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Truth is the Best Treatment

Elder Rex D. Pinegar
Of the Presidency of the Seventy
30 September 1983

I appreciate the honor of being with you this morning to talk with you about some things that I hope will be useful as you look at your professional opportunities and the Church. I cannot talk about anything that we do in education, family or civic matters without referring to the Church because to me the Church is the vehicle through which the gospel of Jesus Christ reaches the lives of people and permits them the full advantage of the gospel. Family, education, and civic matters depend upon the gospel of Jesus Christ for their full significance.

As professional people you have at least two things that are very important in your lives. These two things are, first, the gospel and, second, your experiences—your training in the professions of the world that relate to dealing with people and their problems. I commend you for your acceptance of both of these great responsibilities.

You have accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ not only in principle but also as a way of life. You cannot separate what you do from that commitment. You have had some discussions about the challenges that that represents. I believe the real life we are hoping to become a part of is life in the gospel of Jesus Christ, for that is life eternal. Therefore, all that we do needs to have eternal life as our objective.

There is no group of people that I admire more than you. It is very difficult these days to get anyone to be interested in solving problems. People come to you hoping to find a way to resolve the conflicts that are in their lives. The training you have had should enhance your ability to do that. And it will, so long as that training is utilized within the framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now let me differentiate between the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ. Some years ago, we were with Elder Boyd K. Packer at a mission presidents' seminar. He asked the mission presidents and their wives this question: "Tell me what is wrong with this quote, 'Go ye therefore unto all the world and teach the Church to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.'" The error was obvious. We do not go out to teach the Church. We go out to teach the gospel. In your professions, you are not going to the people that come to you or going out among the people of your profession to teach them the Church. Yet, while you may not be required to lead your clients to the Church, by your own profession of a testimony of Jesus Christ and acceptance of this gospel, you are committed to lead them to the truth. You realize that until your clients recognize the truth in its many facets of living, they will not be helped in eternal ways. If we do not teach them, counsel them according to true principles, we will only add to their confusion.

Now what are some of those truths? First, the greatest truth that we will ever learn is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. It is true that man is created in the image of God, that is what gives man his eternal value. For if man were but a creation of men, he would have value only so long as men viewed him as someone of worth. But, when individuals come to understand that they are children of God, that their being is an eternal being and therefore has eternal value, that places within them a sense of belonging to something greater than the experiences of living here in the earth. Then, any single experience need not overwhelm them or destroy their sense of self-worth.

In the 1962 October general conference of the Church, President David O. McKay gave a talk about the most satanic and destructive instructions that mankind had ever faced. He described

these as instructions that had come into the educational systems since the turn of the century. He said these doctrines, if followed, could destroy man.

Now what were those doctrines? Those doctrines were doctrines which said that man is good and, therefore, it is his environment that makes him bad. If that were true, and we are to help men, then what must we focus on? His environment. By manipulating the environment, then, we would change man from being something bad or experiencing whatever is wrong with him to being something good. Such false teachings would place man as the ultimate in authority. If man is the ultimate good, and all else is bad, then man makes the decision as to that which is of the greatest and highest value. If we contrast that with the gospel of Jesus Christ, we discover the fallacy that man is the ultimate authority. Man can do and does good things and bad things.

The gospel of Jesus Christ says that man is fallen. And therefore, in order for man to realize his greatest potential, he must look up to that condition from which he fell—the condition of an acceptable relationship with God. When man returns to that condition, then his environment takes on those same characteristics. Our correct focus, then, should be on the improvement of man and let man improve his environment. Otherwise, man becomes so involved in the activities of his environment that the resulting entanglement causes him to lose the perception of himself as being free to act for himself rather than to be acted upon. So first, man is a child of God who has “fallen” from His presence.

Second, man has agency. The only way for an individual to accept his responsibilities is to understand that he is free to act for himself. If man were not free to act for himself, then he would be subject to others and their direction. He would have no control over his own future and therefore, no possibility of freedom—freedom to be what he really desires to be. (When I say man, I hope you understand I am talking about woman as well. Each of us is more than just a nondescript person, each is somebody—an individual.) When we recognize there is agency in our lives, we rejoice that we are free to act. We can face any problem, any

challenge with confidence for we are in a very real sense in control of what we will be, for the decisions are ours.

