

Embarrassments in Arising to Speak—The Different Religions—None Perfect Except Revealed From God

Discourse by Elder Joseph F. Smith, delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, Feb. 17, 1867.

Very unexpectedly to me I have been asked to stand before you for a short time this afternoon; and although to me it is a great task to attempt to speak to so many, yet it is a pleasure to be able to express my feelings in relation to the truth. I do not know why it should be embarrassing or a task for me to rise before the Saints, for I feel, when I am in their midst, that I am in the midst of the people of God and my friends, whose faith is in common with, and whose desires to a great extent are the same as my own. I feel that I am in the midst of those who are praying to the same God, desiring the accomplishment of the same purposes and objects, and who are ever willing to lend their faith and prayers for the assistance of those who are called upon to officiate in the ministry, and who are not looking for a fault nor seeking to make one an offender for a word, but whose feelings are drawn out after the truth, and who desire to hear words that will be comforting, instructing and beneficial to us all. Why under these circumstances, one should feel embarrassed to rise up here is a little singular to me, and always has been. But it is so, unless he who speaks is filled with the Spirit of the Lord to such an extent that he cares for nothing but God and his approval.

I suppose that this embarrassment is, to some extent, owing to false notions—to pride, perhaps, and to feelings that are more or less common to us all, though not founded upon any correct principle. Why should we fear one another? Why should we fear to discharge the duties devolving upon us as the servants and people of God, under any circumstances or in any place? Why should we fear to stand up and speak the truth, although aware of our weakness and feeling our dependence on God? Have we not the promise that God will give us strength according to our day, and that he will help those who desire it to accomplish all the good that is in their hearts? God has made this promise, and it is our duty to go forward and engage in the work he requires of us, fearlessly and with a determination to carry it out regardless of man. God being our helper.

I have felt this way when traveling in the world, perhaps more so than it would be possible for me to feel here; for when one is thrown upon his own resources, or I may say upon God for assistance, he realizes that he has but few friends; he lives nearer to God, exercises more faith, is more diligent in prayer, and is, therefore, more alive to the duties devolving upon him than when associating in the midst of his friends. I have often reflected why I should tremble and fear to stand before the Saints, the Prophet, or the Apostles, and let them hear my voice, or to give expression to my thoughts. Again, I have thought was there anything in me, any secret feelings that were not right, or that I feared were not right, and for expressing which I would be censured; and even were this the case, how foundationless is such a fear, for were there any thoughts and reflections within me not of God, or not true, why should I be fearful to express them where they might be corrected? Would it not be better to express them and have them corrected, than to harbor, cling to, and reason upon them until I convinced myself that they were right, when to have them corrected would perhaps prove a very great trial to me, if not my overthrow.

When I look at and think of myself I do not know that I now entertain or have ever entertained a thought which I would be ashamed of my friends or the servants of God knowing. I desire so to live continually that my thoughts and feelings may be right before God, that my heart may be pure and open to the influences and dictations of the Holy Spirit, that I may be led wholly by the truth, and in the path that leads to eternal life. These should be the feelings of every Saint; if they are not mine, they should be, and when I look at and think of myself, I feel that this is the case. Yet we are all fallible and all liable to err, susceptible of prejudices and assailed by good and bad influences. In every condition of life we are more or less liable to be influenced and controlled in our thoughts and actions by the circumstances by which we are surrounded; the result is we are sometimes alive to the truth and faithful before the Lord, full of kindness, of friendship and love towards our brethren—the servants of God—and towards the work in which we are engaged; and sometimes we are lukewarm and indifferent about these things. I would love to see the time when we could so live in the enjoyment of the Holy Spirit, every moment of our lives, that no circumstance nor influence could be brought to bear against us that would change that even tenor which is inspired and called forth by the influences of the good Spirit.

