

# *Principles with a Promise*

## A. THEODORE TUTTLE

**M**y dear fellow students, it is always a pleasant occasion to come to Brigham Young University. But it is likewise an awesome responsibility. For that reason I am grateful for that beautiful prayer by Brother Turner and pray with you that it will be fulfilled in our behalf.

Some of you may remember the 1970 space flight of Apollo 13. It was to be man's third landing on the moon. The launching was perfect, the first 205,000 miles of flight flawless. Then, on the evening of the third day, Jack Swigert's voice suddenly crackled into the mission spacecraft center in Houston: "Hey, we've got a problem here." What had been an almost boring trip was instantly transformed into a frantic struggle to rescue the three astronauts from the prospect of a death no man had experienced before—death while drifting endlessly in space.

As the tense drama unfolded, it was learned that one of the two essential oxygen tanks in the service module had exploded. A leak from the other tank showed on the spaceship's dials. Clearly they were in trouble. These tanks supplied not only the critical oxygen but power and water as well. And now they had only a limited supply.

As soon as mission control in Houston was advised, everyone went into action. They mounted a massive rescue operation involving at least 10,000 people. The landing on the moon was aborted; the total effort now was to return the crew safely to the earth. You probably recall the rest of the story. You may even have been part of the largest television audience in history as it watched Apollo 13's final descent. Out of the scores of evaluations made on the whole experience, there was agreement on one point: The crew was rescued because they *received* constant direction from mission control at Houston and *followed* that direction.

In many respects, their experience is like your journey through life. A wise Father has launched you on your earthly journey. He has provided most of the essentials for the trip, though some of them are in limited supply. Like those astronauts, your ultimate goal is to get back where you came from, and in the process you have a mission to perform. You

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*A. Theodore Tuttle was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 31 January 1978.*

face some challenging times, all right. Sometimes you get yourselves into trouble. When that happens, you have to change your course and get back on the right track; we call that process repentance. Repentance simply means changing your course and getting back on the path.

Signals from your “mission control headquarters” are always coming through. Whether or not you are able to receive them depends on the condition of your “receiving sets.” As you students take your journey on your own, keep your “receiving sets” in good condition. There are laws that govern your ability to receive the signals. You need to understand the operation of law in your life.

There are many laws; for example, there is Murphy’s Law. I am sure you are all acquainted with that: “If anything can go wrong, it will.” Then there is O’Toole’s Commentary on Murphy’s Law; he said, “Murphy was an optimist.” There is also the law of gravity. You understand that, but perhaps you are not aware of Murgatroyd’s Observation on the law of gravity—that “any object will fall so as to cause the most damage.” Jennings’s Commentary on Murgatroyd’s Observation is that “the chance of bread falling with the buttered side down is directly proportional to the cost of the carpet.”

While I do not deny the operation of such “laws,” I want to put into better perspective some of God’s laws.

For your journey through life, one of the first things you need to know is:

*There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—*

*And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.* [D&C 130:30–21]

I want to repeat that. “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations

of the world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessings from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”

Ponder that thought. This great revelation did not evolve from man’s reason; it was revealed from heaven. It sets forth unmistakably the fact that there are principles upon which promises are predicated, and that obedience is the key to receiving blessings. This revelation gives you “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24). In other words, it is truth. Perhaps the operation of this law can best be seen in the account of God’s relationship with the people of the Book of Mormon. Numerous verses in the Book of Mormon emphasize the truth of this law. One may illustrate the many: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence (2 Nephi 1:20). There are many others (see 2 Nephi 1:19, 20, 26; 4:4; 26:32–33; Omni 6; Mosiah 1:7; 2:23–24; 2:31; Alma 9:13–14; 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1; 3 Nephi 5:22).

In conjunction with laws, principles, or truth (and I will use them interchangeably, though technically they differ somewhat), there is generally a condition and a promise, either stated or implied. Note:

*Unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.*

*All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified.* [D&C 88:38–39]

And another, “For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world” (D&C 132:5).

Concerning law Elder McConkie has written:

*All things are governed by law; nothing is exempt. In the eternal perspective there is no such thing as chance; in the divine economy the same in varying result always flows from the same cause. These principles are immutable, eternal, everlasting; they apply to all things both temporal and spiritual. . . .*

*There is no whim, chance, or caprice in the operation of gospel law. Divine blessings always result from obedience to the law upon which their receipt is predicated. . . .*

[In this same discussion Elder McConkie said,] *Once a law has been ordained, it thereafter operates automatically; that is, whenever there is compliance with its terms and conditions, the promised [blessings] accrue. . . .* [Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 395]

Usually when we consider laws we are inclined to think of them as being something very restrictive, something that holds us down. We frequently think of law as the opposite of liberty. That is not so; law is the basis of freedom. It can be likened to the situation of the astronauts. When they were advised to move into the lunar module and stay there in order to save precious oxygen for the return trip in the command module, it was not only cold but cramped. Commander Lovell described their condition to mission control: “Fred [Haise]’s sleeping place is now in the tunnel, upside down with his head resting on the ascent engine cover. . . . Jack [Swigert] is on the floor . . . with a restraint harness wrapped around his arm to keep him there” (*Newsweek*, April 27, 1970, p. 25). The result of their obedience, however, eventually freed them from certain death in space.

I suppose you too have felt a bit shackled by some of God’s laws. On occasion any one of you may have wanted to physically express some natural feelings toward another but were restricted from improper actions by obedience to the law of chastity. At the time you may have felt resentment against the restraints of law. Obedience, however, frees you from

remorse. Obedience brings inner peace. In quieter moments, are you not grateful for such restraint?

Another illustration may help. A father was out with his son flying a kite. He had let nearly all the string go out. As the little boy watched the kite go higher and higher, he said, “Daddy, let all the string out. Let go of it. Let it fly clear up to the sky!”

The wise father, seeing an opportunity to teach a lesson, replied, “Oh, no, my son. If we were to let go of the string the kite would come down. We have to keep a hold on it to keep the kite up. You see, oftentimes the things that hold you down are really the things that keep you up.”

Some people look at fences as though they were there to keep them out, when in reality they mark paths to guide them in.

I would like to cite several illustrations of the principles and promises our Heavenly Father has given to guide you along your journey. The first one is sometimes called “the law of the harvest.”

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

*For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. [Galatians 6:7]*

If you sow seeds that are lustful and sensuous, you shall reap regret; and the labor of that season is lost. Ultimately corruption shall follow just as surely as one season follows another. On the other hand, the promise is equally true that the seeds of honor and virtue will one day bring the crowning gift of life everlasting.

Most of you have seen the film *The Ten Commandments*. You may recall Cecil B. DeMille’s introduction to this epic, in which he recites the great lesson taught by history and the experience of the ages: “We cannot break [God’s laws]. We can only “break ourselves against them.” Ponder that thought. This

principle applies to physical, moral, or spiritual laws.

You may be thinking of someone you know who is misbehaving yet seems to be happy and to have no problems. You wonder how this principle can possibly be true. Does it apply to everyone? Remember, God does not balance his books in October, but balance them he will. We look at things with limited vision; he judges things in eternal perspective. The decisions between the way of the flesh and the way of the spirit have eternal implications. They become the most crucial decisions you will ever make. You will not only reap what you sow in kind; you will reap what you sow abundantly. Nature provides bountiful blossoms from only a few seeds. The law of the harvest is unfailing. Plant only what you will be willing to harvest abundantly.

The Word of Wisdom was

*Given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints. . . .*

*In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation—*

*That inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good. . . .*

*Tobacco is not for the body. . . .*

*And . . . hot drinks [meaning tea and coffee] are not for the body. . . . [D&C 89:3–5, 8–9]*

Then comes the marvelous promise of health, wisdom, strength, and life.

