

# *The Perfect Mousetrap*

By Denver C. Snuffer, Jr. © 2025

‘If you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door;’ or so the saying goes. The saying has wrongly been attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson. It captures the idea that when you find a creative solution to a problem, the solution will be recognized and appreciated. That idea drives problem solving and innovation.

A perfect mousetrap would capture every one and allow for no escape. The adversary who opposes us treats us like vermin to be destroyed. It is the devil’s objective to develop the perfect mousetrap. His trap is designed to obstruct salvation.

People fall victim to individual weaknesses: pride, lust, sloth, ignorance, and appetites of the flesh. That sort of retail sin is so common place that it is unremarkable. But religious societies also fall victim to wholesale corruption, which is where the adversary does his greatest damage. When the religions go astray, churches become spiritually genocidal. That is the constant target of the adversary.

He largely achieved this in Enoch’s time, with only a small city escaping. As for everyone else outside that city, “he beheld Satan, and he had a great chain in his hand, and he veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced.” (RE Gen. 4:15.)

Historic Christianity has fallen for their perfect mousetrap. The devil so completely trapped Christianity that the Lord’s evaluation in 1820 was that “they were all wrong” and their “professors were all corrupt.”

Something absolutely new was needed, and the restoration began. Within twenty-nine months vanity and unbelief “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[.]” (T&C 82:20)

From there, every one of the restoration churches<sup>1</sup> have in turn fallen for the perfect mousetrap designed for them. They have hierarchies. Hierarchies attract aspiring men. Men have risen to positions of authority who are uninspired and uninspiring. They are trapped in the same design as Historic Christianity and offer nothing better than now teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.

We present a new and different challenge to the adversary. Therefore, at present a perfect mousetrap is being tailored for us. I’m hoping this talk will help us avoid being captured by it:

Zion is not a goal, an achievement or a destination. It is apparently only possible as a by-product. There is no precedent that I am aware of where people settled on Zion as a goal to be accomplished and then succeeded. That is because if people think it is their goal, then anything that frustrates the goal is thought to be opposition, needing to be condemned. Fellow believers become opponents to one another. Instead of being “one” the opposite happens. Once sides are taken, each can point to the other as the problem. The “other” is responsible for preventing Zion. In this fear of missing out on Zion, distress and anger increases and everyone in your way becomes an enemy.

It is an invidious, and surprisingly successful way to divide people and create schisms. We go to war against anything seen as an impediment to

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning every one of today’s churches that claim Joseph Smith as their founder.

the goal of Zion. Discussion and resolution are impossible. Instead the society degenerates into accusing one another of being contentious, and the minions of Satan because ‘contention is of the devil.’

When there is finally a society capable of living in harmony with one another, Zion will follow in due course as a natural by-product of that society. If it could be achieved as a goal at a chosen location, then earlier, better people would already have accomplished it. Generations have come and gone hoping to see it return, and have not done so. We are no better than other failed utopians, and cannot do better than the past failures, until we begin to acquire the necessary traits and skills that allow authentic harmony to thrive and grow.

We have recently seen an upheaval among the women, which has bled out community wide. There has been no real resolution of the issues. Interestingly, there were basically two viewpoints, and both were relying on scripture to support their position in the disagreements. I was uninvolved but curious about the outcome. It abruptly ended with a vote that, as a byproduct, confirmed the women’s voice in favor of no longer discussing difficult issues. That, of course, is a product of misunderstanding our duties to one another.

When two opposing sides have scriptural support for their conflicting positions, it parallels the encounter between the Lord and the devil. In Matthew’s account, it records in part: “Then Jesus was taken up into the holy city, and the spirit set him on a pinnacle of the temple. Then the Devil came unto him and said, If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down, for it is written: He shall give his angels charge concerning you, and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again: You shall not test the Lord your God.” RE Matt. 2:6.

The devil quoted RE Psalms 91:1: “there shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands lest you dash your foot against a stone.” Christ responded quoting RE Deu. 3:2: “You shall not test the Lord your God, as you tested him in Massah.” The opposing sides of our Lord and a fallen angel are clear. Yet scripture was used to support both the devil’s request and the Lord’s response. If nothing else teaches us to be cautious about how we employ scripture, this ought to, and jar us into taking greater care. The devil may well be a better scriptorian than you, and, if so, may win the argument.

It is perhaps this very kind of proof texting of scripture that underlies the Lord’s caution to us: “Take care how you invoke my name. Mankind has been controlled by the adversary through anger and jealousy, which has led to bloodshed and the misery of many souls. Even strong disagreements should not provoke anger, nor to invoke my name in vain as if I had part in your every dispute.” (T&C 157:54.) It would be wise to consider that we should take care how we invoke scripture in our disagreements. Maybe also to consider taking great care not to invoke scripture in vain as if it took our part in every dispute.

I am quite confident about this community’s familiarity with scripture. Some of you are dedicated students of scripture. But there is reason to be concerned that we, like the devil, use scripture to support our side of an argument when the intent of the material we quote was only to help us measure our own behavior, govern our own thoughts, and control our own discipleship. Perhaps when we extend scripture outside of that role, to insist we are right in an argument, or more clearly when we are ‘proving’ someone else is wrong, we have a form of godliness but deny its power to shape our thinking. It makes one wonder about the fearful and

terrible possibility that we, like those of Joseph's day, claim for doctrine the commandments of men. That sobering thought frightens me, and I hope you would let it sink deep enough into your heart to frighten you.

The scriptures deserve careful study. But that study should be to correct ourselves, not to persuade others they must agree with us. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by an appeal to authority, whether it is priesthood authority or how we interpret scripture. That happens only through persuasion, pure knowledge, and humility. Persuasion is only a tool, not a commandment to go about imposing your views on others. Remember, "the Lord could have disputed every day of His life with someone. He deliberately chose to not contend. He was not an argumentative personality." (T&C 174:2.)<sup>2</sup> Some minds don't need to be changed, and some cannot be changed. There is a difference between 'persuasion' and 'persuading.' We engage in the process of persuasion, but may frequently fall short of persuading. When our efforts fall short of persuading, we have no authority structure that allows us to impose an outcome on others. Failing to persuade is to be expected. No artificial deadline that appeals to a vote can ever remedy the failure to persuade.

