

How to Study the Doctrines of the Church.

A LECTURE

ELDER JOHN NICHOLSON,

Delivered at the General Conference of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, Salt Lake City, Sunday Afternoon, June 3, 1888.

REPORTED BY F. E. BARKER.

The subject that has been given to your humble servant to treat upon this afternoon is entitled, How to Study the Doctrines of the Church.

After having listened to the eloquent lectures and discourses which have been delivered in this house since the commencement of this great conference, I have felt some regret that I have not more amply prepared myself for the discharge of this duty. I, however, dismiss this feeling, as it is not altogether dissociated from selfishness, which I desire, under all circumstances, to discard. I simply wish to offer a few suggestions that I hope will be of use in the Mutual Improvement Associations in a practical sense.

I have long recognized the need of some simple process, or system, that would enable the young of the community to pursue a course of study that would make them, in the shortest time possible, conversant with the principles of the Gospel of the Redeemer. I assert it to be the duty of every youth within the pale of the Church to place himself in a position that will enable him, whenever occasion shall demand it, to give an intelligent reason for the hope that is in him.

In connection with this question, there is an important reason that has been touched upon by those who have preceded me, and has been specially mentioned in the address of the Superintendent that has just been read—the magnitude of the work that devolves upon this community of Saints, the burden of which must necessarily and naturally devolve upon the younger element of the people. It is no less a labor than the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom in all the world, as a witness, that in passing judgment upon the nations the Lord may be justified.

There should be a preparation for the discharge of this duty commensurate with its vastness. It is the greatest work ever imposed upon any people. There are now fourteen hundred millions of God's creatures on the face of the earth entitled to hear the proclamation that has been revealed from heaven in this day. This, of itself, gives a commensurate idea of the scope of the obligation involved. Having spent a number of years in the ministry, I have suffered personally from ignorance, especially when at the outset I undertook, at the call of the servants of God, the performance of this great duty. I have seen bands of young Elders who have left their homes in the mountains arrive at the port of Liverpool, and have been present when they attended their first meeting abroad, and, perhaps for the first time, endeavored to address a public audience and explain the nature of their message. Many of the scenes have been of a humiliating character, because of the inability of some of them to perform the task that they had undertaken. I remember one scene that comes up before my mind vividly now, when perhaps a dozen Elders came into a meeting, the first of their mission. The bench on which they sat rattled on the floor, because of their trembling, so great was their anxiety, as they awaited their turn to be called on to speak. There was one who appeared to have more confidence than the rest. He arose with greater assurance. When he undertook to address the small audience that had gathered in a small room, everything that he had thought of vanished from his mind—and he had not probably thought of much either. He told me afterwards that, although the room was but a few feet in length, it seemed to him to be at least three miles long. He stood with his mind a perfect blank; but he recollected having heard the Elders, in the Old Tabernacle, say when they arose to speak, "Brethren and sisters, I hope I will edify you," and, after a brilliant pause, he said, "I guess I won't say any more,"—for the reason that he hadn't any more to say. It is needless to state, that the congregation, in that instance, were not edified by him to any appreciable extent.

In my opinion, in pursuing the study of the doctrines of the Church, there should be a method that will cultivate that class of ability that will enable those who pursue the study to explain to others the information they acquire. Public speaking should be cultivated largely in this community, because it is by that medium that we reach the people, when we do not reach them through the printing press.

Now, what are the main essentials for a preacher of the Gospel? He should, in the first place, have his mind stored with a knowledge of the doctrines he is sent to deliver. It is said in the Scriptures, "How shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?" I will add a little more, and say, How shall they preach except they know what to preach about. Therefore, a prerequisite to the success of the preacher

is that he should be possessed of the required information, and, secondly, that he should gain the necessary experience to enable him to communicate it to others; thirdly, and principally, he should possess the spirit of God, for without it he is as dry as a chip, only the chip has the advantage.

There are some people who have, in my opinion, a mistaken idea regarding the function of that Spirit in reference to the preaching of the Gospel. It is somewhat the same as the delusion that possessed the mind of Oliver Cowdery, who desired of the Lord that he should have a similar power to that which was entrusted to the Prophet Joseph Smith—the gift of translation. The Lord informed him that he did not exercise the gift because he imagined he could do so without the use of his mental powers. He should have studied it out, and if it was correct the spirit would have borne witness. If it was erroneous he would have no such testimony.

Some people think all that is necessary in order to preach the Gospel is that they should be called upon, and go out and stand up, and the Lord will immediately pump them full of intelligence. Such do not comprehend the economy of God. They do not understand that He intends that men shall cultivate the gifts that they have inherited and received from Him; and that he never has from the beginning, and never will, worlds without end, place a premium upon laziness. There is no excellence without labor, and the operations of the Holy Spirit suggest to the mind thoughts that are proper, and bring to the memory, when needed, those things that are appropriate to be spoken, as occasion may require. It is presumable that no person in this audience would have the stupidity to take an empty bucket, lower it into a deep well, lift it out and expect it to be full of water. When he drew it out, the water would be conspicuous for its absence. Yet some people expect the Spirit of God to do all the work, bringing the waters of life out of a dry and empty mind; empty because indolent.

