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## A Discussion of Lecture 6: Great Faith Obtained Only Through Personal Sacrifice

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*A Discussion of Lecture 6*

# Great Faith Obtained Only Through Personal Sacrifice

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Robert J. Matthews

**I**t is an honor to be involved with this symposium which is sponsored by the Religious Studies Center and is focused on the Lectures on Faith. It is certainly an important subject and it is appropriate that Brigham Young University should present a symposium and prepare a publication on this topic. The Lectures on Faith are the greatest and most profound treatises on faith that we know of. Although the seven lectures are systematically arranged in a logical way, they are not easy reading, but are worth the effort. The spiritual understanding that is available from the Lectures on Faith justifies many re-readings and invites an intense study for anyone who sincerely wants to know what faith really is. The lectures are a valuable clarification and bringing together of what the scriptures teach about faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The orderly progress of ideas in the Lectures on Faith makes them one of our greatest possessions for explaining a systematic theology. The catechism for Lecture 1 defines “theology” as a “revealed science.” We do not ordinarily think of theology or of religion as a “science,” but it can be so regarded. And if the concepts are given by revelation, theology is the truest of sciences. President Brigham Young called it a “celestial science” (*Journal of Discourses* 6:318; hereafter *JD*). He also said:

We want every branch of science taught in this place that is taught in the world. But our favourite study is that branch which particularly belongs to the Elders of Israel—namely, theology. Every Elder should become a profound theologian—should understand this branch better than all the world (*JD* 6:317).

I am reminded also that the complete title to Elder Parley P. Pratt's popular work, *Key to Theology*, is actually *The Key to the Science of Theology*. In that light I would define the Lectures on Faith as lessons in the revealed science of theology. They are in a class by themselves and are literally "designed to unfold to the understanding the doctrine of Jesus Christ" in a rational, scientific manner (*LF* 1:1).

The earlier presentations in this symposium have emphasized what faith is and what it rests upon. It has been shown that in order to exercise true faith in God we need to know something of his perfect character and attributes. When we learn of the perfections and attributes of Deity, we are then able to develop unshaken confidence in God, because our minds can be at rest and be assured that God can and will fulfil all his promises. When we become men and women of faith, we can have this unshaken confidence and trust because the scriptures guarantee that the true God is perfect and is therefore an unchangeable, complete, and living God.

Such is the message of the first five of the Lectures on Faith. I have been asked to discuss the content of Lecture 6, which is a sobering task, and I feel a great need for the help of the Holy Ghost in order to present it in the proper perspective and spirit. I cannot speak for the Church or for the University, but I believe what I have written is correct. So that this paper will continue the unity and purpose of this symposium, it is necessary to quote briefly from two of the preceding lectures. First, from Lecture 4:2:

Let us here observe that the real design which the God of heaven had in view in making the human family acquainted with his attributes was that they might be enabled to exercise faith in him through the idea of the existence of his attributes. . . . The God of heaven, understanding most perfectly the constitution of human

nature and the weakness of men, knew what was necessary to be revealed and what ideas needed to be planted in their minds to enable them to exercise faith in him unto eternal life.

And also paragraph 3 of Lecture 5:

From the foregoing account of the Godhead, which is given in his revelations, the Saints have a sure foundation laid for the exercise of faith unto life and salvation through the atonement and mediation of Jesus Christ. By his blood they have a forgiveness of sins. . . . As the Son partakes of the fulness of the Father through the Spirit, so the Saints are, by the same Spirit, to be partakers of the same fulness, to enjoy the same glory . . . through the love of the Father, the mediation of Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. They are to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

The sixth lecture, building on the foundation established by the earlier ones, introduces two major items: first, the necessity of each person's knowing (not merely believing or hoping) that his/her life is acceptable to God; and second, the necessity of our being willing to sacrifice all earthly possessions and honors as the means to obtain the knowledge of and the approval of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will discuss these items in that order.