Will this time ever be? While surrounded by so many imperfections, clothed in mortality, and subject to the weakness and failings of the flesh, will the time ever be when we as a people, with such glorious promises, privileges and rights, and with such inestimable blessings, shall enjoy the Spirit of God to the exclusion of every other influence that exists? Will we ever be able to enjoy the Spirit of the Lord, while in mortality, to such a degree that we can govern ourselves and not give way one moment to an evil thought or passion? I do not know; but this I do know, that we now have all that is necessary to enable us to attain to this perfection in the truth and the knowledge of God. If we have it not now, I do not believe we ever will. "Why," inquires one, "what have we now?" We have the promise of Almighty God that he will give his Spirit to guide, strengthen, and assist every individual to accomplish all the good in his heart, if he will only come up to the standard he has established. Besides this promise which the Lord has made, we have the holy priesthood, a powerful auxiliary in our hands if used properly, to enable us to overcome the evils that surround us in the world. But when engaged in our daily avocations, or tried by poverty, sickness, enemies, false friends, or when we are spoken evil of, we too often forget that we hold the priesthood, that we are Elders in Israel—the servants of God—chosen to accomplish his great work in the last days. The result is we regard ourselves simply as men mixed up with and surrounded by sin, and we are apt to drink into the spirit around us, forget God, our callings, and the responsibilities resting upon us, and become like others, through giving way to evils which they practice.

I have seen individuals, of whom we might expect better things, give way to evils of this kind until I have heard them say, "What is religion?" "In what way is one religion better than another? Mormon, Jew, Catholic, Protestant, or any and all religious denominations in the world are all after the same thing, and there are good and bad in all, and there is about as much evil among the Latter-day Saints as among any other religious denomination." "Why," say they, "look at the Methodists, some of them are as pious, good and faithful and are as good citizens, neighbors and friends as any you will find among the Latter-day Saints or any other denomination; or go among the Catholics and you will find some as honest, virtuous, upright, and charitable as any you will find among the Latter-day Saints." This being their opinion they decide that one is just as good as another. Now it is true that, so far as moral worth is concerned, we may find hundreds of thousands in the world who are honest, moral and upright to the best of their knowledge. I believe that among the inhabitants of the earth today, notwithstanding the vast amount of corruption and sin and the almost universal moral degradation, there are thousands of good, honest, well-meaning people.

So far as they have light and knowledge and understand the principles of truth, so far do thousands of the inhabitants of the earth today honor them in their lives. But that does not constitute them the people of God, neither does it argue that they have the holy priesthood, nor that the Gospel in its purity and fulness has been revealed to them; nothing of the kind. Then I say that they are wanting. Although I feel liberal in my heart towards mankind, and willing to accord this truth to the benefit of the honest in heart; yet I am compelled to acknowledge that they are lacking. And because there are good people out of this Church as well as in, that does not argue that we have not the priesthood, that God is not in communion with us, that we are not in fellowship with him, nor that we are not the people he has chosen, through whom to accomplish his great work in the latter days. It simply proves what the prophets and the servants of God have often said, that there are honest people in the world who are not in this Church, and for that reason the Gospel is preached to the nations, that the honest may be gathered into the fold and family of God, that they may take a part in the building up of his kingdom in the last days.

When you compare the systems, creeds, and governing principles among the sects and religious denominations in the world, where will you find one that is perfect, or that is calculated to lead men back to a unity of the faith and to God? Where will you find a system or a denomination of religious people in the world who have such principles embodied in their faith? You cannot find such a system, if you go beyond the pale of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "Well," inquires one, "are those principles embodied in our faith? Is that principle of government here that is calculated to unite not only this Church but the whole human family in one faith? Are we not to some extent divided one against another, and have we not selfish thoughts and feelings, and do we not have strife in our midst, and do we love one another with a brotherly love and act under the influence of the good Spirit all the time?"

If we did act under its influence and followed its dictation continually, we would be one, and bickering, strife, and selfishness would be laid aside, and we would look after and be as zealous for our neighbor's as for our own good. But we still see in our midst controversies, differences of thought and opinion, one up and another down, and the same thing regarded in a different light by different persons, &c. Why is this? Because the Gospel net has gathered in of every kind, and because we are only children in the school; because we have learned only the first letters, as it were, in the great Gospel plan, and that but imperfectly. And one cause of the diversity in our thoughts and reflections is that some have had greater experience and comprehend the truth more perfectly than others. But does this prove that the Gospel we have embraced does not contain those principles necessary to unite all mankind in the truth. No, it does not. What are these great principles that are calculated to unite the whole human family, and to cause them to worship the same God, adhere to the same counsel and be governed by the same voice? They are the principle of revelation, the power of God revealed to his people, the belief in the hearts of the people that it is God's right to rule and dictate, and that it is not the right of any man to say it shall be thus and so; nor are the people required to obey these principles blindly—without knowledge.