We need to be familiar with scripture. Scripture ought to fill our thoughts. Ideas should originate in our discoveries in scripture. When we search the scriptures only to find what supports our argument, we are going in the opposite and wrong direction.<sup>3</sup> At that point the scriptures no longer

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<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, He clearly defended His position when challenged and accused of wrongdoing.

<sup>3</sup> On August 10, 2010 (while still a member of the LDS church and therefore the citations are all to the LDS scriptures chapters and verses) I wrote this on my website: **2 Nephi 29: 4-5**: "We tend to see those with whom we differ as enemies. But the Lord does not want us to approach religious disagreement in this way. Instead he would have us 'recover' them. He says: 'ye have cursed them, and have hated them, and have not sought to recover them.' As Joseph Smith's History recounts, his persecutors ought 'to have treated me kindly, and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me.' (JS-H 1: 28.) That is the only way to obtain agreement - persuasion, gentleness, meekness and love unfeigned. (D&C 121: 41-42.) Instead of 'holding a court' against someone, we ought to preach the Gospel to them and teach them the truth with love and meekness. It is clear the Lord is showing by example how our attitudes ought to be displayed with those who persecute and reject us. But, then again, He taught the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5, 6, 7) and in how He lived (John 8: 10-11) and died (Luke 23: 34). Oddly we would convict and excommunicate the adulterer, but our Lord would not. Nor

speak to us, but we are asserting authority over them and others to gain control of the discussion.

Throughout Christ's mortal ministry, He was continually challenged and condemned by religious leaders using scripture. According to their use of scripture He violated the Sabbath<sup>4</sup>, blasphemed<sup>5</sup>, failed to respect Abraham's descendants' chosen status<sup>6</sup>, and was repeatedly regarded as unclean<sup>7</sup>. Because we know Christ as the Son of God, we can accept a different understanding of scripture. But every one of the Pharisees' criticisms had support in the Law of Moses. An accuser of the brethren<sup>8</sup> does not need to invent a new basis to condemn others. They only need to misapply scripture externally as a weapon against others rather than letting the scriptures counsel and correct them internally. Joseph Smith taught to the Relief Society: "The devil has great power to deceive; he will so transform things as to make one gape at those who are doing the will of God."<sup>9</sup> In that same talk he cautioned the sisters to, "beware of self-righteousness and be limited in the estimate of your own virtues, and not think yourselves more righteous than others[.]"<sup>10</sup> His warning and counsel then would be good advice to heed today.

Using scripture to address the problem, define the problem, and highlight the problem ironically will not solve the problem. It just clarifies how each

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does He who holds the greatest claim to condemn the Jews condemn them. Instead He says we ought to have gratitude for their pains, labors and diligence.

"What does our ingratitude merit us? It merits us judgment. For the same judgment we apply to them will in turn be applied to us. We will see it used as the basis for His rejection of us: 'I will return all these things upon your own heads; for I the Lord have not forgotten my people.'

"Being a religious people is fine; but being a self-righteous people has always been perilous. It is no different today. **We should use the scriptures to inform our inner life. It is meant for internal use only. External application is likely to cause burning.**" (Emphasis added.)

<sup>4</sup> A violation of RE Lev. 12:2.

<sup>5</sup> A violation of RE Lev. 24:16, punishable in death.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., RE John 6:14, T&C 171 TSJ 6:18.

<sup>7</sup> See RE Lev. 10:4

<sup>8</sup> A term used to identify Satan in RE Rev. 4:4 and extended as a warning to us in T&C 157:8-9.

<sup>9</sup> See, Address to Relief Society, April 28, 1842 at *TPJS*, p. 227; DHC 4:605.

<sup>10</sup> *Id* at p. 228, 606.

individual sees and interprets their own self-righteousness. That approach avoids any recognition of personal failures or misunderstandings.

When the Lord explained to Joseph Smith that the Christian churches were a failure, He stated bluntly: “those professors were all corrupt, that, They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.” (T&C 1: JS-H Part 1: 2:5.) The Christian churches had the Bible, and the Bible was how they learned of Christ. But they used the scriptures to teach for doctrines the commandments of men, because they were unable to penetrate the meaning. They substituted their own doctrines in place of the Lord’s. This led to imposing commandments of men. This was a pantomime of godliness, inauthentic, artificial, a mere imitation. It was not godliness itself. However, all of their creeds were based in scripture. Other Christian sects have opposed the entire restoration by claiming that Mormonism was non-Biblical and therefore heretical. God’s work has always been attacked by using, quoting, and employing scripture. We attack one another using scripture to denounce and condemn without any appreciation of the irony involved.

I have taught against the idea of establishing a church, hierarchy, office, or any position that commands respect. The adversary has developed the perfect mousetrap to ensnare the entirety of all social institutions by corrupting the head. That simple plan for corruption has worked to imprison, subjugate, control and enslave both the bodies and minds of mankind ever since Cain introduced the adversary’s system of gaining power. It is a trap that has turned financial, social, fraternal and religious organizations into tools to mislead and entrap the minds and souls of men. In the most benign form, they just distract from salvation through Jesus Christ into some other good cause. In the most malignant form,

they enforce wickedness and subjugation on the controlled population. The single objective is to prevent salvation, and the effect for this world is to preclude Zion.

Look at the churches now in existence. Are they not ALL wrong? If not, then tell me which one is without corruption. The LDS church has adopted the false creed that the “brethren cannot lead you astray.” Of all the creeds that are an abomination in God’s sight, perhaps this one is the most invidious. It has led very good people to uncritically follow men who have become corrupted by the cares of this world. Church hierarchies focus on the needs of the institution which has defeated the central role of Jesus Christ. The leaders of Christian denominations are not necessarily (or all) corrupt in the sense that they mean to do evil; but they accomplish nothing but evil when they follow an institution that teaches doctrines of men and attempt to gain popularity. Adding, subtracting, altering in any material way the teachings of Jesus Christ is all that is needed to interfere with the salvation of men’s souls. Church institutions all contain some measure of Christ’s Gospel. Correspondingly, they all do some good. But they also have not, will not, and indeed cannot bring Zion.

