

## DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

DELIVERED

In the Thirteenth Ward Meeting  
House, Sunday Afternoon,  
November 2nd, 1873.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

ACCORDING to our usual custom we have assembled on this, the first day of the week, to partake of the Sacrament, as a witness before God and angels, and as a testimony one to another, that we are determined to keep the commandments of the Most High, and to obey his laws, and the institutions and ordinances of his kingdom. The order of things we are now celebrating we have endeavored to observe from the organization of this church. It has been our practice, when circumstances would permit, to assemble every Sabbath day for this purpose, and also to express one to another our desires and to bear our testimonies concerning the truth, and also to preach when we felt the spirit to do so.

I feel, this afternoon, to investigate before this assembly some of the distinguishing characteristics between this people and the various religious denominations of Christendom. I do not do this particularly for the edification and benefit of the Saints; but, as there are probably many now present who never have had the opportunity of learning the difference which exists between the faith of the Latter-day Saints and that of other religious denominations, I presume that it would be interesting to them to have some of these things spoken of on the present occasion. We differ in our religious faith and notions in some things which I consider to be of essential importance to the salvation of the children of men; in some points of our doctrine and faith we do not differ so much with religious people generally as might be supposed.

To begin, then, we believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, our heavenly Father; we believe also in the existence of his Son Jesus Christ, as the Savior of the world, and that he, through the shedding of his blood, has opened a way by which the fallen sons and daughters of the children of men may be saved. I believe that almost every Christian denomination has the same views in regard to the atonement of Christ, and that they, as well as we, believe in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. We also believe that it is important and necessary that all mankind should repent of and forsake their sins, and that they should forsake everything that is contrary to the law of God and that is in violation of his institutions; everything immoral and unholiness that we have been in the habit of practicing; that we should repent of these things, not merely in word but absolutely repent of and put them away. I believe that all denominations who believe in Christ also believe in repentance; hence, so far as faith in God the Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and repentance and reformation are concerned, there are few distinguishing characteristics between us and the outside world. We also believe that it is important for every person who wishes to obtain the forgiveness of his sins to be baptized in water—immersed—in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, for their remission. In this we differ with most of the religious world. I believe that the sect which is generally called Campbellites believe in being baptized in water for the remission of sins. The Church of England also believe in baptism for the remission of sins, but they do not administer that ordinance by immersion. We also believe that when a person has repented, and has been baptized for the remission of his sins, by one having authority to administer this ordinance, his sins will be forgiven. Not but what the Lord has, in some instances, on record, forgiven the sins of parties before baptism. We have some account, in both ancient and modern times, of the Lord having done this. The Prophet Joseph obtained a forgiveness of his sins, before baptism, and also the gift of the Holy Ghost; but the reason, probably, was that there was no church that had been organized after the ancient pattern at the time he received the administration of the angels, and there being no minister authorized to administer baptism and the laying on of hands, the Lord in that instance dispensed with the forms and ordinances recorded for that purpose in the New Testament, and granted unto him both these blessings—the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Before he was baptized he translated the greater part of the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, through the aid of the Urim and Thummim. We have an account of at least one instance, in ancient times, where the Holy Ghost was given before baptism, that is the case of Cornelius. The Holy Ghost was poured out upon him, and upon his household, before they were baptized. It was contrary to the ordinance, and the form that had been laid down in the gospel; but on that occasion it was evidently given for a special purpose, namely, to convince the brethren who accompanied Peter to the place where Cornelius lived that their traditions concerning the Gentiles were incorrect; and to prove to them that the Gentiles were heirs of salvation as well as the Jews, the Lord condescended, while Peter was speaking to Cornelius and his house, to bestow upon them the Holy Ghost, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied, before they were baptized. When Peter saw that the Holy Ghost had been bestowed upon them, he turned to the Jewish brethren, and said "Who can forbid water that these should be baptized, seeing they have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"

