

FIRST PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

An Unending Conflict, a Victory Assured

BY PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY



We are engaged in a great eternal struggle that concerns the very souls of the sons and daughters of God.

Nearly 10 decades have passed now since my birth, and for the better part of that time, there has been war among mankind in one part of the earth or another. No one can ever estimate the terrible suffering incident to these wars across the globe. Lives numbered in the millions have been lost. The terrible wounds of war have left bodies maimed and minds destroyed. Families have been left without fathers and mothers. Young people who have been recruited to fight have, in many instances, died while those yet alive have had woven into the very fabric of their natures elements of hatred which will never leave them. The treasure of nations has been wasted and will never be recovered.

The devastation of war seems so unnecessary and such a terrible waste of human life and national resources. We ask, will this terrible, destructive way of handling disagreements among the sons and daughters of God ever end?

But there is another war that has gone on since before the world was created and that is likely to continue for a long time. It is a war that reaches beyond questions of territory or national sovereignty. John the Revelator speaks of that struggle:

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

“And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:7–9).

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The Continuing Struggle

That war, so bitter, so intense, has never ceased. It is the war between truth and error, between agency and compulsion, between the followers of Christ and those who have denied Him. His enemies have used every stratagem in that conflict. They've indulged in lying and deceit. They've employed money and wealth. They've tricked the minds of men. They've murdered and destroyed and engaged in every kind of evil practice to thwart the work of Christ.

Murder began on the earth when Cain slew Abel. The Old Testament is replete with accounts of the same eternal struggle.

It found expression in the vile accusations against the Man of Galilee, the Christ, who healed the sick and lifted men's hearts and hopes, He who taught the gospel of peace. His enemies, motivated by that evil power, seized Him, tortured Him, nailed Him to the cross, and spoke in

mockery against Him. But by the power of His godhood, He overcame the death His enemies had inflicted and through His sacrifice brought salvation from death to all men.

That eternal war went on in the decay of the work He established, in the corruption which later infected it, when darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people (see Isaiah 60:2).

But the forces of God could not be vanquished. The Light of Christ touched the heart of a man here and a man there, and vast good came to pass notwithstanding much of oppression and suffering.

There came a time of renaissance, with struggles for liberty—struggles for which much of blood and sacrifice was paid. The Spirit of God moved upon men to found a nation wherein freedom of worship and freedom of expression and freedom of agency were protected. There followed then the opening of the dispensation of the fulness of times with a visit to earth of God the Eternal Father and His Beloved Son, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. This glorious event was followed by visits of angels restoring the ancient keys and priesthood.

But the war was not over. It was renewed and redirected. There was contempt. There was persecution. There were drivings from one place to another. There was the murder of the young prophet of God and of his beloved brother, 163 years ago this month.

The Latter-day Saints fled their comfortable homes, their farms, their fields, their shops, their beautiful temple built at such tremendous sacrifice. They came to mountain valleys, thousands of them dying along the way. They came to the kind of place that President Joseph Smith had instructed



the Twelve to find, “where the devil cannot dig us out.”¹

But the adversary has never stopped trying. In the October conference of 1896, President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98), then an aged man, stood in the Tabernacle on Temple Square and said:

“There are two powers on the earth and in the midst of the inhabitants of the earth—the power of God and the power of the devil. In our history we have had some very peculiar experiences. When God has had a people on the earth, it matters not in what age, Lucifer, the son of the morning, and the millions of fallen spirits that were cast out of heaven, have warred against God, against Christ, against the work of God, and against the people of God. And they are not backward in doing it in our day and generation. Whenever the Lord set His hand to perform any work, those powers labored to overthrow it.”²

President Woodruff knew whereof he spoke. He had then only recently passed through those difficult and perilous days when the government of the nation had come against our people, determined to destroy this Church as an organization. Despite the difficulties of those days, the Saints did not give up. In faith they moved forward. They put their trust in the Almighty, and He revealed unto them the path they should follow. In faith they accepted that revelation and walked in obedience.

The Pattern of Conflict

But the war did not end. It abated somewhat, and we’re grateful for that. Nonetheless, the adversary of truth has continued his struggle.

That war, so bitter, so intense, has never ceased. It is the war between truth and error; between agency and compulsion, between the followers of Christ and those who have denied Him.

Notwithstanding the present strength of the Church, it seems that we are constantly under attack from one quarter or another. But we go on. We must go on. We have gone forward, and we will continue to go forward. In some seasons the issues are major. At other times they are only local skirmishes. But they are all part of a pattern.

Opposition has been felt in the undying efforts of many, both within and without the Church, to destroy faith, to belittle, to demean, to bear false witness, to tempt and allure and induce our people to practices inconsistent with the teachings and standards of this work of God.

The war goes on. It is as it was in the beginning. There may not be the intensity, and I am grateful for that. But the principles at issue are the same. The victims who fall are as precious as those who have fallen in the past. It is an ongoing battle. The men of the priesthood, with the daughters of God who are our companions and allies, are all part of the army of the Lord.

