

Choice of Rulers—Headship—One Man Power—The Yoke of Jesus

Discourse by Elder John Taylor, delivered at the 42nd Semi-Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, October 7, 1872.

I am happy to have the privilege of meeting with and speaking to the Saints on the present occasion. If I were inclined to take a text I would repeat a passage made use of by Jesus, which is something like this—"Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart and you shall find rest to your souls." Perhaps I may not have got it verbatim, however the principle is there, and you can correct it from the written word. The ideas contained in the saying of the Redeemer are rather peculiar. The yoke that is there referred to would seem to imply a degree of servitude of some kind or other, and men generally look upon such expressions in that point of view. The nations of the earth, generally, are under some kind of rule and government. The religious portion of mankind are also under a species of government and rule, and no matter where you go, you find an influence of this kind more or less prevailing among men. We stand here in rather an anomalous position. We have a church with its government or laws, and we have also a government and laws according to the organization of the United States. Hence our obligations are twofold, one as subjects of the United States, the other as subjects of the Church of God. And then, were we to go a little further, we might also add, of the kingdom of God. Now, in every government of men that exists anywhere on the face of the earth, there is a species of rule associated with and founded on authority voluntarily given by the people or usurped by the rulers, according to circumstances; but all mankind, everywhere, are under some form of dominion, government or rule. The same thing applies also to churches and the worship of God. There are various systems in existence on the earth, including Judaism, Mahomedanism, Pantheism, and heathenism of many kinds, as it has existed for generations in many parts of the earth; and there is Christianity with the multifarious ideas, rule, and authority of the Christian churches as they exist, scattered abroad in the earth, principally in Europe and America as well as in some parts of Africa and Asia. But whether we refer to the Pagan, Jewish, Christian, or any other form of religion, its followers are expected to submit to some kind of authority; to subscribe to certain articles of faith, and to submit to certain forms, laws and ordinances, according to their several theories.

The same thing precisely, exists among the nations; they have their various forms of rule, government and dominion, and they exact certain conditions from their subjects. No matter what kind of government, it requires a species of obedience from all persons living under it; for government, of course, necessarily implies rule, authority, dominion, governors and governed, or law and the execution of that law. All these principles exist in one form or another over all the face of the wide earth whereon we live. We cannot separate ourselves from that, go where we will. In a despotic government the power to dictate and control all its affairs is vested in the emperor, according to his own will and pleasure, sometimes, perhaps, modified by counsel, which he can receive or reject at pleasure. In other kinds of government, such as are called limited monarchies, the people hold a certain part of the power or authority in their own hands, and give a certain part to the government. The government of England belongs to this class. There they have a king or queen, as the case may be, at the head of the government, and two houses called the Lords and Commons, the latter are elected by and represent the people. It is what is called a popular government, the people having a voice, but at the same time they concede a certain amount of their power to their legislators, who manage their affairs according to their ideas of what would be most beneficial for the nation.

The government of the United States is what is called a republic. In a form of government of this kind the foundation of all law, power and authority is the voice or will of the people; that is the genius of the government. It is based upon a written constitution granting unto the legislature power to do thus and so, and to go no further; and while they who make and administer the laws confine themselves within the limits of that constitution, their acts are what is called constitutional. When they go beyond that, their acts are called unconstitutional, that is, they deprive the people of certain rights guaranteed to them by the written compact that they have entered into. I speak of these things simply to elucidate certain ideas that I wish to communicate.

But to proceed further. If we—the people in this Territory, or in other Territories or in the States, confer certain powers on the General Government, we no longer retain them, they are ceded away by us to others. If we give to our legislators certain authority, they hold that authority, and it is for us to submit to the laws which may be

enacted by them. This is what is called republicanism, and it is also in agreement with the theory of a limited monarchy. Whenever a people give up certain rights they ought to honor the parties into whose hands they place them. The President of the United States ought to be sustained; so ought the ministers of the government of England, by the people over whom they preside, because they are acting for and on their behalf and according to their dictates. If you go to some other governments they ask no odds of the people. Say they, "We will be sustained, if we have to sustain ourselves by the sword."

