

Alma 4:6**1** *Pride and Costly Apparel*

Their words echo the oft-repeated play on words of our own day: "Love people and use things; don't love things and use people." Those things we love more than people become our costly apparel...

Even though costly apparel was and is a physical manifestation, Me Blanch, a professor of English at BYU, rightly identified it as a spiritual problem: "When money and possessions become the chief marks of distinction in society, then the pursuit of money becomes the only action worthwhile. And if this pursuit requires the sacrifice of honesty, integrity, compassion, and all other virtues, then so be it, for the love of money is indeed the root of all evil. Thus the wearing of costly apparel involves the soul as much as the body." ("Challenge to the Reign of the Judges," in Kent Jackson, ed., *Studies in Scripture*, 7: 292).

I recall the experience of one of my students who drove to seminary in a very expensive sports car presented to her by her father on her sixteenth birthday. Along with my other students, I stood in the parking lot celebrating as well as coveting her brand new car. Later in the day she drove to the seminary to visit with me one on one. With no other students around, she was free to share her feelings concerning this expensive gift. Surprisingly, her emotions were not based on the joy of receiving the beautiful car but of sorrow—almost mourning—regarding the distance between herself and her father. Her tears were interrupted by these words: "He gives me everything money can buy and nothing it can't."...

Our society may well be as guilty as the wealthy Zoramites of using fashion as "the science of appearances, inspiring us with the desire to seem rather than to be." (Edwin Hubbel Chapin, as quoted in Stephen R. Covey, *Spiritual roots of Human Relations*, p. 26) In our day the costly apparel syndrome may be identified as one aspect of the modern-day term *conspicuous consumption*. The word *conspicuous* alludes to the visual side of vanity—the need to be seen or recognized. *Consumption* refers to that which we take in or consume. Conspicuous consumption may be defined as that which we take to ourselves in order to be recognized and approved of by others. The person trapped in conspicuous consumption, especially as it applies to "costly apparel," must be focused on the opinions of others, because what is "in" today may be out of fashion tomorrow. Vanity then becomes its own punishment, because there is never time to be satisfied—the eyes and opinions of others can turn so quickly to embrace someone else.

K. Douglas Bassett, *Life Lessons from the Book of Mormon*, "Faces of Pride in the Book of Mormon" p. 117-119.

2 Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that he is "finding his place in it," while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of being really at home in earth which is just what we want. C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, p.155

3 We now no longer camp as for a night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven...We have built for this world a family mansion, and for the next a family tomb. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 80.

Alma 4:8**4** *They began to be scornful, one towards another*

C.S.Lewis wrote: "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man" (*Mere Christianity*, p. 109). When a person spends all of his time looking over—comparing and contrasting himself with others—rather than looking up to Christ, he will soon grieve the Spirit of Christ and thus alienate the very power by which relationships are sweetened and sustained. Rather than being filled with love, he is filled with suspicion or resentment. Resentment tends to lead eventually to persecution.

Millett & McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol 3, p.21.

Alma 4:10-12**5** *Stumbling Block*

Whenever Christians fail to live up to their covenants, whenever those called to be pure in heart are instead as salt which has been tainted through mixture and contamination, whenever those commissioned to be the light of the world do no more than provide a faint flicker to a darkened world—when these conditions obtain, the Church has failed in fulfilling its mission to make a difference for good. Whenever members of the Church begin to proselyte others to partake of their sins and thereby share their guilt, to that extent the Church becomes a hindrance, a stumbling block to those who so desperately need its righteous influence.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987-1992], 2: 21.

6

Pride is essentially competitive in nature.... In the words of C. S. Lewis: "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man.... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone" (*Mere Christianity* [New York: Macmillan, 1852], 109-10)....

Pride is ugly. It says, "If you succeed, I am a failure"...

Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion. I repeat: *Pride* is the great stumbling block to Zion.

Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, Apr. 1989 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989], 4-7.

7

One of our best missionary tools is the sterling examples of members who live the gospel. This is what the Lord meant when He said to the Church, "Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness.... Zion must put on her beautiful garments" (D&C 82:14).

Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, May 1985, p.7

8

Among the Latter-day Saints, the preaching of false doctrines disguised as truths of the gospel, may be expected from people of two classes, and practically from these only; they are:

First—The hopelessly ignorant, whose lack of intelligence is due to their indolence and sloth, who make but feeble effort, if indeed any at all, to better themselves by reading and study; those who are afflicted with a dread disease that may develop into an incurable malady—laziness.

