

What Shall a Man Give in Exchange for His Soul?

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Of the Seventy



We are to give up all our sins, big or small, for the Father's reward of eternal life.

The Savior once asked His disciples the following question: "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"¹

This is a question that my father taught me to carefully consider years ago. As I was growing up, my parents assigned me chores around the house and paid me an allowance for that work. I often used that money, a little over 50 cents a week, to go to the movies. Back then a movie ticket cost 25 cents for an 11-year-old. This left me with 25 cents to spend on candy bars, which cost 5 cents apiece. A movie with five candy bars! It couldn't get much better than that.

All was well until I turned 12. Standing in line one afternoon, I realized that the ticket price for a 12-year-old was 35 cents, and that meant two less candy bars. Not quite prepared to make that sacrifice, I reasoned to myself, "You look the same as you did a week ago." I then stepped up and asked for the 25-cent ticket. The cashier did not blink, and I bought my regular five candy bars instead of three.

Elated by my accomplishment, I later rushed home to tell my dad about my big coup. As I poured out the details, he said nothing. When I finished, he simply looked at me and said, "Son, would you sell your soul for a nickel?" His words pierced my 12-year-old heart. It is a lesson I have never forgotten.

Years later I found myself asking this same question to a less-active Melchizedek Priesthood holder. He was a wonderful man who loved his family. He, however, had not been to church for many years. He had a talented son who played on an elite travel sports team that practiced and played games on Sunday. That team had won multiple major championships. As we met, I reminded him that, as a priesthood holder, he was promised that if he magnified his oath and covenant, he would receive "all that [our] Father hath."² I then asked him, "Is a national championship worth more than all the Father has?" He gently said, "I see your point" and made an appointment to visit with his bishop.

Today it is so easy to get caught up in the noise of the world—despite our good intentions. The world presses us to "[look] beyond the mark."³ Someone recently asked me, "Does one drink really matter?" Can you see that is the adversary's question? Cain asked, "Who is the Lord that I should know him?"⁴ and then lost his soul. With self-justification of petty sins, Satan triumphs. For a bottle of milk,⁵ a misspelled name,⁶ a mess of pottage,⁷ birthrights and inheritances have been traded.

As we consider the nickel or national-championship exchanges in our lives, we can either self-justify our actions, like Cain, or look to submit to the will of God. The question before us is not whether we are doing things which need correcting, because we always are. Rather, the question is, will we “shrink” or “finish” the call upon our soul to do the will of the Father?⁸

The Lord loves our righteousness but asks of us continued repentance and submission. In the Bible we read that it was a commandment-keeping, wealthy young man who knelt before the Savior and asked what he needed to do to have eternal life. He turned away grieved when the Savior said, “One thing thou lackest: ... sell whatsoever thou hast.”⁹

Yet, it was another wealthy but worldly man, the chief Lamanite king, the father of Lamoni, who also asked the same question about eternal life, saying: “What shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit[?] ... I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.”¹⁰

Do you remember the response the Lord gave the king through His servant Aaron? “If thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.”¹¹

When the king understood the sacrifice required, he humbled and prostrated himself and then prayed, “O God, ... I will give away all my sins to know thee.”¹²

This is the exchange the Savior is asking of us: we are to give up all our sins, big or small, for the Father’s reward of eternal life. We are to forget self-justifying stories, excuses, rationalizations, defense mechanisms, procrastinations, appearances, personal pride, judgmental thoughts, and doing things our way. We are to separate ourselves from all worldliness and take upon us the image of God in our countenances.¹³

Brothers and sisters, remember that this charge is more than just not doing bad things. With an engaged enemy we must also act and not sit in “thoughtless stupor.”¹⁴ Taking upon the countenance of God means serving each other. There are sins of commission and sins of omission, and we are to rise above both.

While serving as a mission president in Africa, I was forever taught this great truth. I was on my way to a meeting when I saw a young boy alone, crying hysterically on the side of the road. A voice within me said, “Stop and help that boy.” As quick as I heard this voice, in a split second, I rationalized: “You can’t stop. You will be late. You’re the presiding officer and can’t walk in late.”

When I arrived at the meetinghouse, I heard the same voice say again: “Go help that boy.” I then gave my car keys to a Church member named Afasi and asked him to bring the boy to me. About 20 minutes later, I felt a tap on my shoulder. The young boy was outside.

