

The Merciful Obtain Mercy

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When our hearts are filled with the love of God, we become “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving.”

My dear brothers and sisters, not long ago I received a letter from a concerned mother who pleaded for a general conference talk on a topic that would specifically benefit her two children. A rift had grown between them, and they had stopped speaking to each other. The mother was heartbroken. In the letter she assured me that a general conference message on this topic would reconcile her children, and all would be well.

This good sister’s sincere and heartfelt plea was just one of several promptings I have received over these last months that I should say a few words today on a topic that is a growing concern—not only for a worried mother but for many in the Church and, indeed, the world.

I am impressed by the faith of this loving mother that a general conference talk could help heal the relationship between her children. I am sure that her confidence was not so much in the abilities of the speakers but in “the virtue of the word of God,” which has a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than ... anything else.”¹ Dear sister, I pray that the Spirit will touch your children’s hearts.

When Relationships Go Bad

Strained and broken relationships are as old as humankind itself. Ancient Cain was the first who allowed the cancer of bitterness and malice to canker his heart. He tilled the ground of his soul with envy and hatred and allowed these feelings to ripen until he did the unthinkable—murdering his own brother and becoming, in the process, the father of Satan’s lies.²

Since those first days the spirit of envy and hatred has led to some of the most tragic stories in history. It turned Saul against David, the sons of Jacob against their brother Joseph, Laman and Lemuel against Nephi, and Amalickiah against Moroni.

I imagine that every person on earth has been affected in some way by the destructive spirit of contention, resentment, and revenge. Perhaps there are even times when we recognize this spirit in ourselves. When we feel hurt, angry, or envious, it is quite easy to judge other people, often assigning dark motives to their actions in order to justify our own feelings of resentment.

The Doctrine

Of course, we know this is wrong. The doctrine is clear. We all depend on the Savior; none of us can be saved

without Him. Christ's Atonement is infinite and eternal. Forgiveness for *our* sins comes with conditions. We must repent, and we must be willing to forgive others. Jesus taught: "Forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not ... [stands] condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin"³ and "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."⁴

Of course, these words seem perfectly reasonable—when applied to someone else. We can so clearly and easily see the harmful results that come when *others* judge and hold grudges. And we certainly don't like it when people judge us.

But when it comes to our own prejudices and grievances, we too often justify our anger as righteous and our judgment as reliable and only appropriate. Though we cannot look into another's heart, we assume that we know a bad motive or even a bad person when we see one. We make exceptions when it comes to our own bitterness because we feel that, in our case, we have all the information we need to hold someone else in contempt.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, said that those who pass judgment on others are "inexcusable." The moment we judge someone else, he explained, we condemn ourselves, for none is without sin.⁵ Refusing to forgive is a grievous sin—one the Savior warned against. Jesus's own disciples had "sought occasion against [each other] and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened."⁶

Our Savior has spoken so clearly on this subject that there is little room for private interpretation. "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive," but then He said, "... of you it is *required* to forgive *all* men."⁷

May I add a footnote here? When the Lord requires that we forgive all men, that includes forgiving ourselves. Sometimes, of all the people in the world, the one who is the hardest to forgive—as well as perhaps the one who is most in need of our forgiveness—is the person looking back at us in the mirror.

The Bottom Line

This topic of judging others could actually be taught in a two-word sermon. When it comes to hating, gossiping, ignoring, ridiculing, holding grudges, or wanting to cause harm, please apply the following:

Stop it!

It's that simple. We simply have to stop judging others and replace judgmental thoughts and feelings with a heart full of love for God and His children. God is our Father. We are His children. We are all brothers and sisters. I don't know exactly how to articulate this point of *not judging others* with sufficient eloquence, passion, and persuasion to make it stick. I can quote scripture, I can try to expound doctrine, and I will even quote a bumper sticker I recently saw. It was attached to the back of a car whose driver appeared to be a little rough around the edges, but the words on the sticker taught an insightful lesson. It read, "Don't judge me because I sin differently than you."

We must recognize that we are all imperfect—that we are beggars before God. Haven't we all, at one time or another, meekly approached the mercy seat and pleaded for grace? Haven't we wished with all the energy of our souls for mercy—to be forgiven for the mistakes we have made and the sins we have committed?

