


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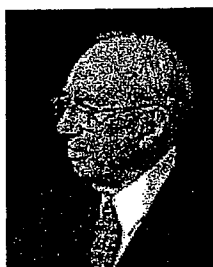
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Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Our behavior in public must be above reproach. Our behavior in private is even more important. It must clear the standard set by the Lord.



My dear brethren, I wish to speak very plainly this evening about a matter that I feel deeply concerned over. What a great pleasure and a worrisome challenge it is to speak to you. What a tremendous brotherhood we are as those who hold this precious and wonderful priesthood. It comes from God, our Eternal Father, who in this glorious dispensation has, with His Beloved Son, spoken again from the heavens. They have sent Their authorized servants to bestow this divine authority upon men.

Personal worthiness becomes the standard of eligibility to receive and exercise this sacred power. It is of this that I wish to speak tonight.

I begin by reading to you from the Doctrine and Covenants, section 121:

"The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and . . . the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

"That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man" ([D&C 121:36-37](#)).

That is the unequivocal word of the Lord concerning His divine authority. What a tremendous obligation this places upon each of us. We who hold the priesthood of God must stand above the ways of the world. We must discipline ourselves. We cannot be self-righteous, but we can and must be decent, honorable men.

Our behavior in public must be above reproach. Our behavior in private is even more important. It must clear the standard set by the Lord. We cannot indulge in sin, let alone try to cover our sins. We cannot gratify our pride. We cannot partake of the vanity of unrighteous ambition. We cannot exercise control, or dominion, or compulsion upon our wives or children, or any others in any degree of unrighteousness.

If we do any of these things, the powers of heaven are withdrawn. The Spirit of the Lord is grieved. The very virtue of our priesthood is nullified. Its authority is lost.

The manner of our living, the words we speak, and our everyday behavior have a bearing upon our effectiveness as men and boys holding the priesthood.

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Our fifth article of faith states: "We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof."

Even though those in authority lay hands upon our heads and we are ordained, we may through our behavior nullify and forfeit any right to exercise this divine authority.

Section 121 goes on to say: "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

"By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile" (D&C 121:41-42).

Now, my brethren, those are the parameters within which this priesthood must find expression. It is not as a cloak that we put on and take off at will. It is, when exercised in righteousness, as the very tissue of our bodies, a part of us at all times and in all circumstances.

And so, to you young men who hold the Aaronic Priesthood, you have had conferred upon you that power which holds the keys to the ministering of angels. Think of that for a minute.

You cannot afford to do anything that would place a curtain between you and the ministering of angels in your behalf.

You cannot be immoral in any sense. You cannot be dishonest. You cannot cheat or lie. You cannot take the name of God in vain or use filthy language and still have the right to the ministering of angels.

I do not want you to be self-righteous. I want you to be manly, to be vibrant and strong and happy. To those who are athletically inclined, I want you to be good athletes and strive to become champions. But in doing so, you do not have to indulge in unseemly behavior or profane or filthy language.

To you young men who look forward to going on missions, please do not cloud your lives with anything that would cast a doubt upon your worthiness to go forth as servants of the living God.

You must not, you cannot under any circumstances compromise the divine power which you carry within you as ordained ministers of the gospel.

By way of warning, and forewarning, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have set forth the following statement directed to you:

"As missionaries, you are expected to maintain the highest standards of conduct, including strict observance of the law of chastity, . . .

". . . You should never be alone with anyone else, male or female, adult or child [other than your assigned companion].

"Even false accusations against an innocent missionary can take many months to investigate and may result in disruption or termination of missionary service. Protect yourselves from such accusations by never being separated from your companion, even in the homes you visit" (First

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Presidency statement on missionary conduct, 22 Mar. 2002).

You need not worry about these things if you will at all times observe the rules of missionary service. If you do so, you will have a wonderful experience, and you will return in honor to those you love without taint or suspicion or regret.

When you return home, never forget that you are still an elder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

You will become involved in the search for an eternal companion. You will wish to marry in the house of the Lord. For you, there should be no alternative. Be careful, lest you destroy your eligibility to be so married. Have a wonderful time. But keep your courtship within the bounds of rigid self-discipline. The Lord has given a mandate and a promise. He has said, "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly." Then there follows the promise that "thy confidence [shall] wax strong in the presence of God; and . . . the Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion" (D&C 121:45-46).

The wife you choose will be your equal. Paul declared, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:11).

In the marriage companionship there is neither inferiority nor superiority. The woman does not walk ahead of the man; neither does the man walk ahead of the woman. They walk side by side as a son and daughter of God on an eternal journey.

