Keeping the Kingdom Clean

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Keeping the Kingdom Clean

Hartman Rector, Jr.
First Quorum of the Seventy

It's a great honor, and privilege, to greet you this morning in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ, because we've met in his name, those who comprise your group, an association of Mormon counselors and psychotherapists. The fact that you say you're a Mormon means that you represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord's programs are calculated to make the children of our Heavenly Father happy. You see, He's been given the responsibility to save all of the Lord's children, every one. He's done everything that's godly possible to save his brothers and sisters and we are privileged to assist in the great work. There are basic programs in the Church, as you well know; primarily, four basic programs. There's priesthood genealogy work, there's priesthood missionary work, there's priesthood welfare work, and there's priesthood home teaching. All four of these basic programs fit together in a very cohesive manner.

You, by your selection of a profession, have decided that you want to help people to overcome their problems, their sins; and I presume there's nothing that could be more godly than to help a man overcome his sins. That's what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. In fact, he has paid the price of our sins, everyone of them; and if we will accept what he has done and follow the path that he marked for us, then all things will work together for our good and we will be the recipients of what is known as eternal life, eternal life meaning the power to pro-create after your own kind eternally. That is a purely Mormon description of that term and no one else could really understand that. It has nothing to do with immortality. That comes as a free gift to everyone, but eternal life is the greatest gift of God. But it isn't a gift in the true sense of the word. It isn't a gift as resurrection is a gift. That comes to everyone. Whether you want it or not you're going to get it. There are going to be a lot of people resurrected that don't want to be resurrected. They're going to get it anyway. And those who are filthy will be filthy still. Those that are righteous will be righteous still. Resurrection comes to all.

But eternal life comes only to those who have prepared themselves to receive it. The Lord cannot give us gifts that we're not in condition to receive. Condition comes through obedience. It doesn't come through any other way. If we would receive eternal life, we'll have to obey. We must learn obedience. Obedience is the first law of heaven. It's also the first law of this earth, and we must teach obedience. As a matter of fact, everything we do in the kingdom of God gets down to the business of teaching obedience to the children of our Heavenly Father because without it there is no exaltation. There won't be any disobedient spirits in the celestial kingdom. They wouldn't be happy there.

We face very difficult times. I presume there have been no more difficult times. Maybe back in Noah's time we were about the same because we've been told that in the day that the Lord comes again, in his second coming, it will be like unto the time of Noah when they were eating and drinking and giving in marriage until the flood came and took them all away. That's the same condition that we're going to face with his second coming.

Paul speaks of our day and he speaks specifically of the things that are going on today. I think I ought to give you Paul's statement on the subject. You'll find it in the third chapter of I Timothy. "This know, that in the last days, perilous times shall come." (last days, perilous times we are there), "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy without natural affection," (could there ever be a more perfect fulfillment to that one), "trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent," (it's all around us), "fierce despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: From such turn away. For of this work are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women," (what an interesting comment), "laden with sins, lead away with diverse lusts," (I don't want you to think that we think all the sisters are silly; we don't). Some of the things that are going on, some of the problems that come to me relating to those who are trying to practice polygamy when the Lord has forbidden it - any woman that would get involved in this would be classified as "silly."), "Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. But they shall proceed no further, for their folly shall be manifest unto all men," as there was also those who opposed Moses back in his time, "But thou has full known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience," (Paul's talking about himself here), "persecutions, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, but out of them all, the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will love godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Now, that's a pro-
instructions were, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

We had a statement of conditions as they exist today. They are all around us and you in your profession know what I’m talking about. But we also have the way out, the answer. He says that the scripture is the answer and it is. But we have to follow it, we have to live it, we have to make it the central part of our counseling and of our teaching. When I was called as a member of the First Council, I’d never been a bishop, I’d never been a stake president, never been a mission president. I was a seventies president. All I knew was how to bring people into the Church. I’d never given any counsel to anybody. I came to Salt Lake and they showed me where my desk was and the instructions were, "Here’s the handbook of instructions." They handed me the Church Handbook of Instruction Number 20, which you probably are familiar with.

