

D&C LESSON 14

THE LAW OF CONSECRATION

By Ted L. Gibbons

Imagine that you are a father or mother and that you have twin sons whom you love equally because they both try to obey you and serve you with equal diligence. Because they are so faithful you are going to do something very nice for them on their birthday. You give son #1 a brand new Pontiac Grand Am and son #2 a tricycle. Son #1 also gets a new Armani suit, and son #2 gets a loin cloth. You also give son #1 a great deal of money and son #2 a few coins. For dinner you give son #1 a turkey dinner and son #2 a turnip. What is wrong with the way you are treating your two sons? Turn to D&C 38: 26,27.

For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just? Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine. (D&C 38:26,27)

The Law of Consecration is the law that the Lord gave his saints to insure that his people become one spiritually, socially, and economically, and that all of his faithful children will be treated fairly.

I. GOD REVEALED THE LAW OF CONSECRATION TO HIS SAINTS.

Before Joseph Smith arrived in Kirtland (about the first of February 1831), he indicated that a new economic system would be instituted. That economic system would be called the Law of Consecration. Elder Bruce R. McConkie defined this law as follows:

The law of consecration is that we consecrate our time, our talents, and our money and property to the cause of the Church; such are to be available to the extent they are needed to further the Lord's interests on earth . . ." C.R., April 1975, p.74)

In D&C 38: 32 the Lord promised to reveal his law to the saints? The introduction to this new economic system would be included in that law. The Lord gave the basic principle of this law in D&C 38: 24, 25. It was and is: "Let every man esteem his brother as himself." The parable you read at the beginning of the lesson (see D&C 38:26.27) describes what the Lord wants to accomplish with this law. According to that parable, how does the Lord want his children to be treated in their associations with each other?

"And let every man deal honestly, and be alike among this people, and receive alike, that ye may be one, even as I have commanded you."
(D&C 51:9)

It is the Lord's will that his people should be honest and be alike and be one. This law encourages all three of these conditions. How does the Law of Consecration encourage honesty, equality, and unity?

The law of consecration began to be restored in this dispensation on the 9th of February 1831 in D&C 42. Many additional instructions concerning the principles

and practices associated with this law were revealed in subsequent sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, but in D&C 42, the Lord began to explain what kinds of attitudes and devotion were required by this law. Why were people expected to consecrate of their properties?

“And behold, thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support that which thou hast to impart unto them, with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken.” (D&C 42:30)

“And remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple.” (D&C 52:40)

These properties were really being given to the Lord.

“And inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ***ye will do it unto me***; and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors, two of the elders, or high priests, such as he shall appoint or has appointed and set apart for that purpose.” (D&C 42:31, emphasis added)

How many people in the true church are exempt from this law?

And behold, none are exempt from this law who belong to the church of the living God . . .(D&C 70:10)

People who desire to live in Zion (or come to Zion) must be willing to lay everything before the Lord through his representative, the Bishop. (See D&C 72:15) In reality, how much of what we enjoy in mortality belongs to us?

“I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine.” (D&C 104:14)

If we are not the owners of these things, what are we? The revelations tell us we are stewards.

“For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures.” (104:13)

Under this law, all men are supposed to be equal. (51:3, 9) But the equality required by the law of consecration is not absolute. What are the four factors that were to be considered in order to balance this equality?

“Wherefore, let my servant Edward Partridge, and those whom he has chosen, in whom I am well pleased, appoint unto this people their portions, every man equal according to his family, according to his circumstances and his wants and needs.” (51:3)

Since one of the considerations under this law is “wants,” what would prevent a person from taking advantage of the system because of unnecessary or extravagant wants? Those wants must be *just*.

“And you are to be equal, or in other words, you are to have equal

claims on the properties, for the benefit of managing the concerns of your stewardships, every man according to his wants and his needs, inasmuch as his wants are just—” (82:17)

Under most current economic systems, the standard is “every man for himself.” But under this law each person is required to seek “the interest of his neighbor.” (D&C 82:19)

In 1839 Joseph Smith arrived in Far West, Missouri from Kirtland. Not long after his arrival he made a speech to the people of Far West. Among other things he said,

Brethren, we are gathering to this beautiful land, to build up "Zion." . . . But since I have been here I perceive the spirit of selfishness, Covetousness, exists in the hearts of the Saints. . . . Here are those who begin to spread out buying up all the land they are able to do, to the exclusion of the poorer ones who are not so much blessed with this world's goods, thinking to lay foundation for themselves only, looking to their own individual families and those who are to follow them. . . . Now I want to tell you that Zion cannot be built up in any such way. . . . I see signs put out, Beer signs, speculative schemes are being introduced this is the way of the world--Babylon indeed, and I tell you in the name of the God of Israel, if there is not repentance . . . and a turning from such ungodliness, covetousness, and self will you will be broken up and scattered from this choice land to the four winds of Heaven [sic]. (Cited in *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, Vol.9, Ch.12, p.347)

The fact that the Church lost its foothold in Missouri for many generations tells us that in fact the Saints were broken and scattered from the land of Zion for their unwillingness to live the laws associated therewith.