She is not your servant, your chattel, nor anything of the kind.

How tragic and utterly disgusting a phenomenon is wife abuse. Any man in this Church who abuses his wife, who demeans her, who insults her, who exercises unrighteous dominion over her is unworthy to hold the priesthood. Though he may have been ordained, the heavens will withdraw, the Spirit of the Lord will be grieved, and it will be amen to the authority of the priesthood of that man.

Any man who engages in this practice is unworthy to hold a temple recommend.

I regret to say that I see too much of this ugly phenomenon. There are men who cuff their wives about, both verbally and physically. What a tragedy when a man demeans the mother of his children.

It is true that there are a few women who abuse their husbands. But I am not speaking to them tonight. I am speaking to the men of this Church, men upon whom the Almighty has bestowed His holy priesthood.

My brethren, if there be any within the sound of my voice who are guilty of such behavior, I call upon you to repent. Get on your knees and ask the Lord to forgive you. Pray to Him for the power to control your tongue and your heavy hand. Ask for the forgiveness of your wife and your children. President McKay was wont to say, "No other success can compensate for failure in the home" (quoting J. E. McCulloch, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [1924], 42; in Conference Report, Apr. 1935, 116). And President Lee said, "The most important part of the Lord's work that you will do, is the work that you do within the walls of your own home" (Harold B. Lee, *Doing the Right Things for the Right Reasons*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [19 Apr. 1961], 5).

I am confident that when we stand before the bar of God, there will be little mention of how much wealth we accumulated in life or of any honors which we may have achieved. But there will be

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searching questions concerning our domestic relations. And I am convinced that only those who have walked through life with love and respect and appreciation for their companions and children will receive from our eternal judge the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21).

I mention another type of abuse. It is of the elderly. I think it is not common among us. I hope it is not. I pray that it is not.

I believe our people, almost all of them, observe the ancient commandment, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12).

But how tragic it is, how absolutely revolting is abuse of the elderly.

More and more we are living longer, thanks to the miracle of modern science and medical practice. But with old age comes a deterioration of physical capacity and sometimes mental capacity. I have said before that I have discovered that there is much of lead in the years that are called golden. I am so profoundly grateful for the love and solicitude of our children toward their mother and their father. How beautiful is the picture of a son or daughter going out of his or her way to assist with kindness and benevolence and love an aged parent.

Now I wish to mention another form of abuse that has been much publicized in the media. It is the sordid and evil abuse of children by adults, usually men. Such abuse is not new. There is evidence to indicate that it goes back through the ages. It is a most despicable and tragic and terrible thing. I regret to say that there has been some very limited expression of this monstrous evil among us. It is something that cannot be countenanced or tolerated. The Lord Himself said, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6).

That is very strong language from the Prince of Peace, the Son of God.

I quote from our *Church Handbook of Instructions*: "The Church's position is that abuse cannot be tolerated in any form. Those who abuse . . . are subject to Church discipline. They should not be given Church callings and may not have a temple recommend. Even if a person who abused a child sexually or physically receives Church discipline and is later restored to full fellowship or readmitted by baptism, leaders should not call the person to any position working with children or youth unless the First Presidency authorizes removal of the annotation of the person's membership record.

"In instances of abuse, the first responsibility of the Church is to help those who have been abused and to protect those who may be vulnerable to future abuse" (*Book 1: Stake Presidencies and Bishoprics* [1998], 157-58).

For a long period now we have worked on this problem. We have urged bishops, stake presidents, and others to reach out to victims, to comfort them, to strengthen them, to let them know that what happened was wrong, that the experience was not their fault, and that it need never happen again.

We have issued publications, established a telephone line where Church officers may receive counsel in handling cases, and offered professional help through LDS Family Services.

These acts are often criminal in their nature. They are punishable under the law. Professional counselors, including lawyers and social workers, are available on this help line to advise bishops and stake presidents concerning their obligations in these circumstances. Those in other nations

should call their respective Area Presidents.

Now the work of the Church is a work of salvation. I want to emphasize that. It is a work of saving souls. We desire to help both the victim and the offender. Our hearts reach out to the victim, and we must act to assist him or her. Our hearts reach out to the offender, but we cannot tolerate the sin of which he may be guilty. Where there has been offense, there is a penalty. The process of the civil law will work its way. And the ecclesiastical process will work its way, often resulting in excommunication. This is both a delicate and a serious matter.

