
Selfishness

D&C 54: Introduction

Church Historian John Whitmer recorded, “At this time, the church at Thompson Ohio was involved in difficulty, because of the rebellion of Leman Copley. Who would not do as he had previously agreed. Which thing confused the whole church.”¹ At issue was a contractual agreement between the New York Saints and Leman Copley, a Church member and large property owner in Thompson, an agrarian community in northeastern Ohio. Copley had entered a contractual agreement to permit the New York Saints to settle on his land. After the Saints had settled, “Copley broke the engagement” and insisted the New York Saints leave immediately.²

In the introduction to Section 54, the word *selfishness* is used to describe the reason Leman Copley broke his covenant and placed the Saints in a precarious situation. Selfishness is defined as a lack of consideration for others and an undue concern for personal profit and pleasure. The opposite of selfishness is sacrifice, which is the giving up of something you want or something you desire for the greater good of others. The Christlike choice is obviously sacrifice. In so doing, there is found the greater reward.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson in his general conference address in October 2006 told the story of his father who understood the great value of sacrifice:

Years ago, when my brothers and I were boys, our mother had radical cancer surgery. She came very close to death. Much of the tissue in her neck and shoulder had to be removed, and for a long time it was very painful for her to use her right arm.

¹ John Whitmer, *History*, 1831–circa 1847, 29. Joseph Smith Papers.

² Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:180.

One morning about a year after the surgery, my father took Mother to an appliance store and asked the manager to show her how to use a machine he had for ironing clothes. The machine was called an Ironrite. It was operated from a chair by pressing pedals with one's knees to lower a padded roller against a heated metal surface and turn the roller, feeding in shirts, pants, dresses, and other articles. You can see that this would make ironing (of which there was a great deal in our family of five boys) much easier, especially for a woman with limited use of her arm. Mother was shocked when Dad told the manager they would buy the machine and then paid cash for it. Despite my father's good income as a veterinarian, Mother's surgery and medications had left them in a difficult financial situation.

On the way home, my mother was upset: "How can we afford it? Where did the money come from? How will we get along now?" Finally Dad told her that he had gone without lunches for nearly a year to save enough money. "Now when you iron," he said, "you won't have to stop and go into the bedroom and cry until the pain in your arm stops." She didn't know he knew about that. I was not aware of my father's sacrifice and act of love for my mother at the time, but now that I know, I say to myself, "There is a man."³

³ D. Todd Christofferson, "Let Us Be Men," *Ensign*, November 2006.