

DISCOURSE

BY

APOSTLE ERASTUS SNOW,

DELIVERED

At the Quarterly Conference, Parowan, Sunday Afternoon, June 24th, 1883.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

I want to say to the young men and the young ladies and to all the people—but especially our children, the youths in Israel—that the leaders of this people do not speak of themselves. That which they are striving to impress upon the people is of the Lord and not of man. The Latter-day Saints have not been gathered from the different nations of the earth, and brought together in these mountains to worship man, nor to serve man, to be their slaves, nor to be obedient unto man, and if anybody has such an idea or intention they have got hold of the wrong people. The people who are gathered here are not the people calculated to do such a thing. The faith we teach throws everybody upon their own responsibility; they are at liberty to act and choose for themselves, and all will be held responsible before God for their faith and conduct. The free agency of man is and always has been a prominent doctrine in this Church, and no one advocated it more strongly than the Prophet Joseph Smith. The free agency of man is inseparably connected with intelligence, as the revelations of God in the Doctrine and Covenants plainly and explicitly declare, that all intelligence is independent. Without this agency there would be no self-existence. And because of this agency, which existed in eternity before the worlds were, with intelligent beings, with our spirits when they existed in the spirit world—through the exercise of this agency Satan fell, and all those who clung to him and rebelled against our Heavenly Father. Brother Cannon has impressed us with the idea that obedience to correct principle, believing in the truth and living it and obeying it, is as good an evidence of independent thought and character—and perhaps a little more so—than to be disobedient; that no man, woman or child will be more independent by rejecting the truth, by disobeying correct laws and correct principles, than those who receive and obey the truth with contrite hearts. Now, what say you, you must all judge for yourselves, and choose what you will be. My experience and observation of the Latter-day Saints is that they are the hardest people I know anything about to either drive or lead in a wrong direction. Brother Cannon speaks of President Young and President Taylor and other good men, our leaders, being led, as it were, by a hair in obedience to the Priesthood, which implies simply obedience to truth and to correct doctrine, and to righteousness. This is the explanation the Prophet Joseph Smith gave to a certain lawyer in his time who came to see him and his people and expressed astonishment and surprise at the ease with which he controlled the people, and said it was something that was not to be found among the learned men of the world. Said he: "We cannot do it. What is the secret of your success?" "Why," said the Prophet, "I do not govern the people. I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves." I have been young, now I am getting old and expect to pass away soon, as well as all those who have been for many years before the people serving the Lord and laboring to promote the welfare of the people; but from my youth up I have observed the dealings of God with the Latter-day Saints. I am pretty well acquainted with them. They are pretty well acquainted with their leaders. They are pretty well acquainted with the voice of truth, and they know it when they hear it as a rule—that is, all those who are humble and prayerful and who love the truth and the voice of the good Shepherd, they know it when they hear it, and when principles are taught that are good, that come from God, they comprehend them and receive them. But as Paul said in one of his epistles to the ancient Saints: "There is a law in our members, warring against the law of the spirit and bringing our bodies into bondage to the law of sin and death." That is, the lusts and desires of the flesh and the pride of life which we have to war against. And this warfare

commences as soon as we begin to grow up to maturity. It is this that lays the foundation for rebellion. As soon as this begins to manifest itself in us, in our youth, so soon we need to begin to curb it. And here comes in the duty of parents in their Priesthood and calling, to watch over those children that are given them of the Lord, which are lent to them for a season. It is required of them to teach those children the law of the Lord and the ways of the righteous, and to restrain them from passions, from anger, from strife, from contention, from envy, from jealousy, from disobedience; to impress them with the necessity of doing right and repenting of wrong whenever they do it, that they may hold in check the passions that are common to our nature; and to show them how to enjoy all that the Lord has designed, for our happiness in this world and our exaltation in the next without excess, without allowing our tabernacle to be used as instruments of sin and wickedness.