Second—The proud and self-vaunting ones, who read by the lamp of their own conceit; who interpret by rules of their own contriving; who have become a law unto themselves, and so pose as the sole judges of their own doings. More dangerously ignorant than the first.

Beware of the lazy and the proud; their infection in each case is contagious; better for them and for all when they are compelled to display the yellow flag of warning, that the clean and uninfected may be protected.

Joseph F. Smith, *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 41, p. 178.

9

"...The time is coming when we will be mixed up in these now peaceful valleys to that extent that it will be difficult to tell the face of a Saint from the face of an enemy to the people of God. Then, brethren, look out for the great sieve, for there will be a great sifting time, and many will fall; for I say unto you there is a test, a TEST, A TEST coming, and who will be able to stand? ... To meet the difficulties that are coming, it will be necessary for you to have a knowledge of the truth of this work for yourselves. The difficulties will be such a character that the man or woman who does not possess this personal knowledge or witness will fall. If you have not got the testimony, live right and call upon the Lord and cease not till you obtain it. If you do not you will not stand.... The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. If you do not have it, how can you stand?"

Heber C. Kimball (Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, pp.446, 449-450)

- 10 President Gordon B. Hinckley related the story of a young man who faced terrible odds to learn about the gospel because of the way Church members treated him:
- "He was not a member of the Church. He and his parents were active in another faith.
- "He recalls that when he was growing up, some of his LDS associates belittled him, made him feel out of place, and poked fun at him.
- "He came to literally hate this Church and its people. He saw no good in any of them.
- "Then his father lost his employment and had to move. In the new location, at the age of 17, he was able to enroll in college. There, for the first time in his life, he felt the warmth of friends, one of whom, named Richard, asked him to join a club of which he was president. He writes:
- "For the first time in my life someone wanted me around. I didn't know how to react, but thankfully I joined.... It was a feeling that I loved, the feeling of having a friend. I had prayed for one my whole life. And now after 17 years of waiting, God answered that prayer.'
- "At the age of 19 he found himself as a tent partner with Richard during their summer employment. He noticed Richard reading a book every night. He asked what he was reading. He was told that he was reading the Book of Mormon. He adds:
- "I quickly changed the subject and went to bed. After all, that is the book that ruined my childhood. I tried forgetting about it, but a week went by and I couldn't sleep. Why was he reading it every night? I soon couldn't stand the unanswered questions in my head. So one night I asked him what was so important in that book. What was in it?.... He started to read where he had stopped. He read about Jesus and about an appearance in the Americas, I was shocked. I didn't think that the Mormons believed in Jesus.' ...
- "On a subsequent occasion this young man and his friend were traveling. Richard handed him a Book of Mormon and asked that he read it aloud. He did so, and suddenly the inspiration of the Holy Spirit touched him.
- "Time passed and his faith increased. He agreed to be baptized....
- "That is the end of the story, but there are great statements in that story. One is the sorry manner in which his young Mormon associates treated him.
- "Next is the manner in which his newfound friend, Richard, treated him. It was totally opposite from his previous experience. It led to his conversion and baptism in the face of terrible odds."
- Gordon B. Hinckley, *Conference Report*, Apr. 2006, 62-63; or *Ensign*, May 2006, 59-60.

Alma 4:13

- 11 *While others were abasing themselves*

One need not submit to either the blatant evil of the perverse or the subtle persuasions of the sly. Indeed, the Book of Mormon is a powerful witness of the fact that one can live a life of fidelity and devotion in the midst of pride and priestcraft and greed and persecution. So it was that while some who claimed membership in the true Church in Alma's day were untrue to their trust and reveled in their pride, others of the household of faith stood firm and steadfast. They abased themselves, that is, they acknowledged that their prosperity was a gift from the Almighty and not simply a product of their own industry; further they acknowledge their need for divine assistance and realized their absolute nothingness without the Lord. They were personal witnesses of the fact that in all eternity no person can come unto God except he or she put off the carnal and fallen state and partake of the cleansing powers of the blood of Christ.

Millett & McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol 3, p.22-23.

