

An Epistle to the Saints from the Apostles

An Epistle to the Restoration Saints
December 11, 2016

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus Christ. This is a day of trouble and danger on many fronts. As the people of Christ, we should not be surprised by these events. What is surprising is the anemic response of the people of God to the day of trouble in the world.

The world's challenges include political uncertainty and tremendous social unrest between various people groups and religions of the world. There is an increasing degree of lawlessness in the societies of the world as well as governmental unrest. The economy is fragile worldwide. Terrorism and personal violence appear to be on the rise. Even the elements are in turmoil with storms, earthquakes, fires and water contamination.

If any day has ever seemed to fit the description of the last days, the days in which we live qualify. The issues of civil unrest, corruption, health crises, violence and family stress appear to ignore the reality that essential laws of truth and righteousness are beyond the scope of political solutions. We know the only cure for these ills is repentance with deep humility and honoring the God of this and all lands.

The Restoration gospel was especially prepared for such a day as this. We are stewards of this great gift today and we find ourselves unprepared, weak and divided. Now is a day for the Saints of the living God to come together to accomplish the work of the kingdom of God and the gathering of the House of Israel (see Psalm 50:5).

Jesus died for the souls of men, women and children. He died to liberate us from the grip of eternal death and bring us safe again into the Father's presence through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our calling is to extend the declaration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. We confess the hand of the Lord is preparing the way for the gospel to move forward to meet the challenges of this day and to fulfill the words of the prophets.

The Restoration branches have two choices. We can continue to view ourselves as pieces of a fractured church, much like a window that has been broken by a rock. We can defend our piece of glass, using the sharp edges and points to harm or drive others away, or we can surrender our individual pieces into the hand of the Lord and let him make something new and beautiful out of us, as the craftsman does in creating a stained-glass window.

Agency of individuals and groups is a precious thing. Our Father gave us agency in creation and redeemed our agency in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He bought it for us by the blood of the Son. He preserves our agency by the word of his power.

Agency was given for the exercise of charity. In Genesis 7:39-40 the Lord told Enoch agency was intended to allow us to choose to love each other as brothers and sisters and to choose God as our Father. This is true love. It is consistent with the testimony of Jesus when he revealed the two greatest commandments of the law (Matthew 22:34-39) and John's witness in his first epistle.

One Protestant theologian has written that sin is disordered love. When any person chooses to love outside of the parameters of the love which God proposed, he or she is committing sin. It is sin against God and his intent for our lives and his creation. This is inordinate love of self, idols or false gods.

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The evidence of our disordered love is seen in fear, fighting, divisions, dissention, pride, bitterness and envy. Where is faith, hope and charity?

God is calling us to repentance. The words of Zenos regarding the olive tree in the vineyard of Jacob 3 apply to the Restoration branches.

Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard? And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master, Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard? Have not the branches thereof overcome the roots, which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold, they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves. Behold, I say, Is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted (Jacob 3:104-108)?

The word applies because rather than submit to the hand of the Lord of the vineyard, we have rebelled against him and exalted the branches above the root. He has called us to be one and we have continually refused. He has scattered and divided us to humble ourselves, but we have become proud in our independence and perception of right thinking. We give lip service to the scriptures and to the genuine calling of the Lord to the latter-day church while setting ourselves up as judges over our brothers and sisters and suffering them or refusing them based on standards of our own making. Do men preach the fullness of the gospel? Do men follow the patterns of D&C 52:4 and preach by the standard of D&C 50:4-5? Why are we divided on minutiae? As in the days of his visit to Bountiful, the Lord can set things aright in a moment when the time is right.

This is a time to humble ourselves before the Lord. We are scattered and distressed because God's hand is on us to chasten us for our sin and pride. He is seeking to convince us that his wisdom, not ours, is all that matters. We must surrender pride of place and position and abandon priestcraft. Be generous one to another and in brotherly kindness serve one another in affection and charity that is worthy of the Saints of the Most High God.

Agency is a powerful thing. When used as our Father intended, it allows the fullness of the blessing of God and Christ into our souls. The misuse of agency, a refusal to love God completely as our Father and to love one another, excludes us from Celestial glory and perhaps consigns us to wait for the Second Resurrection and, at best, Telestial glory.

Ezekiel was told to raise a warning voice in his generation. Like other warning voices, Ezekiel was to call the people to repentance. And the Lord said:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die-and thou givest him not warning nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life-the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

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We, of the Restoration, have been charged to preach the gospel to all the people of the world, first to the Gentiles and then to the Jews. We are commanded to take the Book of Mormon to the remnant of the House of Israel. We have a message of repentance and a voice of warning to declare.

Let us now rally to the cause of Christ and labor together for the common cause of the gospel and Zion. Our organizational disputes are a distraction we cannot afford. It is time for the elders to come together to seek the Lord's direction and to be bold in preaching the gospel in the last days. It is a day for filling our vessels with oil, NOT comparing designs and functionality of our lamps!

It is therefore, a day of repentance. Repentance from dead works and from whatever is more important to us today than the gospel and the salvation of souls. We must forsake our individual and corporate idols. We must repent of priestcraft in all its forms. We must abandon Babylon's system of secret combinations.

It is a day for humility and sore repentance before the Lord. It is a day of sackcloth and ashes. It is a day of fasting, mourning and mighty prayer.

Everything else is a distraction. Seek to love the Truth and sell it not. There is a day coming when these other matters will be dealt with for good.

Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days; and the rebellious shall be cut off out of the land of Zion, and shall be sent away, and shall not inherit the land; for verily, I say that the rebellious are not of the blood of Ephraim; wherefore, they shall be plucked out. Behold, I, the Lord, have made my church in these last days like unto a judge sitting on a hill, or in a high place, to judge the nations; for it shall come to pass that the inhabitants of Zion shall judge all things pertaining to Zion; and liars and hypocrites shall be proved by them; and they who are not apostles and prophets shall be known (D&C 64:7).

Who will we be? Those who yield their heart with a willing mind and faithful obedience and thus eat the spoils of the land of Zion? Or will we be the rebellious who are cast out of the land.

The day will come when those who are not apostles and prophets will be made known. When that day comes, we can settle our secondary disputes. Until then, there is the real, urgent work of his Kingdom that must be done. Even in our fractured condition we can carry the same message of the fullness of his restored gospel. Let us, therefore, together become those with willing minds and hearts yielding to obey the Lord in all things. Secondly, let every man, every Saint, learn his or her duty and with one voice let us preach repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ for the glory of the kingdom of God and the restoration of the House of Israel. Today is not a day of many words, but of choosing and of action, so let us therefore, in the name of Jesus Christ, rally to the gospel call and work while the day lasts. If we do nothing, the blood of this generation will stain our garments at that last day when opportunity for repentance and the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb will have passed.

In Gospel Bonds,

Gary R. Whiting & Randy L. Vick

Apostles of Jesus Christ by the will of God.