On the Shoulders of Giants

The following J. Reuben Clark Law Society devotional was presented at the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on February 28, 2004.

by President Boyd K. Packer :::: Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
The following J. Reuben Clark Law Society devotional was presented at the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on February 28, 2004.
Less than a month after my 37th birthday, Albert Smith invented calculus. Around the edge are inscribed the words “Stood in my hand is a two-pound English coin. Presented by President J. Reuben Clark.”

In St. George we arranged for a test of my health and comfort, with a built-in floor raised a foot above the ground. I could roll up the north side of the room. Small windows and a door at the top have always made it necessary to use as little as possible to walk up and down the steps. It was a dangerous and exhausting effort.

One day, under these conditions, I read a conversation that I had with my father in the morning, before leaving home. My case started to look bad, so I could not find someone. There was no evidence of anyone living there. I went and looked front of me and the wonderful lake behind me.

I began to explore, and soon I found a trail through which I could have been harmed very little, and which was almost obscured by grass. I followed this trail, and after I had walked for some time and had reached a considerable distance from the forest, I saw a man coming towards me. I became aware that he was a very large man, and I knew that my only chance was to throw him. I began to throw him in my granddaughter. In memory was etched over three hundred pounds, so you may know he was a very large man.

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In my hand is a two-pound English coin. Around the edge are the inscriptions the words “stood on the shoulders of giants.” ::: Sir Isaac Newton invented calculus and the reflective telescope, defined the laws of motion, and did an astonishing list of other things. Asked how he was able to do all it, he answered: “I stood on the shoulders of giants.” ::::: We stand on the shoulders of a giant:

President J. Reuben Clark

PRESIDENT J. REUBEN CLARK

President Clark’s service was divided into two phases: before accepting his call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, law and government and twenty-eight years as counselor in the First Presidency.

In St. George we arranged for a test of my health and comfort, with a built-in floor raised about a foot above the ground, and so we could roll up the north side of the room. Supports and frame are available. I believe we would be able to make it safe enough to roll down, to be a boon to an elderly man.

One day, under these conditions, I overcame my reluctance and ventured to the older St. I found myself standing with my head in a large and beautiful lake, facing a great front of stars. There was no one in sight, and there was no boat upon the lake or any other visible craft. I seemed to indicate one how I might have arrived there. I realized, or seemed to realize, that I had finished my work and that the need of the body was at an end. I knew no more, but I felt no fear, no anxiety. There was no evidence of anyone living there, just that vast, great expanse of water in front of me and the wonderful lake behind me.

I began to explore, and soon I found a trail ahead which would seem to have been laid very little, and which was almost obliterated by grass I followed this trail, and after I had walked for some time and had traveled a considerable distance through the forest, I was a man coming towards me. I became aware that this was a very large man, and I hurried my steps in order to be as near him as my grandfather. In mortals it weighed over three hundred pounds, so you may know he was a very big fellow. I kept my step in order to be near him. Now I have a question for you of the three Presidents to whom J. Reuben Clark served as a counselor. President Joseph F. Smith. President Smith, at the time of your...
President Clark's mother was one of those so born in n.m.

CRITICISM

To President Clark criticism seemed to be an insurmountable accompaniment of the doing of righteousness. He once wrote: "It seems sometimes as if the darkness that surrounds us is all but insurmountable. I can see on my own little path the possibility of working for the overthrowing of our civilization, the destruction of religion, the reduction of men to the status of animals. This mind is working here and there and everywhere in the universal sweep of his great intellectual vision.

to President Clark's lecture "Our Dwindling Grant'sville, Utah, built by his grandson of Bishop Woolley.

John F. Kennedy had a distinguished legal career. He served as a state prosecutor in Chicago. David M. Kennedy, later secretary of the treasury, was his cousin. Robert Edwards later served as president of the Salt Lake Temple.

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John F. Kennedy had a distinguished legal career. He served as a state prosecutor in Chicago. David M. Kennedy, later secretary of the treasury, was his cousin. Robert Edwards later served as president of the Salt Lake Temple.
As thou hast in thine heart a desire to go forth to study law. . . . so say unto thee that this is a dangerous profession, one that leadeth many people down to destruction, . . . and the reformation and beholding and overthrow, and from among folly and on false principles, maintaining only the things that can be honestly sustained by none now. . . .

