

EQUALITY

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PUBLISHED
HERALD PUBLISHING HOUSE
REORGANIZED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS
LAMONI, IOWA

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Equality is the condition or quality of being equal. Persons under this condition are neither superior nor inferior; greater nor less; better nor worse.

This does not mean that one is just as tall as another, or that all must weigh in the same notch, eat the same amount of food, or sing well in the same key; but it does mean that there are no servants and no masters, no exalted and no debased, none specially privileged and none whose rights are specially abridged.

In temporal matters each is supplied according to “his needs and wants inasmuch as his wants are just.” But it is not necessary that all shall engage in the same business, or work at the same trade, nor that they shall have the same sized family, nor have a stewardship of the same amount of property. The equality of the holding is based upon the needs and just wants of all and is determined according to the reasonable demands, circumstances, business capabilities, talents, and calling of each.

PURITY OF LIFE FIRST

There absolutely can be no idlers, loafers, busy-bodies, backbiters, deceivers, rogues, liars, drunkards, libertines, or covetous persons where there is equality; and conversely, where any of these things exist the rules and laws belonging to this order can not be safely entered upon; hence the divine instruction to the church in December, 1833, upon its failure to carry out the law of equality among the Saints:

“Behold, I say unto you, there were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them; therefore by these things they polluted their inheritances.” Doctrine and Covenants 98:3

Also the following, June 22, 1834:

“Therefore, in consequence of the transgression of my people, it is expedient in me that mine elders should wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion, that they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, and have experience, and know more perfectly, concerning their duty, and the things which I require at their hands.”

Doctrine and Covenants 102:3

The rule of conduct enjoined by Jesus at the first of his ministry in Palestine is the true governing principle to be met at the threshold of the Zion state of equality, and men must ever stand dazed and disappointed who undertake to bring about the hoped for conditions among a people who fail to keep this law:

“Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” Matthew 7:21 I.V.

Those who attempt to force the condition without following the laws governing are in a like pitiable state as the religious enthusiast who promises that heaven may be gained any way you please, so you say, “Lord, help, I am a sinner.” But Jesus taught, “Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Why not follow Christ, instead of the teaching of some man? “Enter ye in at the straight gate.”

The question of conditions precedent to entering upon the system of equality has been presented to the reader at this early time in considering the question, because in the judgment of the writer it is the one phase to which the attention of all should now be earnestly directed. It is an easy matter to awaken a desire on the part of the people to enter upon the enjoyment of the holy association of complete oneness and equality, but another thing to lead them so to live and sacrifice as to make the introduction of the order of equality possible. The error of the present age is much the same as with the Jews when Jesus taught and wrought among them; there is a great desire to be partakers of the “loaves and fishes,” but too little disposition shown to commend the religion of the Master by keeping his sayings. There can be no nearer approach to the doctrine of equality without an earnest effort of self-denial and unselfish sacrifice.

EQUALITY OF RIGHTS

One prominent feature of the condition of being equal is already fully reached by the people, but has been unappreciated by many and abused by many others. It is that of equality of rights. To proceed further in the way of divine oneness this must be zealously cherished and honored. It applies to every person and to every condition, and so necessarily its bounds stop at the borders of the rights belonging to every other individual. It at once opens the door of opportunity and advancement to all, but just as effectually closes the avenue of interference with the work, business, rights, and privileges of everyone.

Equality of rights does not permit one to take advantage of his neighbor, interfere with the work of others, or in any way authorize him to assume a position of influence and trust to which he is not properly called and elevated. A community of rights run in parallel lines, not at angles, and properly honored, permit no clashes between the privileged membership. It follows without exception, that we should be at absolute peace with each other.

Again, the fact of equality of rights in the church, or state, interferes in no way with the work of officers or teachers. The work and calling of these is parallel with the rights of all others; there is a collision only when parties fail of duty, and abuse the doctrine of equality of rights. To effectually honor and guard his own rights a member must faithfully respect and recognize the rights of all others, and everyone in his place

and station. One under this great bill of rights can no more disrespect and disregard the rights of the official or the laymember, and stand excusable, than he can disregard the rights belonging to the sacred precincts of the home of one of these, and stand guiltless. How pertinent, indeed, is the instruction of the Lord to his people: "Let every man learn his duty." He must not only stay within his own line of work and usefulness, but he must also keep out of the way and work of others.

