

D&C LESSON 16

"THOU SHALT . . . OFFER UP THY SACRAMENTS UPON MY HOLY DAY"

By Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION:

The Lord commanded: "Go ye out from among the wicked. Save yourselves. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." A critical element in observing this commandment is to "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."

The Sabbath lasts all day! In a revelation "especially applicable to the saints in Zion," the Lord states that the Sabbath was given that we might keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." It is a day to partake of the sacrament, a day "to pay [our] devotions unto the Most High," a day of "fasting and prayer," a day to offer our time, talent, and means in service to our God and our fellowmen,¹ a day to "[confess our] sins [to our] brethren, and before the Lord." It is also a good day to pay our tithes and fast offerings, a day to be marked by sincere sacrifice of the pursuits and pleasures of the world. It is a day to keep the Sabbath covenant, a day of "rejoicing and prayer," a day of "cheerful hearts and countenances." (Elder H. Aldridge Gillespie, C.R., Oct. 2000)

1. THE LORD ESTABLISHED THE SABBATH.

A friend once commented that whoever said the Sabbath was a day of rest was not a Mormon. His tongue was firmly in his cheek when he said it, but he was not wide of the mark by very much. We who have placed the Gospel of Christ at the center of our lives know that completing Sabbath assignments and duties can be labor—work—of the most demanding kind. But when the Lord set apart a day of the week as a day of rest, he seems to have done so with the intent that we should *rest* from all our weekly labors (D&C 59:10), and from the work that

demands our attention on the non-Sabbath days.

If we do the same things on the Sabbath that we do on Tuesday and Friday, when do we make the necessary preparations and reparations to keep ourselves unspotted from the world? We must have a time to immerse ourselves in the things of the Spirit just as we must have a time to immerse our clothing in the waters that clean and refresh.

“Let us not be like the Church member who partakes of the sacrament in the morning, then defiles the Sabbath that afternoon by cleaning the house or by watching television or by choosing an afternoon of sleep over an afternoon of service.” (Pres. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Example of Abraham,” *Ensign*, June 1975, 6).

I think I understand that house cleaning or television watching or excessive sleeping defile the Sabbath. They pervert the purpose and spirit of the Sabbath by making it more difficult for us separate ourselves from the world and to sanctify ourselves. It is hard not to believe that the pervasive presence of sporting events on the Sabbath is one additional Satanic endeavor to keep us from the spiritual maturity that can come from righteous living.

In the Lord’s most significant modern sermon on the Sabbath, D&C 59, he teaches powerful lessons about what we ought to do on his holy day. In D&C 59:13, after providing a meaningful list of appropriate activities, he declares, “And on this day thou shalt do none other thing . . .”

Come out of the world, he invites and commands us. *Partake of the sanctifying power of the Sabbath day*.

2. PAY THY DEVOTIONS TO THE MOST HIGH BY WORSHIPPING HIM IN SUNDAY CHURCH MEETINGS.

Part of the process of being spiritually cleansed and refreshed happens as we attend the Sabbath meetings designed to teach and edify and renew us. The Lord commanded us to “go to the house of prayer” on his day (D&C 59:9). In that place we can “pay [our] devotions to the most high . . .” Of course we can and

ought to do that on other days and at other times (see D&C 59:11), but sheltered safely in the walls of a dedicated building, the chances for intrusions from the distractions of worldliness are greatly minimized. Phones do not ring; doorbells do not chime; children do not ask for rides or loans . . . Ecclesiastes gave some wonderful counsel about reverence in the house of the Lord and about things we can do to maximize the disinfecting influences of the Lord's Day:

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. (Eccl. 5:1-3)

I suspect that the author (Solomon? See Eccl. 1:1) is thinking of the Temple when he speaks of "the house of God," but his teachings have worthwhile implications for worship at any dedicated building.

- T** "Keep thy foot" Find a place to sit and stay there. Don't dilute the influence of prelude music or preaching by moving about.
- T** "Be more ready to hear, than . . . to be . . . rash with thy mouth" We are invited to share feelings and experiences in our classes and our testimony meetings. But almost always we will learn more from listening than from speaking. I have a feeling that our ears are closer to our hearts than our mouths. Solomon suggests that to speak too readily or frequently is to "give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil." Would this not be particularly true in our Sacrament meetings? How often have you been distracted from the sweetness of the sacrament of the whisperings of the Spirit by conversations—even quiet conversations—being conducted around you?
- T** "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God." This is the same concept cited in the previous paragraph, but the explanation of this counsel in verse 2 suggests one more reason for putting the emphasis on listening rather than speaking. "For God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." Another way

to say this might be: *"Be more ready to be taught (by the Spirit) than to teach."* After all, "a fool's voice is known by multitude of words."