A number of years ago I was working in a reading clinic at the University of Southern California. There was a young man, about fourteen years of age, who came to this clinic. His difficulty was not reading, but that was the expression of his problems and the reason he came to the clinic. When I looked at Richard, I realized that we had a little bit of a challenge. He was a little bit larger than I. I said, "Richard, I'm really glad you're here." "Umm." I was hoping he would speak. He looked at me as if to say, "Okay, I'm here, now what" or almost as if to say, "so what?" "So Richard, let me find out a little bit about yourself. What do you like to do?" Nothing. After a few more hardly audible replies from Richard a question hit pay dirt: "If you could be anyone in this world that you wanted, who would it be?" He said, "I want to be like my dad." "Why is that, Richard?" There was a softening that came almost immediately. He said, "I want to be like him because my mother loved him."

You need to know a little bit about Richard and his dad. Richard was fourteen. His father had been in prison for eleven years. But he wanted to be like his dad. Why? Because his mother loved his father. What did Richard want? The love of his mother. Richard wanted an identity with someone that he knew loved him. Richard was a big kid who was supposed to know a lot of things, but he had a little bit of a problem. He never had quite been able to reconcile the loss of his father. His mother always talked about his father, and Richard felt trapped. He didn't realize he could act for himself in some positive ways that would change his circumstance and, especially, would change his perception of himself.

I discovered that Richard had already learned to read. What he hadn't learned was how to deal with success. When a person is successful, certain things are expected of him. It was that expectation level that he was unable to maintain. Again, he did not realize that he was free to act, that he could act for himself and that the very things that he did made a difference not only in his life but in the lives of everyone around him. A new concept for Richard

was that the reaction others had toward him was based upon his own actions.

Yes, to understand that we are free to act is a very important thing. It is an important part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Heavenly Father has said that men are free to act for themselves. They are agents unto themselves. When we meet with our clients, this truth may be a hard thing for them to understand. The truth is that we must want the consequences of what we want. All actions bring with them consequences. Consequences are sometimes things that we discover we don't want. It is like a man who just purchased a new car. He really wanted that new car. He loved that new car. He got in it. He drove it. He liked it, and he wanted it. What didn't he want? The payments. He didn't want to make the payments. After two or three months he didn't like the payments, but he wanted the car. He quit making the payments, and he soon discovered he couldn't keep the car without them. He lost the car and then what happened? He began to feel like everyone was against him.

Life is filled with consequences. The scriptures teach us that we were placed here in the earth to accomplish a grand purpose: "And we will prove them herewith to see if they will do whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them." We are in the earth with the great consequence. The consequence is to see if we will do whatsoever God, not man, will command us. Our consequences then are the result of our actions. If we want the right consequences, we must want to do what our Heavenly Father wants us to do, and we must not let ourselves become bound by what men want us to do. Joseph Smith's experience with Martin Harris is a prime example of this.

You will recall that Martin Harris, being married, wanted to please his wife. But Martin wanted to please his wife so much so that when he went to Joseph and asked Joseph if he could show the materials they had translated to his wife, he was very disappointed when Joseph said no to him. Joseph told Martin the Lord had told him He would tell him who he could reveal the translated materials to, and it just happened to be that Martin Harris' wife was not one of them. So Martin, I suppose, went back to his wife

and told her she could not view the materials. She must have said “yes” with some authority because Martin went back to Joseph to ask him a second time. Joseph agreed to ask the Lord again. The Lord said no the first time, and He said no the second time. Joseph told Martin no a second time. Martin went back and told his wife. His wife must have said, “Yes, I want to see the translated materials. If I don’t get to see them you don’t get the money. I won’t let you mortgage the farm.” Martin consented to ask Joseph a third time. Joseph asked the Lord a third time. The answer from the Lord is very interesting on the third request. First He said no, and then He gave conditions under which a “yes” could be given. Joseph then took His answer as meaning it’s alright Joseph; sure you go right ahead. So Joseph went back and gave the conditions to Martin Harris and made very explicit the instructions which he gave. Martin said, “Yes sir, I’ll do it.”

Well you know the story—the translated materials were lost or stolen. At least they were put away. Joseph was in such a state of frustration that he could not be calmed. How did the Lord counsel Joseph? In the third section of the Doctrine and Covenants, we have a tremendous description of what most people face in the world today when they discover that their lives are out of harmony with truth. There, the Lord speaking to Joseph said, “Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men.” Now why wasn’t the work of God frustrated? Because He does not vary. The Lord does not vary from that which He has said. Neither does He turn to the left hand nor to the right hand, but his course is one eternal round. Therefore, He is not frustrated, but who was frustrated? Joseph.