Some people have announced themselves in favor of what are called debating clubs or societies. If I am not mistaken, some such institutions exist in the community now. I know that they have existed in the past. It has been claimed that by this method we learn principles and also gain practice and facility in presenting them to the public. I am prepared to announce myself as opposed to debating societies among the Latter-day Saints as not in harmony with the genius of the Gospel. But I do not believe in making statements without giving a reason for the propositions that are offered. In debates it is the custom to select a subject, and an affirmative and negative are formulated. The subject is treated negatively and affirmatively. On every topic, then, under such a system, some person or persons must speak from false premises, and resort to sophistry to sustain error. One effect of this is, that it drives away the Spirit of truth, which recedes from conditions that are antagonistic to its own nature. Young men may obtain a species of brilliancy by pursuing the study of a subject by the debating process; but it is like the brilliancy of the comet, it is eccentric and unreliable, and not at all like that of one of the fixed stars. It leads to sophistical reasoning and tends to inidelity.

You ask what system I would suggest? I should say the one that comes the nearest to obtaining the beneficial results of debate without any of its deleterious effects. I have formulated a method of that character, and have practically demonstrated its beneficial results among the young people, having personally taught a number of classes in accordance with it. It is simply this: The subject is selected; suppose that we call the theme the First Principles of the Gospel. I formulate a number of propositions, one set of which are opposite in character to the views that we desire to sustain, and the other in harmony with them. I will give you an example of the process by naming some of the propositions that are, in one instance, based upon the views generally entertained by the religious world, and the other those that can be consistently sustained by the student. I will here repeat them in their order:

Positions generally sustained by sectarians (notably Protestants) to be reasoned away and overturned by the student.

First. That salvation cannot be attained by belief in Christ and His atonement without good works.

Second. That the only correct mode of baptism is immersion; that it is positively essential to salvation, and is for the remission of sins.

Third. That the Holy Ghost is obtained after belief, repentance and baptism, by the ordinance of laying on of the hands of men having divine authority.

Fourth. That Apostles, Prophets and other inspired teachers and revelation are as necessary to the Church now as ever, and cannot be dispensed with.

First. That salvation can be obtained by belief in Christ and His atonement, independent of good works.

Second. That baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring or immersion; that it is not positively essential, and not for the remission of sins.

Third. That the Holy Ghost can be obtained by belief in the Lord Jesus Christ without attending to any outward ordinances.

Fourth. That Apostles, Prophets and other inspired teachers and revelation were needed in the primitive condition of the Church, but are done away because no longer needed.

The number of propositions may be increased to any extension desired, according as it may be necessary to divide and simplify the subject. Any theme can be treated in this way, religious or otherwise. It is founded upon the demonstrated truth that there is an opposite in all things and that nothing stimulates mental activity in man to so intense a degree as opposition. Hence the philosophy of formulating and speaking to an opposite proposition as an objective point.

The method of instructing a class of young men in this routine is simply this: Suppose that the propositions are seven in number, and the number of the class twelve. I assign to the head of the class No. 1, to the next number 2, and so on until No. 7 is reached, and then give the balance to the remainder of the class. As teacher, I define to the class what a discourse on the first principles of the Gospel is, in order to give them a guide. Each member prepares himself with scripture and reason to annihilate the one proposition and sustain the other. He addresses his fellow members of the class, not longer than fifteen minutes, as if they were a lot of unbelieving sectarians sitting in cloudy darkness; and each member goes through the whole of the seven propositions. If a student has only ordinary aptitude, after he has treated each division of the subject and collated the evidence necessary to demolish and sustain, at the end of the exercises, or the course, he possesses a fund of information combined with practice in public speaking, surprising to himself, and that will enable him, when he enters the evangelical field, to go there as a missionary with a foundation, at least, for the labor confronting him.

You see the advantage of such a simple method as this. It gives the student some conception of the erroneous views with which he has to contend in the world; it gives him an understanding of the principles of the Gospel that he has to proclaim, and also enables him to explain his doctrines to others. Therefore it does not kill two birds only with one stone—it kills three.

If twelve young men of moderate education and fair intelligence be selected and put through a catechism, to show that they can say little or nothing regarding the principles and doctrines of the Gospel, in twelve weeks, or after going through this course, if examined again, it will be found that, almost without exception, they will be able to discourse intelligently upon the first principles.