We have heard during this conference—and especially this forenoon from President Taylor—some very important principles advanced for our government as individuals and as communities, principles which we are to observe and which are essential to our purity and progress as a people, and as individuals, and our exaltation in the eternal world. For the law of the Lord is strict unto those who are instructed and have opportunities to observe it, and far more so with us as Latter-day Saints than with the Gentile world. The Lord will make greater allowance for the Gentile world than He will for us, and He has had compassion upon us and made greater allowance for us in the days of our ignorance than He will do for us in the future; for He expects us as a people to profit by our experience and our instruction and the opportunities afforded us, and to improve our condition, to purify our persons, our families, and our communities, and to purge evil from our midst. And touching moral purity and the intercourse of the sexes and the objects and purposes of this intercourse, God has revealed to the Latter-day Saints, as He also revealed unto our fathers, that He has a great and glorious and grand object in view in placing us here upon the earth, male and female, and commanding us to multiply and replenish the earth. His purposes in these things are from eternity to eternity. They reach back into our first or former existence, and consequently will reach forward through this our second, and into our next estate, and through all eternity. And we need a correct understanding of the proper use of the privileges and blessings that are given unto us. On this depends the glory and the exaltation of ourselves and our children for evermore. The Lord is striving to educate a people that will properly understand these things and appreciate them, and that will not trifle with the fountains of life and with those choice blessings that are placed within their reach. When we look abroad into the Gentile nations at the present time, those who are acquainted with their condition are constrained to acknowledge that we live in a wicked and adulterous generation. Adultery, whoredom and lust have cured the Gentile nations, and the wicked portion of all mankind, we may say, from time immemorial. But with the seed of Abraham, the children of Israel—who were called a holy nation, a peculiar people—God has sought to regulate, by His laws, those things, and to teach the people so that they may raise up unto Him a holy nation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood. He chose Abraham from among the nations and blessed him. He promised to multiply his seed like the stars in the heaven or the sands of the sea shore for number. He tried and proved him well as we heard this morning. He blessed him and blessed his seed after him, likewise his son Isaac and his grandson, Jacob, and promised that the oracles should remain with him and his seed. Nevertheless, the promises made were general; they were not promises to individuals alone. Yet the promises were conditional. They were given on condition that their posterity should abide in the truth, follow the teachings and examples of their fathers, and prove themselves worthy; for Nephi has said concerning these things in the Book of Mormon that God covenants with none except those that repent and believe in His Son and keep His command-

ments. But there are special promises to the children of Israel, the seed of Abraham, as a people; for as a people they are the elect of God. But as individuals every one is held responsible for their own sins. No promise of the father can save any individual. Nevertheless, according to the promise made unto the fathers, God makes manifest among the children of Israel the Priesthood and reveals unto them the gospel, and giveth them an opportunity to receive it and obey it and obtain exaltation through it, if they will, and in this respect they are more favored than the gentile nations throughout the whole world, though He has said that whoever fears God and works righteousness is accepted of Him among all nations and all peoples, Jew or Gentile. But the Lord has set His hand to gather His people, and He is selecting them by the preaching of the Gospel to the world by the Elders of Israel. The spirit which accompanies the preaching of the Gospel feels after and searches out and gathers together the seed of Abraham that are worthy to be saved. It gathers together those whom God has called to have part in the great latter day work, in "the dispensation of the fulness of times"—the ten thousand of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh, spoken of by Moses when he blessed the tribes of Israel.

Well, now, because the Lord has set His hand to gather out from the nations of the earth the humble and the honest in heart and those that will be obedient and will submit themselves to the truth and to the law of the Lord, therefore He reveals unto them a new and everlasting covenant, the holy covenant of marriage for time and for all eternity, the union of the sexes, the sealing of wives to husbands and husbands to wives, children to parents, etc., the uniting and sealing us in the holy Priesthood unto the fathers and even unto our Lord Jesus Christ, who stands at the head of the kingdom of righteousness, the Chief Apostle and High Priest of our profession, and unto this new and everlasting covenant has the Lord purposed and designed His people to be united and bound together with the Son, our Savior, and through Him unto His Father; for He has said, "Whoever receiveth me receiveth my Father, and all that my Father hath shall be given unto him."

