

The Love and Laws of God

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My dear brothers and sisters, Wendy and I have looked forward to being with you today. Just a few days ago we returned from an international assignment, and now we are in the final stages of preparing for general conference. But there is no group we would rather be with today than you.

I wish to discuss five truths that I feel impressed to share with you.

I.

Truth number one: *You are sons and daughters of God.*

You already know this. You have sung about it since you were toddlers. But let me clarify a distinguishing characteristic about your identity. You are the children whom God chose to be part of His battalion during this great climax in the longstanding battle between good and evil—between truth and error. I would not be surprised if, when the veil is lifted in the next life, we learn

that you actually pled with our Heavenly Father to be reserved for now. I would not be surprised to learn that premortally you loved the Lord so much that you promised to defend His name and gospel during this world’s tumultuous winding-up scenes. One thing is certain: You are of the house of Israel and you have been sent here to help gather God’s elect.

II.

Truth number two: *Truth is truth.*

Some things are simply true. The arbiter of truth is God—not your favorite social media news feed, not Google, and certainly not those who are disaffected from the Church.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught that absolute truth cannot be “altered by the opinions of men. . . . If men are really humble, they will realize that they *discover*, but do not *create*, truth.”¹

Many now claim that truth is relative and that there is no such thing as divine law or a divine

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plan. Such a claim is simply not true. There is a difference between right and wrong. Truth is based upon the laws God has established for the dependability, protection, and nurturing of His children. Eternal laws operate in and affect each of our lives, whether we believe them or not.

III.

Truth number three: *God loves every one of us with perfect love.*

More than anything, our Father wants His children to *choose* to return home to Him. Everything He does is motivated by His yearning desire. The entire reason we are on this earth is to qualify to live with Him forever. We do that by using our agency to find and stay on the covenant path that leads back to our heavenly home.

God knew that because of the adversary's deceptive tactics and traps, the covenant path would not be easy to find or to stay on. So He sent His Only Begotten Son to atone for us and to show us the way. The godly power available to all who love and follow Jesus Christ is the power to heal us, strengthen us, cleanse us from sin, and magnify us to do things we could never do on our own. Our Savior is the Divine Exemplar who marked the path that we are to follow.

Because the Father and the Son love us with infinite, perfect love and because They know we cannot see everything They see, They have given us laws that will guide and protect us.

There is a strong connection between God's love and His laws. I have come to see the significance of that connection and the power of divine law. Two experiences may illustrate.

The first I see as a parent. I am the grateful father of nine daughters and one son. I love them with all my heart. As our children were growing up, their mother and I established family rules to keep them safe and facilitate their growth. Our children did not always like or understand the rules, but because we loved them, we were willing to do all we could to guide and protect them.

As much as I love my children, I can only imagine how much God loves each of us, because His love for us is infinite! The apostle Paul taught that

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.²

Just as the rules that my wife and I developed for our children were motivated by love, God's laws reflect His perfect love for each of us. His laws keep us spiritually safe and help us to progress eternally.

The second experience by which I came to see the power of divine law came during my career as a medical doctor and scientific researcher.

After graduating from medical school, I pursued advanced education in surgery. At that time there was no such thing as heart surgery. Then I teamed up with other researchers in the daunting task of making an artificial heart and lung machine. We knew that such an apparatus could possibly maintain the body's circulation while repairs might be made on the heart. But during that early era, there was much we did *not* know.

Then one day, two truths articulated in the Doctrine and Covenants spoke to my inquiring mind. These truths were, first, that all blessings are predicated upon obedience to law³ and, second, that to *every* kingdom there is a law given.⁴

Well, I reasoned that if every kingdom had a law, there must be laws that govern the beating heart. I was determined to discover those laws and obey them. By doing so, blessings would come and lives could be saved.

In medical school I had been taught that if one touched the beating heart, it would stop beating. However, one of the first laws we discovered in the lab was that we *could* touch the heart of an animal without losing its heartbeat. This finding opened the door later to uncovering another law that made more complex open-heart operations possible.