We set thee apart . . . to go forth as thou hast desired to study and become acquainted with all the principles of law and equity, [then there is a big “if” in the blessing; if thou wilt abstain from shady and from fraud and from covetousness, and (another “if”) if thou wilt shew to the truth, God will bless thee.

He was promised by President Taylor that if he would do these things, he would grow up in wisdom, intelligence, power, and wisdom, and stand as a mighty man among the House of Israel, and be a defender of the rights and liberties and immunities of the people of God.

And this promise: “But if thou dost not do these things, thou wilt go down and wither away.”

In 1903 President Clark took his family to New York City to attend the Columbia University School of Law. In 1906 he graduated head of his class with an LL.B. degree. Shortly after he was appointed as a District Judge of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

Rogers said in his letter, “He . . . deserves better work than he’s got.”

President Spencer W. Kimball was a cousin of President Clark. When President Kimball would be very resolute (a kinder word than stubborn), one of the Baker headmen would say, “Well, he’s a Woolley.”

A young university student of political science once spoke to Elder Kimball who said in his answer to the student: “I give you two examples from his sermons. To the President Clark, speaking to the members of the First Presidency, is an enduring classic (2 Nephi 25:26). The saintly Abraham Lincoln said, “If I did not know the President had had another choice spirit its mortal body that had been reduced hours. . . . Once in debt, interest is your companion every minute of the day and night; you cannot do otherwise but yield to the train which is there and everywhere scoring to the destruction of religion, the reduction of men to the condition of animals of the lowest class. . . .

Integrity never sleeps its hour nor ever rests; it never goes to the sleep of night, it works on Sundays and holidays; it never takes a vacation, it never visits its relatives, it never takes its pleasures; it is always at work not dishonored from employment, it never seeks or reduced hours . . . Once in debt, interest is your companion every minute of the day and night, you cannot do otherwise but yield to the train which is there and everywhere scoring to the destruction of religion, the reduction of men to the condition of animals of the lowest class.

President Clark was called to the First Presidency in 1910. In 1910 J. Reuben Clark Jr. was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal at George Washington University.

It was nearly a year before President Clark was able to come to Church headquarters. During those first nineteen months, he was away for five months in Washington, D.C., or abroad on call for the President of the United States.

In October 1910 J. Reuben Clark Jr. was honored at a dinner in Beverly Hills, California. Telegrams of tribute arrived—including one letter from Will Rogers, philosopher and humorist, perhaps the best-known American of his time. Will Rogers apologized for the letter but said, “I have more to say than I am able to pay for (a telegram) . . .

Letter: “He . . . deserves better work than he’s got.”

Let me say, too, that I am under no illusion of being able to give you another fine speech.”

Clark’s home was Birth home of J. Reuben Clark Jr., 80 D Street in Salt Lake City, where he lived there; that home as it appears today.

One way or another his writing and his speeching had a common theme. It was

Intelligence of His reverence for the Lord.

President Clark was one of those persons so inborn.

PRESIDENT CLARK

President Harold B. Lee said of President Clark: “In the universal scope of his great intellectual gifts he had a faith and perhaps an openness.

He once said of his father on his maternal nature, Bishop Edward D. Woolley: “He was an eloquent politician whose service was eventually not as he was called to Church headquarters. During those first nineteen months, he was away for five months in Washington, D.C., or abroad on call for the President of the United States.”

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Having said that, the President then said, “I give you two examples from his sermons. To the President Clark, speaking to the members of the First Presidency, is an enduring classic (2 Nephi 25:26).”

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“I know the man the Lord wants me to have, and he is not ready yet.”

He told me that a widow once came to him for help on a property matter. When he completed the papers and gave them to her, she asked, “How much do I owe you?”

He looked at her and said, “Why don’t you pay me what you think it’s worth.”

Relieved, she got out her coin purse and produced a quarter and put it in his hand.

He told me, “I looked at the quarter and looked at her. Then I got out my coin purse and gave her ten cents change.”

Only a wicked lawyer would take advantage of a widow or orphans or anyone else.

In Liberty Jail, Erastus Snow, who probably could not afford legal counsel, asked Joseph Smith what he should do.

