

# God's Covenant People

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I appreciate the invitation from the conference organizers to speak today. I've been working on this talk since the Winter Solstice. The Lord's work is vast. This talk will shed light on more of His great plan. This is a message specifically intended for our group and not something to be taught to others who lack the necessary background to understand it. Without the necessary background in our scriptures and prior teachings, a novice would have difficulty putting this talk into the correct context.<sup>1</sup>

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This talk results from my discouragement at what I have observed of us. We are not like other religious groups. We have no public relations or marketing resources to conceal infighting. That is a good thing, in my opinion. Our disagreements and infighting are conducted publicly, and nothing about them is hidden from others. This gives us a much more realistic view of ourselves than any institution that conceals its internal conflicts or misrepresents the cracks within its membership. We are far more transparent than institutional denominations. Because of this, we should have no illusions about our weaknesses and disagreements. I do not.

We have problems. Our group clearly includes people with severe personality disorders. Some people have trauma from their past, making it difficult to develop healthy relationships with others. There are people who lack self-awareness and are puzzled when they offend others with inappropriate conduct. Additionally, many of us refuse to ever accept responsibility for our own dreadful behavior. Our infighting suggests that we are not true followers of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Remember Hyrum Smith's letter to those living in China Creek: "And again, I say unto you, an elder has no business to undertake to preach mysteries in any part of the world, for God has commanded us all to preach nothing but the first principles unto the world. Neither has any elder any authority to preach any mysterious thing to any branch of the church unless he has a direct commandment from God to do so. Let the matter of the grand councils of Heaven, and the making of gods, worlds, and devils entirely alone, for you are not called to teach any such doctrine — for neither you nor the people are capacitated to understand any such principles — less so to teach them. For when God commands men to teach such principles, the saints will receive them. Therefore, beware what you teach! For the mysteries of God are not given to all men; and unto those to whom they are given they are placed under restrictions to impart only such as God will command them, and the residue is to be kept in a faithful breast, otherwise he will be brought under condemnation. By this God will prove his faithful servants, who will be called and numbered with the chosen." T&C 152:2.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus taught His disciples: "I give you a new commandment, That you love one another. Love each other as I have loved you. If you have love for each other it will be a sign that will identify you to all mankind as my followers." T&C 171: TSJ 10:7.

There are narcissists, egomaniacs, and aspiring souls who crave recognition because they are hollow inside. There are sexual deviants. At least two men are in prison for sex crimes. I have heard allegations of at least one other man who may also present a sexual threat to children. Our ranks include many who cannot be gathered into a community of peace of one heart and one mind.

We have people in our community who are marred by sin and unrepentant. There are foolish people led astray by their egos and ambitions who assert they are entitled to lead others. They ask to be supported by tithes and be given offices or positions of authority. These people are evil, inspired by an adversary who seeks to destroy souls.

On the other hand, many men and women have great intellect, knowledge, skills, education, and wisdom. They are willing to help and do things that lift others. The contributions of these people have made possible the many things that have been accomplished. These include recovering, compiling, and publishing the Restoration Edition of the scriptures, organizing nineteen general conferences and over fifty regional conferences, organizing fellowships and distributing tithing to those in need. It has required a body of faithful believers to accomplish what has been done. However, these accomplishments do not hide what we lack. Clearly, there remain obstacles for us to overcome to be gathered into a community and live in peace with one another.

We received instructions 11 years ago and have been given more than a decade to learn new skills and practice them in order to work out our conflicts, but we have failed to do that required work.<sup>3</sup> Without the desire and effort to learn, we cannot gain the necessary skills. The system of fellowships we were instructed to use was one way to prepare for gathering. We were to gather our tithes and work together to decide how to distribute them to those in need. We have largely neglected to do that and many more things. Additionally, we still have numerous interpersonal conflicts that we lack the desire or the skills to resolve.

As I have considered our few successes and many failures, I have been despairing and quite pessimistic. We still have far too many shortcomings despite all the guidance the Lord has provided. When I learned that rancor and hard feelings still linger over the Guide and Standard, it surprised me. When I saw that women are no more wise, fair, or just than men have been—and saw the rancor they showed one another—I was discouraged and doubted that we could ever gather together and live in peace with one another. We have the same social upheavals in our group as modern Babylon has. A lot of our

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<sup>3</sup> See the talk given on April 12, 2014: [Lecture 6—Zion](https://denversnuffer.com/blog/papers/) at: <https://denversnuffer.com/blog/papers/> or the downloadable pdf paper available there, or the chapter *Zion*, in *Preserving the Restoration*, (Millcreek Press, Salt Lake City, 2015) pp. 237-293.

disputes resemble the political campaigns of modern Babylon, and it suggests that we are far more influenced by the social winds of a larger corrupt society than by the Lord's instructions.

I have felt responsible for our widespread quarreling, frequent backbiting, grudges, gossip, petty jealousies, inability to support one another, selfishness, reactivity, unwillingness to sacrifice for the sake of building a community, and general unfitness to gather into a cohesive body. I have been dismayed by our inability to remain silent when we should not speak, our failure to speak when we should, and our inability to recognize the care and respect that must be taken with each other and with God. I have taken into account the earlier failures in Kirtland, Missouri, Illinois, and Salt Lake, and concluded that we share the same weaknesses and faults among us, as history records about them. This has left me with little hope for our chances of success.

Because of my discouragement, I went to the Lord in prayer with my hopelessness. I learned a great deal from that prayer, and that experience with the Lord has led to this talk. I was wrong in my understanding of the mechanics the Lord will use to accomplish the prophesied "gathering" of His people. My understanding was different from what the Lord had in mind. I learned that the Lord can and will do some significant pruning, even of those who will be gathered. There will be experiences that will humble and refine His people. In answer to my despairing prayer:

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My mind was flooded with scriptures that helped me understand how the Lord had dealt with His people in the past. This is how He will also deal with us.

The complete records of God's people from the days of Adam<sup>4</sup> through the present do not exist. However, we have enough evidence to understand that He both blesses and curses His followers. Being "chosen" by God does not mean there is no accountability. On the contrary, when God chooses and covenants with people, He actively involves Himself in their history.

The Lord explained through Moses how He would deal with the Children of Israel if they obeyed or if they disobeyed. He blesses, but He also humbles and corrects. From Deuteronomy:

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<sup>4</sup>Throughout this talk I use the name "Adam" and references to God as "He" and "Him" in the same sense as ancient Hebrew. "Adam" was the name given to the couple, and includes both Adam and Eve. The masculine pronoun for God includes both the male and female, and therefore both God and His Divine Consort or female companion are included in the pronouns used in this talk. See, *Our Divine Parents*.

Deuteronomy 8:6-8:<sup>5</sup>

But it shall come to pass if you will not listen unto the voice of the Lord your God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your store. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your land, the increase of your cattle and the flocks of your sheep. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The Lord shall send upon you cursing, vexation, and rebuke in all that you set your hand unto in order to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings whereby you have forsaken me. The Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto you until he has consumed you from off the land to which you go to possess it. The Lord shall smite you with a wasting disease, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue you until you perish. And your heaven that is over your head shall be brass, and the earth that is under you shall be iron. The Lord shall make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven shall it come down upon you until you are destroyed.

The Lord shall cause you to be smitten before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them, and shall be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And your carcass shall be food unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall frighten them away.

The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt, and with the tumors, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof you cannot be healed. The Lord shall smite you with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart.

The Lord was always willing to bless Israel. But the Lord is not limited to blessing the rebellious and unrepentant. He can, has, and will discipline His people when they require it. The account in Deuteronomy continues in the next chapter:

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this talk I cite the Restoration Edition of the scriptures, and use *Covenant of Christ* for quoted passages rather than *The Book of Mormon*.

Deuteronomy 9:4

And it shall come to pass, when all these things have come upon you — the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you shall call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and shall return unto the Lord your God, and shall obey his voice according to all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul — that then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of yours are driven out unto the outermost parts of heaven, from there will the Lord your God gather you, and from there will he fetch you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it, and he will do you good and multiply you above your fathers.

The history of the Old Covenant is filled with the Lord vindicating His word. He blesses His people when they are faithful. He humbles them when they are not. But He watches over them throughout, never abandoning them despite their shortcomings.

