

## DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER CHAS. W. PENROSE.

DELIVERED

In the Assembly Hall, on Sunday,  
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REPORTED BY G. F. GIBBS.

I feel thankful, my brethren and sisters, that I have the privilege, with you, of assembling in this place to worship God; and I feel very thankful that we are able to meet and worship God in the way that He has appointed; and that the religion that we have embraced is no cunningly devised fable of man, but is the very truth of the eternal God and has been sent down from heaven in these latter times for our benefit, for our guidance, and for our salvation, if we will hearken to and obey it.

The God whom we worship is not a God of our own invention, but a God who has revealed Himself to us, to a certain degree, and who has pointed out to us the way in which we should walk. There is a prevalent idea in the world that all the God there is, is such as men have framed and fashioned in their own minds. It is true that the people of the earth in different ages have imagined a great many things in regard to Deity. They have set up Gods of their own, worshipping them according to their own notions. But this is not the case with the people called Latter-day Saints. They have not framed and fashioned a being to fall down before and worship; but they have received communication from a Divine Being with instructions how they should act, and those instructions form their religion. The leaders of this Church have not invented the system; but every principle connected therewith has been revealed from on high.

The God whom the "Christians" worship is a being of their own creation—if, indeed, there can be such a being as they describe him to be; they have formed certain notions concerning deity, and then they have formulated those notions into articles of faith or religion. So with the heathen nations, so called. They have formed idols of wood and stone; others have chosen the heavenly bodies, such as the sun, which represent to them certain qualities which they think deity should possess. Not that the heathen nations really and truly worship the wood or the stone, as such; but the images which they set up, or the objects which they adore merely draw their attention to something behind and above and greater than those objects. So with the Roman Catholic. When he bows down before the image of the Virgin Mary, or before the image of the Savior upon the cross, he does not profess to worship the picture or the image; these are merely methods to lead the mind to something beyond what the natural eyes see. But then, these various deities which people worship are, after all, the emanation of their own minds; they are gods of their own invention. Herein lies the great difference between the sects of Christendom and of heathendom, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The people of this peculiar Church worship a Being who has to some extent manifested himself to them, and who has told them what they know concerning Him. And the revelations He has made to us of Himself, and of the Gospel of salvation that we have received have been given in this our day and time through men whom He Himself has chosen for this purpose. So with regard to the different ordinances and doctrines of the Church to which we belong; and so with our mode of worship, and everything belonging to our religion. It has all been revealed to us, and we accept it as having come from a higher source.

Our religion consists of that which God reveals to us, not of that which we make ourselves and then offer to Him. Some people seem to have the idea that God ought to receive their worship, no matter in what way it is made; that He ought to accept the ordinances which they administer or receive, no matter what they may be; that all the worship which they offer ought to be accepted by Deity, no matter in what shape or form it may be devised. This is because the inhabitants of the earth do not understand the true and living God and His ways. The Lord will not accept that which He Himself has not appointed; He

will not acknowledge that which He Himself has not revealed. The inhabitants of the earth are, of course, at liberty to devise modes of worship, and they may frame their own religious tenets and doctrines, but these are not acceptable to the Lord, neither is it reasonable that He should be expected to accept them. When God manifests himself to the inhabitants of the earth and reveals to them truth, and makes known to them ordinances, then the people are under obligations to receive that which God has manifested; but God Almighty is not under obligation to accept that which man has invented. It is true that the doctrines which God has revealed in these latter days are not new, that they are not revealed for the first time, because we are living in the latter days. In previous ages of the world God manifested himself and revealed to the inhabitants of the earth His ways and called upon them to walk in His path; and, therefore, a great many things which God has revealed to us may be found in the ancient Scriptures. Holy men of old, called in the same way as men are in these days, have left on record some things which God manifested to them; and they are written in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, and in records that have been lost, but which will be brought forth in this great and last dispensation of God's mercy to man. So we may take up the book called the Bible and read a great many principles which have been made manifest to us in our day; but we do not take them from the Bible or any of these records. We receive them because God has revealed them to us; and when we open the Bible or any of the books written by inspiration, and find written therein many things which correspond to that which He has revealed to us, they serve to corroborate the living word of God which has come down direct to us out of heaven.

The different sects in Christendom profess to take the Bible, the Old and New Testament, as their guide to salvation; and they say, whatsoever is not found therein and cannot be proved thereby is not to be received as an article of faith. That, in general terms, is one of the principles which runs through the various "Christian" sects. They found their faith, or profess to, upon the Bible. While we do not take that position, while our faith is not founded upon the Bible or on any written book, when we compare the Bible with what we do believe, what God has revealed to us, we find it corresponds; we find that God is the same yesterday, to day and forever. This Book says that, and that His works are one eternal round. Truth is not new; it may be revealed anew, and may be new to the people to whom it is revealed. But there is only one plan of salvation, one true and everlasting Gospel. That Gospel God revealed in the beginning; that Gospel God has revealed at different times; and in these latter days He has revealed the same old Gospel again in great plainness, and prepared the way so that all people who desire the truth may come to the knowledge of it without being left to depend upon books that were written hundreds of years ago. He having poured out upon man again the same spirit to guide and direct them and to enable them to understand God and His purposes, that men had who wrote the things contained in the Bible or in any other inspired book left on record. And herein is another great difference between the religion of the Latter-day Saints and all other religions in the world. We have a living faith, a living God, and the living word of God to guide and direct us every day of our lives. When we read the letter of the word of the Lord given ages ago, that has been handed down from generation to generation, we have the satisfaction of knowing that the things which God has revealed to us were revealed to the ancients, and that by receiving these things they came to know God, whom to know is life eternal; and we are thereby encouraged to imitate their examples, and also to avoid the errors which they fell into.