A full compliance with and adherence to the principles and law of equality of rights will prove our capability of entering upon a further advanced position in the work of equality. There is nothing known to the writer which so much defers the full institution of the order as that of awaiting the general notice that the entire membership, brothers and sisters, fully recognize, keep, and honor the law of equality of rights. Who is prepared to issue the order stating that all are ready?

The Bishopric has sought under the provisions of the law to ascertain how nearly the Saints were prepared for advanced conditions and has asked for financial reports and expressions of readiness to sacrifice and help as the law directs.

"For according to the law every man that cometh up to Zion must lay all things before the bishop in Zion." Doctrine and Covenants 72:3

"And also my servants who are abroad in the earth should send forth the accounts of their stewardships to the land of Zion, for the land of Zion shall be a seat and a place to receive and do all these things." Ibid., 69:2

The fact that the command was given to "lay all things before the bishop," is all that is necessary to prove that this is an essential part of the work. The Lord does not direct a nonessential thing to be done. It is written, "My word shall not return unto me void."

Many have thought they could climb up some other way, failing to recognize the fact that to insist upon our own way and wishes in this matter is but to put farther from us the cherished promises.

EQUALITY IN SPIRITUAL THINGS

It is a full and perfect obedience to the law of Christ that brings us into harmony with the divine will where all may be owned as children, sons and daughters of God, and receive of the divine spirit and the distribution of spiritual gifts, not as we often wish and ask, but according to our needs, and "as he will."

God is not partial, and yet out of his great abundance he bestows upon his children "diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit"; not the same gift to each one, but to each according to his wants and needs, and all this that each may "profit withal." To each is given full and fair opportunity with everyone else; all receiving according to their several abilities, and it is then left with the individual under this proper condition to prove what he will be.

It is represented of the church and its work that in that day before the Son of man comes, the kingdom of heaven, the church, is "as a man traveling into a far country,

who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway went on his journey.”—Matthew 25:14, 15, Inspired Translation. From this illustration it is apparent that we are made stewards of our heavenly Father and receive according to his wise provisions, gifts and stewardships, for the great and good purpose of activity and usefulness; and not simply for our own comfort and ease or satisfaction. This is also clearly expressed in the parable of the rich man and the unjust steward, Luke sixteenth chapter. The useful life and work of Jesus of Nazareth is the pattern for all, and it is written that “He went about doing good”; also, that “he is our pattern in all things.”

To bestow spiritual gifts, divine favor, or material riches upon a people without regard to their respective abilities and capacities to properly appreciate and use, would destroy rather than build them up, and burden instead of giving comfort and help. Among the requisites to the desirable conditions of equality is that principle that provides that each shall receive that which to him is useful and to a great degree enjoyable. If this is not correct, then there may be less general happiness and comfort under the order of equality than there is in the reverse state, notwithstanding the many daydreams upon the question.

The advance position necessary to gain true and full equality is that we reach the condition where all have a true conception of the duties we owe to God and to each other. Without this it is impossible to move together without jealousies, jarrings, and complainings. There must be a possibility of moving with oneness of purpose and desire in order to succeed. We should be equal in industry and interest, well balanced in frugality and economy, and all of a disposition of self-helpfulness and charity toward others. How else can we maintain the equal state and relation should it once be entered upon?

TRUE CHARACTER NECESSARY

It is revealed that:

“The Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them; and Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness unto the people of God.”

Doctrine and Covenants 36:2

Jesus said:

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” John 13:35

Well, have we proved it to the world? We may do so by developing characters that are in full harmony with the law. These are not builded, however, by reading idle tales, or meting out such instruction as develops a feeling of enmity and hatred between brethren, or mankind in general, whether rich or poor, bond or free, or of whatever class or station.

