

The Lord's Supper—Antiquity of the Gospel—The Apostasy—The Restoration

Discourse by Elder Orson Pratt, sen., delivered in the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, June 14th, 1868.

We have assembled ourselves together this afternoon, according to our usual custom, to worship the Lord our God and to partake of the Lord's supper, in commemoration of the death and suffering of our Great Redeemer. In this manner we show forth his death until he comes. By attending to this ordinance, and all other ordinances and institutions of the Kingdom of God, we witness before God, before angels and before one another, that we are His disciples.

Jesus is the only name given under Heaven by whom salvation can come. There is no other being or name, no other person appointed, no individual that has received authority to open up the way of salvation to the human family, only our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is He in whom the Latter-day Saints believe; it is He whom we worship. We also worship the Father in His name. It is the gospel which He has revealed which we have received. It is the Holy Ghost which the Father bestows upon the children of men, through His name, by which we are sanctified and made pure in heart.

The gospel of the Son of God is not a doctrine of late invention; but it is an old doctrine—a doctrine that was made manifest in the beginning. It has been taught in every dispensation; and all that were saved in the days of Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, or the prophets, as well as in the days of Christ, and since His day, were saved through belief in the Son of God, and in His gospel. This great plan was revealed to mankind in the early ages of the world as well as in the meridian of time.

The same gospel that was preached by the Apostles, was also preached by the ancient patriarchs and antediluvians. The same gospel that was preached in the days of the apostles, is also preached now to the Latter-day Saints. There has been a variety of dispensations of this gospel, made manifest to the human family. We have had in addition to the law of the gospel, many ordinances and institutions given to the children of men, suited to their particular circumstances, and to the conditions in which they were placed.

In the days of Moses, for instance, certain laws and ordinances were revealed from Heaven, suited to the condition of that people. But they had the gospel preached to them before the law of carnal commandments was revealed. Hence Paul says, in his epistle to the Hebrews, the gospel was preached to them as well as unto us, that is, to those who were in the wilderness with Moses. They had the gospel; but it did not profit them, says Paul, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. Hence they had to be dealt with and chastised for their unbelief and rebellion. The Lord had to afflict them, cutting many of them off and swearing in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest.

The gospel was also preached to Abraham. The same gospel by which the heathens were saved in the days of the apostles was known and preached in the days of Abraham. The same gospel that, according to the testimony of the New Testament, brought life and immortality to light was preached before the days of Abraham to Enoch, and through understanding the principles of that gospel his faith in the principles of immortality and eternal life became so strong that he was translated and taken to Heaven without seeing death.

In these latter times the Lord our God has condescended to send a dispensation of His gospel to the human family. You may enquire, what is the purpose the Lord has in view in sending the gospel in this age? Have we not here the books that contain the gospel of the Son of God, as it was preached in ancient times? Have we not here the word of the living God by which the people were saved before and after Christ came? And if they could be saved in those different dispensations in the early ages of the world and in the meridian of time, why should the Lord reveal another dispensation of this same gospel to the human family? I know that these enquiries arise, more or less, in the minds of individuals. I have often heard them in traveling among the various nations of the earth. When the gospel as revealed in the Book of Mormon, has been presented to the people, and they have been told that God

has commenced another dispensation of the same gospel, they would immediately enquire “What is the use of it? We have the gospel by which the ancients were saved, revealed in the New Testament, and why do you bring us another dispensation of it?” Let me reply to this, and say a few words in relation to the object and purposes that our Father in Heaven has had in view in revealing the gospel afresh to the children of men.

