

Lessons from Nehemiah to Help Us Defend and Protect Religious Liberty

Michael D. Fielding¹

Introduction

In recent years, several members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have counseled us to protect and defend religious liberty.² They have taught that we must be civil in our discourse,³ become educated and assume responsibility,⁴ work with other faiths,⁵ speak up,⁶ and educate others.⁷ They have counseled us to do this on the Internet⁸ and in our own communities,⁹ and to be wise in our efforts.¹⁰ We have also been told that extraordinary effort will be required to protect religious liberty.¹¹ The threats to religious liberty are very real, and there is a great need for people of faith to rise to the occasion and defend religious freedoms. Fortunately, the Old Testament book of Nehemiah provides many important lessons about how we can apply Apostolic counsel to “work together to both protect religious freedom and restore morality.”¹²

¹ Michael D. Fielding is a partner at Husch Blackwell LLP in Kansas City, Missouri where he focuses on insolvency and creditors’ rights on a nationwide basis. He and his wife are the parents of six children. Mr. Fielding currently serves as a member of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society’s Religious Freedom Subcommittee of the Service & Outreach Committee.

² See Elder L. Tom Perry, “Mormon Apostle Promotes Religious Freedom,” Video at <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/official-statement/religious-freedom> (website last visited January 8, 2014) (hereinafter “Elder Perry Video”); Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Faith, Family, and Religious Freedom,” Clark Memorandum, Fall 2013, p. 28 (available at http://www.jrcs.org/clark_memo/sections/f13/CMF13_Holland.pdf) (hereinafter “Elder Holland, *Clark Memorandum*”); Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Strengthening the Free Exercise of Religion,” Speech given at The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty Canterbury Medal Dinner in New York City, May 16, 2013. For the full transcript see <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/transcript-strengthening-free-exercise-of-religion-elder-dallin-h-oaks> (hereinafter “Elder Oaks, May 2013”); Elder Quentin L. Cook, “Restoring Morality and Religious Freedom,” *Ensign*, September 2012 (pp. 32-39) <http://www.lds.org/ensign/2012/09/restoring-morality-and-religious-freedom?lang=eng>; From a commencement address delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on December 16, 2011. For the full text, visit <http://web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches/speeches.aspx>. (hereinafter “Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012”); Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Truth and Tolerance,” CES Fireside, September 11, 2011. For the full transcript see <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/-truth-and-tolerance-elder-dallin-h-oaks> (hereinafter “Elder Oaks, CES Fireside”); Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Preserving Religious Freedom,” speech given at Chapman University School of Law on February 4, 2011. For the full transcript see <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/elder-oaks-religious-freedom-Chapman-University> (hereinafter “Elder Oaks, Chapman University”); Elder Quentin L. Cook, “Let There Be Light!” *Ensign*, November 2010 (pp. 27-31), also available at <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2010/10/let-there-be-light?lang=eng> (hereinafter “Elder Cook, *Ensign*, 2010”); Elder Dallin H. Oaks, Speech on Religious Freedom given at BYU-Idaho on October 13, 2009. For the full transcript see <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/oaks-religious-freedom> (hereinafter “Elder Oaks, BYU”).

³ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 36).

⁴ *Id.* (p. 37).

⁵ *Id.* (p. 38).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Elder Oaks, May 2013, Part II.

⁸ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 38).

⁹ Elder Perry Video.

¹⁰ Elder Oaks, CES Fireside (Part V).

¹¹ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 38).

¹² *Id.* at p. 37.

Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls

Nehemiah served as a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes¹³ who was king Persia from 465 – 425 B.C.¹⁴ Nehemiah learned that the remaining Jews at Jerusalem were suffering great afflictions and that the city's wall was broken and its gates had been burned.¹⁵ This knowledge caused him to weep, mourn for days, fast, and pray both "day and night."¹⁶ Nehemiah confessed not only his sins but also those of his father and the children of Israel.¹⁷ He recognized that the children of Israel were scattered among the nations because of their transgressions, and he remembered the Lord's promise that if the children of Israel would turn to the Lord and keep His commandments then the Lord would gather them to the place that He had chosen for them.¹⁸ Now that some of the Jews had been gathered back to Judaea, Nehemiah petitioned the Lord that he would prosper and find mercy in the sight of the king.¹⁹