There’s not enough information in there to take care of you for five minutes.

The next thing I knew, a stream of people who had the worst problems I’ve ever heard in my life began to file into my office. I really was naive. I didn’t know that the kind of problems that we have in the Church existed. But, I’ve had a great experience. I’ve found that most people have two reasons for doing things, one that sounds good and the real one. If I could find out what the real problem was, and that’s not always easy, as you know, I had no problem at all with giving an answer. It came right out of the scriptures. If you know the scriptures, you’ve got the answer. They’re there, and they work. They work every time and I think it’s the only way that you can help people. You’ve got to help them out of the scriptures because they are given by inspiration of God and they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Follow the scriptures and I guarantee you will succeed. You cannot succeed anything else, and if you get involved in the philosophies of men, mingled with scripture, you’ll be in serious trouble. It will not work.

President Kimball is traveling the church over today, holding what we call solemn assemblies. That’s where we have the presiding priesthood in an area come together with President Kimball and the First Presidency. President Kimball is making it very plain that there is presently a tremendous surge of evil sweeping the world and the Church in particular. That’s just what Paul said was going to happen. And so President Kimball is substantiating precisely what Paul has said. And then he proceeds to give instructions on specific problems, and every one of those instructions comes specifically out of the scriptures.

I’d like to give you just a few items this morning to illustrate what I’m saying. We have 250 young men every week come into the missionary home here in Salt Lake. Of that 250, approximately 70 to 80 have to have an interview. They’ve been interviewed by their stake president, but they did not confess all of the things they needed to confess. Many times they have blatantly lied to their bishops and stake presidents. They receive a lecture when they come into the mission home that kind of lays it on the line to them and 70 or 80 or them out of every 250 decide that there are some things they better confess.

Now, perhaps all but maybe ten or fifteen of those didn’t really need to be confessed. I mean, they’ve had bad thoughts, they’ve mouthed off to their parents, they haven’t treated their brothers and sisters with kindness, this kind of thing. If they feel like they ought to confess it, then they ought to confess it, of course. But they are not serious problems. But ten to fifteen of those confessions definitely should have been confessed and usually two or three of them have to go home because they have committed fornication after they have been set apart as missionaries or after they’ve been to the temple, and if those two conditions exist, then they must be sent back to their priesthood leaders to be handled. Now, these are the cream of the crop. This is the best that the Lord has. But this is a problem that we face today. So obviously, we’re really not getting down to cases in our interviews, bishops and stake presidents, to the extent that we should be.

"...if you get involved in the philosophies of men, mingled with scripture, you’ll be in serious trouble..."

We’ve had some changes in emphasis in handling transgressors in the not too distant past. For years we lived by the 42nd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 24-26, where the Lord says: "Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that commiteth adultery and repenteth not, shall be cast out." Cast out, means you’ll be handled for your membership - either temporary or permanent casting out - that’s either disfellowshipment or excommunication. "But he that has committed adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsaketh it, and doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive; But if he doeth it again, he shall not be forgiven, but shall be cast out." That sounds like you get a second chance and you do.

We have lived by this for years. I am convinced that prophets of God don’t have any new ideas. That may sound a little sacrilegious. But I think that the Lord gives his prophet, gives the man the idea years before. He’s
had it so long that he’s lived with it, he’s prayed about it, he’s fasted over it, he’s worked on it, he’s expounded it, he’s been criticized because of it, but he’s got it to where it’s in the correct context, it is correct in its interpretation, and when the Lord wants that particular thing done in the Church, he puts that man in the position. What is he going to do? Just what he’s been living with for years.