We learned that if we added potassium chloride to blood flowing into the coronary arteries, thereby altering the normal sodium/potassium ratio, the heart would stop beating instantly. Then, when we nourished the heart with blood that

had a normal sodium/potassium ratio, the heart would spring back to its normal beating pattern. Literally we could turn the heart off long enough to repair it and then turn it back on again.

Decades later, when I explained this to a group of medical students, one prominent professor asked, “But what if it doesn’t work?” My answer? It *always* works, because it is based on divine law.

Divine law is incontrovertible! The same can be said of the law of gravity and the laws of foil and lift that allow airplanes to fly. Each is an absolute truth. Doctors or pilots do not have the power to change those laws, but their understanding of them safeguards lives.

My dear brothers and sisters, divine laws are God’s gifts to His children. Just as our family’s rules kept our children safe as they grew to adulthood, just as divine laws governing the heart and the flight of airplanes keep you safe on an operating table or while traveling, abiding by God’s laws will keep you safe as you progress toward eventual exaltation. Let me say it as succinctly as I can: As you abide by God’s laws, you *are* progressing toward exaltation.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that God “institute[d] laws whereby [we] could have a privilege to advance like himself.”⁵ God’s greatest blessings are reserved for those who obey His laws, as He explained: “For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing.”⁶ God’s laws are motivated entirely by His infinite love for us and His desire for us to become all we can become.

IV.

Truth number four: *The Lord Jesus Christ, whose Church this is, appoints prophets and apostles to communicate His love and teach His laws.*

The gospel of Jesus Christ is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.”⁷

Each of the Lord’s apostles is in a position to observe and feel the love that Heavenly Father has for His children, particularly for those who are struggling. He cares deeply about those who have strayed from the covenant path, especially when they fear there is no way back.

My dear young friends, there is *always* a way back. Jesus Christ (and His gospel) is the way. You have not committed any sin so serious that you are beyond the reach of the Savior’s love and atoning grace. As you take steps to repent and follow God’s laws, you will begin to feel just how much Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son want you back home with Them! They want you to be happy. They will do anything within Their power that does not violate *your* agency or *Their* laws to help you come back. How I cherish the privilege of feeling Their love for you!

Sometimes we as leaders of the Church are criticized for holding firm to the laws of God, defending the Savior’s doctrine, and resisting the social pressures of our day. But our commission as ordained apostles is “to go into all the world to preach [His] gospel unto every creature.”⁸ That means we are commanded to teach truth.

In doing so, sometimes we are accused of being uncaring as we teach the Father’s requirements for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. But wouldn’t it be far more uncaring for us *not* to tell the truth—*not* to teach what God has revealed?

It is precisely because we do care deeply about all of God’s children that we proclaim His truth. We may not always tell people what they want to hear. Prophets are rarely popular. But we will *always* teach the truth!

My dear young friends, exaltation is not easy. Requirements include a focused and persistent effort to keep God’s laws, rigorously repenting when we don’t. But the reward for doing so is far greater than anything we can imagine, because it brings us joy here and “never-ending happiness”⁹ hereafter.

Thus our commission as apostles is to teach nothing but truth. That commission does *not* give us the authority to modify divine law.

For example, let’s consider the definition of marriage. In recent years, many countries, including the United States, have legalized same-sex marriage. As members of the Church, we respect the laws of the land and abide by them, including civil marriage. The truth is, however, that in the beginning—in *the beginning*—marriage was ordained by God! And to this day it is defined by

Him as being between a man and a woman. God has not changed *His* definition of marriage.

God has also not changed His law of chastity. Requirements to enter the temple have not changed. And our desire for there to be love at home and harmony between parent and child has not changed.