In 1832, the Lord provided guidance and counsel that would largely be ignored by those living at the time. Although many of the splinter groups that emerged after Joseph Smith's death claim to have remained faithful, history does not support this claim. This was the 1832 warning:

T&C 82:20:

And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received, which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation rests upon the children of Zion, even all, and they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon, and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say but to do according to that which I have written, that they may bring forth fruit meet for their Father's kingdom. Otherwise, there remains a scourge and a judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion, for shall the children of the kingdom pollute my holy land? Verily, verily I say unto you, nay.

The warning was not heeded. We do not need to study volumes of history to know what happened after the Lord required repentance and was ignored. We were provided with an accurate account of the resulting sad history in an inspired prayer offered to ask the Lord to accept our efforts:

T&C 156: 2-5:

We are mindful that in 1832 the gentile saints were condemned for vanity and unbelief because they treated lightly the things they had received, and they were warned by you that they would remain under condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments, not only to say, but to do. You commanded the gentiles that they bring forth fruit meet for their Father's kingdom, and if they failed to do so, there remained a scourge and judgment to be poured out upon those who claimed to be the children of Zion. They failed to bring forth the required fruit, and were judged and scourged, and then violently driven out of Jackson County, Missouri.

You explained there were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires by them; therefore, by these things they polluted their inheritances. But they did not repent, and in their pride they threatened to wage a war of extermination against the Missouri citizens, heedless of your warnings. But it was you who used the Missouri citizens as your hand of judgment to scourge the condemned saints in your attempt to persuade them to repent and no longer treat lightly your word. They still saw no Divine purpose behind their distress, and railed against their Missouri persecutors. Despite their suffering, they were not sufficiently humbled to repent. Instead, they breathed out threats and expressed hope to gain vengeance against the same Missouri mobs to whom you had given power to afflict the gentile saints to inspire them to repent. Because of the hardness of their hearts, the gentile saints were again mobbed and slain, and in 1838 altogether driven out of the State of Missouri, with Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and other leaders, cast into prison and condemned to die. But you were merciful, and did not suffer Joseph, Hyrum, or any of those imprisoned with them, to be killed. In your mercy, the surviving saints and the imprisoned leaders were able to obtain refuge in Illinois, whose people welcomed the saints, and a season of peace followed.

In 1841 you mercifully extended another opportunity to the gentile saints to repent and return, and you approved Joseph's offering and acknowledgements of the past failures of the saints when he petitioned you on their behalf. You found the prayers of Joseph and the gentiles were acceptable before you, and you granted to the saints another chance for you to recover them as your people. As you stated to the former gentiles, 'There is not a place found on earth that you may come to and restore again that which was lost unto us, or which you had taken away, even the fullness of the Priesthood. You offered and intended for a house to be built unto your name in which you deigned to reveal to your people things which have been kept hidden from before the foundation of the world, things which pertain to the dispensation of the fullness of times. You gave to them sufficient time to build a house unto your name, warning them to complete the work or their baptisms for the dead would be unacceptable.

In those days, you warned the people you will not perform the oath which you make, neither fulfill the promises which they expect at your hands, or in other words, you would remove your covenant if they failed to do what you commanded. And you foretold what you would do unto the people if they neglected to do the work assigned them. You warned, For instead of blessings, we, by our own works, would bring cursings, wrath, indignation, and judgments upon our own heads, by our follies, and by all our abominations, which we practice before you. You foretold that at the end of this appointment our baptisms for our dead shall not be acceptable unto you; and if the gentiles did not do the things you commanded, at the end of the appointment we would be rejected as a church, with our dead, said the Lord our God. But the secret works of darkness multiplied, and the gentile follies did not end, and they practiced secret abominations in violation of your commandments and in defiance of your warnings.

From this, we know the Lord did not abandon the early saints of this latest dispensation. He instructed and warned them. He let them decide how they would react. When they failed to repent, the natural consequences of misconduct were tragic. This was intended to reclaim them by humbling them.

Next, this scripture came to mind:

Abinadi in Mosiah 7:8:

Go and tell this people, this is what the Lord says: Woe to this people. I've seen their abominations, wickedness, and whoredoms! Unless they repent, I'll punish them in My anger. Unless they repent and turn to the Lord who is God, I'll let their enemies overpower them; indeed, they'll be brought into slavery, and be punished by their enemies. They will know that I Am the Lord their God — a God who requires faithfulness, punishing My people for their iniquities. Unless these people repent and turn to the Lord who is God, they'll be brought into slavery; no one will set them free except for the Lord the Almighty God. When they cry to Me, I'll be slow to hear their cries. I'll let them be killed by their enemies. Unless they repent in sincere humility and regret, and honestly ask the Lord their God in faith to forgive, I won't hear their prayers or save them from their punishment. This is what the Lord says and this is what He's commanded me to say.

Later, we learn that Abinadi's warning was not heeded. Then the Lord disciplined the people with the terrible consequences just as He had Abinadi prophesy:

Alma 14:14

Clearly Abinadi's prophecy regarding the priests' descendants was fulfilled, words he said before he suffered death by fire. Because he said to them: What you do with me after this will be the same fate you will suffer. Now Abinadi was the first executed by fire because of his belief in God. And this is what he meant, that many would suffer death by fire just like him. He told Noah's priests that their descendants would cause many to be put to death in the same way he was, and they would be scattered widely and killed, as a sheep without a shepherd that's driven and killed by wild animals. Now these words were confirmed, since they were driven, hunted, and struck down by the Lamanites.

There was a cause and effect. The Lord's foresight was vindicated, and the suffering could have been avoided had the people repented.

We have another example from Enos describing his people in Enos 1:6: And we had a great many prophets, but the people were stubborn and hard to persuade. Nothing kept them from destruction except for blunt and unequivocal language preaching and prophesying about wars, conflicts, and destruction, and constantly reminding them of death and the length of eternity and God's judgments and power — all this continually threatening them to keep them in the



fear of the Lord — I say there was nothing except for unmistakable blunt language that could keep them from quickly being destroyed. This is how I would describe them.

Following Enos, a century and a half later, Nephite history records the Lord did not abandon but continued to discipline and guide His people:

Omni 1:3:

For the Lord — after He had led them out of the land of Jerusalem and protected and kept them from falling into their enemies' hands — wouldn't allow the words He told our forefathers fail to be proven true, having said that to the degree you don't keep My commandments, you won't prosper in the land. Therefore the Lord punished them according to His justice.

They were warned, failed to repent, and reaped the consequences. It is a predictable cycle that happened repeatedly in both the Nephite and Jaredite dispensations. Now we have a dispensation underway and the opportunity to give heed to the Lord, or to reject His instructions. If we heed Him, one story unfolds, and if we reject His counsel, a different story will befall us.

Answer to Prayer T&C 157:55-56:

But I require a statement of principles to be adopted by the mutual agreement of my people, for if you cannot do so, you will be unable to accomplish other works that I will require at your hands. When you have an agreed statement of principles, I require it to also be added as a guide and standard for my people to follow. Remember there are others who know nothing, as yet, of my work now underway, and therefore the guide and standard is to bless, benefit, and inform them — so I command you to be wise in word and kind in deed as you write what I require of you.

Do not murmur, saying, Too much has been required at our hands in too short a time. If your hearts were right, it was a light thing I have asked. You hinder and delay and then you say I require too much of you and do not allow you time, when, if your hearts were right and you prepared yourselves, you could have finished this work long ago. Do you indeed desire to be my people? Then accept and do as I have required. (Emphasis added.)

From these words, we know there are other works He will require of us, and He has warned us that we will be “unable to accomplish other works [He] will require at [our] hands,” so we know greater demands are going to be

imposed. Will our continuing disputes and arguments require the Lord's disciplining hand to be imposed on us as has been previously needed for His people in times past? What should we be doing to prepare for the other works, the greater demands? What physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental skills will be needed to accomplish what God will require of us? How are we preparing ourselves in these ways for the coming difficulties? We know we have been told to "reason together" but we do not have that skill. Reasoning requires give-and-take, respect and trying to understand another point of view. It requires patience and development of skills, critical reasoning, and thoughtfulness. Most of all it requires attentive listening that lets us understand one another.

We were warned in the covenant He made with us:

Covenant T&C 158:19:

But if you do not honor me, nor seek to recover my people Israel, nor teach your children to honor me, nor care for the poor among you, nor help lighten one another's burdens, then you have no promise from me and I will raise up other people who will honor and serve me, and give unto them this land, and if they repent, I will abide with them.

This warning serves as a reminder that we are expected to obey and contribute to furthering the Lord's work. He will help. He will labor beside us as the allegory of the olive tree states in Jacob 3:27: "Then the servants went ahead and worked hard, and the lord of the vineyard also worked with them. And they obeyed the lord of the vineyard's direction in all things." This is the prophecy. But it will not be fulfilled by lazy servants who will not "work hard" and "obey the [Lord's] direction in all things." If you do not want other people to replace you, then you must be obedient.