This new and everlasting covenant reveals unto us the keys of the Holy Priesthood and ordinances thereof. It is the grand keystone of the arch which the Lord is building in the earth. In other words, it is that which completes the exaltation and glory of the righteous who receive the everlasting Gospel, and without it they could not attain unto the eternal power and Godhead and the fulness of celestial glory. Now many may enter into the glory of God and become servants in the kingdom of God who are not able to abide this new and everlasting covenant; but as we are told in the Doctrine and Covenants, with them there is an end to their exaltation. They may remain in their saved condition without exaltation, but they enter not into the order of the Gods. They cannot progress through the ceaseless rounds of eternity except they abide in the covenant, and abide the law that governs it, and the Lord will not be mocked in these things.

We heard this morning how strict was the law pertaining to these matters. Now we say unto all Israel, old and young, these things are revealed unto us for our good. The strictness of the law may not in times past have been taught us and enforced upon us as we may look for it being taught and enforced in the future. But it behooveth us to reflect upon these things, and while it is our privilege to go forward earnestly desiring and seeking after all that the Lord has to bestow upon us, yet we must remember that the more we receive and the greater privileges we are permitted to enjoy, the more strict accountability will be required of us, and the more dreadful will be the consequences of transgression or violation of the holy covenants and obligations which we assume.

Now, I wish to say that I realize that there are some in our midst—whether they are in your midst in this State of Zion or not, I am not prepared to say with any certainty, for I can only judge of the condition and feeling of the people as I am informed from time to time—I say, there are some whom Satan would stir to disobedience and try to make an impression upon their minds

that the system of plural marriage, and those things that pertain to the sealing of men and women for time and for eternity, and the revelation which has been read in our hearing, given through the Prophet Joseph pertaining to this subject—that it was the work of man and not the work of God. We have recently had published in some of the Utah papers some letters on this subject, and one from Joseph Smith, the eldest son of the Prophet, in which a great deal of sophistry is made use of, special pleading, such as the lawyer that he is, seems only capable of using. And the object of this special pleading and this sophistry is to try to leave an impression upon the ignorant, those who know no better, that plural marriage was not introduced and sanctioned and practised by his father, but that it has been an innovation of man, and does not belong to the system of religion which he believed and practised and taught the people. And there are some among us who would fain take this view of the subject; not that there are many who believe it, but there are some who would like to believe it. And so there are in the world many people who fear that "Mormonism" as a whole is true and of God; they are very much afraid that it is, but they hope that it is not. They do not want to receive it; they do not want to live it, but they are afraid it is true, and multitudes of people have been convinced of its truth, but have not the honesty to acknowledge it; and many who would acknowledge it for a little season, would afterwards, because of the love of the world, fall away, and thus condemnation has fallen upon the world because they will not obey the truth when they hear it. And so it is with some among the Latter-day Saints. They are pretty well satisfied that this doctrine of plural marriage is true and that it was revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, but they would like an excuse for disavowing and rejecting it. And why so? Mainly because their minds are closed up and have not been able to comprehend the principles that are embraced in this doctrine and connected with it. Their minds are contracted and limited. They think more of this present life than they do of the future. They want to lay up riches; they want to gather personal comforts around them; they want to gratify the pride of life and the lusts of the flesh. They do not understand that which is for their real good, their real happiness. But I testify that there is more real happiness in serving God and abiding in His law, and submitting to all its conditions and requirements than there can be in taking an opposite course. This is the testimony of all who receive and abide in the truth, and there is abundant evidence in their lives and conduct to prove that they, in receiving the truth, enjoy more comfort and happiness than those who reject it. And touching our plural families, I will say that, with all the weaknesses that are common to frail humanity, and that manifest themselves in our midst—the men who enter into this order in the sincerity of their hearts and with devotion to God, and the women who also enter into it in the love of the truth and in the earnestness of their souls, fearing God and desiring to do His will—that with all the weaknesses that manifest themselves, I say there is treble the genuine comfort and happiness in those families who enter into this order and abide in it, than is to be found in the same number of families in monogamy in this Church, to say nothing of the Gentile world. And then we will take the Latter-day Saints as a whole, whether in plural marriage or single marriage, and we will say that there is ten times more genuine happiness and comfort in believing and obeying the Gospel—whether in plural or single wedlock—than is to be found among the same number of people in any part of the world outside of this Church. Now, in this you are all my witnesses. Many of you have been in the world. You know what you were, and how you felt, and how your neighbors felt, and what kind of enjoyment you had before you heard the fulness of the Gospel. You know pretty well the condition of the world now—the condition of those who have not received the Gospel—and you know what your condition is and has been since you received the Gospel. And who among you Latter-day Saints would exchange your present condition for the condition of the outside world? Are we not prepared to testify that our happiness is treble,

