

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 50

This section addresses false spirits and spiritual manifestations. D&C 50 contains themes and rhetoric originally presented in D&C 46, but develops them to a greater degree.

Interestingly, the Lord spends no time at all addressing, explaining or cataloging any of the false spiritual phenomena. He only tells them how to deal with them when confronted with them.

Based upon subject, the section can be arranged as follows:

- Introduction - Evil spirits are abroad (v. 1-3)
- Hypocrisy in the ecclesia (v. 4-9)
- Let us reason together (v. 10-36)
 - Header - Face to face reasoning (v. 10-12)
 - Questions and Answers (v. 13-16)
 - Discourses on the questions (v. 17-35)
 - Discourse on Question 1 (v. 17-25)
 - Preach and receive by the Spirit of Truth (v. 17-22)
 - Light and darkness (v. 23-25)
 - Discourse on Question 2 (v. 26-35)
 - All things subject unto him (v. 26-30)
 - Spirits subject unto him (v. 31-35)
- Footer - Blessed are you who hear (v. 36)
- Particulars (v. 37-39)
- Conclusion - Fear not little children (v. 40-46)

1 Hearken, O ye elders of my church, and give ear to the voice of the living God; and attend to the words of wisdom which shall be given unto you, according as ye have asked and are agreed as touching the church, and the spirits which have gone abroad in the earth. 2 Behold, verily I say unto you, that there are many spirits which are false spirits, which have gone forth in the earth, deceiving the world. 3 And also Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you.

v1-3 Introduction - Evil spirits are abroad in the earth. These verses inform the ecclesia that there are evil spirits going about trying to deceive them, even the Adversary himself. Just as there is a Holy Spirit trying to lead them into all truth, there is an unholy spirit trying to deceive and destroy them.

v2 Compare D&C 46:7-8

v3 Compare D&C 28:11.

4 Behold, I, the Lord, have looked upon you, and have seen abominations in the church

that profess my name. 5 But blessed are they who are faithful and endure, whether in life or in death, for they shall inherit eternal life. 6 But wo unto them that are deceivers and hypocrites, for, thus saith the Lord, I will bring them to judgment. 7 Behold, verily I say unto you, there are hypocrites among you, who have deceived some, which has given the adversary power; but behold such shall be reclaimed; 8 But the hypocrites shall be detected and shall be cut off, either in life or in death, even as I will; and wo unto them who are cut off from my church, for the same are overcome of the world. 9 Wherefore, let every man beware lest he do that which is not in truth and righteousness before me.

v4-9 These verses deliver a scathing rebuke on hypocrisy among the ecclesia. The text can be arranged as an inverted parallelism:

- A - (v. 4) I have seen abominations in My church
- B - (v. 5) Faithful blessed, whether in life or death
- C - (v. 6) The deceivers shall be judged
- C - (v. 7) The deceived shall be reclaimed
- B - (v. 8) Hypocrites cut off, either in life or death
- A - (v. 9) Beware of unrighteousness

These verses present the opposite of what D&C 46:28-33 advocates, namely worshiping in Spirit, hence the accusation of hypocrisy.

v4 Compare D&C 1:30-33.

v6-7 An interesting antithesis where the deceivers will be judged, but those whom they deceive will be reclaimed. The result is the work the deceivers have done to promote themselves will ultimately fail as they are only damning themselves and not anybody else.

10 And now come, saith the Lord, by the Spirit, unto the elders of his church, and let us reason together, that ye may understand; 11 Let us reason even as a man reasoneth one with another face to face. 12 Now, when a man reasoneth he is understood of man, because he reasoneth as a man; even so will I, the Lord, reason with you that you may understand.

v10-36 Let us reason together. Here is a classical set of Q. & A. with the Lord. This kind of rhetorical device is most often associated with Isaiah, cf. Isa. 1:11-12, Isa. 10:3-4, Isa. 21:11-12, Isa. 22:1-2, Isa. 28:24-25, &c.

v10-12 Header. This text introduces "face to face reasoning" style and indicates it is presented in such a fashion that it

cannot be misunderstood. The Lord is speaking in "plainness", cp. 2 Ne. 25:7.

13 Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question--unto what were ye ordained? 14 To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth. 15 And then received ye spirits which ye could not understand, and received them to be of God; and in this are ye justified? 16 Behold ye shall answer this question yourselves; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto you; he that is weak among you hereafter shall be made strong.

v13-16 Questions and Answers.

