

mandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.”⁸

When hands are laid upon our heads after baptism, we are confirmed members of His Church and then given the gift of the Holy Ghost. If we live righteously and remain worthy, we are promised His constant companionship; He will guide our lives, teach us truths, and testify to us that Jesus is the Christ. As covenant members of the Lord’s Church, we promise to serve Him and keep His commandments “that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon [us].”⁹

Pouring out of the Spirit in West Africa

In West Africa, where we are currently serving, we feel His Spirit being poured out in rich abundance upon the faithful Saints. In 1989 a storm hit Ghana—not a storm of wind or rain but a storm of persecution, slander, and misunderstandings. It was a trying time; the Church was new there. All our non-African missionaries were required to leave the country. Our meetinghouses were locked and guarded so they could not be used by the members. The Saints could not gather together, so they worshiped as families in their own homes. Some members were arrested and even imprisoned.

This period of time is referred to as “the freeze.” Members had little contact or support from the outside Church, but they were not left on their own to weather the storm. They had the scriptures and the

words of the prophets; they put their trust and faith in the Lord, and He poured out His Spirit upon them. One member of the Church said, “We had the Spirit of the Lord with us; we could feel Him guiding and directing us. We drew closer to one another, and we drew nearer to the Savior.”

For 18 months the Saints fasted and prayed for the day when the freeze would end. In November of 1990 the ban was lifted. The worst of the storm had passed, but it had taken its toll. There were those who had fallen away. Their roots had been shallow and their foundation weak. The foundation of the Church in Ghana today is built on the faith of those who weathered the storm. They were deeply rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, the scriptures, the living prophets, and the Holy Ghost all testify of Christ. They will help us build on “a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.”¹⁰ Of this I humbly testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Helaman 5:12.
2. Jacob 7:9–12.
3. Helaman 5:12.
4. John 5:39.
5. 1 Nephi 4:13.
6. Omni 1:17.
7. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 3.
8. John 14:15–16.
9. Mosiah 18:10.
10. Helaman 5:12.

Elder Lynn A. Mickelsen

Do not wash dirty linen in public

While driving through a small town in Mexico, a man ran over and killed a dog that darted in front of him. From that day on he was known in the village as *mata-*

perros. No consideration or thought was given to the origin of the name; he was simply the “dog killer.” For those who came along later, not knowing the circumstance, their minds conjured up a terrible image of what he had done.

Reputations built on rumor or reality or established by nickname can be virtually impossible to overcome. The adage “Do not wash your dirty linen in public” is wise counsel. It is not necessary, appropriate, or healthy to expose our private or family mistakes and sins for public scrutiny. The more widely a sin is known, the more difficult the repentance or change.

This is not to say that sin should be covered, although that is the natural impulse of anyone who commits a sin. Rather than repent, we want to hide any mistakes or sins committed. But as Cain discovered when he killed Abel, he could not hide his sins from the Lord,¹ for all things are present before Him.² He knows of every disobedient act we commit, but—different from the general public—He, with His knowledge of our sins, gives the specific promise that He will remember them no more if we repent.³

Process for washing dirty linen

Washing dirty linen and repentance are intrinsically linked. Sin brings an uncleanliness before the Lord that must be reconciled. There is, however, a time and a place for confession and asking forgiveness. The scope of those parameters depends on the nature and the magnitude of the sin. Where there has been a public offense or a violation of public trust, the responsibility would be to air that wrongdoing in public and ask forgiveness. The span of our responsibility in repentance is to the Lord, His servants, and those we have offended.

There is a parallel between our garments being washed clean through the blood of the Lamb and how we wash our own dirty linen. It is through His atoning sacrifice that our garments will be cleansed. The scriptural reference to garments encompasses our whole being. The need for cleansing comes as we become soiled through sin. The judgment and forgiving

are the Savior’s prerogative, for only He can forgive and wash away our sins.⁴

When King Benjamin gave his great sermon in the land of Zarahemla,⁵ the Saints changed their hearts,⁶ and there was peace and prosperity throughout the land. Time went by, and Alma was called to preside over the Church. Caught up in their prosperity, some of the members of the Church fell into sin. Alma’s heart was troubled when they were brought before him. Not knowing how to handle the problem, he took them before King Mosiah, but the king remanded them to Alma’s judgment.

Fearing to do wrong in the sight of God, Alma poured out his whole soul to God and pleaded with Him for answers as to how to handle the transgressors. Because of Alma’s great love for his fellowman and his fervent desire to do God’s will, the Lord blessed him mightily, even with a promise of eternal life. Then the Lord explained to him why his pleading for understanding in judgment was so important, saying: “This is *my* Church. It is *my* name through which they will be saved. It is through *my* sacrifice. It is *I* who will judge.”⁷

How often do we forget who has the right to judge? Forgiveness of sin depends on Him, not on us. So the next time we are tempted to hang dirty linen in public, let us remember:

First, go to the Lord.

Second, go to the one we have offended.

Third, if necessary, go to our judge in Israel.

And fourth, then put it away.