We come now to religious matters, and here in our own country are Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and a host of others. I need not go to foreign countries and examine their religions. I wish to arrive at certain conclusions, and to do so I have no need to go beyond the confines of the United States. Here we have the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Quakers, Shakers and so forth. Very well, all these sects have their own peculiar ideas of church government. The Methodist has his Discipline—a system got up by the ministers of that church that all its members have to be governed by. They must come within the purview and be under the influence thereof. If you ask a Methodist to become a Latter-day Saint, he might say, and truly, "I have not the privilege of being Methodist and Latter-day Saint at the same time." A man cannot be a Baptist and a Methodist at the same time, neither can he be a Methodist and a shaking Quaker. Why? Because he is bound by the articles of the Discipline of his church, and he must submit to that. So it is in regard to the Catholics. Many of you have no doubt read recently of Pere Hyacinthe, who, a short time ago, was very popular among the Roman Catholics. But he dissented from their views; and among other things he took to himself a wife, which was contrary to their ideas and creed, and probably his own views. The result was that they excommunicated him and they treated him as if he had been dead, and had a funeral, following him to his grave while he was yet living. This is according to their ideas, and he, being a Catholic, had no right to expect anything else. A Catholic priest must submit to the laws of the priesthood, and they have excommunicated him for departing therefrom, and he had no cause to complain. We may have our own peculiar ideas about the propriety of this, that and the other religious faith, ceremonies and forms of worship, but I am now speaking of law, and of governments, and of the arrangements that peoples, nations, churches, and the members of churches bind themselves to be governed by.

The same thing applies to any of the various sects that exist in Christendom. The Baptist commences a church, and he believes in baptism by immersion, but he could not be a Latter-day Saint. Why? Because he can be baptized by anybody not having authority from God, and he does not believe that baptism is for the remission of sins. According to his ideas he must have his sins forgiven first, and then be baptized after a while. He could not be a Latter-day Saint, because his ideas and ours are at variance. If a man is a Baptist, as long as he remains so, he must submit to their law. If he is a Methodist, and remains so, he must submit to their discipline, be it right or wrong, the question of their laws being Scriptural or not has to be decided in and of itself. It is the same way with a nation. If I were in Russia, and did not like the government, I might, if they would allow me, go to England, come to the United States, or go to one of the Southern republics, and become a citizen thereof, but I could not be a republican in Russia. If I went to England, I should have to be subject to the laws of England, and the same if I came to the United States, hence the principle that I mentioned before is applicable all the way through, no matter which way you look at it. I am not saying at present which of these governments, whether religious or political, is right, I am merely trying to elucidate a principle that exists among and is acknowledged by men. If I go to live in any country on the face of the earth, I have to be subject to its laws, and if I am a reasonable, intelligent man, I acknowledge the propriety of my being so. If I join the Methodist church, I have a right to be a good Methodist, and to submit to their discipline. If I join the Baptist church I have a right to be a good Baptist, and to submit to their discipline, creed, laws and so on, for I join them knowing that I ought to submit to them, and as an honorable man I do so or leave it.

Well, we stand here in a peculiar position, as before stated. We are here in a religious capacity, and we are here in a political capacity. As religionists our faith is that God has spoken, and that angels have ministered to men; that the everlasting Gospel has been restored in its fullness, simplicity and purity, as it existed in Jesus's day. We believe in Apostles and Prophets, and in the principle of revelation—in God communicating with the human family. These things were taught to us before we became members of this Church, and we received them as part and parcel of our faith, and having faith in this system we obeyed it. We believed in being baptized for the remission of

sins, and having hands laid upon us for the reception of the Holy Ghost. That is our faith, it has been communicated to us by revelation, by the opening heavens, by the voice of God, by the ministering of holy angels, and by the testimony of God's servants, as they have gone forth through the world.

We also believe in having a Priesthood—a ruling power to regulate and dictate, under the guidance of the Almighty, the affairs of his Church and kingdom upon the earth. That is our faith, and it was taught to us when we first listened to “Mormonism.” Before we were baptized into this Church we believed the men whom we heard proclaim its principles were inspired by the Almighty, and we pray to God for them daily now, that the revelations of Heaven may be unfolded to their view, and that the purposes of God may be made plain to their understanding, that they may be able to instruct the people and lead them in the way of life. This is our faith, and when we talk about these things we do so understandingly, there is no halfway business about it.