Question 1 (v. 13)

Answer 1 (v. 14)

Question 2 (v. 15)

Non-answer 2 (v. 16)

The first question and answer (v. 13-24) deals with the calling these men share, they were all called to preach the gospel and gather the elect. This subject appears many times in preceding sections, cp. D&C 4, D&C 29:7-8, so the question is a didactic one presented by a peeved Teacher.

The second rhetorical question (v. 15) is a follow-up to the first and identifies where the audience messed up, but it lets the audience answer this time (v. 16).

17 Verily I say unto you, he that is ordained of me and sent forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? 18 And if it be by some other way it is not of God. 19 And again, he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? 20 If it be some other way it is not of God. 21 Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth? 22 Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.

23 And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness. 24 That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. 25 And again, verily I say unto you, and I say it that you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from among you;

v17-35 The Lord goes into a discourse addressing each of the two questions from v. 13-16 separately and carefully.

v17-25 Discourse on the subject of question 1, namely preaching

by the Comforter, or Holy Spirit.

v17-22 Preaching and receiving by the Spirit of Truth. These verses state plainly that in the teacher and pupil student relationship the Holy Spirit is an essential third partner. Without the Holy Spirit's participation in the conversation, which should be inspiring both the teacher and the student, then neither is spiritually edified.

v23-25 Light and darkness. If the ideal case from v. 17-22 is not being adhered to then the result is darkness. If the Spirit is not involved in the preaching and receiving, then there is only darkness and no light.

The darkness versus light serves well to present a stark contrast between teaching with and without the Spirit. It also serves to rhetorically connect the Holy Spirit verses unholy spirit issues from the preceding text of this section as the Holy Spirit is commonly associated with light and the adversary is commonly associated with darkness, John 1:5. So the individual who is not taught by the Spirit and does not receive by the Spirit remains subject to the unholy spirit.

26 He that is ordained of God and sent forth, the same is appointed to be the greatest, notwithstanding he is the least and the servant of all. 27 Wherefore, he is possessor of all things; for all things are subject unto him, both in heaven and on the earth, the life and the light, the Spirit and the power, sent forth by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son. 28 But no man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin. 29 And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. 30 But know this, it shall be given you what you shall ask; and as ye are appointed to the head, the spirits shall be subject unto you.

31 Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that if you behold a spirit manifested that you cannot understand, and you receive not that spirit, ye shall ask of the Father in the name of Jesus; and if he give not unto you that spirit, then you may know that it is not of God. 32 And it shall be given unto you, power over that spirit; and you shall proclaim against that spirit with a loud voice that it is not of God-- 33 Not with railing accusation, that ye be not overcome, neither with boasting nor rejoicing, lest you be seized therewith. 34 He that receiveth of God, let him account it of God; and let him rejoice that he is accounted of God worthy to receive. 35 And by giving heed and doing these things which ye have received, and which ye shall hereafter receive--and the kingdom is given you of the Father, and power to overcome all things which are not ordained of him--

v26-35 Discourse on the subject of question 2, namely dealing with spirits you cannot understand.

v26-30 All things are subject unto him. Those who are called and ordained to the work are invested with God's authority, the Priesthood. Thus, the things of heaven and earth are subject to them so long as they act according to the will of God. Given this kind of authority, they can deal appropriately with unholy spirits.

On "all things", cp. 2 Peter 1:3. Cross referencing this "all things" with the D&C 76:55 or D&C 132:20 is not safe as those are in reference to post-mortal exalted individuals and here we are speaking of the Priesthood being conferred upon mortals.

v28-29 Compare D&C 46:28-30.

v30 "appointed to the head", cp. D&C 46:29.

v31-35 Spirits will be subject to the just Priesthood holder. In the event the person is confronted by a spiritual phenomena they are not sure of, they are told here how to deal with it. Note the caution in v. 33, that if a person takes pride in the Priesthood as though it were their power the Priesthood will no longer protect them and the evil spirit will "seize" them. Verse 34 then goes on to admonish the individual to remember that the authority is of God and that they are to consider themselves fortunate to be worthy to receive, or be tested by, these manifestations.

v31 "give not unto you that spirit", the Lord appears to be speaking about spiritual gifts, akin to D&C 46:13-25. If they pray to the Lord for the same gift they are observing and He doesn't give it to them, then it is because it is not from Him, it is from the Adversary.

v32 "with a loud voice", not yelling or screaming, but audibly so all present can hear by what authority the action is being performed, so none present will mistake the priesthood holder for being the authority and not the Priesthood.

