Blessings of the Gospel Only Obtained By Compliance With the Law

Discourse by Elder Lorenzo Snow, delivered at the General Conference, Salt Lake City, Monday Morning, April 7th, 1879.

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."

In connection with this I will quote part of the words of the Savior in his sermon on the Mount, as contained in the last verse of the 5th chapter of Matthew.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

In occupying a short time this morning, I desire an interest in your faith and prayers.

We learn that the Lord appeared to Abraham and made him very great promises, and that before he was prepared to receive them a cer– tain requirement was made of him, that he should become perfect before the Lord. And the same requirement was made by the Savior of his disciples, that they should become perfect, even as he and his Father in heaven were perfect. This I conceive to be a subject that concerns the Latter-day Saints; and I wish to offer a few remarks by way of suggestion, for the reflection of those whom it concerns.

The Lord proposes to confer the highest blessings upon the Latter-day Saints; but, like Abraham, we must prepare ourselves for them, and to do this the same law that was given to him of the Lord has been given to us for our observance. We also are required to arrive at a state of perfection before the Lord; and the Lord in this case, the same as in every other, has not made a requirement that cannot be complied with, but on the other hand, He has placed for the use of the Latter-day Saints the means by which they can conform to His holy order. When the Lord made this requirement of Abraham, He gave him the means by which he could become qualified to obey that law and come up fully to the requirement. He had the privilege of the Holy Spirit, as we are told the Gospel was preached to Abraham, and through that Gospel he could obtain that divine aid which would enable him to understand the things of God, and without it no man could arrive at a state of perfection before the Lord. So in reference to the Latter-day Saints, they could not possibly come up to such a moral and spiritual standard except through supernatural aid and assistance. Neither do we expect that the Latter-day Saints, at once will or can conform to this law under all circumstances. It requires time; it requires much patience and discipline of the mind and heart in order to obey this commandment. And although we may fail at first in our attempts, yet this should not discourage the Latter-day Saints from endeavoring to exercise a determination to comply with the great requirement. Abraham, although he might have had faith to walk before the Lord according to this divine law, yet there were times when his faith was sorely tried, but still he was not discouraged because he exercised a determination to comply with the will of God. We may think that we cannot live up to the perfect law, that the work of perfecting ourselves is too difficult. This may be true in part, but the fact still remains that it is a command of the Almighty to us and we cannot ignore it. When we experience trying moments, then is the time for us to avail ourselves of that great privilege of calling upon the Lord for strength and understanding, intelligence and grace by which we can overcome the weakness of the flesh against which we have to make a continual warfare.

Abraham was called to leave his kindred and country. Had he not complied with this requirement, he would not have been approved of the Lord. But he did comply; and while he was leaving his home, he no doubt was living in obedience, to this divine law of perfection. Had he failed in this, he certainly could not have obeyed the requirements of the Almighty. And while he was leaving his father's house, while he was subjecting himself to this trial, he was doing that which his own conscience and the Spirit of God justified him in doing, and nobody could have done better, providing he was doing no wrong when he was performing this labor.

When the Latter-day Saints received the Gospel in the nations afar, and when the voice of the Almighty to them

was, to leave the lands of their fathers, to leave their kindred as Abraham did, so far as they complied with this requirement, so far they were walking in obedience to this law; and they were as perfect as men could be under the circumstances, and in the sphere in which they were acting, not that they were perfect in knowledge or power, etc.; but in their feelings, in their integrity, motives and determination. And while they were crossing the great deep, providing they did not murmur nor complain, but obeyed the counsels which were given them, and in every way comported themselves in a becoming manner, they were as perfect as God required them to be.

The Lord designs to bring us up into the celestial kingdom. He has made known, through direct revelation, that we are His offspring, begotten in the eternal worlds, that we have come to this earth for the special purpose of preparing ourselves to receive a fullness of our Father's glory when we shall return into his presence. Therefore, we must seek the ability to keep this law, to sanctify our motives, desires, feelings and affections, that they may be pure and holy, and our will in all things be subservient to the will of God, and have no will of our own except to do the will of our Father. Such a man in his sphere is perfect, and commands the blessing of God in all that he does and wherever he goes. But we are subject to folly, to the weakness of the flesh, and we are more or less ignorant, thereby liable to err. Yes, but that is no reason why we should not feel desirous to comply with this command of God, especially seeing that he has placed within our reach the means of accomplishing this work. This I understand is the meaning of the word perfection, as expressed by our Savior and by the Lord to Abraham. A person may be perfect in regard to some things and not others. A person who obeys the word of wisdom faithfully, is perfect as far as that law is concerned. When we repented of our sins and were baptized for the remission of them, we were perfect as far as that matter was concerned. Now we are told by the Apostle John, that "we are the sons of God, but it does not appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he [Christ] is pure." The Latter-day Saints expect to arrive at this state of perfection; we expect to become as our Father and God, fit and worthy children to dwell in his presence; we expect that when the Son of God shall appear, we shall receive our bodies renewed and glorified, and that "these vile bodies will be changed and become like unto his glorious body." These are our expectations. Now let all present put this question to themselves. Are our expectations well founded? In other words, are we seeking to purify ourselves? How can a Latter-day Saint feel justified in himself unless he is seeking to purify himself even as God is pure—unless he is seeking to keep his conscience void of offense before God and man every day of his life. We doubtless, many of us, walk from day to day and from week to week, and from month to month, before God, feeling under no condemnation, comporting ourselves properly, and seeking earnestly and in all meekness for the Spirit of God to dictate our daily course; and yet there may be a certain time or times in our life, when we are greatly tried and perhaps overcome; even if this be so, that is no reason why we should not try again, and that, too, with redoubled energy and determination to accomplish our object, There was the Apostle Peter, for instance, a man valiant for the truth, and a man who walked before God in a manner that met with his divine approval; he told the Savior on a certain occasion that though all men forsook him he would not. But the Savior, foreseeing what would happen, told him that on that same night, before the cock crowed, he would deny him thrice, and he did so. He proved himself unequal for the trial; but afterwards he gained power, and his mind was disciplined to that extent that such trials could not possibly affect him. And if we could read in detail the life of Abraham, or the lives of other great and holy men, we would doubtless find that their efforts to be righteous were not always crowned with success. Hence we should not be discouraged if we should be overcome in a weak moment; but, on the contrary, straightway repent of the error or the wrong we may have committed, and as far as possible repair it, and then seek to God for renewed strength to go on and do better.