After King Artaxerxes noticed Nehemiah's sore countenance,²⁰ Nehemiah explained to the king that his sadness was because "the place of [his] fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire."²¹ He asked permission of the king to go and build the city.²² Nehemiah also requested (and the king granted) that he would be able to reach his destination at Judah and obtain the needed timber for the construction that was to be done.²³

After arriving at Jerusalem Nehemiah initially did not tell the people what "God had put in [Nehemiah's] heart to do at Jerusalem."²⁴ Rather, on the third night he took a few men with him and "viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof [that] were consumed with fire."²⁵ Following his inspection, Nehemiah spoke to the people citing their distress, the bad condition of Jerusalem and the gates that had been burned with fire.²⁶ He invited, "come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach."²⁷ He told the people of God's hand

¹³ Neh. 1:11; 2:1.

¹⁴ Bible Dictionary, "Artaxerxes" (p. 614) in the King James Version of the Bible as published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

¹⁵ Neh. 1:3.

¹⁶ Neh. 1:4, 6. Similar to Nehemiah, we must also seek the Lord's help and direction through fasting and prayer.

¹⁷ Neh. 1:6-7.

¹⁸ Neh. 1:7-9.

¹⁹ Neh. 1:11.

²⁰ Neh. 2:1-2.

²¹ Neh. 2:3.

²² Neh. 2:4-5.

²³ Neh. 2:7-9.

²⁴ Neh. 2:11-12.

²⁵ Neh. 2:12-13 (see v. 12-15).

²⁶ Neh. 2:17. An implication of Nehemiah chapter 1 is that the Jews that had been gathered back to Judaea who were in "great affliction and reproach" (Neh. 1:3) would have been those that had once again started keeping the Lord's commandments and had been gathered back to the chosen land. See Neh. 1:9.

²⁷ Neh. 2:17.

upon him and King Artaxerxes' words.²⁸ The people courageously responded: "Let us rise up and build," and the scripture records that "they strengthened their hands for this good work."²⁹

When the Jews' enemies heard of the plan to rebuild walls they "laughed [the Jews] to scorn, and despised [them] and openly questioned if they would rebel against the king."³⁰ To this Nehemiah responded with faith and determination: "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore his servants will arise and build."³¹

The people who assisted Nehemiah came from varied backgrounds and locations. They included the high priest and priests,³² goldsmiths,³³ perfumers or ointment makers,³⁴ a man and his daughters,³⁵ rulers of different locations,³⁶ Levites,³⁷ temple workers³⁸ and merchants.³⁹ The builders came from various locations including Jericho,⁴⁰ Gibeon,⁴¹ Jerusalem,⁴² Zanoah,⁴³ Beth-haccerem,⁴⁴ Mizpah,⁴⁵ Beth-zur,⁴⁶ Keilah⁴⁷ and the plains.⁴⁸ There were many other people who assisted in building, but the scriptural account does not state what their occupation was or from where they came.⁴⁹

Sanballat (one of the principle leaders of the Jews' enemies) was angry and mocked the Jews to both his brethren and the Samaritan army.⁵⁰ He called them "feeble" and asked whether they would "revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?"⁵¹ His colleague Tobiah the

²⁸ Neh. 2:18. Just as Nehemiah lead the Jews in the reconstruction of Jerusalem's walls, there is also a great need for leaders in our individual communities—people with vision and understanding who will step forward and lead and encourage people to work in the cause of defending and protecting religious liberties.

²⁹ Neh. 2:18.

³⁰ Neh. 2:19.

³¹ Neh. 2:20.

³² Neh. 3:1, 22 and 28.

³³ Neh. 3:8, 31-32.

³⁴ Neh. 3:8.

³⁵ Neh. 3:12.

³⁶ Neh. 3:9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

³⁷ Neh. 3:17.

³⁸ Neh. 3:26. As set forth in footnote a of the King James Version of the Bible as published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the Nethinims were temple servants.

³⁹ Neh. 3:31-32.

⁴⁰ Neh. 3:2.

⁴¹ Neh. 3:7.

⁴² Neh. 3:9 and 12.

⁴³ Neh. 3:13.

⁴⁴ Neh. 3:14.

⁴⁵ Neh. 3:15, 19.