36 And behold, verily I say unto you, blessed are you who are now hearing these words of mine from the mouth of my servant, for your sins are forgiven you.

v36 Footer, composed of "blessed are you who hear". The Q. &

A. and Discourses are closed with a typical benediction,
"Blessed are you, if...."

37 Let my servant Joseph Wakefield, in whom I am well pleased, and my servant Parley P. Pratt go forth among the churches and strengthen them by the word of exhortation; 38 And also my servant John Corrill, or as many of my servants as are ordained unto this office, and let them labor in the vineyard; and let no man hinder them doing that which I have appointed unto them-- 39 Wherefore, in this thing my servant Edward Partridge is not justified; nevertheless let him repent and he shall be forgiven.

v37-39 Particulars concerning specific people are dealt with. Three are endorsed, but Edward Partridge is admonished.

Partridge is often spoken of favorably (cf. D&C 41:9-11, D&C 51:1-8, D&C 52:24, D&C 124:19-21), but is apparently warned in D&C 42:10 and again corrected in D&C 58:14-16 and D&C 64:17. Whatever the cause of the chiding at present, Partridge clearly repented of it. See [Sherilyn Farnes' Masters Thesis](#) on Edward Partridge for a lengthy discussion on his life and legacy.

40 Behold, ye are little children and ye cannot bear all things now; ye must grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. 41 Fear not, little children, for you are mine, and I have overcome the world, and you are of them that my Father hath given me; 42 And none of them that my Father hath given me shall be lost. 43 And the Father and I are one. I am in the Father and the Father in me; and inasmuch as ye have received me, ye are in me and I in you. 44 Wherefore, I am in your midst, and I am the good shepherd, and the stone of Israel. He that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall. 45 And the day cometh that you shall hear my voice and see me, and know that I am. 46 Watch, therefore, that ye may be ready. Even so. Amen.

v40-46 The section concludes with a series of Johannine paraphrases, note the numerous cross references into the Gospel of John in the footnotes (the footnotes in my edition don't make the v. 44 and John 10:11 "good shepherd" connection though). Also note the tender and caring manner with which the Lord closes off here, following the pattern of D&C 121:43.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 50

Numerous manuscript copies of this revelation existed previous to the first printings, indicating the importance this revelation held among the early ecclesia.

The revelation was first published in the Evening and Morning Star, volume 1, number 3, page 17, dated August, 1832. It was then published in the Book of Commandments in 1833, pages 119-123. It was published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, pages 134-136. It was then published in Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 2, pages 402-403, dated January 15, 1844. And in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 6, pages 84-85, dated November, 1844.

Excerpt from History of the Church

During the month of April, I continued to translate the Scriptures as time would allow. In May, a number of Elders being present, and not understanding the different spirits abroad in the earth, I inquired and received from the Lord the following:

[text of D&C 50 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, page 170)

Excerpt from History of the Church

Soon after the Gospel was established in Kirtland, and during the absence of the authorities of the Church, many false spirits were introduced, many strange visions were seen, and wild, enthusiastic notions were entertained: men ran out of doors under the influence of this spirit, and some of them got upon the stumps of trees and shouted, and all kinds of extravagances were entered into by them; one man pursued a ball that he said he saw flying in the air, until he came to a precipice when he jumped into the top of a tree, which saved his life; and many ridiculous things were entered into, calculated to bring disgrace upon the Church of God, to cause the Spirit of God to be withdrawn, and to uproot and destroy those glorious principles which had been developed for the salvation of the human family. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 4, page 580)

Excerpt from the Book of John Whitmer

For a perpetual memory, to the shame and confusion of the

devil-permit me, to say a few things, respecting the proceedings of some of those who were disciples, and some remain among us, and will, and have come from under the error and enthusiasm, which they had fallen.

Some had visions and could not tell what they saw. Some would fancy to themselves that they had the sword of Laban, and would wield it as expert as a light dragoon, some would act like an Indian in the act of scalping, some would slide or scoot on the floor, with the rapidity of a serpent, which termed sailing in the boat to the Lamanites, preaching the gospel. And many other vain and foolish maneuvers, that are unmeaning, and unprofitable to mention. Thus the devil blinded the eyes of some good and honest disciples. I write these things to show how ignorant and undiscerning children are and how easy mankind is led astray notwithstanding the things of God that are written, concerning his kingdom.

