

Love and Law

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The love of God does not supersede His laws and His commandments, and the effect of God's laws and commandments does not diminish the purpose and effect of His love.

I have been impressed to speak about God's love and God's commandments. My message is that God's universal and perfect love is shown in all the blessings of His gospel plan, including the fact that His choicest blessings are reserved for those who obey His laws.¹ These are eternal principles that should guide parents in their love and teaching of their children.

I.

I begin with four examples which illustrate some mortal confusion between love and law.

- A young adult in a cohabitation relationship tells grieving parents, "If you really loved me, you would accept me and my partner just like you accept your married children."
- A youth reacts to parental commands or pressure by declaring, "If you really loved me, you wouldn't force me."

In these examples a person violating commandments asserts that parental love should override the commandments of divine law and the teachings of parents.

The next two examples show mortal confusion about the effect of God's love.

- A person rejects the doctrine that a couple must be married for eternity to enjoy family relationships in the next life, declaring, "If God really loved us, I can't believe He would separate husbands and wives in this way."
- Another person says his faith has been destroyed by the suffering God allows to be inflicted on a person or a race, concluding, "If there was a God who loved us, He wouldn't let this happen."

These persons disbelieve eternal laws which they consider contrary to their

concept of the effect of God's love. Persons who take this position do not understand the nature of God's love or the purpose of His laws and commandments. The love of God does not supersede His laws and His commandments, and the effect of God's laws and commandments does not diminish the purpose and effect of His love. The same should be true of parental love and rules.

II.

First, consider the love of God, described so meaningfully this morning by President Dieter F. Uchtdorf. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" the Apostle Paul asked. Not tribulation, not persecution, not peril or the sword (see Romans 8:35). "For I am persuaded," he concluded, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, ... nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God" (verses 38–39).

There is no greater evidence of the infinite power and perfection of God's love than is declared by the Apostle John: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Another Apostle wrote that God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). Think how it must have grieved our Heavenly Father to send His Son to endure incomprehensible suffering for our sins. That is the greatest evidence of His love for each of us!

God's love for His children is an eternal reality, but why does He love us so much, and why do we desire that love? The answer is found in the relationship between God's love and His laws.

Some seem to value God's love because of their hope that His love is so great and so unconditional that it will mercifully excuse them from obeying His laws. In contrast, those who understand God's plan for His children know that God's laws are invariable, which is another great evidence of His love for His children. Mercy cannot rob justice,² and those who obtain mercy are "they who have kept the covenant and observed the commandment" (D&C 54:6).

We read again and again in the Bible and in modern scriptures of God's anger with the wicked³ and of His acting in His wrath⁴ against those who violate His laws. How are anger and wrath evidence of His love? Joseph Smith taught that God "institute[d] laws whereby [the spirits that He would send into the world] could have a privilege to advance like himself."⁵ God's love is so perfect that He lovingly requires us to obey His commandments because He knows that only through obedience to His laws can we become perfect, as He is. For this reason, God's anger and His wrath are not a *contradiction* of His love but an *evidence* of His love. Every parent knows that you can love a child totally and completely while still being creatively angry and disappointed at that child's self-defeating behavior.

The love of God is so universal that His perfect plan bestows many gifts on all of His children, even those who disobey His laws. Mortality is one such gift, bestowed on all who qualified in the War in Heaven.⁶ Another unconditional gift is the universal resurrection: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Many other mortal gifts are not tied to our personal obedience to law. As Jesus taught, our Heavenly Father “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45).

If only we will listen, we can know of God’s love and feel it, even when we are disobedient. A woman recently returned to Church activity gave this description in a sacrament meeting talk: “He has always been there for me, even when I rejected Him. He has always guided me and comforted me with His tender mercies all around me, but I [was] too angry to see and accept incidents and feelings as such.”⁷

III.

God’s choicest blessings are clearly contingent upon obedience to God’s laws and commandments. The key teaching is from modern revelation:

“There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

“And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20–21).

This great principle helps us understand the *why* of many things, like justice and mercy balanced by the Atonement. It also explains why God will not forestall the exercise of agency by His children. Agency—our power to choose—is fundamental to the gospel plan that brings us to earth. God does not intervene to forestall the consequences of some persons’ choices in order to protect the well-being of other persons—even when they kill, injure, or oppress one another—for this would destroy His plan for our eternal progress.⁸ He will bless us to endure the consequences of others’ choices, but He will not prevent those choices.⁹

If a person understands the teachings of Jesus, he or she cannot reasonably conclude that our loving Heavenly Father or His divine Son believes that Their love supersedes Their commandments. Consider these examples.