When we learn the truth and understand what is for our greatest good, we will feel in our hearts that it is God's right to rule and reign, and to say to us what shall be, and that it is our privilege to obey, and there will not be a feeling in our hearts contrary to his dictation. We will then feel that whatever is, is right; and in this we cannot then rightly be called superstitious, blind, or deluded, for that would be impossible because we will then be governed by higher light and intelligence—by that intelligence which convinces us that God lives, reigns, made the earth and all things it contains, that he is the Father of all, that we are his children, and that all things are in his hands. We will then comprehend this, and, consequently, will feel that it is his right to say and ours to do. But how is it today? We do not practically comprehend these facts to their full extent, our own selfish interests more or less blind us, we measurably stand in our own light and choke the channel of blessings from heaven, and cannot fully receive from the Giver of all good that blessing, exaltation, and glory that he is ever willing to bestow upon all who will acknowledge and love him and worship him in spirit and in truth.

This is a great and important work—one that we do not fully comprehend. When the Spirit of the Lord rests powerfully upon us, we realize it to some extent; but we do not always have that Spirit in such copious measure, and when we are left to ourselves we are weak, frail, and liable to err. This shows to us that we should be more faithful than we have ever been, and that day and night, wherever we are and under whatever circumstances we may be placed, in order to enjoy the Spirit of the Gospel we must live to God by observing truth, honoring his law, and ever manifest a vigorous determination to accomplish the work he has assigned us.

I thank the Lord that I have the privilege of being associated with this people; and, whatever men may say or do, I desire that the testimony of the truth may continue with me, that I may ever realize for myself that the Gospel has again been revealed to man on the earth.

It seems to me that today, or I may say this present moment is a moment of trial for this people. I have often heard the President say, in relation to our having been driven from our homes, hated and mistreated by our enemies and the enemies of truth, that we were not then particularly tried. I believe it. I believe that then we were more happy and better alive to the work we are engaged in than many are today. I believe, of the two, take the period when the Saints were driven from the State of Missouri, or subsequently, when we were driven from the State of Illinois, and compare it with the present day, that today is the day of trial for this people. When you go along the street, and meet a man or a woman, do you know whether he or she is a Latter-day Saint or not? There was a time when we could walk up and down the streets and tell by the very countenances of men whether they were Latter-day Saints, or not; but can you do it now? You cannot, unless you have greater discernment and more of the Spirit and power of God than I have. Why? Because many are trying as hard as they can to transform themselves into the very shape, character, and spirit of the world. Elders in Israel, young men, mothers and daughters in Israel are conforming to the world's fashions until their very countenances indicate its spirit and character. This course is to the shame and disgrace of those who are so unwise. It is not so much in the settlements, but go where you will in this city and you can see some of these foolish ones. And when the line is drawn and the choice made, there are many, who we think today are in fellowship with the Lord, that will be left without the pale. Yet they are now going

smoothly along, and we meet, shake hands and call each other brother. We meet here in this Tabernacle and partake of the Holy Sacrament together as brethren in the bonds of the covenant, and go smoothly along together; but it is not all gold that glitters. It is not all as it appears; the surface is deceptive, and while many think that it is no harm to pattern after the foolish, wicked, nonsensical notions and fashions of the world and the character of worldlings, taking them into our homes and making them our companions, and think that we are just as good Saints with as without them, by and by we will wake up to the astounding fact that we have been deceived and misled.

Why did God call us from the world and denounce it? Why did he say that none were good, and that the religious worship of the world was not acceptable to him, but was a mockery and an abomination in his sight? Why tell this to the Prophet and say to him, "I will make you an instrument in my hands to gather out my people from the world, that I may have a righteous and pure people who will worship me in spirit and in truth, and who will not draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me?" It was because the world was corrupt and had gone after the fashions and follies of men; because the people were led by the doctrines of men, put their faith in man and made flesh their arm; and had forsaken God. They boasted of themselves, in their own strength, glory, might and power, and said that they cared not for God, as was manifested on an occasion during the late rebellion, in a convention that was called, I think at Chicago. A proposition was made that they conquer the South; someone proposed, "by the help of God;" but they unanimously voted that they would do it without the help of God, or not at all. They would have the glory of it themselves, they wanted none of the help of God to do it. God was out of the question with them, for they gloried in their own strength.