These things grieved the servants of the Lord, and some conversed together on this subject, and others came in and we were at Joseph Smith Jr. the Seers, and made it a matter of consultation, for many would not turn from their folly, unless God would give a revelation, therefore, the Lord spoke to Joseph saying:

[text of D&C 50 quoted]

(John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 6, paragraphs 7-9)

Excerpt from Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt

As I went forth among the different branches, some very strange spiritual operations were manifested, which were disgusting, rather than edifying. Some persons would seem to swoon away, and make unseemly gestures, and be drawn or disfigured in their countenances. Others would fall into ecstasies, and be drawn into contortions, cramp, fits, etc. Others would seem to have visions and revelations, which were not edifying, and which were not congenial to the doctrine and spirit of the gospel. In short, a false and lying spirit seemed to be creeping into the Church.

All these things were new and strange to me, and had originated in the Church during our absence, and previous to the arrival of President Joseph Smith from New York.

Feeling our weakness and inexperience, and lest we should err in judgment concerning these spiritual phenomena, myself, John Murdock, and several other Elders, went to Joseph Smith, and asked him to inquire of the Lord concerning these spirits or

manifestations.

After we had joined in prayer in his translating room, he dictated in our presence the following revelation:--[D&C 50] Each sentence was uttered slowly and very distinctly, and with a pause between each, sufficiently long for it to be recorded, by an ordinary writer, in long hand.

This was the manner in which all his written revelations were dictated and written. There was never any hesitation, reviewing, or reading back, in order to keep the run of the subject; neither did any of these communications undergo revisions, interlinings, or corrections. As he dictated them so they stood, so far as I have witnessed; and I was present to witness the dictation of several communications of several pages each.

This inquiry was made and the answer given in May, 1831.
(Parley P. Pratt, Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, page 48)

Excerpt from John Carter Journal

...while the Elders were gone to the Missouri and while I was here [in Amherst], it seemed as though I was placed in the frontiers of the armies of the pit [of hell]. For, I had not been there long before I began to be tried with exercise and transactions that took place in the Church. One principle thing that became a trial to my mind was certain exercises that they called visions that individuals had. The first of them that I saw was at Mr. Barana's house in Amherst.

On seeing them, I was doubtful concerning them, and did not know what to do, for I did not know as I could depend on my own views as well as I could on some others that were present, that I supposed had more knowledge in the work than I, and I saw that they fellowshipped the exercises. I then endeavored to lay hold of the throne of grace for to know more concerning the same, but could not obtain a union with that falling spirit that was in the meeting. I at length came to the conclusion that I would kneel down and pray in faith that every false spirit should depart from the meeting. And I thought whether I or these visionary persons, as they called them, had any spirit, that if I prayed in faith it would depart accordingly. I kneeled down and prayed, and I thought I prayed in faith. Now, when I had earnestly prayed to the Lord and had ceased to pray vocally, I found there was some considerable difference in the meeting, for when I began to pray there were two of them that lay prostrate in what some of them call a vision. But, after I had prayed a

few minutes, they come suddenly out of them and were clothed in their right mind. I, on seeing this, felt considerably well convinced in my own mind that these exercises were not good.

But, after the meeting, I conversed with some of the Elders, and I found that were full in the belief that these kind of visions were from a good spirit. I then, after seeing them, and even all the Church so confirmed, that the exercises were of the Lord, that I began to conclude that I had been mistaken and began to think that the reason their visions were broken off as above mentioned while I was at prayer was because I was so far inferior to my glorious privilege under this influence.

I was led to conclude that those exercises were of the Spirit of the Lord, though at times I was led to grieve very much concerning them until at length I provided by a revelation that had been given to the Elders concerning Spirits that these Spirit visionary exercises, as they were called, were not of the Lord. I proved them in the following manner. It was at a time when I was with Silvester Smith. Smith was attending to a meeting on what is called the middle ridge in Amherst in Ohio. Here at a meeting, as we were about to attend to the administration of the communion, there was a young woman taken with an exercise that brought her onto the floor. And because I doubted of such a manner of influences in public congregations, I requested Brother Silvester that we should try that spirit according to the revelation that God had given. He immediately complied with my request. We then knelt down and asked our Heavenly Father in the name of Christ, that if that spirit that that Sister possessed was of him that He would give it to us, and we prayed in faith, but we did not receive that spirit. We then arose and I got upon my seat, silent for some minutes. But, Brother Sylvester arose and laid hands upon the Sister, but this was not as the commandment directs, for the command reads thus:

Wherefore it shall come to pass that if you behold a spirit manifest that ye cannot understand and ye receive not that spirit ye shall ask the Father in the name of Jesus and if he give you not that spirit then ye may know that is not of God. Not with railing accusation, that ye be not overcome. Neither with boasting, nor rejoicing, lest you be seized therewith.