⁴⁶ Neh. 3:16.

⁴⁷ Neh. 3:17.

⁴⁸ Neh. 3:22.

⁴⁹ Neh. 3:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29 and 30. Presumably, many of them lived in Jerusalem or the surrounding area. Notably, there is no indication that any of these individuals had previous experience building walls or gates.

⁵⁰ Neh. 4:1-2.

⁵¹ Neh. 4:2. The reference to "heaps of rubbish" indicates just how bad things were at Jerusalem.

Ammonite mocked that a fox would be able to break down the wall.⁵² Rather than respond to their enemies in a war of words, Nehemiah simply prayed to the Lord asking that He deal with their enemies' iniquity.⁵³ Moreover, the anger and mocking of their enemies did not stop the Jews' work.⁵⁴ Indeed, Nehemiah simply states: "So built we the wall...for the people had a mind to work."⁵⁵

As the Jews' enemies saw the work progress, they conspired to fight against Jerusalem and hinder the work.⁵⁶ The Jews' immediate response to this new threat was to pray to God and set a watch to look for the enemies day and night.⁵⁷ However, both the Jews and their enemies appear to have recognized that, given the condition of Jerusalem, the enemies would be able to do a surprise attack and the Jews would not have a safe place to resort to.⁵⁸ To defend themselves, Nehemiah set in both "the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places...people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows."⁵⁹ Nehemiah further encouraged the people to not be afraid of their enemies but rather to remember the Lord and to fight for their brethren, families and homes.⁶⁰ In short, the planned surprise attack did not occur and "God had brought [the Jews' enemies'] counsel to nought."⁶¹ Accordingly, the Jews "returned...to the wall, every one to his work."⁶²

After that point, half of the people worked on the wall and the other half stood ready with weapons and shields to defend themselves against potential attack.⁶³ Indeed, even the builders of the wall kept their swords with them as they worked.⁶⁴ Given the distance by which everyone was separated on the wall, they also devised a plan that if they heard the trumpet blow they would all resort there.⁶⁵ But if that fight was to occur, Nehemiah proclaimed: "our God shall fight for us."⁶⁶

"So [the Jews] laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared."⁶⁷ Indeed, it seems that the enemies' efforts at stopping the work caused the Jews to intensify their efforts. Nehemiah said to the people: "Let everyone with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day."⁶⁸ Accordingly, none of them took off their clothes except for washing.⁶⁹

⁵² Neh. 4:3.

⁵³ Neh. 4:4-5.

⁵⁴ Neh. 4:6.

⁵⁵ Neh. 4:6.

⁵⁶ Neh. 4:7-8. In other words, when their mocking and derisions failed the enemies ratcheted up their efforts by planning to take physical action to stop the work. Notably, the enemies were not conspiring to come against the Jews generally but their planned attack was focused on the people that were building the wall.

⁵⁷ Neh. 4:9.

⁵⁸ Neh. 4:10-12.

⁵⁹ Neh. 4:13.

⁶⁰ Neh. 4:14.

⁶¹ Neh. 4:15.

⁶² Neh. 4:15.

⁶³ Neh 4:16.

⁶⁴ Neh. 4:17-18.

⁶⁵ Neh. 4:19-20.

⁶⁶ Neh. 4:20.

⁶⁷ Neh. 4:21.

⁶⁸ Neh. 4:22.

⁶⁹ Neh. 4:23.

The work progressed to the point where the walls had been built but doors had not yet been set upon the gates.⁷⁰ At that point, Jews' enemies thought to do mischief to Nehemiah by asking him to meet with them in a village in the plain of Ono.⁷¹ But Nehemiah did not go to them.⁷² Rather, he sent messengers saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"⁷³ This back and forth exchange happened four separate times.⁷⁴ Sanballat realized that his request for a meeting would not work. Accordingly, he sent messengers a fifth time with a different message.⁷⁵ Specifically, he accused Nehemiah of setting himself up as a king of Jerusalem, he claimed that this would be reported to King Artaxerxes and that he and Nehemiah should "take counsel together."⁷⁶ To these false accusations Nehemiah simply responded with the truth: "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart."⁷⁷ In short, Nehemiah records "For they all made us afraid, saying, "Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done."⁷⁸ In response to this, turned to the Lord saying: "Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."⁷⁹

