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WHEN EVIL APPEARS GOOD AND GOOD APPEARS EVIL

*How the adversary tries to mischaracterize
and undermine the blessings of living
according to the Father's plan.*

One of the most cunning aspects of the adversary's efforts to thwart our Father in Heaven's plan of happiness is his deceitful teaching that there is no evil influence or devil (see 2 Nephi 28:22) and his attempt to redefine evil as good and good as evil, darkness as light and light as darkness, and bitter as sweet and sweet as bitter! (see 2 Nephi 15:20).

This is sometimes called a paradigm shift—"when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way,"¹ thus portraying things to be exactly the opposite of what they really are. In his classic novel *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis wrote from a senior devil's point of view. Lewis inverted traditional values using irony and satire to make evil appear good and good appear evil.²



In this vein, I had a provocative meeting with an internationally recognized advertising expert a few months ago. We were discussing the influence of evil and the consequences of bad choices.

He envisioned an interesting hypothetical account of Lucifer meeting with an advertising agency. The adversary described his dilemma: he and his followers had rebelled and rejected the Father's plan and had come to understand that they could not prevail against God. Lucifer understood that while the Father's plan was about joy and happiness, his own plan resulted in grief and misery. The problem, Lucifer explained to the ad executive, was how to attract followers.

It was determined that Lucifer's only hope of success was to achieve a paradigm shift or values inversion—in other words, to characterize the Father's plan as resulting in grief and misery and Lucifer's plan as resulting in joy and happiness.

The Word of Wisdom advocates wholesome health practices with a promise that those acting in obedience to the divine command “shall receive health . . . and shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge.”

This hypothetical meeting serves a useful purpose. The truth is, not only do the enemies of the Father's plan attempt to undermine the doctrine and principles of the plan, but they also attempt to mischaracterize the blessings that flow from the plan. Their basic effort is to make that which is good, righteous, and joyful seem miserable.

I will discuss some of the adversary's efforts to mischaracterize and undermine the blessings of living according to the Father's plan.

Word of Wisdom

Over the course of a lifetime, I have seen the lives of many of my friends blighted and sometimes destroyed by alcohol. An alcohol culture isn't just about Church doctrine; it is also about the health and happiness of everyone. Latter-day Saints can be an important voice in educating society about the consequences of this issue.

In the Father's plan, the Word of Wisdom—given because of “evils and designs . . . of conspiring men”—provides health principles. It is “adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints.” It sets forth particulars, including that “wine or strong drink [alcohol] . . . is not good.” Tobacco and hot drinks (tea and coffee) “are not for the body” (D&C 89:4, 3, 5, 8–9).

This revelation also advocates wholesome health practices with a promise. It promises that those acting in obedience to the divine command “shall receive health . . . and shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge” (D&C 89:18–19).³

The distortion that the adversary utilizes is clearly illustrated by his advocacy for tobacco and alcohol.

Even the hypothetical advertising agency would have a hard time casting tobacco in a favorable light today. The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) received the Word of Wisdom by revelation in 1833. In 1921, President Heber J. Grant (1856–1945), inspired by the Lord, called on all Saints to more fully live the Word of Wisdom.⁴ At the time, mass marketing and glamorization in the movies made cigarette smoking appear fashionable, sophisticated, and fun. It wasn't until 1964, 43 years later, that the Surgeon General of the United States concluded, “Cigarette smoking is a health hazard of sufficient importance in the United States to warrant appropriate remedial action.”⁵

The statistics today with respect to cigarette smoking are not in dispute. Smokers are more likely than non-smokers to develop heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer. Smoking is estimated to increase the risk of lung cancer by 25 times.⁶

So what the adversary portrayed as fashionable, sophisticated, and fun has in fact resulted in misery and untimely death for millions of people.



Alcohol is another example. Over many years I have followed a research project that commenced in the 1940s. Initially, 268 men attending Harvard University were periodically studied over their entire lives. Later, others, including women, became part of the study. The goal of the original study was to find out about success and happiness.

