

SELF-CONTROL, SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-GOVERNANCE

A question frequently asked when the topic of Zion comes up is, “*What lack I yet?*” The answer is easy to see for any objective observer. As individuals there is a lack self-control, self-awareness, and self-governance. There are a few who understand and practice these principles, but unless more people begin to adopt them as a standard of behavior, any eventual gathering will necessarily be diminutive. It is true that the Lord’s words can be vindicated by small and simple means and Zion can return with as few as a single family, but that doesn’t need to be the case if common sense can be applied to the recently revealed truth God has provided to this generation.

SELF-CONTROL

Peaceful individuals are best described as those who’s outward behavior and communication do not pose a threat to those around them, rather than simply those who do not disturb the peace of the company they are in. Some of the most peaceful are often the most provocative whose words and actions are very disturbing because they cause others to question everything they thought they knew. However, when you are in the presence of a truly peaceful person, you generally enjoy their company because there is no feeling of intimidation nor loss of affection. You look forward to your next encounter with them seeing the ongoing interaction as stimulating, rewarding, and full of life. Similarly, a peaceful person does not couch aggression with passivity nor masquerade as weak and harmless. Peacefulness has the twin of meekness, and one cannot be meek without first being capable of great strength...which comes by developing self-control over time.

Human beings are constituted with emotions meant to help them experience life with depth and color. While you may not have much control over when or how your emotions will flare, you can learn and apply skills that temper those emotions with rational thoughts that provide the scope needed to control the magnitude of your reactions to those emotions. With disciplined practice, you can develop into a person in control of yourself so that you do not pose a threat to those around you. None ever do this perfectly, but to the extent you try, you become less of a threat to the community you are trying to build. Thus, a peaceful person is somebody actively working out how to control themselves and is having enough success at it that he/she may have something of great value to offer in a relationship with another, and potentially as a husband or wife in a marital relationship.

Individuals have the responsibility to align what they do with what they say, and it’s always much easier to say than to do. Most of the difficulties people have experienced thus far in getting this project off the ground have come because many do not have the self-control to take great care with what they communicate to others in-person, or through various electronic media such as text, email or blog postings. Measuring your words means that before you compose speech of any kind, you spend a significant amount of thoughtful reflection about the topic before ever making a comment in person or sitting down to write. If you are not prepared to comment, it is not disrespectful to let others know you would like a moment(s) to think about it before responding, and they will likely respect you more for it if you do. When you do decide to reduce your thoughts to writing, make use of the extra time afforded and choose your words carefully. Once written, more time should be taken to analyze, critique, and eliminate unnecessary words and accusatory speech to be certain the overall communication is respectful to any who may read your words. Then after

you think it is ready to send, set it aside for a few hours or days to allow time for your mind to clear to later discover if there has been anything said that does NOT need to be said, which is sometimes even more important. Then comes the more difficult labor of aligning what you do with what you say to establish the trust and respect of others who will come to know you as a person of honesty and integrity. Though you will never be perfect in these things, by and by you will become a well-constituted, properly organized and highly functional person with whom any society can live with in peace.

SELF-AWARENESS

Finding inner peace is a personal journey between the individual and God and entire libraries have been written on the topic. However, being a “peaceful person” as it relates to how you interact with others who are likewise on their own peace journey involves a different skill set and a more developed level of personal maturity based on the level of societal integration. It requires that you operate continually from a base level of introspection to be aware of your weaknesses and shortcomings and realize when they become a burden to those around you. Social cues are easy to notice even for the novice observer. Children do it intuitively from the time they are born yet somehow adults lose those skills as they develop selfish personality traits due to various experiences in life. Being self-aware means that you remain vigilant in observing how others are perceiving your words or behavior and make any needed correction contemporaneously while in the moment.

Even for those who have cultivated an advanced level of self-awareness, if they intend to preserve a peaceful life for themselves and their community, there will inevitably be needed adjustments in thinking and communication required through their various associations. There will yet be more refined skills needed as men and women set out together on the same path in a marital relationship intended to bring the couple together permanently as they share all aspects of daily life. More often than not, couples ultimately fail to find lasting peace in the marital relationship and their paths diverge. But for those who can successfully navigate life together peacefully, they possess something of great value to offer society as examples of how the process can be done while also demonstrating to each other and those around them that they represent no threat to their society. It is in this state that it may be possible for God to dwell among them because it’s a reflection of His home above.

It is inside the marriage union where the most intense learning takes place and personal growth occurs as individuals give more of themselves through sacrifice. Marriage is the practical laboratory where the skills of peaceful existence with others are put into practice full-time with the intent of those skills taking up permanent residency within them. On top of all that has gone on before, husbands and wives now have the challenge of folding into the mix the art of continual conflict resolution and compromise. When they are successful, the marriage will thrive as likewise it will fail if the necessary skills are not cultivated and grown. It is particularly difficult during the initial years of the marriage while the two separate backgrounds of the past are required to merge into a unified present. Yet another level of maturity and self-control is required if the union is blessed with children that become additional variables in the equation.