Today every church is filled with professors who are all corrupt. Their corruption varies in degree, but anything less than a living, covenant-based relationship with God is necessarily corrupt. They all profess the words spoken by Christ, but do not perform His works. It makes them just like the hypocrites, scribes, and Pharisees about whom Christ said: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than he was before — like unto yourselves.” There is goodness in churches, and that adds to their mischief. Where can we learn directly from heaven? Where can we find a witness who has peered into the seven heavens? Who has passed the sentinels that guard the way?



Joseph Smith mentioned in his letter of 11 September 1842, “Michael the archangel, the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of diverse angels from Michael, or Adam, down to the present time, all declaring each one: Their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their Priesthood.” (T&C 151:15-16.) That passing mention I believe is related to his reported statement of being caught up to the seventh heaven.<sup>11</sup> Ask yourself; who has passed the sentinel angels who guard the way? Those who guard the way are likely the same souls who served while they were mortal in a role where they authored God’s words that later became our scriptures. Perhaps it is for this reason Joseph Smith taught,

We consider that God has created man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect; and that **the nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments**, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin; and like the ancients, arrives at that point of faith where he is wrapped in the power and glory of his Maker, and is caught up to dwell with Him. But we consider that this is a station to which no man ever arrived in a moment.<sup>12</sup> (Emphasis added.)

I trust Joseph Smith’s explanation and exposition of scripture over all the learned scribes and scholars with divinity degrees, PhDs, and a command

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<sup>11</sup> “John the Revelator was caught up to the third heaven, but I know one who was caught up to the seventh heaven and saw and heard things not lawful for me to utter.” Rollins Lightner, Mary Elizabeth, *Autobiography of Mary E. Lightner* (1818-1913). See also, Carter, Kate B. *Our Pioneer Heritage*; (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958) 5:307; and Andrus, Hyrum, *They Knew the Prophet*, (American Fork: Covenant Communications; 2004) pp. 24-25.

<sup>12</sup> *TPJS*, p. 51, taken from *DHC*, 2:8; from *The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad*, Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Feb. 1834, p. 135

of Hebrew and Greek. It is my view that Joseph kept company with those ancients, and therefore his opinions hold forth a clearer view than others. Their tawdry attempts to compete with and argue against his exposition of scripture holds no sway with me. Like those in Joseph's day, we are among those who "draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." Godliness humbly approaches the Almighty in meekness, and shows compassion on their fellow man. Christ's example of godliness was described to us in a recent revelation: "[He] chose to not dispute. When the definition was given, it was accompanied by the realization the Lord could have disputed every day of His life with someone. He deliberately chose to not contend. He was not an argumentative personality." (T&C 174:1-2.) We are not able to discuss or resolve issues without becoming argumentative, contentious, and emotionally distressed. Emotional immaturity keeps us stuck wrongly believing that discussion, including passionate discussion, is a sin.

We bicker and contend because of our pride and fear. We do not want to acknowledge our failures and weaknesses. We are awful people. We are filthy. The Lord accurately describes us: "You have all been wounded, your hearts pierced through with sorrows because of how the world has treated you. But you have also scarred one another by your unkind treatment of each other, and you do not notice your misconduct toward others because you think yourself justified in this. You bear the scars on your countenances, from the soles of your feet to the head, and every heart is faint. Your visages have been so marred that your hardness, mistrust, suspicions, resentments, fear, jealousies, and anger toward your fellow man bear outward witness of your inner self; you cannot hide it." (T&C 157:49.) When the Lord looks upon me that is how I look. Isaiah described us also, and lamented: "we have sinned, we are all as an unclean thing. And all our righteousness[] are as filthy rags, and we all do

fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” (RE Isa. 24:5.)

Our adversary whispers flattery to us and says ‘we are special. We are chosen. We are better than other people, and are better, even, than our fellow Covenant Christians. Look at the flaws you can see everywhere in others!’ And so the perfect mousetrap is assembled carefully, artfully, until it becomes impossible for there to be Zion in our day.

The devil will pacify us, lulling us into worldly security, so that we begin to say: Everything is fine in Zion; in fact, Zion is prospering. Everything is fine! And so he swindles us, and leads us away carefully down to hell. This is how he whispers in our ears until he imprisons us with his awful chains, from which there’s no rescue. We become imprisoned by death and hell and the accuser; but we will stand before God’s throne and be judged according to our filthy works. Therefore, we will suffer woes because we are at ease in Zion! (See, RE 2 Ne. 12:4.)

Because of the many successful traps religions have fallen prey to, there is no other group with any present hope for Zion. However, we are so far afield from where we need to be that the devil rejoices at our divisions. We already have schisms, and many more are coming. It is not the opposition from outside our small number that threatens us as much as the internal foolishness, ignorance, pride, arrogance, lack of humility and vanity. There is a great deal left to be accomplished. The completion of the restoration has hardly begun. But we have proven to be so weak-minded, vain, prideful and foolish that we continually are veering away from the Lord.

Haste does not produce anything but pestilence. (T&C 50:6.) We want to go to Zion, get to Zion, see Zion, and we wrongly think anything or anyone that delays our determination to get that accomplished is of the

devil. We fall prey to the misconception that someone else is delaying our achievement, when the fault lies inside of us. The Lord has counseled us to, “care for the soul and for the life of the soul. And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience you may possess your souls, and you shall have eternal life.” (T&C 101:6.) We lack the character to be led gently and gradually in character development, choosing instead to be trapped into thinking our fellow Covenant Christians are hindering us. If you can think of the person, or people you blame the most for preventing us from achieving Zion, then you have identified who you need most to learn to love. You won’t ever go to Zion without them. Unless you are of one heart and one mind with them, you are unfit for Zion. Let that idea remind you of just how unlikely it is for us to escape the devil’s perfect mousetrap designed for us.

We are chosen to do a work. But that does not mean anything other than the Lord will work with us to get His work accomplished. In times past when a chosen people veer away from the Lord He has addressed the failure by three means: First, He has led away a small group who will give heed to continue working with them. Second, He has afflicted and sent scourges to humble the people, so they return to Him. And third, He has told them bluntly to repent and given them a chance to respond favorably, which, when they do, reconciles them with Him. If they reject His warning they are “destroyed.”<sup>13</sup> Any of those three alternatives can become ours.