This study contains three significant insights. First, adult happiness has a high correlation with childhood family happiness, especially love and affection from parents.⁷ Second is the importance of a healthy, stable marriage to lifelong happiness.⁸ Third is the negative effect of alcohol on marital and lifetime success and happiness. Alcohol abuse touches one-third of families in the United States and is involved in one-fourth of hospital admissions. It plays a major role in death, bad health, and diminished accomplishment.⁹

A recent *Washington Post* front-page article based on U.S. federal health data reported that “women in America are drinking far more, and far more frequently, than their mothers or grandmothers did, and alcohol consumption is killing them in record numbers.” The article concluded that

“the current and emerging science does not support the purported benefits of moderate drinking” and that “the risk of death from cancer appears to go up with any level of alcohol consumption.”¹⁰

In the past few years, many universities across the world have been trying to diminish alcohol use because of its connection to serious antisocial behaviors, including sexual assault and serious health concerns, especially from binge drinking. The terrible impact of alcohol on young brains is now medically established.¹¹

In reciting primarily personal health issues, I have not attempted to categorize other serious consequences of alcohol use such as accidents while driving under the influence, men trying to excuse physical and sexual assaults because of alcohol impairment, and the effects on fetal brains from alcohol use by women during pregnancy.¹²

As if cigarette smoking, alcohol abuse, and an opiate epidemic¹³ were not harmful enough to society, we now see the forces of evil pushing legalization of recreational marijuana.



Family Choices

Family choices follow a similar pattern. In the Father's plan, the role of families is clearly set forth.

In "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," we read: "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁴

It is fairly common in today's world, in another paradigm shift, to trumpet alternative choices in a positive way that are in direct conflict with this plan and that are unfavorable to marriage and family:

- The choice for both women and men to put education and careers ahead of marriage and family.
- The choice to purposefully have no or few children¹⁵ or to terminate pregnancy when it is inconvenient.

- The choice to engage in immoral conduct as a substitute for the sacred institution of marriage.

The adversary has targeted women and has painted motherhood as a dead-end road of drudgery. He has targeted men and has painted fatherhood as unimportant and fidelity as "old school." The alienation and objectification created by pornography is an example of immoral conduct being substituted for the sacred institution of marriage. It underscores the horrific turning from truth and righteousness that the adversary seeks.

Inappropriate alternative choices are painted as appropriate in helping to achieve the worldly goals of freedom and equality. As a result of such choices, the average number of children a woman will bear in her lifetime is declining dramatically. It is estimated that 46 percent of the world lives in countries in which the fertility rate is below 2.1 children—the rate necessary for the population to remain stable. Most European and Asian countries are below this level. Italy and Japan are both at about 1.3 births. Japan is expected to decrease in population from 120 million to about 100 million by the year 2050.¹⁶

This worldwide decline in population has been described by some as a “demographic winter.”¹⁷ Many countries are not having enough children to replace the generation that is dying.

Let me share one other reality that is of great concern to me. I had a sobering experience in Jerusalem in 2016 at the Children’s Memorial, which is part of the World Holocaust Remembrance Center. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and I, together with two American Jewish leaders, laid a remembrance wreath. It is believed that more than one million Jewish children were killed during the Holocaust.¹⁸

As I experienced the museum, I was overcome with emotion. Standing outside to regain my composure, I reflected on the horror of the experience and suddenly realized that in the United States alone, there are as many abortions every two years as the number of Jewish children killed in the Holocaust during the Second World War.¹⁹

The Jewish children were killed because they were Jews, and there is no analogue to this in all history, but the intensity of my feeling was about the loss of children. Bringing children into the world is a sacred part of our Father in Heaven’s plan of happiness. We are so numbed and intimidated by the immensity of the practice of abortion that many of us have pushed it to the back of our minds and try to keep it out of our consciousness. Clearly the adversary is attacking the value of children on many levels.

Abortion needs to be approached carefully. This is a problem that will probably not be solved by personal condemnation or judgmental accusations. Some have cautioned not to judge a ship—or men or women—without understanding the length of the voyage and the storms encountered.²⁰ I might add, many who engage in this deplorable conduct do not have a testimony of the Savior or knowledge of the Father’s plan.