SELF-GOVERNANCE

The point of fellowship is to espouse righteous principles and teach them to others knowing that they are all a work in progress with the intent to improve. However, they also take upon themselves the responsibility and culpability for the way they behave along the way. The preservation of peace in a society of equals depends on individuals and married couples operating at a base level of self-governance to temporarily remove themselves from participation when their behavior represents an ongoing threat to that peace. And the community should allow them to do so. This process should be deeply personal, reflective, and voluntary without any need for public involvement or grand displays of repentance. This is the level of accountability you should come to expect in yourself as well as in those with whom you fellowship. By extension, the same principles of self-governance apply to men who are asked to administer ordinances of the priesthood in public.

For example, if a man has a public certificate but has concerns about his behavior internally, he should withdraw from public service until he has resolved them, or all other's concerns that have been brought to his attention externally. If he is married and his wife is the one with concerns, he should likewise quietly withdraw until her concerns are resolved. And again, the community should allow him to do so in either case without any need for public involvement. Once issued, it's unnecessary and disorganized to persevere over whose names belong on priesthood certificates when intermittent difficulties with the individual or in the marriage arise. Only in extreme circumstances or repeated unrepentant offenses should a council of women be considered to repeal the man's authority to serve in public, and even then, only after he refuses to withdraw when concerns are brought to his attention. If a council is needed for a married man, because he is only one half of the union, unless the couple can both claim the same home fellowship to consider the matter, the alternate provision of holding the council at a general conference is the most logical path forward in keeping with the commandments given by the Lord. The women's council process was not designed by God as a means of determining personal worthiness through the removal or reinstatement of a certificate. That remains a matter between the ordained man and God as he labors with Him to receive it. As for the time being, the responsibilities placed upon men and women with regards to priesthood are VERY limited. Men can ordain and administer the ordinances of baptism and sacrament inside their own household and women can vote to sustain or withdraw a man from public priesthood ordinance administration. Making any more or less of these commandments is surely grievous to the Lord who has more than once expressed His displeasure with ongoing disputations over His words.

With respect to marriage, while the union itself is comprised of two distinct personalities, implicit in the decision to marry is the obligation to become a singular entity, like a coin with two sides. From a public perspective, the moment the couple enters the marriage covenant, they become responsible to represent (hold themselves out) to their community as a single unit. Though they may interact with their community separately with unique and varied personalities, they are to be viewed and socialized with as a single unit so that no impropriety occurs. A peaceful marriage implies that the couple has enough self-control and self-awareness to keep the process of learning and refinement a private matter worked out between the husband and wife as they strive together to build a house of God. Personal disagreements, arguments, and seasons of doubt, are dealt with away from public view where otherwise they may cause those around them to gossip and take opposing sides, thus unwittingly drawing them into the conflict and disturbing their peace.

And again, the fellowship community itself has the responsibility of interacting with the couple as a singular unit during seasons of joy as well as seasons of difficulty when marital fighting may be exposed to public view. During such times, the community should refrain from coming between the husband and wife by adopting or advocating one point of view over the other when they air out their grievances to the public. It is unwise to impose personal views of what a successful marriage should look like when in truth, couples are in various stages of development and not directly comparable to another. When public fighting ensues, casting judgement on either the man or the woman based on what they hear or see outwardly may not be indicative of the reality of things that go on behind the scenes inwardly. Instead, rather than justifying one or the other by dealing with them separately, they should be held accountable together and asked to privately resolve the matter enough that their outward behavior as a singular unit is once again wholesome and peaceful before re-entering the gathering. If repeated public fighting continues, the couple should have the self-awareness and self-governance to remove themselves from ALL fellowship gatherings until needed changes happen that can result in their presence as a couple not posing a threat to the peace of the community. Only under rare and extreme cases of abuse should the community become involved in the marriage, and even then, only after first-hand witness of extreme circumstances which would require intervention. However, if a marriage can successfully demonstrate to their community that overall, they can live peacefully together as a singular unit, they have something of great value to offer a larger community composed of single individuals, married people and families. Though the marriage is still very flawed with bumps in the road along the way, by and by such a union becomes well-constituted, properly organized and highly functional with whom any society can live with in peace.

CONCLUSION

Enough hearts have been broken, friendships divided, gossip spread, assumptions made, and words gone unmeasured to fill an entire dispensation with little time remaining in this one. If you have apologies to make, then make them. If someone is trying to make amends and offer an apology to you, then accept it. If you are holding on to bad feelings for another, then let them go and view them with fresh eyes. If you have behavioral changes to make that are currently causing you to disturb the peace of your fellowship and community, then make the needed changes immediately. The commonsense application of self-control, self-awareness, and self-governance are all that is needed to eliminate any further explanations or definitions of what has been graciously given by God with regard to how a peaceful community is formed. Truly, Zion is an outcome, not a destination.