

AN OLIVE LEAF

THE TRUE NATURE OF REAL LOVE

By Elder Neal A. Maxwell

The following is excerpted from Elder Neal A. Maxwell's reflection, "Wicked and Adulterous Generation," in his book, *Sermons Not Spoken*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 54–64.

ALL SERIOUS READERS of the scriptures are familiar with the instances in which Jesus juxtaposed particular adjectives, which was more than accidental.

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An *evil and adulterous* generation seeketh after a sign. . . . (Matthew 12:38-39; *italics added*)

A *wicked and adulterous* generation seeketh after a sign. . . . (Matthew 16:4; *italics added*)

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation. . . . (Mark 8:38)

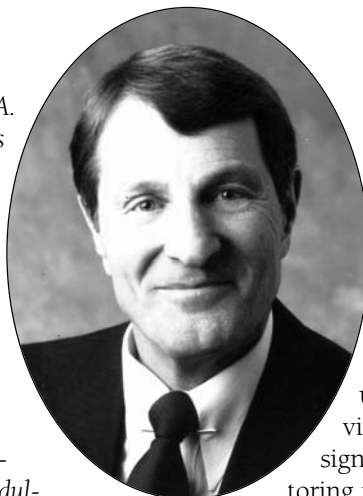
Why that particular juxtaposition? Why not "wicked and merciless generation"? Or "wicked and proud generation"? Such words might have been equally and descriptively accurate. But the linkage with sexual immorality is too deliberate to ignore. . . .

SIGN seekers, like adulterers, often do have a clear preference for *repeated* sensation. Those who do not understand why adultery is intrinsically wrong will also fail to understand why faith is a justified requirement laid upon us by God. We are to walk by faith and to overcome by faith (see D&C 76:53).

Those who will not humble themselves "because of the word" (see Alma 32:14-16) are no different than the magicians of Pharaoh's court. Those men must have been impressed by the miracles which came from the Lord through Moses. But their proximate reactions made no ultimate difference! The magicians merely became hardened again, as if to say, "What has the Lord shown us lately?"

By contrast, the faithful, who are intellectually honest but are confronted with new and present challenges, sing of the Lord, "We've proved Him in days that are past." . . .

Those who are adulterous have also a strong preference for "now" rather than for eternity. Impatience and incontinence, quite naturally, team up.



Such erring individuals or generations also have a strong preference for meeting the needs of "me" over attending to others, a lifestyle which speeds selfishness on its endless, empty journey.

By making demands of God, the proud would attach conditions to their discipleship. But discipleship requires of us unconditional surrender to the Lord. Hence the proud neither understand nor really love God. Therefore they violate the first commandment by seeing God as a sign provided upon request; as a function, not a tutoring father.

Is this not precisely how some regard their sexual partners, as something to be used and then dismissed or discarded?

But God will not be used: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). Yet God is ever ready to respond when a request is right.

Ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God (Mormon 9:28; see also 3 Nephi 18:20).

Nor does God, who is perfect in mercy, require perfection of us before He responds. If we are seeking and striving, it is a beginning which is welcomed and rewarded with gifts.

For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, *and him that seeketh so to do*; that all may be benefited that seek or ask of me, that ask and not for a sign that they may consume it upon their lusts. (D&C 46:9; *italics added*)

Clearly in examining Jesus' words *wicked and adulterous generation* we are dealing, therefore, not only with the true nature of faith but with the true nature of real love as well—whether love of God or of man. . . .

THIS . . . spiritual view is, of course, in stark contrast to those who urge, "Eat, drink, and be merry," because "you only live once!" The gospel response to that assertion is, "Yes, we only live once, but that once is forever!" How constant the contest between the spiritual and the sensual, and how different the consequences, as Jesus' prophecy foretold.

As the foregoing attempts to illustrate, divine deliberateness was at work when the Lord juxtaposed two words so directly as he has done with "wicked and adulterous generation." ☪