And the world, today, glory in their own wealth, power and knowledge, and for this they are an abomination in the sight of God; and he has raised up a Prophet and has put forth his hand for the last time to gather his people and to do his great and marvelous work. He is sending forth his missionaries to preach the Gospel to the nations of the earth, to gather out the honest and those who will serve him with full purpose of heart, that they may be gathered from the midst of the world's wickedness and corruption, to a place where they can better serve the Lord and accomplish his purposes. Then, when we are gathered, when the Lord has delivered us from the hands of our enemies, brought us out of bondage with his outstretched arm and planted us in the midst of these mountains in peace and surrounded us with blessings, and has enriched the soil so that it yields its strength for our good, and has made of us a peculiar people—when the Lord has done this for us—today some will cringe and bow to the degrading fashions of the world, and court the society and habits of the wicked. Such conduct is a crying shame on those who, professing to be Latter-day Saints, act so unwisely. We profess to have forsaken the world and to live accordingly to the requirements of the Gospel, and it behooves us to walk worthily of so excellent a profession.

We cannot trifle with the things of God. Many talents have been committed to us; if we put them in a napkin and hide them in the earth, we shall be beaten with many stripes; but if we use them wisely, we shall receive great blessings and rewards. If we wish to see the work of God carried victoriously forward, if we wish to accomplish the purposes of the Almighty, and have a desire to carry out his will on the earth, that it may be done here as it is in heaven, we must live as we profess, be guided by the whisperings of his Spirit and the teachings and counsels of his servants. Who is there among us that does not feel an interest in the work of God. Those who do not will be cut short, they will lose their inheritance, and the rights and privileges guaranteed to man through his faithfulness.

It grieves me when I hear young men, who have been born and reared in this Church, speaking indifferently of the truth, and as apt to take up an argument against as in its favor. I thank the Lord that I have never been guilty of that to my knowledge; but I do not claim any particular credit on this account, for I was taught from my childhood that the great work in which we are engaged is true, and designed for the salvation of mankind. Until I was fifteen years old I did not know this, but I believed it, my heart was in it, and my feelings were enlisted, and any opposite influence, obstacle or power with which I came in contact, even in my childhood, roused me in a moment, and I felt that I was for the truth and the people of God.

When I was sent on my first mission, though only fifteen years of age, I began to learn and sense things for myself, I began to receive and bear testimony of the truth. In my weakness I endeavored to preach the Gospel, to tell people the truth, and to explain to them the way of life. This gave to me a knowledge and fixed my faith and

feelings, and made them to me seemingly unchangeable. But we are changeable, weak and frail, we know not today what we may do or what may occur tomorrow. This is a frail, poor, low condition for the offspring of God to be in, yet it is our condition exactly. Notwithstanding this, men today will boast of their greatness, power, wealth, descent, associations, influence and honors, when the poor, insignificant, miserable things may be dead and food for worms tomorrow. That great thing that boasted of his influence, is proud and stands up in majesty today, may be food for worms tomorrow. O, the foolishness of man!

It is for the people called Latter-day Saints to make God their boast, to ascribe to him the honor and power, and to say within themselves, O Father, we are thine. That is the way all mortality should feel. They should feel that the earth and its fulness are God's, that the gold and silver, the cattle on a thousand hills, the rich fields, the streams of water, the rivers, lakes, ocean, and all they contain are his. He made them; they are not ours, for he has not given them to us; we have not earned them; but when we have earned them, when we have proved faithful over a few things committed to us here, when we have proved wise stewards over the little things, when we have fought the good fight of faith, endured to the end and worked out our salvation, then the earth and its fulness will be given to the Saints of the Most High, and they shall possess it forever and ever. But it is not ours yet, neither is it man's, neither will it be, until he has earned an inheritance upon it by his faithfulness, diligence, good precepts and examples, and by his endurance to the end in the truth, and not till then. And when we think that by simply bearing the name of Saint, or associating with good men and women, we shall secure an inheritance on this goodly earth, that will yet be purified and made like a sea of glass for a dwelling place for the just, we shall find that we have deceived ourselves, and will see the crown and inheritance designed for us taken away and given to this one or that one who lived on the earth when we did, but who, instead of having only the name of Saints, were Saints in very deed.