T "For a dream cometh through the multitude of business . . ." I do not pretend to know what the exact meaning of this phrase is. Other translations of the Bible suggest that the 'dream' mentioned above is a preoccupation (or a nightmare) caused by too much concern with business or busyness. While waiting for Sacrament meeting to begin I have watched members in my ward (and I have done this myself) such as quorum leaders and home teachers scurry about talking to members in an effort to get church business completed. Such commotion may cause the spiritual dimensions of the meeting to seem unreal or unproductive, like a dream.

You might ask yourself what benefit you derive from Sacrament Meetings. Be brutally honest. This would not be an evaluation of what you ought to get out of them, but what you do in fact get out of them.

Part of the worship service of our meetings is the singing of hymns. Do you sing with your heart? Alma asked the people of Zarahemla if they had "felt to sing the song of redeeming love." (Alma 5:26) Have you felt that way as you have raised your voice in praise and prayer to the Almighty?

I attended today the funeral of a dear friend and neighbor who passed away after an extended bout with stomach cancer. At the funeral we sang "Because I Have Been Given Much" (Hymn #219) and "How Great Thou Art" (Hymn #86). The daughters and grandchildren of the deceased sang "I Am a Child of God." I was deeply moved by these musical sermons. I felt to sing the song of redeeming love.

We must not allow ourselves to think that the song of the vocal cords is the music of real significance. The Lord's instructions about singing relate to the heart and to the feelings. He has little if anything to say about vocal *quality*.

"Alexander Schreiner, one of the great tabernacle organists, recalled a story about someone who asked a music director how he could stand to hear Brother Stanton bellow off-key at Church gatherings. The wise old leader replied, 'Brother Stanton is one of our most devout worshipers,, and when he bellows he is a supreme musician...."

Don't pay too much attention to the sounds he makes. If you do, you may miss the music." (*Ensign*, March 2000, p. 19)

The praying in our congregations is also an important time of growth and regeneration. There are things we can do to make them more meaningful.

I will now ask this congregation, how many of you thought of mentally repeating my prayer as the words came to your ears? Did you realize that the order of prayer required you to mentally follow the words of the person who was praying? With us every one should mentally repeat the same words and ask for the same things as does the one who leads vocally, and let all say, amen. There are times and places when all should vocally repeat the words spoken, but in our prayer meetings and in our family circles let every heart be united with the one who takes the lead by being mouth before the Lord, and let every person mentally repeat the prayers, and all unite in whatever is asked for, and the Lord will not withhold, but will give to such persons the things which they ask for and rightly need. (Brigham Young: JD, Vol. III, p. 53)

3. PAY DEVOTIONS TO THE MOST HIGH BY PARTAKING OF THE SACRAMENT.

The language of D&C 59:9 with regard to the Sacrament is most interesting. We are commanded to "offer up" our sacraments. The same language appears in 59:12. D&C 62:4 is a revelation given to a group of elders traveling to Zion. The Lord said:

"And now continue your journey. Assemble yourselves upon the land of Zion; and hold a meeting and rejoice together, and offer a sacrament unto the Most High."

What is the significance of these commands to *offer*, rather than *partake of*, a sacrament? Are we really supposed to offer something? 3Nephi 9:19,20 suggests what offering might be expected of us.

"And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea,

your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings. And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not."

As we covenant to take his name and keep his commandments and always remember his sacrifices for us, we do offer our hearts to him. We find ourselves in a situation very much like the ancient Israelites, who came to offer sacrifice at a place where the priests officiated and where the flesh and blood (of animals) was placed upon an altar.

"So it is that real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal in us upon the altar and letting it be consumed! Such is the "sacrifice unto the Lord ... of a broken heart and a contrite spirit," (D&C 59:8), a prerequisite to taking up the cross, while giving "away all [our] sins" in order to "know God" (Alma 22:18) for the denial of self precedes the full acceptance of Him." (Neal A. Maxwell, "Deny Yourselves of All Ungodliness," *Ensign*, May 1995, 68)

This experience with the sacrament is one more purifying element of the Sabbath day.

