

THE MESSAGE

THAT IS CHRISTIAN COURAGE

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*Answering our accusers
in the Savior's way.*



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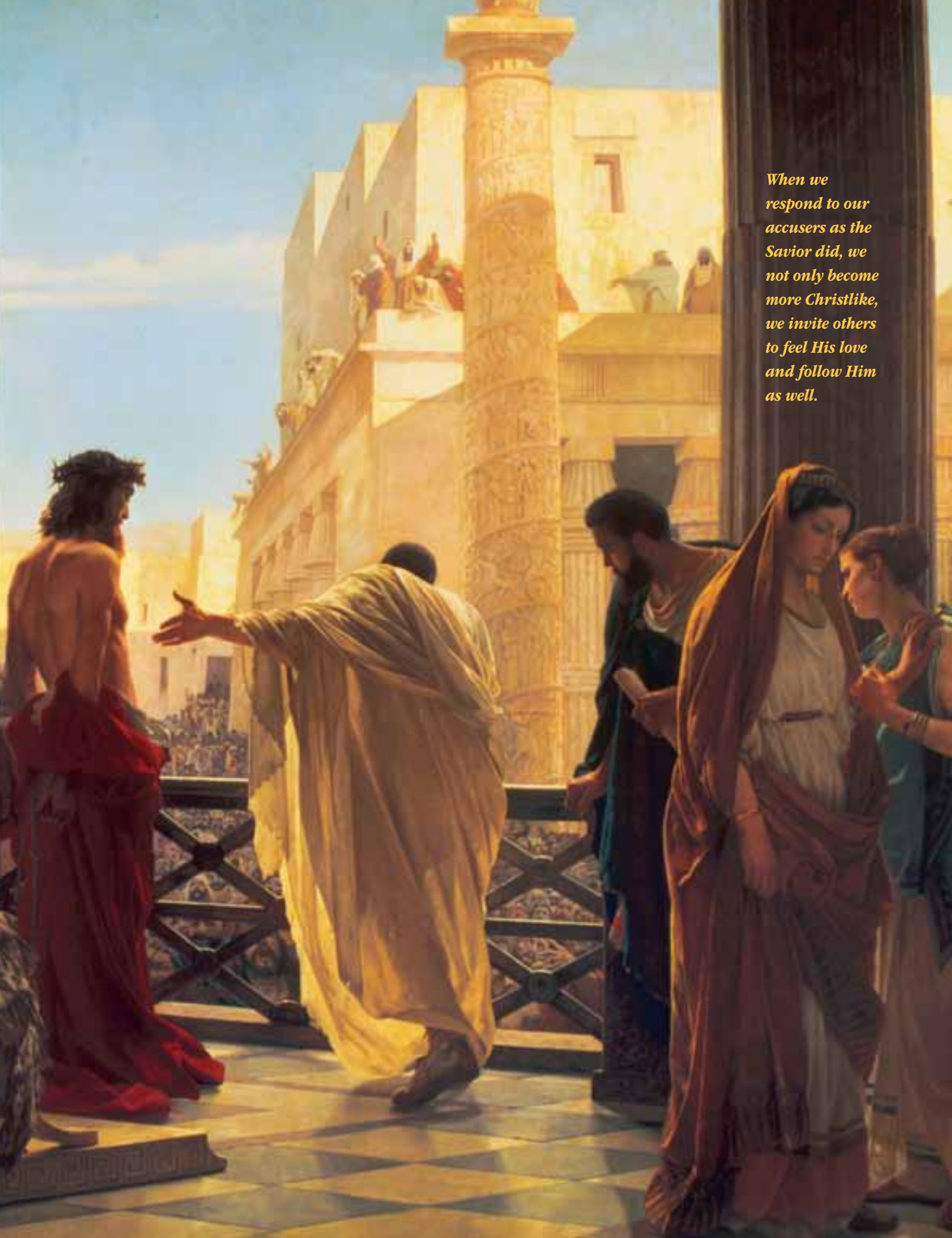
Recently a group of bright, faithful young Latter-day Saints wrote down some of the most pressing questions on their minds. One sister asked, “Why doesn’t the Church defend itself more actively when accusations are made against it?”

To her inquiry I would say that one of mortality’s great tests comes when our beliefs are questioned or criticized. In such moments, we may want to respond aggressively—to “put up our dukes.” But these are important opportunities to step back, pray, and follow the Savior’s example. Remember that Jesus Himself was despised and rejected by the world. And in Lehi’s dream, those coming to the Savior also endured “mocking and pointing . . . fingers” (1 Nephi 8:27). “The world hath hated [my disciples],” Jesus said, “because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). But when we respond to our accusers as the Savior did, we not only become more Christlike, we invite others to feel His love and follow Him as well.

Responding in a Christlike Way

To respond in a Christlike way cannot be scripted or based on a formula. The Savior responded differently in every situation. When He was confronted by wicked King Herod, He remained silent. When He stood before Pilate, He bore a simple and powerful testimony of His divinity and purpose. Facing the money-changers who were defiling the temple, He





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exercised His divine responsibility to preserve and protect that which was sacred. Lifted up upon a cross, He uttered the incomparable Christian response: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Some people mistakenly think responses such as silence, meekness, forgiveness, and bearing humble testimony are passive or weak. But to “love [our] enemies, bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which despitefully use [us], and persecute [us]” (Matthew 5:44) takes faith, strength, and, most of all, Christian courage.

