

# THE DESERET WEEKLY.

Truth and Liberty.

No. 20.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, MAY 2, 1896.

VOL. LII.

## DISCOURSE

Delivered at the Utah Stake Conference, Provo, Sunday, April 19th, 1896, by

PRESIDENT JOSEPH F. SMITH.

[REPORTED BY ARTHUR WINTER.]

It is a very inspiring sight to behold the numerous faces which confront me and those sitting upon this stand this afternoon. I am pleased to see so many assembled at this conference meeting, and I trust that all may enjoy the portion of the good spirit which is needful, that we may be profited by our coming together. I would gladly, if permitted, sit during the remainder of the meeting, and listen to others talk; but, being here, and the brethren feeling that I should say a few words, I do not desire to shrink from any duty. We have had some excellent instructions today, and I understand that you had excellent meetings here yesterday. I was pleased to hear that the people of this Stake of Zion turned out to their Saturday conference meetings as I understand they did yesterday. It is a good sign.

Reference was made this morning, by one of the brethren, to the subject of Church discipline. He, of course, touched it very lightly. I desire to say a few words upon that subject, and I presume I shall touch it very lightly, too. There is one thing I desire to impress upon the minds of the Latter-day Saints in relation to Church discipline, and that is this: there is nothing in the discipline of the Church which is calculated to dwarf or stultify any man or woman. There is nothing in it that any man or woman need to be ashamed of. We need not speak of it with mealy mouth, or with trepidation, or fear, because it is a legitimate subject upon which to speak to the Latter-day Saints, to reflect upon and to talk about, and one that should be understood by the Latter-day Saints.

It is frequently said that order is the first law of heaven. I wish to put this in a different light. Order in the Church is the result of obedience to the laws of God and to the discipline which He has established among men. My opinion is that obedience, which one of the ancient prophets said was "better than sacrifice," is the first law of heaven—if there can be any law called the first or above all others. Without obedience there can be no order, no discipline, no government. The will of God cannot be done, either in the heavens or on the earth, except men will obey the will of the Father. And when men obey the will of the Father, order is the result. Confusion ceases, and peace is

made to prevail, when men yield obedience to the requirements of the Father, or to the laws of God. Discipline is that practice which is necessary to bring men and women into an understanding of the laws and requirements of God; or, it is that condition which will exist when men understand the laws of God and yield obedience to them.

One of the principles of the Gospel of Christ requires that a man or a woman shall believe in the Father and the Son; and unless men will believe and confess that they do believe in the Father and in the Son, it would be highly improper for the constituted authorities of the Church to admit them to membership therein. The discipline of the Church requires that a man shall believe in God, and in Jesus Christ, and also that he shall repent of his sins, before he can be admitted into fellowship in the Church. We would think it highly improper to admit a man into the Church by baptism who declared by his words or by his acts that he did not believe, and that he would not repent of his sins. A man must show proofs of repentance and a desire to forsake his sins before he can be admitted to membership in the Church. This is a part of our discipline, and it is proper, consistent and essential. Indeed, no man or woman can be admitted into the fold of Christ without faith in Christ and repentance of sin. None of us will question the rightfulness of this discipline of the Church. None of us will dispute the necessity of it. It is self-evident to all. It must be so, or the Church would be composed of non-believers, and non-conformists to the doctrine of Christ.

When a member of the Fourth ward of Provo desires to move out of that ward into the First ward, what does the discipline of the Church require of him in order that he may properly take a change of membership from the one ward to the other? There is a rule of discipline in the Church in relation to this simple matter; and if it be not observed, the member of the Fourth ward removing into the First will by that simple act lose the recognition of his membership in the Church. And if by so simple an act as this a man may jeopardize his standing in the Church, how much more necessary is it that there should be strict discipline in the Church in relation to the higher duties and functions of members of the Church? It is an established rule in the Church, and the discipline of the Church requires that a member of the Fourth ward desiring to remove to the First ward shall make application to the Bishop of the Fourth ward and shall say to him in effect: "Bishop, I have determined to move out of this ward, and my purpose is now to settle in the First ward, and I

desire from you a letter of recommendation, that I can carry with me, certifying that I am a member of the Church, in good fellowship in the Fourth ward, so that I may be entitled to be received as a member of the Church, in good standing, in the ward to which I shall remove." The Bishop of the Fourth ward, agreeable to his request, issues a letter of standing to him, certifying that he and his family are members of the Church, in good standing, in his ward, and as such he recommends them to the confidence and fellowship of any ward that they may desire to join.

Now, no man is exempt from this discipline of the Church. No man can override this rule and still be regarded as a member in good standing. The moment a man undertakes to take the bit in his own mouth and say, "I will not ask my Bishop for a letter of standing; I will move to where I please, and claim standing in the Church wherever I please to locate," that moment he becomes insubordinate and certainly could not be regarded as a member in good standing or as a type of good membership in the Church. Furthermore, if a man should do such a thing as that, whether he be only a lay member of the Church or an Elder, or a High Priest, or an Apostle, or a President, the Bishop of the ward to which he moves and where he claims fellowship, if he does his duty, will say to that man, no matter what position he may occupy in the Church, that he must bring a letter of standing in the Church from the Bishop of the ward where he did reside, so that it may be presented to the people of his ward and be acted upon by them. If the man should refuse to do this, his standing in the Church would be precarious and doubtful. He would not be entitled to claim the rights and privileges of membership in the ward to which he removed; he would come there as a stranger. He would come there possibly with the reputation of having belonged to the Church, but without the credentials, without the written evidence which is necessary for all members of the Church to take with them when they remove from one place to another.

This is the recognized duty of all members in the Church. We are all familiar with this, and we say it is right, and essential. If it were not so, John Brown of the First ward, might commit some wrong for which he would be cut off the Church, and finding that he had forfeited his standing in the First ward, in order to get back into the Church again he would remove from the First ward into the Fourth ward, and enter at once upon his membership there, they, of course, not knowing that he had been cut off the Church. I have known of some such things as that having been done when