What did the Lord command us to do in 1831, and which remains our obligation still today?

T&C 46:2

Wherefore, I give unto them a commandment, saying thus: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your might, mind, and strength, and in the name of Jesus Christ you shall serve him. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. You shall not steal, neither commit adultery, nor kill, nor do anything like unto it. You shall thank the Lord your God in all things. You shall offer a sacrifice unto the Lord your God in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

And in the Covenant of Christ, we are commanded to do the same things that are reiterated in the Answer to Prayer for Covenant:

3 Ne. 14:1:

Listen all you Gentiles; hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, which He commanded me to write about you. He commands me to write this: Turn away, all you Gentiles, from your wicked ways and repent of your evil deeds, your lying and deceiving, your whoredoms, your secret abominations and idolatrous ways, your murders, priestcrafts, envying, and strife, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come to Me and be baptized in My name, so you can receive a remission of your sins and receive the Holy Ghost, so you can be included with My people of the house of Israel. (See also T&C 158:10.)

There were many more scriptures that came to my mind, including: 2 Ne. 8:6-7:

Watch this happen: the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah His word, the inspired voices and ordinances of salvation, the prophet and prophetess, the priest and priestess, wisdom from the counselors, knowledge from the teacher, and they'll be left without prudence, insight, and understanding. He'll let their boys lead them, babies will govern them. The people will oppress one another, everyone abusing their neighbor. Young people will bully the elderly, and those without status will bully the honorable. When a man will grab ahold of his brother in his father's house, and say: You at least have a cloak, you lead us and get us out of these ruins — but he'll protest, saying: I have no remedy, for in my house I have no food or clothing; don't think I can be your ruler. Jerusalem staggers and Judah has fallen because what they say and what they do fights against the Lord, defying Him in front of His glorious presence. The look of their faces shows their defiance, they parade and celebrate sins like Sodom, and they don't hide it. Woe to them, for they've provoked disaster for themselves. Tell the righteous that it will be well with them, for they will be spared for their righteousness. Woe to the wicked, for their defiance will be repaid.

And as for My people, the youth oppress you, foolish women control you. O My people, those who lead you bring you confusion and away from My path. The Lord stands up to

announce His judgment against the people. The Lord will accuse the elders and leaders of His people, announcing: It's you who've wrecked My vineyard and taken the property belonging to the poor into your houses. How dare you do this? Why do you crush My people and hit the poor in their faces, demands the Lord God of Hosts. The Lord adds: The women of Zion are uppity, parading with their noses in the air, flirting with roving eyes, strutting with swaying hips, clattering bracelets on their ankles, therefore the Lord will cover their heads with sores and scabs, and the Lord will make these women of Zion bald. In that day, the Lord will strip away their fine outfits, tearing off their earrings, bracelets, astrological jewelry, necklaces, scarves, and the charm bracelets, the wigs and hair extensions, anklets, girdles, perfumes, and scents, the sorority rings, and nose rings, the evening gowns, furs, and purses, their mirrors, linen undergarments, lace, and scarves. And then, instead of perfume there will be rot; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of groomed hair, baldness; and instead of expensive clothing, a worn bag; scarring instead of beauty. Their men will fall in battle, and those in the prime of life will die in the war. And her streets will be filled with crying and mourning, and destitute she will sit on the ground.

And this also:

But His people haven't returned to Him who punished them; they reject the Lord of Hosts. Therefore the Lord cut off the head and tail from Israel, palm branch and reed, in a single day. The leaders and teachers are the head, and the lying prophets are the tail. The guides of this people mislead them, and those who follow stumble in the dark. Therefore the Lord will have no sympathy for their young men, nor pity the orphans and widows; for every one of them is a hypocrite and ungodly, and every mouth speaks foolishness. Despite this His anger remains, and His control over everything remains intact.

Wickedness burns like a fire destroying weeds and thorns, and sets ablaze the forests, rolling forward like a pillar of smoke. It's the wrath of the Lord of Hosts that scorches the land and the people become fuel for the fire; they won't spare one another. On the right hand they gobble up but remain hungry, on the left they eat but are never satisfied. They'll eat their own families — Ephraim eating Manasseh's, and Manasseh eating Ephraim's —

and together they eat Judah's. Nevertheless, His anger remains, and His control over everything remains intact.

Woe to those who make unjust laws, and to those who issue oppressive orders, subverting the rights of the poor, denying justice and imposing tyranny, victimizing widows and orphans. What will you do on the day of judgment, when disaster comes from far away? Where will you run for help? Where will you hide your riches? You'll have no choice but to cower among the prisoners or be killed with the others. Despite this His anger remains, and His control over everything remains intact. 2 Ne. 9:13-15.

And this also from the Lord to us:  
2 Ne. 11:17-18:

He commands there to be no priestcrafts. Priestcrafts are when preachers set themselves up as a light to the world, so they can make money and receive praise from the world, but they have no desire for Zion to advance. The Lord has forbidden priestcrafts. So the Lord God has commanded everyone to have charity — that is, love — and unless they have charity, they're nothing. As a result, if they had charity, they wouldn't allow those who labor in Zion to waste away. But laborers in Zion must work for the good of Zion since they'll perish if they work only for money. Again, the Lord God has commanded people not to murder, not to lie, not to steal, not to misuse His name, not to envy, not to hate, not to fight with each other, not to commit whoredoms — not to do any of these things. Because whoever does them will perish, since none of these iniquities come from the Lord. Indeed, He does what's good among mankind. And He doesn't do anything without it being clear to mankind. He invites everyone to come to Him and share in His goodness and doesn't deny anyone who comes to Him, black or white, enslaved or free, male or female; and He remembers those who don't worship Him or know anything about Him. All are the same to God — Jews and Gentiles.

But in the last days or in the time of the Gentiles, every nation of Gentiles and Jews — both those who come upon this land and those who live on other lands, indeed, on every land throughout the earth — will be drunk with iniquity and all kinds of abominations. And when that day arrives, the Lord of Hosts will send thunder, and earthquakes, and loud noises, and storms,

and tempests, and uncontrolled fires. And all the nations that fight against Zion and interfere with her will be like a mere dream of the nighttime. It will be to them like a hungry man who dreams that he ate his fill, but when he wakes up he remains hungry. Or like a thirsty man who dreams he gets a drink, but when he wakes up he's still thirsty and starving and he craves relief. Yes, this is how it will be for all the people who fight against Mount Zion. Those of you who commit iniquity, stop and marvel; you'll cry out and wail. You'll be drunk, but not with wine; you'll stagger, but not with hard liquor. The Lord has poured out a spirit of deep sleep upon you. You've closed your eyes and rejected the prophets, and He's taken away your teachers and seers because of your iniquity.

There were more, but I hope these scriptures are enough to teach the point. We are obligated to heed the Lord. We only have two choices: either to learn by precept or through sad experience. If we learn by precept, then we listen and follow the Lord. But, when we reject the Lord's counsel and ignore His warning, then we learn through sad experiences. Based on the recent communication with the Lord, it appears we will need, and are going to learn, from sad experiences.

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After this part of the Lord's message ended, the Lord then taught that in the beginning, in the first generations of the patriarchal fathers, they learned that faith, hope, and charity described the character and attributes of God. In *Lectures on Faith*, Joseph Smith taught the School of the Prophets:

T&C 110: Lecture 3:2-4:

Let us here observe that three things are necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation.

First, the idea that he actually exists.

Secondly, a correct idea of his character, perfections, and attributes.

To have a correct idea of God's character, we must recognize that God is the embodiment of faith, hope, and charity. Anciently, those were understood as God's attributes, and therefore, godliness required mankind to

likewise have faith, hope, and charity.<sup>6</sup> If God did not have faith, he could not lead prophets to prophesy, nor could He have covenanted to have people at His return whose unified hearts will welcome His coming:

Malachi 1:12:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall seal the heart of the Fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their Fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The Lord needed to have faith that He will send Elijah and accomplish this promised event. We have every reason to have faith in God's promise, but God likewise had faith to make the promise. If we believe in and trust the Lord, then we ought to have faith in His promises. Here is another promise from the Lord for what is to happen:

T&C 58:3:

[I]n the barren deserts there shall come forth pools of living water and the parched ground shall no longer be a thirsty land. And they shall bring forth their rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim, my servants, and the boundaries of the everlasting hills shall tremble at their presence, and there shall they fall down and be crowned with glory, even in Zion, by the hands of the servants of the Lord, even the children of Ephraim, and they shall be filled with songs of everlasting joy. Behold, this is the blessing of the everlasting God upon the heads of the tribes of Israel, and the richer blessing upon the head of Ephraim and his fellows. And they also of the tribe of Judah, after their pain, shall be sanctified in holiness before the Lord, to dwell in his presence day and night, for ever and ever.