"Windows must be washed regularly to clean away dust and dirt. If left to accumulate without regular cleaning, thickening grime can block out light and darken the window. Just as earthly windows need consistent, thorough cleaning, so do the windows of our spirituality.

"Weekly sacrament meeting attendance helps us strengthen our resolve to keep our personal windows of heaven free from the obscuring haze of earthly distractions and temptations. By partaking of the sacrament worthily to renew our baptismal covenants, we

clarify our view of life's eternal purpose and divine priorities. The sacrament prayers invite personal introspection, repentance, and rededication as we pledge our willingness to remember our Savior, Jesus the Christ. This commitment to become like Christ, repeated weekly, defines the supreme aspiration of Latter-day Saint life." (Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Windows of Light and Truth," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 77)

4. PAY DEVOTIONS TO GOD BY RESTING FROM YOUR LABORS.

Years ago I spent a week at Uncle Sam's expense playing military games in the woods and swamps of eastern Alabama and western Georgia. The closest I came to water was what was in my canteen and what hit me falling from cloudy skies. I wore the same uniform the entire week. I wore it to crawl through the weeds and the mud. I wore it to march from location to location. I wore it to eat. As I brought my clothes into continual contact with the world, parts of it kept rubbing off on me. By the end of that miserable week, those fatigues were revolting. They were so filthy and so foul I thought I could walk down a dirt road and topple trees on both sides. A trip to the laundry would have solved all my problems, but I did not have that opportunity during that week.

What happens to our spirits in a week of rubbing up against the world? How much of evil and iniquity and filth is transferred to the sensitive surfaces of our souls in a week of being in the world? Even when we are determined to live above the carnality about us, life has a way of throwing itself in our pathways and splattering us with unexpected and undesired contaminants.

Thus the Lord tells us that one of the great purposes of the Sabbath is to enable us to wash away the filth of a week in Babylon. It is on the Sabbath that we clean our spirits. We remove them from the world and wash them in preparation for another week. "And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world," he says, "thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day." (D&C 59:9)

The Lord commands us to offer our "oblations . . . unto the Most High" on the Sabbath. *Oblations* is a wonderful word. My dictionary defines it as "an offering

of a sacrifice, thanksgiving, etc. to God . . . [or] the thing or things offered." Footnote 12b tells us the word refers to: "*offerings, whether of time, talents, or means, in service of God and fellowman.*"

Thus we find a powerful definition of the kinds of work acceptable to the Lord on the Sabbath day. We seem to be free to do anything that can be called an oblation. Perhaps it was this concept to which the Savior had reference in the account in which he healed a man in spite of the objections of his enemies: "Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9)

The Lord's command to offer our oblations is clear evidence that it is lawful to do good on Sunday. In Matthew 12:12 the Savior taught, "Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days."

5. THE LORD BLESSES THOSE WHO KEEP THE SABBATH DAY HOLY.

"Consider the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy . . . We live in a time when many people throughout the world have transferred their allegiance on the Sabbath from places of worship to places of amusement . . . I ask, "Which way do you face?" Scriptures give us encouragement to do right: "If thou turn away... from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord,... and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure . . ." (Elder Russell M. Nelson, C.R., April 1996)

Our observance of this commandment to keep the day holy (as with all other commandments) is evidence of our commitment to our covenants. The choices we make on the Sabbath reflect clearly to others the things we value most. Read and ponder the promises of D&C 59:16-20. All the necessary things to sustain and enrich life are promised to those who keep this day holy as God has commanded. These promises could well be brought in as testimony on the day of judgement when people at the bar of God declare that they had to work on the Sabbath in order to make ends meet or keep a roof over their heads or keep food on the table.

If we do this (the things specified in this revelation about the Sabbath)

- ' The fulness of the earth is ours.
- ' The beasts and fowls are ours.
- ' The herbs and the good things of the earth are ours.
- ' These things will provide us with food, clothing, shelter, orchards, gardens, vineyards.
- ' All things of the earth will be for our use and benefit

These things will

- ' Please the eye
- ' Gladden the heart
- ' Strengthen the body
- ' Enliven the soul

What additional things are there that we might want enough to disregard this commandment about the Sabbath day. Should we do it for a better car? A larger house? More exciting entertainment?

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