Every move made in a spirit of selfishness and envy, or with the object of bitterly arraying men against each other, is prompted by the spirit from beneath, not the Spirit of truth that is from above. The work of the Spirit of the Lord is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

A people moved by this may arrive at equality and true holiness, and there is a bright future for such; but the reverse spirit leads to hatred, variance, discord, and finally anarchy and death. All then should “try the spirits” which move them to action. We can not afford to be falsely led; and the test is not the desire or will of the individual, but the word of God. Each should be careful to examine himself and ascertain the underlying motive of his efforts, and talk, about equality. Is it to serve self, or to humbly serve the Lord? If it is for the latter purpose, then be forward to put away every evil work.

INHERITANCES AND STEWARDSHIPS

The disposition of inheritances and stewardships under the law to more fully equalize the benefits, burdens and opportunities among the Saints, presents no exception to the examples already set out, showing that the Lord deals out to every man according to wisdom and in justice and equity. The proposition is clearly set forth in Doctrine and Covenants 77:1, of the application of unvarying principles touching equality, both in heavenly and earthly things:

“For if ye are not equal in earthly things, ye can not be equal in obtaining heavenly things; for if you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you.”

Also section 101, paragraph 2:

“I the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and builded the earth as a very handy work; and all things therein are mine; and it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine, but it must needs be done in mine own way.”

If there was no specific declaration upon the manner of distribution of properties then in the books, it would be determinable from the divine plan touching spiritual things as hereinbefore set out. Everyone will receive “according to his wants and needs, inasmuch as his wants are just.” But the plan is made specific in word:

“And you are to be equal, or in other words, you are to have equal claims on the properties, for the benefit of managing the concerns of your stewardships, every man according to his wants and his needs, inasmuch as his wants are just; and all this for the benefit of the church of the living God, that every man may improve upon his talent, that every man may gain other talents; yea, even an hundredfold, to be cast into the Lord’s storehouse, to become the common property of the whole church, every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God.” Doctrine and Covenants 81:4

Do not overlook the fact that under the Lord's plan everyone has his stewardship. This is the special business, means of livelihood, particular work, or profession, whatever one is called to do, or is capable of doing and properly allotted; and these several stewardships are as distinctly separate and apart from all others and the *common fund*, as each person has his own separate, individual identity and is responsible to God for his acts, and must separately answer to God for his faithfulness in, and development of, the stewardship.

Each member, however, has equal claims upon the common fund, the storehouse, for the management of his stewardship. But the claim upon the common fund is not determined by the individual himself, any more than a member may determine what gifts of the Spirit he will have. Spiritual things which are for the good of all are not at each one's direction or wish, but as God wills. And temporalities which are for the good of all are not given out upon the demand of a member as he wills, or may judge himself entitled to the same, but they are administered according to his "wants inasmuch as his wants are just."

It is clear then, that someone must pass upon the question of the "just wants," when this common fund is to be drawn upon, and that under such condition persons may often be for a time disappointed even under the "all things common" idea, when this is administered according to the law of Christ. Let no one misconstrue the law of uniformity as set out. All are to have "equal claims on the properties for the benefit of managing the concerns of their stewardships." This is right and every just claim would be allowed; but what about an improper claim?

INDIVIDUAL AND JOINT OWNERSHIP

Under the Lord's system of equality every person who is counted worthy to have part and lot therein has what is properly termed his own interests, as well as this right of claim upon the church "storehouse." This preserves the liberty and independence of the member, and this conservation of individual liberties is as essential to the state and condition of equality and the well-being of Zion, as any other vital principle. Special provision is made for this under the law so that no undue advantage may be taken one of another, notwithstanding differences of opinion, controversies, and even discipline may arise. The statement is:

"Women have claim upon their husbands for their maintenance until the husbands are taken; and if they are not found transgressors they shall have fellowship in the church; and if they are not faithful, they shall not have fellowship in the church; yet they may remain upon their inheritances according to the laws of the land." Doctrine and Covenants 82:1

The principle applies equally to the husband or anyone else, and to the stewardship as well as the inheritance. Either may be disposed of by the steward, owner, as did Esau his birthright, but can not be taken away against the steward's will, except he barter it away according to the law of the land. Again, paragraph 2:

“All children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance until they are of age; and after that, they have claim upon the church; or, in other words, upon the Lord’s storehouse, if their parents have not wherewith to give them inheritances. And the storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church, that widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor.”

