

DO'S *and* DON'TS

of Defending Your Beliefs

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One of the things we agree to do as part of the baptismal covenant is “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that [we] may be in” (Mosiah 18:9). And incidentally, we renew this covenant every week when we partake of the sacrament.

In the April 2014 general conference, several speakers reminded us that there will be times when standing as a witness of God will mean having to face opposition, criticism, and ridicule. So what should you do when you're required to take the uncomfortable, uncool, or unpopular step of defending your beliefs?

Be brave and humble, firm and gentle, all at the same time. With the Lord's help, it's not as hard as it sounds.



HERE'S SOME ADVICE FROM THE SCRIPTURES

The scriptures give you some basic principles for standing up for your faith, including the following.

—“FOR I AM —
NOT ASHAMED
OF THE GOSPEL OF
CHRIST”

(Romans 1:16).

As President Thomas S. Monson has said, “We will all face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us—all of us—have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God’s approval” (“Be Strong and of a Good Courage,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 69).

—“*We speak,* —
NOT IN THE WORDS
— *which man’s* —
WISDOM TEACHETH,
— *but which* —
THE HOLY GHOST
TEACHETH”

(1 Corinthians 2:13).

Heavenly Father has given you the gift of the Holy Ghost, and you should take advantage of this gift. This doesn’t mean reason and logic can’t be inspired or confirmed by the Spirit; it just means that

you should rely on the Spirit to guide your defense of your faith. Bear testimony by the Spirit. That’s the Lord’s way. (See also D&C 100:5–8.)

—“HE THAT —
HATH THE
SPIRIT OF CONTENTION
IS NOT OF ME,
— BUT IS —
OF THE DEVIL,
WHO IS THE FATHER OF
CONTENTION, AND
HE STIRRETH UP
THE HEARTS
— OF MEN —
TO CONTEND WITH ANGER,
ONE WITH ANOTHER”

(3 Nephi 11:29).

The point here is not that you should avoid any discussion in which people have differing points of view. Rather, it has to do with your intent as well as the emotions involved. We should seek understanding and try to persuade with meekness, not just score points and prove we’re right and someone else is wrong. A discussion where people are getting really worked up and angry is one you should either try to soften or simply avoid.

—“A SOFT ANSWER —
TURNETH AWAY
wrath;
— BUT —
GRIEVOUS WORDS
stir up anger”

(Proverbs 15:1).

Elder W. Craig Zwick of the Seventy has explained this scripture this way: “A ‘soft answer’ consists of a reasoned response—disciplined words from a humble heart. It does not mean we never speak directly or that we compromise doctrinal truth. Words that may be firm in information can be soft in spirit” (“What Are You Thinking?” *Ensign*, May 2014, 42).

—“*Behold,* —
I send you forth
as sheep in the
midst of wolves:
be ye therefore
wise as serpents,
and *harmless*
— as doves” —
(Matthew 10:16).

The Savior doesn’t want you to be ignorant or naïve, but He also doesn’t want you to attack anyone. Knowing what goes on in the world doesn’t mean we have to use its tactics.

—“CONTEND AGAINST
NO CHURCH”
— (D&C 18:20). —

There is no need to criticize other churches. Positive statements of your beliefs rather than negative statements about others will be most effective. As the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “We don’t ask any people to throw away any good they have got; we only ask them to come and get more” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 155).

—“AND THOU —
SHALT DECLARE
glad tidings. . .
— “AND THOU SHALT
— DO IT WITH —
all humility,
TRUSTING IN ME,
— *reviling not* —
AGAINST REVILERS”

(D&C 19:29–30).

The tidings you declare are *glad*. Remember that, and make sure your face and your voice show it too. Also, the word *revile* here means to hurl abusive or insulting language at a person. So if

someone's doing that to you, don't retaliate and do the same thing back to them. The Apostle Peter taught that the Savior Himself gave the example you should follow in this regard (see 1 Peter 2:23).

“SEE THAT YE ARE NOT *lifted up unto pride; yea,* SEE THAT YE DO NOT BOAST IN YOUR OWN WISDOM, *nor of your much strength.* “USE BOLDNESS, BUT NOT OVERBEARANCE”
(Alma 38:11-12).

Again, be humble. It's not about you or how smart and capable you are. Also, you can