In my opinion President Kimball has had no new ideas on missionary work. I have seen him struggle with trying to get things done in missionary work in this Church that he knew desperately needed to be done, but could not do because he was not in position to do it. So when he becomes President of the Church, what happens? Well, we embark on the greatest Church that he knew desperately needed to be done, on missionary work. I have seen him struggle with but could not do because he was not in position to do it. You’ll find it right here, recorded in the first talk he’s going to say again. You’ll find it right here, in the first talk that he gave, “God will not be mocked.” And here he gives us specific commandments. That’s a little better than the scriptures. The Lord has already said it. I find that living prophets never say anything the Lord hasn’t already said. They don’t get out on a limb by themselves. Sometimes the elders of Israel do, but prophets don’t. They don’t do it, and you shouldn’t either. You ought to be sure that what you say to the people is couched in scripture, that it’s found in the scriptures, that it is the word of the Lord, because you can’t improve on that.

So, President Lee became president of the church, he gave us a new interpretation of that scripture. He said, “Brethren, that scripture does not apply to people who make covenants across the altar of the temple. When you have made a covenant across the altar of the temple and you violate that covenant and the Lord tells you that violation of this covenant will bring upon you the judgment of God, for God will not be mocked, then we’ve got to keep the Lord from being mocked and that means we’re going to have to handle transgressors,” that’s exactly what it means.

I believe there have been more courts held in the last four years than were held in the forty years previous. That’s an estimate on my part, but I’m pretty sure it’s true. In the past we have been “winking” at transgressors. So we have to handle transgressors. We don’t structure what the verdict is, but we say the court should be held.

What happens if you don’t handle a transgressor? We have perfect evidence of what happens. Here’s a statement by John Taylor which makes it very plain: “Furthermore, I’ve heard of some bishops who have been seeking to cover up the iniquities of men. I tell them, in the name of God, they’ll have to bear them themselves and mete that judgment, and I tell you that any man who tampers with iniquity, he’ll have to bear that iniquity, and if any of you want to partake the sins of men or uphold them, you’ll have to bear them. Do you hear it, you bishops, you presidents, God will require it at your hands. You are not placed in the position to tamper with the principles of righteousness nor to cover up the infamies and corruptions of men.” That says that a judge in Israel who fails to act when there is clear indication to do so will have to answer that sin himself. Most of us have enough sins of our own. We don’t need anybody else’s to answer for. But that’s what will happen unless you do act. That’s how serious the Lord is with this.

“...we have to follow it, we have to live it, we have to make it a central part of our counseling...”

What happens in the kingdom if we don’t act? George Q. Cannon, then a member of the First Presidency of the Church, made this very pointed statement on the law of chastity: The spirit of God would undoubtedly be so grieved that it would forsake not only those who are guilty of these acts, but it would withdraw itself from those who would suffer them to be done in our midst unchecked and unrebuked. And from the President of the Church down through the entire ranks of the priesthood, there would be a loss of the Spirit of God, a withdrawal of his gifts and blessings and his power because of their not taking the proper measures to check and expose their iniquities.

Now, I think that’s about as plain as it can be said, that is if you fail to handle the transgressor in the Kingdom of God, you let the Church fill up with fornicators and adulterers, and if you let that happen, the Lord will disown it. He’s done it five times previous to this dispensation. We’ve had six dispensations of the gospel. That’s dispensing to the earth of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ with authority to administer the ordinances. Five times it was lost. Why? Because of iniquity! Inside the Church, or outside? Inside! There’s always been iniquity outside of the Church. That hasn’t changed. I don’t think it will ever change. That’s the reason we call people out of the world into the marvelous light of Christ, and it’s got to change their lives; and if it doesn’t happen, then they don’t become saints.

Paul and his brethren could not get together to handle transgressors. They tried. I don’t know how long it took Paul to get from his hometown of Tarsus to Jerusalem, headquarters of the Church at that time. I guess he went home sometimes. It probably took him weeks. It could have taken months. He had to walk all the way. Sister Rector and I made that trip not long ago in forty minutes. That’s how long it took in a DC-8 jet. We flew from Tel Aviv to Adana, Turkey. Adana, Turkey is 20 miles down the road from Tarsus, and Tel Aviv is...
about a 40-minute bus ride out of Jerusalem. That's all it took. You see, for the first time in history of the world, we have transportation and communication facilities sufficient to allow us to keep the kingdom clean. And we must keep it clean. It is what his letters are all about. He was trying to call people to repentance by writing letters. Did you ever try that? I tried that one time. It didn't work. I was a mission president. I wrote this man a letter, called him to repentance. It was just as though he hadn't gotten it. You've got to have a face to face confrontation. You've got to sit across the desk facing the man or the woman, or the young man or the young woman, it's all the same. Many times you know much more by what you feel than what they say, anyway. I have sat for hours, I mean literally hours, to get the kind of confession that I knew had to come before a man can be helped. You've got to get it broken right down to the bedrock. You've got to get it all out or you cannot help people.