Now what that teaches me is that if we desire to keep from being frustrated, we must make certain that there is more of the Lord in our work than there is of ourselves. We must want to be in harmony with the truth which the Lord speaks. The Lord said to Joseph on that occasion, that he should not have gone on in the persuasions of men, “You should have been faithful; and he [God] would have been with you in every time of trouble.” Now the Lord didn’t promise Joseph that he wouldn’t have any troubles. He did promise him, however, that if he would listen to the promptings of

the Lord, and seek after those consequences that were in harmony with what the Lord wanted, then he would loose his frustrations, and he would become strong.

How do these three things apply to you? From my perspective of you as counselors, I think they apply in almost everything you do. Today, we face a world that is trying to get rid of guilt for doing that which is out of harmony with the Lord, and there are no shortcuts to repentance. Therefore, we cannot remove guilt from people. Individuals are the only ones who can do that. They do it by repenting. The Lord has said that if we will repent, He will forgive us. Repenting removes our guilt.

One of the best examples of this in the scriptures, that I know of, is the experience of Enos. Enos said he went into the woods to hunt. (Enos became one of my favorites when I learned he loved to wrestle.) Enos wrote, "I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins." He then tells how he went out, and he prayed. He said the reason he prayed was because the teachings of his father sank deep in his heart, and he considered what God expected of him. He knelt down and prayed all day long. ". . . Yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens. And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed." Enos continues, "And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away." And he says at that point he turned to the Lord and said, "How did you do that? How did that happen?" Notice the Lord's reply was: "Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen." There are no shortcuts to repentance.

Guilt is a positive influence, or ought to be viewed as such, in the lives of every individual whether they be members of the Church or not. What does guilt represent? Guilt represents the divine within man. When we are sensitive enough to feel guilt, we have just become aware that we are greater than the problem that we face. We are greater than the weakness that we have. The presence of a feeling of guilt may say there is still a sense within us of that which is right. So let us not be too quick to get people to shy away from a sense of guilt, but let us encourage them to use

their awareness to change their lives. That is the only way they can get rid of righteous guilt. The scriptures indicate that when men come to the Lord he will show them their weaknesses. It is an awareness of these weaknesses that reveals the power behind the feelings of righteous guilt. Righteous guilt is caused by our own willing rebellion against the commandments of the Lord. One cannot do wrong knowingly and be free from this guilt. I recognize that the use of the term "righteous" may seem antithetical to guilt, but I use that distinction to indicate that such guilt, if utilized properly, will bring about a righteous result. Through this approach, our Heavenly Father enables us to do as the scriptures say, "judges ourselves," that is, we are literally agents unto ourselves. Therefore, progress through our lives here in mortality and eternity is of our own making. This makes it very important that we have the proper understanding of the power of guilt.

If we simply say to a client, "Oh, you shouldn't feel guilty about that," we may have a result that we are not looking for. We may have a consequence that we do not desire. Oh yes, we want them to be rid of the guilt, but what is the consequence that we desire?—that they change their behavior for the better so that the guilt will not return. The change to behavior consistent with the principles of righteousness brings an assurance of self-worth.

Some years ago, I sat in a counseling session with a young man who wanted to go on a mission. As we sat together in the office, he said some things to me about his life that were almost unbelievable. I said, "Well, what should we do about it?" He said, "Well, I have got to go on a mission because the prophet said every young man should go on a mission." He was feeling guilty that he wouldn't be able to go on the mission. "But do you feel guilty about what you have done to keep you from going on a mission?" "No," he replied. He then told me who would not let him go. Was it his actions? No. It was the bishop or the stake president or else I, who was doing the final interview: we were the ones who were keeping him from going. "You won't let me go will you?" I said, "Of course I will. Do you want to go? Do you want the consequences of going on a mission?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "You tell me. What are you going to be doing on a mission?"

He began to talk about what he thought he would be doing—teaching people about Jesus Christ and the principles that He taught, the blessings of the atonement, faith and repentance. I said, “What was that last word?” “Repentance.” “And then what? And then baptism for what? The remission of sins.” “Well,” he said, “I want to go anyway.” I asked, “Do you *really* want to go?” He said, “I do. I can’t go back and face my parents. I can’t go back and face my bishop or my stake president, because they will know that I lied to them.” I said, “Do you know that you did?” He said, “Yes, but I still want to go.” I said, “You can’t go.” He replied, “You can’t keep me from going.” “That’s right,” I said, “I’m not keeping you from going. Your own unworthiness is keeping you from going, but I *am* telling you that you can’t go.” “We’ll see about that,” he said, and he went to his father. His father called someone that I worked for, and the boy went.