## Knowing That One's Life Is Acceptable to God

In the sixth Lecture on Faith, paragraphs 2 and 3, we read the following:

It is essential for any person to have an actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing is according to the will of God to enable him to have that confidence in God without which no person can obtain eternal life. It was this that enabled the ancient Saints to endure all their afflictions and persecutions and to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing (not believing merely) that they had a more enduring substance.

Having the assurance that they were pursuing a course which was agreeable to the will of God, they were enabled to take not only the spoiling of their goods and the wasting of their substance joyfully, but also to suffer death in its most horrid forms, knowing (not merely believing) that when this "earthly house of this tabernacle [was] dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1).

What is there about living in this mortal fallen world that makes this kind of knowledge so important and necessary? We read from the next paragraph:

Such was and always will be the situation of the Saints of God. Unless they have an actual knowledge that the course they are pursuing is according to the will of God, they will grow weary in their minds and faint. For such has been and always will be the opposition in the hearts of unbelievers and those who know not God against the pure and unadulterated religion of heaven (the only thing which ensures eternal life). They will persecute to the uttermost all who worship God according to his revelations, receive the truth in the love of it, and submit themselves to be guided and directed by his will. And they will drive them to such extremities that nothing short of an actual knowledge of their being the favorites of heaven and of their having embraced that order of things which God has established for the redemption of man will enable them to exercise that confidence in him necessary for them to overcome the world and obtain that crown of glory which is laid up for them that fear God (LF 6:4).

The matter is stated even more clearly in paragraph 5:

For a man to lay down his all—his character and reputation, his honor and applause, his good name among men, his houses, his lands, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children, and even his own life also, counting all things but filth and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ—requires more than mere belief or supposition that he is doing the will of God. It requires actual knowledge, realizing that when these sufferings are ended, he will enter into eternal rest and be a partaker of the glory of God.

The foregoing is so plain, so well stated, and so reasonable that I feel confident that anyone who reads it will understand it and will almost automatically want to have that same knowledge and testimony. It just naturally follows that after we learn of the perfect character and nature of God, what kind of a being he is, there wells up within our own hearts an intense desire, a craving and thirsting, a longing to be in harmony with him. That is why repentance, followed by baptism for the remission of sins and the laying on of hands for the baptism of fire or the Holy Ghost, accompany true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are sequential steps that inch us along the pathway towards having our own

lives conform to the revelations and commandments of God. Such a course of life feeds the soul, and comforts and gives it rest. Only a very calloused nature would not long for that unity and joy that come as a result of our knowing that we have the Lord's specific, precise, and particular approval.

Faith begins by hearing the word of God as it is preached by an authorized person through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit kindles a desire for repentance and urges us to remove from our lives every deed and thought that would be offensive to God. Repentance brings unity and wholeness, whereas sin is fractious and divisive. "Wickedness never was happiness," and it jars the spirit of man (Alma 41:10). We cannot do wrong and feel right. These principles operate in everyone's life because we all came from God in the beginning and are his sons and daughters. Sometimes it takes a little longer for some of us to be touched and moved by the principles of eternal life, but we can be certain that sooner or later every human being will be so touched. With some it may be at the day of judgment, when it is too late to gain full benefit.

An example of how the preaching of the gospel and the workings of the Spirit move a people to repent and to seek divine approval is shown in Alma 22. Aaron begins teaching the king of the Lamanites by telling him what kind of a being God is and about the creation of the world and of Adam. Then he teaches the king about the fall of man and the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. "And Aaron did expound all these things unto the king" (v 14).

The effect these teachings and the testimony of Aaron had on the king's mind illustrates the doctrine we are examining in Lecture 6:

And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up



all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy.

But Aaron said unto him: If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.

And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying:

O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day (Alma 22:15-18).

It is not difficult to see that the king wanted to be in favor with God. He didn't know a great deal about the scriptures or of the science of theology, but when he heard the gospel properly taught, his soul hungered for righteousness.