Now although we do not base our faith upon the Bible or any other written work, yet at the same time there are no people upon the face of the earth who believe so much in the sacred scriptures left on record and handed down to us, as do the Latter-day Saints. Though we are not dependent upon books for our religion—for our religion would exist if there were no books in existence, at the same time we manifest by

our works that we have more faith in the Bible than the people who profess to base their faith upon it.

At the beginning of our religion, if I may use that term—but really there is no beginning, for it is true, and truth is eternal without beginning and without end; every principle of truth always had an existence, and when, therefore, I say beginning of our religion, I mean the beginning of the revelation to the people in the day in which we live—when our religion was first revealed the world was in ignorance concerning God and His ways. It is true there was a glimmering of light concerning Him which was obtained through reading the Bible and other works containing the writings of men who in former times were to some extent inspired. For the inspiration of God in olden times was not confined to the men who wrote the Jewish Scriptures. The Jewish prophets revealed the word of God; the holy men of God who moved among the people in that nation were inspired from on high; but God has permitted His Spirit, which is the light of truth, and which manifests truth, to be poured out upon all the inhabitants of the earth to some extent; for in that they live and move and have their being, and all people of any age, race or country who seek unto God with an honest heart in fervent prayer, desiring truth and to be taught of God, will be enlightened by Him. There have been inspired bards and sages and poets, who have uttered words of truth, words of inspiration concerning things of which they had been enlightened of God. And many things that such men wrote have been recorded and handed down, and scraps of them may be found among all nations and peoples. As the Apostle Paul says, "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.' His spirit has enlightened mankind in all ages to a certain extent; for the spirit of the Lord, which gives light to the human understanding is the spirit by which we live; it is the spirit of light; it is the spirit of life. And as the light, that proceeds forth from that glorious luminary, the sun, gives light to the earth, and also light to vegetation, and to man and beast, so the spirit of Him who created us has been poured out upon all people, and upon all animated things; indeed, we are told in the revelations of God, that the light, which lights our eyes is through Him that enlighteneth our understandings, and is the same light that proceeds from the bosom of God, and that fills the immensity of space; that it is the same light that lightens every man that cometh into the world—the Jew, the Gentile, the bond and the free. We are told, that "there is a spirit in man and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." This is that spirit. It is the light of Christ; it is the light of God. It is the life of our bodies, and it is also the light of our minds. This spirit is not confined to one race of people, or to one country, or to one age or generation, but it is universal; it is of Him in whom we live and move and have our being. It is the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And if all men would be guided by that natural light, that natural inspiration which gives them understanding, and by which they exist, they would be guided directly to Him who is the fountain of all light; they would then be in a condition to be communicated with by Him who is their Maker and Creator. But the inhabitants of the earth have been from the beginning prone to walk in the ways of darkness rather than in the light, because, as Jesus explained it, "their deeds are evil." This is the reason why there is so much ignorance in the world concerning God and His ways.

When the Lord, at different times, has raised up men who sought Him, who learned of Him, and who put themselves in such a condition that He could communicate with them, and through them to the rest of mankind, generally speaking, those men have been despised and rejected by the multitude. The great masses of the people have gone downward in error and darkness; it has been hard for them to walk in

that straight and narrow path which leads upward to light, to intelligence, to purity, to the presence of Him who is the author of truth; and, therefore, the vast majority of the servants of God, who have been called to be special witnesses of the Almighty to a fallen world, have met with cruel and inhuman treatment from those to whom they were sent. They have generally been persecuted; they have been put to death in many instances in the most ignominious manner; they have been beheaded; they have been torn asunder; they have been cast into furnaces and into dens of wild beasts, and in order to escape maltreatment they have roamed hills and mountains, concealing themselves in dens and caves of the earth; men bearing a heavenly message, a message fraught with peace and good will to all men, a message too, involving their eternal welfare and happiness. This is the reason why there has been so much ignorance in the world concerning God; and it is in consequence of their disobedience, in consequence of their wickedness, in consequence of their love for darkness rather than light, in consequence of their choosing the things that come from beneath in preference to things that come from above. For there are two opposing spirits or influences upon the earth, just as there are light and darkness. They cannot dwell together; they always were and always will be at war one with another, but one flees away at the approach of the other, as when the light of the morning beams forth over the hill tops, darkness flees away.