Aside from using fear generally to try to stop the work, Sanballat also hired a false prophet to attempt to make Nehemiah personally afraid and sin so that they could slander him.⁸⁰ Specifically, the false prophet sought to induce Nehemiah to hide in the temple because people were purportedly coming in the night to kill him.⁸¹ To this Nehemiah responded with courage saying he would not flee or go into the temple to save his life.⁸² In response to these efforts Nehemiah simply petitioned God to think about his enemies "according to these their works."⁸³

Despite the efforts of their enemies to hinder the work, the wall was finished in 52 days.⁸⁴ "And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof...they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God."⁸⁵

Parallels between Nehemiah and our efforts to defend religious liberty

There are numerous lessons from Nehemiah that can help in our personal efforts to follow Apostolic counsel to "work together to both protect religious freedom and restore morality."⁸⁶

⁷⁰ Neh. 6:1.

⁷¹ Neh. 6:2.

⁷² Neh. 6:3.

⁷³ Neh. 6:3.

⁷⁴ Neh. 6:4.

⁷⁵ Neh. 6:5.

⁷⁶ Neh. 6:6-7.

⁷⁷ Neh. 6:8.

⁷⁸ Neh. 6:9.

⁷⁹ Neh. 6:9.

⁸⁰ Neh. 6:10-14.

⁸¹ Neh. 6:10.

⁸² Neh. 6:11.

⁸³ Neh. 6:14.

⁸⁴ Neh. 6:15.

⁸⁵ Neh. 6:16.

⁸⁶ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 37).

Seek the Lord's help and be civil in your discourse

A hallmark of Nehemiah is his continual seeking the Lord's help and responding to his enemies in the Lord's way. This is first manifested in his confession of sins of the children of Israel and him and his family,⁸⁷ his remembrance of the Lord's promises to the children of Israel,⁸⁸ and his petition to the Lord for help with respect to King Artaxerxes.⁸⁹ When the Jews' enemies laughed and scorned, Nehemiah responded with faith and determination saying, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore his servants will arise and build."⁹⁰ When mocked about their ability to do the work, Nehemiah did not respond in a war of words but rather Nehemiah simply prayed to the Lord asking that He deal with their enemies' iniquity.⁹¹ When threats of physical violence arose, the Jews' immediate response was to pray to God and set a watch to look for the enemies day and night.⁹² Nehemiah further encouraged the people to not be afraid of their enemies but rather to remember the Lord and to fight for their brethren, families and homes.⁹³ Recognizing that a battle with their enemies was a very real threat, Nehemiah proclaimed: "our God shall fight for us."⁹⁴ When their enemies attempted to use fear to weaken the Jews' hands to stop the work, Nehemiah turned to the Lord saying: "Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."⁹⁵ When the enemies hired a false prophet to induce Nehemiah to flee, he simply petitioned God to think about them "according to these their works."⁹⁶

Nehemiah's responses to his enemies parallels the counsel we have received in promoting religious liberty. Elder Quentin L. Cook has challenged us to "[b]e an active participant, not a silent observer."⁹⁷ But in doing so, he has also cautioned "to be civil and responsible as you defend religious liberty and moral values."⁹⁸ He elaborated:

We need to be civil in our discourse and respectful in our interactions. We live in a world where there is much turmoil. Many people are both angry and afraid. The Savior taught us to love even our enemies (see Matthew 5:44). This is especially true when we disagree. The moral basis of civility is the Golden Rule. It is taught in most religions and particularly by the Savior. "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31).⁹⁹

Elder Dallin H. Oaks also counseled:

[W]hen believers seek to promote their positions in the public square, their methods and their advocacy should always be tolerant of the opinions and positions of those who do not share their beliefs. We should not add to the extremism that divides our

⁸⁷ Neh. 1:6-7.

⁸⁸ Neh. 1:7-9.

⁸⁹ Neh. 1:11.

⁹⁰ Neh. 2:20.

⁹¹ Neh. 4:4-5.

⁹² Neh. 4:9.

⁹³ Neh. 4:14.

⁹⁴ Neh. 4:20.

⁹⁵ Neh. 6:9.

⁹⁶ Neh. 6:14.

⁹⁷ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 38).