The faith of our Lord will cause these hope-filled events to happen! These words should also enable us to share in God's hope for His people. What a glorious picture this presents for us! Imagine being filled with songs of everlasting joy after being crowned with glory in Zion. Faith shared with the Lord, in turn, lets us likewise share in God's hope for these future scenes to happen.

Faith, hope, and charity are godly attributes, and we are invited to share in them. Again, the Lord has said:

T&C 31:14-15:

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<sup>6</sup> This understanding of God's attributes is far more ancient than either Paul's (1 Cor. 1:53) or Mormon's (Moroni 7:1) and goes back to the time of the Patriarchs. Both Paul and Mormon drew their teachings from much earlier times.

And with one heart and with one mind gather up your riches that you may purchase an inheritance which shall hereafter be appointed you, and it shall be called the New Jerusalem, a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety for the saints of the Most High God. And the glory of the Lord shall be there, and the terror of the Lord also shall be there, insomuch that the wicked will not come unto it. And it shall be called Zion.

And it shall come to pass among the wicked that every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety, and there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven, and it shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another. And it shall be said among the wicked, Let us not go up to battle against Zion, for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible, wherefore we cannot stand. And it shall come to pass that the righteous shall be gathered out from among all nations, and shall come to Zion singing with songs of everlasting joy.

Here, a second time, the Lord mentions “songs of everlasting joy.” The faithful completion of God’s promises makes those who will be there rejoice with songs of joy.

The scriptures often testify to God’s power to accomplish His will. For example:

T&C 166:3:

The Lord has brought about His purposes. This has been in His heart all along. He has chosen to use small means to accomplish it, but he always uses the smallest of means to fulfill His purposes.

Isaiah 15:21:

Remember this and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure — calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executes my counsel from a far country. Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

Mormon 4:3:



For the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on until all his promises shall be fulfilled.

It is by faith God has given His word unto men beforehand, and it is through God's hope that He foresees vindicating His word through weak vessels and flawed men. He sees the end from the beginning through faith, acting with hope for the outcome while leaving mankind free to choose for themselves if they will obey and succeed, or disobey and fail:

2 Ne. 7:5:

[T]he Lord remembers all those who have been broken off; consequently, He remembers us also. So be of good cheer and remember you're free to act for yourselves, to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life. So, my dear people reconcile yourselves to God's will, not to the will of the accuser and the flesh. And remember that after you're reconciled to God, it's only in and through God's grace that you're saved.

However, God's faith is based not merely on foreknowledge. It is based on the understanding that some part of mankind will choose to follow, elect to obey, and decide to be faithful to Him. We have agency and the right to make our own decisions. We must justify God's faith in us by having faith in Him. That interrelationship between God's faith as a moving principle of action and our reciprocal faith and trust in Him brings hope. To understand hope, we need to define what it is, on what basis it exists, and the effects flowing from it.

It should seem beyond question that for God to exist at all, it requires that He has the freedom to act independently. His freedom to act, like our own, is required for existence itself. Without that ability to act, there is no existence but only an inert object to be acted upon without any sentience or choice. We have this revelation from 1833:

T&C 93:10:

All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise, there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man, because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light, and every man whose spirit receives not the light is under condemnation.

For mankind's existence, it is required for intelligence (singular) to become intelligences (plural). As I explained in *Beloved Enos*:<sup>7</sup>

When organized into separate personalities, the intelligence changes from the singular to the plural. With this change comes creation (or organization) and as a result, mankind came into being. Joseph further reveals that in order to exist we had to have the freedom to choose. Without that freedom we would not exist at all. We would still be singular, uncreated and without an existence. "All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence." (D&C 93: 30, emphasis added.) There is no existence unless we are free (and able) to choose for ourselves.

Our existence flows from God's intelligence. We were created from it. But to exist we must be independent from God. How, if we are part of God and emanated from Him, can we ever be "independent" from Him? This paradox is also solved by Joseph Smith. He brought the nature of eternal life, or the kind of life God has into a whole new dimension. It's true we have always had Paul's teaching: "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord." (1 Cor. 11: 11.) But this ambiguous statement has had no particular meaning for Christianity, which disavowed eternal marriage and practiced a "till death do you part" form of marital relationship for those who chose to be married. Traditional Catholic theology preferred celibacy, insisting upon it for priestly service. Joseph, on the other hand, poured meaning into this statement in a way which was unprecedented in mankind's then existing memory.

Joseph referred to a "new and everlasting covenant" involving eternal marriage and eternal increase. Speaking of heaven, Joseph wrote, "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase." (D&C 131: 1–4.) Eternal life is most correctly referred to by Joseph in revelation as "eternal lives." This is because in Joseph's revelations marriage implies children and continuing creation in the afterlife. "Therefore, if a man

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<sup>7</sup> *Beloved Enos*, Millcreek Press (Salt Lake City), 2009.

marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world. Therefore, when they are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory. For these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever.” (D&C 132: 15–17.) In the revelations given through Joseph Smith, creation is ongoing and meant to be shared by those who follow God’s plan.

The intelligence out of which we were created might just as accurately be referred to as the “word” or the “thought” of God. In Genesis 1: 3 we read: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” God speaks light into existence. Or we might describe it as God imagining or conceiving light into existence. Since we are made of light, or truth, or the glory of God, it would be equally true that He conceives or imagines us into existence. It was both a creative act and an act of faith for God to conceive of us. As the *Lectures on Faith* put it: “[F]aith is not only the principle of action, but of power also, in all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth. Thus says the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (11: 3): ‘Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.’ By this we understand that the principle of power which existed in the bosom of God, by which the worlds were framed, was faith; and that it is by reason of this principle of power existing in the Deity, that all created things exist; so that all things in heaven, on earth, or under the earth, exist by reason of faith as it existed in HIM. Had it not been for the principle of faith the worlds would never have been framed, neither would man have been formed of the dust. It is the principle by which Jehovah works, and through which he exercises power over all temporal as well as eternal things. Take this principle or attribute - for it is an attribute - from the Deity, and he would cease to exist. Who cannot see that if God framed

the worlds by faith, that it is by faith that he exercises power over them, and that faith is the principle of power? And if the principle of power, it must be so in man as well as in the Deity? This is the testimony of all the sacred writers, and the lesson which they have been endeavoring to teach to man.” (Lectures 1: 13–17, emphasis added.) Elsewhere he added: “it is by faith that the Deity works.” (Lectures 7: 1.)

It is absolutely essential to the process of “creation” or “conceiving” for God the Father to have a female consort or Mother God. If we were the product of only one mind’s thought, or word, or intelligence we could never act independently of the one mind. Everything about the conceived individual would be under the exclusive control of the one mind. Therefore such an individual would be wholly predictable and subordinate in all of its acts to the single mind. Only when two are jointly conceiving an individual does it become possible for the individual conceived to be independent of control. So long as both have input, neither one can fully control what the personality will choose to do. The life’s choices, the story-line, the events and decisions of any given personality cannot be fully controlled by either the Father or the Mother when both are allowed to create, conceive or organize the personality. Intelligences require parents in the plural; otherwise they could not acquire independence of thought.

When the Father and Mother hold the thought (or word, or intelligence) long enough, with faith in the existence of this new creation, while neither one is fully controlling the individual intelligence, then existence becomes possible. The person has everything necessary to exist in her own right. It becomes possible for the intelligence to make her own choice. Only when the intelligence accepts that right and makes a choice freely, without control by the Father and Mother, does the intelligence begin to exist. “All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.” (D&C 93: 30.) It was an act of faith by God the Father and His consort to cause the intelligence to be conceived or organized. But it requires an act of faith on the part of the intelligence to exercise her own free will to accept its creation. Unless she is free to act by making her own choice and actually does so, there is no existence.