We meet here today in Conference, believing in these principles. When we talk about paying our tithing, we believe that it is the duty of all who ever obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ to contribute one-tenth of their increase to the Lord. As Latter-day Saints we subscribe to this, and we believe it is right to be honest, and to show integrity in this as in everything else. We believe in being truthful, virtuous, pure and holy, and we believe in keeping the commandments of God in all things. This is part and parcel of our religious faith and belief, and we have, from time to time, of our own free will, subscribed to these very principles of which I have spoken; and we have held up our hands time and time again to sustain the authorities of the Church and kingdom of God upon the earth. Having said so much in regard to these things, I desire, very briefly, to compare the position that we occupy with that which others occupy.

I have already told you that there exists a variety of governments on the earth, and that all men are expected to be in subjection to the laws and usages of the governments under which they live. I have told you that in England they have a limited monarchy. At the present time a queen presides over their destinies. How did she come to that office? She was born of royalty, and inherited it by lineal descent. The people had no choice in the matter. She has been, I believe, a very good, virtuous, exemplary woman, and has ruled with mildness, generosity and kindness among her people; but if she had done otherwise, she was still their queen. Now I want to talk about what people call equal rights, and to examine a certain principle in relation to these things. What say had the people of England in regard to their queen? None at all. The President of the United States is elected by the people, therefore he is what may be termed the people's candidate. How often do they elect a President of the United States? Once every four years, and consequently there is great excitement now on account of the coming Presidential election. The people are ranging themselves into parties, and each party using all the influence they possess to elect their own special and peculiar favorites. Besides the President, there are Legislators and Governors. Governors generally hold their office for four years; Senators of the United States from four to six years, according to circumstances; members of the House of Representatives for two years. In many of the States and Territories the Legislators are elected for two years, and hence, during the time for which they are elected, they have a perfect right to use their own judgment in enacting laws for the benefit of the people, being sworn not to transcend certain bounds laid down as their guide. If they should be ever so bad during their term of office, and should enact oppressive laws, the people have no right to change them until their time expires, unless, from some flagrant violation of their trust, they should be impeached.

How is it in the churches? With the Catholics it is once a priest always a priest, except in such cases as that of Pere Hyacinthe, and then they bury them. In some churches the bishops and other authorities hold office during good behavior, or for lifetime; in some churches they are voted for by a certain conclave according to circumstances and their own peculiar notions and dogmas, and in very many instances these officers hold their offices for life without any counteraction whatever, unless they violate their own constitutions, laws or discipline, when they are liable to be dealt with according to the laws and regulations of their several churches. Now nobody thinks they are very badly oppressed in all this. They enter these churches voluntarily, they are not bound to stay in them, and they leave them when they like.

Now let us contrast our position with that of other people in these respects. We hear a good deal about one man power. I want to examine that power a little, and see how it exists, and how far it extends. We believe in two

principles—one is the voice of God, the other is the voice of the people. For instance, we believe that nobody but God could set the religious world right, we believe that none but God could have given any man correct information in regard to doctrine and ordinances. We believe that God did instruct Joseph Smith in relation to both, and also pertaining to the government of his people here on the earth. How are this people selected and set apart? Joseph Smith was selected by the Lord, and set apart, and ordained by holy angels. How with the others? By the authority which God conferred on Joseph he selected, set apart, and ordained others to the various orders and organizations of the Priesthood. We know that the Lord, in former times, called some men who did not magnify their calling, and who were set aside as unfit for the Master's use. Jesus, for instance, called Judas to be one of the Twelve, and Judas betrayed him, and he was cut off from the Twelve. We have had many instances in our Church of a similar nature, men have been found unfaithful, and they have been cut off. By whom? By the authority of that Priesthood of which they formed a part. That Priesthood has the same power now that it had formerly—to bind on earth and it is bound in heaven, to loose on earth and it is loosed in heaven. How does this Priesthood stand in relation to the people? It is not thrust upon them as the queens of England, the kings of France, the emperor of Austria, or as the former king, but now emperor of Prussia, are; no, it is not thrust upon the people in any such way. It is precisely in the same way that the Israelites were organized in former times—God gave them certain laws, and all the people said "Amen," then the laws became binding upon Israel. The position we occupy is this: the Holy Ghost, which has been given to all who have obeyed the Gospel, and have lived faithful to its precepts, takes of the things of God, and shows them forth through a living Priesthood to a people enlightened and instructed by the Spirit of revelation from God, and the people thus enlightened, instructed and blessed by the spirit of light, voluntarily and gladly sustain the Priesthood who minister unto them. When Joseph Smith was upon the earth, he did not force himself upon the people as these kings and emperors do, but he presented himself before them every six months, at the Annual or Semi-Annual Conference, and the people had a chance to lift up their hands to receive or reject him. That was the position occupied by Joseph Smith, and those associated with him, in guiding the affairs of the Church and kingdom of God upon the earth, and it is precisely so with President Young. He stands here as the representative of God to the people, as the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He is, or ought to be, full of light, life, revelation and the power of God, and he is, and bears testimony to it. He ought to be able to lead the people in the paths of life, and he is. He is the choice of God, and what more? He is the choice of the people of God. Has he a right to say, "I am chosen, I am elected, I am President, and I will do as I darned please, and help yourselves?" No, he presents himself before you, and if there is any man who has aught against him, he has the privilege of holding up his hand to signify the same. That is the position of our President—he is brought to a test every six months, as it rolls around, before the assembled Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is the same with the Twelve, the President of the Stake, the High Council, the Presidents of Seventies, and with all the leading officers of the Church—they are all put to this test twice a year, and the people have the privilege of voting for or against them, just as they please.