If it had not been for the great apostasy after the apostles had preached the gospel, during which the last vestige of the Church of Jesus Christ was rooted out of the earth by the wickedness of the children of men; if it had not been that the priesthood was taken from the earth and the power to preach the everlasting gospel in its fullness had ceased among the nations, I do not know that there would have been any necessity whatever for another revelation of the gospel, and its gifts, blessings and powers, and the priesthood and apostleship in the latter days. But I think it can be proved beyond the power of controversy or reasonable contradiction that the gospel of the Son of God, as it was preached in the days of the apostles, has been entirely rooted out from among men. I do not mean the letter of it; we have that in part; but I mean the power to preach it and to administer its ordinances; the power to build up the church and kingdom of God; the power to speak in the name of the Lord; the power which characterized the ancient servants of the living God; the power which rested on the inspired apostles by which they could call upon God and receive revelation from heaven. That power has been rooted out from the earth. A form has been left it is true—in fact a great many forms; but what is the form without the power? What, for instance, is the use of preaching baptism for the remission of sins to the human family, if there is no person authorized and ordained from God to administer baptism to those who believe and repent? None at all. People might go forth and preach baptism from age to age and from generation to generation, but who could be baptized, or what would be the use of it, unless there were authority to administer the ordinance?

What use would be the Lord’s Supper, of which we are now partaking, if we should go and preach it all the days of our lives, provided there were no persons authorized to administer the ordinance? None at all. They could not partake of the ordinance acceptably before God. We could not receive the ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins, unless there were some person sent by new revelation to administer this ordinance to us.

Again, what use would be the ordinance of the laying on of hands in confirmation, as it was performed in the days of the ancient apostles? This is a part of the gospel, as well as faith and repentance. What use is it unless there is a man called of God to lay on hands and confirm the gift of the Holy Ghost upon the heads of baptized believers, as was done anciently?

Here is the great question between the Latter-day Saints, and the whole Christian world. It is one of the great fundamental principles at issue between us and the whole world. And it is something of the greatest importance. It is not one of the nonessentials; but it is something that concerns the whole human family, no matter whether they are religious people or irreligious; whether believers in the Bible or unbelievers, or whether they are of this, that or the other sect. This is not the question; but the great question is, has God authority among the nations to preach, to baptize, to administer the sacrament, to confirm by the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, to lay hands on the sick and command them in the name of Jesus Christ to be healed as they did in ancient days, or has He not? If He has not we may preach until doom’s day, and our preaching will not save us in the fullness of the glory of the heavenly worlds. We may baptize, and our baptisms will not be recorded in the heavens. We may administer the sacrament, but God will never receive the authority by which it is administered, and it will not be recorded in the behalf of the individuals who received it from unauthorized hands.

What testimony have we that there has been no authority for many generations, or from the days of the ancient apostles until the present century? Have we any evidence in relation to this matter? We are sorry to say that we have so much that we are obliged to believe that darkness has truly reigned over the inhabitants of the earth, and gross darkness has filled their minds. We will present a little testimony before this assembly, this afternoon, on this subject; but as it is a subject with which you are well acquainted we need not dwell upon it long.

One of the greatest evidences that can be offered that authority to preach the gospel and administer in its ordinances has ceased from the days of the apostles down to the present time, is that which is acknowledged by the whole Christian world, Catholic and Protestant, namely that the days of revelation have ceased, that the canon

of Scripture is closed and full.

Now supposing we admit this, for the sake of reasoning a little while on the subject. Admit that after the apostles fell asleep there was no further revelation, that the canon of scripture was closed up at the end of the first century of the Christian era. If we admit this you see the dilemma into which the whole world is plunged. No man can receive the priesthood and authority to administer either in word, in doctrine or in ordinances without new revelation from Heaven. Shall I prove it? Let me refer you to the testimony of Paul in the epistle to the Hebrews, wherein he says that no man taketh this honor to himself, except he be called of God as was Aaron. Turn over to the Book of Exodus, if you wish to learn how Aaron was called. God, in the first place, by His own voice, and by the ministration of an angel, called His servant Moses, raised him up as a great and mighty prophet, gave him authority from the heavens to administer in the name of the Lord; and then gave him revelation and commandment to call his brother Aaron. God spoke to Moses, on that occasion, and told him that his brother Aaron should be a minister and that he should set apart Aaron unto the Priesthood, and that he should have power to go in and out before the Children of Israel; and that he should wear the breastplate, containing the Urim and Thummim, so that he could enquire in behalf of the Children of Israel, and judge between man and man.

