

When Does it End?

My thoughts on this subject were originally triggered by a General Conference talk from last April.

The officer's face clouded, and he replied: "My family will be disappointed... As for my future and my career, all opportunity may be foreclosed against me."

President Hinckley asked, "Are you willing to pay so great a price for the gospel?"

With his dark eyes moistened by tears, he answered with a question: "It's true, isn't it?"

President Hinckley responded, "Yes, it is true."

To which the officer replied, "Then what else matters?"

Of course, for all of us, there are other things that matter. When I heard President Hinckley's talk as a 21-year-old, I needed to be serious about my studies; I needed employment to keep me in school; somehow I had to figure out how to convince a special young lady that she should take a chance on me; and I enjoyed other worthy activities.¹

If you are not familiar with the story it is well worth reading. But what led to the reflections here are his comments in the last paragraph I cited.

It seems that this same idea has arisen in several other settings lately, although it may just be that I am attuned to it. What are the limits of our spiritual life, and where does the non-spiritual portion kick in?

Once I framed this question, my mind naturally jumped to D&C 29:34:

Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created.

My point being, I don't think there is any part of our life which is not a part of our spiritual existence, or our religious obligation. The conflict arises, I think, from how we define some terms. God says that none of his laws are temporal. Isn't our religious life a response to God's laws?

Let's turn to a simple example. I like to read. I have read thousands of

¹ "It's True, Isn't It? Then What Else Matters?" Elder Neil L. Andersen April 2007

books in my life. Almost none of those are history, biography, or anything else useful. They are 99%² novels. I read for escape and entertainment, not for learning. So what law from God am I fulfilling by reading those books?³

One way to start approaching this question is to reverse it: In what part of my life should I stop obeying God's commandments? The answer to that question seems clear – I always want to be obeying God's commandments. As it turns out, though, there are a great number of commandments, especially if we consider that all of the counsel we receive in each General Conference also counts as commandments. So it is clear that we do not judge our obedience to law by carrying around a long checklist. In fact, the obedience that leads to Christ has much less to do with actions than it does with attitudes. I can tell how well I am doing before God by how much of the company of his spirit I have with me.

We are here in mortality to enjoy a range of experiences and learn from all of them. I have commented elsewhere about the level of spirituality I achieved after spending 4 days almost completely in the temple. However, I am required to have and raise a family, including providing for them. I cannot do that except by going to work. Spending all day every day in the temple is not a viable alternative. There must be more to obedience than attending constantly to things we tend to consider religious behavior.

Turning back to the example of the books, I find a lot of relaxation and enjoyment in reading books. I think that fits within the realm of things that God expects of me in this life. I cannot always be running, or else I will wear myself out and fail. However, there are different books I can read. Do they dwell on scenes of immorality, dishonesty, violence, or other disregard for the commandments of God? If so, that relaxation is probably not helping my spirituality. As I have sought to pay attention to how I use my time and what that does to my spirituality, I have found that I am reading less and less. I am aware that time spent in a novel necessarily takes time away from other activities. I have to be careful to judge whether I am getting benefit from the reading to offset the time not spent on other things.

Ultimately, all of our activities bear on our eternal existence, and we

² Did you know that 85% of all statistics are made up on the spot?

³ I'm sure that if this example doesn't apply to you, you can come up with several from your own life.

should never think of any of our time as our own. Everything we have is God's, and must always be handled in that light. He loves us, and desires our eternal joy. Some of that translates into temporal enjoyment, even in activities such as reading, games, sports, and hunting. However, even when we are involved in such activities we need to be ready to respond to any command from God. Enos was hunting when he felt the need to pray about the welfare of his soul. Moses was tending Jethro's flocks when he turned aside to see the bush that burned without being consumed. We need to understand that whatever our activity, we are still before the Lord. As we truly understand our eternal role, we will see that we can do all sorts of things, but we and our time are always the Lord's.