On the Day of Pentecost, when we are told, three thousand were pricked in their hearts, and desired to know what they should do; the answer given was that they should repent of their sins. They already believed, before they repented, the testimony of Peter and the rest of the Apostles that Jesus was the very Christ; they believed these Old Testament Scriptures that related to him, which were quoted by the Apostle Peter on that occasion; and they were pricked in their hearts. If they had not believed that Jesus was the Christ, they would not have been pricked in their hearts and convicted of sin; but they believed, and the answer of Peter to their inquiry about what they should do to be saved was—"Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the Holy Ghost." Can not every person, who reflects a moment on this passage, see that the remission of sins and the Holy Ghost, were two blessings promised after repentance and faith, and baptism for the remission of sins? When the people of Samaria heard the preaching of Philip, they also believed and repented, and they were baptized, and there was great joy in that city. No doubt their sins were then remitted, an event which would cause joy and satisfaction among the Samaritans. But there was not one soul of all those converts in Samaria, neither man nor woman, who had received the Holy Ghost, they had only believed in Christ and received the forgiveness of sins, but none of them were as yet born of the Spirit. When the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, which Philip had preached unto them, they sent Peter and John, and they came down to Samaria and knelt down and prayed for these baptized Samaritans, that they might receive the Holy Ghost; "for as yet," says the Scripture, "he had not fallen upon any of them, only they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; and when they had prayed for them, they laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost."

Now they must have received on that occasion, something that was powerful and miraculous, so much so that it made itself manifest even to bystanders. The reason which I have for believing this is in consequence of what Simon Magus said and did on that occasion. He came to the apostle Peter and offering money to him, said—"Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Ghost." He was evidently convinced that there was a power made manifest on that occasion, and as he had been a sorcerer, and had deluded and deceived the people in former times, and had evidently come into the church with a corrupt heart, he no doubt wished to obtain this increased power to aid him in his future operations. But Peter answered—"Let thy money perish with thee, I perceive that thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

Here then is a sacred ordinance which I wish to call your attention to, namely the laying on of hands. The Samaritans had, no doubt, believed as firmly as ever persons could believe; they had repented as much as any persons could repent; they had complied with the ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins, and were justified and filled with great joy in consequence of the forgiveness of their sins; but with all this, why did they not receive the Holy Ghost? Why was it not sent down from heaven as it was on Cornelius? Because there were none present on that occasion that needed to be convinced, as in the case of the household of Cornelius; no Jewish brethren there to forbid water; no ones there to have their traditions corrected, and consequently the Lord did not give a sign to them. But when they were confirmed, he sent upon them the Holy Ghost through the sacred ordinance of the laying on of hands. That is as much an ordinance as baptism.

Here then is one instance wherein we differ from the main portions of the religious world. It is true the Church of England practices confirmation—they lay hands upon those who are sprinkled; but we have no account of the gifts following this administration among the members of that church, such as the gift of tongues, healing and the various gifts of the Spirit. They are withheld. We differ then from the outside religious world in this one ordinance. No person comes into this church and is acknowledged to be in full fellowship as a member of the church, unless one or more of the servants of God have administered the sacred ordinance of the laying on of hands expressly for the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. I do not know why it was that the Lord established this ordinance. He seems to have, in all ages, bestowed blessings upon the children of men through simple ordinances, and he seldom gave blessings, unless those ordinances were complied with. When the angel came to Cornelius and told him that his prayers and his alms had ascended up before God as a memorial, he did not see proper on that occasion to tell exactly what he should do in order to be saved; but he told him to send for Peter, and he would tell him words whereby he and his house should be saved. Cornelius had faith enough in that angel to actually send for Peter. There was something required on the part of Cornelius to manifest his faith before God. There was something required of the children of Israel when they were to take the City of Jericho. It would have been an easy matter for God to have thrown down the walls of Jericho in an instant without making any requirement of the children of Israel; but he determined to try their faith, so they were commanded to pass round the walls of the city once a day for seven days, and on each day when they encompassed the walls they were to blow rams' horns. On the seventh day they were to go round the walls of the city seven times, and when they had com-

pleted their last circuit on the seventh day they were to give a certain blast with the horns, and all the people were to give a shout, then the walls were to fall down. Now, could not the Lord have done it without going through all that process? Oh yes, but he did not see proper to do so, he wanted to try the faith of that people, to see whether they would be obedient to that which he required of them. When they had shown their faith by their works, then the power of God was made manifest.