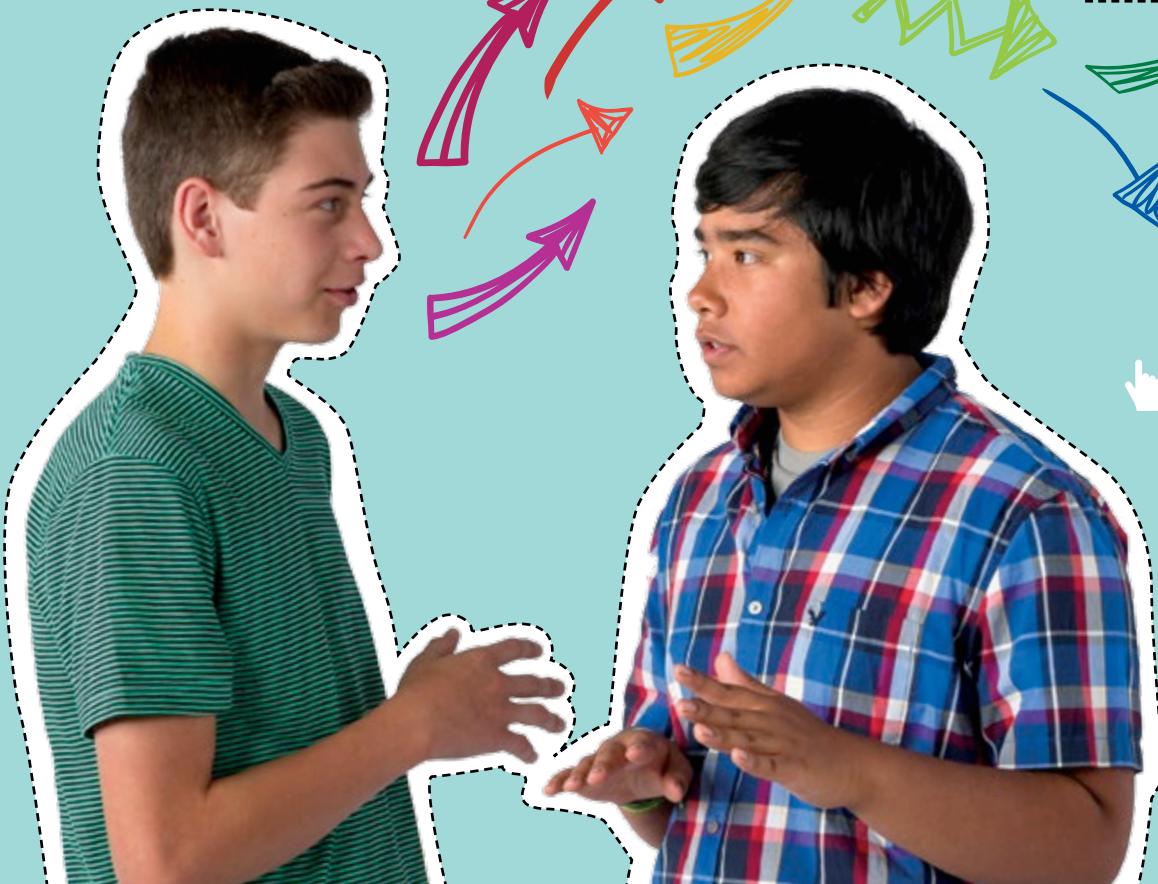
be bold without making overblown statements or being a verbal or intellectual bully. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said: “You will one day find yourself called upon to defend your faith. . . . Such moments will require both courage and courtesy on your part” (“The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 6).

“*And of tenets thou shalt not talk,* but thou shalt declare repentance and faith on the Savior, and *remission of sins by baptism, and by fire, yea, even the Holy Ghost*”
(D&C 19:31).

Here, the word *tenets* refers to opinions or teachings that go beyond the basics. So the Lord is saying to stick to the basic message of the gospel when you're declaring His glad tidings. This also applies to defending your faith. You don't need to stray into detailed discussions about every little thing related to the Church. As Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, “Keep your sharing of the gospel *simple*” (“I Have Given You an Example,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 34).

“LOVE YOUR ENEMIES, BLESS THEM THAT CURSE YOU, DO GOOD TO THEM THAT HATE YOU, AND PRAY FOR THEM WHICH DESPITEFULLY USE YOU, AND PERSECUTE YOU”
(Matthew 5:44).

“Everyone, independent of his or her decisions and beliefs, deserves our kindness and consideration,” said Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “The Savior taught us to love not only our friends but also those who disagree with us—and even those who repudiate us” (“Spiritual Whirlwinds,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 20).



Finding Courage
Read more on this topic at lds.org/go/courageNE8.

How Do You Defend?
Do you have experience in defending your beliefs? Or do you have ideas to add to these lists? Go to lds.org/go/defendNE8 and share.

HERE'S SOME ADDITIONAL ADVICE

BEFORE YOU SAY ANYTHING

- Check the context—is it a suitable time and place to speak up?
- Gauge the emotional climate—what's everyone feeling, and where is the discussion headed?
- Try to determine people's real intent—are they just looking for an argument, or would they be open to your testimony of the truth?
- Examine your motives—do you want to help someone or just be right?
- Pray for the Spirit to guide you.
- Be in the habit of praying, studying the scriptures, and attending church.
- Realize you won't necessarily be popular but God will be pleased if you do what's right.

WHILE THE DISCUSSION'S GOING ON

- Don't assume that people will be offended if you share your beliefs.
- Don't be apologetic.
- Try to find common ground.
- Stay positive, and make positive statements rather than negative defenses (which come across like you're saying "Am not!" all the time).
- Recognize that some terminology and concepts may be new for some people (like *premortal life* or *apostasy*).
- Remember, it's not a debate—you don't have to change the other person's view, and the Lord's cause isn't going to win because you scored more points.
- Don't have the same conversation with the same person over and over again if it just leads to an argument every time.
- If something comes up that you don't know anything about, you can say that you want to study and think it through so you can talk about it later.
- Sometimes you may need to just bear your testimony and leave.
- Have an exit strategy—not only how to get out of a conversation but how to pick up your spirits after you leave a really hard conversation.

WHEN TALKING IN PERSON

- Check your volume and tone; don't talk loudly or heatedly.
- Smile, or at least don't look angry, upset, or bored.
- Don't just be thinking of what you're going to say next, but focus on how the conversation is affecting the person.
- Don't get drawn into a physical confrontation. Just . . . no. That would be sad.

ON THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- If you see misinformation, tactfully and factually correct it if appropriate.
- Don't get into a flame war.
- Rather than always commenting on public discussions, send more private messages.
- Don't be afraid to share a video, article, or meme.
- Check out Mormon.org/FAQ for answers you can summarize in your own words.
- If someone's acting like a bully (attacking, mocking, and so on), avoid that person.
- Stop, calm down, and think before responding to something that upsets you, whether that's a few moments, hours, or days.
- If a person won't listen and the posts just make you mad, stop following that feed.

MOTTOES THAT ARE EASY TO REMEMBER

**“BE OF GOOD CHEER,
AND DO NOT FEAR”**

————— (D&C 68:6). —————

*I dare to defend, but
— I don't care to contend. —*