We have a similar example with Enos, who said his "soul hungered" because he had often heard his father Jacob speak "concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints," and these things "sunk deep into [his] heart" (Enos 1:3-4). He had great strugglings in the spirit, a "wrestle" (v 2) he called it, until he gained a remission of his sins and obtained the voice of the Lord to his mind. Then he said "my guilt was swept away" (v 6), and "my soul did rest" (v 17). When he asked how it was done, the Lord said, "thy faith hath made thee whole" (v 8).

By reading the accounts of the Lamanite king and of Enos, we obtain a glimpse of what they felt. But what about we who live now? How can we feel what they felt and gain what they gained?

The great question for us, therefore, is: How do we today go about getting that individual assurance and actual knowledge that we are pursuing a course of life that is acceptable to the will of God? The answer is that we have to do the same things that were required in earlier dispensations. The gospel has not changed. Faith is the same, the requirements are the same, and the rewards are the same. There are no special sales, no bargain days.

## Being Willing to Sacrifice All Things

There is greater clarity given to us on the need to be willing to sacrifice all things than we have perhaps realized. We read in Lecture 6:7:

Let us here observe that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation. For from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It is through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life. And it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth's sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do His will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering and that he has not sought nor will he seek His face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life.

### *Why Faith and Knowledge Are Dependent upon Sacrifice*

A major consideration at this point is *why* perfect faith can be obtained only by the willingness to sacrifice all earthly things. The quick answer may be: "God has so ordered it." No doubt this is true, but we may want to understand more about it. A large factor inherent in the willingness to sacrifice all earthly possessions is the knowledge that the plan of redemption neither begins nor ends with this mortal life. It began in the premortal world and extends to the postmortal one. This plan is founded in God's wisdom, God's knowledge, and God's power. Through the fall of Adam all mankind have become subject to two deaths—the physical death of the body, which is caused by the separation of the body and the spirit; and the spiritual death, which is caused by the separation of the person from the things of God, that is, to "die" as to things of righteousness.



Because of these two deaths, all human beings are cut off from a knowledge of God; they have no conscious memory of God, and no memory of a premortal life, nor any understanding of a postmortal one after this mortal probation. Our knowledge in this natural, mortal, fallen state is earthbound. Our affections, interests, ambitions, and desires are centered on this present mortal life. The natural man knows none of the things of God. Neither can he know them for they are only obtained by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor 2:14). As we learn the first principles of the gospel, the Holy Ghost gives us a testimony of the reality of God, of heaven, and of Jesus Christ. As we advance in righteousness, there comes a time when we will be asked to consecrate all that we have for the kingdom of God on earth. What better test of our faith and testimony is there than to be asked to forego our honors, possessions, reputations, and such things, to gain a future inheritance in a time and place which as natural man we didn't even know existed, nor did we know that the willingness to sacrifice all things is the way to get there.

In view of the conditions that exist with the natural, mortal world, it is obviously the right thing for the Lord to require of those of us who would partake of the fulness of salvation to consecrate all that we have to his work, and to be willing to serve him at all costs. Anything short of that would not be a complete and adequate test of our confidence and faith in the Almighty God. Nor could anything less measure the progress we have made in overcoming the natural man. It is in this way that mortality serves most effectively as a probationary and preparatory state.