We were given a new way to handle tithes. We gather them to use for the needs among our own people. That direction has been followed by many groups, and lives have been directly blessed by the generosity. To the extent that direction has been followed, our community has obtained a great advantage. The Lord’s instructions are like that. If followed, they are designed to bless us directly. How we have responded in payment and

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<sup>13</sup> “Destroyed” is used as defined in the *Glossary of Terms*.

distribution of tithes has been one of the greatest indications of our faith in the Lord and our hope for one another. However, unlike our successes with tithes, we have not extended our faith, trust and obedience to the Lord's instructions in the way we treat one another. Politely ignoring each other is not a virtue. Suppressing our disagreements as a pretense of fellowship is inauthentic and hypocritical. Covering our disagreements with self-justifying scriptures is hardly resolving disputes. Stifling a needed conversation is not the same thing as having one mind.

Churches amass wealth. ALL of them do. That is why we are taught to immediately divert our tithes to relieve the needs of those among us. And ONLY when there is no need among a fellowship does the donor have the opportunity to assist by using the excess to otherwise advance the Lord's work. Our system of using tithes helps to provide some relief, some mutual assistance, and some small measure of equality. But if we ever succeed in having no poor among us, there are far greater challenges to overcome for Zion to return.

There are greater impediments to Zion than how tithes and wealth are handled by church hierarchies. Churches have men in positions of authority who can decide controversies or resolve conflicts. They form religious societies that are necessarily unequal. In a society of equals, the guardrails that impose order are removed. In a society of equals, all of the dispute resolution, conflict solving and disagreements are addressed by reasoning together.<sup>14</sup> Everyone must negotiate their differences. On July 14, 2017 we were commanded to “reason together” as we bear in mind the Lord's teachings, commandments, precepts, and principles.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Even the Lord humbles Himself to reason together with us. See, e.g., RE Isaiah 1:3; T&C 36:3

<sup>15</sup> T&C 157:45: “what I say unto one I say unto all: I have given to you my doctrine, and have also revealed teachings, commandments, precepts, and principles to guide you, and it is not meet that I command you in all things — reason together and apply what I have given you, and it will be enough.”

Because differences and disagreements are unavoidable, Zion presents a unique challenge. That is why Zion has fled. The challenge of addressing the inequalities that Zion requires has excited thinkers like Rousseau, John Locke, Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Karl Marx, and Nelson Mandela, among others. They may not have envisioned Zion as an end result, but they wanted an equal and open society. They struggled to find a way to accomplish that.

Churches have offices, and offices are presumed to command respect and attention. When speaking from authority, there is no obligation to use gentleness, meekness, persuasion, pure knowledge and love unfeigned because it is an office that commands respect. If the office is presumed to have “authority” then it is always the same outcome: “We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen.” (T&C 139:5.)

Men who crave office, or authority of any kind, and desire to direct others, are some of the “wolves” in our midst. People of that ilk occupy the offices of all the churches, and the adversary knows that a corrupt man who occupies church office will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Moreover, he will prevent those who might otherwise have entered from entering.<sup>16</sup>

It is not necessary to make churches utterly corrupt to damn (meaning “hinder”) the souls of men. It is only necessary to hedge up the way with an error here and a forgotten truth there. That happened throughout the Book of Mormon, and was termed “dwindling in unbelief.”<sup>17</sup> Forgetting and neglecting truth is enough to damn believers. The restoration is

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<sup>16</sup> NC Luke 8:17.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., RE 1 Ne. 3:18; 2 Ne. 11:13-14; Alma 21:2; Helaman 2:34; 5:16; Ether 1:17; Mormon 4:8, among others.

needed to reverse that process. Joseph Smith explained in a letter to John Wentworth that, “We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” T&C 146:29.) We were also told at the same time the Lord accepted our scriptures, that, “you need not think they contain all my words nor that more will not be given, for there are many things yet to be restored unto my people. It is ordained that some things are only to be given to people who are mine and cannot otherwise be given to mankind on earth. You do not yet understand the glory to be revealed unto my covenant people.” (T&C 157:44.)

In a podcast titled *Comprehending, Part 4*, this material was provided:

The gospel is vast, and only the beginning, introductory part of the restoration was established through Joseph Smith. There is still a great deal left to recover. The task is daunting. Unto what can I liken it to help you see it clearly?

I stand beside a great ocean and I cannot convey it to you. I am but a man and all I have is a cup with which to show you. If I labor all my life using my cup I can never convey the ocean to you. Using the limited talent and means I have, and with only a cup at a time, I can never convey enough to allow you to comprehend the ocean’s sheer size. My effort mocks the great ocean because my measure is too modest, comparatively microscopic.

Using a cup, how can I ever portray the depth and pressure of the ocean? How can you ever discover its vast range of temperature in my small cup? How will you understand the relation between temperature and current, or the great power of the ocean’s current? How shall I explain the effect of the

moon on the ocean's tides when I have only a cup to declare it to you? How will the great diversity of both plant and animal life living in the ocean ever be understood when I have only a cup to show you?

In the top 600 feet of the ocean lives 90% of known oceanic animal life, but the ocean is over 36,000 feet deep. Mount Everest rises 29,000 feet, and the ocean plunges down more than 7,000 feet beyond Everest's height. If 90% of the animal life we know lives in less than the top 2% of the ocean, how much life is there in the oceans we know nothing about. Life we have not even a hint exists may thrive in abundance in depths completely hidden from our knowledge.

The grandeur of Christ's gospel makes my capacity to declare it pitiful. I confess my inability, and I fear I can never do enough to help this generation to awaken and arise. If I can help you grasp even a little of it, then let me point you to God who can do the rest. Men cannot utter what you need to learn. I am not capable, and it is not lawful.