I was very much pleased with Brother Hyde's discourse on this subject a few months ago; it was a most excellent description of things as they are and as they will be, and it was true. If we do not now know that it was so, we will have to learn; and if we are not willing to receive instruction and counsel, we will have to learn through experience and stern necessity, and be made to realize our condition and dependence on God.

In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, when the latter, looking beyond the yawning gulf that separated him from Paradise, saw Lazarus enjoying bliss in Abraham's bosom, and wanted an angel sent to warn his friends on earth, the Lord Jesus said, if they will not believe the Prophets and Apostles, neither would they believe though one should be raised from the dead. So in these days, if the Prophets, Apostles and Elders called of God and commissioned to preach the Gospel are not believed by the people, neither would they believe an angel, or one raised from the dead. I once felt that this was a pretty hard saying, but I am now convinced that it is true. I always, perhaps, conceded that it was true, yet at times I felt, would it not be possible for an angel to convince the people when we could not.

Since then I have seen and conversed with men, have known the feelings of their hearts and seen that they were just as full of the darkness of hell as they could be. So full and firmly rooted were they in darkness and ignorance and in a determination not to receive the truth that, though angels and ministering spirits had taught them, they would still have preferred to remain in ignorance and unbelief. I was forcibly reminded of this a short time ago, when in conversation with Alexander H. Smith. Do you suppose an angel would convince him? He said that no human testimony could convince him. Affliction and the chastisement of God might affect his body, but could not touch his heart; it is like adamant, and there are thousands and thousands in the same condition—shutting out the very possibility of truth's reaching their understandings. They will not receive the testimony of men, yet they will quote and reiterate the testimonies of men whom we know to be as wicked and corrupt as the devil; but when Prophets and Apostles ordained under the hands of the Prophet Joseph, and who are carrying out the very plans and purposes made manifest through him, bear testimony of these things, their testimony is rejected, for they will not receive the testimony of men. It is simply this—we will not have the truth, we cannot bear it, and you cannot force it upon us—we do not want it.

This is a free country; the kingdom of God is a kingdom of freedom; the Gospel of the Son of God is the Gospel of

liberty. Men can worship God, if they wish to, but, if not, they may go and worship stones, the sun, moon, stars, or anything else that they wish. We will protect and respect every man in his rights, so far as they do not interfere with the rights of others, for every man must answer for his own deeds.

I sometimes hear the Latter-day Saints instructed about the way they should treat strangers; they are told to extend to all men due respect and kindness. You would not be a Latter-day Saint if you did not; you would not manifest the Spirit of the Gospel did you not show them due kindness, and respect; but remember, at the same time, that you do not compromise yourselves. In trying to be kind and courteous to others, we sometimes place ourselves in their power, and as sure as we do, bad men will take advantage of it. How was the counsel given by the Savior to the Apostles, "Be ye therefore as wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves." But this generation is wiser than the children of light—the Saints. Why? In one particular, because, when we embrace the Gospel we feel well, so thankful to the Lord, so full of gratitude, that we are thrown off our guard, suspect no evil, nor look for sin in any man, and so invite them into our circles, and, by and by they get the upper hand of us; we begin to loose faith and to think that the devil has not such an awkward cloven foot, that his horns and tail are not quite so long, nor he quite so deformed, black, and hideous as we thought. We have been deceived; we thought that the devil had long horns and tail, a cloven foot, and was black, hideous, and grinning; but when we find him out, he is a gentleman in black broad cloth, with a smooth tongue, pleasant countenance, high forehead, and so on; quite a good-looking fellow. That is the kind of a person we find the devil to be, and we will find him in more persons than one, and that too right in this city.

I feel well and thankful to have the privilege of being a Saint; and I hope, brethren and sisters, that anything good that is said to us we will feel like carrying out in our lives. It is our duty, and we should never fail to do so.

May God bless us and all Israel, and keep us in the paths of truth.

Notwithstanding what I have said here today about the vanity and foolishness amongst us, especially in Great Salt Lake City, yet I believe, as has been frequently said, that taking this people as a whole they are the best on the earth; and I believe that more good people can be found here that can be found in the same number anywhere else on the earth, and that if one-third, one-half, or two-thirds of this people should fall away and go astray, the number then remaining would be sufficient to carry off the work victoriously, for it is God's work, and he has decreed that it shall be fulfilled according to the predictions of the Prophets. May God grant it, and help us all to be faithful, that we may be numbered among those who obtain a crown and inheritance, is my prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen.