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The Lord's Standard of MORALITY

Some years ago my father, an attorney, was trying a lawsuit. For his authority, he cited only one case—a California Supreme Court case issued many years before. His opponent cited a number of lower-court decisions of more recent vintage.

The judge said to my father, “Mr. Callister, don’t you have a more recent case than this?” My father looked at the judge and replied, “Your Honor, may I remind you that when the supreme court speaks on a matter, it only needs to speak once.” The

judge nodded with approval. He was reminded that the supreme court trumps all lower-court decisions, however numerous or recent they may be.

So it is with God our Father—He needs to speak only once on the issue of morality, and that one declaration trumps all the opinions of the lower courts, whether uttered by psychologists, counselors, politicians, friends, parents, or would-be moralists of the day.

It is almost unbelievable to think that God has given to His children the power that is most prized and sacred to

Him—the power to create life. Because God gave us this power, He, and He alone, has the right to prescribe how it should be used.

Contrary to much public sentiment, there is nothing negative or restraining about God’s moral standards. Rather, they are positive, uplifting, and liberating. They build relationships of trust, they enhance self-esteem, they foster a clear conscience, and they invite the Spirit of the Lord to bless individual and married lives. They are the proven standards for happy marriages and stable communities.

**Our choice to obey
or disobey God’s
standard of morality
will largely determine our
happiness in life.**

What, then, is the Lord's standard for use of the sacred power of procreation—His standard of morality? In truth, the Lord's standard of morality is not so much a list of do's and don'ts as it is a principle, which can be expressed as follows: The procreative power is to be exercised in the marriage relationship for two key reasons: (1) to bind and strengthen ties between spouses and (2) to bring souls into the world. These uses have the blessing and endorsement of the Lord.

On the other hand, the procreative power is not to be exercised outside the husband-wife relationship. Accordingly, any conscious thoughts or voluntary actions that stimulate or result in the expression of the procreative power outside the marriage relationship are disapproved by the Lord.

I now cite some of the Lord's standards of morality so as to minimize any misunderstanding or ambiguity.

FORNICATION AND ADULTERY

The Lord forbids fornication and adultery despite how the world feels toward these behaviors. These acts constitute the ultimate use of the procreative power with someone of the opposite sex with whom we are not legally married. It is fornication if neither party is married; it is adultery if either or both parties are married.

The Apostle Paul said,

"For this is the will of God, . . . that ye should abstain from fornication" (1 Thessalonians 4:3; emphasis added). He also said, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: *neither fornicators . . . nor adulterers . . .* shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; emphasis added).

Sometimes people do not realize the seriousness of these transgressions or, in some cases, rationalize it away. Corianton did not seem to realize the seriousness of what he had done when he sinned with the harlot Isabel. Alma, his father, put it in perspective: "Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord?" (Alma 39:5). Joseph also spoke of this great evil when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

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INAPPROPRIATE TOUCHING

Inappropriate touching arouses the procreative powers. Accordingly, in the premarital setting it is contrary to God's moral standard to touch the private or sacred parts of another's body, whether or not the person is clothed.¹

SELF-ABUSE

The Lord condemns self-abuse. Self-abuse is the act of stimulating



the procreative power of one's own body. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said:

“Do not be guilty of tampering or playing with this sacred power of creation. . . .

“ . . . It is not pleasing to the Lord, nor is it pleasing to you. It does not make you feel worthy or clean.”²

SAME-GENDER RELATIONSHIPS

Some would have us believe that the Church's stand against same-gender physical relationships is a temporary policy and not an eternal doctrine. Such a belief would be at odds with the scriptures, with the words of modern prophets, and with the plan of salvation, all of which teach the necessity of eternal marriage between a man and a woman as a condition to exaltation.

A same-gender relationship is inconsistent with God's eternal pattern that husbands and wives not only have children in mortality but also have eternal increase in their exalted condition.

We recognize that everyone is a son or daughter of God and deserves to be treated as such. We all struggle with imperfections, some not of our choosing. But we also believe in an infinite Atonement that has the capacity in this life or the life to come to endow us with every power necessary to convert our weaknesses and imperfections into strengths. The Lord promised us, “For if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

Those with same-gender tendencies have a duty to (1) abstain from immoral relationships and (2) do all within their power to avail themselves of the refining, perfecting powers of the Atonement. In the interim, however, those who have same-gender tendencies but do not act on them are worthy to hold Church positions and receive a temple recommend.³

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TENTACLES OF THE ADVERSARY

Now I share some danger signals that precede some of the sins I have mentioned. In some regards, Satan is like an octopus trying to capture us. If one tentacle does not work, he will try another and another until he finds one that takes hold. Following are some of the tentacles of the evil one designed to cause us to break God's standard of morality.

Pornography

God desires that His children not watch any movie or TV show, go to any website, or view any magazine that is pornographic in any way. Pornography is any picture or narrative that feeds the carnal man within. It is *repulsive* to the Spirit of the Lord.

No one can claim to be fooled by the effects of pornography, believing there is any such thing as an innocent glance.

It is a poisonous, venomous, unforgiving snake that will strike the moment you take your first look and will continue to strike with a full portion of venom with each look thereafter.

If you are afflicted with this malady, you need to do all within your power to overcome it. It may require confession, intense prayer, fasting, immersion in the scriptures, replacing idle time with constructive time, putting strict boundaries on Internet usage, professional counseling, and the like, but you can overcome it. At some point willpower will be an indispensable ingredient—there is not a pill or counseling technique to solve every addiction.

Immodest Dress

Our dress affects not only our thoughts and actions but also the thoughts and actions of others. Accordingly, Paul the Apostle counseled “women [to] adorn themselves in modest apparel” (1 Timothy 2:9).

The dress of a woman has a powerful impact upon the minds and passions of men. If it is too low or too high or too tight, it may prompt improper thoughts, even in the mind of a young man who is striving to be pure.⁴

Men and women can look sharp and be fashionable, yet they can also be modest. Women particularly can dress modestly and in the process contribute to their own self-respect and to the moral purity of men. In the end, most women get the type of man they dress for.

Unclean Thoughts

It has been said, “You can watch the birds fly by; just don’t let them build a nest on your head.” There is nothing wrong with noticing the pretty young lady or handsome young man as they walk by—that is normal. But if those thoughts turn to lust, then the nest is being built.

We cannot avoid seeing every improper billboard or immodestly dressed person, but we can drive out the improper thought once it arises. The sin is not in involuntarily seeing something improper; the sin is in entertaining the thought once it comes. The scriptures tell us, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

In essence, our thoughts become the seeds of our actions. We do have the power within us to take control of our lives and our thoughts. Good and evil thoughts cannot coexist in our minds any more than light and dark can exist at the same time and in the same place. At some point we must decide which will be our invited guest.

If we so desire, we can drive out every evil thought and immediately replace it with an uplifting song or poem or scripture. Just as darkness flees at the presence of light, so evil flees at the presence of good.

Secluded Places and Tempting Friends

At certain times and places, no matter how strong we are, we have less resistance. Some of the best of men and women in the worst of circumstances have fallen. It happened to King David as he watched Bathsheba at night-time, at first from a seemingly safe distance (see 2 Samuel 11:2–4). None of us should think we are too powerful or

too immune to succumb. Secluded locations, late nights, and morally loose friends have incredible magnetic fields to draw us into Satan’s clutches.

Rationalization

Two oft-repeated rationalizations are used to support moral transgression. The first is “I loved her.” Satan is the great counterfeiter. He tries to palm off lust as love. There

is a simple test to detect the difference. Love is motivated by self-control, obedience to God’s moral laws, respect for others, and unselfishness. On the other hand, lust is motivated by disobedience, self-gratification, and lack of discipline.

The second rationalization is “No one will ever know.” The Lord has dispelled that myth on multiple occasions. He declared, “The rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the

housetops, *and their secret acts shall be revealed*” (D&C 1:3; emphasis added).

There is no field so dark or corner so secluded that no one will ever know. God will know, and you will know if you violate His moral law.

REPENTANCE

If we have made moral mistakes in our lives, we can repent because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The first and foundational step to living a morally clean life for the future is to repent of past transgressions, to exchange a foundation of sand for a foundation of rock. Often that commences with confession.

Repentance, however, is not just a matter of time or forsaking a sin or making a confession. Most of all, repentance is an honest change of heart, a burning resolve to live a morally clean life—not because we have to but because we want to.

God made it clear that we cannot violate His standards without suffering the consequences, but because He is

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loving and compassionate beyond measure, He gives us this glorious hope:

“For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

“*Nevertheless, he that repents* and does the commandments of the Lord *shall be forgiven*” (D&C 1:31–32; emphasis added).

To all honest souls who change their hearts and forsake their sins, He has promised, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

However, it is always better to remain clean than to sin and repent afterward. Why is that? Because certain adverse consequences of sin may remain even after repentance, such as disease or a child born out of wedlock or damage to our reputation. Our goal in life is not just to be clean but also to be perfect. The quest for perfection is accelerated when we are clean, but it is stymied when we are not.

Alma taught, “Wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). We cannot break God’s moral laws with impunity and be happy because God, who created us, placed within our souls a moral compass known as our conscience. Anytime we violate God’s standard of morality, that conscience goes to work—it gnaws at us, it triggers feelings of guilt and remorse, and it acts as a divine witness testifying to the truth of that standard.

We may try to ignore it and we may try

to suppress it, but we cannot escape it. God’s standard of morality cannot be dismissed; it cannot be diluted or compromised; it can only be obeyed or disobeyed. Eventually we either fight it or embrace it. Our choice will largely determine our happiness in life.

BLESSINGS OF A MORAL LIFE

The blessings of living a clean and moral life are overwhelming. Such a life will bring self-confidence and self-esteem. It will result in a clear conscience. It will make us eligible for a spouse of like purity and will make the expression of the procreative power in the marriage relationship sweeter and more rewarding because we have reserved it for the time the Lord Himself has endorsed.

Because the Lord loves us immensely and wants us to be happy, He has announced His intentions for His children in these latter days: “For I will raise up unto myself a pure people, that will serve me in righteousness” (D&C 100:16).

May each of us be a part of that pure generation and embrace the Lord’s standard of morality. ■

From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on January 22, 2013. For the full text in English, go to web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.

NOTES

1. See Richard G. Scott, “The Power of Righteousness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 69; *Liahona*, Jan. 1999, 81.
2. Boyd K. Packer, *To Young Men Only* (1976), 4, 5.
3. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 21.4.6.
4. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Pornography,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2005, 90.

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