Because we all depend on the mercy of God, how can we deny to others any measure of the grace we so

desperately desire for ourselves? My beloved brothers and sisters, should we not forgive as we wish to be forgiven?

The Love of God

Is this difficult to do?

Yes, of course.

Forgiving ourselves and others is not easy. In fact, for most of us it requires a major change in our attitude and way of thinking—even a change of heart. But there is good news. This “mighty change”⁸ of heart is exactly what the gospel of Jesus Christ is designed to bring into our lives.

How is it done? Through the love of God.

When our hearts are filled with the love of God, something good and pure happens to us. We “keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.”⁹

The more we allow the love of God to govern our minds and emotions—the more we allow our love for our Heavenly Father to swell within our hearts—the easier it is to love others with the pure love of Christ. As we open our hearts to the glowing dawn of the love of God, the darkness and cold of animosity and envy will eventually fade.

As always, Christ is our exemplar. In His teachings as in His life, He showed us the way. He forgave the wicked, the vulgar, and those who sought to hurt and to do Him harm.

Jesus said it is easy to love those who love us; even the wicked can do *that*. But Jesus Christ taught a higher law. His words echo through the centuries and are meant for us today. They are meant for all who desire to be His disciples. They are meant for you and me: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”¹⁰

When our hearts are filled with the love of God, we become “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving [each other], even as God for Christ’s sake [forgave us].”¹¹

The pure love of Christ can remove the scales of resentment and wrath from our eyes, allowing us to see others the way our Heavenly Father sees us: as flawed and imperfect mortals who have potential and worth far beyond our capacity to imagine. Because God loves us so much, we too must love and forgive each other.

The Way of the Disciple

My dear brothers and sisters, consider the following questions as a self-test:

Do you harbor a grudge against someone else?

Do you gossip, even when what you say may be true?

Do you exclude, push away, or punish others because of something they have done?

Do you secretly envy another?

Do you wish to cause harm to someone?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may want to apply the two-word sermon from earlier: stop it!

In a world of accusations and unfriendliness, it is easy to gather and cast stones. But before we do so, let us remember the words of the One who is our Master and model: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone.”¹²

Brothers and sisters, let us put down our stones.

Let us be kind.

Let us forgive.

Let us talk peacefully with each other.

Let the love of God fill our hearts.

“Let us do good unto all men.”¹³

The Savior promised: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. ... For with the same measure that [you use] it shall be measured to you again.”¹⁴

Shouldn't this promise be enough to always focus our efforts on acts of kindness, forgiveness, and charity instead of on any negative behavior?

Let us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, return good for evil.¹⁵ Let us not seek revenge or allow our wrath to overcome us.

“For it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

“Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. ...

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”¹⁶

Remember: in the end, it is the merciful who obtain mercy.¹⁷

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wherever we may be, let us be known as a people who “have love one to another.”¹⁸

Love One Another

Brothers and sisters, there is enough heartache and sorrow in this life without our adding to it through our own stubbornness, bitterness, and resentment.

We are not perfect.

The people around us are not perfect.¹⁹ People do things that annoy, disappoint, and anger. In this mortal life it will always be that way.

Nevertheless, we must let go of our grievances. Part of the purpose of mortality is to learn how to let go of such things. *That is the Lord's way.*

Remember, heaven is filled with those who have this in common: They are forgiven. And they forgive.

Lay your burden at the Savior's feet. Let go of judgment. Allow Christ's Atonement to change and heal your heart. Love one another. Forgive one another.

The merciful will obtain mercy.

Of this I testify in the name of the One who loved so well and so completely that He gave His life for us, His friends—in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Alma 31:5.

2. See Moses 5:16–32.

3. Doctrine and Covenants 64:9.

4. Matthew 5:7.

5. See Romans 2:1.

6. Doctrine and Covenants 64:8.

7. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10; emphasis added.

8. Mosiah 5:2.

9. 1 John 5:3–4.

10. Matthew 5:44; see also verses 45–47.

11. Ephesians 4:32.

12. John 8:7.

13. Galatians 6:10.

14. Luke 6:38.

15. See Matthew 5:39–41.

16. Romans 12:19–21.

17. See Matthew 5:7.

18. John 13:35.

19. See Romans 3:23.