### *Why the Miraculous Is Necessary in the Gospel*

Due to the nature of fallen man, a true revealed religion must of necessity be miraculous in its nature. The knowledge, blessings, communications, and powers of a heavenly, divine system have to be extra-terrestrial. The power and the knowledge to save fallen mankind must come from outside the earth itself;

outside of us ourselves. It cannot originate with us. It must come from God, or there can be no salvation or redemption in it. Hence God tests his children by asking them to do something entirely outside of the natural style of mortality. All of the commandments of God are that way. Baptism, ordination, faith, sacrifice, prayer, repentance, obedience to specified commandments, personal cleanliness of thought, etc.—all are contrary to what comes naturally to us. Acts of obedience are responses that we must learn and do deliberately; they cannot happen by chance, happenstance, or accident. And obeying the commandments is not the kind of thing we would do naturally. Doing what comes naturally does not lead to celestial glory and godhood. Only by doing what is not natural, because of our faith, do we find salvation. We wouldn't consistently keep all the commandments if we didn't have faith, and that is why we can see the truth of Paul's declaration, "Without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Heb 11:6).

Natural man, with the natural, unregenerated mind, is given to rationalization and to discounting the validity of divine revelation and the importance of obedience, and even the need for a redemptive sacrifice and death of a God. Rationalization thus becomes the great usurper, the eroder and the robber of our faith. This is demonstrated very clearly in the book of Helaman just previous to the time of Jesus' birth. Even though so many "signs . . . [had been] wrought among the people," those who did not believe in the gospel said: "It is not *reasonable* that such a being as Christ shall come" (16:18-23; emphasis added). The unbelievers' idea of "reasonableness" caused them to miss the message of redemption through Jesus Christ.

### *The Role of Revelation and Testimony*

It is totally clear from the content of the Lectures on Faith that there can be no true religion among men and women on this earth without revelation and testimony from God. Without revelation from heaven, mankind would not know what kind of

being God is, and any ideas about his attributes and perfections could only be guesswork. The God of heaven must reveal himself, or he must remain forever unknown. First, as we have seen, we could not exercise true faith in a God we knew nothing about. True faith cannot take root and thrive in ignorance. Second, our faith would not be strong and unshaken unless we knew by continuing revelation that our lifestyle was pleasing to God. It would simply be impossible for any of us to exercise the kind of pure faith that is described in these lectures in the absence of direct, immediate, and personal revelation.

Such necessary revelation does not often come by an angelic visitor or personal open vision, but it comes most often by the personal manifestations and whisperings of the Holy Ghost. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “the Holy Ghost is a revelator,” and “no man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 328; hereafter *TPJS*). Revelation and testimony come to us through the Holy Ghost and are miraculous occurrences, outside the normal realm of man’s five natural senses.

A religion without revelation is but a philosophical network of human ideas, no matter how ingenious and astute it may be. Without revelation its adherents and believers could not know whether the God they worshiped even existed—much less whether or not he was pleased with the way they worshipped him or even whether he cared. When it comes to the matter of man’s relationship to God, not to have any revelation from him leaves everything to supposition and opinion. This is the idea given in Doctrine and Covenants 93:19, wherein the Lord says: “I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.”

As we have discovered in the Lectures on Faith, revelation from God must cover several subject areas. First, it must reveal that there *is* a God. Second, it must reveal the traits of his character and attributes, and show that these attributes are perfect in him. Third, it must reveal what God wants man to do and what

he wants him not to do. And fourth, it must assure us that what we are doing is what God would have us do. Receiving this last revelation is the basic message of the sixth lecture.

For a person to receive a direct, individual and personal revelation from God is an experience not obtained merely for the asking. To be told by the Almighty God, the Creator of the Universe, that he has noticed us and that he is pleased by our service and obedience is a blessing worth years of search and toil. Such a reward is the theme of both the parable of the “treasure hid in a field” and that of the “pearl of great price” (Matt 13:44, 45-46). The message of both parables is that giving all that we have would not be giving too much to gain such favor with God. Heaven, knowing the proper price to place on all its goods, has so ordained that the kind of faith that is powerful enough to enable us to lay hold on eternal life is available only on the basis of our being willing to sacrifice all earthly goods and honors.

There are records in the scriptures of those who have made this kind of sacrifice. Jesus is the greatest example. He said to the Nephites:

I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning (3 Nephi 11:11).

Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul, was a learned man, accepted within his own Pharisee group, valiant above those his own age, and had position, power, and influence. He was determined to prevent Christianity from destroying the religion of the Jews. He was not an evil man; he simply did not understand. And in his error he viewed the doctrine of Christ as an enemy to the revelations God had given to Moses and to Abraham. What did the Lord require of Paul? The same thing that he requires of all who seek salvation and a place with him in eternity. He required total obedience and the willingness to sacrifice all things. When Paul was first converted by a vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus, he little knew what awaited him. At that time the Lord

said in a vision to Ananias, who had some doubts about Paul's reputation: "[Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16).

Paul had many visions, many revelations and many trials, and suffered intense persecution and hardship, including imprisonment, whippings, character assassination, loss of friends, privation, and illness. Yet he stayed true to his testimony and came off victorious. In speaking of himself and of his companions who were thus tried and tested to the uttermost, Paul wrote:

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed (2 Cor 4:8-9).

Later, while in a Roman prison, he wrote:

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ (Philip 3:7-8).

Why was Paul willing to continue on in the face of so much opposition? It was because he knew what God required, and that the God of heaven had accepted his efforts, and that his salvation was sure. We read from 2 Timothy 4:6-8, as Paul wrote from a prison cell in Rome:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Paul knew that his life was acceptable to God and that his calling and election were sure.

Paul's convert, Timothy, whom he affectionately called "my own dear son in the faith," was a man like Paul, dedicated



to the work of the Lord above his own interests. Paul, writing to the Church at Philippi, said of Timothy:

For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel (Philip 2:20-22).

The Book of Mormon also is a record of faithful disciples who sacrificed all things. We read of Nephi, that righteous, wondrous prophet-son of Helaman who lived just before the advent of Jesus among the Nephites, that he was absolutely single-minded to God. In return for his obedience, the Lord trusted him and gave him power in the ministry and promised to bless him forever. We read from Helaman 10:3-5:

And it came to pass as he was thus pondering—being much cast down because of the wickedness of the people of the Nephites, their secret works of darkness, and their murderings, and their plunderings, and all manner of iniquities—and it came to pass as he was thus pondering in his heart, behold, a voice came unto him saying:

Blessed art thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unweariness declared the word, which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but hast sought my will, and to keep my commandments.

And now, because thou hast done this with such unweariness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will.

There can be no question that after receiving this revelation, Nephi knew his life was acceptable to God and he would be saved.

These valiant souls (Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Nephi, among many others) gave all that they had, their time, talents, possessions, and desires, to the building up of the kingdom of God on the earth. Some of them also gave their lives. And they knew that God was aware of their struggles and would not forget them.

But not all the heroes were in olden times. Those who lay in Richmond Jail, Liberty Jail, and Carthage Jail suffered in like manner as did the former prophets. And the Latter-day Saints who were driven out of Missouri and out of Illinois suffered as much in cold weather, prison, loss of family, loss of goods, and in death, as did the Former-day Saints in the lions' dens and the arenas of Rome.

It was in this light that the Prophet Joseph Smith viewed the sufferings of the Latter-day Saints in the early days of this Church:

Such inhumanity, and relentless cruelty and barbarity as were practiced against the Saints in Missouri can scarcely be found in the annals of history (*TPJS* 126).

We also read in the Prophet's epistle to the Church, written 25 March 1839 from Liberty Jail, Missouri:

And now, beloved brethren, we say unto you, that inasmuch as God hath said that He would have a tried people, that He would purge them as gold, now we think that this time He has chosen His own crucible, wherein we have been tried; and we think if we get through with any degree of safety, and shall have kept the faith, that it will be a sign to this generation, altogether sufficient to leave them without excuse; and we think also, it will be a trial of our faith equal to that of Abraham, and that the ancients will not have whereof to boast over us in the day of judgment, as being called to pass through heavier afflictions; that we may hold an even weight in the balance with them; but now, after having suffered so great sacrifice and having passed through so great a season of sorrow, we trust that a ram may be caught in the thicket speedily, to relieve the sons and daughters of Abraham from their great anxiety, and to light up the lamp of salvation upon their countenances, that they may hold on now, after having gone so far unto everlasting life (*TPJS* 135-136).

