

Sexual intimacy outside marriage is sin

Many youth have been led to believe that sexual intimacy is "not that bad" as long as it does not involve the act that could cause pregnancy. That is false. Sexual intimacy in any of its forms, outside the covenant of marriage, is serious sin. Serious sin is addictive. It forges binding habits that are difficult to sever. If you have broken such laws, seek help from your bishop or stake president, since such transgression requires a confession both to the Lord and to such a judge as a necessary step toward forgiveness. These sins can be avoided by not permitting anyone to touch the private, sacred parts of your body and by refusing to do that with anyone else.

Invitation to repent and come back

Have you wandered from the path of joy and now find yourself where you do not want to be, with feelings you do not want to have? Is there a yearning to return to the peace and joy of a worthy life? I invite you with all the love of my heart to repent and come back. Decide to do it now. That journey is not as difficult as it seems. You can cast out guilt, overcome depression, receive the blessing of peace of mind, and find enduring joy. Pray for help and guidance, and you will be led to

find it. Go to where you know the light of truth shines—to a worthy friend, a loving bishop or stake president, an understanding parent. Please come back. We love you. We need you. Follow the path to peace and joy through complete repentance. The Savior will help you obtain forgiveness as you sincerely follow all of the steps to repentance. He is the Redeemer. He loves you. He wants you to have peace and joy in your life. Now I testify that He lives. He will help you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 6:9.
2. Moses 5:8.
3. *Doctrine and Covenants* 19:13, 20.
4. 2 Nephi 9:21, 23.
5. See 2 Nephi 9:8–10; 2:5.
6. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 100–101.
7. See Enos 1:10.
8. *Doctrine and Covenants* 1:31–32.
9. *Doctrine and Covenants* 53:7.
10. Alma 38:8–9.
11. See Alma 26:22.
12. See Alma 32:13.
13. 2 Nephi 2:7; italics added.
14. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 61:2.
15. See 2 Corinthians 7:9–10.
16. *Doctrine and Covenants* 58:42–43.
17. See Alma 48:17–18.
18. Alma 26:20.

Elder Donald L. Hallstrom

The influence of culture and tradition

I will ever be grateful for having been born and nurtured in Hawaii, part of what the scriptures often refer to as "the isles of the sea." Called a melting pot because of its multiethnic composition, Hawaii has more accurately been referred to as a "delicious stew," with each culture maintaining an identity but blending together in a harmonious societal broth which can be savored by all.

Having additionally served a mission in England, spending significant time on the United States mainland, and now living and serving in Asia, I have long been interested in culture and tradition and their influence on how we look, think, and act. *Culture* is defined as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and . . . traits of a . . . group" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed. [1993], 282). Traditions, established patterns of behavior transmitted from generation to generation, are an

inherent part of culture. Our culture and its related traditions help establish our sense of identity and fill the vital human need to belong.

Uplifting traditions

Of traditions which are complementary to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul admonished the Thessalonians, "Therefore, . . . stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). In the Church, powerful traditions remind us of the strength and sacrifice of our ancestors and inspire our efforts. Among them are industry, frugality, and complete devotion to a righteous cause. Others are based on doctrine and standards which may seem peculiar to the world but are consistent with God's pattern. These include chaste behavior, modesty of dress, unpolluted language, Sabbath observance, adherence to the Word of Wisdom, and the payment of tithes.

Even in ethnic culture, many traditions can reinforce gospel standards and principles. For example, anciently, Hawaiians had a practice, the spirit of which is still exhibited today by many in the islands. When greeting another person, one would come face-to-face and offer an expression of "ha," even expelling their breath for another to feel. The literal translation of *ha* is "the breath of life." It was a way to give of oneself and show another a deep sense of brotherly love and caring. When foreigners first came to Hawaii, they did not exhibit this same respect for others. They were called *haole*, *ha-ole*, meaning "without ha."

If there is a people who should have "ha"—an intense feeling of charity and compassion toward others—it is members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A true Latter-day Saint possesses a love for others that is consistent with the belief that everyone is a brother or a sister.

Uplifting traditions play a significant role in leading us toward the things of the Spirit. Those that promote love for Deity and unity in families and among people are especially important.

Unwanted traditions

The power of tradition, however, poses a significant danger. It can cause us to forget our heavenly heritage. To achieve eternal goals, we must reconcile our earthly culture with the doctrine of the everlasting gospel. This process involves embracing all that is spiritually elevating in our family and societal traditions and discarding that which is a barrier to our eternal view and achievement. We must transform ourselves from being "natural" men and women, as defined by King Benjamin, and become Saints by yielding "to the enticings of the Holy Spirit" (Mosiah 3:19).

Also warning of this peril and its gravity, the Prophet Joseph Smith was inspired to clarify one of Paul's epistles to the people of Corinth by stating:

"And it came to pass that the children, being brought up in subjection to the law of Moses, gave heed to the traditions of their fathers and believed not the gospel of Christ, wherein they became unholly" (D&C 74:4).

Please be not dismissive and think this principle applies only to others and their culture; know that it is valid for you and for me, wherever on earth we may live or whatever our family circumstances may be.

Unwanted traditions are those which lead us away from performing holy ordinances and keeping sacred covenants. Our guide should be the doctrine taught by the scriptures and the prophets. Traditions which devalue marriage and family, abase women or do not recognize the majesty of their God-given roles, honor temporal success more than spiritual, or teach that reliance upon God is a weak-

ness of character all lead us away from eternal truths.

Cultivate a tradition of righteousness

Of all the traditions we should cultivate within ourselves and our families, a "tradition of righteousness" should be preeminent. Hallmarks of this tradition are an unwavering love for God and His Only Begotten Son, respect for prophets and priesthood power, a constant seeking of the Holy Spirit, and the discipline of discipleship, which transforms believing into doing. A tradition of righteousness sets a pattern for living which draws children closer to parents, and both closer to God, and elevates obedience from a burden to a blessing.

In a world where traditions often confuse right and wrong:

- We are inspired by the courage of each young person who has honored the Sabbath day, kept the Word of Wisdom, and remained chaste when popular culture has established the opposite as not only acceptable but expected.

- We are inspired by the wisdom of each man who has molded a career which properly supports his premier responsibility to spiritually lead his family when wealth and power are more highly valued by the world.

- We are inspired by the nobility of each husband and wife who have established a relationship of equality and kindness when one of selfishness and indifference is so common.

As the supernal nature of our life begins to be understood and experienced, we desire nothing temporal to impede our celestial journey.

Humbled by the responsibility but joyous in the opportunity to preach the gospel and bear witness in all the world, I affirm my knowledge of eternal truths and everlasting culture. I testify of 15 men with prophetic calling and apostolic authority and one among them, even President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides with dignity, vision, and a clear sense of righteous tradition. Of most significance, I testify of the Savior and Redeemer of mankind, of His Church, and of His atoning love, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us, followed by Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation will now sing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet." Following the singing, Elders Ronald A. Rasband and Douglas L. Callister of the Seventy will address us. They will be followed by Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet."

Elder Ronald A. Rasband

Gratitude for calling and family

My dear brothers and sisters, I feel it a great privilege and honor to stand here at this pulpit today. I pray for the blessing of the Holy Spirit, that what I say may add to the spiritual feelings we all experience at conference time.

I would be very ungrateful if I did not take this opportunity to thank the Lord in all sincerity for my calling as a Seventy. I would also like to thank our dear prophet, President Hinckley, and his fellow leaders of the Church for their confidence in me. I pledge to them and