It is difficult for created or organized intelligences to have faith in their autonomy from God, their Heavenly Parents, while they

are in the presence of their Creators. They have difficulty even imagining such a thing. Christ first took this step in the pre-mortal realm. Christ showed the way for others to follow. He began the process of accepting and acting by faith, independently, proving for the rest of us the “Word” of God. We had faith in the Father’s “Word” because Christ demonstrated it to be true. We acquired the faith to follow the Father because Christ’s example. It does no disservice to our Heavenly Parents to attribute to Christ the whole of our existence. Heavenly Parents organized our intelligences, but it was Christ alone who proved the Word of God was faithful and true. This is why John could testify: “The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him. And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us. And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first.” (D&C 93: 10–14, emphasis added.)

We began to accept our existence, began to act independently in the sphere in which we were placed. We were able to do this because of our faith in Christ’s original example of faith. Christ led, we followed. He is correctly called our Father, even before we were born. He was the Word of God incarnate. What the Father said was possible, Christ proved by being the living example. We owe everything to our Heavenly Parents for conceiving us in the first place. But we also owe everything to the Son, who proved by faith that we could all exist. This made possible our own faith and our own independent consciousness.

Faith is an independent power beginning with God. Faith is what controls, organizes or creates all things. “It surely will not be required of us to prove that this is the principle upon which all eternity has acted and will act; for every reflecting mind must know that it is by reason of this power that all the hosts of heaven perform their works of wonder, majesty, and glory. Angels move from place to place by virtue of this power; it is by reason of it that they are enabled to descend from heaven to earth; and were it not for the power of faith they never could be ministering spirits to them who should be heirs of salvation, neither could they act as

heavenly messengers, for they would be destitute of the power necessary to enable them to do the will of God. It is only necessary for us to say that the whole visible creation, as it now exists, is the effect of faith. It was faith by which it was framed, and it is by the power of faith that it continues in its organized form, and by which the planets move round their orbits and sparkle forth their glory. So, then, faith is truly the first principle in the science of THEOLOGY, and, when understood, leads the mind back to the beginning, and carries it forward to the end; or, in other words, from eternity to eternity. As faith, then, is the principle by which the heavenly hosts perform their works, and by which they enjoy all their felicity, we might expect to find it set forth in a revelation from God as the principle upon which his creatures here below must act in order to obtain the felicities enjoyed by the saints in the eternal world; and that, when God would undertake to raise up men for the enjoyment of himself, he would teach them the necessity of living by faith, and the impossibility there was of their enjoying the blessedness of eternity without it, seeing that all the blessings of eternity are the effects of faith. Therefore it is said, and appropriately too, that ‘Without faith it is impossible to please God.’ If it should be asked-Why is it impossible to please God without faith? The answer would be-Because without faith it is impossible for men to be saved; and as God desires the salvation of men, he must, of course, desire that they should have faith; and he could not be pleased unless they had, or else he could be pleased with their destruction.” (Lectures 7: 4–7, emphasis added.)

We could not develop the kind of faith God has while living in His presence. We got as far as possible there, but to go further we needed another experience or form of existence. Since the Father wanted to move His children as organized intelligences/personalities to a higher form of existence, a Great Plan needed to be employed. The Plan required God to create the circumstances in which it is possible for these personalities to develop the faith necessary for a higher form of existence. We learn from Joseph Smith’s revelations that we are in that stage of development right now.

Joseph points us to Job for an account of our reaction when we learned the news of this Great Plan regarding our mortal experience. Job wrote of the moment when we heard we would have an opportunity to come live by faith while God remained

veiled: “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38: 4–7.) Joseph assured us we all “shouted for joy” at the news announcing this mortal life and explaining its purpose. Joseph revealed a more complete account in Abraham 3, where we read: “Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.” (Id., vs. 22–26.) We needed this second opportunity in a new existence to develop and to be “added upon.” We lacked vital understanding which could only be gained by the physical experiences here. (*Beloved Enos*, pp. 15-24, footnotes omitted, internal scripture citations as in the original.)

I quote this to remind you of how we first obtained existence so that we could then, independent of our Eternal Parents, obtain faith. However, because of our existence, there is also the possibility for God to have faith in us and, in turn, to have hope. Hope is linked directly to faith. Mankind has faith in God and in His promises to us. Our confidence in His promises is what makes our hope possible. As defined in the *Glossary*, hope means:

Something far greater, more profound, more strongly felt, more firmly based than just expectancy from vague desire. Hope

involves unshakable faith or confidence. Hope comes from “many revelations and the spirit of prophecy” and is based upon “witnesses” coming from beyond the veil to confirm the expectations. It causes faith which is “unshakable.” It is hope which is powerful, controlling, and causes a thing to come to pass because it is now their right to receive the thing promised. God has conferred that right upon them. Hope is more than a wish, as it requires one to secure a promise from God. It requires one to be at rest — secure in the knowledge the Lord has promised a glorious resurrection. Hope is waiting for the time of the Lord’s promise to be fulfilled. Hope describes the state of mind of the recipient during the time interval after the promise, but before its realization. Hope involves unshakable faith or confidence. It is a concrete assurance, based upon a promise or covenant. Hope comes from knowing the Lord has promised one something. As sure as God’s word cannot fail, one’s hope is secure in Him. But men and women only obtain that hope from Him by getting Him to make a promise to them. (Footnotes omitted.)

This describes the basis for mankind’s hope but leads to the question: Upon what is God’s hope based? Would it not necessarily be on that same principle as mankind’s hope? And if so, then what does it require for future events to become a fixed hope in God?

We must conclude that if our hope in God is based upon our faith in Him, God’s hope in our fulfillment of prophecy, promises, and covenants must likewise be based on the same principle of faith. Our hope is predicated upon our confidence in God. It follows, therefore, that God’s hope is predicated upon His confidence in us.

Before this creation, some of God’s sons (and their companions) were identified as “noble and great” and correspondingly also “Gods” before the world was organized. These were chosen before they were born to accomplish work for the benefit of others. They were to be sent into the world, not to be proven or tested, but instead to participate in proving or testing others. They were already known to be true and faithful to God and His plan of salvation.<sup>8</sup>

From this, we can know that God’s hope for the completion of the events needed to fulfill His oaths, covenants, prophecies, and promises rests

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<sup>8</sup> This subject is better understood if you remember what was included in the essay *First Three Words*, which can be found in the book *Essays: Three Degrees* (Millcreek Press, Salt Lake City, 2013) with the relevant discussion beginning on page 21 and running through the end of the essay. It can also be read on my website as a downloadable pdf, with the relevant discussion beginning on page 14 and going through the end of the document.



upon God's faith in other Gods (the noble and great) who covenanted with Him before the world was organized. He had the confidence and hope that in proceeding with this creation, it would be possible to redeem it and save the souls of mankind sent to live in it. Just as God knew before the world was created that Jesus Christ would deliver it from ruin by His faithful fulfillment of His promises, God likewise knew before the world was created that His servants sent to accomplish other promises would also keep their obligations to Him.

So, God's hope is predicated upon promises made by Gods before creation and rests on the same principle as our hope in God. God has faith in the Gods He recognized as being His sons before this cycle of creation in this world. As Joseph taught about these sons of God:

“Now,” says God, when He visited Moses in the bush, (Moses was a stammering sort of a boy like me) God said, “Thou shalt be a God unto the children of Israel.” God said, “Thou shalt be a God unto Aaron, and he shall be thy spokesman.” I believe those Gods that God reveals as Gods to be sons of God, and all can cry, “Abba, Father!” Sons of God who exalt themselves to be Gods, even from before the foundation of the world, and are the only Gods I have a reverence for. (*DHC*, 6: 478; *TPJS*, p. 375.)<sup>9</sup>

The reason for God's hope is His confidence in the covenants made with the sons of God who exalted themselves before the foundation of the world. He trusts them to help with the work of redeeming mankind. Because of them, He is willing to make promises to mankind, trusting they will be kept. This hope underlies His ability to inspire prophecy. God's hope in the completion of His plan of redemption is grounded in God's faith in the noble and great ones He chose before the world “to fulfill and do the work of the Father's covenants”<sup>10</sup> He made with mankind.

God has faith, which justifies His hope in the same way that mankind can have faith in God and hope in His promises. It is the same in this existence as it is in eternity, and in all things, there is a type and shadow.

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<sup>9</sup> This helps clarify reason for the claim of Satan, as a deceiver, from the Genesis account: “And Satan cam among them, saying, I am also a Son of God.” (Gen. 3:5.)

