

Speaking Today

The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood

By President Spencer W. Kimball

Timely addresses by Church leaders and members

The following are selected addresses delivered at the Relief Society General Conference, October 1 and 2, 1975. Additional addresses will be printed in the April issue.

My beloved sisters and the few brethren who are here, it is a real pleasure to stand before you today and discuss with you some important matters pertaining to our lives. It has been many years since we began to hold these Relief Society conferences on an annual basis. Perhaps this will be the last of that exact pattern. We know your board will produce and present to you a program that will be fulfilling and interesting to you and that you will carry on. We do not intend to reduce the interest in this great work but rather to multiply it.

So long as the body of the Church was in Utah or even in the Intermountain West, it was not an impossible thing to call to headquarters the women of the Church for their delightful period of fellowship, learning, and training. But now conditions are different. Great changes have come. In the old days perhaps a few representatives could come for the messages and relay them to the scattered membership, but now the church of the Lord is in a different age and we have different conditions. We now have some 707 stakes, 133 missions, and 3 1/2 million people and we have to approach our problems a little differently than when we had one-tenth of that number. This we have found in the total Church; so as you know, for the past four years, we have been taking to the people in their own homelands area conferences where the General Authorities give the gospel directly to them. For four years we have held these conferences—in Manchester, England; Mexico City; Munich, Germany; and Stockholm, Sweden; and last year down in South America, and just recently over in the Orient. We were well received. We estimate that we talked to 114,000 people in those conferences; the most we would get here would be a small fraction of that number.

Accordingly, we feel that what I have mentioned in area conferences can also happen in the rank and file with the auxiliary organizations. We believe you will be happy with this new program that will be given to you.

We are deeply grateful for the Relief Society presidency, Sister Smith and her counselors and associates, for the devoted and efficient leadership they are giving. We also remember with gratitude the many years of great service and leadership given by Sister Spafford and her associates, and we are grateful to all good women everywhere who serve in this important work. I would like to comment on the excellent statements made by these sisters today.

We shall now move forward on a newly arranged program and shall hope that all the women of the Church may profit from this rich program, and we hope that there will be a great increase in the attendance of the sisters in this important work.

The themes will be the same. The standards will continue at the same height as at present, and we expect that children and families everywhere may profit from the change that is now in full swing.

The basic program is still the same, and we call upon all women to gear their lives and train their children as in the past, only more so. We give to you the admonition of the great apostle Paul as he spoke to the Ephesian converts:

“Finally, my brethren [and that means sisters too], be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph. 6:10–12.)

Our women are among the best educated and best trained. We encourage all of you to keep abreast of the times, to be familiar with current events, to be able to read the signs of the times, to be prepared to direct your children in the proper paths to guarantee to them a purposeful and eventful life. Paul says to put on the whole armor of God, as we have read. All of you who are students of the scriptures know of Satan, the father of lies. You know how he turns the truth into a lie. He garnishes evil to make it appear beautiful, pleasing, easy, and even good. He told the prophet, Moses, “Worship me.” Moses was alert enough to ask, “Where is thy glory? Who art thou?” Moses had already gone through an experience with his Lord who had told him, “No man

can behold all my glory and afterwards remain in the flesh on the earth.” Moses had been given a great vision by God who had protected him so that he could see and hear and not be consumed. He beheld God with his spiritual eyes. Moses said, “I would have withered and died in the bright presence of the Lord but for his protection.” Moses, then, in questioning Satan, said, “I could not look upon God except he strengthen me with his glory, but you Satan, where is your glory? For I can look upon you with my natural eyes. God said unto me, Worship God for him only shalt thou serve.”

Moses again said, “I will not cease to call upon God.” Satan then resorted to his last chance. He said, “I am the Only Begotten, worship me.” In his great fear, Moses said again, “Depart from me, Satan, for this one God only will I worship. In the name of the Only Begotten, depart hence, Satan.” (See Moses 1:1–24.) And that is a good statement to be used by every soul who is besieged by this father of lies.

When he is challenged, Satan is angry, as he was with Moses. He cried with a loud voice, trembled, and shook, and he departed from Moses who was resolute. There was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth as he departed from Moses. There was nothing else for him to do. He has to leave when you say, “Depart from me, Satan.” Every soul who has mortality is stronger than Satan, if that soul is determined.

Temptations are great. Satan tells us that black is white. He lies to us; therefore, we must be prepared to make a bold stand before Satan, who is without flesh and blood, and against principalities and powers and the rulers of darkness. We need the whole armor of God that we may withstand. We must quench the fiery darts of the wicked with the shield of faith.