When Jesus began His ministry, His first message was repentance.¹⁰

When He exercised loving mercy by not condemning the woman taken in adultery, He nevertheless told her, “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Jesus taught, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

The effect of God's commandments and laws is not changed to accommodate popular behavior or desires. If anyone thinks that godly or parental love for an individual grants the loved one license to disobey the law, he or she does not understand either love or law. The Lord declared: "That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still" (D&C 88:35).

We read in modern revelation, "All kingdoms have a law given" (D&C 88:36). For example:

"He who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.

"And he who cannot abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory.

"And he who cannot abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory" (D&C 88:22–24).

In other words, the kingdom of glory to which the Final Judgment assigns us is not determined by love but by the law that God has invoked in His plan to qualify us for eternal life, "the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:7).

IV.

In teaching and reacting to their children, parents have many opportunities to apply these principles. One such opportunity has to do with the gifts parents bestow on their children. Just as God has bestowed some gifts on all of His mortal children without requiring their personal obedience to His laws, parents provide many benefits like housing and food even if their children are not in total harmony with all parental requirements. But, following the example of an all-wise and loving Heavenly Father who has given laws and commandments for the benefit of His children, wise parents condition some parental gifts on obedience.

If parents have a wayward child—such as a teenager indulging in alcohol or drugs—they face a serious question. Does parental love require that these substances or their consumption be allowed in the home, or do the requirements of civil law or the seriousness of the conduct or the interests of other children in the home require that this be forbidden?

To pose an even more serious question, if an adult child is living in cohabitation, does the seriousness of sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage require that this child feel the full weight of family disapproval by being excluded from any family contacts, or does parental love require that the fact of cohabitation be ignored? I have seen both of these extremes, and I believe that both are inappropriate.

Where do parents draw the line? That is a matter for parental wisdom, guided by the inspiration of the Lord. There is no area of parental action that is more needful of heavenly guidance or more likely to receive it than the decisions of parents in raising their children and governing their families. This is the work of eternity.

As parents grapple with these problems, they should remember the Lord's teaching that we leave the ninety and nine and go out into the wilderness to rescue the lost sheep.¹¹ President Thomas S. Monson has called for a loving crusade to rescue our brothers and sisters who are wandering in the wilderness of apathy or ignorance.¹² These teachings require continued loving concern, which surely requires continued loving associations.

Parents should also remember the Lord's frequent teaching that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6).¹³ In his conference talk on tolerance and love, Elder Russell M. Nelson taught that "real love for the sinner may compel courageous confrontation—not acquiescence! Real love does not support self-destructing behavior."¹⁴

Wherever the line is drawn between the power of love and the force of law, the breaking of commandments is certain to impact loving family relationships. Jesus taught:

"Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:

"For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.

"The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother" (Luke 12:51–53).

This sobering teaching reminds us that when family members are not united in striving to keep the commandments of God, there will be divisions. We do all that we can to avoid impairing loving relationships, but sometimes it happens after all we can do.

In the midst of such stress, we must endure the reality that the straying of our

loved ones will detract from our happiness, but it should not detract from our love for one another or our patient efforts to be united in understanding God's love and God's laws.

I testify of the truth of these things, which are part of the plan of salvation and the doctrine of Christ, of whom I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See Russell M. Nelson, "Divine Love," *Liahona*, Feb. 2003, 12; *Ensign*, Feb. 2003, 20.

2. See Alma 42:25.

3. See, for example, Judges 2:12–14; Psalm 7:11; D&C 5:8; 63:32.

4. See, for example, 2 Kings 23:26–27; Ephesians 5:6; 1 Nephi 22:16–17; Alma 12:35–36; D&C 84:24.

5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 210.

6. See Revelation 12:7–8.

7. Letter of Dec. 6, 2005, in author's possession.

8. Compare Alma 42:8.

9. Compare Mosiah 24:14–15.

10. See Matthew 4:17.

11. See Luke 15:3–7.

12. See Thomas S. Monson, "Lost Battalions," *Liahona*, Sept. 1987, 3; *Ensign*, Apr. 1987, 3.

13. See also Proverbs 3:12; Revelation 3:19; D&C 95:1.

14. Russell M. Nelson, "Teach Us Tolerance and Love," *Ensign*, May 1994, 71.

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