D&C 51:15 tells us that it is a privilege to live this law. The law of consecration was the institution by which a society, in which each person esteems his brother as himself could be organized.

II. THE LAW OF CONSECRATION IS AN ETERNAL LAW.

In D&C 78:3, 4, the Lord tells us something about the duration of these laws. How long will these principles last? They are “permanent and everlasting.”

“For verily I say unto you, the time has come, and is now at hand; and behold, and lo, it must needs be that there be an organization of my people, in regulating and establishing the affairs of the storehouse for the poor of my people, both in this place and in the land of Zion For a ***permanent and everlasting establishment*** and order unto my church, to advance the cause, which ye have espoused, to the salvation of man, and to the glory of your Father who is in heaven . . .”
(D&C 78:3,4, emphasis added)

They will advance the cause of the “salvation of man” and the “glory of your Father who is in heaven.” Why is it so important that we are equal in earthly things?

“That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things.” (D&C 78:5)

What else does this law prepare us for?

“For if you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you.” (D&C 78:7)

Many of the qualities shared by those who are willing to consecrate of their properties for the welfare of the poor and needy are the very qualities that make a Zion society possible. How does the Lord describe Zion in D&C 97:21? In Moses 7:18, what qualities exemplify the people and society of Zion? What additional information is found in 4 Nephi 1-3, 12, 13, 15 about the benefits of living in a Zion society?

Even after the expulsion from Missouri, the Saints made several attempts to implement this law, or portions of it, in their social order. After the saints moved to Utah, Brigham Young invited and encouraged the saints in many communities to enter into a cooperative economic and spiritual union. In many instances this order was referred to as a “United Order.” Here are some of the rules of conduct for those who entered into this order as it was established in Saint George, Utah.

We will not take the name of Deity in vain nor speak lightly of his character . . . We will pray with our families morning and evening and also attend to secret prayer . . . We will treat our families with due kindness and affection . . . we will refrain from being contentious and quarrelsome . . . and will cultivate a spirit of charity towards all. . . . We will observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy . . . We will be simple in our dress and manner of living, using proper economy and prudence in the management of all entrusted to our care . . . We will honestly and diligently labor and devote ourselves and all we have to the “order”

and to the building of the kingdom of God. (*Comprehensive History of the Church*, 4: 485-86)

What kind of society would exist if people in an entire community were willing to make and keep a covenant to live by these principles? What advantages would come to an individual or family living in a community where people lived the law of consecration? Can you think of experiences in which a society living this law (or a family attempting to implement the principles of this law) would have been a blessing to you or your family in a time of hardship or need?

“When were you last fed by a family member or friend? When were you last given nourishment for growth and ideas, plans, sorting of the day, sharing of fun, recreation, sorrow, anxiety, concern, and meditation? These ingredients can only be shared by someone who loves and cares. Have you ever gone to extend sympathy and comfort in moments of death and trial, only to come away fed by the faith and trust of the loving bereaved? Certainly the best way for us to show our love in keeping and feeding is by taking the time to prove it hour by hour and day by day. Our expressions of love and comfort are empty if our actions don’t match. God loves us to continue. Our neighbors and families love us if we will but follow through with sustaining support and self-sharing. True love is as eternal as life itself. Who is to say the joys of eternity are not wrapped up in continuous feeding, keeping, and caring? We need not weary in well-doing when we understand God’s purposes and his children.”
(Marvin J. Ashton, “Love Takes Time,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 109–10)

III. WE CAN CONSECRATE OUR LIVES UNTO THE LORD NOW.

The revelations make it clear that we must be prepared to live this law before the coming of the Lord in his Glory. We must be willing to lay all we have on the altar of our love for the Lord and devote ourselves to the welfare of others. There are at least three steps we must take in preparation to live this law in its fulness.

1) We must acknowledge and believe that in reality everything we have belongs to the Lord, and that we are his stewards. (See D&C 104:17; Psalm 24:1) Bishop Victor L. Brown, Presiding Bishop of the Church, taught of this matter. He said

“Until we feel in total harmony with this, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for us to accept the law of consecration. As we prepare to live this law, we will look forward with great anticipation to the day when the call will come. If, on the other hand, we hope it can be delayed so we can have the pleasure of accumulating material things, we are on the wrong path. (Bishop Victor L. Brown, *The Law of Consecration*, fireside, Brigham Young University Marriott Center, November 7, 1976.)