Here then, on the one hand, there is the voice of God. Shall we object to it? Who made us? Who organized us, and the elements with which we are surrounded and that we inhale? Who organized the planetary system that we see around us? Who provides breakfast, dinner and supper for the millions that dwell on the face of the earth? Who clothes them, as he does the lilies of the field? Who imparts unto man his breath, life, health, his powers of locomotion, thought, and all the godlike attributes with which he is endowed? Where did they come from? Who has controlled and managed the affairs of the world from its creation until the present time? The Great I Am, the Great Eloheim, the Great God who is our Father. We bow before him. Is it a hardship to reverence the Lord our God? Is it a hardship to have him for our instructor? And shall we follow the notions, theories, ideas and folly of men, who seek to supersede the wisdom, light and paternal care of God our heavenly Father? No, we will not. God is our God, "the Lord is our God, the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our King, and he shall rule over us." We do not object to bow the knee to God and say, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven:" and we pray that it may be hastened. We acknowledge, we bow before, we reverence the name of our heavenly Father. That is one thing that we do for God, who causes seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, day and night, the God who has watched over us and all the myriads of the inhabitants of the earth from the time of creation until the present time; the God in whose hands are the destinies of the human family pertaining to this world and the worlds to come. If God will deign to teach, lead and dictate us,

we bow with reverence before him, and say, "It is the Lord, let him do as seems him good." We ask the guidance of the Almighty, we reverentially present ourselves before him and we submit to his authority; for his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

What next? Then comes the freedom of man. On the one hand the guidance of God, on the other the freedom of man. We ask God to dictate us and he does. He has given us a President, Apostles, Prophets, Bishops; he has organized his Church in the most perfect and harmonious manner. We see these things before us. I need not talk about the country that we inhabit, nor about the blessings that have been shed abroad among us, rich in comparison with those enjoyed by others by whom we are surrounded. These things are patent to all intelligent men, and surprise is frequently expressed at our improvements and at the wisdom and intelligence that have governed, managed and controlled our affairs; they do not know where they came from. We do—they come from God through the medium of his servants.

What next? God having given us a President inspired by his Holy Spirit, we are required to vote for him—will we have him or will we reject him? We lift up our hands and say, "Yes, we will receive him." The world say this is despotism, being governed by one man. Is it despotism for every man and every woman to have a voice in the selection of those who rule over them? Is that despotism, tyranny or oppression? If it is I do not know what the terms mean. There are no people on the face of the earth today who have to undergo so severe a criticism as the President and Priesthood of this Church before the people, and why is it that the people vote unanimously for them? "Well," say the world, "there is a kind of influence, we hardly know what, we wish it did not exist, for we do not like this one man power." I know you do not, for it is one thousand men, ten thousand men power, it is the power of the kingdom of God on the earth, and the power of God united with it, that is what it is. As I have already said, it is not only the President of the Church who has to undergo this test, but the Twelve, the Seventies, and all the presiding officers of the Church have to go through the same ordeal.