⁹⁸ *Id.*

⁹⁹ *Id.* at p. 36.

society. As believers we must always speak with love and show patience, understanding, and compassion toward our adversaries. Christian believers are under command to love their neighbors (Luke 10:27), to forgive (Matt. 18:21-35), and to do good to those who spitefully use them (Matt. 5:44). They should always remember the Savior's teaching that we "bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which spitefully use [us], and persecute [us]" (Matt. 5:44).¹⁰⁰

Elder Oaks further teaches: "Even as we seek to speak with love, we must not be surprised when our positions are ridiculed and we are persecuted and reviled. As the Savior said, "so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:12). And modern revelation commands us not to revile against revilers (Doctrine and Covenants 19:30)."¹⁰¹

Cultivate relationships with governmental authorities and opinion leaders

As a servant to the king, Nehemiah was in a unique position of influence where he was able to petition the king to get the essential items he needed to accomplish his desire—i.e., passage to Judah and lumber that would have been essential for the construction. The dialogue between Nehemiah suggests that he previously had established a relationship of trust with the king. Notably, Nehemiah did not couch his request with a focus on the condition of the existing inhabitants. Rather, his dialogue with the king was done in a way that likely would have been persuasive to the king—i.e., "the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire."¹⁰² Notably, Nehemiah's desire was not for fame, worldly wealth, pleasure or power. Rather, he wanted to do a righteous act—i.e., seeking the welfare of the children of Israel.¹⁰³

In a similar manner to Nehemiah, we who seek to promote religious freedom should cultivate relationships of trust with both governmental authorities as well as opinion leaders. In this regard Elder Oaks has counseled that "[R]eligious persons will often be most persuasive in political discourse by framing arguments and positions in ways that are respectful of those who do not share their religious beliefs and that contribute to the reasoned discussion and compromise that is essential in a pluralistic society."¹⁰⁴

Elder Oaks provides a great example of discussing the importance of religious liberty in a manner which would be appealing to non-believers who seek the betterment of society. Specifically, he has noted:

Many of the most significant moral advances in Western society have been motivated by religious principles and persuaded to official adoption by pulpit preaching. Examples include the abolition of the slave trade in England and the Emancipation Proclamation in this country. The same is true of the Civil Rights movement of the last half-century. These great advances were not motivated and moved by secular ethics or persons who

¹⁰⁰ Elder Oaks, CES Fireside, (Part V).

¹⁰¹ Elder Oaks, BYU, (Part VI).

¹⁰² Neh. 2:3.

¹⁰³ Neh. 2:10.

¹⁰⁴ Elder Oaks, BYU (Part VI).

believed in moral relativism. They were driven primarily by persons who had a clear religious vision of what was morally right.¹⁰⁵

Elder Cook has also noted that “[o]ur challenge is to help people without religious faith understand that the protection of moral principles grounded in religion is a great benefit to society and that religious devotion is critical to public virtue.”¹⁰⁶

Become well educated and educate others

Nehemiah educated himself prior to beginning reconstruction of Jerusalem’s walls. First he learned of the great afflictions that the Jews were suffering as well as the condition of Jerusalem’s walls and gates.¹⁰⁷ After arriving at Jerusalem Nehemiah initially did not tell the people what “God had put in [his] heart to do,”¹⁰⁸ but rather on third night he took a small group of men and viewed the broken walls and burned gates of the city.¹⁰⁹ His recognition of the dire situation of the Jews coupled with his first-hand knowledge of the condition of the walls was an essential prerequisite to achieving his ultimate desire—constructing a wall which could serve as an essential defense for the Jews.

Elder Cook has counseled: “It is important for us to become well educated on this issue and assume responsibility for ensuring that the religious freedom we have inherited is passed on to future generations. We must work together to both protect religious freedom and restore morality.”¹¹⁰ Just as Nehemiah learned of the Jews’ condition and personally viewed the broken walls which he intended to rebuild, it is important that we become educated regarding the many facets of religious liberty. Doing so is essential to us effectively doing this “great work.”¹¹¹

Elder Oaks has also counseled of the need to educate others. He said, “We must give greater attention to the education of the rising generation. If the foundation of religious liberty is weakening, it must be because the role of religion and the contribution of religious organizations and religiously motivated people in our nation is not sufficiently understood.”¹¹²

He further elaborated:

The problem of educating the public, and especially the rising generation, needs to be addressed on a front wider than preaching, lobbying, and litigating. We must employ education to broaden the base of citizens who understand and are committed to defending religious freedom. This will require better information for our religious believers and also the enlistment of other groups.¹¹³

In short, educating ourselves and educating others about religious liberty is essential to our success.

