

The Obligation of



the Church

There is a vast congregation of men and women throughout the world, in every country, of every creed and color, waiting for us and our great message.

BY ELDER JOHN A. WIDTSOE

The world is in a disturbed condition. There is discouragement everywhere. No man seems to see the end from the beginning. I have pondered in my heart for some time what my obligation is in this state of worldly confusion. What is the obligation of my Church, the restored Church of Christ in these latter days? Perhaps all of us have entertained such thoughts in these unhappy days.

There is a world cry for peace; everybody wants peace. In newspapers, magazines, books, [and] from the public platform come cries for peace. As far back as I can remember, there has never been such a worldwide appeal for peace among the children of men. . . .

It is a curious commentary on human nature that men who cry for peace look upon peace as something that may be picked as an apple from a tree, something that lies about within easy reach of humanity. If I pick an apple from a tree, I have first planted the tree, cared for it, watered it, brought it to maturity. Then in due time I may have the fruit.



John A. Widtsoe was born January 31, 1872, on the Isle of Froyen, Norway, to John A. and Anna K. Gaarden Widtsoe. He married Leah E. Dunford in the Salt Lake Temple on June 1, 1898. Before being ordained an Apostle on March 17, 1921, he enjoyed prominence as a scientist, educator, author, and academician, serving as president of Utah Agricultural College and the University of Utah. Elder Widtsoe, a prolific author of books on Church history and doctrine, died in Salt Lake City on November 29, 1952, at age 80. Elder Widtsoe delivered this important address about missionary work during general conference in October 1946; capitalization and punctuation have been modernized.

So with peace. It is not a thing by itself to be picked up casually; but it is the fruit of something precedent. Like the tree, something must be planted and nourished and cared for if we are to obtain peace.

Peace: Result of Obedience to Gospel

It is a marvel to thinking men that those who write on peace fail to understand that it can be obtained only by the use of a body of principles which, if obeyed, in time would give us peace. We cannot begin with peace; we must begin with the philosophy or the system which, if accepted and honored, will lead to peace. Failure to understand that seems to be the error of the nations at this time, of the organizations and conventions of nations, assembled in great meetings on this side and the other side of the Atlantic. They have so far failed to touch upon the foundations of peace, upon the issues which are the aids to peace. They clamor for the peace they want, without yielding obedience to the methods by which that peace may be obtained.

The Latter-day Saints, from the beginning of our history, have taught that the good things of life—above all, peace—can come only through acceptance of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Prince of Peace. He is the Prince of Peace. It is only as the men and women of the world, all children of God, accept the gospel of the Son of God that peace shall come to rule



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and reign and be established upon earth. That has been our message from the beginning of the restoration of the gospel in this day. We still proclaim without hesitation that there is only one way to peace, one way to the perfect human happiness—the way of the gospel paved with the principles that constitute the gospel.

We make a further claim, brethren and sisters. It is a claim that often makes us hesitant in stating it because it is so vast in its meaning, in its implications. We claim that this people, this Church, organized by God's own voice in this generation, possesses the only system of truth containing all of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, by that token, there can be no full peace, no complete happiness upon earth, until the men and women of the world accept the great latter-day message. We stand humbly before this claim, I know, but it is our claim. The Lord has said so.

He has said further that the time shall come in these latter days when every ear shall hear and every eye shall see and every heart [shall] be penetrated by the eternal message of the gospel, and that this great message shall be delivered "by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days" (D&C 1:4). . . .

Our Obligation to Teach the Truth

Now, then, if all this be true in my thinking about these things, there lies my obligation. It is my divine obligation somehow, through my feeble efforts and through yours, and through all the members of the Church, to teach all the

world the truth of the restored gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I must try to plant this truth in the hearts of men and women. I must contribute every day in my way, as best I can, toward the teaching of the truth which alone can bring peace to our unhappy world. It is a tremendous obligation when we view it as a whole but, with the help of the Lord, easy to meet if we take the tasks one by one, always keeping our obligation in mind as we travel through life.