*[G]reat and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of his Kingdom which he showed unto us, which surpasses all understanding, in glory, and in might, and in dominion, which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the Spirit, and are not lawful for men to utter, neither is man capable to make them known, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows on those who love him and purify themselves before him, to whom he grants the privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves that through the power and manifestation of the Spirit, while in the flesh, they may be able to bear his presence in the world of glory. (T&C 69:29).*



It is conceit that makes you wrongly believe you know something of God's work. It has been conceit that has motivated some of the schematic divisions by ambitious men and women to inappropriately think they can do better by leading others away. There are still ambitious and foolish people among us who crave the opportunity to lead a following. When such characters succeed, and people depart from us, I let them go in peace and trouble them no more. But the Lord intends to introduce us to the oceans of truth He has in store for those who love Him and purify themselves before Him, to whom He grants the privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves. The Lord requires patience in order for us to possess our souls. The Lord's pace must be accepted. Pushing it forward or pulling it back will not alter it. He does not share our haste. Haste is yet another mousetrap designed by the adversary to exploit a character flaw. None of us understands our circumstances better than the Lord.

If we are free to pursue the truth without an overlord, then we become obligated to seek salvation with fear and trembling before God.

Everyone is free to preach, teach, exhort or expound, and if they fail to impress you then you are under no obligation to honor their "office". You can freely reject. You can freely receive when the truth of a matter becomes "delicious" to you. You can obey God's instructions and be given more or you can elect to depart and go in peace when you do. The Covenant of Christ recounts this lesson: "Those who harden their hearts receive less of His word. Those who don't harden their hearts are given a greater part of His word, until they understand God's mysteries. They can be given God's mysteries until everything is fully known. However those who harden their hearts are given less of His word, until they know nothing about His mysteries. Then the accuser captures them and leads

them by his will down to destruction. This is what the chains of hell mean.” (CoC Alma 9:3.)

We know and have been taught that we cannot be equal if there is an institutional church. If we have an institution, the adversary will never stop in the effort to corrupt it. It will inevitably attract aspiring men. Before long, it will become just another failed effort to honor God, and will instead be used to honor men. That particular dead-end mousetrap does not threaten us because we are not establishing an organization. But the adversary is clever and has devised another perfect mousetrap for our group. Make no mistake, if we have a system that can be corrupted the enemy is clever enough to find a flaw and exploit it. His aim is not our utter corruption, just to gain enough erosion of the group to prevent Zion. He knows a modest change in direction will eventually lead to catastrophic failure. Everywhere we look there are modest changes, small adjustments, clever interpretations, and inventive efforts to avoid following the Lord’s instructions; instructions given to us as a blessing, if they are followed.

Recent discussions among the women have revealed the widely held but mistaken belief that disagreements somehow must be buried to avoid being an accuser. They rely on the revelation in T&C 157:8-9 to support that idea. That mistaken idea prevents the necessary discussions to resolve differences. That, in turn, guarantees failure. It comes from a false spirit pretending to follow God. We should remember to ask:

[W]ho can drag into daylight and develop the hidden mysteries of the false spirits that so frequently are made manifest among the Latter Day Saints? We answer that no man can do this without the Priesthood and having a knowledge of the laws by which spirits are governed; for as no man knows the things of God, but by the spirit of God, so no

man knows the spirit of the Devil, and his power and influence, but by possessing intelligence which is more than human, and having unfolded through the medium of the Priesthood the mysterious operations of his devices — without knowing the angelic form, the sanctified look and gesture, and the zeal that is frequently manifested by him for the glory of God, together with the prophetic spirit, the gracious influence, the godly appearance, and the holy garb, which is so characteristic of his proceedings and his mysterious windings. A man must have the discerning of spirits before he can drag into daylight this hellish influence and unfold it unto the world in all its soul-destroying, diabolical, and horrid colors; for nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the spirit of God. Thousands have felt the influence of its terrible power and baneful effects. Long pilgrimages have been undertaken, penances endured, and pain, misery, and ruin have followed in their train; nations have been convulsed, kingdoms overthrown, provinces laid waste, and blood, carnage, and desolation are garments in which it has been clothed. The Turks, the Hindus, the Jews, the Christians, the Indians — in fact all nations have been deceived, imposed upon, and injured through the mischievous effects of false spirits. (T&C 147:5.)

Joseph has provided us a key. To detect false spirits beware of pretended sanctimony, false piety, and displays of overtly virtuous actions to portray a person's trustworthiness. A little common sense goes a long way. Any one of you should be able to discern between dark and light, lies and truth, or a false façade and real substance. Avoid those who are self-serving, proclaiming their righteousness, or claiming God is on their side

and you **MUST** believe them. None of us are more worthy than another. Truth alone deserves respect, never the individual. None of us are “good.”<sup>18</sup>

We have been trapped by the odd but successful scheme that the adversary has used with success in misleading Covenant Christians into the false idea that any argument is an accusation, and therefore, the participants are accusers or Satan. This false idea has been coupled with a second idea that states it is rare for the voice of the people to choose wrong. By combining these two ideas, we have the perfect trap to imprison the Covenant Christians in a box they cannot escape. Once again the devil is using scripture to justify evil in a fashion not unlike the encounter of the devil with Christ in Matthew. Both times the devil plays the role of scribe to mislead.

The way to peace and Zion runs through “reasoning together.” That requires differences to be thoughtfully and truthfully explained. Differing viewpoints must be supported by the proponents and questions must be permitted and answers given. The only reason to ever trust “the voice of the people” is if the people have thoughtfully discussed the issues. Then ideally the unified voice reflects a wise and well-informed decision. An ignorant united voice is foolish and undeserving of any respect. We need to abandon the phobia of discussing difficult issues with one another. We cannot peacefully avoid one another to produce Zion. We cannot produce a false façade that remains placid until it abruptly turns violent because the façade has proven to be so intolerable that it can no longer be endured.

When you advocate an idea to persuade others, you must allow the idea to be questioned. Even if there is a spirited disagreement, any idea worth

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<sup>18</sup> My last talk explained why the Lord refused to permit Himself to be called “good.” If He wasn’t, then we certainly aren’t.

advancing is worth defending and explaining. This includes allowing your assumptions to be questioned openly and publicly, an obligation that will be explored in greater detail later in this paper. This process isn't for everyone, but if you enter the kitchen of ideas, you must be emotionally mature enough to endure the fire and heat always there. If you choose to stay out of the kitchen, don't then interfere with the cooks who remain engaged in the labor. When some of our fellow-believers are discussing an issue, don't complain and try to suppress their efforts. That only fractures the community further.