Was Aaron called in any other way but by new revelation through the prophet Moses? He was not. Can any man receive the priesthood only by revelation? Can he receive his calling in any way wherein God does not communicate himself by new revelation from Heaven? I answer no, no. No man can assume the priesthood, and the power thereof, and officiate therein, unless he be called as this man of God was called in the days of Moses.

Admit then that the canon of scripture was closed when John the Revelator received his gospel, after he returned from the Isle of Patmos, and that when the apostles passed from the earth communication between earth and Heaven was closed, who could be their successors? No individual could hold the office or receive it unless God sent new revelation from Heaven, pointing out by name the individual upon whom the authority and calling to preach and administer in His name should rest.

If revelations were given in the second, third, fourth, fifth or any of the following centuries, where are those revelations? They are not in the Bible. Can we find them among the records of the Roman Catholics? No. What do we find there? According to the testimony of their bishops, archbishops and most learned men, they believe in no new revelation; but they take for their guide the traditions and revelations that have been handed down to them. We judge them out of their own mouths. If there have been no revelations given to the Catholic church, as they themselves testify in their writings, then there has been no Pope called to sit in the chair of St. Peter; no bishops nor archbishops to act in the places of the ancient apostles; and they are all impostors. Perhaps I ought to qualify that saying a little. There may have been some of them who were very sincere in following the traditions of their fathers, and who received the priesthood among the Catholics with all the sincerity that characterized some of the heathen priests, in receiving their priesthood from their fathers. But sincerity does not prove authority; and we have their own testimony that all authority was cut off from them, and that there was no man designated by name through revelation to occupy the position of St. Peter in Rome.

Again, come down to about three centuries ago, when the first Reformers came out and began to testify and protest against the Mother Church, and what do they exhibit? We are hunting for authority. They have invented articles of faith, and these alone are the basis of their authority. As a sample we may take the Church of England in the days of King Henry the Eighth. We may also take the Reformers on the Continent of Europe under Martin Luther, Calvin, and various other great Reformers. Men, no doubt, who were sincere and who did much good among the people. But let us hear their testimony. They declare also that the canon of scripture is full. In this respect, they follow in the tracks of the old "Mother." They exclaim, "No revelation, no voice of God; no inspired prophet or apostle; no communications with the heavens, no ministration of angels."

Well, then, what have you got? Oh, we have the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. But the scriptures do not call you to administer in the ordinances of the gospel. The scriptures did not name you, Martin Luther, nor you John Calvin, nor any of you Reformers, as the individuals to go forth to baptize the people and establish the kingdom of God. "Oh, but," says one, "the scriptures tell us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

They do not tell you any such thing. That commission was given to men who lived 1,800 years ago. It did not mean Paul, Timothy, Titus or Barnabas, but it meant the eleven men, and them only.

"But," says one, "did they not have others to assist them?" Yes, but they did not act by virtue of that commission which Jesus gave to his apostles, just before he ascended to the presence of his Father. That applied to the individuals to whom he spoke, and to no others. Paul could have had no authority to preach or baptize, until the day of his death if God had not given a new revelation to that effect. Timothy never could have acted and baptized, until the day of his death, without being ordained by the spirit of prophecy and by the laying on of hands, as we are informed in the New Testament. Barnabas never could have gone forth among the people as an apostle—for he was an apostle, though not one of the Twelve—and acted in connection with the apostle Paul, unless the Holy Ghost had said "separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work of the ministry unto which I have called them." It required new revelation. And if no man could act even in the days of the apostles on the old commission given to the eleven, how much less can people act upon it who live 1,500 or 1,800 years after who undertake to pick it up, and say we are authorized to preach under this commission because those eleven men were authorized.