He was about 10 years of age. We found out his father was dead and his mother was in jail. He lived in the slums of Accra with a caretaker, who gave him food and a place to sleep. To earn his board, he sold dried fish on the streets. But after this day of hawking, when he reached in his pocket, he found a hole in it. He had lost all his earnings. Afasi and I knew immediately that if he returned without the money, he would be called a liar, most likely beaten, and then cast out onto the street. It was in that moment of alarm when I first saw him. We calmed his fears, replaced his loss, and took him back home to his caretaker.

As I went home that evening, I realized two great truths. First, I knew as never before that God is mindful of each of us and will never forsake us; and second, I knew that we must always hearken to the voice of the Spirit within us and go “straightway”¹⁵ wherever it takes us, regardless of our fears or any inconvenience.

One day the disciples asked the Savior who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He told them to be converted, humble, and submissive as little children. He then said, “The Son of man is come to save that which [is] lost.”¹⁶ With that one sentence, He defined our mission. We are to go to the rescue—to the lost, the last, and the least. It is not enough to avoid evil; we must “suffer his cross”¹⁷ and “be anxiously engaged,”¹⁸ helping others to conversion. With compassion and love we embrace the prodigal,¹⁹ answer the cries of orphans in hysteria, the pleas of those in darkness and despair,²⁰ and the distress calls of family in need. “Satan need not get everyone to be like Cain or Judas ... ,” said Elder Neal A. Maxwell. “He needs only to get able men ... to see themselves as sophisticated neutrals.”²¹

After a recent stake conference, a teenage boy approached me and asked, “Does God love me?” May our lives of service always affirm that God forsakes no one.

To the question, “What will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Satan would have us sell our lives for the candy bars and championships of this world. The Savior, however, calls us, without price, to exchange our sins, to take upon us His countenance, and to take that into the hearts of those within our reach. For this we may receive all that God has, which we are told is greater than all the combined treasures of this earth.²² Can you even imagine?

On a recent trip to Nicaragua, I noticed a plaque in the modest home of a family we visited. It read, “My testimony is my most precious possession.” So it is with me. My testimony is my soul’s treasure, and in the integrity of my heart, I leave you my witness that this church is God’s true Church, that our Savior stands at its head and directs it through His chosen prophet. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Matthew 16:26.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.

3. Jacob 4:14.

4. Moses 5:16.

5. A bottle of milk and its strippings (rich in cream) was at the center of a dispute between Thomas B. Marsh’s wife and Mrs. Harris, who had agreed to combine resources and make cheese. When Mrs. Harris

found that Mrs. Marsh didn't include the strippings with the milk but kept them for herself, Mrs. Harris complained, and the women quarreled. Thomas Marsh took the matter to the bishop, who sided with Mrs. Harris. It went from the bishop to the high council to the First Presidency, all of whom agreed that Mrs. Marsh was in the wrong. This drove a wedge between Thomas Marsh and the Brethren. Soon after that, Thomas Marsh testified before a Missourian magistrate that the Mormons were hostile toward the state of Missouri. (See George A. Smith, "Discourse," *Deseret News*, Apr. 16, 1856, 44.)

6. When the Prophet Joseph Smith issued a call to Simonds Ryder to serve as a missionary, Ryder discovered that his name was spelled "Rider" in the printed revelation. He became offended, and this led to his apostasy and eventual participation in tarring and feathering the Prophet. Ryder didn't know that Joseph Smith usually dictated revelations to his scribes and had no part in the spelling. (See Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830-1838* [1983], 93-94; Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* [1983], 286.)

7. In Genesis 25 we learn that Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for "bread and pottage of lentiles" (verse 34).

8. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:18-19.

9. See Mark 10:21-22.

10. Alma 22:15.

11. Alma 22:16.

12. Alma 22:18.

13. See Alma 5:14-19.

14. Alma 60:7.

15. Mark 1:18.

16. Matthew 18:11.

17. Jacob 1:8.

18. Doctrine and Covenants 58:27.

19. See Luke 15:11–32.

20. See Joseph Smith—History 1:15–16.

21. Neal A. Maxwell, *Deposition of a Disciple* (1976), 88.

22. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:38.