*And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;*

*And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;*

*And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.*

*And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen. [D&C 89:19–21; emphasis added]*

During the last world war I served in the Marine Corps. We were required to undergo extreme physical hardships, not only in training but in combat at Iwo Jima. I had never been especially robust in my youth, and when these occasions had to be met I needed extra strength. I had faithfully observed the Word of Wisdom all my life. During times of stress I asked the Lord to fulfill the promises he had made in the Word of Wisdom. From my own personal experience, I know this principle is true.

Another principle with promise is the law of tithing. I am selecting those principles that illustrate the unerring operation of divine law. I select those also that help to keep your “receiving sets” in good condition.

*Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith. . . . [The Lord is emphasizing a principle with a promise—in fact, three promises] if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

*And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the fields. . . . [What is the devourer? It is anything that devours your substance and keeps you from prospering.]*

*And all nations shall call you blessed, for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts. [3 Nephi 24:10–12]*

In the present dispensation the Lord has promised an added blessing for its faithful observance: “For he that is tithed shall not be burned . . .” (D&C 64:23). (You can understand why some have facetiously spoken of obedience to this law as “fire insurance.”)

If any of you think that you do not have enough money to pay tithing, let me share with you an observation. People pay tithing not because they have money, but because they have faith. When they comply with the law, the promise then becomes operative and can be fulfilled.

As I have traveled about the Church, it has been my privilege to mingle with those who have much and with those who have very little. Those who have complied with the law of tithing have received the promised blessings. Blessings have not always come in material ways, but blessings have truly come. The principle always works. I have heard testimonies to this truth, and I know of myself the principle is true. Do you think that I would teach you those principles if I did not know that they were true? They will be fulfilled in your behalf. I want to see your lives blessed by observance of these principles.

The law of the Sabbath also illustrates this principle.

[Note the purpose of the Sabbath day:] *And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, [is there anyone who does not want to do that?] thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day [a sacrament is a spiritual covenant];*

*For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High.*

To “rest from your labors,” you stop the regular weekly routine in order to have time to do the work of the Lord and to worship the Lord on the Sabbath day. Note the promise if we do so.

*Verily I say, that inasmuch as ye do this, the fullness of the earth is yours . . .*

*And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; . . .*

*But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. [D&C 59:9–10, 16, 20, 23; emphasis added]*

Do you want to miss this promise? All mankind is seeking for peace. Yet peace—inner peace—and eternal life are within your grasp if you will but reach out and claim them by doing the works of righteousness.

(I hope that sometime your great president will share with you his university experience—the pressures to study on the Sabbath day, his refusal to do it, and his testimony of how the Lord fulfills His promises.)

Finally, I would suggest an additional dimension to your relationship to law. The Lord expects you to pursue righteousness.

*For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.*

*Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;*

*For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.*

*But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.*

*Who am I that made man, saith the Lord, that will hold him guiltless that obeys not my commandments?*

*Who am I, saith the Lord, that have promised and have not fulfilled.*

*I command and men obey not; I revoke and they receive not the blessing.*

*Then they say in their hearts: This is not the work of the Lord, for his promises are not fulfilled. But, wo unto such, for their reward lurketh beneath, and not from above. [D&C 58:26–33]*

The Lord has given you this earthly experience. He has established laws to guide you. He has promised blessings for obedience. He wants you to return to live with him. Like the crew of Apollo 13, you cannot get "home" without direction from heaven. Like them, you may be oblivious to a hurricane boiling toward your splash-down area. Were you not guided by revelation from God, you could easily lose contact, wander off your course, and find yourself in outer darkness where

you must drift eternally. If, however, you will listen to and follow divine direction, you can gain eternal life.

I testify that our Heavenly Father lives, and that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior, and our Redeemer. President Kimball is his living prophet. Your safeguard on your journey through life is the constant direction from a wise and loving Heavenly Father. With all my heart I plead with you to listen, to obey, and to live. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.