Nevertheless, we recognize, and must always recognize, that when the penalty has been paid and the demands of justice have been met, there will be a helpful and kindly hand reaching out to assist. There may be continuing restrictions, but there will also be kindness.

Now brethren, I suppose that I have sounded negative as I have spoken to you this evening. I do not wish to. But I do wish to raise a warning voice to the priesthood of this Church throughout the world.

God has bestowed upon us a gift most precious and wonderful. It carries with it the authority to govern the Church, to administer in its affairs, to speak with authority in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to act as His dedicated servants, to bless the sick, to bless our families and many others. It serves as a guide by which to live our lives, in its fulness, its authority reaches beyond the veil of death into the eternities that lie ahead.

There is nothing else to compare with it in all this world. Safeguard it, cherish it, love it, live worthy of it.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16), is my humble prayer as I leave my blessing upon you and extend my love, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

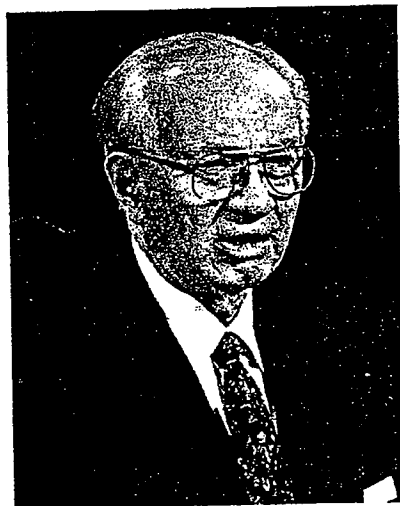
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SUN. DAY MORNING SESSION
2 October 1994

SAVE THE CHILDREN

President Gordon B. Hinckley
First Counselor in the First Presidency

God bless us to be mindful of them, to lift them and guide them as they walk in dangerous paths, to pray for them, to bless them, to love them.



My brethren and sisters, it becomes my responsibility to open this session in speaking to you.

I seek the direction of the Holy Spirit. I sense the tremendous responsibility of speaking to hundreds of thousands of Latter-day Saints, perhaps even millions, across the world.

I thank you for your gracious hospitality to us wherever we meet with you. It is truly a humbling experience to be the recipient of such generous kindness. You write letters of appreciation which bring encouragement. You are trying to live the gospel and rear your families in light and truth. You are truly Latter-day Saints, and I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to be one with you and to partake of your fellowship and your love.

Sister Hinckley and I were recently

involved in a regional conference in Rexburg, Idaho. We had not been to Yellowstone National Park for many years. We decided to drive to the conference and on Monday return home by way of Yellowstone.

In 1988, terrible forest fires raged there. Each day the news media brought us graphic reports of the intensity of the fires as they raced over thousands of acres, destroying millions of trees. The flames finally burned out, and people literally mourned over the desolate picture of countless lodgepole pines, their tops burned and the straight, scorched trunks standing like solemn grave markers in a crowded cemetery.

But when we visited there about a month ago, we saw something of captivating interest. The dead pines still stood, but between the burned trees new seedlings have sprung from the ground, millions of them.

Evidently when fire hit the tree-tops, the pinecones exploded, scattering seed to the ground. There is a new generation of trees now, young and beautiful and filled with promise. The old trees eventually will fall and the new ones will grow tall to create a forest of great beauty and usefulness.

As we drove through the park, I thought of the wonders of nature, of the rhythm of our lives. We grow old, and I am among those who have done so. Our vitality and our powers slacken. But a new generation is at our feet. These are children. These too are sons and daughters of God whose time has come to take their place on earth. They are like the new growth in the park—young, tender,

sensitive, beautiful, and full of promise.

As Tagore, the poet of India, once observed, "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man" (Charles L. Wallis, ed., *The Treasure Chest*, New York: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 49).

Children are the promise of the future. They are the future itself. The tragedy is that so many are born to lives of sorrow, of hunger, of fear and trouble and want. Children become the victims, in so many, many cases, of man's inhumanity to man. In recent months we have seen them on our television screens—the children of Somalia, their bodies bloated, their eyes staring with the stare of death. More recently we have seen them in Rwanda, the victims of raging cholera and vicious and unrelenting hunger. Uncounted numbers have died.

These were the promise of a new and better generation in these lands, where disease, malnutrition, bullets, and neglect have mowed them down like tender plants before the sharp blade of the sickle.