What would you think, Americans—citizens of this great Republic, if some man in Great Britain should take it into his head to come over here, to this country of ours to represent the inhabitants of Great Britain; and when you ask him for his authority, "Oh," says he, "I have received no new commission. My government did not commission me to come to America to act as Minister Plenipotentiary." We again ask him, by what authority then do you present yourself before this great Republic? You must, of course, pretend to some authority? "Oh, yes," says he, "but I have no new commission; I have an old one given to one of my predecessors—one given to a man dead and gone. I happened to have access to his writings and papers, and finding his commission I put it into my pocket and came here to act as Minister."

Now would you not think he had left his country because he was insane? Would you acknowledge his authority? No. Would God acknowledge the authority of a man who assumed to act under an old commission given to people who have laid in their graves some eighteen centuries? No. If we act in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in administering the great and sacred ordinance of baptism, we must be commissioned by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost to do this work, or else it would be blasphemy and wickedness in the extreme, not only in those who administer, but in those who suffer themselves to be deceived and receive the ordinance from their hands.

It is a testimony then to us when both the Catholics, and the Protestants in all the various sects, rise up and tell us that the canon of scripture is full and closed, and when they present us with their articles of faith, and say here are sixty-six books in the Old and New Testaments, and you must not receive revelation from God only as it is contained in these sixty-six books. There has been no new revelation since, no new commission, no new authority, no voice of angels, no voice of God, no inspiration, no calling by new revelation; but we act only upon the old commission. When they tell us this, if we are reflecting people, we find ourselves totally unprepared to receive the gospel at their hands.

As to the gospel being in the world, the letter of it is here, to be sure; but where is the authority to administer? Where is there a man, among the Catholics or Protestants, among Christians, or Pagans, or Mahommedans, or elsewhere, who could have ministered the gospel to any of our forefathers who lived before the present century? Nowhere could you or I have received the gospel, forty years ago, if we had then lived? We could have read the letter of it; we could have read what God did when He had authority upon the earth. But reading a thing is entirely different from receiving it. Reading about new revelation, prophecies and ministrations of angels is one thing, but the actually receiving them is entirely another thing. You can read these things and never enter the Kingdom of God; but if you receive them, and continue faithful, you have a testimony, a witness within yourselves that you are accepted of the Lord our God. All other hopes are vain. It is in vain for us to look for all the blessings of the gospel, when there is no priesthood or authority among the children of men. Moreover, what were the blessings that followed the administration of the Holy Spirit? That is a part of the gospel just as much as faith and repentance. The servants of God were entrusted not only with the ministration of the word and the outward ordinances, but Paul says "God has made us able ministers of His spirit." There was something that had power in it, when the

authority was on the earth. It gave power to administer the letter and the outward ordinances; and it also gave power to administer the Spirit according to the promise that God had made. Hence we find, that when the people at Samaria were baptized, through the preaching of Philip, they did not then receive the Holy Ghost. But when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had received the letter of the word, through Philip, they sent Peter and John; and when they came down and prayed for them, and laid their hands upon them, they received the Holy Ghost.

Here then is an instance of the ministration of the Spirit as well as of the water. Here was a power that attended the ancient apostles. They had authority given to them, from on High to administer in this higher ordinance wherein the Spirit of God was shed forth abundantly in the hearts of the children of men.

But we do not wish to dwell on the subject of this great apostasy and the loss of authority of which we have been speaking. We desire to dwell upon a more pleasing subject, namely, the restoration of authority and power to minister the word, and the ordinances, and the Spirit of the gospel, to the children of men.

“Has such authority been restored” inquires one? Yes; if it has not, neither you nor I can ever obey the gospel. We may hear it preached, but we never can obey its ordinances, without such restoration. The great question is, “How was it restored?” The Latter-day Saints are ready to answer this question.