It is so in relation to baptism. When we have shown that we have faith in God and in the ordinances and institutions of his kingdom; when we prove our belief in the principle of baptism by rendering obedience thereto, we then obtain the remission of our sins. When we have faith enough to have hands laid upon us for the reception of the Holy Ghost, after being baptized, the Lord sees that we are complying with the institutions of his kingdom, and he is willing to bestow the blessing of the Holy Ghost. When we have faith enough to go to the house of worship on the first day of the week and offer up our sacrament before the Lord, according to his commandments, we witness before him that we are willing to keep his commandments; but when, without excuse, we neglect this week after week, we show that we are careless and indifferent, and the influence of the Holy Spirit, which we would otherwise enjoy as Latter-day Saints, is withheld from us.

Let none experiment on this, let no Latter-day Saints neglect to come to meetings when it is their privilege to do so, and also neglect this divine ordinance, which the Lord has instituted in commemoration of the death and sufferings of his Son; for if they continue to do this without any reasonable excuse, they will soon begin to be darkened in their minds. Hence you see, that all these ordinances, however simple in their nature, are instituted of the Lord, and if we have not faith sufficient to comply with them, it proves that we have not much faith in God. The apostle James speaks upon the subject of faith very plainly: he says—"Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." Faith without works is dead, being alone. Men may profess ever so much faith in Christ, but if they do not attend to the ordinances of heaven, we know that their faith is a dead faith, and will not obtain the blessings which the Lord has promised. We will pass on, however, in taking up the distinguishing characteristics, between the Latter-day Saints and other religious denominations. We shall, however, have to dwell briefly on the different points, for there are many things wherein we differ.

When the baptized believer has received the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, the question is What will be its manifestations, &c., and how are we, as Latter-day Saints, to know that we have received the Holy Ghost? This is a very important question for us to decide in our own minds. How are believers in Christ to know that they are believers, such as the Lord will acknowledge? They are to know it by the pouring out of the Holy Ghost upon them. How am I to know when the Holy Ghost is poured out upon me, or how are you to know? We would not know only by comparing with the Scriptures, or by some revelation to our own minds, which would give us this knowledge. For instance, suppose we should receive a spirit that would cause us to fall down on the ground, or cause us to be cramped up into an ill kind of a shape, or that would take away our strength and all our memory and understanding, should we not know at once that no such spirit was acceptable in the sight of God? and, after reading about the gifts of the Holy Ghost to man, should we not know, that it does not operate thus? When the Holy Ghost rests upon the servants and handmaidens of the Lord, it imparts a variety of gifts, not all to one man, and not the same to every individual; but it gives to one, one gift, and to another, another. For instance it gives to some the gift of wisdom. Now, what is it to receive the word of wisdom? When a person receives, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the word or gift of wisdom, he receives revelation. Herein, then, is another point in which we differ from the religious world generally. They do not believe in any later revelation than the New Testament, that is, they did not when this church arose; but of late years, since the rise of this church, many of them have begun to believe in revelation later than the New Testament.

When the Holy Ghost falls upon some it gives them the word of wisdom, that is, it imparts to them an understanding of things that are wise. The Spirit may whisper, "It is wise for you to do this thing," "It is wise for you to do that thing," "It is wise for you to take such a course, and to do thus and so." This is what might be termed the word of wisdom. A person may have great wisdom and yet not have much knowledge; he may have great wisdom given by revelation to know how to exercise that degree of knowledge which he may be in possession of. Then again there are others who may receive the gift of knowledge from God and yet they may have very little wisdom; and they do not know how to turn their knowledge to the best advantage. Here is the distinction then between a revelation which gives wisdom, and a revelation which gives knowledge.

To another is given, by the Spirit, the gift of healing. Some may say that the gift of healing was only intended for ancient times, to establish the gospel; that the people in those days needed some miraculous power and evidence to convince them of the truth of the gospel; but I find that the gift of healing was given for the benefit of all who had faith to be healed. This was the way that the Lord administered in ancient times, and there is just as much necessity in our day that the sick should be healed, as there was eighteen centuries ago; and the Lord is just as will-

ing, inasmuch as we will exercise faith in him, to bestow the gift of healing now as he was in ancient times. This seems to be a kind of common gift, not limited altogether to a few individuals, as we find recorded in the last chapter of Mark. Jesus said on that occasion, speaking to his Apostles—"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, he that believes"—that is every creature in all the world who believes—"and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned." And these signs shall follow them that believe, "that is, every creature in all the world that believes, showing that the believers generally might have the gift of healing, although, perhaps, to some it is given more fully than it is to others. "These signs shall follow them that believe, in my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover."

