
First Presidency Message

In Search of Peace and Freedom

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I recall a very troubling conversation I had years ago with a young man in a South American airport, where we were both delayed by late planes.

His hair was long and his face bearded, his glasses large and round. Sandals were on his feet, and his clothing such as to give the appearance of total indifference to any standard of style.

He was earnest and evidently sincere. He was educated and thoughtful, a graduate of a great North American university. Without employment and sustained by his father, he was traveling through South America.

What was he after in life? I asked. “Peace—and freedom” was his immediate response. Did he use drugs? Yes, they were one of his means to obtain the peace and freedom he sought. Discussion of drugs led to discussion of morals. He talked matter-of-factly about the new morality that gave so much more freedom than any previous generation had ever known.

He had learned in our opening introductions that I was a churchman; and he let me know, in something of a condescending way, that the morality of my generation was a joke. Then with earnestness he asked how I could honestly defend personal virtue and moral chastity. I shocked him a little when I declared that *his freedom was a delusion, that his peace was a fraud, and that I would tell him why.*

I have thought much of that discussion and others like it that I have held over the years. Today there are persons numbered in the millions who, in a search for freedom from moral restraint and peace from submerged conscience, have opened a floodgate of practices that enslave and debauch. These practices, if left unchecked, will not only destroy these individuals but also the nations of which they are a part.

I remember thinking of this freedom and this peace when I faced a young man and a young woman across the desk of my office. He was handsome, tall, and manly. She was a beautiful girl, an excellent student, sensitive and perceptive.

The girl sobbed, and tears fell from the eyes of the young man. They were freshmen at a university. They were to be married the next week, but not in the kind of wedding of which they had dreamed. They had

planned *that to come three years in the future, following graduation*. Now they found themselves in a situation that both regretted and for which neither was prepared. Shattered were their dreams of schooling, the years of preparation they knew each needed for the competitive world that lay ahead. Rather, they would now have to establish a home, he to become the breadwinner at the best figure his meager skills could command.

The young man looked up through his tears. “We were sold short,” he said.

“We’ve cheated one another,” she responded. “We’ve cheated one another and the parents who love us—and we’ve cheated ourselves. We were betrayed. We fell for the rubbish that virtue is hypocrisy; and we’ve found that the new morality, the idea that sin is only in one’s mind, is a booby trap that’s destroyed us.”

They spoke of a thousand thoughts that had crossed their minds in the fearful days and the anxious nights of the past few weeks. Should she seek an abortion? The temptation was there in the frightening contemplation of the ordeal that lay ahead. No, never, she had concluded. Life is sacred under any circumstance. How could she ever live with herself if she took measures to destroy the gift of life even under these conditions?

Perhaps she could go to some place where she was not known, they thought, and he could go on with his schooling. The child could be placed for adoption. There were excellent organizations that could assist in such a program, and there were good families anxious for children. But they had dismissed that thought. He would never leave her to face her trial alone. He was responsible, and he would meet that responsibility even though it blighted the future of which he had dreamed.

I admired his courage, his determination to make the best of a difficult situation; but my heart ached as I watched them, bereft and sobbing. Here was tragedy. Here was heartbreak. Here was entrapment. Here was bondage.

They had been told of freedom, that evil was only a thing of the mind. But they found they had lost their freedom. Nor had they known peace. They had bartered their peace and their freedom—the freedom to marry when they chose to marry, the freedom to secure the education of which they had dreamed, and, more important, the peace of self-respect.

My young friend in the airport might have countered my story by saying that this couple was not smart. Had they been wise to the things available to them, they would not have found themselves in this sorry situation.

I would have replied that their situation is far from unique and that it is daily growing more acute.

Can there be peace in the heart of any person, can there be freedom in the life of one who has been left

only misery as the bitter fruit of indulgence?

Can anything be more false or dishonest than gratification of passion without acceptance of responsibility?

I remember seeing in Korea the tragic aftermath of war in the thousands of orphans born of Korean mothers and soldier fathers. These abandoned children became creatures of sorrow, unwanted, the flotsam of a miserable tide of immorality. It was so in Vietnam also—tens of thousands of fatherless children were abandoned. Peace and freedom? There can be neither for anyone who has wantonly indulged nor for those left as the innocent and tragic victims of lust.

Certain kinds of men are prone to gloat over their immoral conquests. What a cheap and sullied victory. There is no conquest in gloating, only self-deception and a miserable fraud. The only conquest that brings satisfaction is the conquest of self. It was said of old that he who governs himself is greater than he who takes a city. (See Prov. 16:32.)

Are not the words of Tennyson still appropriate: “My strength is as the strength of ten, Because my heart is pure.” (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Sir Galahad.”)