Alma 4:1412 *Retaining a remission of sins*

Is there any doubt that retaining a remission of sins depends on our caring for one another? If we believe these teachings, if we profess to follow the Savior and his prophets, if we want to be true to our covenants and have the Spirit of the Lord in our lives, then we must do the things that the Savior said and did.

Marion G. Romney, *Conference Report*, Oct. 1980, 136; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 92.

Alma 4:1913 *Bearing pure testimony*

Elder Packer said this: "True doctrine understood changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel."

Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, p. 17.

14 **Bearing down in pure testimony.** The teacher's divine commission has been clearly articulated by the scriptures and by living prophets. He or she is to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to be taught out of the standard works and from the words of the living oracles. It is to be taught by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is to be applied to the life situations of the listeners, thus "likening the scriptures" unto the Saints. Finally, and as the capstone of the teaching enterprise, the teacher is to bear witness, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that what has been taught is true. Faith is developed and commitment is built as a result of testimony, pure and solid testimony.

The Holy Ghost is the converter. The gospel teacher has much to do in the preparation of the lesson, the search of the scriptures, the declaration of the truth; but the Holy Ghost is the converter. And the gospel teacher must never forget this. He or she must never seek to usurp the role of the Spirit nor upstage him whose influence results in renewal and righteousness. The person who bears pure testimony never seeks for cheap substitutes for the Spirit. He never relies upon methodologies which might confuse sentimentality with spirituality, emotional display with edification. His witness is more than story, and his testimony is more than an expression of gratitude. He tries the virtue of the word of God (Alma 31:5), trusts in the power of the scriptures and the words of the prophets to penetrate to the heart of his listeners, and bears witness of his message with sincerity and with soberness.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *The Holy Ghost*, pp. 119-20; or Millet & McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol 3, p. 24.

15 Those who have prepared carefully for the fast and testimony meeting won't ... give sermons nor exhortations nor travel reports nor try to entertain as they bear witness. Because they will have already expressed appreciation to people privately, they will have less need to do it publicly. Neither will they feel a need to use eloquent language or to go on at length. A testimony is a simple expression of what we feel... Even a child can feel such things, ... and our preparations of fasting and prayer produces in us child-like feelings. That preparation for the fast and testimony meeting is a covenant obligation for members of the Church.

Henry B. Eying, *Ensign*, Nov. 1996 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996], 32.

16 The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, comp. by Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 12.

17 A few years ago I conducted a church history tour and we went back east and one of the places we stopped was Niagara Falls.... We stayed at a hotel right on the riverbank,... so we were told to go check in, find out where our room was, and then meet in a large hall for dinner. As we ... went to the dining room, the most frequent comment was, "Do you have a room with a view?" Everybody was asking everybody else, "Do you have a room with a view?" I had looked out the window. I was on the backside of the building. I had no view ... of the falls. But the next day I was talking to the group, and I said it this way. "To have a room with a view, an office with a view, a home on the hillside with a view—that's wonderful! But if you get a testimony of the gospel, whereby you know about Jesus and you know about the Plan of Salvation, and you know about Joseph Smith and ... [the living Prophet], you may not have a room with a view, but you will have a life with a view." And that's what you need.

Robert J. Matthews, Devotional Address, Orem Institute of Religion, 18 Feb. 2005.

18 We often hear some members, and especially children, bear their testimonies, listing things for which they are thankful: their love of family, the Church, their teachers, their friends. For them, the gospel is something that they are grateful for because it makes them feel happy and secure....

My experience throughout the Church leads me to worry that too many of our members' testimonies linger on "I am thankful" and "I love," and too few are able to say with humble but sincere clarity, "I know." As a result, our meetings sometimes lack the testimony-rich, spiritual underpinnings that stir the soul and have meaningful, positive impact on the lives of all those who hear them.

Our testimony meetings need to be more centered on the Savior, the doctrines of the gospel, the blessings of the Restoration, and the teachings of the scriptures. We need to replace stories, travelogues, and lectures with pure testimonies....

The Spirit cannot be restrained when pure testimony of Christ is borne.

M. Russell Ballard, *Conference Report*, Oct. 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 42-43.

19 Many years ago, Brigham Young told of an early missionary in the Church who was asked to share his testimony with a large group of people. According to President Young, this particular elder "never had been able to say that he knew Joseph [Smith] was a Prophet." He would have preferred to just say a prayer and leave, but the circumstances made that impossible. So he started to speak, and as soon as he got 'Joseph' out, 'is a Prophet,' was... next; and from that, his tongue was loosened, and he continued talking until near sundown.

