

“Choose You This Day”

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A month and a half ago, I marked my baptismal anniversary. Each year this is a time for me to pause and reflect upon the eternal shaping of my heart and mind that the truth of the gospel has brought into my life. I am humbled as I look back on that season of studying and questioning that preceded my decision to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was motivated by an almost urgent need for a spiritual dimension in my life, so for four years—all of them in my teens—I searched for something solid in a world of shifting values. The light and strength of the gospel of Jesus Christ stabilized my world, and I will be forever grateful.

Almost exactly one year after my baptism, I was enrolled in a large Book of Mormon class at Brigham Young University, studying Alma 30. The professor, the inimitable Brother Ivan J. Barrett, announced one day that we could earn extra credit by attending a one-act play about the story of Korihor, the anti-Christ. Because extra credit is always a good idea in school—and in life, for that matter—I decided to attend the production. I watched as the tragedy of a life misspent unfolded on the stage and was struck by how logical Korihor’s philosophical arguments would have sounded to me not that many months earlier. But because I had been fortified by the gift of the Holy Ghost and my developing testimony of the Savior, I could see clearly the destructive chain that was forged as Satan deceived Korihor and he, in turn, deceived all who would heed his words.

Sisters and brothers, we are now being confronted by twenty-first-century Korihors. Those same erroneous philosophies are being redressed and recycled by the adversary and delivered at rapid speed and in multiple mediums. President Ezra Taft Benson observed: “The type of apostates in the Book of Mormon is similar to the type we have today. God, with his infinite foreknowledge, so molded the Book of Mormon that we might see the error and know how to combat false educational, political, religious, and philosophical concepts of our time.”¹

Indeed, every generation of believers—and especially this one—has encountered its Korihors, those who would twist and distort the truth. I find it interesting that Korihor emerged against a backdrop of peace after a season of mourning and great spiritual cleansing in the land. It was a time when the freedom of religion was protected, and the existing law in Zarahemla promoted an orderly society. Korihor used those conditions to his advantage and urged the people to replace the prophecies of God with the philosophies of men.

Similarly, our nation is healing from a time of devastating loss and mourning. In the aftermath of the recent national tragedy, many have sought spiritual comfort and understanding. Like the people of Zarahemla in 74 B.C., we are guaranteed today the freedom to worship God by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, and the laws of this land are designed to promote and maintain an orderly society. Because we live in this dispensation, the adversary's work is accelerated and a virtual army of well-trained Korihors are seeking currently to confuse, distract, and ultimately destroy our faith in the Savior.

Why do you think that so many found the message of ancient Korihor compelling? I picture him as an articulate man with a commanding presence and a charismatic personality. Having surrendered such powerful talents to Satan, he sought to confound and misdirect the people. He pressed his philosophies, which denied Christ and spoke against the prophets, upon the faithful. Korihor's purpose was to "interrupt their rejoicings" (Alma 30:22). And when he had the people's attention, his next tactic was to have them doubt what they had been taught in their youth by their parents. Because such thinking appealed to their pride, they were primed to listen to his ideas.

And what did they hear? In that one chapter, Alma 30, Korihor preaches fifteen false philosophies. Let's examine in some depth just three of them, some of their current manifestations, the truths that transcend the philosophical logic, and ways we can fortify ourselves against them.

Relativism is the first. In verse 17, Korihor offered as fact that "whatsoever a man does is no crime." This approach views life through a blurred, darkened lens. Elder Neal A. Maxwell explains, "Relativism involves the denial of the existence of absolute truths and, therefore, of an absolute truthgiver."² A modern application of relativism is situational ethics, the practice of being moral chameleons. Such individuals adjust their ethical conduct and code, depending upon the current context and which method will serve their purposes best. In addition, one who subscribes to this philosophy concludes that, in the short- and the long-term, we are ultimately accountable only to ourselves. Such thinking does not even acknowledge our eventual command performance before the great Judge (Psalms 75:7). Considering this approach, Elder Richard B. Wirthlin concludes, "Societies structured by situational ethics—the belief that all truths are relative—create a moral environment defined by undistinguished shades of gray."³

Note the contrast between gray relativism and the distinct boundaries that mark the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have been given clear commandments and have made covenants that require our specific and consistent behavior. Our demeanor does not depend on our location or the company we keep; to the contrary, we are commanded "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things and in all places" (Mosiah 18:9; emphasis added).