Listen to the conclusion of renowned historians Will and Ariel Durant. Out of the vast experience of writing a thousand years of history, they wrote:

“No one man, however brilliant or well-informed, can come in one lifetime to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history. A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by custom, morals, or laws, he may ruin his life before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group.” (*The Lessons of History*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968, pp. 35–36.)

Self-discipline was never easy. I do not doubt that it is more difficult today. We live in a sex-saturated world. I am convinced that many of our youth, and many older but no-less-gullible adults, are victims of the persuasive elements which surround them—the pornographic literature which has become a multi-million-dollar-a-year business in the U. S. alone, seductive movies and television shows that excite and give sanction to promiscuity, dress standards that invite familiarity, judicial decisions that destroy legal restraint, parents who often unwittingly push the children they love toward situations they later regret.

A wise writer has observed that “a new religion is emerging throughout the world, a religion in which the body is the supreme object of worship to the exclusion of all other aspects of existence. The pursuit of

its pleasures has grown into a cult; ¼ for its ritual no efforts are spared. We have bartered holiness for convenience, ¼ wisdom for information, joy for pleasure, tradition for fashion.” (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, New York: Schocken Books, 1966, p. 200.)

Nakedness or near-nakedness has become the hallmark of much public entertainment. It reaches beyond this into the realm of sadistic perversion. As one seasoned New York critic remarked, “It’s not only the nudity; it’s the crudity.”

Can there be any reasonable doubt that in sowing the wind of a sex-saturated world, we are reaping the whirlwind of decay? We need to read more history. Nations and civilizations have flowered, then died, poisoned by their own moral sickness. As one commentator has remarked, Rome perished before the Goths poured over its walls. “But it was not that the walls were low. It was that Rome itself was low.” (*U. S. News & World Report*, May 28, 1962, p. 90.)

As with the bud, so with the blossom. Youth is the seedtime for the future flowering of family life. No nation, no civilization can long endure without strength in the homes and lives of its people. That strength derives from the integrity of those who live in those homes.

No family can have peace, no life can be free from the storms of adversity unless that family and that home are built on foundations of morality, fidelity, and mutual respect. There cannot be peace where there is not trust; there cannot be freedom where there is not loyalty. The warm sunlight of love will not rise out of a swamp of immorality.

To hope for peace and love and gladness out of promiscuity is to hope for that which will never come. To wish for freedom out of immorality is to wish for something that cannot be. Said the Savior, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” (John 8:34.)

The prophet of the Lord, President Ezra Taft Benson, has clearly spoken on these matters:

“The Book of Mormon warns us of the tactics of the adversary in the last day: ‘And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.’ (2 Ne. 28:21.)

“The plaguing sin of this generation is sexual immorality. This, the Prophet Joseph said, would be the source of more temptations, more buffetings, and more difficulties for the elders of Israel than any other. (See *Journal of Discourses*, 8:55.)

“President Joseph F. Smith said that sexual impurity would be one of the three dangers that would threaten the Church within—and so it does. (See *Gospel Doctrine*, pp. 312–13.) *It permeates our society.*” (*Ensign*, May 1986, p. 4.)

Is there a valid case for virtue in our world? It is the only way to freedom from regret. The peace of conscience which flows therefrom is the only personal peace that is not counterfeit.

And beyond all of this is the unfailing promise of God to those who walk in virtue. Declared Jesus of Nazareth, speaking on the mountain, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8.) That is a promise, made by him who has the power to fulfill.

And again, the voice of modern revelation speaks an unmatched promise that follows a simple commandment:

“Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly.” And here is the promise: “Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God. ¼

“The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, ¼ and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever.” (D&C 121:45–46.)

May I comment on this marvelous promise. It has been my privilege on various occasions to converse with presidents of the United States and important leaders in other governments. At the close of each visit, I have reflected on the rewarding experience of standing with confidence in the presence of an acknowledged leader. And then I have thought, what a wonderful thing, what a marvelous thing it would be to stand with confidence—unafraid and unashamed and unembarrassed—in the presence of God. This is the promise held out to every virtuous man and woman.

I know of no greater promise made by God to man than this promise made to those who let virtue garnish their thoughts unceasingly.

Channing Pollock once remarked: “A world in which everyone believed in the purity of women and the nobility of men, and acted accordingly, would be a very different world, but a grand place to live in.” (*Reader’s Digest, June 1960, p. 77.*)

I assure you that it would be a world of freedom in which the spirit of mankind might grow to undreamed-of glory, a world of peace—the peace of clear conscience, of unsullied love, of fidelity, of unfailing trust and loyalty.

This may appear an unattainable dream for the world. But for each member of this church it can be a reality, and the world will become so much the richer and the stronger for the virtue of our individual lives.

God bless each of us to realize this freedom, to know this peace, to gain this blessing. As a servant of the Lord, I promise you that if you will sow in virtue, you will reap in gladness now and in all the years

yet to come.

Gospel topics: agency, freedom, morality, Word of Wisdom