You read the papers, you watch television, you hear the radio, you read books and magazines, and much that comes to your consciousness is

designed to lead you astray.

Much of what you read is scurrilous. It is to tempt you. You are intelligent women. You have learned from your infancy what is right. You know what you want for your children. You must make your own decisions in determining if it is right or wrong.

Some of those who write for the public have already gone after the far afield. They have chosen already to subvert the right way. Some of the things they are telling you these days are: it is not necessary to marry; it is not necessary to marry to have children; it is not necessary to have children; you may have all the worldly pleasures without these obligations and responsibilities. There is the pill. There is abortion. There are other ways to give you this loosely held, so-called freedom. They are telling you that you are manacled to your homes, to your husbands, to your children, to your housework. They are talking and writing to you about a freedom they know nothing about.

Only she is free who knows no master, either Satan or his emissaries. Our only master should be the Savior. It was the apostle Paul who said, "Ye are the servant of whom ye choose to obey." (See Rom. 6:16.)

And the Lord said:

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

"They answered [the Savior], We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?"

"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. ..." And that is true in a very literal way.

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. ...

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him." He is still a murderer. He will always be a murderer. "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." That is one of the principal things before us these days, this murder that he talks about.

"And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not," the Savior said. (John 8:32-34, 36, 44-45.)

The role of woman was fixed even before she was created, and God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is written:

"And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them. [The

story of the rib, of course, is figurative.]

“And I, God, blessed them [Man here is always in the plural. It was plural from the beginning.] and said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over [it].” (Moses 2:27–28.)

And the scripture says,

“And I, God said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning: Let us make man [not a separate man, but a complete man, which is husband and wife] in our image, after our likeness; and it was so.” (Moses 2:26.) What a beautiful partnership! Adam and Eve were married for eternity by the Lord. Such a marriage extends beyond the grave. All peoples should call for this kind of marriage.

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.” (Gen. 4:1.)

“This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him;

“Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam [Mr. and Mrs. Adam, I suppose, or Brother and Sister Adam], in the day when they were created.” (Gen. 5:1–2.)

This is a partnership. Then when they had created them in the image of God, to them was given the eternal command, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28), and as they completed this magnificent creation, they looked it over and pronounced it “good, very good” something that isn’t to be improved upon by our modern intellectuals; the male to till the ground, support the family, to give proper leadership; the woman to cooperate, to bear the children, and to rear and teach them. It was “good, very good.”

And that’s the way the Lord organized it. This wasn’t an experiment. He knew what he was doing. Those things that endanger a happy marriage are infidelity, slothfulness, selfishness, abortion, unwarranted birth control, leaving the home to others, and sin in all of its many manifestations.

Eve, so recently from the eternal throne, seemed to understand the way of life, for she was happy—happy!—that they had eaten the forbidden fruit. Adam blessed God and began to prophesy because his eyes were opened and he realized that in this life there should be joy for them and in the course of events they should again see God in the flesh. And Eve was glad, and she said, “Otherwise we never would have had children.” (Moses 5:11.) She, like other normal women, wanted children. They rejoiced in their confirmed status. And Nephi wrote,

“All things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.” There were no guesses here, no trial and error.

“Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.”
(2 Ne. 2:24–25.)

So our beloved mother Eve began the human race with gladness, wanting children, glad for the joy that they would bring to her, willing to assume the problems connected with a family, but also the joys.

Since infancy we have been singing the beloved song “O My Father,” its meaning only partly understood by many people. Sister Eliza R. Snow gave us these words and I think they are magnificent. In every funeral of the Kimball family so long as I can remember, “O My Father” was the principal song.

O My Father

*O my Father, thou that dwellest
In the high and glorious place,
When shall I regain thy presence,
And again behold thy face?
In thy holy habitation,
Did my spirit once reside?
In my first primeval childhood,
Was I nurtured near thy side?*

*For a wise and glorious purpose
Thou hast placed me here on earth,
And withheld the recollection
Of my former friends and birth.
Yet oft-times a secret something
Whispered, “You’re a stranger here;”
And I felt that I had wandered
From a more exalted sphere.*

*I had learned to call thee Father,
Through thy Spirit from on high,
But until the key of knowledge
Was restored, I knew not why.
In the heavens are parents single?
No; the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason, truth eternal
Tells me I’ve a mother there.*

*When I leave this frail existence,
When I lay this mortal by,
Father, Mother, may I meet you*

*In your royal courts on high?
Then, at length, when I've completed
All you sent me forth to do,
With your mutual approbation
Let me come and dwell with you.*

(Hymns, no. 138)

That speaks to the whole gospel program, doesn't it?

