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13 May 2006—Mother's Day

We speak on this day of our mothers. While not all of us are mothers, all of us have mothers. We reverence them and honor their sacrifices for us, for they are not a few.

I want to speak briefly on the ideal of motherhood, an ideal to which no human can attain in this life. This is what we do in the church generally: we speak of things as they *really* are (D&C 93:24) in the eternal realms, those ideals to which we aspire but nearly always fall short because of our inherently flawed natures.

That we all fall short is nothing new, nor is it preventable. Anyone who strives for flawlessness will be sorely disappointed in this life, but fortunately flawlessness is not the goal. Perfection is the goal, and perfection is another matter entirely, as we've mentioned at this pulpit before.

The word "perfect" in the scriptures ("τέλειός") does not denote flawlessness, but "completeness" or "wholeness". A man or woman who has repented of all his or her sins and has found forgiveness (i.e., has been justified by the atonement) can be made perfect by the grace of Christ (Moroni 10:32). That we can fall from that grace is documented (D&C 20:32), but we speak of perfection in this sense because it *is* attainable, unlike flawlessness, which is a dangerous semantic distraction from true perfection.

I mention this now because all women in this congregation are in different circumstances of motherhood, just as all men and women in this congregation are in different marital circumstances. For example, one-sixth of the families in our ward are single adult families. This includes those who have never been married, those who have been divorced or separated, or those who have been widowed.

Of those in our ward who are currently married, some have been sealed in the temple, and some have not. Of those sealed in the temple, some have strived for a celestial marriage, and some have not. Even of those who strive, there are varying degrees of dedication and devotion. We have all kinds of circumstances in our ward, and yet *all* of these people can be saved if they will repent of their sins and exercise faith in Christ unto salvation.

When we speak of the ideal of *motherhood*, we honor and reverence our mothers, but we also, and I speak especially to the men now, we honor and reverence those divine characteristics common to all women that allows them to become mothers.

As I've mentioned, we have some women who are single, some who are divorced, some who have children, some who do not, and some who cannot have children. Of those women with children, all of them make mistakes in raising them (as do the fathers of course). The circumstances of the mothers in this ward vary widely, but all fall short of the ideal. It may be that a mother of three may have more to learn about motherhood than a woman with no children but who has already been blessed with divine motherly traits. The fact is, that for us to judge one another based solely on outward appearance is wrong.

This brings me to my final point. Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged" (3 Nephi 14:1, 2).

This not only applies to each of us looking outward at others, but it also applies to each of us when we consider our own standing before the Lord. Do not hastily condemn yourself because you think you're a failure in some way. Some of you may feel that you haven't done as well as you could have all of the time, and that your mistakes as a mother or father have been the cause of an errant child.

*If your mistakes have indeed contributed (or are currently contributing) to the waywardness of a child, these can be and are covered by the atonement of Christ. Do not underestimate the broad and subtle effects of Christ's grace on your children because of your faithfulness. God knows we all make and will continue making mistakes as long as we draw breath as mortals. We do not have all knowledge, and so we ignorantly do the best we can. "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's [or any other parent's] transgression" (Articles of Faith 2). In other cases, we act against our knowledge of good and perhaps commit a sin of anger or are abusive to a child in some way.*

In either case, whether you act in ignorance, or are willfully disobedient to light and knowledge, know that you can be forgiven, and the grace of Christ can heal your soul as well as your child's soul. In fact, the only thing that cannot be covered by the atonement in time or eternity is the child's own moral agency. When you have been forgiven of your sins, and even after Christ's grace has been extended to your child to give them every opportunity to undo or correct what mistakes you may have made, the child still has his or her moral agency to do with what they will, just as it is so with the parent.

Know that your faith and prayers are heard and will avail you much (James 5:16). Remember the effect of faith and prayer of Alma on his son Alma and the sons of Mosiah, who were the "very vilest of sinners" (Mosiah 28:4). Your child may be missing important opportunities to serve in the Church because of their choices, but I say now that the Lord still loves them, and as he lives, I testify that each of your children *can* be saved in the kingdom of heaven. To paraphrase Winston Churchill: Never, never, never give up on them. And as Mormon said to his son Moroni:

And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God (Moroni 9:6).

May we be faithful to our covenants and "land [our] souls... at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out" (Helaman 3:30), in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.