The Lord gave a warning to Martin Harris about this in D&C 19:26?

“And again, I command thee that thou shalt not covet thine own property, but impart it freely to the printing of the Book of Mormon, which contains the truth and the word of God—”

Brigham young spoke of the danger of covetousness. He said:

“I am more afraid of covetousness in our Elders than I am of the hordes of hell. Have we men out now of that class? I believe so. I am afraid of such spirits; for they are more powerful and injurious to this

people than all hell outside of our borders. All our enemies in the United States or in the world, and all hell with them marshalled against us, could not do us the injury that covetousness in the hearts of this people could do us; for it is idolatry." (Brigham Young, JD Vol. 5, p. 353)

What is there about covetousness, even with regard to personal property, that would be injurious to those who desire to live in a Zion society? Do you have possessions of such value to you that you would be unable or reluctant to lay them on the altar if asked to do so by the Lord or his servants?

2) We must be willing to offer those things that are required of us at the present time. Those who are unable to make the sacrifices required by the church *now* may encounter substantial difficulty in making the greater ones required by the law of consecration. Full time missionary work, for example, is a sacrifice related to the law of consecration. Elder Robert D. Hales taught that

"Going on a mission teaches you to live the law of consecration. It may be the only time in your life when you can give to the Lord all your time, talents, and resources. In return the Lord will bless you with his spirit. He will be close to you and will strengthen you." (Elder Robert D. Hales, April, 1996, CR, p. 50)

Elder Stephen L. Richards spoke of the relationship between tithing and consecration:

"There is no higher evidence of that consecration than this giving which has been enjoined upon us by the Lord . . . So the law of tithing is the epitome of the Gospel. It is genuine worship and true

recognition of the sovereignty of God. It is real consecration, the giving of the muscle and energy of life to the cause: and it begets the abundant life of love and service for which the Christ came." (Stephen L Richards, Conference Report, April 1929, p.53)

How does the process of paying our tithes and offerings prepare us for the higher law we will live in Zion and in the Celestial Kingdom? We must recognize that the amount or extent of our contributions is of no consequence at all. It is the spirit and attitude with which we pay that makes all the difference as we prepare for the higher law.

Fast offerings also provide an opportunity for us to practice the principles of this law. Pres. Marion G. Romney taught

"... in lieu of residues and surpluses which were accumulated and built up under the United Order, we, today, have our fast offerings, our Welfare donations, and our tithing all of which may be devoted to the care of the poor, as well as for the carrying on of the activities and business of the Church.

"What prohibits us from giving as much in fast offerings as we would have given in surpluses under the United Order? Nothing but our own limitations." (C.R., April 1966, p. 100)

3) We must learn to love our neighbor as ourselves, "every man seeking the interest of his neighbor . . ." (D&C 82:19) What counsel does the Lord give about this in Jacob 2:17? Reflect on experiences when others have gone out of their ways and sacrificed to help you in a time of need. Review the following story and consider what it tells you about the preparation of Grandfather Condie to live this law in its fulness.

"Old Bob came into our lives in an interesting way. He was a widower

in his eighties when the house in which he was living was to be demolished. I heard him tell my grandfather his plight at the three of us sat on the old front porch swing. . . He said . . . "Mr. Condie, I don't know what to do. I have no family, no place to go. I have no money." I wondered how grandfather would answer. Slowly grandfather reached into his pocket and took from it [an] old leather purse . . . He removed a key and handed it to Old Bob. Tenderly he said, "bob, here is the key to that house I own next door. Take it. Move in your things. Stay as long as you like. There will be no rent to pay and nobody will ever put you out again." (Elder Thomas Monson, C.R., April 1981, p. 66)

This love of neighbor and of the Lord is the true foundation of the law of consecration. As we grow in love, our ability to live this law will also grow. President Marion G. Romney taught:

"When we reach the state of having the "pure love of Christ," our desire to serve one another will have grown to the point where we will be living fully the law of consecration." (Pres. Marion G. Romney, Oct. 1981 C.R. pp 132)

CONCLUSION:

If we can truthfully and gladly acknowledge that all we possess belongs to the Lord, if we can cheerfully make every sacrifice required by the priesthood and Kingdom of God, and if we can learn to love our neighbors as ourselves, we will be prepared to live the law of consecration. President Harold B. Lee remarked:

We heard President [J. Reuben] Clark say . . . "If you think about it clearly, when you think about our storehouses where we are putting all

the surpluses we can, when we are paying a full tithing, when we are giving assistance in the health services, when we are giving assistance in the programs by which we reach out to those who are far afield . . . we will not be far from living the united order. (*The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, p. 207)

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