However, for those who believe we are accountable to God—and even for many of those not of our faith—this has become a tragedy of monumental proportions. When you combine it with the demographic winter we just explored, it is a serious moral blot on our society.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught: “Supreme happiness in marriage is governed considerably by a primary factor—that of the bearing and rearing of children. . . . The Church cannot approve nor condone . . . measures which . . . greatly limit the family.”²¹

With respect to the number and spacing of children, the health of the mother must be considered, and the decision should be made prayerfully by husbands and wives.²² Such decisions should never be judged by outsiders. Some faithful Saints are not able to have children or may not have the opportunity to marry. They will receive every blessing at the ultimate banquet of consequences.²³

Nevertheless, Lucifer has supported abortion and in a horrific paradigm shift has convinced many people that children represent lost opportunity and misery instead of joy and happiness.

As Latter-day Saints, we must be at the forefront of changing hearts and minds on the importance of children.

The Father’s plan is established through families. Every family member is important, and their roles are beautiful, glorious, and fulfilling.

The attacks on the family I just described ultimately result in grief and misery.

The Lord has declared that His work and His glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The plan is established through families. Every family member is important, and their roles are beautiful, glorious, and fulfilling.

The family proclamation could not be more clear about the consequences of choices inconsistent with the Father’s plan. It unequivocally proclaims, “We warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals,

communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”²⁴

This clearly sets forth the ultimate banquet of consequences and the cumulative impact of choices not in accordance with the Father’s plan of happiness.

In all marriages and in raising children, there are challenges and sacrifices. But the rewards both in this life and in the eternities are breathtakingly beautiful. They emanate from a loving Father in Heaven.

Prospering in the Land

A familiar scripture found throughout the Book of Mormon has two parts. It reads, “Inasmuch as ye shall keep

- Seeking the kingdom of God first.
- Working, planning, and spending wisely.
- Planning for the future.
- Using wealth to build up the kingdom of God.

Lucifer’s Objective

In addition to portraying blessings as misery, Lucifer seeks to undermine the Father’s plan and destroy faith in Jesus Christ and His doctrine. The assault on the Bible and the divinity of Jesus Christ has never been more pronounced in my lifetime than it is today. As the scriptures predicted, Lucifer is using many devices to accomplish this objective.

It is one thing to be misled by the adversary. It is another to be one of his mercenaries. Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said it beautifully: “How tragic it is that so many mortals are mercenaries for the adversary . . . and are . . . bought off at such low prices. A little status, a little money, a little praise, a little fleeting fame, and they are willing to do the bidding of him who can offer all sorts of transitory ‘rewards,’ but who has no celestial currency.”²⁵

There is probably no better example of the impact of mercenaries than Lehi’s vision of the tree of life and the great and spacious building in the Book of Mormon. Those in the building pointed fingers at those who had grasped the rod of iron and even partaken of the fruit of the tree. The partakers became “ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:27–28).

Thus, bad choices result in a banquet with bitter, rancid, nasty, and miserable results.

Compare this to the glorious banquet of consequences promised to you who are faithful. You will “be filled with the glory of the Lord” and “sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of” your body, and all that the Father hath will be given to you (D&C 84:32, 33; see also verses 34–38).

In such a banquet of consequences, the spiritual food we feast upon is delicious, savory, sweet, succulent, nourishing, and fulfilling and will allow our hearts to

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the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.” The second part reads, “Inasmuch as ye will not keep the commandments of God ye shall be cut off from his presence” (see, for example, Alma 36:30). It is clear that having the blessing of the Holy Spirit through obedience is a principal element of prospering in the land.

In addition, sacred teachings of the Church establish having sufficient for our needs as the best measure of temporal prosperity. Lucifer’s paradigm shift here is to elevate the seeking of great wealth and the acquisition of highly visible luxury products. Some seem absolutely driven to achieve the lifestyle of the rich and famous. Excess wealth is not promised to faithful members, nor does it usually bring happiness.