¹⁰⁵ Elder Oaks, May 2013 (Part I).

¹⁰⁶ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 37).

¹⁰⁷ Neh. 1:3.

¹⁰⁸ Neh. 2:11-12.

¹⁰⁹ Neh. 2:12-13 (see v. 12-15).

¹¹⁰ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 37).

¹¹¹ Neh. 6:3.

¹¹² Elder Oaks, May 2013 (Part II).

¹¹³ *Id.*

Work with other faiths

The people who assisted Nehemiah came from various occupations and locations.¹¹⁴ The reconstruction of Jerusalem's walls was a task that could not be accomplished by one person. Rather, it took a united effort by those who cared deeply for the project's success. Indeed, when faced with threats physical violence, the Jews worked together to protect themselves while the work progressed.¹¹⁵

Efforts to protect and defend religious liberties will require a united effort. In this regard, Elder Cook stated:

Presidents of the Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints], including President Thomas S. Monson, have made it clear that all religions hold truths and that we should work together for the common good. In his inaugural press conference, President Monson emphasized this cooperation. He stated, "We have a responsibility to be active in the communities where we live ... and to work cooperatively with other churches. ... It's important that we eliminate the weakness of one standing alone and substitute for it the strength of people working together."¹¹⁶

Elder Oaks further notes, "The religious community must unite to be sure we are not coerced or deterred into silence by the kinds of intimidation or threatening rhetoric that are being experienced."¹¹⁷ "We must insist on our constitutional right and duty to exercise our religion, to vote our consciences on public issues and to participate in elections and debates in the public square and the halls of justice. These are the rights of all citizens and they are also the rights of religious leaders."¹¹⁸ Elder L. Tom Perry also recently added: "Besides protecting our own rights, we must protect the rights of others, including the most vulnerable and the least popular."¹¹⁹

Elder Oaks provides further counsel as to how we can unite with other faiths:

This proposal that we unite more effectively does not require any examination of the doctrinal differences among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, or even an identification of the many common elements of our beliefs. All that is necessary for unity and a broad coalition along the lines I am suggesting is a common belief that there is a right and wrong in human behavior that has been established by a Supreme Being. All who believe in that fundamental should unite more effectively to preserve and strengthen the freedom to advocate and practice our religious beliefs, whatever they are. We must walk together for a ways on the same path in order to secure our freedom to pursue our separate ways when that is necessary according to our own beliefs.¹²⁰

Finally, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has noted:

¹¹⁴ Neh. 3:1-32.

¹¹⁵ Neh. 4:7-21.

¹¹⁶ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 37) (citing Thomas S. Monson, in "Who Are the Mormons?" <http://mormonnewsroom.org/article/who-are-the-mormons>).

¹¹⁷ Elder Oaks, Chapman University (Part V).

¹¹⁸ Elder Oaks, BYU (Part VI).

¹¹⁹ Elder Perry Video.

¹²⁰ Elder Oaks, Chapman University (Part V).

In the face of such waning religiosity—or, at the very least, waning religious affiliation— Latter-day Saints and other churches must be ever more effective in making the persuasive case for why both religious belief and institutional identity are more relevant than ever and deserve continued consideration and privilege within our society. Such appeals, however, will be met with increasingly sophisticated arguments, including from some in the legal profession.¹²¹

Plainly stated, if we desire to succeed in this critical endeavor, then it will be essential that we work together with other faiths and other people who understand the importance of religious liberty to society.

