

UNSPOTTED

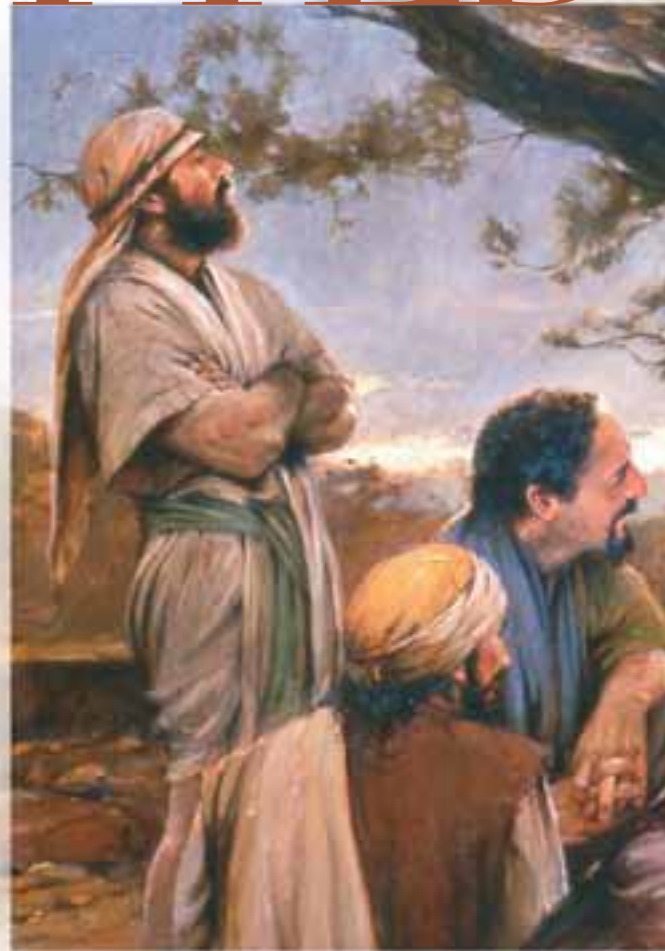


David O. McKay, ninth President of the Church, was born in Huntsville, Utah, on September 8, 1873. He married Emma Rae Riggs on January 2, 1901. Five years later, on April 9, 1906, he was called as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. On April 9, 1951, he was sustained as President of the Church. This article is an excerpt from a talk given by Elder McKay in general conference, October 1911.

BY PRESIDENT DAVID O. MCKAY
(1873–1970)

Wordsworth once wrote of Milton, “Thy soul was like a star and dwelt apart.” It seems to me, after listening to the brethren testify to the principles of the gospel and the high standard of living among the Latter-day Saints, that this people “dwells apart,” that they should be in reality “a peculiar people.” I do not mean that we are not to mingle with our friends who do not believe as we, neither do I believe that we ought to be exclusive; but as the Church of God we must “dwell apart.” Now, in what way? James says that “pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). It is in the sense of keeping ourselves unspotted from the world that I take it the Church of God should be distinct. . . .

In that most impressive prayer of the Savior’s, . . . He says, speaking of His Apostles, “these are in the world,” and then adds these significant words, “I pray not that



thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:11, 15). This is in harmony with the teachings of the Book of Mormon, as recorded in the 42nd chapter of the Book of Alma, where it is explained why the children of God are here in this world; [namely], to mingle with the sons of men, to gain an experience that will bring them back to God;

from the World



but not to partake of the sins of the world. The Savior said to His Apostles on the same evening that He offered that beautiful prayer, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Going soon to meet His Father, He admonished them to follow His example, praying not that God should take them out of the world, but that He should keep them from the evil. . . .

The Individual Test

I have never met a member of the Church who would not express himself . . . as being willing to defend his membership if this Church were attacked. . . . That feeling, that spirit of defense is always looking for some exceptional manifestation of opposition, something great that is coming. When such comes, we think we shall be ready to defend



We are told
by Paul
not to conform to the fashions of the world. The test, after all, of the efficiency of God's people is an individual one. What is the individual doing? Each one should ask "Am I living so that I am keeping unspotted from the world?"

the Church, when, perhaps this very day, there has been an encroachment upon our souls which has weakened our power to defend the truth. Trees that can stand in the midst of the hurricane often yield to the destroying pests that you can scarcely see with a microscope, and the greatest foes of humanity today are those unseen microscopical microbes that attack the body. It is the unseen influences at work in society that are undermining the manhood and womanhood of today. It is these unseen influences that come from the world that get us when we are least prepared to defend ourselves. When we do not withstand the encroachments of these evil influences, we weaken the possibility of defending the Church of Christ. This is an individual work, and what the individuals are, that the aggregate is.

I was with a party of friends recently, driving over a beautiful valley, not far from Salt Lake City. We passed a beautiful wheat field. It was an impressive sight really to see that dry farm of wheat, and one of the party

expressed his admiration of the luxuriant growth in the field, and looked at it in general. There it stood apart from the sagebrush and barren surroundings. But he was not satisfied with looking at it in the aggregate; the conveyance was stopped, and he looked at individual heads of wheat and exclaimed, "Look what large heads." . . . That was not enough. He broke the head, shuffled it in his hand, blew the chaff away, and examined each kernel. "The kernels," continued he, "are plump and solid." After all, the test of that wheat field was the individual kernel of wheat, and so it is in a community, so it is in the Church. The test, after all, of the efficiency of God's people is an individual one. What is the individual doing? Each one should ask, "Am I living so that I am keeping unspotted from the evil of the world?" . . .