As a people, Latter-day Saints have indeed prospered. Wise financial principles include:



rejoice. When we “come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted” (2 Nephi 9:51), we can follow the narrow path and the straight course that will bring us to the Holy One of Israel, “for the Lord God is his name” (2 Nephi 9:41). ■

From a devotional address, “A Banquet of Consequences: The Cumulative Result of All Choices,” given at Brigham Young University on February 7, 2017. For the full address in English, visit speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (2003), “paradigm shift,” merriam-webster.com.
2. See C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (1942).
3. See Jed Woodworth, “The Word of Wisdom,” in *Revelations in Context: The Stories behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants*, Matthew McBride and James Goldberg, eds. (2016), 183–89; “The Word of Wisdom,” June 1, 2013, history.lds.org.
4. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Heber J. Grant* (2002), 188–97.

5. *Smoking and Health: Report of the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service*, PHS publication no. 1103 (1964), 33; see also *The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General* (2014), [surgeongeneral.gov](https://www.surgeongeneral.gov).
6. See “Health Effects of Cigarette Smoking,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 15, 2017, [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).
7. See George E. Vaillant, *Triumphs of Experience: The Men of the Harvard Grant Study* (2012), 108–9.
8. See Alvin Powell, “Decoding Keys to a Healthy Life,” *Harvard Gazette*, Feb. 2, 2012, news.harvard.edu.
9. See Vaillant, *Triumphs of Experience*, 292. By comparison, a separate long-term study of active Church members had positive results (see James E. Enstrom and Lester Breslow, “Lifestyle and Reduced Mortality among Active California Mormons, 1980–2004,” *Preventive Medicine*, vol. 46, no. 2 [Feb. 2008], 133–36).
10. Kimberly Kindy and Dan Keating, “For Women, Heavy Drinking Has Been Normalized. That’s Dangerous,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 23, 2016, [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com); the conclusion quotes Robert D. Brewer from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention alcohol program.
11. See “Fact Sheets—Underage Drinking,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oct. 20, 2016, [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).
12. See Anne Schuchat, “The CDC’s Recommendations to Help Prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders,” *American Family Physician*, vol. 95, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 2017), 6–7, [aafp.org](https://www.aafp.org).
13. See “Inside a Killer Drug Epidemic: A Look at America’s Opioid Crisis,” *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 2017, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com).
14. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
15. “The percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with no children living with them more than doubled since 1967” (Emily Schondelmeyer, “No Kids in the House: A Historical Look at Adults Living without Children,” U.S. Census Bureau, Dec. 20, 2016, [census.gov](https://www.census.gov)).
16. See *World Fertility Patterns 2015*, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015, 6, [un.org](https://www.un.org); “Birth and Fertility of the Resident Population,” Istat (Italian National Institute of Statistics), Nov. 28, 2016, [istat.it](https://www.istat.it); “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050, Buddhists,” Pew Research Center, Apr. 2, 2015, 6–12, 102–111, [pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org); Adam Taylor, “It’s Official: Japan’s Population Is Dramatically Shrinking,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 26, 2016, [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com); and Ana Swanson, “Japan’s Birth Rate Problem Is Way Worse Than Anyone Imagined,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 7, 2015, [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com).
17. See *The New Economic Reality: Demographic Winter*, BYUtv, [byutv.org](https://www.byutv.org).
18. See “Plight of Jewish Children,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [ushmm.org](https://www.ushmm.org).
19. See Reproductive Health: Data and Statistics: “Abortion,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 10, 2017, [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). I recognize that the number of abortions has declined in recent years, but the number is still extremely high.
20. Sometimes attributed to Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881); see *Handbook 1: Stake Presidents and Bishops* (2010), 17.3.1. This section provides limited abortion exceptions involving rape, incest, health of the mother, and severe defects of the baby.
21. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 328–29; see also *Eternal Marriage Student Manual* (Church Educational System manual, 2003), 14–18, [LDS.org](https://www.lds.org).
22. See Gordon B. Hinckley, *Cornerstones of a Happy Home* (pamphlet, 1984), 6, [LDS.org](https://www.lds.org).
23. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.3.3.
24. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” 2.
25. Neal A. Maxwell, *Things As They Really Are* (1978), 42.