President Young used this experience to teach that "the Lord pours out His Spirit upon a man, when he testifies that [which] the Lord gives him to testify of." (*Millennial Star*, supplement, 1853, 30).

M. Russell Ballard, *Conference Report*, Oct. 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 44.

20 We held a series of zone conferences to improve the spirituality of the mission. Rather than schedule instructions on the mechanics of missionary work, we determined to have a testimony meeting. In the last conference, in the testimony of one of the humble elders, I found the answer to the problem. There was something different about the brief testimony of this frightened new elder. He stood for less than a minute, yet I learned from his expression what it was that was missing.

The testimonies we'd heard from all other missionaries went something like this: "I'm grateful to be in the mission field, I've learned a lot from it, I have a fine companion. I've learned a lot from him. I'm grateful for my parents. We had an interesting experience last week. We were out knocking on doors and ..." Then the missionary would relate an experience. His conclusion would be something like this: "I'm grateful to be in the mission field. I have a testimony of the gospel." And he would conclude "in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen."

This young elder was different somehow. Anxious not to spend an extra second on his feet, he said simply, in hurried, frightened words, "I know that God lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that we have a prophet of God leading the Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen."

This was a testimony. It was not just an experience or an expression of gratitude. It was declaration, a witness! Most of the elders had said "I have a testimony," but they had not declared it. This young elder had, in a very few words, delivered his testimony—direct, basic, and, as it turned out, powerful.

I then knew what was wrong in the mission. We were telling stories, expressing gratitude, admitting that we had testimonies, but we were not bearing them.

Boyd K. Packer, *Teach ye Diligently*, 275.

21

Alma understood a basic fact of life. There is no way of caring for the problems of mankind unless the great majority of them have been taught and subscribed their lives to a code of conduct which will keep them from falling into sin. The Lord, in the very beginning established for our first earthly parents commandments and covenants which, if observed and obeyed, will keep us from the heartache and waste of unrighteous living. As we consider conditions in the world today, we should be asking the question: "How can we more effectively prevent the loss resulting from an overwhelming increase in spiritual, emotional, and physical problems now afflicting mankind?" It seems as if we are spending too much of our time and energy in repairing the damage of sin and not enough time in teaching them the Lord's law as a foundation on which they can govern their lives.

L. Tom Perry, "But the Labourers Are Few", *Ensign*, May 1992, p. 23.

22

You will recall that Alma gave up the judgment seat so that he might have time and strength for a greater work: [Alma 4:19]

For this same reason, the world today needs the power of pure testimony. It needs the gospel of Jesus Christ, and if the world is to hear that gospel, there must be messengers to teach it.

Gordon B. Hinckley, "There Must Be Messengers," *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, 2.

23

Simply stated, testimony—real testimony, born of the Spirit and confirmed by the Holy Ghost—changes lives. It changes how you think and what you do. It changes what you say. It affects every priority you set and every choice you make....

My experience throughout the Church leads me to worry that too many of our members' testimonies linger on "I am thankful" and "I love," and too few are able to say with humble but sincere clarity, "I know." As a result, our meetings sometimes lack the testimony-rich, spiritual underpinnings that stir the soul and have meaningful, positive impact on the lives of all those who hear them.

Our testimony meetings need to be more centered on the Savior, the doctrines of the gospel, the blessings of the Restoration, and the teachings of the scriptures. We need to replace stories, travelogues, and lectures with pure testimonies....

... To bear testimony is "to bear witness by the power of the Holy Ghost; to make a solemn declaration of truth based on personal knowledge or belief" (Guide to the Scriptures, "Testify"). Clear declaration of truth makes a difference in people's lives. That is what changes hearts. That is what the Holy Ghost can confirm in the hearts of God's children. Although we can have testimonies of many things as members of the Church, there are basic truths we need to constantly teach one another and share with those not of our faith. Testify that God is our Father and Jesus is the Christ. The plan of Salvation is centered on the Savior's Atonement. Joseph Smith restored the fullness of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Book of Mormon is evidence that our testimony is true.

M. Russell Ballard, *Conference Report*, Oct. 2004, 42-43; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 40-41.