It seems that the gifts here named are general gifts, intended more or less for the whole church, not only for those in the priesthood, but for those out of the priesthood, for males and for females. For instance, children are often taken sick, and it is the privilege of their parents, whether they have the priesthood or not, by virtue of this promise, to lay their hands on their sick children, and ask the Lord, in the name of Jesus, to heal them. Suppose that the father, the head of the family, is absent, has the mother the right to lay her hands upon her sick child? We say that, by virtue of this promise which the Lord has made, she may lay her hands upon her child or children and ask God to heal it or them. How many scores and scores of cases have there been in this church, every year since it was organized, where the parents, both brethren and sisters, have had power over disease, through the Spirit of God being poured out upon them, and their children have been healed through the laying on of their hands? Here then, is another point wherein we differ from the religious world. Go and ask them, if they will come and visit a sick person. "Oh yes," says the minister, "I will visit the sick." When he arrives the sick person or his friends request him to pray. That is all right and in accordance with the gospel. They kneel down and the minister prays that the Lord will look in mercy upon the sick person, and, if it please him, heal and restore him. But do they lay on hands or anoint with oil as the Scriptures direct? The Scriptures say—"If any one among you is sick, let him send for the elders of the church and let them pray for him"—it is all right to pray—"and let them anoint the sick in the name of the Lord." Now, when they do this they are complying with the requisitions of the gospel of the Son of God, and why not follow this ordinance of laying on of hands on the sick, and anointing them with oil, just as well as following the praying part? No wonder that they do not have power over sickness and disease; for they only attend to half their duties—they pray but neglect the other part. Inquires one, "Can not the Lord hear prayer and heal the sick just as well without laying on of hands and anointing with oil as with it?" He could have thrown down the walls of Jericho without the children of Israel walking around them, and blowing rams' horns; but the Lord has a form, then why not comply with it and leave the event with him. It requires faith on the part of the sick in order to be healed; they ought to have faith as well as their friends. When an infant child is sick, it, of course, is not required to exercise faith; but its parents and friends can exercise faith on its behalf, as was done in ancient times. Sometimes sickness will deprive an adult person of his senses, in that case his friends may exercise faith for him. But where there is no faith in God, as in the case of infants, his servants may prevail, and heal the sick, but this is not always the case. For instance, as great a man as Paul was, a person who had the gift of healing to such a degree that even by carrying a handkerchief, or some little article from him to those who were sick, devils would flee and the sick would be healed, I say that as great a man as he, was obliged on a certain occasion to leave one of his fellow laborers in the ministry sick at Miletus. Why? Because he had not faith. People may sometimes have faith, and at other times they do not exercise it; sometimes people are appointed unto death, and in such cases, the administrations of the elders are not likely to be effectual. If believers could always exercise faith to be healed of disease all the ancient saints might be living now, eighteen hundred years after they were born. But the Lord heals the sick when it seems good unto him, and he gives us, inasmuch as we are not appointed unto death, the privilege of calling upon his name, and of having the administrations of his servants in our behalf. This has been practiced ever since this church was organized—forty-three years since; and and if it had done no good, if there had been no healings in that time, do you suppose the Latter-day Saints would continue to be members of the church? No, the church would have quickly broken up, it would not have lasted more than two or three years if its members had not found the promises verified, according to the word of the Lord; but they have found that the Lord really does stretch forth his hand to heal the sick, and that he does raise them up from the very point of death, and restore them, almost instantly, to health and strength. Knowing this to be the case, the afflicted Saints have faith in the ordinances and they continue sending for the Elders, and God blesses their administrations.

Then, if I received a spirit by which, in the name of Jesus Christ, I was enabled to rebuke sickness, and that sickness was rebuked, and the persons were raised up, should I not have reason to believe that had received that true spirit of the gospel, called the Holy Ghost? I certainly should.