The Prophet Joseph Smith demonstrated this courage throughout his life. Though he “suffer[ed] severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious” (Joseph Smith—History 1:27), he did not retaliate or give in to hatred. Like all true disciples of Christ, he stood with the Savior by loving others in a tolerant and compassionate way. *That is Christian courage.*

When we do not retaliate—when we turn the other cheek and resist feelings of anger—we too stand with the Savior. We show forth His love, which is the only power that can subdue the adversary and answer our accusers without accusing them in return. That is not weakness. *That is Christian courage.*

Opportunity in Opposition

Through the years we learn that challenges to our faith are not new, and they aren’t likely to disappear soon. But *true disciples of Christ see opportunity in the midst of opposition.*

Experience shows that seasons of negative publicity about the Church can help accomplish the Lord’s purposes. In 1983 the First Presidency wrote to Church leaders, “Opposition may be in itself an opportunity. . . . These criticisms create . . . interest in the Church. . . . This provides an opportunity [for members] to present the truth to those whose attention is thus directed toward us.”¹

We can take advantage of such opportunities in many ways: a kind letter to the editor, a conversation with a friend, a comment on a blog, or a reassuring word to one who has made a disparaging comment. We can answer with love those who have been influenced by misinformation and prejudice—who are “kept from the truth because they know not where to find it” (D&C 123:12). I assure you that to answer our accusers in this way is never weakness. *It is Christian courage in action.*

As we respond to others, each circumstance will be different. Fortunately, the Lord knows the hearts of our accusers and how we can most effectively respond to them. *As true disciples seek guidance from the Spirit, they receive inspiration tailored to each encounter. And in every encounter, true disciples respond in ways that invite the Spirit of the Lord.*

Avoiding Contention

We must never become contentious when we are discussing our faith. The Savior has said, “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me” (3 Nephi 11:29). More regrettable than the Church being accused of not being Christian is when Church members react to such accusations in an un-Christlike way! May our conversations with others always be marked by the fruits of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,



[and] temperance” (Galatians 5:22–23). To be meek, as defined in Webster’s dictionary, is “manifesting patience and longsuffering: enduring injury without resentment.”² Meekness is not weakness. It is a badge of Christian courage.

This is not to suggest that we compromise our principles or dilute our beliefs. We cannot change the doctrines of the restored gospel, even if teaching and obeying them makes us unpopular in the eyes of the world. Yet even as we feel to speak the word of God with boldness, we must pray to be filled with the Holy Ghost (see Acts 4:29, 31). We should never confuse boldness with Satan’s counterfeit: overbearance (see Alma 38:12). True disciples speak with quiet confidence, not boastful pride.

As true disciples, our primary concern must be others’ welfare, not personal vindication. Questions and criticisms give us an opportunity to reach out to others and demonstrate that they matter to our Heavenly Father and to us. Our aim should be to help them understand the truth, not defend our egos or score points in a theological debate. Our heartfelt testimonies are the most powerful answer we can give our accusers. And such testimonies can only be borne in love and meekness.

True disciples avoid being unduly judgmental of others’ views. Many of us have cultivated strong friendships with those who are not members of our Church. We need them, and they need us. As President Thomas S. Monson has taught, “Let us learn respect for others. . . . None of us lives alone—in our city, our nation, or our world.”³

Staying on the High Ground

As the Savior demonstrated with Herod, *sometimes true disciples must show Christian courage by saying nothing at all.* Some may try to provoke us and engage us in argument. In the Book of Mormon, we read about Lehonti and his men camped upon a mount. The traitorous Amalickiah urged Lehonti to “come down” and meet him in the valley. But when Lehonti left the high ground, he was poisoned “by degrees” until he died, and his army fell into Amalickiah’s hands (see



Alma 47). By arguments and accusations, some people bait us to leave the high ground. Sometimes others want us to come down off the high ground and join them in a theological scrum in the mud. These few contentious individuals are set on picking religious fights, online or in person. We are always better staying on the higher ground of mutual respect and love.

In doing so, we follow the example of the prophet Nehemiah, who built a wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s enemies entreated him to meet

them on the plain, where “they thought to do [him] mischief.” Unlike Lehonti, however, Nehemiah wisely refused their offer with this message: “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:2–3). We too have a great work to do, which will not be accomplished if we allow ourselves to stop and argue and be distracted. Instead we should muster Christian courage and move on. As we read in Psalms, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers” (Psalm 37:1).

To my inquiring sister and all who seek to know how we should respond to our accusers, I reply, we *love* them. Whatever their race, creed, religion, or political persuasion, if we follow Christ and show forth His courage, we must love them. We do not feel we are *better than* they are. Rather, we desire with our love to show them a *better way*—the way of Jesus Christ. His way leads to the gate of baptism, the strait and narrow path of righteous living, and the temple of God. *He* is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Only through Him can we and all our brothers and sisters inherit the greatest gift we can receive—eternal life and eternal happiness. To help them, to be an example for them, is not for the weak. It is for the strong. It is for you and me, Latter-day Saints who pay the price of discipleship by answering our accusers with Christian courage. **NE**

From an October 2008 general conference address.

NOTES

1. First Presidency letter, Dec. 1, 1983.
2. *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (1976), “meek,” 1403.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “In Quest of the Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1988, 3.