I will now go back to my text. I have been a long way from it, but you know it is usual to preach from the text. I have been from mine awhile, now I am coming back to it. Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls." What was the yoke placed upon the followers of Jesus? Precisely the same as that placed upon you. What did he tell his disciples to do? To go forth and baptize the people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and it was promised that certain signs should follow them that believed. In his name they should cast out devils, speak with new tongues, if they drank any deadly thing it should not hurt them, and if they laid hands on the sick they should recover. The word was—"Go forth in my name and with my authority, and my Spirit shall accompany you." And it did, and the people became one in faith, doctrine and principle, just as the Scriptures say. "Take my yoke upon you." What was it? Said he, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." This was the kind of yoke Jesus put upon them, and this is the kind that is put upon you—to love righteousness, keep the commands of God, live your religion and obey the principles of truth, is this a hard yoke? This is what is required of Latter-day Saints. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me!" And how did he do it? He obeyed the will of his Father, and then he expected his disciples to obey his will. Said he, "Father, I pray for them, that they may be one"—a good deal of this one-man power there, was there not? "I pray for them, that they may be one, even as the Father and I are one, that they may be one in us;" and in his mind, looking to the universal expansion of this heavenly principle, said he, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for all them that shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, even as I and the Father are one, that the world may know that thou hast sent me." This was the kind of principle the Savior taught to his followers, and this is the kind that is taught to us.

Now let me ask is it right for a Methodist to obey the Methodist discipline? Yes, or else leave them, he has the privilege to do which he pleases. Is it right for a Presbyterian to obey the Presbyterian doctrine and principles? Yes, or leave them. Is it right for a Roman Catholic to obey their principles? Yes, or leave them. Is it right for a Latter-day Saint to obey their principles? Yes, or leave them, one of the two. Do not try to drag in something else, do not make Methodists of us for instance, nor Presbyterians. Do not try to make Catholics of us, if you do not like "Mormonism" leave it. That is honest, straightforward and upright, and good doctrine, and according to the

principles which are acknowledged to be correct everywhere. "Well," says one, "I think that things could be improved a little." Well then, go out somewhere and make your improvements, here is a big continent, go north or south, or where you please. Get as many to follow you as you can, and teach them what principles you please, and if you can build up a better system than ours all right, but do not start it here. This is the kind of faith that Paul spoke of when he said, "If thou hast faith have it to thyself." If you do not have it to yourselves take as many with you as you can get. That is right, the world is open, plenty of room in every direction, go and try your hand and see how you will succeed.

The same principle is true in relation to other things as well as to religion. I might apply it to things political. Some people say, "You folks always vote together," we would be poor coots if we did not, and just as bad as the rest of you. Some folks here, a short time ago, got up a little political operation, and tried how it would answer to run one against another; but it did not work well and they had to quit. We believe in oneness, and our outside friends say, "We do not." Yes you do, y-e-s y-o-u d-o. Now all you gentlemen who go in for General Grant would you not like to elect him? Yes you would, and you will use all the influence that you have to do so, and if he is not elected it will be because you cannot do it, because you have not influence enough to elect him. On the other hand, you who are in favor of Horace Greeley, how you would like to have him elected, would you not? Yes, you would. And will you not get all to vote for him that you possibly can? Yes, and if all do not vote for him it will not be your fault. Well, if the people do not vote as we want them it will not be our fault, and the only difference, in this respect, between you and President Young is, that he has a little more influence than you, therefore do not grunt about it, these things are fair and straightforward. When men talk about oppression they talk about what they do not understand, and the same when they talk about the one-man power and the bondage of the people. Is it not horrible bondage for the whole people to have the privilege of voting for whom they please? Terrible, let us get out of it, shall we not, and go somewhere where they will not let us do as we please, and have some of that liberty that would put shackles upon us, and bind us down? But we Latter-day Saints do not want that, we want to be delivered from that, and to walk according to the light of truth. Well, let us take the yoke of Christ upon us, and learn of him, and keep the commandments of God. And if we vote for a Bishop somewhere over yonder, let us sustain him as long as he is in office, and if he does not do what is right we will vote him out. And if we have Presidents or Apostles or anybody that we do not like, let us vote them out, and be free men, and cultivate and cherish in our bosoms the principles of liberty. But let us be careful that we do not grieve the Spirit of the Lord, and while we are looking at these things let us look at our own eternal interests, and lean upon God for wisdom and instruction, that his Spirit may lead us in the paths of life, that we may comprehend true principles, and be one as Jesus was and is one with the Father.

May God help us to be faithful, in the name of Jesus. Amen.