Without individual ownership there would be no such thing as parents being able to give their children their inheritances. Ownership in a proper way is the order; this seems to be one of the main objects to be attained. Without this, instead of there being no poor, every man would be poor; and in case he did not walk according to any edict that might be issued by the church, although he did not believe it, he would be set adrift without a penny as effectually as it was ever possible under the darkest reign of the popes. God’s ways are the reverse of this; in directing in this special work, he says of the bishop:

“When he shall appoint a man his portion, give unto him a writing that shall secure unto him his portion, that he shall hold it, even this right and this inheritance in the church, until he transgresses and is not accounted worthy by the voice of the church, according to the laws and covenants of the church, to belong to the church; and if he shall transgress, and is not accounted worthy to belong to the church, he shall not have power to claim that portion which he has consecrated unto the bishop for the poor and needy of my church; therefore he shall not retain [draw back] the gift, but shall only have claim on that portion that is deeded unto him. And thus all things shall be made sure according to the laws of the land.”
Doctrine and Covenants 51:1

It is safe to affirm that men’s rights are not jeopardized in carrying out the law of Christ, but preserved; and this is in perfect harmony with the instruction to the church April 18, 1902:

“In regard to the gathering and the work of the bishopric in regard to the law of tithing and consecration, I made inquiry what should be the attitude of the church in regard thereto. To this question I was answered, that the Book of Doctrine and Covenants as accepted by the church was to guide the advice and action of the bishopric, taken as a whole, each revelation contained therein having its appropriate bearing upon each of the others and their relation thereto; and unless the liberties of the people of the church should be in jeopardy, the application of the law as stated by the bishopric should be acceded to.” Doctrine and Covenants 126:10

The stewardship is to God, and not simply to the church. No rule of action can ever be made which invalidates the law requiring each to answer to God for his work, or that sets aside the doctrine of personal liberty of the citizen. God’s children must be free; Zion is not made up of the following of slaves. This freedom, however, permits no one to live above the law, or to violate a single one of its provisions. True liberty is ever within the law, not outside.

THE GENERAL GOOD CONSERVED

It will be observed that the doctrine of Equality is not for the benefit of the few, but for all; all are to be equal under the system. And while there may be differences in the amounts and the values of stewardships in order that each “may improve upon his talent,” yet the general results are for the common good. The gains to the extent of “an hundredfold” or less, are cast into “the Lord’s storehouse, to become the common property of the whole church.” This does not mean that one’s stewardship can not be extended and developed under the energy and enterprise of a faithful citizen of Zion. In keeping with the extended knowledge, demands, and opportunities, it is safe to say that it will, both before and during the millennium, for that matter; but can not be done at the expense of the stewardship of any other person. All have equal claim upon the storehouse for the management of their stewardships; but some may be more industrious, self-sacrificing, and zealous in their work than others, and everyone will be rewarded according to his works.

Under the system, whoever prospers most does the most for the general good and not simply for himself; and this eliminates the disposition to selfishness and jealousy from the account; for the gains, as already shown, “become the common property of the whole church, every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God.”

Christ is willing to bless and enrich his people, but not until they shall have proved by their devotion and sacrifices that they can bear this, and are worthy to receive. Particular inquiry was made of Jesus upon this on a certain occasion:

“Peter said, Lo, we have left all and followed thee.” “And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, there is no man who has left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time; and in the world to come, life everlasting.” Luke 18:29, 30

To those who labor and patiently wait, abiding trustfully the Lord’s time, sacrificing for Zion’s weal, walking unselfishly and in the truth, seeking not to please themselves but him who hath made the promises sure, there is hope—to such the redemption, gathering, and equality need not be deferred.

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