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## DISCOURSE

Delivered at the General Conference of Church, in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Tuesday, October 6th, 1896, by

PRESIDENT GEORGE Q. CANNON

[REPORTED BY ARTHUR WINTER.]

Our Conference thus far has been one of exceeding interest to me, and I presume it has been to all who have shared in its proceedings. I do not know that I ever heard our brethren of the Twelve Apostles speak with greater power than they have during this Conference; I do not know that I ever felt more edified myself by the remarks which have been made; and I have felt very thankful for the measure of the Spirit of God that has rested down upon President Wilford Woodruff. He has been greatly favored of the Lord in speaking to us. And so with President Lorenzo Snow. I have no doubt that the Latter-day Saints will go from this Conference instructed upon many points, and with their minds enlightened concerning many things that perhaps have been, to some extent, hidden from them. From that which I have heard, it is evident that a great many surmises have been indulged in, and perhaps ill-natured and unjust remarks made concerning the authorities of the Church over some of their recent actions. I was, therefore, exceedingly thankful that the Spirit of God moved upon President Woodruff and the other brethren to address the Conference upon the subject that they spoke upon. I believe it is the duty of the authorities of this Church to explain as far as possible the motives for their actions and for their expressions; for we are a united body, and that which interests those who are called to lead the Church interests all the members of the Church. Moreover, to have perfect harmony, and to prevent the adversary from taking advantage, it is necessary that sometimes explanations be made which men naturally shrink from making, especially in public. This has been the case with the authorities of the Church; it has been so with President Woodruff and also with the rest of the brethren. Then again, the situation of affairs has been very peculiar, especially because of politics having received so much attention, and causing feelings among the people, and in some instances among the leading men. In consequence of this, the brethren have felt to hold their peace, and to say nothing about affairs that really needed venting. We have been reticent, because we felt that we were likely to be misunderstood, and to have miscon-

ceptions of our motives. For this reason we have permitted ourselves to be exposed to animadversion and censure, and, in some instances, condemnation. Of course, you can understand why the brethren should feel delicate. Anxiety to save was the dominant feeling in their breasts.

But that which has transpired and the explanations that were made yesterday ought to be a solemn warning to Latter-day Saints to not be hasty in their conclusions, nor in their animadversions and censures, not to say their condemnation of the men whom God has placed to preside over the Church. I believe that a great amount of sin has been committed on this point; that the Spirit of God has been grieved, and that darkness has come to many minds, because men and women have indulged in condemnation without understanding all the circumstances surrounding the case which was mentioned here yesterday. Only a few days ago a letter came to hand containing the most severe strictures concerning our conduct. It was written by a man who was formerly a President of a Seventy and a Sunday school superintendent. He expressed himself in a manner to lead us who read the letter to conclude that he gave voice to the feelings of a great many others also. This man said we stood self-convicted of having violated a law of the Church, and he called upon us to repent and make amends for our conduct. Now, when a man who professes to love the cause of Zion and to respect the authorities of the Church will put his thoughts on paper in this form, and send them to us, it furnishes an index of how others may feel who may not have as good opportunity even as he had to know the truth. It is very significant that such a letter should be written and sent. While it is only a little thing of itself it is an indication of how hundreds of others may feel.

In the remarks that I make here I would like to bring this home to the minds of the members of this Church. There is one thing that the Lord has warned us about from the beginning, and that is, not to speak evil of the Lord's anointed. He has told us that any member of the Church who indulged in this is liable to lose the Spirit of God and go into darkness. The Prophet Joseph said time and again that it was one of the first and strongest symptoms of apostasy. Have we not proved this? Have not his words upon this subject been fulfilled to the very letter? No man can do this without incurring the displeasure of the Lord. It may seem strange, in this age of irreverence and iconoclasm, to talk in this way. Nevertheless, this is the truth. God has chosen His servants. He claims it as

His prerogative to condemn them, if they need condemnation. He has not given it to us individually to censure and condemn them. No man, however strong he may be in the faith, however high in the priesthood, can speak evil of the Lord's anointed and find fault with God's authority on the earth without incurring His displeasure. The Holy Spirit will withdraw itself from such a man, and he will go into darkness. This being the case, do you not see how important it is that we should be careful? However difficult it may be for us to understand the reasons for any action of the authorities of the Church, we should not too hastily call their acts in question and pronounce them wrong. Perhaps never since the days of the great apostasy in Kirtland has there been such a spirit to do this that I am speaking of as there has been of late years. Why, some of us have felt as though we scarcely dare go to conference in some places, we have heard such an arraignment of our motives and such a condemnation of our actions. This is a strange thing to say, yet it is true, and many persons here know it is true.

Yesterday's explanations ought to have the effect to make those persons who have indulged in these censorious remarks and in this condemnation feel so ashamed of themselves as to cause them, if they have any love for the truth and any desire to keep the commandments of God, to clothe themselves in sackcloth and ashes and beseech the Lord to forgive them for the sin they have committed. For they have condemned innocent men. They have said that which is not true about the servants of God, and no man has the right to do this about anybody, much less about men who are striving to do all they can for the work of God. If these men and women do not repent, they are likely to apostatize.

I had a daughter in this congregation yesterday, and she overheard one sister remark to another, "Why, I thought it was only one or two in the First Presidency that had these feelings, and that this was some personal difficulty with one of them. Why, it is the whole of the Twelve as well. It is not confined to one or two of the First Presidency, or to the three; but it is also the Twelve."

This shows the ignorance that has prevailed concerning the situation of affairs, and it shows how we have been exposed to these unjust and cruel remarks. It has seemed as though many of our people have taken their inspiration and their ideas concerning the transactions of the authorities of the Church from articles in the newspapers, the writers of which knew no more about that which was going on than an entire stranger.