<sup>10</sup> Moroni 7:6. This refers to ministering angels, but remember the definition of an “angel” from the *Glossary*: “For he that receives my servants receives me (T&C 82:17). The word ‘servants’ in this context means ‘angels.’ Angel is derived from the Greek word *aggelos* [ἄγγελος] which means ‘messenger.’ The messenger must bring a message from the Lord. It does not matter if the messenger is mortal. The word describes a category of messenger that includes not only pre-mortal and post-mortal spirits, but also living men. When anyone, man or angel, is entrusted with a message from God, the message is God's. God makes no distinction between the messenger and Himself.”

By this we understand that the principle of power which existed in the bosom of God, by which the worlds were framed, was faith, and that it is by reason of this principle of power existing in the Deity that all created things exist — so that all things in Heaven, on earth, or under the earth, exist by reason of faith, as it existed in him. (T&C 110: LoF 1:15.)

God's faith is not limited to confidence in Himself alone but extends to His confidence in His Sons. I believe God had faith in Joseph Smith to found a dispensation of the gospel. As Joseph said of himself: "Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council." (TPJS, p. 365)

This, in turn, leads to God's attribute of charity. It is by charity that God acts to reprove and correct mankind. He uses small means to urge us to righteousness, but when we fail to heed, He uses suitable means to accomplish His ends. This has included dreams to warn (see, e.g., Gen. 9:35, 1 Ne. 1:6, Matt. 1:9, T&C 172, and many others), droughts to distress (see, e.g., Haggai 1:2, Helaman 4:3, and others) wars to destroy (see, e.g., Joel 1:14, 1 Ne. 3:18, Helaman 4:1, Matt. 11:7, Ecclesiastes 1:10, among many others), and plagues (see, e.g., Zechariah 1:40, Mosiah 7:12, Revelation 6:9, T&C 85:3, among many others) to humble in times past. But in every instance, it is through charity, or the pure love of Christ, that informs the means chosen. For it is His "work and [His] glory: to bring to pass the immortality and the eternal life of man." Gen. 1:7. These are tools deliberately employed to accomplish God's will to humble and redeem mankind. It demonstrates God's charity for mankind. It reflects the righteous prayer of Nephi, son of Helaman:

Helaman 4:11:

And may God in His infinite wisdom do whatever is required for mankind to be led to repent and do good works, so they can be restored to grace for grace based on their works. I want all mankind to be saved.

A loving parent cannot abandon or ignore their duty to correct and discipline their child. As stated in Proverbs 1:10: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction; for whom the Lord loves, he corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delights."

And in Hebrews 1:52, it is explained:

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him, for whom the Lord loves he chastens,

and scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? But if you are without chastisement whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they truly for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

God's care and concern for us are shown by His correcting and chastening of us as it is needed. This is how we experience God's charity toward us. As the Lord promised Enos:

Enos 1:2:

[T]he Lord's voice came into my mind again, saying: I'll bless or punish them according to their diligence in keeping My commandments. I've given them this land, and it's a holy land; and I'll only curse it because of iniquity. Therefore I'll bless or punish your people just as I've said, and bring their transgressions down with sorrow on their own heads.

Sometimes, because there are wolves who will destroy the work of God, He chooses to end the lives of His opponents. Alma wrote this:

Alma 3:11:

Now all of you that wish to follow the voice of the Good Shepherd: Come and separate yourselves from the wicked and don't touch their unclean things. Their names will be erased, dividing the names of the wicked from the names of the righteous, so that God's word will be fulfilled, which says: The names of the wicked won't be mixed in with the names of My people; because the names of the righteous will be included in the Book of Life, and I'll bestow upon them an inheritance at My right hand. Now, my people, how can you criticize this? I tell you: If you speak opposing it, it doesn't matter, because God's word will certainly be fulfilled. Indeed, does any shepherd with a flock fail to watch over them to prevent wolves from attacking and eating his flock? If a wolf enters his flock, doesn't he drive it out? And ultimately, if he can, he'll kill it. Now I tell you the Good Shepherd is calling out to you. And if you're willing to respond to

His voice, He'll bring you into His fold and you'll be His sheep. He commands you not to let any ravenous wolf enter among you, to prevent you from being destroyed.

To us the Lord has explained:

The Lord explained to me that “some people are taken and not healed because, in the Wisdom of God that person is ready and if left will recede rather than advance, and some are taken because, if left, would interfere with and delay or hinder God’s purposes for others, and some are given to suffer because it gives them the opportunity to develop in Godly attributes they would not otherwise attain. God’s Wisdom is greater than man’s and sees more than can man. But in all matters there is reason and wisdom in how matters of health, life, and death unfold.” (Website post January 29, 2023, *God’s Wisdom*.)

After learning that the Lord intends to accomplish His work through our group, or at least a remnant that includes some from our group, I was then told that the Lord has given us a name. When the Lord names His people He then commits to work with them, for there is no reason for Him to name what He intends to abandon. Even if the people reject Him, for at least three and four generations the Lord will reach out to recover them. Only when they have altogether gone too far astray will He then end His work with the people He has named, to choose and work with another people. Therefore, the fact He has now named us holds great significance. This is what the Lord has declared:

This is what you shall say to the people: “I give to you a name to distinguish you from others, and you shall call one another by this name: ‘Covenant Christians’ because you have and hold a covenant with me that make you my followers deserving of my protection. But my protection does not only defend, but also corrects, reproves, disciplines and guides you along that you may be mine indeed.”

It is noteworthy that the name given to us by the Lord associates us with the larger Christian world rather than the much smaller “Mormon” world. Disassociating us from the Mormon world needs to happen because the two largest denominations are no longer true to the foundation. Between the abominable creeds adopted by the LDS church, and in turn, by its many daughters, and the Community of Christ’s declining regard for the Book of

Mormon, they have both abandoned the original restoration.<sup>11</sup> That suggests to my mind that the people who will ultimately be “gathered unto [Zion] out of every nation under heaven, and ... shall be the only people that shall not be at war one with another”<sup>12</sup> will include other faithful people recognized by the Lord. People who can live in peace with one another, without rancor or jealousy, fear and defensiveness will undoubtedly exclude some of us and include some outside this present body of believers. Currently, we are plagued by fear, anxiety, defensiveness, judgment, discord, anger, intolerance, a lack of desire, and capacity for doing the work God has asked us to do. (See T&C 157:3, 5, 10, 16-20, 49, 53-54, and 58; T&C 158: 4-5.) Many have openly stated their unwillingness to engage in the work and lack the desire to understand one another. There is little to commend us as a people of Zion.

We can learn by precept. That requires us to not only listen to but also to heed the things the Lord says to us. Giving heed does not mean we argue with one another about some particular statement, phrase, or verse, using a teaching to justify our opinions, perceptions, or errors. Giving heed requires us to submit, obey, and respect the Lord’s words as if they are meant to condemn and correct us personally. They are not intended to equip us to criticize our neighbor or justify our ignorant opinion. Seeing the flaws in others is easy. It requires nothing of us. Seeing our own flaws seems to be impossible. The words of the Lord are precepts or teachings intended to bring you down in humility so you can meekly submit to His guidance in all things, not just the things you care about.

Alternatively, we can choose to fail by not heeding the Lord’s precepts, instead enduring sad experiences that remind us of our own lowliness. None of

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<sup>11</sup> This corruption was prophesied in Joseph’s last dream: “I was back in Kirtland, Ohio, and thought I would take a walk out by myself and view my old farm, which I found grown up with weeds and brambles, and altogether bearing evidence of neglect and want of culture. I went into the barn, which I found without floor or doors, with the weather boarding off, and was altogether in keeping with the farm. While I viewed the desolation around me, and was contemplating how it might be recovered from the curse upon it, there came rushing into the barn a company of furious men who commenced to pick a quarrel with me. The leader of the party ordered me to leave the barn and the farm, stating it was none of mine and that I must give up all hope of ever possessing it. I told him the farm was given me, and although I had not had any use of it for some time back, still, I had not sold it, and according to righteous principles it belonged to me. He then grew furious and began to rail upon me, and threaten me, and said it never did belong to me. I then told him that I did not think it worth contending about, that I had no desire to live upon it in its present state, and if he thought he had a better right, I would not quarrel with him about it, but leave. But my assurance that I would not trouble him at present did not seem to satisfy him, as he seemed determined to quarrel with me, and threatened me with destruction of my body. While he was thus engaged, pouring out his bitter words upon me, a rabble rushed in and nearly filled the barn, drew out their knives, and began to quarrel among themselves for the premises, and for a moment forgot me, at which time I took the opportunity to walk out of the barn, about up to my ankles in mud. When I was a little distance from the barn, I heard them screeching and screaming in a very distressed manner, as it appeared they had engaged in a general fight with their knives. While they were thus engaged, the dream or vision ended.” T&C 153.