Before he was to leave, I had one more interview with him. I informed him that if he was going he had to stay there. It was made clear to him that once his mission began he would be required to see it through. He said, “Well, I don’t intend to come home.” I repeated, “Well, you just remember that I am not going to let you come home.”

He went into the mission field and was there almost a week when he went to his mission president and said, “I can’t stay here. I am not worthy to be here. I have got to go home.” The mission president said, “Well, I have word that you can’t go home.” The young man said, “Have you been talking to Elder Pinegar?” “No, but there is a little note here that says, ‘this young man is not to come home.’” Well, he was fabricating that. I found out he used that with all of his missionaries. The young man said, “Well, I’ll call Elder Pinegar.” The mission president said, “Well, if you insist on leaving I guess you can, but I’ll have to call first.” The president called me and told me who the young man was and told me the circumstances. I then spoke to them while both were on the line. The young man got on the line, and we talked for a moment. He said, “I want to come home.” I said, “What did I tell you when you were in my office?” “I know what you told me, but I want to come home.” “I’m not going to let you come home. You put

yourself in that position and you are going to endure the consequences of that decision.”

We said a few other things and then he said, “Alright, I’ll stay.” So he stayed almost a month. He called again. He said, “Things are getting worse, not better.” I said, “Do you really want the consequences of coming home?” No, he didn’t want that. I said, “Alright then you are going to stay.” So he stayed. He completed his mission. When he came home, he said, “I have never had such a hell in my life.” I asked, “What do you mean?” He said, “I discovered that I couldn’t teach what I did not do.”

I want you to consider that. We can only really teach what we are and what we do, not what we believe. To teach our beliefs if we are not living in harmony with them is to fool ourselves; we are not fooling those we teach/counsel.

In your positions you have great opportunities. People come to you seeking relief from the consequences of their actions. You, of all of the counselors, of all of the therapists in all of the world, have the greatest opportunity because you can put into the counseling the gospel of Jesus Christ. You of all counselors are the ones people can come to and know that you are not afraid to be what you are—a son or a daughter of God, one who is willing to exercise his own agency, agency to choose to do right, to be honest, virtuous and to obey God’s commandments. As you do that, then your own sensitivity to the needs of your clients will be increased immeasurably. You were given a gift when you became a member of this Church. It was called the gift of the Holy Ghost—intended as a gift to lead you and me and all others who are willing to receive it to all truth, not just to some. This means to all truth, including the truth of knowing the true spirit of the person you are counseling with—to be able to perceive their real needs, not just those you see on the surface.

I was mentioning to Dr. Carlfred Broderick the dilemma of going into a classroom in the middle of the year and taking over a sixth grade class of 36 youngsters. I had echo in my mind the statement of Sister Young, one of my professors at Brigham Young University. She said, “Now, Rex, when you get in the classroom,

if you really want to do something for those children, you find out where they are and you take them from there.” I looked at those 36 youngsters, and I thought, well this is great. I’ll find out where they are. You know the three regular groups, the high, medium and low; well, I found out there were 36 groups—each of them at a different place in each subject; and each of them not only in a different place as far as the academic world was concerned, but in a different place in their own social development, their own physical development, their own emotional power. I was in a dilemma.

What do you do? I can honestly say to you there wasn’t anything that my training could do except encourage me to find out. So, as I sat with them, one by one, the prayer in my heart was that I would know the child and somehow be able to see what the relationship between that child and me ought to be. I felt that until that relationship was established, I couldn’t help the child.

One day my principal came over to see my lesson plans. After about a week and a half we sat down in his office and he said, “There is something wrong with your plans.” “What do you mean?” I asked. He said, “Well, looking at your plans I cannot see where you are having reading and where you are having math and where you are having English.” I said, “Oh it’s there.” I took out my plan and I said, “You see we have reading all day long; we have English all day long; we have math all day long.” He said, “You don’t do that.” I said, “I don’t know what you mean; that is what we are doing.” It took him a full six months to get me trained that you don’t do that. You have to have a low, medium and high group—three groups, three reading groups, etc. I put them in three reading groups in 36 different places.