Though we of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles cannot change the laws of God, we *do* have the charge “to build up the church, and regulate all the affairs of the same in all nations.”¹⁰ Thus we *can* adjust policy when the Lord directs us to do so. You have recently seen such examples. Because the Restoration is ongoing, policy changes will surely continue.¹¹

Perhaps I can illustrate this through policy adjustments regarding those who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) and their children. (I realize that other initials could be added to this acronym, but LGBT should suffice for the purposes of this message.)

Consider the policy announced in November 2015 related to the advisability of baptism for the children of LGBT parents. Our concern then, and one we discussed at length and prayed about fervently over a long period of time, was to find a way to reduce friction between gay or lesbian parents and their children.

Because parents are the primary exemplars for their children, we did not want to put young children in the position of having to choose between beliefs and behavior they learned at home and what they were taught at church. We wanted to facilitate harmony in the home and avoid pitting children and parents against each other. Thus in 2015 the policy was made to assist children and their parents in this circumstance; namely, that children being raised by LGBT parents would not automatically be eligible for baptism at age eight. Exceptions to this policy would require First Presidency approval.

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve have continued to seek the Lord’s guidance and to plead with Him in behalf of His children who were affected by the 2015 policy. We knew that this policy created concern and confusion for some and heartache for others. That grieved us.

Whenever the sons and daughters of God weep—for whatever reasons—we weep. So our supplications to the Lord continued.

We also took note of LGBT parents who sought permission from the First Presidency for their children to be baptized. In nearly every case in which the LGBT parents agreed to teach their children about—and be supportive of—the covenant of baptism, the requested exception was granted.

As a result of our continued supplication, we recently felt directed to adjust the policy such that the baptism of children of LGBT parents may be authorized by bishops *without* First Presidency approval, if the custodial parents request the baptism and understand that a child will be taught about sacred covenants to be made at baptism.

We also determined that LGBT parents may request that a baby be named and blessed by one who worthily holds the Melchizedek Priesthood. It is important that these parents understand that ward members will contact them periodically and that when a child who has been blessed reaches eight years of age, local leaders will recommend that the child be baptized.

Finally, we also clarified that homosexual immorality would be treated in the eyes of the Church in the same manner as heterosexual immorality.

Though it may not have looked this way to some, the 2015 and 2019 policy adjustments on this matter were both motivated by love—the love of our Heavenly Father for His children and the love of the Brethren for those whom we serve.

Because we feel the depth of God’s love for His children, we care deeply about *every* child of God, regardless of age, personal circumstances, gender, sexual orientation, or other unique challenges.

V.

Now, for the fifth truth: *You may know for yourself what is true and what is not by learning to discern the whisperings of the Spirit.* “For the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. . . . It speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be.”¹²

My dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to seek earnestly a confirmation from the Spirit

that what I have told you is true and is from the Lord. He has declared that we may seek knowledge from heaven and expect to receive it: “If thou shalt ask,” the Lord promised, “thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge.”¹³

Ask your Heavenly Father if we truly are the Lord’s apostles and prophets. Ask if we have received revelation on this and other matters. Ask if these five truths are, in fact, true.

Now, in my capacity as president of the Church, I invoke a blessing upon you to be able to discern between right and wrong, between the laws of God and the conflicting voices of the world. I bless you with power to detect the adversary’s deceptions. I bless you with greater capacity to receive revelation. And I bless you to be able to feel the infinite reach of God’s perfect love for *you*.

I so bless you and express my love for you, along with my witness that this is the Lord’s Church and that He presides over and guides all we do, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “Absolute Truth,” BYU devotional address, 6 September 1977; emphasis in original.

2. Romans 8:38–39.

3. See D&C 130:21.

4. See D&C 88:38.

5. Joseph Smith, *HC* 6:312 (7 April 1844); quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 210.

6. D&C 132:5.

7. Ephesians 2:20.

8. D&C 18:28.

9. Mosiah 2:41.

10. D&C 107:33.

11. “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9).

12. Jacob 4:13.

13. D&C 42:61.