Man became a living soul—mankind, male and female. The Creators breathed into their nostrils the breath of life and man and woman became living souls. We don't know exactly how their coming into this world happened, and when we're able to understand it the Lord will tell us.

As an indication of the importance the gods gave to women, the Lord said,

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24.)

Do you note that? She, the woman, occupies the first place. She is preeminent, even above the parents who are so dear to all of us. Even the children must take their proper but significant place.

I have seen some women who give their children that spot, that preeminence, in their affection and crowd out the father. That is a serious mistake. Many marriages have gone “on the rocks” for this very cause.

They were partners, each given a part of the work of life to do. The fact that some women and men disregard their work and their opportunities does not change the program.

The Lord said to the woman: “... in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” I wonder if those who translated the Bible might have used the term *distress* instead of sorrow. It would mean much the same, except I think there is great gladness in most Latter-day Saint homes when there is to be a child there. As He concludes this statement he says, “and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Gen. 3:16.) I have a question about the word *rule*. It gives the wrong impression. I would prefer to use the word *preside* because that's what he does. A righteous husband presides over his wife and family.

I have attended missionary meetings all over the world. I have heard thousands of missionaries tell about their families back home in Utah or California or Arizona or elsewhere. I have heard the testimonies of these fine young men. What do they talk about? Why, you know, when they

speak of home, they talk about their mothers. Almost invariably they speak of the faithfulness of their mothers, the devotion of their mothers to them, her training of them, her deep appreciation for them. Once in a while the father comes in for just a tiny word or two. As a father, I have felt a little twinge of jealousy sometimes when my missionary sons have thus expressed themselves; yet I know what these missionaries say is true and wholly justified. How happy the mothers must be with this adoration and love! Is it not worth all the “sorrow” and suffering and sacrifice?

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (Prov. 22:6.) Those are the words of a very wise, inspired man. What a joy this must be to the mothers as they see the fruits of their labors: their children showing the impress of a righteous mother assisted by a righteous father.

To be a wise mother and a good wife is the ideal that Korean women have followed for thousands of years. We heard it many times in Korea recently.

We are happy to see Paul’s exhortation to women. He instructed Titus to teach the women “to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” (See Titus 2:4–5.)

No woman has ever been asked by the Church authorities to follow her husband into an evil pit. She is to follow him as he follows and obeys the Savior of the world, but in deciding this, she should always be sure she is fair.

One woman said, “My home and husband come first in my life. I took care of my children myself when they were little and trained them all. I taught them all to read at home.” Here is a mother who is interested in more than just giving the child food and shelter.

Mothers have a sacred role. They are partners with God, as well as with their own husbands, first in giving birth to the Lord’s spirit children and then in rearing those children so they will serve the Lord and keep his commandments. Could there be a more sacred trust than to be a trustee for honorable, well-born, well-developed children? We affirm the Church’s strong, unalterable stand against innovations or any unchastity or breaking of the laws that could possibly reflect in the lives of the children.

Motherhood is a holy calling, a sacred dedication for carrying out the Lord’s work, a consecration and devotion to the rearing and fostering, the nurturing of body, mind, and spirit of those who kept their first estate and who came to this earth for their second estate to learn and be

tested and to work toward godhood.

The role of mother, then, is to help those children to keep their second estate, so that they might have glory added upon their heads forever and ever.

We have often said, “This divine service of motherhood can be rendered only by mothers. It may not be passed to others. Nurses cannot do it; public nurseries cannot do it. Hired help cannot do it; kind relatives cannot do it. Only by mother, aided as much as may be by a loving father, brothers and sisters, and other relatives, can the full needed measure of watchful care be given.”

The mother who entrusts her child to the care of others that she may do nonmotherly work, whether for gold, for fame, for civic service should remember that in Proverbs we read, “A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.” (Prov. 29:15.)

And we remember that in the modern revelations we learn that if parents do not teach their children to pray and walk uprightly before the Lord, “the sin be upon the heads of the parents.” (D&C 68:25.)

My beloved brothers and sisters, it is a great joy to be with you and to find you in such excellent circumstances, under such wonderful leadership, coming so far to get instructions from the Lord. I hope that all your lives will be brightened and blessed by your having come to this conference.

May God bless you sisters, bless you in your homes and in your families, and especially with your husbands that they may recognize in you a great power so that they might better fulfill their responsibilities in life. Your Heavenly Father will smile upon you as you live the commandments and teach them to your children. This is the work of the Lord. God Almighty is responsible for it. It is a great experience to put one’s life in the hands of his Heavenly Father so that he may give the service that is required.

We leave our blessings with you. God be with you as you return to your homes, that you may be protected and blessed and take back a new spirit, increased fidelity, and interest. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.