To show the simplicity and aptitude of this system, take for instance, one of these propositions; the second one, in relation to baptism:

The sectarian, as a rule, holds that this ordinance may be administered by sprinkling, pouring or immersion, that it is not positively essential to salvation, and is not for the remission of sins. It is for the student to show in opposition to that view, that the proper mode is immersion, that it is indispensable, and is for the remission of sins. He speaks as if he addressed an audience of unbelievers, citing the words of Jesus to Nicodemus; "except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" and the example of the Savior when He was about to be baptized by John, when He says, "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." He thus clinches the essentiality of the ordinance by the unequalled word and unmistakable example of the Redeemer. He proves the mode to be immersion, by quoting the words of Paul in the sixth chapter of the Romans, wherein baptism is compared to being buried with Christ. No other mode is comparable to a burial, any more than it would be proper to say a body was buried by sprinkling a small quantity of dust upon it. The student as easily proves the object of baptism, by quoting the words of Peter, in the second chapter of Acts, when addressing the multitude: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Thus you will see how readily the student can master these subjects, piece by piece, until he becomes familiar with the doctrines of the Church, line upon line, precept upon precept, and at the same time acquires the ability to explain them to others. Every department of the subject is as easy of treatment as the one now cited as an example; and there is scarcely any limit to the proofs and arguments that can be found to sustain them.

You see how the student proceeds to acquire his information and prepare himself to go out into the world as a minister of life explaining intelligently the message which he has to deliver.

In this method there is this advantage; that it is not the teacher that does and says, but the student. I have discovered that it is not what the student hears that does him the most good and fixes principles upon his mind, but what he does and says himself.

In addition to the information imparted and the guidance offered by the teacher in other respects, he can also aid the pupils greatly in eliminating those faults that so frequently mar the effect of public speaking. Some, for instance, have the practice of looking up at the ceiling instead of at the audience, as if there was somebody aloft that they were endeavoring to convince of the correctness of the views that they are enunciating. There are young men who get into a habit of standing in a slack and careless way, as if they were held up by a string attached to the top of their

heads and that if it were cut they would drop to the floor in a heap. Others have a way of expressing their thoughts as if they themselves did not believe a word of what they were saying. In order to convince others, a man must first convince himself. He must be in earnest and have his soul in his subject. Otherwise his words will, to use a homely phrase, fall upon his auditors like water upon the back of a goose, only to roll off.

There are other discrepancies that can be corrected, and the teacher can be a great aid to the students in placing them in a path that will help them to become efficient and polished missionaries for the Lord.

Writing can be adopted as well as speaking, where it is desired. But there is too much writing and speaking of a desultory character that is not calculated to make the student's mind expand, or cause him to progress to any great extent. When the young engage in exercises either of speaking or writing, they should first select the subject, and then look at it in all its bearings. Suppose that a theme of this kind be chosen: that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God. How should we treat it? We should treat it as though we were expecting to meet those who do not believe as we do. Therefore, we speak against the following proposition:

That Joseph Smith was an impostor. To prove that his mission and character were genuine, we show what constitutes a prophet, and we point out that Joseph Smith had those constituents. This is exhibited, firstly, by scriptural evidence, in the shape of prophecies which point to the raising up of a prophet in the latter times. Secondly, that many of his own predictions have been fulfilled. Thirdly, that he organized the Church of Christ in its completeness, after the pattern given by the Redeemer himself. Fourthly, that those who conform to the doctrines He enunciated receive the Holy Ghost; the testimony of Jesus. In this way, instead of being disjointed and jumbling, an argumentative building is made complete, "a thing of beauty and a joy forever."

To the young, should be pointed out the necessity of intense thought. If they think strongly and methodically, they will speak and write vigorously, and vice versa. If they are taught to think systematically, they will exhibit the beauty of the principles of the Gospel in their clearness. Instead of doing this, and invoking the aid of the Spirit of God to assist us we sometimes act like a huntsman who goes into the field and shoots aimlessly in the air, hitting nothing, because there is no object in view.

There may be an objection raised to the method I have attempted to define, on the ground that it requires classification. Instead of that being an objection, it is, to my mind, a recommendation. In these matters, we cannot afford to lay aside the demonstrated truths of ages. When a school is conducted, you do not take the whole of the pupils together and teach them one subject at a time en masse. You have to grade and classify them according to their capacity and degree of advancement. Unless we do this, we will not make the progress in the Associations, that we can by adopting a more systematic and practical course.

I should have been pleased to have expressed myself further, as the subject opens before my mind; but, in the words of the hymn that we often sing, "The time is far spent, there is little remaining."

with this difference, that there isn't any left at all.

May the Lord bless you, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Amen.

SUNDAY SERVICES.

Religious services were held in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday, June 17, 1888, commencing at 2 o'clock p. m., President Angus M. Cannon presiding.