We now continue from Lecture 6:8:

It is in vain for persons to fancy to themselves that they are heirs with those, or can be heirs with them, who have offered their all in sacrifice, and by this means obtained faith in God and favor with him so as to obtain eternal life, unless they in like manner offer unto him the same sacrifice and through that offering obtain the knowledge that they are accepted of him.

*Trials and Tests Are Custom-made*

We do not mean to imply by all these examples that only martyrs will be saved or that only those who are driven out of their homes or who lose their farms, businesses, and health to a mob are saved. What we find in the revelations and in the teachings of the brethren is that the Lord requires such undivided allegiance, that a person who expects to inherit a celestial glory must be willing to sacrifice all things if called upon to do so. The gospel provides a way for a person to show that willingness by solemn oath and covenant, in the Lord's own way and according to his plan of redemption. This is a covenant of total consecration. The Prophet Joseph Smith has said:

When we consecrate our property to the Lord it is to administer to the wants of the poor and needy, for this is the law of God; it is not for the benefit of the rich, those who have no need; and when a man consecrates or dedicates his wife and children, he does not give them to his brother, or to his neighbor, for there is no such law. . . . For a man to consecrate his property, wife and children, to the Lord, is nothing more nor less than to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the widow and fatherless, the sick and afflicted, and do all he can to administer to their relief in their afflictions, and for him and his house to serve the Lord. In order to do this, he and all his house must be virtuous, and must shun the very appearance of evil (*TPJS* 127).

The Lord's plan of redemption requires men and women to consecrate all their belongings and abilities to the service of God. This they do by covenant. The Lord may then test them to see how sincere they are and how much they are willing to sacrifice.

We cannot say what, in the economy of God, he will require of any one of us individually. There is a universal requirement of all mankind to "endure to the end," and we also know that "where much is given much is required." Some commandments pertain to everyone. Some individual tests, however, are "tailor-made" and suited to the particular person and circumstances. When a person has been obedient to the first principles and the universal requirements, it appears that the Lord then devises more search-

ing, individualized tests for a specific purpose in relation to a specific individual. The most popular example of this is the commandment God gave to Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. It seems to have had at least two immediate purposes. One was to test Abraham's faith and obedience; and the other was to give Abraham experience whereby he would learn something about himself and about godliness that he had not understood sufficiently before. We read from President John Taylor:

I heard the Prophet Joseph say, in speaking to the Twelve on one occasion: "You will have all kinds of trials to pass through. And it is quite as necessary for you to be tried as it was for Abraham and other men of God, and (said he) God will feel after you, and He will take hold of you and wrench your very heart strings, and if you cannot stand it you will not be fit for an inheritance in the Celestial Kingdom of God" (*JD* 24:197).

And again from another talk by President Taylor:

I heard Joseph Smith say and I presume Brother Snow heard him also—in preaching to the Twelve in Nauvoo, that the Lord would get hold of their heart strings and wrench them, and that they would have to be tried as Abraham was tried. . . . And Joseph said that if God had known any other way whereby he could have touched Abraham's feelings more acutely and more keenly he would have done so. It was not only his parental feelings that were touched. There was something else besides. He had the promise that in him and in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed; that his seed should be multiplied as the stars of the heaven and as the sand upon the sea shore. He had looked forward through the vista of future ages and seen, by the spirit of revelation, myriads of his people rise up through whom God would convey intelligence, light and salvation to a world. But in being called upon to sacrifice his son it seemed as though all his prospects pertaining to posterity were come to naught. But he had faith in God, and he fulfilled the thing that was required of him. Yet we cannot conceive of anything that could be more trying and more perplexing than the position in which he was placed (*JD* 24:264).