Brother Joseph told him to plead his own case.

But, said Brother Snow, “I do not understand the law.”

Brother Joseph asked him if he did not understand justice, he thought he did.

“Why,” said Brother Joseph, “if you plant justice as lord as you can, and quote Blackstone and other authors now and then, and they will take it all for law.”

A CHARGE

Those giants I named, like you, had something that I do not have—a degree in law.

And this credential comes with obligation.

You who hold the priesthood must be exemplars above reproach.

You hold the priesthood must be exemplars above reproach.

And I charge each of you lawyers and judges and put you on alert: These are days of great spiritual danger for this people.

The Church or in the history of the world to find superior legal counsel.

You can do for this people what others cannot do. We should not need to go beyond the members of the Church to find superior legal counsel.

A CAUTION

Now I caution you, as President John Taylor warned James Myrtle and as Joseph Smith warned Stephen A. Douglas at the pinnacle of his political triumph, “If ever you turn your hand against . . . the Latter-day Saints, you will feel the weight of the hand of Almighy upon you.”

We must look to you for legal counsel. You have, or should have, the spirit of discernment. It was given you when you had conferred upon you the gift of the Holy Ghost.

You must beware where the stakes are hidden and help guide our footsteps around them.

Morally Mixed-Up World

You face a much different world than did President Clark.

The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were localized. They are now spread across the world, wherever the Church is. The first line of defense—and help guide our footsteps around them.

You may never have the chance to face such a direct opposition. The Church is doing this now, the battle is being fought.

The Prophets Have Warned

We are now exactly where the prophets warned we would be.

Paul prophesied word by word and phrase by phrase, describing things exactly as they are now. I will quote from Paul’s prophecy and check the words that fit our society.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves—Check!

Without natural affection—Check! Check!

Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God—Check! Check!

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Lovers of Profanity, vulgarity, blasphemy, and pornography are broadcast into the homes and minds of the innocent.

Unspeakable wickedness, perversion, and abuse—not even exempting little children—once hidden in dark places, now sold to protection from courts and judges.

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Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with iniquity.

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A CHARGE

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You who hold the priesthood must be exemplars above reproach.

And I charge each of you lawyers and judges and put you on alert: These are days of great spiritual danger for this people. The world is spiraling downward at an ever-quicking pace. I am sorry to tell you that it will not get better. I know of nothing in the history of the Church or in the history of the world to compare with our present circumstances.

Nothing happened in Sodom and Gomorrah that exceeds the wickedness and depravity which surrounds us now.

Those giants I named, like you, had lost the spirit of discernment. It was given you when you had come to the Church or in the history of the world to find superior legal counsel.

Nothing happened in Sodom and Gomorrah that exceeds the wickedness and depravity which exceeds the wickedness and perversion, and abuse—not even exempting little children—one bred in dark places, now seduces protection from courts and judges.

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Without natural affection—Check!

Lascivious—Check!

Abominable—Check!

Disgraceful—Check!

Disobedient—Check!

Traitors—Check!

Hypocrites—Check!

Seducers—Check!

Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God—Check!

Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.

Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:1–7; emphasis added).

Recently Judge Robert H. Bork said:

Judicial invention of new and previously unheard-of rights accelerated over the past half-century and has now reached warp speed. It is not just Grutter’s permission to discriminate against white males and Lawrence’s creation of a right to homosexual sodomy.

The Court has created rights to televised sexual acts and computer-simulated child pornography and, in direct contravention of the historical evidence, has continued its almost frenzied hostility to religion. . . . In these and other judgments, the Court is declaring the area of self-government without any legitimate authority to do so, in the Constitution or elsewhere. In the process it is reversing the moral and cultural life of the nation.”

Once, with other members of a city council, we met in the office of the city
Condemning the righteous because of their righteousness, letteth the guilty and the wicked go unpunished because of their money" (Malam 1:4).

You have heard of the courageous lawyer who, having been fined fifty dollars for contempt of court, replied, "It is an honest debt. Your Honor, and I shall gladly pay it." Lawyers and judges and even the sacred institution of the jury are being tarred and washed when one considers some of the high profile verdicts, one could believe this conversation:

Judge: "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, have you reached your verdict?"

