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Faith & Works

IN A SECULAR SOCIETY

*It is our singular privilege to be true to the faith
and to press forward in good works.*

Education in secular subjects contributes much to the betterment of our world. Secular learning of the highest level blossoms in an atmosphere of virtue, moral responsibility, spiritual truth, and faith.

Much is touted today about secular societies. People and nations pride themselves on being *secular* and on focusing on “worldly things or [on] things that are not regarded as religious, spiritual, or sacred.”¹

Religious expression in some parts of the world today is discouraged in public forums, civil rights are dependent on courts and legislative processes, and men and women readily seek solutions and redress through litigious means. In the extreme, society’s secularism overlooks the concept of eternal life, places all things in the context of the natural world, and consequently is prone to *works without faith*.

It requires watchfulness and great effort to be men and women of faith in a secular world. It is the nature of people, when inundated by worldliness, to “first endure, then pity, then embrace.”² Secularism is inundating people today with such results.

Unchecked by faith in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of mankind, the secular world produces men and women who are “proud, obsessed with self, overly competitive, reactionary, fiercely independent, driven by desires, appetites, [and] worldly acclaim. . . . In general, the natural man is an unredeemed creature, a being who walks . . . in the light of his own fire . . . [see 2 Nephi 7:10–11]. Such a one is acclimated to the nature of things about him, taking his cues and bearings from a fallen world.”³

Succinctly stated, “All men that are in a state of nature, or . . . in a carnal state, . . . are without God in the world” (Alma 41:11).

Because secularism typically ignores the eternal perspective, it can in time lead to unbelief. In the words of Wolfhart Pannenberg, who was a professor of theology at the University of Munich:

“A public climate of secularism undermines the confidence of Christians in the truth of what they believe. . . .

“In a secular milieu, even an elementary knowledge of Christianity . . . dwindles. It is no longer a matter of rejecting Christian





teachings; large numbers of people have not the vaguest knowledge of what those teachings are. . . . The more widespread the ignorance of Christianity, the greater the prejudice against Christianity. . . .

“. . . The difficulty is exacerbated by the cultural relativizing of the very idea of truth. . . . In the view of many, . . . Christian doctrines are merely opinions that may or may not be affirmed according to individual preference, or depending on whether they speak to personally felt needs. . . .

“. . . The thoroughly secularized social order gives rise to a feeling of meaninglessness.”⁴

Faith in Christ is replaced by faith in man. In public discourse and private thought, the questions of where we came from, where we go when life ends, and what ultimately governs the here and now go unaddressed and become irrelevant. This state of unbelief is becoming a calamity of colossal proportions.

The Importance of the Restoration

Heavenly Father knew this would happen. The Restoration of the gospel rekindled faith in Jesus Christ as the Creator, Savior, and Redeemer. It brought again the correct understanding of life's purposes. In 1831 the Lord told His children:

“Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; . . .

“That faith . . . might increase in the earth” (D&C 1:17, 21).

Before the foundations of this world were laid, before the orbs of the universe received their place, men and women lived and moved

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and had their being (see Acts 17:28). The secular thought that life is nothing more than biology denies the fundamental truth—the subconscious awareness residing in the recesses of every living soul—that “man *was* also in the beginning *with God*” (D&C 93:29; emphasis added). This truth is immutable and irrefutable.

Paradisiacal Eden with our first parents, Adam and Eve, came thereafter so that we, through mortal life’s experiences and

Christ’s Redemption, might become complete, fully developed, and perfected beings. The ages of the patriarchs, the supernal advent of our Savior and His incomparable Atonement in the meridian of time, and “the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), which began in 1820, set the framework by which men and women, boys and girls could once more govern their lives and surroundings by “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Articles of Faith 1:4).



We stand at the confluence of these world events. “What is past is prologue, and what has been is yet to be.”⁵ What can happen—what must happen—is that our faith and accompanying works stem the tide of unbelief in the world. This is our lot in life as well as our sacred duty as Latter-day Saints.⁶

Our Master said, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matthew 17:20). President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) reminded us, “When all is said and done, the only real wealth of the Church is in the faith of its people.”⁷

He also said: “In the on-working of this great cause, increased faith is what we most need. Without it, the work would stagnate. With it, no one can stop its progress.”⁸

Such faith is more than attitude, more than belief, more than mere expression of what one knows or feels. Real faith, the faith spoken of by the prophets, begets righteousness in this life and salvation in the life to come. It is centered in the true and living God and in Jesus Christ, whom He has sent (see John 17:3). It is founded on truth, preceded by knowledge, and perfected by works. It causes mortals to understand and behave as Heavenly Father’s children should. This faith “is the first great governing principle which [enables us to have] power, dominion, and authority over”⁹ how we think and act and what manner of men and women we are.

A Formula for Faith

The Apostle James gave us the formula for such faith:

“What profit is it . . . for a man to say he hath faith, and hath not works? . . .

“Yea, a man may say, I will show thee I have faith without works; but I say, Show me thy faith without works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. . . .

“ . . . Faith, if it have not works is dead, being alone. . . .

“Seest thou how works [are] wrought with . . . faith, and by works [is] faith made perfect?” (Joseph Smith Translation, James 2:14–15, 17, 21 [in the Bible appendix]).

We hear much about *benchmarks*. A benchmark is “a standard of excellence [or] achievement . . . against which similar things [are] measured or judged.”¹⁰ There are four benchmarks that can help each of us know if our personal faith in Christ is being “made perfect” by our works. These benchmarks are:

1. The choices we make
2. The devotion we exhibit
3. The obedience we practice
4. The service we give

I bear my witness that God is in His heaven and knows all of His children. Jesus Christ is His Beloved Son, the Redeemer of all mankind. Joseph Smith, as a young lad, was called by the voice of God and His Holy Son as a prophet, and ensuing from that call, the true Church and kingdom of God was restored to the earth. How blessed we are to know these things and to stand at the confluence of history.

We came from realms of glory. It is our singular privilege to be true to the faith and to press forward in good works.

May we do what the prophets say. Generations past expect it, generations present are saved by it, generations future depend upon it, and the Holy Spirit will guide us every step of the way. ■

From a Church Educational System fireside address, “Faith and Works in a Secular World,” given at Brigham Young University on November 5, 2006. For the full address, visit speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (1987), “secular.”
2. Alexander Pope, in John Bartlett, comp., *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, 14th ed. (1968), 409.
3. *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (2003), “Natural man.”
4. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “How to Think about Secularism,” *First Things*, no. 64 (June–July 1996), 27, 30; available at firstthings.com/article/1996/06/002-how-to-think-about-secularism.
5. Boyd K. Packer, General Authority training meeting, Oct. 2006; see also William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, act 2, scene 1, line 253.
6. See D. Todd Christofferson, “Moral Discipline,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 105–8.
7. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The State of the Church,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 54.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Faith to Move Mountains,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 85.
9. *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 5.
10. *Random House Dictionary*, “benchmark.”