Speaking also of the test given to Abraham, President George Q. Cannon said:

Why did the Lord ask such things of Abraham? Because, knowing what his future would be and that he would be the father of an innumerable posterity, he [sic] was determined to test him. God did

not do this for His own sake for He knew by His foreknowledge what Abraham would do; but the purpose was to impress upon Abraham a lesson and to enable him to attain unto knowledge that he could not obtain in any other way. That is why God tries all of us. It is not for His own knowledge for He knows all things beforehand. He knows all your lives and everything you will do. But He tries us for our own good that we may know ourselves; for it is most important that a man should know himself.

He required Abraham to submit to this trial because He intended to give him glory, exaltation and honor; He intended to make him a king and a priest, to share with Himself the glory, power and dominion which He exercised. And was this trial any more than God himself had passed through? (89).

### *We Receive No Witness Until After the Trial of Our Faith*

There is always a spiritual reward and benefit from obeying any commandment of God, and there is always a divine reason for that commandment, although the one so commanded may not be able to comprehend it until later. If we fail the small tests, we may never have the opportunity to take the large ones. Consequently, we may not realize what was really taking place. I think this is the point the prophet Moroni was making when he said, “dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6). One of the lessons we learn from the scriptures is that trials are not always a penalty for sins. Sometimes, as with Abraham, Job, or Joseph Smith, trials have an educational purpose and are designed to “give experience, and shall be for thy good” (see D&C 122:7).

### *Sacrifice Is an Educational Experience*

A significant reason for the Lord’s requiring the willingness to sacrifice all things is the experience it gives those who do it. It is not only necessary that we have confidence in God, but there is also a dimension to be gained about ourselves through the experience and the discipline of making a sacrifice. Our own acts tell us something about ourselves. Sacrificing all that we have in



obedience to the Lord's commandments greatly increases our own self-confidence. We know for ourselves that we *can* keep the commandments—we have done it. This has a powerful effect upon our attitude about ourselves. Notice the language of the Lord given in Doctrine and Covenants 97:8-9:

Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me. For I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit.

In speaking on this same subject—of a person's knowing and being aware that he or she has been obedient, even at a cost—President David O. McKay said that “spirituality is the consciousness of victory over self” (351).

Anciently, King David understood something of the importance of sacrifice, when on one occasion a friend wanted to give him oxen to sacrifice to the Lord. David's reply was:

I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver (2 Sam 24:24).

The concept of customized tests is very important. We do not all have the same tests, and we can benefit from what Elder Boyd K. Packer said on this theme in the October 1980 General Conference:

Our lives are made up of thousands of everyday choices. Over the years these little choices will be bundled together and show clearly what we value.

The crucial test of life, I repeat, does not center in the choice between fame and obscurity, nor between wealth and poverty. The greatest decision of life is between good and evil.

We may foolishly bring unhappiness and trouble, even suffering upon ourselves. These are not always to be regarded as penalties imposed by a displeased Creator. They are part of the lessons of life, part of the test.

Some are tested by poor health, some by a body that is deformed or homely. Others are tested by handsome and healthy bodies; some by the passion of youth; others by the erosions of age.

Some suffer disappointment in marriage, family problems; others live in poverty and obscurity. Some (perhaps this is the hardest test) find ease and luxury.

All are part of the test, and there is more equality in this testing than sometimes we suspect.

It is possible to be both rich and famous and at the same time succeed spiritually. But the Lord warned of the difficulty of it when He talked of camels and needles (see Matt 19:24) (21).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke along the same lines to some students at Brigham Young University:

God knows what his children can become and tries them to help them reach their potential. . . . In time each person will receive a “customized challenge” to determine his dedication to God (“Link Truths” 11).