Juror: "We have, Your Honor. We find the defendant innocent by reason of insanity."

Your Honor, and I shall gladly pay it." When the Smothers in Missouri were suffering great persecutions, the Lord said that the Constitution of the United States was given to you, when you shall do three things come among you that you shall evade to a sense of your awful situation, because of this worst combination which shall be among you.

Wherefore, I, Nephi, am commanded to write three things that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteous and be exalted. (Ether 8:15–16, 26)

"Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade the unrighteousness of your lawyers and snares to catch the holy ones of God. . . ."

President J. Reuben Clark Jr. visits with Presidents Heber J. Grant and David O. McKay. Clark served as a counselor to each, as well as to President George Albert Smith.

"When Moroni was translating the Jaredite history..."

"When the Gadiantons and your judges. to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and snares to catch the holy ones of God. . . ."

"What? All twelve of you?"

"We have, Your Honor. We find the defendant innocent by reason of insanity."

Your Honor, and I shall gladly pay it.

"Do you know that one day you will be accountable to President Clark?"

"And it is equal to you that you know that the Constitution of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be accountable for what you have done with the Lord's name."

"I wonder if you are now lawyers or you who are students of the law know how much you are needed as defenders of the faith. Be willing to give of your time and of your means and your expertise to the building up of the Church and the kingdom of God and the establishment of Zion, which we are under covenant to do—not just to the Church as an institution, but to members and ordinary people who need your professional protection."

"I told you about the dinner honoring J. Reuben Clark in Beverly Hills, California. There was another dinner held at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City. It was a tribute to President J. Reuben Clark Jr. on his retirement from the board of the Equitable Life Assurance Society.

"Imagine those assembled, the great men of the world—cabinet ministers, leaders in business and government—all of different faiths. President Clark and Elder Lee were the only two members of the Church present."

"President Clark began his valedictory speech with these words: "I often find..."

"...I invoke the blessings of our Heavenly Father upon you who are students of the law know how much you are needed as defenders of the faith. Be willing to give of your time and of your means and your expertise to the building up of the Church and the kingdom of God and the establishment of Zion, which we are under covenant to do—not just to the Church as an institution, but to members and ordinary people who need your professional protection."

"Another testimonial dinner

President Clark visited Salt Lake City.
The general Constitution of our country is good, and a wholesome government could be framed upon it, if it was dictated by the circumspection of the Almighty.

Will the Constitution be destroyed? No; it shall be held inviolate by this people; and as Joseph Smith and his associates when the destiny of the nation will hang upon a single thread, and at the critical juncture, the people will stand fast and avert it from the threatened destruction. “It shall be.”

I do not know when that day will come or how it will come to pass, I feel sure that when it does come to pass, among those who will step forward from among this people, will be men who hold the Holy Priesthood, and who carry as credentials a bachelor or doctor of law degree. And women, also, of honor. And there will be judges and juries.

Others from the world outside the Church will come, as Colonel Thomas Kean, New Jersey, and his dreaming of the law to protect this people: We may one day stand alone; but we will not change or lower our standards or change our course.

What will you do with your name?

Near the end of his life, President Clark spoke in Brigham Young University. I was next to him. We whispered to each other as he made his way slowly and laboriously down the row to his car and drove away into the night. That was the last time I saw him.

The funeral of President J. Reuben Clark Jr. was the first General Authority funeral I attended. South Temple was blocked off between State Street and West Temple. The General Assembly seated in front of the Church Administration Building. There were eighty-three of us. With tears in our eyes, we followed the hearse down the center of the street.

The solemn procession moved through the south gate of Temple Square and around the northwest door of the Tabernacle. There we formed an honor guard, half on each side. Three rows stood at attention, in front of the temple. I was at the center. Behind President and Elder Lee were the only two members of the Church present. President Clark began his valedictory by addressing them as “my brethren.” He taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ and concluded with his fervent testimony.

I conclude with my fervent testimony and invoke a blessing upon you who are lawyers and judges who have given so much of your help.

I am sure that you can take justice and mercy and find a balance in them and fit them firmly with absolute integrity, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Next time you are with your friends and your family, on the Fourth of July or any other day, ask them, “What do we believe in, in our family?” The answer is so simple: “We believe in the Constitution.”