Not too long after that I had the opportunity to come to Brigham Young University and meet some of the greatest people I have ever known. They are called students. Students have problems and challenges—opportunities to change their lives. I discovered the very same thing. The only thing that was different was their ages. It isn’t only the student who has a problem, there are people of every age and background. They all have challenges. But you, bless your hearts, have a gift that will enable you to reach into their

individual lives to discern their needs. That gift is the Gift of the Holy Ghost which can lead you to all truth. I am grateful for you. I empathize and sometimes sympathize with the challenges that you face.

Walking down the hall at the University of Southern California some years ago, one of my professors, a professor of statistics, came to me. He said, "Pinegar, I understand that you are a Mormon." I thought these were the golden questions in reverse and was all set to give him the answers. I said, "Yes, sir, I am." He said, "But you are in psychology." I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Do you feel that you can do that and still be a member of your Church?" I said, "Why of course." "We'll see," he said.

I shall be ever grateful to the Lord for that experience. From that moment on, everything that came to me I measured against the gospel of Jesus Christ, and if it didn't fit, then I had two choices—I could put it into one of two categories, the "discarded" category or the "set it over here" category—the latter category because I may not quite have been able to understand yet. But I did not adopt it until after I found out where it fit, and if it didn't fit, I found myself absolutely free to discard it. You are free too. Just as we have been talking about your clients being free to act for themselves, so are you. And that's how it fits with you.

Now what shall be the consequences? I think the consequences will be everything that you would like. You will feel good about yourself. You will not have to look back with dread about the counsel you have given your clients. You will be able to look at them, squarely and honestly, because you will not feel you have betrayed yourself. Those are the consequences that we all desire. You need not be ashamed to have something that the world does not enjoy in that "gift." In the third section of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord told Joseph that except he repent, he would be delivered up and become as other men, having no more gift. That is not a consequence that you and I can afford. We cannot afford to give up that gift. We have to remain true to it. And that is the joy of it.

In closing may I just say to you, that we pray for you. There are many people who will come to you who will not come to the ecclesiastical leaders of the Church, whether it be a bishop, a stake president, an elder's quorum president, a home teacher, or even a general authority. They come to you because their guilt sometimes will not permit them to come to us. And you sometimes have the opportunity to assist well before we do. Sometimes they never come to us after having come to you because they have set things straight in their own hearts and minds.

Now the Lord bless you for what you do. You are needed desperately. There are those in the world who will only have you as their contact with the gospel. Now I shall say as I did in the beginning—while you have no obligation or responsibility to lead your clients to the Church, you must lead them to the truth. When they begin to deal with the truth, they begin to make changes that will last, that will endure hardships, challenges, setbacks and will bring them forward victoriously. Let me close with this brief experience.

Speaking with a group of missionaries, I asked them this question, and I would like you to respond in the same way. "Have any of you ever participated on a championship athletic team of any kind? What kind would that be—football, track, swimming, wrestling, basketball?" You know when I said this, this young fellow sitting right in the front jumped up with his hands straight in the air. His excitement lifted his feet right off the floor. I knew he was the one I wanted. I had him come up and stand by me. He was barely five feet tall. I put my arm around him and said, "Champion athletic team?" "Yes sir, basketball," he replied. The shock was all over my face. I said, "Basketball?" He said, "Yes sir, state champions." I said, "State champions. Tell us about your most exciting game." "It was the championship game." He continued, "One of those games where we made a basket, they made a basket, we made a basket, they made a basket, we made a basket—it went like that the whole game. With four seconds to go we were three points behind. We made a basket. Time out was called with three seconds left on the clock." He said, "The team came off the floor, and we got up off the bench, and we really gave

it to them.” Now you know where he was playing. He said, “We patted them on the back and said, ‘Come on gang, we know you can win this game. You are going to win this game. We know you can do it.’” He said, “It was at that point that the coach turned to me and said, ‘Fred get in there.’ ‘Yes sir.’ I walked out towards the court, and the coach put his arm around me and instructed me, ‘Now look, Fred, I want you to do just one thing, get the ball.’ ‘Yes sir.’ I walked out on that court when that referee’s whistle blew. In my heart all I could think was get the ball, get the ball, get the ball.” So he said, “I did. I got the ball. I threw it to John, and we won. I guess you know who they carried off the floor—John. No one had to carry me off the floor—I was already walking three feet off the floor. I was taller than I had ever been.” I said, “Why is that?” He said, “I am a champion.” What was it that made him a champion? “When did you learn you were a champion?” “When we won.” Now, how did he win. By getting the ball. You cannot score in the game of life without the ball. And the ball we are talking about is the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we want to win, both we and our clients must somehow get that into our lives. Of this I bear witness, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.