Trials and adversities may often be blessings in disguise and are part of the “sacrifice of all things” required for the development of true faith. Several great prophets of this dispensation have spoken on this subject. President Harold B. Lee said the following in addressing Church Office employees at the annual Christmas Devotional in the Tabernacle on Temple Square on 13 December 1973:

We are tested, we are tried. . . . We don’t realize perhaps the severity of the tests that we are going through. In [the early days of the Church], there were murderings, there were mobbings. . . . [The Saints] were driven out into the desert, they were starving and they were unclad, they were cold. We are the inheritors of what they gave to us. But what are we doing with it? Today we are basking in the lap of luxury, the like of which we’ve never seen before in the history of the world. It would seem that probably this is the most severe test of any . . . we’ve ever had in the history of this Church (4-5).

And President Ezra Taft Benson (then President of the Council of the Twelve) told the Regional Representatives on 30 September 1977:

Every generation has its tests and its chance to stand and prove itself. Would you like to know of one of our toughest tests?

Hear the warning words of President Brigham Young: “The worst fear I have about this people is that they will get rich in this country, forget God and His people, wax fat, and kick themselves out of the Church and go to hell. This people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty and all manner of persecution and be true. But my greatest fear is that they cannot stand wealth.”

Ours then seems to be the toughest test of all for the evils are more subtle, more clever. It all seems less menacing and it is harder to detect. While every test of righteousness represents a struggle, this particular test seems like no test at all, no struggle, and so could be the most deceiving of all tests.

Do you know what peace and prosperity can do to a people—it can put them to sleep (2).

### *Sacrifice Seen in Perspective*

In this paper we have spoken much of sacrifice and the spiritual influence it has on those who do it and the loss to those who do not. In one sense, however, there is no lasting sacrifice as President George Q. Cannon explained:

If we expect to attain the fulfillment of the promises God has made to us, we must be self-sacrificing. There is no sacrifice that God can ask of us or His servants whom He has chosen to lead us that we should hesitate about making. In one sense of the word it is no sacrifice. We may call it so because it comes in contact with our selfishness and our unbelief (89).

And Elder Bruce R. McConkie said:

Sacrifice pertains to mortality; in the eternal sense there is none. Sacrifice involves giving up the things of this world because of the promises of blessings to be gained in a better world. In the eternal perspective there is no sacrifice in giving up all things—even including the laying down of one’s life—if eternal life is gained through such a course (664).

We conclude and summarize this discussion by quoting excerpts from Lecture 6:9-12:

In the last days before the Lord comes, he is to gather together his saints who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice.

... Those who do not make the sacrifice cannot enjoy this faith, because men are dependent upon this sacrifice in order to obtain this faith. Therefore, they cannot lay hold upon eternal life,

because the revelations of God do not guarantee unto them the authority so to do; and without this guarantee faith could not exist.

All the Saints of whom we have account in all the revelations of God which are extant obtained the knowledge which they had of their acceptance in his sight through the sacrifice which they offered unto him. And through the knowledge thus obtained, their faith became sufficiently strong to lay hold upon the promise of eternal life. . . .

But those who have not made this sacrifice to God do not know that the course which they pursue is well pleasing in his sight. For whatever may be their belief or their opinion, it is a matter of doubt and uncertainty in their mind; and where doubt and uncertainty are, there faith is not, nor can it be. For doubt and faith do not exist in the same person at the same time. So persons whose minds are under doubts and fears cannot have unshaken confidence, and where unshaken confidence is not, there faith is weak. And where faith is weak, the persons will not be able to contend against all the opposition, tribulations, and afflictions which they will have to encounter in order to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus. But they will grow weary in their minds, and the adversary will have power over them and destroy them.

Making a serious study of the Lectures on Faith is a sobering experience. I can assure you that one cannot examine and absorb these lectures and afterwards be flippant or indifferent about what God requires of us in this life. To study these lectures and to prepare a paper on them is a deep spiritual experience.

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