Missionary work must grow in foreign fields as never before; missionary work at home must increase as never before. We shall employ every modern device—the telephone, telegraph, radio, printing press, the short wave systems . . . , and the other devices that are coming. We shall use them all in our attempt to win men and women from wickedness to righteousness, from untruth or near truth to full and complete truth, which is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This Church is not merely for me and for you who are in the Church. I must begin with myself, undoubtedly. My own salvation comes first; but unless I give of my strength to the winning of other souls for God, my own salvation will be incomplete. That applies to all of us. . . . We have a calling, not merely to build the Church of Christ and to save ourselves therein but also a commission to save the whole world. We are, as it were, set apart, consecrated for that great purpose. All of Israel must remember, every man or woman who enters the waters of baptism must keep in mind, and every child that comes into the Church must be taught that by the ordinance of baptism we accept the great and divine commission to serve the Lord in building His Church. It will then be easy to keep the commandments of God, to lay aside or meet courageously the temptations that face us. To stand alone, saying selfishly, "I have received the gospel; it is good to be a Latter-day Saint" will not be doing our duty; but when we say, "Now, I have received this great blessing. I shall pass it on to others," there comes the flowering in the hearts of men of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Commission to Supplant Evil with Good

We are not as other people; we are different. We are humble acceptors of the truth, yielders to God's will and word, under a commission to change the whole world, from evil to good. It is a great commission. It has been our commission from the beginning.

The great men who led this Church from the beginning have voiced this commission or calling to which we are consecrated. When we talk about this commission, about our duty or obligation, let us not forget the lesson of these mighty men. In the midst of confusion let us look back to the labors of those who have gone before us, our fathers who founded the Church under God's direction, who toiled from city to city, across the plains and the desert to build a commonwealth. They left behind them, not necessarily the heritage of their methods, for the world has changed, but the heritage of their undaunted, unchanging spirit. We must be as eager to fulfill God's word as they were in their day. We must do that, my brethren and sisters, if we are to fulfill and meet our full obligation in this difficult age. To those who catch the spirit of this obligation, of this commission, of this calling to a great people will come strength to resist, as I have said, the temptations of the world. It will be easy to reject the cocktail; the cigar can be laid aside easily; to divide with the Lord in tithing will not seem difficult; to converse with the Lord in prayer will be a joyful experience. Men are changed and transformed who enter into partnership with God in helping to establish His great cause upon the face of the earth.

God's Work Is Eternal

This work is not an ordinary cause. It is God's cause. It is not a cause for a day. It is a cause for the eternities, both gone and coming. We are working out an eternal project, you and I, all of us. We of today must do as well as those who went before us, a bit better perhaps, for new opportunities have come to us in our day. We should do better in this Church in the cause of righteousness than grandfather or great-grandfather. More light has come, more opportunity is given, more means are at our command. We should do better. And we all, especially the youth of the Church, should dream about the future of the Church, and give our own earnest endeavors to the fulfillment of our commissions. . . .



PHOTOGRAPH BY HYUNGYU LEE

By the ordinance of baptism we accept the great and divine commission to serve the Lord in building His Church.

I want to bear this testimony to you that as I have traveled through the world, . . . I have found thousands of people not acquainted with the gospel—good, clean, wholesome people, walking in darkness, who are looking for light, who, misled by untruths, are looking for truth, and unhappy because of the untruths handed to them by tradition. There [is] a vast congregation of men and women throughout the world, in every country, of every creed and color, waiting for us and our great message. The field is ripe unto harvest.

Now I pray, my brethren and sisters, that we may rise in our strength, the strength of Zion, and fill and fulfill our commission. Let us forget at least a part of the time the daily duties that hold us down and give ourselves to thoughts and actions in building actively under our great obligation the great latter-day kingdom of God, the Almighty Father. May it be so, I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. ■