To illustrate how we can find ourselves in settings where we confront relativism, I'd like to tell you of an experience I had some years ago while I was in law school. I had traveled with some of my classmates to attend a conference for women student groups in a large city on

the West Coast. All of the sessions addressed current hot topics in the law, the presenters were well prepared, and the large audience was receptive. The keynote speaker was especially skillful. Her style was practiced, and her tone was persuasive; she told stories that her audience could relate to, and she took a clever, backdoor approach to presenting her politically charged subject. As I listened to this speaker's opening remarks, I felt uneasy and began looking around the large auditorium to see others' reactions. The women were riveted upon the presenter's every word. When her voice rose in a question, almost every person in attendance nodded her head in enthusiastic agreement. My discomfort escalated as I witnessed the speaker's smooth manipulation of facts and distortion of solid ethical standards.

At the end of the first day, I sat at dinner with some of the representatives from other schools and listened as they reviewed the sessions they had attended. Without exception, these bright, articulate young women singled out the main speaker's address as the highlight of the conference thus far. Moreover, they wholeheartedly endorsed her platform. They didn't state their reasoning outright, because it was so obvious to them: if you are female, intelligent, and educated in the law, you will subscribe to this wise, seasoned practitioner's approach. Soon I knew I couldn't let my silence lead others to think that I agreed with this conclusion, and I began to search for a time and a way to express my differing perspective.

I decided that the best opportunity would be at a delegates' meeting on the second and final day of the conference. As BYU Law School's representative, I knew I would be asked to sign off on a resolution that endorsed many of the falsehoods presented in the opening keynote address. It would then be sent on to the American Bar Association with a letter of support from the national student organization. I was certain that my refusal to put my name and the law school's name at the bottom of that document would be met with surprise, opposition, and even anger; but I was certain that the time had come for me to take a stand.

Then, just before the roll call was taken, the lead delegate announced that because of time constraints, the resolution would be tabled until the following year. Well, I have to confess to you that my initial reaction was overwhelming relief that I didn't have to oppose what appeared to be something that had unanimous support. That feeling faded quickly, however, and I knew that I still needed to weigh in. That night in my hotel room I wrote a four-page letter informing the conference leaders that my school would not have endorsed the measure, and using the truths of the gospel, I explained why. Upon reflection, I can say that I honestly don't believe my few words of dissent were likely to persuade anyone who read the letter to change her opinion, but I needed to voice them. The absolutes of the gospel required such action.

Hedonism is the second philosophy that I'd like to discuss with you. Verse 18 of Alma 30 describes the deterioration of the character of individuals who would value pleasure above all else, those who did "lift up their heads in wickedness." Today hedonism is big business. At every turn, we're assaulted by enticements to be entertained and urged to seek that which stimulates and distracts. Such pursuits never satiate the appetites that crave them. Indeed, when we make the pleasure of our senses a priority in our lives, ironically we dull those

senses and become “past feeling” (1 Nephi 17:45).

By contrast, as members of the Church, we understand that we are literally here in mortality to seek joy (2 Nephi 2:25). In his April 1995 general conference address, Elder Maxwell pointed out the distinction between pleasure and joy: “Sensory happiness is illusory happiness. Even legitimate pleasure is as transitory as the things which produce it, while joy is as lasting as the things which produce it!”⁴ If our first priority is to show our love for our Heavenly Father and our gratitude to our Savior by honoring the covenants we have made with them and seeking to build a kingdom on earth, joy will be both the sustaining byproduct and the ultimate result of our efforts (D&C 11:13).

The third philosophy is negativism. In Alma 30:13, Korihor calls out to those who are “bound down under a foolish and vain hope.” He states that belief in Christ is a cumbersome “yoke” and equates commandments with restrictions, even bondage. He views obedience to divine laws as a hold upon our freedom and urges us to throw off such restraints. Thus, Korihor attempts to steer us away from the faith that we feel in our hearts by appealing to our logic. He asserts that our faith in and obedience to God is the result of a “frenzied mind”; it is a mental “derangement.”

What a difference it makes when we view obedience with the Spirit and through the gospel lens! The truth is that obeying commandments does indeed bind us—to God—and, in the process, frees us from the bondage of sin (Romans 6:18). Korihor and his counterparts in today’s world continually seek to present such potentially faith-destroying distraction and logical persuasion that can have a corrosive effect upon the hearts of those who hear them. As Sister M. Catherine Thomas warns, “The danger of riveting false concepts upon our hearts, of embracing the precepts and uninspired philosophies of men, is that they limit our perception of the truth and thus inhibit our spiritual power and happiness; they thicken the veil.”⁵

In verse 18 we learn that Korihor’s persistent preaching did, indeed, distance some of his listeners from the Spirit, for he was successful in “leading away the hearts of many.” As I have read and reread this verse in preparing to speak today, I have been struck by the following: this anti-Christ led “away many women, and also men” (emphasis added). I’ve asked myself, Did Korihor seek out the women first? Were their tender hearts especially vulnerable to his message? If so, his reasoning might be found in these thoughts from Sister Patricia Holland:

“If I were Satan and wanted to destroy a society, I think I would stage a full-blown blitz on women. I would keep them so distraught and distracted that they would never find the calming strength and serenity for which their gender has always been known.”⁶

Clearly we can see how devastating and far-reaching the impact is when the adversary uses false logic to capture the hearts of righteous women!

As wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, many look to us for direction. We must strengthen our resolve and stride firmly past a barrage of such tactics. Gerald N. Lund has observed

that “the path that leads back to our Heavenly Father meets inevitable opposition. At times our heads are confused by those who would seek to mislead our hearts. Living in the Age of Information, we are unceasingly bombarded by facts and ideas. But information added to more information does not equal truth.” How can we keep our minds clear and our hearts full of faith as we walk that straight and narrow path back home?

We must be ever vigilant and continually guard against Satan’s customized methods of planting fear and doubt in our minds and hearts. If we are to resist and stand firm, we should be anticipating erroneous, man-made ideals and preparing to counter such philosophies as relativism, hedonism, and negativism. We can do so by calling upon time-proven, faith-building approaches such as praying always, studying the scriptures, worshipping in the temple, heeding the counsel of our leaders, serving one another, and seeking the influence of the Holy Ghost continually. Let me mention two ways that have helped me look to eternal things and filter out anything that would obscure that view.

Focus more personally on the sacramental experience. What a blessing it is to renew our commitment to follow the Savior each week as we partake of the sacrament. Because we do have such frequent opportunities, our observance can become routine. Add to that fact the reality that some seasons of our lives, such as when we are teaching young children about reverence, are more about keeping peace than seeking it! Nonetheless, whenever possible, we should anticipate our active participation in this sacred process. I’ve found that if I select something in advance to ponder—a verse of scripture, a hymn, an important lesson from the past week—I am more engaged and receptive to spiritual promptings. The Atonement ceases to be merely a subject for mental contemplation and becomes a heartfelt experience. At those times, I feel my Savior’s sacrifice, I feel specific remorse for anything in my life that separates me from him, and I feel deep resolve to show my remembrance of him in all that I do and say. I sincerely want that kind of experience to be the rule, rather than the exception, for me as I participate in the sacrament.

Recently, my husband, Gary, and I were visiting a beautiful part of northern California and attended a sacrament meeting there before catching a flight back home. That particular weekend, I had had some extra time to count my blessings and concentrate upon my gratitude for the Savior’s incomprehensible gift to me. From the first notes of the sacrament hymn, I was filled with the kind of joy that literally no words can express. But I wanted to try and capture my thoughts and feelings, so I wrote the following lines shortly after the meeting: “Today I felt humbled and edified in much the same way I feel in the temple as I renew essential covenants. I knew I was surrounded by fellow Saints who are of royal birth, and I was lifted by and with them in inexpressible appreciation for our Savior.” Such an experience clears my head and strengthens my heart.

Contemplate how to better serve those within our stewardship. Seeking inspiration to know how best to promote growth and eternal progression for members of our families, those we serve in callings, close friends, and neighbors is the noblest of pursuits. My favorite picture of our four sons shows them standing on the deck of a ship near the railing. When I took the photo, I was so focused on the sons that I didn’t even notice the sun setting in the distance, sending illuminating rays across the water. Because this photo records a brief interlude

before life as we had known it would change dramatically for our family and for each of our sons as individuals, it reminds me of my need to step back, clear away anything such as too-familiar habits, assumptions, or my own needs that would obscure my view of the best way to serve my brothers and sisters. Continually seeking to become a more fine-tuned instrument in the Lord's hands will align us with the truths of his gospel.

For we will be challenged in our beliefs and in the principles that guide our lives; some, like Korihor, will try to shake the firm foundation we stand upon. May we consider the ways each day, amid challenges and, yes, even mundane circumstances, that you and I can strengthen our grip on the gospel's iron rod. Strong personal testimony, born of a willing mind and a faithful heart, will protect us from such storms and shape our daily choices. In his recent book, *Stand a Little Taller*, President Gordon B. Hinckley reminds us that our direction is set by such "small, day-to-day choices" that become "the substance of our lives."⁷ May we choose this day—and every day—to serve the Lord is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1 Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning: A Modern-day Prophet Testifies of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 3.

2 Neal A. Maxwell, "Some Thoughts on the Gospel and the Behavioral Sciences," *Ensign*, July 1976, 74.

3 Richard B. Wirthlin, "Four Absolute Truths Provide an Unfailing Moral Compass," *Ensign*, November 1997, 9.

4 Neal A. Maxwell, "Deny Yourself of All Ungodliness," *Ensign*, May 1995, 67.

5 M. Catherine Thomas, *Spiritual Lightening* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 5.

6 Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 85.

7 Gordon B. Hinckley, *Stand a Little Taller: Counsel and Inspiration for Each Day of the Year* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 13; see also Alma 37:6.

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