We must be united. An army that is disorganized will not be victorious. It is imperative that we close ranks, that we march together as one. We cannot have division among us and expect victory. We cannot have disloyalty and expect unity. We cannot be unclean and expect the help of the Almighty.

The young men of the priesthood, the deacons, teachers, and priests, have had laid upon them in their priesthood offices the duty to preach the gospel, to teach the truth, to encourage the weak to be strong, to “invite all to come unto Christ” (D&C 20:59). The young women of the Church have no less a responsibility to be obedient



to the commandments of God and to serve as examples of faith and virtue.

No son or daughter of our Heavenly Father can afford to partake of things that will weaken the mind, the body, or the eternal spirit. These include drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and pornography. You cannot be involved in immoral activity. You cannot do these things and be valiant as warriors in the cause of the Lord in the great, everlasting contest that goes on for the souls of our Father's children.

The men of this Church cannot be unfaithful or untrue to their wives, to their families, to their priesthood responsibilities if they are to be valiant in moving the work of the Lord forward in this great battle for truth and salvation. They cannot be dishonest and unscrupulous in temporal affairs without tarnishing their armor. The women of this Church, be they wives, mothers, or sisters who have not found companions, cannot be unfaithful or untrue to their covenants and blessings and serve as the bulwark in the kingdom that they are meant to be.

In our meetings, we occasionally sing an old hymn:

Who's on the Lord's side? Who?

Now is the time to show.

We ask it fearlessly:

Who's on the Lord's side? Who?

We wage no common war,

Cope with no common foe.

The enemy's awake;

Who's on the Lord's side? Who?²³

A Call to Commitment

Some years ago a friend told me of a conversation he had had with another member of the Church. My friend had asked whether his associate felt close to his Heavenly Father. The man replied that he did not feel close. Why not? He said, "Candidly, because I don't want to." Then he went on to say, "If I were close to Heavenly Father, He would probably want some commitment from me, and I am not ready for that."

Think of it—a man who has taken upon himself the name of the Lord in baptism, a man who has renewed his covenants with the Lord in his sacrament meetings, a man who has accepted the priesthood of God and yet has said that if he were close to his Heavenly Father, some commitment might be expected of him, and he was not ready for that.

In this work there must be commitment. There must be devotion. We are engaged in a great eternal struggle that concerns the very souls of the sons and daughters of God. We are not losing. We are winning. We will continue to win if we will be faithful and true. We *can* do it. We *must* do it. We *will* do it. There is nothing the Lord has asked of us that in faith we cannot accomplish.

I think of the children of Israel when they fled Egypt. They camped beside the Red Sea. Looking back, they saw Pharaoh and his armies coming to destroy them. Fear gripped their hearts. With the armies behind them and the sea before them, they cried out in terror.

"And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew

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to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.

“The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, . . . speak unto the children of Israel, *that they go forward*” (Exodus 14:13–15; emphasis added).

The sea parted, and the children of Israel moved to their salvation. The Egyptians followed to their own destruction.

Shall we not also in faith move forward? He who is our eternal leader, the Lord Jesus Christ, has challenged us in words of revelation. Said He:

“Wherefore, lift up your hearts and rejoice, and gird up your loins, and take upon you my whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day. . . .

“Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, which I have sent mine angels to commit unto you;

“Taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of my Spirit, . . . and be faithful until I come, and ye shall be caught up, that where I am ye shall be also” (D&C 27:15–18).

A Bright Future

The war goes on. It is waged across the world over the issues of agency and compulsion. It is waged by an army of missionaries over the issues of truth and error. It is waged in our own lives, day in and day out, in our homes, in our work, in our school associations; it is waged over questions of love and respect, of loyalty and fidelity, of obedience

and integrity. We are all involved in it—child, youth, or adult, each of us. We are winning, and the future never looked brighter.

May our God bless us in the work that is so clearly laid out before us. May we be faithful. May we be valiant. May we have the courage to be true to the trust God has placed in each of us. May we be unafraid. “For [to quote the words of Paul to Timothy] God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” (2 Timothy 1:7–8). ■

NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 6:222.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* (2004), 220.
3. “Who’s on the Lord’s Side?” *Hymns*, no. 260.

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Use the article to review the history of the war of good and evil that has been going on since before the Creation of the world. Explain that the Light of Christ represents hope in a dark world. Read the section “A Bright Future.” Suggest actions we can take to win the war between good and evil.

2. Write the words of 2 Timothy 1:7–8 on a card for each family member. Invite family members to write on the back of the card a personal goal to be a more committed disciple of Jesus Christ. Ask family members to post the card in a place where they will see it daily.

3. Bring a hymnbook as you visit each family. Invite family members to use the index to find hymns that inspire commitment. Choose one hymn to sing or read aloud. Compare these words to portions of President Hinckley’s talk. Conclude by reviewing President Hinckley’s call to commitment and his testimony of the bright future for those who serve faithfully on the Lord’s side.