthood authority. For he has told us that whether it is spoken by his voice or by the voice of his servants, it is the same. And so it is.

Need for Self-Control

Have the courage to maintain control of your eternal destiny. There are no shortcuts, my wonderful young friends, no shortcuts in terms of exaltation and eternal life. President Kimball, in his great book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, quotes the following:

The height of a man's success is gauged by his self-mastery; the depth of his failure, by his self-abandonment. There is no other limitation in either direction. And this law is the expression of eternal justice. He who cannot establish a dominion over himself will have no dominion over others. He who masters himself shall be king. [Author unknown]

Has the thought ever occurred to you that God is depending on you, as a member of this Church, to take charge eventually, to have dominion? You'd better believe it. Shouldn't self-mastery come first? It can happen in no other way. We cannot have dominion, principality, and powers except we gain mastery over ourselves and have dominion over our own feelings and impulses. Why wait? Procrastination invites rationalization. It was Mark Twain who quipped, "I know I can quit smoking. Why, I've quit a thousand times." and don't we find ourselves saying, "Why, I can just

turn it off just like that. When the time comes, I'll be able to stop"? And then there are those who contemplate a magic curtain out there in time and space, and as we pass through that magic curtain, we just automatically void ourselves of all the bad habits and all the things that we're not proud of. This idea is a delusion. It is false. It is the teaching of the adversary.

Maybe we could quote Tagore, who said, "I have spent my days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing remains unsung." We go around in circles, and we spend our time in triviality when we should get on with that which the Lord has given us to do by way of foreordination.

Strengthening Others

Now, speaking again of unselfish motives, I would like to observe that, as important and as immediately satisfying as these personal corrections in life might be, one of the most interesting and satisfying possibilities lies ahead as we, having overcome, can now reach back in added strength to assist others to do likewise. This is really the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it was the Savior who said, "Love thy neighbor" (Matthew 5:43); "Feed my sheep" (John 21:16); "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Luke relates this conversation of the Savior, speaking to Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31–32). When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. Doing this can bring the most soul-satisfying joy that I know of here in mortality. As managing director of the Church's Social Services program, I see thousands upon thousands of volunteers quietly reaching out to lift the alcoholic, to help the drug abuser, to make provisions for an unwed mother that her life might be reconstructed, to

spend time with a prisoner that he might be able to get back on a proper track.

Our charge is no different; "When thou art converted, strengthen they brethren" holds for you and me as well as for Simon Peter. Our repentance can be a double victory as we give ourselves to the Lord in this process of helping others. It can be a great victory for ourselves and for those that we lift up after we have been made stronger. Here again we emphasize the positive, the unselfish act, as the supreme fulfillment of all that we are trying to do.

Gaining Exaltation

Young people, the Lord loves you, and Heavenly Father has not given one single principle that would condemn. Even excommunication is temporary and can only make the future possibilities brighter. His work, and his glory, is to exalt. One more encouraging note, especially for you students (with all due respect to these illustrious faculty members I see here today), is that God doesn't grade on the curve. He would like us all to get an A. And he has made that provision—everybody can get an A—but we have to qualify for it. Don't become an ally to Satan's plan of unhappiness and destruction. Don't you do it. You learn to take advantage of the Lord's purification processes. We have talked about them here today.

"Cast Thy Burden upon the Lord." I am sure that Brother Evan Davis was inspired to select this great hymn today. It fits in so beautifully with the theme of our discussion. Let your heart be in tune. Let it be in tune so that you can receive this blessing:

That the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

That the Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, that thy scepter might be an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and that thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and that

without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever. [See D&C 121:45–46]

That is what this Church is all about. I want to bear you my solemn witness that I know that God lives, that I know that Jesus Christ is his son, and that I know the ordained priesthood officers in the church are good men, servants of our Heavenly Father, who give

themselves unselfishly to the work so that you and I might have proper direction, so that you and I might be able to cast our burdens upon the Lord, and so that you and I might be able to qualify for that great eternal destiny involving a man, a woman, a family unit led by priesthood authority. I pray that we might so live and so qualify ourselves in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.