Extraordinary effort will be required

Nehemiah exemplified the ability to focus on essential work and not let distractions take him away from the task at hand. Nehemiah did not leave his work when induced by his enemies to meet them in the plain of Ono.¹²² Rather he sent messengers saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?”¹²³ Nehemiah was not alone in his determination. The work progressed because “the people had a mind to work.”¹²⁴ The end result of the Jews’ diligent and focused effort was the miraculous reconstruction of Jerusalem’s walls in a mere 52 days.¹²⁵ Everyone recognized “that this work was wrought of our God.”¹²⁶

In a similar regard, Elder Cook has taught that “[e]xtraordinary effort will be required to protect religious liberty.”¹²⁷ Elder L. Tom Perry has stated, “we must...remember that religious freedom has obligations.”¹²⁸ “[The] essential freedoms of conscience embedded in religious liberty must be diligently preserved and protected.”¹²⁹ Elder Oaks has further cautioned that, “[t]here is a battle over the meaning of [religious] freedom. The contest is of eternal importance, and it is your generation that must understand the issues and make the efforts to prevail.”¹³⁰ Indeed, we must work hard in a united manner.

Nehemiah’s account is instructive about the relationship of fear and faith. The Jews’ enemies were relentless in their efforts to stop the work. One of their major tactics was the use of fear because they believed that it would cause the Jews’ “hands [to] be weakened from the work, that it be not done.”¹³¹ “Fear is the opposite of faith.”¹³² In contrast, “[f]aith is a principle of action and of power.”¹³³

¹²¹ Elder Holland, *Clark Memorandum*, p. 23.

¹²² Neh. 6:2.

¹²³ Neh. 6:3.

¹²⁴ Neh. 4:6.

¹²⁵ Neh. 6:15.

¹²⁶ Neh. 6:16.

¹²⁷ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 38).

¹²⁸ Elder Perry Video.

¹²⁹ *Id.*

¹³⁰ Elder Oaks, BYUI.

¹³¹ Neh. 6:9.

¹³² Elder Boyd K. Packer, “The Power of the Priesthood,” April 2010 General Conference, <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2010/04/the-power-of-the-priesthood?lang=eng> (last visited February 1, 2014); see also May 2010 *Ensign*.

Fear leads to inaction, and if we do not act then the work does not get done. Oftentimes, one of our enemies' most powerful tools is fear because it leads to the cessation of action which, in turn, hinders or even stops work. Fortunately, we have an antidote: "[P]erfect love casteth out fear."¹³⁴ So let us love and trust God, keep His commandments, continually exercise faith and diligently proceed in our work.

Conclusion

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has warned that "[the] constitutional guarantee of free exercise of religion....is in need of being defended."¹³⁵ Elder Cook has further said that "[t]he assault on moral principles and religious freedom has never been stronger."¹³⁶ These dangers must be addressed. In the October 2010 General Conference, Elder Cook counseled that, "we need to do our best to preserve light and protect our families and communities from [the] assault on morality and religious freedom."¹³⁷ He further counseled: "We need to protect our families and be at the forefront together with all people of goodwill in doing everything we can to preserve light, hope, and morality in our communities."¹³⁸

This is no small undertaking. "Extraordinary effort will be required to protect religious liberty."¹³⁹ Be courageous. The Lord is on our side. The Book of Mormon teaches that the Lord "will not suffer that the wicked shall destroy the righteous. Wherefore, [the Lord] will preserve the righteous by his power."¹⁴⁰ Elder Holland has noted, "You are among the finest and best trained we have to defend, to advocate, to plead, and to appeal for the great faith, the strong families, and the religious freedom for which and upon which this republic was founded."¹⁴¹ May we, like Nehemiah, rise to the occasion and stand fast in doing this "great work."¹⁴² May God bless you as you diligently seek to defend and protect religious liberties.

¹³³ Bible Dictionary, 670 of the King James Version of the Bible as published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

¹³⁴ 1 John 4:18.

¹³⁵ Elder Oaks, BYUI (Part IV). "John Adams...wisely observed that: 'we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.'" Elder Dallin H. Oaks, "Preserving Religious Freedom," speech given at Chapman University School of Law on February 4, 2011 (Part I) (*citing* Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, 228–29 (Books for Libraries Press, 1969). *See also* Elder Holland, *Clark Memorandum*, p. 25.

¹³⁶ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, November 2010 (p. 27).

¹³⁷ *Id.*

¹³⁸ *Id.* at p. 30.

¹³⁹ Elder Cook, *Ensign*, September 2012 (p. 38).

¹⁴⁰ 1 Nephi 22:16-17.

¹⁴¹ Elder Holland, *Clark Memorandum*, p. 29.

¹⁴² Neh. 6:3.