I have a daughter who recently advanced ideas that were roundly criticized in a public forum. My wife and I said nothing to defend or support her, because we trusted her ability and knew the experience would benefit her. Parents need to let their children develop character. Husbands need to allow their wives to do likewise. In the end, developing skill, being held accountable, and improving ideas only come as a result of testing, challenging and defending.

Honesty and forthrightness may uncover many disagreements. But knowing they exist and openly discussing them is the only way to peacefully unite. Anything else is a lie, a pretense, and a false façade. That is Satan's tool for leading us carefully down to hell.

The current refusal to discuss issues fails to understand that it is not disagreements that offend God. To the contrary, we are required to "reason together". What offends is anger that leads to violence. Working through disagreements does not require anger. Learning to understand a different point of view does not mean a violent reaction is justified. Occasionally everyone on both sides agrees on a goal or preferred outcome, but they do not understand or even recognize there are different ways to achieve the outcome. No-one wants a divided community. But refusing to reason through a difference of opinion will **GUARANTEE** a

community cannot overcome their division. Only by reasoning together can a lasting and peaceable community emerge from a division.

You need to clearly understand what the Lord is telling us when He cautions against ‘anger leading to violence’ because that was never intended to limit our discussion of problems. Even if the discussion becomes loud and lively, we need to engage with one another. As we do, keep in mind that words are not violence. Yelling is not violence. Cursing and using obscenities is not violence. Sometimes, in a spirited exchange I will search my internal lexicon and decide that an obscenity perfectly captures my intent.

One of my daughters was the only girl to play for the Utah Baseball Academy’s traveling tournament baseball team. When the team failed to use fundamentals they had been taught in a game, afterwards the coach would ask her to stand next to him. Whenever he used obscenities in his appraisal of the team’s performance, he would put his hands over her ears to spare her from the colorful language included in the tirade. I’ve never been offended by colorful language, even if it is regarded as a feeble brain’s attempt to express something forcefully.<sup>19</sup>

Only physical harm, serious injury to the body or death is violence. If all it takes is offending a person’s sensibilities then the whole community becomes subject to the emotional and mental weaknesses of the frailest among us and a robust debate of ideas becomes impossible.

There is a tremendous example of a forthright, spirited and difficult exchange in the Book of Mormon. It recounts communication between two leaders of the Nephites in a trying moment in their history. The letters are recorded in NC Alma 27:4-28:4. The Covenant of Christ

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<sup>19</sup> “Profanity is the effort of a feeble brain to express itself forcibly.” - Spencer W. Kimball, *God Will Not Be Mocked*, October 1974 General Conference address.

version is easier to read, so I quote those letters from there below to point out how they reasoned through their great conflict:

And Moroni was angry with the government because of their indifference to the freedom of their country.

He wrote another letter to governor Parhoron. This is what he wrote: I address my letter to Parhoron in the city of Zarahemla, who is the chief judge and the governor over the land, and to all those who have been chosen by this people to govern and support the requirements of this war. I have some complaints about you. You know you have the obligation to assemble men and furnish them with swords, cimeters, and other weapons to defend against the Lamanites, wherever they trespass on our land. [This is a fact.] Now I tell you my men and I, and Helaman and his men also, have suffered tremendously from hunger, thirst, fatigue, and all the difficulties of defending the people. [Another statement of fact.] But if this were all we suffered, we wouldn't criticize or complain. However, the thousands of our slaughtered people who died by the sword might've been spared if you had given our armies adequate strength and aid. [This is a speculative statement based on his assumption.] Your **great neglect** of us is unexplained. [This is an accusation and an invitation to provide an explanation.]

Now we want to know the reason for your **severe neglect**. We want to know why you are so **thoughtless**. [This is a complaint and accusation based on the experience and assumption Moroni is making.] Can you possibly sit **thoughtlessly** on your thrones while your enemies are spreading death all around you, while they're murdering

thousands of your fellow Nephites? [This is an accusation based on Moroni's assumption that lets Parhoron know clearly why Moroni is angry at him.] The very people who have expected your protection, who have put you in a position of trust to help them? Indeed, you could have sent reinforcements to them to help them and could have saved thousands of them from dying by the sword. [This is an assumption.] But this isn't all. You've withheld provisions from them, while many have fought and bled to death hoping to protect this people. [This is a fact.] And they did this when they were about to die from hunger because of **your absolute neglect** of them. [This complaint is based on the fact of neglect coupled with the assumption Parhoron is responsible for the failure.] Now, my dearly loved people (because you ought to be loved by us), you should've acted more diligently to care for and protect the freedom of this people. But **you've neglected them, so much so that the blood of thousands will come upon your heads for vengeance.** [This assumes culpability and willfulness in the failure.] Indeed, all their cries and suffering were seen by God. Could you possibly think you could sit on your thrones and because of God's great kindness **you could do nothing** and He would save you? [Mixture of assumption and conclusion.] If you have believed this, then you believed in vain. Do you think that because so many of your fellow Nephites have been killed, it's because of their wickedness? I tell you: If you have believed this, then **your belief is wrong.** [By making this tentative using "if" it is a challenge for Parhoron to clarify what is happening and why.] I tell you: There are many who have died by the sword, and it



**condemns you.** Because the Lord tolerates the righteous being killed so His justice and judgment can come upon the wicked. Therefore there's no need to think the righteous are lost because they're killed; on the contrary, they enter the rest of the Lord their God.