<sup>12</sup> T&C 31:15.

us should be proud, thinking ourselves better than our fellow man. We aren't. We are not even as much as the dust of the earth because the dust we occupy belongs to God.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we should be grateful for every sad experience and recognize that it is for our good. It is necessary because, for whatever reason, we did not learn by precept. God's plan expects we will learn from both. Learning by precept is not better than learning by sad experience. They are both essential teachers. The important part is how we learn by sad experience: Do we blame, judge, avoid, react, offend, ignore, resist, refuse? Or do we take accountability, reason, observe, engage, submit, ask, share, listen, pray, fast?

After being corrected by the Lord, my pessimism about our condition has been replaced. The Lord does intend to make use of some of us to fulfill His will. However, that will not only include blessing and encouraging us but also disciplining and correcting us. I have no idea how joyful or painful the coming journey will be for any of us. I also do not know how many (or how few) will be there when the journey is completed and the promises are fulfilled. I do have an idea that there has been and will continue to be watchful care taken by the Lord to help a few of us along the remaining journey.

In the months and weeks before this conference, there were jarrings, contentions, envyings, strifes, lustful and covetous desires among us. Are we polluting our inheritance? Women have demonstrated that they "lack the ability to respectfully disagree among one another" (T&C 157:3). Ability refers to the quality of being able to do something, specifically the physical, mental, financial, or legal power to accomplish it, as well as a skill, talent, or capacity. That inability in us was identified in the Answer to the Prayer for Covenant, given eight years ago. At that same time, we were told, "there have been sharp disputes between you that should have been avoided. I speak these words to reprove you that you may learn, not to upbraid you so that you mourn." (Id. ¶5.) We have been given the precepts to guide us and are now witnessing and experiencing the natural consequences that follow from our rejection of Divine guidance.

We MUST, but have not, learned to disagree respectfully. We take sides, prejudice, run away from conflict, and prefer being right with man over being right with God. We need to counsel with one another patiently and listen attentively. Some disagreements and differences may take years to work out. We have an "us vs. them" mentality that permeates this movement. It has been on display for years, and is particularly obvious in the weeks leading up to this conference and the women's conference held yesterday. This is the work, and many of you can't tolerate or won't even entertain the idea that God cares

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<sup>13</sup> Mosiah 1:9.

about how we work on our relationships as much or more than He cares about our projects.

I believe we have had this wise but ignored counsel from the Lord for eight years, and have instead interpreted the following words to justify our failure to do any of the actual work required by the Lord:

In the work you have performed there are those who have been Satan, accusing one another, wounding hearts, and causing jarring, contention, and strife by their accusations. Rather than loving one another, even among you who desire a good thing, some have dealt unkindly as if they were the opponents, accusers, and adversaries. In this they were wrong.

You have sought to recover the scriptures because you hope to obtain the covenant for my protective hand to be over you, but you cannot be Satan and be mine. If you take upon you my covenant, you must abide it as a people to gain what I promise. You think Satan will be bound a thousand years, and it will be so, but do not understand your own duty to bind that spirit within you so that you give no heed to accuse others. It is not enough to say you love God; you must also love your fellow man. Nor is it enough to say you love your fellow man while you, as Satan, divide, contend, and dispute against any person who labors on an errand seeking to do my will. How you proceed must be as noble as the cause you seek. You have become your own adversaries, and you cannot be Satan and also be mine. T&C 157:9-10.

We have acted and are acting as accusers. The Lord openly condemns this. He will continue to provide us with personal and collective opportunities to learn, through precept and sad experience, how to gain the necessary wisdom and knowledge to prepare for living in peace with one another. This more recent opportunity was provided by the Lord when He told us:

Let the women call a conference at a suitable time and place convenient to allow interested women to attend. ... let any who want to speak present their concerns. Reason together and draw upon the experiences from those past women's councils. Let the women learn to come to agreement and the voice of that conference decides all matters raised. (Revelation of June 20, 2024, posted on my website on July 19, 2024.)

God gave us an opportunity with the Guide and Standard. It was to provide an experience for a group of people with differences and disagreements to learn and increase their ability to respectfully disagree while

still coming to a mutual concession. Rather than mutually agreeing, we surrendered the fight without achieving a unanimous statement that satisfied everyone. In that, it was a failure. We are failing again. We are so fixated on achieving a result that we fail to realize that the results do not matter; only the process matters. Results should be a byproduct of the process. We hurry through the process to reach the result, never realizing we've discarded the very tool intended to produce people of one heart and one mind, who can live together in peace. How we proceed is critical to succeeding as a people. Results, accomplished through compulsory means, which include peer pressure, refusing to engage, and shaming someone for a desire to stay in the process, cannot and will not bring people of peace together.

Zion is also a byproduct of the process and will never be the result of an achieved goal. Differences and disagreements should not make us enemies or evil. The Lord expects us to learn and grow our ability to respectfully disagree with one another. If we can acknowledge our differences and talk through our disagreements as beloved brothers and sisters who respect each other, we might just experience a remarkable byproduct. But until we are willing to engage in the process, we are only left to endure sad experiences.

No matter how patiently the Lord deals with us, we should not be fooled. When we do not learn one way, we will be disciplined in another way. Past events involving God's people illustrate that when Divine discipline is imposed, many of the people do not survive, and those who do are often humbled by impoverishment, wounded by the violence, and made meek by their hunger and poverty.

It saddens me to think we will not all arrive together. But I also have seen how easily offended some of us have been at things that should be cheerfully endured. We should expect chastening. If we cannot endure God's chastening hand, then we are not worthy of His blessing. I hope that I can prove faithful. But if any of you are there when the Lord brings again Zion, then let your songs of everlasting joy break forth, and the hills tremble at your presence, and God's pavilion spread over you to shield you from drought and hunger, and let your gratitude in God's charity sink deeply into your souls.

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That concludes the talk I was required to present. But I have a few comments to add:

First, I would propose that the following language be approved by your vote to be added as a section to the *Teachings and Commandments*:

This is what you shall say to the people: "I give to you a name to distinguish you from others, and you shall call one another by this



name: ‘Covenant Christians’ because you have and hold a covenant with me that make you my followers deserving of my protection. But my protection does not only defend, but also corrects, reproveth, disciplines and guides you along that you may be mine indeed.

If you are in favor of adding that language, please stand and say “Yes”—thank you, please be seated.

If you are opposed to adding that language, please stand and say “No”—thank you, please be seated.

Second, we have just been through another opportunity to deal with a controversy that divided us. It has required opposing views to be debated. That may not have been as cheerfully conducted as we might have wanted it to have been. But it was another chance to work through a problem. We needed that. So, now, we should look back on how we did individually in the discussions.

Many of us have approached the task of deciding a controversy with fear, and not with cheerful confidence. I am confident that the voice of the people will almost always choose the right outcome.<sup>14</sup> I approach our disagreements with the confidence that, in the end, we will achieve the right outcome. Be encouraged to lay aside your fears, trust the body of believers, and do not lose faith because we have a matter to resolve.

Third, I readily admit that up until this point, my teaching has failed to produce harmony and peace among us. That requires work, serious effort, patient discussion, and critical reasoning. Not enough has been done to develop the skill of respectfully disagreeing. We avoid the work of reasoning together.

There is an astonishing amount left undone, and each year we make very little progress toward completing the remaining work. We certainly have made progress. But with all that is left to be done, we have only made a start. Although there have been a number of important talks, we have hardly begun to be taught everything that needs to be returned.

At times in human history, multiple written languages were used by the same people. The sacred writings were not preserved in the commonly used written form, but instead, the priests used pictographic images for the sacred messages. These were hieroglyphics: the Greek word “hieros” meant sacred and the word “glyphen” meant to carve. The sacred carving was intended to be

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<sup>14</sup> As King Mosiah observed: “Now it’s not common for the majority of the people to want anything contrary to what’s right, but it’s common for the minority to want what isn’t right. So you must observe this principle and make it your law, to do your business by the majority vote of the people.” Mosiah 13:6.

difficult to decipher, in order to preclude common or profane understanding. That system required an oral tradition to preserve the meaning, tell the story, and provide the key of knowledge required to understand the carved pictograph. It would not allow an uninitiated novice who had not been taught the oral tradition to grasp the meaning of the hieroglyph. An image like a horse, for example, might mean a horse. Or it could mean strength. Or it could mean movement. Or it could mean wealth. Or it could refer to a constellation. Or it could be the name of a place, person, town, or people. It could mean an army. However, to understand the meaning of the image, you had first to be orally initiated into the belief system, at which point the image served as a prompt to recall the underlying story.