Abraham could walk perfectly before God day after day when he was leaving his father's house, and he showed evidences of a superior and well disciplined mind in the course he suggested when his herdsmen quarreled with the herdsmen of his nephew, Lot. There came a time in Abraham's life, however, which must have been very trying; in fact anything more severe can scarcely be conceived of; that was when the Lord called upon him to offer as a sacrifice his beloved and only son, even him through whom he expected the fulfillment of the great promise made him by the Lord; but through manifesting a proper disposition he was enabled to surmount the trial, and prove his faith and integrity to God. It can hardly be supposed that Abraham inherited such a state of mind from his idolatrous parents; but it is consistent to believe that under the blessing of God he was enabled to acquire it, after going through a similar warfare with the flesh as we are, and doubtless being overcome at times and then

overcoming until he was enabled to stand so severe a test. “Let this same mind be in you,” says the Apostle Paul, “which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Now every man that has this object before him will purify himself as God is pure, and try to walk perfectly before him. We have our little follies and our weaknesses; we should try to overcome them as fast as possible, and we should inculcate this feeling in the hearts of our children, that the fear of God may grow up with them from their very youth, and that they may learn to comport themselves properly before him under all circumstances. If the husband can live with his wife one day without quarreling or without treating anyone unkindly or without grieving the Spirit of God in any way, that is well so far; he is so far perfect. Then let him try to be the same the next day. But supposing he should fail in this his next day’s attempt? That is no reason why he should not succeed in doing so the third day. If the Apostle Peter had become discouraged at his manifest failure to maintain the position that he had taken to stand by the Savior under all circumstances, he would have lost all; whereas, by repenting and persevering he lost nothing but gained all, leaving us too to profit by his experience. The Latter-day Saints should cultivate this ambition constantly which was so clearly set forth by the apostles in former days. We should try to walk each day so that our conscience would be void of offense before everybody. And God has placed in the Church certain means by which we can be assisted, namely, apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, etc., “for the perfecting of the Saints,” etc. And he has also conferred upon us his Holy Spirit, which is an unerring guide, standing as an angel of God at our side, telling us what to do, and affording us strength and succor when adverse circumstances arise in our way. We must not allow ourselves to be discouraged whenever we discover our weakness. We can scarcely find an instance in all the glorious examples set us by the prophets, ancient or modern, wherein they permitted the Evil One to discourage them; but on the other hand they constantly sought to overcome, to win the prize, and thus prepare themselves for a fulness of glory. The Prophet Elijah succeeded. He so walked before God that he was worthy to be translated. And Enoch was found worthy to walk with God some 300 years, and was at last, with his people, taken up to heaven.

We are told that in the latter days, “There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old.” And in another scripture we are told that the age of the infant shall be as the age of a tree, and that it shall not die until it shall be old, and then it shall not slumber in the dust but be changed in the twinkling of an eye. But in those days people must live perfectly before the Lord, for we are told in the same passage, that “the sinner,” instead of being favored, “being an hundred years old shall be accursed.” When we once get it into our minds that we really have the power within ourselves through the gospel we have received, to conquer our passions, our appetites and in all things submit our will to the will of our Heavenly Father, and, instead of being the means of generating unpleasant feeling in our family circle, and those with whom we are associated, but assisting greatly to create a little heaven upon earth, then the battle may be said to be half won. One of the chief difficulties that many suffer from is, that we are too apt to forget the great object of life, the motive of our Heavenly Father in sending us here to put on mortality, as well as the holy calling with which we have been called; and hence, instead of rising above the little transitory things of time, we too often allow ourselves to come down to the level of the world without availing ourselves of the divine help which God has instituted, which alone can enable us to overcome them. We are no better than the rest of the world if we do not cultivate the feeling to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect.

This was the exhortation of the Savior to the former-day Saints, who were a people of like passions and who were subject to the same temptations as ourselves, and he knew whether the people could conform to it or not; the Lord never has, nor will he require things of his children which it is impossible for them to perform. The Elders of Israel who expect to go forth to preach the gospel of salvation in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among a people who are full of evil and corruption, should cultivate this spirit especially. And not only they, but everybody, every young man and woman belonging to this Church who is worthy to be called a Saint should cultivate this desire to live up to this requirement that their consciences may be clear before God. It is a beautiful thing, either in young or old, to have this object in view; it is especially delightful to see our young people take a course that the light and intelligence of God can beam in their countenances, that they may have a correct understanding of life, and be able to live above the follies and vanities of the world and the errors and wickedness of man.

May God bless you, brethren and sisters, and pour out His Holy Spirit upon you, that you may be blessed in all your acts, in your incomings and your outgoings and in the performance of every duty, and be blessed in calling upon the Almighty, that His Spirit may be in you as a well of water springing up to everlasting life, to guide you in His fear through all the scenes of life, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus. Amen.