The choir and congregation sang: How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord,

Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!

Prayer by Elder Edward Snelgrove.

The choir sang the hymn:

He died! the Great Redeemer died,

And Israel's daughters wept around.

The Priesthood of the Sixth Ward officiated in the administration of the Sacrament.

BISHOP FREDERICK SCHOENFELDT

Was called to address the congregation. He said he realized that it was a great task to speak to the Saints, and he desired that the Holy Spirit might inspire him. It was a blessed thing to have the privilege of dwelling in the midst of the Saints. He had never seen occasion to regret having gathered with the Lord's people, but had been greatly blessed in doing so.

On Oct. 6, 1883, he was called to take a mission to Europe, there to preach the Gospel of Christ. He had been promised, years before, that he would be sent on such a mission and had realized the fulfillment of that promise. He had labored in the Swiss and German mission, the Saints in which were not very numerous, and those who were there scattered over the country. It was in those lands a gleaner's time, and there was much hard work for the Elders. Those Saints who were faithful were gathering out as rapidly

as their circumstances would permit. When men desire to serve God, He will find means to convey His message to them, no matter what country they live in, and it was because of this that the Saints were gathered from all nations—they sought after the truth, and the Lord opened the way for them to obtain it. In the Swiss and German mission, during the past two years, there had been much opposition to the preaching of the Gospel, and sometimes matters seemed in a very critical condition. But all things had been overruled for the good of the Lord's people. While the speaker had been president of the mission he had endeavored to direct the affairs of the people in the right way; and keep the Saints posted on what was going on. He knew that the condition in which the people had been would result in blessings to the Saints.

Bishop Schoenfeldt desired to "use his influence for good. He was satisfied that the Lord would deliver his people; but felt that it was their duty to live worthy of that deliverance. If they did the Almighty would bring about His purposes and their salvation and His name would be glorified.

The nations of Europe are greatly disturbed at the present time. There are great fears among the people of the early outbreak of war. Extraordinary preparations are being made for war with neighboring nations, yet each government is trembling more because of the secret societies that exist among the people than because of danger from without. The Prophet of the Lord foretold this state of things, and said that war would be poured out upon all nations. Such a period seemed to be near at hand, and if war should come to Europe the result must be terrible. The masses of the people are getting poorer, and their condition more hopeless from year to year.

The Saints are blessed in being far removed from such fearful things, and have great reason to be thankful to the almighty. The condition that exists among the world is productive of a feeling of fear that cannot be described. In some nations the honest heart were becoming few and far between. In others there are still a great many who are upright and honorable men of the earth. But there is not much inquiry regarding the principles of the Gospel, and the chastening hand of God must necessarily fall upon them to turn them from the ways of darkness.

Elder Schoenfeldt was happy at again having the privilege of meeting with the Saints, and with his friends. His desire to worship God aright was intensified by the experience he had passed through. He realized that the Gospel was a pearl of great price. Exhorted the Saints to follow his laws in all circumstances, and to never swerve from the truths revealed by the Almighty. If they were faithful the victory must be with them, for the truth was all powerful, and would overcome all opposition. May the Lord enable the people to be firm in the right.

Sister Louie Poulton sang.

Not a sparrow falls.

ELDER WM. FOTHERINGHAM said it was the calling of the Saints to set aside their secular affairs and assemble on the Sabbath day to worship God. If they did this they would be strengthened by the instructions which they would receive. They would be given greater power in their labors for the salvation, not only of themselves, but of all mankind. They were passing through a school, as it were, to qualify them for the great work which God required them to take part in. If they understood this they would realize that the tribulations they were called on to endure were for their own benefit; they would teach patience, and love and charity.

The Saints should so live that the Holy Spirit should be their constant guide and companion. It was the only means through which they could obtain a knowledge that Jesus was the Christ, the only means for them to secure the blessings of eternal life. If the Holy Spirit was their constant guide, they would receive light from the great centre of intelligence—light that could not be obtained from any other source. How careful then, should they be to keep open this channel, through which they might know the will of God concerning themselves, and be continually in the light. It was the right of the Saints to enjoy the spirit of revelation, that is, when they are living in purity and faithfulness. But they do not have that right when they turn aside from the commandments of the Almighty.

There are great events at our very doors, and the Saints should rejoice therein. If they were humble they would always have the testimony of the truth with them. The speaker had experienced this on many occasions, especially during his labors as a missionary in southern Africa, during the war of the Rebellion. He had also experienced it frequently under other circumstances. Prayed that the peace of heaven would abide with the Saints and guide them in the path of safety.

The choir sang the anthem:

Sing to the Lord in joyful strain.

Benediction by Elder George Ged-dard.

Arrest.

Joseph T. Johnson, of Ogden, has been arrested on a charge of unlawful cohabitation. He gave bonds before Commissioner Cross.