Assuming Thoth of Egypt is Enoch of the Bible, it was Enoch who began the use of pictograph hieroglyphs as a device to conceal sacred knowledge from the uninitiated. This let sacred information be preserved, while also leaving the unworthy ignorant of what they were unwilling to receive and obey. This division of people into a larger, outer group and an inner, more knowledgeable body has been referred to as the “exoteric” and the “esoteric” church.

In the earliest days of this creation, the open exposure of sacred knowledge led to such inordinate wickedness that God determined to destroy the creation and begin anew. A tradition about Enoch claims he knew the flood would not only destroy mankind, but also knowledge. Rather than allow those who would be preserved through the flood to remain ignorant, Enoch was said to have erected two pillars: one of brick and the other of stone. On these, he engraved enough to preserve the sacred knowledge mankind would need to be saved from ignorance and damnation. To preclude the inordinate wickedness that results when esoteric knowledge falls into the hands of wicked men, Enoch used hieroglyphs to prevent the uninitiated from gaining access to the inner knowledge that is intended only for the qualified who have been approved by God.

This division between the outer and inner is reflected in the Tabernacle of Moses, the Temple of Solomon, and the architecture of the Second Temple. There were areas for the public, and others limited to the priests, and still another limited to the High Priest, and then only one time a year. The temples of the Old Testament show there was hidden knowledge that was unavailable to the public, and the content was excluded from the Bible narrative.

Without knowing anything of the mysteries God has kept from the scriptural record, and hidden behind a veil in this creation, we can be confident that no matter how much we may long for it, or how deeply we search to find it, the inner, esoteric knowledge will forever remain unavailable to the public. But it is God’s intent to restore that for a small group in the last days, before

His return in glory. Because the full extent of this cannot be made public, the revelation will need to happen in the Lord's House. As the Lord explained in 1841:

T&C 141:10-13:

For there is not place found on the earth that he may come and restore again that which was lost unto you, or which he has taken away, even the fullness of the Priesthood.

... I command you, all you my saints, to build a house unto me, and I grant unto you a sufficient time to build a house unto me, and during this time your baptisms shall be acceptable unto me. But behold, at the end of this appointment, your baptisms for your dead shall not be acceptable unto me. And if you do not these things, at the end of the appointment you shall be rejected as a church with your dead, says the Lord your God. ...

And again, verily I say unto you, how shall your washings be acceptable unto me except you perform them in a house which you have built to my name? For, for this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was. Therefore, verily I say unto you that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, and honor, and endowment of all her municipals, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name.

And verily I say unto you, let this house be built unto my name that I may reveal my ordinances therein unto my people, for I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fullness of times. And I will show unto my servant Joseph all things pertaining to this house and the Priesthood thereof, and the place whereon it shall be built.

The people living in 1841 were offered the fullness, oracles, ordinances, and conversations by the Lord. They would not receive it. They bickered,

fought for power and influence, and diverted resources away from the temple to construct their own houses. They engaged in abominable sexual sins, lied to conceal it, and conspired to spread their lustful conduct by attributing it to Joseph and Hyrum. They proved themselves utterly incapable of the serious discipleship necessary to obtain the Lord's trust. We are not distinguishing ourselves from them.

If we should ever be able to build a temple, it will fulfill this prophecy of Isaiah, which Christ quoted to the Nephites: "O you afflicted, storm-tossed, and suffering one, know that I will provide a foundation as sturdy as rock and beautiful as sapphire. I'll make your towers more valuable than rubies, doors that are precious, surrounded by heavenly designs upon the walls." (3 Ne. 10:3) Christ immediately followed this quote from Isaiah with the admonition:

Now I tell you that you ought to carefully study these things. In fact, I give you a commandment to study these things diligently, because Isaiah's prophecies are critical. He clearly focused his prophecy on My people who are part of the house of Israel. Therefore, he necessarily prophesied about the Gentiles. And everything he prophesied has happened, or will happen, precisely as he foretold. (Id. ¶4.)

We resist instruction. We would rather fight over things that injure our pride than welcome and accept what the Lord offers. As we were told by the Lord in 2019: "I reminded you that you do not understand the glory to be revealed unto my covenant people." (T&C 177:2.) Although I have tried to get you interested enough to cooperate with the Lord so as to allow Him to fulfill that offer to us, I acknowledge my failure. We have been overtaken by a distracting, false, and prideful spirit that hinders and delays the enormous work remaining to restore all things. We do not yet have even the possibility of building the Lord's House. Although the Lord has provided everything necessary to accomplish that project, we do not have suitable candidates, and we lack the necessary means. We have some interest, and perhaps even a longing, but we lack the thirst and humility to acquire the skills necessary to reason together and resolve our differences amicably.

If we continue on in the next few years the same as we have done for the last decade, we may gain increased understanding, yet more inspired instructions from the Lord, and be blessed by His gentle guidance. But right now, it seems unlikely to me that we will be able to reach the finish line to fulfill the prophecies, vindicate the covenants, and welcome the Lord's return. So, I would ask us all to be more easily entreated by the Lord. To be easily persuaded, eager to respond with alacrity, humble, meek, and repentant. I

cannot help but feel we should already have those qualities, feel the urgency, and readily align ourselves with the Lord's will.

I refuse to act the part of the strongman. I will confine myself to teaching and hope to be persuasive. But you must rise up and willingly accept the burden of discipleship. I do not want you to follow or obey me. I want to persuade you to follow Christ and to take seriously what He asks of us. We need to stop fighting and start reasoning together as if we reflected the image of God. We need to behave more like our Lord and less like His adversary.

The work to prepare people for the Lord's glory is imposed on every disciple. I can only improve myself. I can do nothing to improve you. But you have the power to individually rise up and qualify for the glory to be revealed. Or you can choose instead to lapse into petty arguments, prideful disputes, and more wasted time.

When I was in high school, the debate class had a single proposition that would be debated for a year. Teams would research both sides of the proposition. In any single debate, the team might argue for the proposition or against it. The assigned side would not be disclosed until moments before the debate began. As a result, debate teams needed to understand both sides of the matter well enough to persuasively present arguments from either vantage point. The high school students realized that they could not decide the question personally, because if they aligned themselves with one side, they would not be effective in arguing against it when called to do so. So they suspended judgment during the year. When the class ended, the students were free to decide how they would resolve the matter. However, their opinions were often influenced by the year-long discussions in ways that refined their understanding far beyond where they originally stood.

That debate experience introduced the students involved to critical reasoning. It made them thoughtful. It required them to suspend judgment and to instead consider what would support and what would undermine the question. Those skills are missing among us. We need to be able to discuss, understand, and weigh both sides of an argument being debated. We need to reason carefully, suspend judgment, and listen for the strengths and weaknesses of a question. Instead, we tend to decide everything for ourselves quickly, without respecting there is always another side to the matter. Instead of patiently improving we judge and dismiss each other. We use disagreements to condemn one another. We are at our ugliest when we disagree, and we should instead be models of patience and charity, recognizing fractures are inevitable and treating them as opportunities to understand one another. That seems like a distant goal, presently over the horizon and out of our sight. But we are pointed in the right direction. It may remain a long journey, but we are clearly moving. As long as there is any sign of growth in the Lord's vineyard, He will

tend it and let the growth develop. So, press on, in faith believing, cheerfully confident that we matter enough to the Lord that He has now given to us a name. That is a milestone none of us expected.

Finally, although we are small, we are far stronger than other congregations or denominations. We are equals, entrusted with making joint decisions, and required to struggle over things that other bodies of believers surrender to leaders who adopt and enforce decisions. Our frailties are on display. Theirs are hidden. We have a chance to grow into a harmonious body that can live in peace. We aren't there yet, but we are clearly working on it. Others are not, and indeed cannot. Their unequal status precludes what ours requires. We are often bruised, bleeding and in pain, but once healed are strengthened by the ordeal. Other faiths are only superficially at peace with one another, but it will be impossible to gather them into a body of one heart, one mind, having all things in common, with no poor among them. We may not be able to do that at present either. But, we are actually working on it. And now we know that if we need discipline, affliction, difficulties and challenges to help us along, the Lord has now assured us that He will discipline us. He will be attentive, and not neglectful; so we should expect to be corrected by sad experiences whenever we neglect to learn by precept.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.