The prophet Joseph said one time, "I told the brethren, (he was always saying that, "I told the brethren") that a man should confess all of his sins and not hold back a part." Partial confessions will never clear you with the Lord. You've got to lay it all out, every bit. "By this you may know if a man repents of his sins. Behold, he will confess them and forsake them." That's a vital part of repentance.

And so, we're not going to lose the kingdom today because we're going to handle transgressors. Daniel saw our day. It's very plain that he did. He was looking at our time: "And in these days," he said, "the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break into pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever, Forasmuch as thou sawest the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it break into pieces, the iron, the brass, the clay and the silver and the gold, the great God hath made known unto the king what shall come to pass hereafter and the dream is certain and the interpretation thereof is sure." Nebuchadnezzar had seen our day. Daniel explained it to him. He said in the last days the Lord God's going to set up a kingdom that will never again be thrown down and will not be left to other people. No, we're going to do it. We're going to handle it, because we're going to handle transgressors. We have to. We have no option. Is there no other way? No, I'm afraid there's no other way.

This is not all, of course. The Lord has given some specific interpretations today that we need to be aware of. Here's a statement by President McKay at the April 4, 1969 conference. He said, "A man who has entered the sacred covenants in the House of the Lord to remain true to the marriage vow is a traitor to that covenant if he separates himself from his wife and family just because he has permitted himself to become infatuated with a pretty face and a comely form of some young girl who has flattered him with a smile. Even though a loose interpretation of the law of the land would grant such a man a bill of divorcement, I think he is unworthy of a recommend to consummate his second marriage in the temple." Do you hear what that's saying? I've had young men come to me, in fact I've had six (I keep track of these because they're kind of special cases) and tell me they want to divorce their wives. Why? One young man came in. He'd been married for fifteen years and wanted to divorce his wife. Why did he want to divorce his wife? "Oh, she's sloppy," he said. "She doesn't keep herself nice. The house is a mess."

"Has she just changed, did this just start?"
"Oh, she's always been this way."
I said, "Was she this way before you married her?"
"Yeah, she was this way before we were married."
"What did you marry her for?"
"Because I thought she'd be a good mother for my children."

"Is she a good mother?"
"Oh yeah," he said, "she's a good mother."
I said, "You got just what you asked for, what're you complaining about?" Well, he wanted to divorce his wife, that's what he wanted to do. She had worked and put him through law school. She had literally dressed him. They had a little girl -- loved the little girl. She was expecting a new baby and he wanted to divorce his wife.

"Has she been unfaithful to you?"
"No."

"Well, then you've got to have a reason. Let's find out what the reason is." And it took a while. We finally found out that he'd fallen in love with his secretary. He didn't have any right to fall in love with his secretary. I said, "just what right do you have to fall in love with your secretary? You have no right to do that."

You see, when a man gets in the 40-50 year age category, he's in a very, very dangerous set of circumstances. Someone said, "if you're not handsome at twenty, strong at thirty, rich at 40, or wise at 50, you'll never be handsome, strong, rich or wise." There are certain ages that seem to fit these categories. You see, when a man gets to be 40 to 50 years of age, if he is not financially sound, he's probably not going to do too well in this life. Many of our young professional men are pretty well fixed by the time
they get to 40 or 45 and by the very nature of their work they spend more time with their secretaries than they do with their wife and maybe their four or five children. Now, she doesn’t look like she did when she was twenty years old. Age makes a change in people. She’s probably more beautiful, if he could see it. He looks good to her, in fact, he looks awfully good to her and she wants him and that’s very flattering when a man gets to this age category to have a young woman that wants him. But if you understand what the Lord has said, you’re not going to have that young lady. Not and be sealed in the temple, you’re not. That’s not going to happen. And if you get involved this way, you can forget eternal life. That’s really what we’re saying. If you want to give up eternal life, you go ahead and divorce your wife and take this young lady. Now, of course, if there are transgressions involved on the part of the wife, it’s a different matter. It’s not only just young men, but young women, too. 

“Any woman who will break up her home because of some selfish desire or who’s been untrue to her husband is also untrue to the covenants she’s made in the house of the Lord.”

President Lee said that pretty plainly and I think we ought to be aware of it. It says: “Through these generations the message from our Father has been safeguarded, carefully protected, and mark you likewise that in this day the scriptures are purest at their source. Just as the waters were purest at the mountain source, the purest word of God and the least apt to be polluted is that which comes from the lips of a living prophet who is set up to guide Israel in our own day and time. You will get direction and guidance from a prophet of God today.” That is scripture. It is the scripture that is the most appropriate and applicable to you and to me and to those people that you’re counseling. I don’t think it makes any difference whatsoever whether the person you’re counseling is a member of the Church, but whether or not these principles are true. As you follow, you’ll be blessed.

Now, we haven’t said everything we can say on the subject, that’s for sure. Abortion is abroad in the land and it is a horrendously grievous sin to the Lord. You can have an abortion for any reason up to the twentieth week of pregnancy in California, twenty-six weeks in Hawaii. That’s five months in California, six and a half months in Hawaii. Literally destroying the body of the child. The Lord has been very specific on this subject. If you’d like to know how the Lord feels about it, President Lee’s statement, I think, is just as pointed as it can be. He said, “May we say here that we in the Church are unalterably opposed to abortion. The only exception would be in cases where the doctors find it necessary to perform an abortion to save the life of the mother. We reaffirm that the first purpose of marriage is to bring children into the world and they ought to be welcome.” We as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints must take a stand against the horrendous tidal wave of evil that is sweeping over this earth and it is in the Church too. And we must handle transgressors. We’ve got to get people in condition so the Lord can bless them. You see, if a man violates his covenants, he’s no longer an heir to the celestial kingdom. We don’t do him any favor to leave him in the Church if he can’t get the ultimate reward for his membership in the Church. The best thing we can do for him would be to handle him. Get him outside the Church where he can repent. And you can repent of anything, except murder when you shed innocent blood, or the sin against the Holy Ghost -- the Lord will not let us repent of that. Anything else you can repent of. Of course, it takes time, you bet. Sin takes time, repentance takes time. But you can repent of it so completely you see, that you could come back in the Church and be baptized—for what?—for the remission of sins, and then receive a restoration of your blessings. You’ve become an heir to the celestial kingdom again.

The Church exists strictly to get people in condition so the Lord can bless them. The Lord wants to bless his children, but they must be in condition to receive those
blessings. You are specifically devoting your life to this great task. It's a noble cause to help people repent so they can get themselves in condition to reserve the Lord's blessings.

I pray that you might be tremendously successful in what you set forth to do and that you will take a stand on the side of the Lord in these issues, because there are many in your profession who know not God and those who know not God cannot please him. You've got to have faith in Him if you're going to please Him, so said Paul, and I believe that. May you exercise your faith and may you be successful, and may you be happy in what you do. It's not enough just to be good. You have to be good for something. You see, it's not enough just to pay your tithing. You've got to feel good about it. It's important that you help people, that you feel good about it, that they feel good about it, for I know the Lord will feel good about it. If the Lord feels good about it, you'll know it.

I bear witness that this is the Church and kingdom of God on earth, that we're led by a living prophet of God today and the decisions made in the kingdom of God today are those that the Lord wants made, for this prophet acts under the direction of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose Church it really is and who has given all of the scripture himself for the good of his brothers and sisters all. May we follow him, I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.