through having believed and the Gospel?

Now, as I said to the President last night, we are arriving at a critical crisis in our affairs. The trials and bigots of Christendom—America especially—are driving law-makers into trying to oppress our way and to oppress us politically as well as religiously. They are endeavoring not only to deprive us of religious freedom, but to deprive us of political freedom, and to bring us into bondage. Well, now, they do it as far as the Lord will permit them and no further. They block their wheels. He will overcome their obstacles in their way. They stay their onward progress, and allows His people to be free, whether they will trust Him or not. They have faith in Him or they will deny Him, whether they deny their covenants and principles through fear of the wicked, through persecution, through fear of death. For we have seen those who will follow, those who will halt between two, those who wish to serve and who, at the same time, like to serve the Lord and can such people always be so doubtful and divided? No, they can not. They are tried and proven, and they must take sides one way or the other; they must either back upon the wicked, or unto God and His purpose of soul, or their backs upon God and go down to the ungodly of the world.

Well, now, in regard to the plural marriage and the revelation which I wish to say that Joseph Smith is entirely right of what he says, or how for I know that he does the truth. How far has been blinded or how been influenced to look upon things as correct, or to think he speaks the truth, I do not know. But he is woefully in the dark thinks he does speak the truth. I wish to accuse him of lying, ingly and intentionally. We are multitudes of witnesses know better, and know that his father was murdered. Joseph was in his eleventh year when he was killed. He knew little either of his life or his teachings, and those who govern him know but little of what was taught among the people. There are multitudes of witnesses that were older than he, were intimate with the Prophet Joseph, that know better those who take this other course are trying to convince that this is an institution, and not of God, bring forth that was given to the old upon the American which was given them the brother of Nephi, as you can read, as doubtless often read, in the Book of Jacob arraigned some of the because the men were given to the lusts of the flesh, pride of life, and women they attempted to justify themselves in their whoredom, ferring to what is written in the Jewish Scriptures concerning an Solomon and other many wives and concubines. Jacob informed the Nephi an abomination in the sight of the Lord, and gave unto them a commandment that not any of them should have a wife, and concubines they have none, saying the "delighteth in the chaste men." And in the same the Lord said: "I saith the Lord of up seed unto me, command my people; they shall hearken unto thee." Now, there was a reason the Lord gave this commandment the Nephites. They were people on this vast continent America, and the Lord was plying them to possess the land. But it was not so when called Abraham and promised his seed should be like the upon the sea shore for number recognized the righteousness of plurality of wives, and never time did he restrict them from days of Abraham until Christ far as we have any record in Jewish Scriptures. But there are reasons, as I said before, why the restriction the Nephites, but the restriction He intimated that