Now I tell you: I'm very fearful God's judgments will overtake this people because of their indifference and neglect, **including the indifference and neglect of our government and their abandonment of their fellow Nephites** who have now been killed. If it weren't for **the wickedness that began at the top of our government**, we could have defeated our enemies, and they wouldn't have gained any power over us. [All of these are assumptions, but justified in the absence of any correcting disclosure to Moroni.] We've been punished because of our own warring between ourselves caused by the kingmen, which resulted in so much slaughter of ourselves. We were fighting among ourselves instead of uniting our strength as we had before. We were divided by the ambitions of the kingmen for power and authority to control us. Instead of being true to the cause of our freedom and joining with us to fight against our enemies, they took up their swords to fight against us. This was what caused so much slaughter among ourselves. If we had instead gone together to defend ourselves with the Lord's strength, we would have defeated our enemies, since God had promised us that is what would happen, and His word would certainly have been fulfilled. But now the Lamanites attack us and are murdering our people with the sword, including our women and children, and removing them as prisoners, afflicting sorrow, distress, and pain, and taking our lands; and this is a

result of the great wickedness of the kingmen who are attempting to seize power and authority. [This recital of history lets Parhoron know that Moroni understands the events that led to the overall Nephite weaknes.]

But why should I say very much about this? Because it **appears likely to us you are the ones attempting to seize authority.** It appears likely you are also traitors to your country. [Here is an assumption that from Moroni's vantage point seems "likely" to be the case.] Or have you **neglected us** because you're in the heart of our country and surrounded by security, and that's the reason you don't have food sent to us, as well as men to strengthen our armies? [Another assumption to explain Parhoron's failure.] Have you forgotten the commandments of the Lord your God? Have you forgotten our ancestors were slaves? Have you forgotten the many times we've been rescued from our enemies? Or do you imagine the Lord will repeatedly save us as we **idly sit on our thrones** and fail to use the resources given to us by the Lord? Will you sit complacently surrounded by thousands of people, even tens of thousands who join **your complacency**, while there are thousands around the borders of the land who are dying by the sword, wounded and bleeding? Do you imagine God will consider you guiltless while **you do nothing but watch** these things? [All these are assumptions communicated clearly by Moroni to let Parhoron know his thinking.] I tell you: No.

Now I want you to remember God said to first cleanse the inner vessel, and then the outer vessel afterward. Now unless you repent, and start actively sending food and men to us and

also to Helaman, so he can maintain the parts of our country that he has regained, and so we can also recover the rest of our lands in these parts, we should stop fighting the Lamanites until we've first cleansed our inner vessel, including the top of our government. Unless you start doing what I ask and begin to show me the true spirit of freedom and make the effort to help and support our armies and give them the necessary food for their survival, I'll leave some of my freemen to maintain this part of our land. I'll leave the strength and blessings of God upon them, so no other power can work against them — and I'll do this because of their great faith and their patience in their tribulations — and **I'll take the fight to you.** [This is a clear statement of Morni's desperate plan, and not just a threat.] And if there are any among you who have a desire for freedom, if there's even a spark of freedom remaining, **I'll incite insurrections against you,** up until all those wanting power and authority are dead. [This again is a clear statement of how Moroni plans to solve the problem.] I'm not afraid of your power or authority, but it's God whom I fear. It's to obey His commandments that I take up my sword to defend the cause of my country. And it's because of your iniquity we've suffered these losses. [Another assumption about Parhoron's conduct, resulting in him condemned for "iniquity."]

[What follows is Moroni's clear message about consequences that follow from his disclosed assumptions about Parhoron.] It is time, this very moment, that unless you start defending your country and your little ones, **the sword of justice won't just threaten you, but it will strike you down in punishment, and you'll be destroyed.** I'm waiting for

assistance from you. Unless you resupply us, I'll come against you, right to Zarahemla, and **I'll strike you with the sword**, and end all your power to interfere with this people's defense of our freedom. Indeed, the Lord won't let you live while **your increasing iniquities are causing the destruction** of His righteous people. Can you possibly believe the Lord will spare you and punish the Lamanites, when their ancestors' traditions have caused their hatred? And that hatred has grown because of those who have split from us. **But your iniquity is because of your love of glory and worldly things of no lasting value.** You know you're breaking God's laws, and you know you're **trampling them underfoot.** The Lord has told me: If those whom you've appointed as your governors don't repent of their sins and iniquities, you must go up to battle against them.

Now I'm obligated, based on the covenant I made, to keep the commandments of God. Therefore I ask you to obey God's word and immediately send some provisions and men to me, and to Helaman as well. If you refuse, I'll immediately come against you, because God won't let us die from hunger. Therefore He'll feed us with your food, even if the sword must be used. Now see that you obey God's word. I am Moroni your chief captain. I don't seek power, but to pull it down. I don't seek the world's honor but the glory of God and the freedom and prosperity of my country. And so I close my letter. (Emphasis added.)

What a great example of candid, honest and forthright communication of Moroni's position, understanding and needs. He leaves no room for

doubt. It is the paradigm of clarity with every one of his assumptions set out for Parhoron to address. He uses the words and phrases like: -great neglect, -severe neglect, -absolute neglect, -thoughtlessly, -you could do nothing, -condemns you, -idly sit on your throne, -complacency, -I'll take the fight to you, -I'll incite insurrections, -I'll strike you with the sword, -you'll be destroyed, -your increasing iniquities, -your love of glory and worldly things, and -you're breaking God's laws. Parhoron could not have received a more clear communication. Moroni did not attempt to soften his words. He wanted to be clearly understood. This letter was included in the Book of Mormon text as an example for a reason. We know Captain Moroni is held up as a paradigm of virtue and leadership. He led the stripling warriors and has such high, even mythical regard by readers that we overlook this letter as we consider his example. It should not be overlooked.

In response to the letter, Parhoron wrote back:

Soon after Moroni had sent his letter to the chief governor, he received a letter from Parhoron the chief governor. This is what it said: I Parhoron, the chief governor of this land, send this to Moroni, the chief captain over the army. I tell you, Moroni, I have no pleasure in your great difficulties; they distress me. [This responds directly to an assumption that is wrong.] But there are some who are pleased by your troubles. [This confirms the underlying problem Moroni suspects.] There is a rebellion underway against me and against all the freemen. Our opponents are very numerous. They have attempted to remove me from the judgment seat, and have caused all of the resulting difficulties by their iniquity. Their rhetoric and deceit have confused and misled many people to sympathize with them, resulting in our many difficulties. They

have interfered with resupplying you, and have intimidated our freemen so that they haven't joined you. [This is to correct the assumptions and provide a clarifying explanation of the reasons for Parhoron's failure to resupply the army.] I've been exiled and have fled to Gideon with as many men as I could. [This completely restates the conditions Parhoron is facing.] From here I've sent a proclamation throughout this part of the land. People are flocking to us daily, with their weapons, in defense of their country and their freedom and to pay back our wrongs. Indeed, so many have joined us that those insurrectionists now face stiff resistance; they're now afraid of us and don't dare start the battle against us. But they control the city of Zarahemla, and they have appointed a king to now rule. He has written to the Lamanite king and made an alliance with him. As part of their alliance, he has agreed to hold and defend the city of Zarahemla, expecting that will enable the Lamanites to conquer the rest of the land. He anticipates he will be appointed king over this people after they're conquered by the Lamanites. [Now the correction of Moroni's assumptions redefines the entire situation and shows both Moroni and Parhoron are facing identical challenges.]