As God, from time to time, since the beginning, gave His authority to men, in different dispensations, so He has again, in the last dispensation, sent His angel from Heaven. Does this stumble you, that God has sent a messenger from the courts of glory, down to our earth? It is something contrary to the traditions of the Christian world. It is something that does not agree with the notions of our forefathers for many generations. It does not stumble this congregation; they would not be sitting on these seats today if they had not believed this with all their hearts. An angel has been sent. What for? In the first place to reveal the Book of Mormon, containing the testimony of the fullness of the gospel in all its plainness, as it was revealed here on this continent. By whom? By our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When? Soon after His resurrection from the dead. Soon after He had finished His ministry in the land of Jerusalem, He appeared on this great Western Hemisphere, peopled by numerous nations—the remnants of the House of Israel, of whom our American Indians are the descendants. They saw Jesus as well as the Jews at Jerusalem. They beheld the wounds in His hands, in His feet, and in His side. They saw Him descend clothed in a white robe; they saw Him come down into the midst of their assemblies, in the northern portion of what we call South America. They heard Him open His mouth and teach the multitude assembled on that occasion. They gathered themselves together day after day as far as they could to hear Him teach.

They felt His power as well as the people on the Eastern Continent. The glorious principles of the gospel were taught to them as well as to the Jews at Jerusalem. They had the privilege of being immersed in water for the remission of their sins, and having hands laid upon them for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost as well as their brethren in the distant land of Jerusalem. They heard His voice proclaiming the gospel which he had introduced for the salvation of the children of men, and also explaining the scriptures and prophecies and unfolding all things that should happen even down to the end of time. They wrote His teachings as did Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. The teachings and writings of the disciples and apostles that were called on this American continent were recorded, as well as his sayings on the land of Asia. They had the privilege therefore of knowing about the plan of salvation as well as the people of what we term the Old World. That testimony has been brought to us. How? By the ministration of an holy angel of God.

But even then, we could not obey this gospel. The revealing and translating of this book by inspiration did not give authority to Joseph Smith to baptize, to lay on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, or to administer the Lord’s Supper. No, he only did the work given him to do—reveal the record of the gospel as taught among the Israelites of the American continent. Could the Church arise or anybody be baptized from that? No; it required still further authority. Authority to translate is one thing, authority to baptize is another. Authority to reveal the Book of Mormon is one thing; authority to build up the Church and Kingdom of God is another. But God did afterwards give the authority to baptize and build up His Church. How? By sending angels from Heaven who, themselves, had the power to ordain persons to be Apostles. An individual who does this must hold the Apostleship himself; no other

being would have authority. Whom did the Lord send to restore the Apostleship again to earth, and to confer it on Joseph Smith? No less personages than Peter, James and John, who were with Jesus when he was transfigured in the mount, who then heard the voice of the Father. These persons who held the keys of the Kingdom of God, and had power to administer its ordinances, laid their hands on this great modern Prophet that he might be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Again, did this Church arise according to the wisdom, power and understanding of men? No; God gave commandment in relation to it, and pointed out the day on which it was to be organized. And according to this commandment and revelation it was organized with six members on the 6th of April, 1830.

Here is the great difference between us and the religious world. And, how immense is the difference! If what we have been speaking of, this afternoon, be true, you behold the condition of the whole human family in regard to the ordinances of the gospel. You see that without authority they cannot embrace the gospel. If it be not true then all these Latter-day Saints are deceived, and we, like all the rest of the world, are without authority and power. But if it be true, not only you and I and the people of this Territory are concerned, but every man and woman in the world are equally so. If God has, indeed, sent His holy angel and conferred the Apostleship, and power and authority to administer among the inhabitants of the earth, first to the Gentiles, and afterwards to the scattered remnants of Israel, who can be saved without obeying these institutions of Heaven?