If I received a revelation telling me what would be the best course for me to pursue under certain circumstances, should I not know that it was a revelation from God? I think I should know, just as well as the ancient prophets knew when they received a revelation. If I received knowledge by revelation, concerning this, that or the other thing or principle, would not that be a testimony to me that I had received the Holy Ghost? Again, if I was sick and afflicted and in great pain, and I sent for the elders of the church to come and pray for me and to rebuke the disease which was afflicting me, and, in the name of Jesus, command it to depart, and it was done, would not this be a testimony unto me that the Lord had heard the prayers of his servants, and that he had really and truly verified his promise? Certainly.

To another is given the gift of prophecy, or foretelling future events. Among the ancient Saints this was regarded as a very important gift, much more so than the gift of speaking in tongues, Paul, in addressing the Corinthians, says—"Seek earnestly the best gifts, and forbid not to speak with tongues" &c. And again, he says, "Greater is he that prophesies than he that speaketh with tongues." Again, in the same chapter, he says—"How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation? Let the prophets speak, two or three and the other judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."

Here then we see that the Saints in ancient times prophesied by revelation. If persons come together in a religious capacity, as this assembly has done this afternoon, and God should reveal to some present something pertaining to the future, it is not necessary for them to rise up while any other person is speaking, and make confusion, but let all the prophets who have any revelation, wait until the person speaking gets through, and then let them rise, one by one, and declare what God has revealed to them. This was the way the ancient Christians worshipped, and these were the gifts by which they were distinguished from those who were not Christians, and those also were the distinguishing characteristics between the general world of mankind and the real, true-hearted Christians in ancient times. Why not have the same distinguishing characteristics now? Has God ever said that these gifts should be unnecessary in the church?

We find a great many gifts besides those I have mentioned. The gift of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, the discerning of spirits, and the beholding of angels were all given in ancient times by the Spirit, and the church possessing them was compared to the body of Christ; and the apostle Paul, in order to show the necessity of all these gifts, when comparing them to the body of a man, says, the whole system is necessary, the eye cannot say to the hand "I have no need of you" in the body, for it is absolutely necessary there; neither can the head say to the feet "I have no need of you"; no, the feet are necessary; and even the most imperfect, or simplest member of the human system could not be dispensed with without making a schism in the body. Says Paul, speaking to the church—"You are the body of Christ, and members in particular. God has set in the church, first apostles, second prophets, after that, teachers, workers of miracles, speakers with tongues, interpreters of tongues." All these different ones are members of the body of Christ. Now have we any right to say to the lowest of these members—"We have no need of you in the body?" Supposing the teacher should say to the speaker in tongues—"I have no need of you, now in the body, the Lord has a different kind of a body on the earth from what he had eighteen hundred years ago, and we do not need you now." Another says to the interpreter of tongues—"We have persons who have studied all these languages, and we do not need a person to interpret tongues, by the Spirit, now; we can dispense with this principle from the body of Christ." Another minister arises and he says to the member possessing the gift of healing—"We do not need such a member in the church now, we can do without it in the body; it is true it makes a kind of a schism in the body, and it looks different from what the New Testament has taught; but we are enlightened in this day, we are living in such a blaze of gospel liberty that we do not need the same kind of members now to compose the body of Christ as they did in ancient days," and he passes him by. The worker of miracles comes along and another minister says, "We have no need of you in the body; the discerning of spirits comes along and he says—"I have beheld spirits, I have seen angels." Says the modern religionist—"We have no need of you now in the church, we are sufficiently enlightened to do without you." An apostle comes along and declares his mission and calling, and he is greeted with the customary salutation—"We do not need apostles now. God set those officers in his church at first, but we can dispense with them now." I say if you can dispense with these officers, what have you left? Says one—"We have teachers left." Well why do you not do away with the office of teacher, have you not the same authority to do away with the member of the body of Christ called a teacher, that you have to do away with the apostle, the prophet, the gift of healing, the discerning of spirits? Yes, you have the same right to do away with one officer as with another. If you have only teachers left, I ask Does that constitute the church of God? No, for you have done away with the most prominent officer, the apostle, the one first set in the church, which is like taking a man's head from his body and then saying "Live, live."