Why are men so vicious as to bring about the causes that lead to such terrible fratricidal conflict? Great, I believe, will be their tribulation in the Day of Judgment when they must stand before the Almighty accused of the suffering and destruction of these little ones. I am grateful for kind and generous people of many faiths and persuasions across the world whose hearts reach out in sympathy, many of whom give freely of their substance, their time, even their presence to help those in such terrible distress. I am grateful that we as a church have done much of significance, as President Monson pointed out last night, in sending medicines, food and clothing, and blankets for warmth and shelter to those who suffer so terribly, and particularly to children who otherwise most certainly would die.

Why should they suffer so much in so many places? Surely God, our Eternal Father, must weep when he sees the abuse that is heaped upon his little ones, for I am satisfied they hold a special place in his grand design. That place was confirmed when his Son, the Savior of the world, walked the

dusty roads of Palestine.

"And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

"But Jesus . . . said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein" (Luke 18:15-17).

How great is our responsibility, how serious the responsibility of Christian people and men and women of goodwill everywhere to reach out to ease the plight of suffering children, to lift them from the rut of despair in which they walk.

Of course such suffering is not new. Plagues of disease have in centuries past swept across continents. War has caused the deaths of millions who were totally innocent. Children have been bartered and traded; they have been used as tools by vicious masters; they have mined coal for long hours day after day in the dark and cold depths of the earth; they have worked in sweatshops and been exploited like cheap merchandise.

Surely after all of the history we have read, after all of the suffering of which we have been told, after all of the exploitation of which we are aware, we can do more than we are now doing to lift the blight that condemns millions of children to lives that know little of happiness, that are tragically brief, and that are filled with pain.

And we need not travel halfway across the earth to find weeping children. Countless numbers of them cry out in fear and loneliness from the evil consequences of moral transgression, neglect, and abuse. I speak plainly, perhaps indelicately. But I know of no other way to make clear a matter about which I feel so strongly.

One major problem is the now-common phenomenon of children bearing children, of children without fathers. Somehow there seems to be in the minds of many young men, and some not so young, the idea that there is no relationship between the begetting of a child and responsibility

for its life thereafter. Every young man should realize that whenever a child is begotten outside the bonds of marriage, it has resulted from violation of a God-given commandment reaching at least as far back as Moses. Further, let it be known clearly and understood without question that responsibility inevitably follows, and that this responsibility will continue throughout life. Though the mores of our contemporary society may have crumbled to a point where sexual transgression is glossed over or is regarded as acceptable, there will someday be accountability before the God of heaven for all that we do in violation of his commandments. I believe further that a sense of accountability must at some time bear upon every man who has fathered a child and then abandoned responsibility for its care. He must sometimes stop and wonder whatever became of the child he fathered, of the boy or girl who is flesh of his flesh and soul of his soul.

The burdens that fall upon a young woman who alone must rear her child are unbelievably heavy and consuming. They are likewise heavy upon society through taxes levied to meet the needs of such children and their mothers.

In the United States "in the six years between 1985 and 1990, estimated public outlays related to teenage child-bearing totalled more than \$120 billion. . . .

"Of unmarried teens who give birth, 73 percent will be on welfare within four years [that is almost three out of every four].

"In 1991 federal and state expenditures for aid to families with dependent children . . . totalled \$20 billion plus administrative costs of \$2.6 billion" (*Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children*, New York: Carnegie Corporation, April 1994, p. 21).

The obstacles facing children born and reared in such circumstances are formidable, to say the least.

The answer is straightforward. It lies in adherence to the principles of the gospel and the teaching of the Church. It lies in self-discipline.

Would that every youth might realize this and be governed accordingly. There would be so much less

of heartache and heartbreak. Its importance cannot be overemphasized because the consequences are so serious and so everlasting.

I realize that notwithstanding all of the teaching that can be done, there will be those who will not heed and will go their willful way only to discover to their shock and dismay that they are to become parents, while they are scarcely older than children themselves.

Abortion is not the answer. This only compounds the problem. It is an evil and repulsive escape that will someday bring regret and remorse.

Marriage is the more honorable thing. This means facing up to responsibility. It means giving the child a name, with parents who together can nurture, protect, and love.

When marriage is not possible, experience has shown that adoption, difficult though this may be for the young mother, may afford a greater opportunity for the child to live a life of happiness. Wise and experienced professional counselors and prayerful bishops can assist in these circumstances.

Then there is the terrible, inexcusable, and evil phenomenon of physical and sexual abuse.

It is unnecessary. It is unjustified. It is indefensible.

In terms of physical abuse, I have never accepted the principle of "spare the rod and spoil the child." I will be forever grateful for a father who never laid a hand in anger upon his children. Somehow he had the wonderful talent to let them know what was expected of them and to give them encouragement in achieving it.

