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Cleansing the Inner Vessel

Nowhere are the generosity and the kindness and mercy of God more manifest than in repentance.

This general conference was convened at a time when there is such confusion and such danger that our young people hardly know which way they can walk. Having been warned through the revelations that it would be this way, the prophets and apostles have always been shown what to do.

The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith “that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world.”¹ When the keys were restored, they provided priesthood authority to be present in every home through the grandfathers, the fathers, and the sons.

Fifteen years ago, with the world in turmoil, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles issued “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” the fifth proclamation in the history of the Church. It is a guide that members of the Church would do well to read and to follow.

It states in part: “We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between

a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”²

“The Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them.

“And the Gods said: We will bless them. And . . . we will cause them to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.”³

This commandment has never been rescinded.

“And we will prove them here-with, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”⁴

It is intended that we be happy, for “men are, that they might have joy.”⁵

Lehi taught that men are free and must be “free . . . to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day.”⁶

The old saying “The Lord is voting for me, and Lucifer is voting against me, but it is *my* vote that counts” describes a doctrinal certainty that our agency is more powerful than the

adversary’s will. Agency is precious. We can foolishly, blindly give it away, but it cannot be forcibly taken from us.

There is also an age-old excuse: “The devil made me do it.” Not so! He can deceive you and mislead you, but he does not have the power to force you or anyone else to transgress or to keep you in transgression.

To be entrusted with the power to create life carries with it the greatest of joys and dangerous temptations. The gift of mortal life and the capacity to kindle other lives is a supernal blessing. Through the righteous exercise of this power, as in nothing else, we may come close to our Father in Heaven and experience a fulness of joy. This power is not an incidental part of the plan of happiness. It is the key—the very key.

Whether we use this power as the eternal laws require or reject its divine purpose will forever determine what we will become. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”⁷

There is something very liberating when an individual determines of his or her own free will to be obedient to our Father and our God and expresses that willingness to Him in prayer.

When we obey, we can enjoy these powers in the covenant of marriage. From our fountains of life will spring our children, our family. Love between husband and wife can be constant and bring fulfillment and contentment all the days of our lives.

If one is denied these blessings in mortality, the promise is that they will be provided for in the world to come.

Pure love presupposes that only after a pledge of eternal fidelity, a legal and a lawful ceremony, and ideally after the sealing ordinance in the temple, are those life-giving powers released for the full expression of love. It is to be shared only and solely

between man and woman, husband and wife, with that one who is our companion forever. On this the gospel is very plain.

We are free to ignore the commandments, but when the revelations speak in such blunt terms, such as “thou shalt not,” we had better pay attention.

The adversary is jealous toward all who have power to beget life. Satan cannot beget life; he is impotent. “He seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.”⁸ He seeks to degrade the righteous use of the

life-giving powers by tempting you into immoral relationships.

The Lord used the expression “is like unto” to create an image His followers could understand, such as:

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man.”⁹

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field.”¹⁰

In our day the dreadful influence of pornography is like unto a plague sweeping across the world, infecting one here and one there, relentlessly trying to invade every home, most

frequently through the husband and father. The effect of this plague can be, unfortunately often is, spiritually fatal. Lucifer seeks to disrupt “the great plan of redemption,”¹¹ “the great plan of happiness.”¹²

Pornography will always repel the Spirit of Christ and will interrupt the communications between our Heavenly Father and His children and disrupt the tender relationship between husband and wife.

The priesthood holds consummate power. It can protect you from the plague of pornography—and it is a plague—if you are succumbing to its influence. If one is obedient, the priesthood can show how to break a habit and even erase an addiction. Holders of the priesthood have that authority and should employ it to combat evil influences.

We raise an alarm and warn members of the Church to wake up and understand what is going on. Parents, be alert, ever watchful that this wickedness might threaten your family circle.

We teach a standard of moral conduct that will protect us from Satan’s many substitutes or counterfeits for marriage. We must understand that any persuasion to enter into any relationship that is not in harmony with the principles of the gospel must be wrong. From the Book of Mormon we learn that “wickedness never was happiness.”¹³

Some suppose that they were preset and cannot overcome what they feel are inborn temptations toward the impure and unnatural. Not so! Remember, God is our Heavenly Father.

Paul promised that “God . . . will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”¹⁴ You





can, if you will, break the habits and conquer an addiction and come away from that which is not worthy of any member of the Church. As Alma cautioned, we must “watch and pray continually.”¹⁵

Isaiah warned, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”¹⁶

Years ago I visited a school in Albuquerque. The teacher told me about a youngster who brought a kitten to class. As you can imagine, that disrupted everything. She had him hold the kitten up in front of the children.

It went well until one of the children asked, “Is it a boy kitty or a girl kitty?”

Not wanting to get into that lesson, the teacher said, “It doesn’t matter. It’s just a kitty.”

But they persisted. Finally, one boy raised his hand and said, “I know how you can tell.”

Resigned to face it, the teacher said, “How can you tell?”

And the student answered, “You can vote on it!”

You may laugh at this story, but if we are not alert, there are those today who not only tolerate but advocate voting to change laws that would legalize immorality, as if a vote would somehow alter the designs of God’s laws and nature. A law against nature would be impossible to enforce. For instance, what good would a vote against the law of gravity do?

There are both moral and physical laws “irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world” that cannot be changed.¹⁷ History demonstrates over and over again that moral standards cannot be changed by battle and cannot be changed by ballot. To legalize that which is basically wrong or evil will not prevent the pain and penalties that will follow as surely as night follows day.

Regardless of the opposition, we are determined to stay on course. We will hold to the principles and laws and ordinances of the gospel. If they are misunderstood either innocently or willfully, so be it. We cannot change; we will not change the moral standard. We quickly lose our way when we disobey the laws of God. If we do not protect and foster the family, civilization and our liberties must needs perish.

“I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.”¹⁸

Every soul confined in a prison of sin, guilt, or perversion has a key to the gate. The key is labeled “repentance.” If you know how to use this key, the adversary cannot hold you. The twin principles of repentance and forgiveness exceed in strength the awesome power of the tempter. If you are bound by a habit or an addiction that is unworthy, you must stop conduct that is harmful. Angels will coach you,¹⁹ and priesthood leaders will guide you through those difficult times.

Nowhere are the generosity and the kindness and mercy of God more manifest than in repentance. Do you understand the consummate cleansing power of the Atonement made by the Son of God, our Savior, our Redeemer? He said, “I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent.”²⁰ In that supernal act of love, the Savior paid the penalties for our sins so that we might not have to pay.

For those who truly desire it, there is a way back. Repentance is like unto a detergent. Even ground-in stains of sin will come out.

Priesthood holders carry with them the antidote to remove the terrible images of pornography and to wash away guilt. The priesthood has the power to unlock the influence of our habits, even to unchain from addiction, however tight the grip. It can heal over the scars of past mistakes.

I know of no more beautiful and consoling words in all of revelation than these: “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”²¹

Sometimes, even after confession and paying penalties, the most difficult part of repentance is to forgive one’s self. You must come to know that forgiveness means forgiveness.

“As often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.”²²

President Joseph Fielding Smith told me of a repentant woman struggling to find her way out of a very immoral life. She asked him what she should do now.

In turn, he asked her to read to him from the Old Testament the account of Lot’s wife, who was turned to a pillar of salt.²³ Then he asked her, “What lesson do you gain from those verses?”

She answered, "The Lord will destroy the wicked."

"Not so!" President Smith said that the lesson for this repentant woman and for you is "Don't look back!"²⁴

Strangely enough, it may be that the simplest and most powerful prevention and cure for pornography, or any unclean act, is to ignore and avoid it. Delete from the mind any unworthy thought that tries to take root. Once you have decided to remain clean, you are asserting your God-given agency. And then, as President Smith counseled, "Don't look back."

I promise that ahead of you is peace and happiness for you and your family. The ultimate end of all activity in the Church is that a man and his wife and their children can be happy at home. And I invoke the blessings of the Lord upon you who are struggling against this terrible plague, to find the healing that is available to us in the priesthood of the Lord. I bear witness of that power in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 1:20.
2. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Liahona*, Oct. 2004, 49; *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. Abraham 4:27–28.
4. Abraham 3:25.
5. 2 Nephi 2:25.
6. 2 Nephi 2:26.
7. 1 Corinthians 3:16.
8. 2 Nephi 2:27.
9. Matthew 13:45.
10. Matthew 13:44.
11. Jacob 6:8; Alma 34:31.
12. Alma 42:8.
13. Alma 41:10.
14. 1 Corinthians 10:13.
15. Alma 13:28.
16. Isaiah 5:20.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 130:20.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
19. See 2 Nephi 32:3.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 19:16.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
22. Mosiah 26:30.
23. See Genesis 19:26.
24. See Boyd K. Packer, *The Things of the Soul* (1996), 116.



By Elder Jay E. Jensen
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The Holy Ghost and Revelation

The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead, and with the Father and the Son, He knows all things.

As a young elder, I had been in the mission field about one year, and while reading scriptures and words of the latter-day Apostles about revelation and the Holy Ghost, I had a stunning awakening. I did not have a testimony of my own, specifically of the Father and the Son. I went on my mission living on the borrowed light of my wonderful parents. Never doubting their words, I had not thought about seeking my own spiritual witness. On a February night in San Antonio, Texas, in 1962, I knew that I had to know for myself. In our small apartment I found a place where I could quietly pray out loud, pleading, "Heavenly Father, are You there? I must know for myself!"

Sometime later that night I came to know for myself for the first time in my life that God and Jesus are real. I did not hear an audible voice nor see a heavenly being. I knew in the same way you too may have come to know—which is "by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost" (D&C 121:26) and the spirit of revelation (see D&C 8:1–3) speaking peace to my mind (see D&C 6:23) and assurances to my heart (see Alma 58:11).

From that experience I witnessed the results of Alma's counsel to "awake and arouse [my] faculties . . . to [conduct] an experiment upon [His] words" (Alma 32:27). These words or seeds have grown into trees, indeed giant trees of testimony. The process continues with more experiments upon the word, resulting in additional trees of testimony, now a veritable forest based on revelation through and by the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost Is a Desired Gift

When the Savior visited the Americas, He called twelve disciples. One of His messages to them and the people was about the Holy Ghost. After teaching them, the Savior departed and promised to return the next day. The people worked through the night to gather as many as possible to hear Him.

The disciples gathered the people into 12 groups to teach them what the Savior taught them. Foremost among their teachings was the importance of the Holy Ghost. (See 3 Nephi 11–18.) Then the people knelt and prayed. Their heartfelt desire was to be given the Holy Ghost (see 3 Nephi 19:8–9).