Was anyone, either Jew or Gentile, saved anciently who rejected the preaching of the Apostles? Not one. It mattered not how righteous they might have been, even if they had received the ministrations of angels, like good old Cornelius, they could not be saved without obeying the gospel. You know Cornelius was so righteous, and had given so many alms to the poor, that they had ascended to God as a memorial in his favor. Yet with all this the Lord had to send an angel to tell him that he was not yet in the right way. This angel came to Cornelius and told him to send for Simon whose surname was Peter, and he should tell him how to be saved. Cornelius might have reasoned thus: "Am I not righteous enough to be saved without sending for Peter? Have not my alms come up before the Lord as a memorial? And has He not sent to me an holy angel from Heaven to tell me that my prayers have ascended up to Heaven before Him? And is there any necessity for me to send for a man to tell me whereby I may be saved?" "Yes," said the angel, "he shall tell you." As much as to say, you cannot be saved with all your prayers and alms, unless you have a properly authorized servant of God, to tell you how to be saved, and to administer the ordinances of salvation to you.

When Jesus gave the commission to his apostles in ancient days he told them to preach the gospel to all the world—to every person under the whole heaven, and said, "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." But is not this very severe? Is there any charity in this expression? Must all be condemned who do not bow to this order? Are there not good sects among the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, and good people of all sects and parties, just men whose prayers continually ascend before God? How is it that none of them can be saved without obeying this gospel which these eleven men were commissioned to teach? That was the decree. It mattered not how much righteousness they had, they all had to bow to that one system, that one ordinance, that one church, and be united heart and hand in the building up of that kingdom, and outside of that there was no salvation.

Now, if it be true, as I said, in the first place, that God has sent His angels and that He has conferred the apostleship, and given authority to administer in His name; if this be true is there a man or woman, Jew or Gentile, Mahommedan or Pagan, rich or poor, among the priests or people that can be saved without receiving the Book of Mormon and the authority that God has established? No, not one, if they have had the opportunity of hearing and receiving it. If it be not true, all mankind should reject it. Do you not see the importance of it? It is a message that goes forth, like the ancient one—with authority and power. The same declaration is given in these days, as was given then. A new revelation has been given to us, with new authority, similar to what was given to the apostles in days of old.

I will read a little in relation to this authority, in a revelation given in the early rise of this church to the apostles, and the authorities of this church who had been called by revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. "Therefore, go ye

into all the world, and whatsoever place ye cannot go into ye shall send, that the testimony may go from you into all the world unto every creature. And as I said unto mine apostles, even so I say unto you, for you are mine apostles, even God's high priests. Ye are they whom my Father hath given me; ye are my friends; therefore as I said unto mine apostles I say unto you again, that every soul who believeth on your words and is baptized by water for the remission of sins shall receive the Holy Ghost, and these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name they shall do many wonderful works; in my name they shall cast out devils; in my name they shall heal the sick; in my name they shall open the eyes of the blind, and unstop the ears of the deaf; and the tongue of the dumb shall speak; and if any man shall administer poison unto them it shall not hurt them; and the poison of a serpent shall not have power to harm them." Again he says, and notice how it agrees with the ancient commission, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, they who believe not on your words and are not baptized in water in my name, for the remission of their sins, that they may receive the Holy Ghost, shall be damned and shall not come into my Father's kingdom where my Father and I are, and this revelation unto you and commandment is in force from this very hour upon all the world, and the gospel is unto all who have not received it."

I have read this, in order that the similarity of the two commissions might be apparent to you. We have a commission to preach the gospel to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people; to call upon Gentiles and Jews, ministers and religious people, and professors of all denominations, as well as unbelievers, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to repent of their sins, to be baptized, by those holding authority, for the remission of their sins, that they may be filled with the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. To contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints, that they may have power with God, as promised to every soul that believes. "And," says the Book of Mormon, "if there be one soul among you that doeth good he shall work by the gifts and powers of God, and woe be to them that deny these gifts and powers, for they shall die in their sins, and they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God." Amen.