**Now in your letter you have criticized and judged me, but it doesn't matter. I'm not angry, but am pleased by your patriotic heart. [There was nothing in the criticism or judgment that upset Parhoron, because they were based on assumptions, and all that is needed is to address and correct the assumptions.]** I don't seek power, only to retain my judgment seat to protect my people's rights and liberty. I stand firmly in the liberty that God has given us.

[What follows is Parhoron's proposed course of action now that both men understand each other and the truth about their circumstances.] Now we will oppose wickedness, even to the death. We wouldn't kill the Lamanites if they would stay in their own land. We wouldn't kill our fellow Nephites if they didn't rise up in rebellion and lift their sword against us. We would submit to the burden of slavery if God's justice demanded it, or if He commanded us to do so. But He doesn't command us to put ourselves under the control of our enemies, but to put our trust in Him and He'll rescue us. Therefore **my dear brother Moroni**, let us resist evil. And any evil we can't resist with our words, including rebellions and defections, let us resist with our swords, to preserve our freedom, so we can have joy worshiping in our congregation and obeying our Redeemer and our God. Therefore come quickly to join me with a few of your men, and leave the rest in Lehi and Teancum's charge. Give them orders to follow God's Spirit in conducting the war in that part of the land, for that's the very spirit of freedom within them. I've sent a few provisions to them, to feed them while you come to aid me. Recruit any force you can while on your march here; and we'll immediately go against those defectors in God's strength, directed by the faith we share. We'll take Zarahemla, get control of provisions, and then relieve Lehi and Teancum. We'll strike them with the Lord's strength, and put an end to this sinful rebellion.

**Your letter made me rejoice, Moroni.** Because I was a little worried about what to do, whether it was right for us to attack fellow Nephites. However, as you said: Unless they repent, the Lord has commanded you to go against them. See

that you bless Lehi and Teancum in the Lord. Tell them not to be afraid, since God will protect them, and all those who stand firmly in the liberty God has given us. Now I end my letter to **my dear brother Moroni**. (Emphasis added.)

The response from Parhoron does not include an insecure self-defense. He does not project, nor pretend he has been insulted. He addresses the mistaken assumptions and then he explains the true circumstances to correct Moroni's understanding. And adds, "your letter made me rejoice." He calls him, "my dear brother Moroni" twice in his response. These are two strong-minded men communicating clearly with one another. It is an example of resilient and candid communication about difficult circumstances. There is no communication mousetrap preventing them from dealing directly about needs, assumptions, understanding and positions. We should be capable of conducting such a conversation with each other without taking offense.

Notice that neither one uses scripture to justify their position. These were both men of faith and sound minds. God certainly is part of their concern, and neither one wants to offend God. But they do not couch their position by using scripture to support themselves and to tear down the other person. Although their words are emotional, heartfelt and personal, they addressed the needs, assumptions, and clearly stated their complaints.

We need to develop the abilities to use the same skills as these two men. Their letters are included in the Book of Mormon/Covenant of Christ for our benefit. Learning to do likewise will help us escape the perfect mousetrap being carefully designed for us.

Unlike any other religious society, we have an opportunity to participate with the Lord in His fulfillment of promises, prophecies, and covenants.



The adversary does not rest and just observe our progress. Every one of our character flaws and scriptural misunderstandings, among other things will be exploited to catch us in the perfect mousetrap designed for us. Our pride threatens us. Our self-righteousness is used against us. Our lack of interpersonal skills and emotional regulation is on display. When our divisions turn fellow Covenant Christians into adversaries we are becoming prey to our common adversary.

I've read some of what people believe to be discussing their disagreements. Instead of identifying assumptions, and stating needs, people have used insults, demanded apologies for imagined offenses, employed emotional manipulation, and worn their self-justification on their countenances. Conversations go nowhere. No attempt is made to understand the other viewpoint. No questions are asked and emotional outbursts are hurled at the other side. When things like this happen, progress is impossible. We should all realize that we may well misunderstand the other person and only they can help us. If we give them a chance we can learn that they are not irrational, not our opponent, and not preventing any of us from getting to Zion. The perfect mousetrap being developed for us has begun to catch us in its snare. But if we awake and arise, we can by-pass the trap and emerge stronger, more godly and more unified. It can be an opportunity to advance one heart, one mind, and unify our society. But that requires us to recognize the trap for what it is and what it has succeeded in accomplishing.

The Allegory of the Olive Tree includes these events that we may well see happen:

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. And original fruit again grew in the vineyard, and the original branches began to

grow and produce abundantly, and the wild branches began to be cut off and thrown away. And they kept the root and the top equal based on their strength. This is how they worked with all diligence according to the lord of the vineyard's commandments, until the bad had been thrown out of the vineyard and the lord had saved the good for himself, so the trees had again produced the original fruit. And they became like one body and the fruit was equally good; and the lord of the vineyard had saved the original fruit for himself, which was most valuable to him from the beginning. (CoC Jacob 3:27.)

The key statement in that description of the final preparation of the vineyard for the harvest is the second sentence: And they obeyed the lord of the vineyard's direction in all things. His direction is to accomplish a good thing: restoring something original and valuable. To get there any branch that remains "wild" needs to be cut off and thrown away. What remains will be those whose root and top are equal. So let us reason together to address anything and everything that separates us to obey the Lord's instruction.

May it be so.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.