The inhabitants of the earth have been willing to be led by the influence of darkness; for there is a spirit of darkness upon the earth as well as the spirit of light, which leads to death as surely and certainly as the spirit of light leads to life. In the beginning God gave to man his agency, leaving him to choose either light or darkness, truth or error, as he might please. When men choose to receive the light of truth, the spirit of truth prompts them to do good, but it does not force them to do so; it is gentle and kind, and will enlighten and bless if people are willing to receive and act upon its promptings; but if men choose to walk in their own ways, they are at liberty to do so without let or hindrance, so far as the spirit of light forcing itself upon them to compel them to walk in the way of the Lord, is concerned. The inhabitants of the earth generally have chosen to walk in the paths which lead to death; they have chosen that which is evil and loved it, rather than that which is good; therefore, they have not been led upward to the Source of light, or been able to communicate with Him.

When our Heavenly Father commenced this work with which you and I are identified, the world was in darkness and without knowledge concerning God. There was a little glimmering of light among them concerning some things pertaining to God which men had read about in the Bible; and there were some individuals in other generations who, searching after truth, obtained some comprehension of the principles of truth, but they knew not God nor the ways of God. There was no definite knowledge in this age concerning Deity until God manifested Himself to the Prophet Joseph Smith in His own person and by His Son. Joseph saw the Lord and heard the heavenly voice, saying, "This is my Beloved Son, hear ye Him;" and he was instructed by the ministration of personages direct from the presence of Deity, in regard to the things of God. So that when he came to lay the foundation of this work, he did not attempt to lay it according to his own notions and ideas, or according to that which he had read in books, or that which he had pondered over, or that which he or other men had invented; but he made known to others what God revealed to him. And when he bore testimony that God lived, that Jesus who died on Calvary was the Son of God, he testified of that which he knew, because these Divine beings had manifested themselves to him.

Joseph Smith was given to understand of the existence of a certain record written by men who, in former times, in like manner had received the word of God upon this continent. The place of its existence was also shown to him, and he was inspired of God to translate that record into the English language. Now, Joseph Smith in performing that great work received, continually, evidence of the divine origin of what he wrote or

caused others to write. It was not the emanation of his own brain, or something that he had concocted, but was the work of the Lord as written by the servants of God in ancient times, revealed to him by the power of the Lord God that he might translate it into our language. So in regard to the revelations given to this Church, and concerning every doctrine and principle pertaining to our faith. They did not spring from his thoughts, they were not the product of his mind; but they were revealed to him by the ministration of holy angels, and by the inspiration of that Spirit which gives light to the understanding. For he received blessings to a greater degree than are poured out commonly upon the children of men, as was the case with other men anciently who were called to perform a special work; his mind was enlightened far beyond the condition of his fellow-men, for God bestowed upon him at the proper time the gift of the Holy Ghost, by which he, as well as men anciently, understood and spoke and wrote the mind and will of God. And Joseph Smith learned how to obtain that glorious and heavenly gift not only for himself but for others, and he was enabled to instruct the inhabitants of the earth how they could obtain it, how they could come to a knowledge of the truth for themselves, and commune with God for themselves; how they could obtain a knowledge of His existence through this heavenly gift, so that they might be guided in His ways and know that they were walking in His paths. Joseph could not find this out in and of himself; it was revealed to him from on high; and so with every doctrine and principle, every ordinance and commandment that is in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Now although this religion is divine, coming from God direct, it is not a mysterious religion as some suppose. It is very plain, very simple and very easy to be understood. All people upon the face of the earth may comprehend it; it may be brought down to the understanding of the weakest of all races; all may learn and comprehend those simple principles by which they may come to a knowledge of God and be taught of Him, and by which they may take that course which is right in His sight.

The first principle of true religion is faith. Jesus Christ says, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." This is verily so. All people must be "born again" to be able to see the Kingdom of God, or to be able to comprehend the ways of the Lord. Is this a mystery? No, it is plain and easily understood when we get the spirit and light of God upon it. Jesus said also, "Except a man be born of the water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." A change must take place in the human heart. Men must first be born of the word of God which lives and abides for ever. As the Apostle Peter says, "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." The Apostle James says, "Of his own will begat He us with the word of truth," and again we read "Faith cometh by hearing, the word of God." God's way is this: He calls men who are fitted for His work, and inspires them, and endows them with authority to represent Him, and sends them forth to preach the word of God. When they bear their testimony to people who are honest in their hearts, who desire the truth and who wish to know of God, the Holy Spirit that is in the servants of God, the Spirit accompanying the word spoken by authority, enters the hearts of such people, and they are born of the word of God so that they can see and comprehend the truth. A change is wrought upon them by the power and influence of divine truth, by which they are able to see the truth as the speaker sees it; the word spoken by the gift and power of God carries conviction to the heart, and they at once begin to recognize the authority of Him who imparts the words of life to them. They are born of the word and are able to see and understand to a certain degree, their faith and their ideas having been quickened by the power of God. The light and influence of the Holy Ghost radiating and proceeding from the inspired speaker, accompanies his word. As his testimony is borne under the influence of the Holy Ghost and by authority from on high, conviction seizes hold of the people, and if they