I am persuaded that violent fathers produce violent sons. I am satisfied that such punishment in most instances does more damage than good. Children don't need beating. They need love and encouragement. They need fathers to whom they can look with respect rather than fear. Above all, they need example.

I recently read a biography of George H. Brimhall, who at one time served as president of Brigham Young University. Concerning someone said that he reared boys with a rod, but not a "rod" (Raymond B. and Esther Hamilton).





Tall Pine Tree: *The Life and Work of George H. Brimhall*, n.p., 1988, p. 62). That says it all.

And then there is the terrible, vicious practice of sexual abuse. It is beyond understanding. It is an affront to the decency that ought to exist in every man and woman. It is a violation of that which is sacred and divine. It is destructive in the lives of children. It is reprehensible and worthy of the most severe condemnation.

Shame on any man or woman who would sexually abuse a child. In doing so, the abuser not only does the most serious kind of injury. He or she also stands condemned before the Lord.

It was the Master himself who said, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). How could he have spoken in stronger terms?

If there be any within the sound of my voice who may be guilty of such practice, I urge you with all of the capacity of which I am capable to stop it, to run from it, to get help, to plead with the Lord for forgiveness and make amends to those whom you have offended. God will not be mocked concerning the abuse of his little ones.

When the resurrected Lord appeared on this hemisphere and taught the people, the record states that as he spoke to them, "he wept, . . . and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. "And when he had done this he wept again" (3 Ne. 17:21-22).

There is no more tender and beautiful picture in all of sacred writing than this simple language describing the love of the Savior for little children.

Of all the joys of life, none other equals that of happy parenthood. Of all the responsibilities with which we struggle, none other is so serious. To rear children in an atmosphere of love, security, and faith is the most rewarding of all challenges. The good result from such efforts becomes life's most satisfying compensation.

President Joseph F. Smith said on one occasion: "After all, to do well those things which God ordained to be the common lot of all man-kind, is the truest greatness. To be a successful father or a successful mother is greater than to be a successful general or a successful statesman. One is universal and eternal greatness, the other is ephemeral" (*Gospel Doctrine*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939, p. 285).

I am satisfied that no other experiences of life draw us nearer to heaven than those that exist between happy parents and happy children.

My plea—and I wish I were more eloquent in voicing it—is a plea to save the children. Too many of them walk with pain and fear, in loneliness and despair. Children need sunlight. They need happiness. They need love and nurture. They need kindness and refreshment and affection. Every home, regardless of the cost of the house, can provide an environment of love which will be an environment of salvation.

May I in conclusion read to you a letter that came the other day. It speaks of the kind of home I have in mind. The writer says:

"I thought I would write to you to let you know that life is good. I sit here looking out the window at the beautiful mountains. The apple tree in the backyard is full of almost-ripe fruit, two cooing doves that we have been feeding and watching all summer

are eating at the bird feeder, and the weather has finally cooled down.

"My husband and I have been married for twenty-six years, have five wonderful children, two sons-in-law, and a peaceful, happy home. I marvel at the love of the Lord in our lives. It runs through our marriage and family like a thread. I have nothing to complain about, and most of my fasts are 'thankful' fasts.

"My husband is in the stake presidency, . . . and I teach the Gospel Doctrine class. We have always worked in the Church, and always enjoyed it. We enjoy the gospel, and it is marvelous to watch our children growing up to do the same.

"And so, I just wanted you to know that there is much love, joy, contentment, fun, and gratitude in our life."

Is that picture too good to be true? The writer does not think so. Is it too idealistic? I think not. I know nothing of the size of the house or the yard. That is immaterial. It is the spirit in that home, the extension of the love of a good man who holds the priesthood of God and a good woman whose heart is filled with true affection and gratitude, and of children born of a sound marriage who have been nurtured and reared in an environment of peace and faith and security.

You may not have a mountain to look at where you live. You may not have an apple tree in the backyard. You may not have birds that feed at your porch. But you can have one another as husband and wife, father and mother, and children who live together with love, respect, self-discipline—and prayer, if you please.

The old forest burns and dies. But there is a new one at its roots—one filled with wondrous potential. It is a thing beautiful to look upon, and destined to grow. It is the handiwork of God, a part of his divine plan.

Save the children. Too many suffer and weep. God bless us to be mindful of them, to lift them and guide them as they walk in dangerous paths, to pray for them, to bless them, to love them, to keep them secure until they can run with strength of their own, I pray in the name of him who loves them so very much, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.