Do not expose others’ faults

Another side of exposing dirty linen is the carnal, insatiable appetite that some have to expose the faults of others. The Lord challenged Job as he was chafing under his burden: “Wilt thou condemn me,

that thou mayest be righteous?"⁸ This can happen even in the family when one, supposing he is protecting his *own* good name, exposes in elaborate detail the faults and mistakes of his siblings, his children, or his parents in a form of self-justification designed to alleviate his personal pain.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the prodigal was reclaimed by a faithful father who spoke of his son's worth, not of his faults.

Whenever we tell of others' sins or mistakes, we are in effect passing judgment on them. I heard a man tell his son that an individual would never work for him again because he felt the individual had charged him unfairly. The boy responded, "I'm surprised to hear you say that, Dad, for you have taught us differently."

The father was judging without basis. What should he have done? If he had questions about the charges for the work, he should have discussed them with the man, resolved their differences, and laid it to rest without grousing to others. The Savior taught: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."⁹

When the scribes and the Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus, He stooped and wrote with His finger in the sand so others might not see or hear. Then He said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone." When her accusers had all squirmed away in their sins, He said to the woman, "Go, and sin no more."¹⁰

Do not judge others; forgive and forget

What should we do when we have knowledge of others' problems?

1. Don't judge. Leave judgment to the Lord, the perfect judge. Let us not examine or explore others' sins but look to

their divinity. It is not ours to delve into others' problems but rather to perceive the breadth of their goodness.

2. We must forgive. Although we may have been personally wounded, the Lord said, "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men."¹¹

3. Forget. A relentless memory can canker the most resilient spirit. Leave it alone; lay it down; put it away.

If the wave of temptation to reveal others' sins comes over you, don't tell your neighbor or even your best friend. Go to your bishop. Leave the burden with him. If it is required, report it to the civil or criminal authorities and then leave it alone. I believe that to receive the precious promise that Alma received requires the same spirit and action he took regarding his, and others', dirty linen.

Empathize rather than judge

But what if we are right and they are wrong? Shouldn't we make our position public so others will not judge us to have made the mistake? The Lord has been clear in His instruction regarding this dilemma. It is not our prerogative to judge. The mote is not ours to measure, for the beam in our own eye obstructs our capacity to see. There is no pancake so thin it has only one side.

Empathy is required here, the gift to feel what others feel and to understand what others are experiencing. Empathy is the natural outgrowth of charity. It stimulates and enhances our capacity to serve. Empathy is not sympathy but understanding and caring. It is the basis of true friendship. Empathy leads to respect and opens the door to teaching and learning. The Sioux Indians understand this great principle as they pray, "Great Spirit, help me to never judge another until I have walked for two weeks in his moccasins."

Garments cleansed through repentance

So what should we do with dirty linen? The process begins with repentance. The Savior stands at the door and knocks; He is ready to receive us immediately.¹² Our responsibility is to do the work of repentance. We must abandon our sins so the cleansing can begin. The promise of the Lord is that He will cleanse our garments with His blood.¹³ He gave His life and suffered for all our sins. He can redeem us from our personal fall. Through the Atonement, the Savior, giving Himself as the ransom for our sins, authorizes the Holy Ghost to cleanse us in a baptism of fire. As the Holy Ghost dwells in us, His purifying presence burns out the filthiness of sin. As soon as the commitment is made, the cleansing process begins.

Focus on the Savior to be cleansed

Our commitment to the Lord begins with our focus on Him. We were recently in a stake conference in Nauvoo, Illinois. The choir music was exceptional. The director, who is a professional musician and teaches at a local university, was a master at captivating the choir and congregation. Every movement of his body was intrinsically linked to the music. We wanted to sing exactly as he was leading. All eyes were on him. I thought of the Savior. He has challenged us to be as He is. If we would give Him the rapt attention we were giving Brother Nelson, we would quickly be transformed into the Savior's image.

The transformation as we were singing was momentary. We were where we needed to be, and all had a great desire to follow. If we find ourselves in the places we should be, with the fervent desire to follow the Lord, He will touch our lives and cleanse us that we may live in His presence permanently. There was no coercion by the director to get us to sing, just connection. Real repentance comes with

that connection to the Savior. Let us consider our personal prayers and everyday thoughts. We all have work to do to make the connection the Lord requires.

I asked Brother Nelson how he could draw so much out of us. He humbly replied, "Because their hearts are pure."

"What else?" I asked.

He answered, "It is through the Spirit. That is the only way we can communicate at that level."

So where should our focus be? "And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things."¹⁴ That can happen if we take responsibility for our dirty linen through repentance and make sure it is clean.

May we enjoy the Savior's promise through Moroni to "arise . . . and put on thy beautiful garments. . . . Come unto Christ . . . and love God with all your might, mind and strength, . . . that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ . . . through the shedding of [His] blood . . . , which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot."¹⁵ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Genesis 4:9–10; Moses 5:34–35.
2. See Moses 1:6.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:42.
4. See Alma 5:21–27; Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.
5. See Mosiah 2–5.
6. See Mosiah 5:2.
7. See Mosiah 26:10–24.
8. Job 40:8.
9. Matthew 7:1–2.
10. John 8:7, 11.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.
12. See Revelation 3:20.
13. See Revelation 7:14.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 88:67.
15. Moroni 10:31–33.