The World and Its Temptations

Now, what do we mean by the world? It is sometimes used as an indefinite term. I take it that the world refers to the inhabitants who are alienated from the Saints of God. They are aliens to the Church, and it is the spirit of this alienation that we should keep ourselves free from. We are told by Paul not to conform to the fashions of the world. [Timothy] was warned not to partake of those things, the evils of the world, and to "flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). Purity of heart—Zion is the pure in heart, we have been told, and the strength of this Church lies in the purity of the thoughts and lives of its members; then the testimony of Jesus abides in the soul, and strength comes to each individual to withstand the evils of the world.

These evils present themselves insidiously in our daily associations. They come in the shape of temptations, as they came to the Savior after His baptism. What were those temptations? When Satan said, “Command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3), he was appealing to the appetite. He knew that Jesus was hungry, that He was physically weak, and [he] thought that by pointing to those little lime stones which resemble somewhat a Jewish loaf of bread, he could awaken a desire to eat. Failing in that, when he received the divine word, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4), Satan then tried Him in another way. He dared Him—an appeal to His pride, to His vanity. . . . But the Savior answered him in terms of scripture, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord

thy God” (Matthew 4:7). What was the third? An appeal to His love of power, domain, wealth: “All these things [the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof] will I give thee,” said the tempter, “if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:9). “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10).

Now, nearly every temptation that comes to you and me comes in one of those forms. Classify them, and you will find that under one of those three nearly every given temptation that makes you and me spotted, ever so little may be, comes to us as (1) a temptation of the appetite; (2) a yielding to the pride and fashion and vanity of those alienated from the things of God; or (3) a gratifying of the passion, or a desire for the riches of the world, or power among men. . . .

THE THREE TEMPTATIONS © GARY SMITH



Did They Condemn Him?

Now, when do temptations come? Why, they come to us in our social gatherings, they come to us at our weddings, they come to us in our politics, they come to us in our business relations, on the farm, [and] in the mercantile establishment. In our dealings in all the affairs of life, we find these insidious influences working, and it is when they manifest themselves to the consciousness of each individual that the defense of truth ought to exert itself. . . .

When that little small voice calls to the performance of duty, insignificant though it seem, and its performance unknown to anyone save the individual and God, he who responds gains corresponding strength. Temptation often comes in the same quiet way. Perhaps the yielding to it may not be known by anyone save the individual and his God, but if he does yield to it, he becomes to that extent weakened, and spotted with the evil of the world. Let me cite an instance:



A young missionary was invited to a wedding in a foreign country, at which two of his acquaintances were joined together in the bonds of matrimony, the ceremony being performed by a minister of another church. This young man was the only member of [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] present amidst the one hundred or more guests at the table in the hotel. By each plate was the wine cup, filled to the brim, and also a glass of water. After the ceremony, as the guests were all in their places, the minister arose and said, "Now I propose that the company drink the health of the newly married couple." They all arose.

Now, propriety suggested that [the young Latter-day Saint] take the wine cup. He was a missionary, [and] he belonged to the Church that preaches the Word of Wisdom, revealed direct from God to the Prophet Joseph. Science since then has proved it to be indeed a word of wisdom. He was teaching that, and he was [trying] to live it. Here was a time when he could indulge, [and] no one would know; indeed it seemed to be the act of propriety, but he resisted. Now was the time to defend his Church, and that is what he did. He took the glass of water, and some of his immediate friends by him, dropping their wine cups, followed his example, and at least half a dozen wine glasses remained untouched. Others saw it, and the circumstance furnished an excellent opportunity to converse with these guests upon the Word of Wisdom. Was he humiliated? No, he was strengthened. Were the guests embarrassed? No. Did they feel to condemn him? No. Condemnation was replaced by admiration, as it always is in the hearts of intelligent and God-fearing men and women. . . .

Now, as I say, these temptations come to us in business transactions, or perhaps on the streetcar when we have an opportunity to refuse paying the corporation five cents. Stooping to cheat a corporation! Well, let us always remember this, that the corporation can afford to lose that nickel, but we cannot afford to take it, to steal it. It is an insignificant thing, isn't it? It is really a great thing; it is one of these insidious things stealing into the character of the individual.



If One Can Do It, All Can Do It

Everywhere, in all places, let us remember that “pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from [the sins] of the world” (James 1:27). Can we do it in aggregate? Is this just for the individual? Can we think of a body of men living this way, a hundred men and women, fifteen hundred men and women? If one can do it all can do it. . . .

God . . . will bless every man and woman, no matter where he [or she] may be, who will stand for righteousness and truth, and live so as to keep himself [or herself] unspotted from the world. . . . I want to think of the Priesthood throughout all Israel, . . . whose duty is to preach these things by their lives and words, . . . standing before the world as a light that cannot be hid, because their lives are clean and pure. They are unspotted from the world. Then we shall indeed be a

“peculiar people” and become as God would have us, because we are preaching the gospel by our acts. “If ye love me,” says the Lord, “keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

May He help us to do it, keep us pure and free, our homes pure and true, that our children may breathe the atmosphere of purity and virtue, and we be ever true to the testimony of God that we have in our hearts. ■

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from [the sins] of the world” (James 1:27).



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

Begin by reading the section, “The World and Its Temptations” as a family. Discuss how Christ overcame the three temptations presented to Him by Satan. Compare these to the temptations we face today. Discuss how we can follow the Savior’s example. Consider concluding the lesson by sharing the story of the young missionary.