Now, after Silvester had made some communication, which was not proclaiming against the spirit as I believed it had ought to

have been, that is against the spirit that we had prayed concerning, I then arose and proclaimed against that spirit with a loud voice. But, this was very trying to all the brethren present, for they, about all of them, believed that it was of God. And, now I had some sore conflicts with Satan, for he told me that I had lost all my influence in the Church, and to be sure it apparently was very much so. But, I, after [having] contemplated, for I had realized that if I had the approbation of my Heavenly Father, it was better than to have the good will of many deceived brethren. Having these views, I felt that grace was sufficient to bear me above my trials.

But, I, after making this sacrifice, was immediately possessed with a greater gift of the word than I ever was before, so that my influence instead of decreasing, began to increase. The next Sabbath, after the Sabbath that I proclaimed against the above-mentioned spirit, we met on the Northridge for [a] meeting. Here at this day's meeting, I experienced a marvelous display of the Spirit.

Yet in the fore part of that part of the exercise that I experienced, it seemed to me as though I was almost overwhelmed with an awful influence from the powers of darkness, for I felt as a thick cloud of darkness upon my soul and mind. While in this state of mind, I cried to God mightily for help, and while in my earnestness in calling upon the Lord, the clouds of thick darkness burst from my soul, and I was quickly filled with the blessed influence of the Spirit, and was endowed with power from on high in a marvelous manner as I never was before.

I then was inclined by the Spirit to ask the Lord for what purpose I was thus marvelously exercised and immediately as I felt to make this inquiry, there was as at once a voice spoke unto me, "This is the fulfilment of My word to you, and this power that is given you is power over the spirit you proclaimed against." I then felt endowed with full power over that spirit that I had proclaimed against the Sabbath before, and from that time forth that spirit never came into the meeting when I was present. In this display of that power of God, I had one of the most infallible proofs of the divine origin of the above mentioned revelation.

This together with many other testimonies and the testimony of the Spirit of the living God has confirmed me beyond all doubt in the truth of this most glorious work. (John Carter Journal, pages 20-29, located with Historical Department of the Church, spelling and punctuation corrected)

Excerpt from A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints

During the fall and winter of A.D. 1830 and 1831, Kirtland was continually crowded. Persons came from all quarters inquiring after the new religion. Cowdery and his company left in the fall for the west, to find the spot, as some said, for the temple and place of gathering.

Many improprieties and visionary notions crept into the church, which tried the feelings of the more sound minded. Many young persons became very visionary, and had divers operations, of the spirit, as they supposed. They saw wonderful lights in the air and on the ground, and would relate many great and marvelous things which they saw in their visions. They conducted themselves in a strange manner, sometimes imitating Indians in their manoeuvres, sometimes running out into the fields, getting on stumps of trees and there preaching as though surrounded by a congregation, -- all the while so completely absorbed in visions as to be apparently insensible to all that was passing around them. I would here remark, however, that it was but a very few of the Church who were exercised in that way. The more substantial minded looked upon it with astonishment, and were suspicious that it was from an evil source. [...]

Other elders proceeded to erect churches in various places, and the work increased very fast. Smith remained in Kirtland. Those visionary spirits spoken of before continued in the church, and rose to such a height that the elders became so dissatisfied with them that they determined to have something done about it. Accordingly, they called upon the Prophet and united in prayer, and asked God to give them light upon the subject. They received a revelation through the Prophet, which was very gratifying, for it condemned these visionary spirits, and gave rules for judging of spirits in general. After a while these spirits were rooted out of the Church. Some time in May following a church was organized in Thompson, a township a few miles from Kirtland, at which time Isaac [M]orley and myself were chosen counsellors to the bishop, to assist him in his business, which was to receive consecrations of property, and attend to the temporal concerns of the Church.

Previous to this there was a revelation received, requiring the Prophet to call the elders together, that they might receive an

endowment. This was done, and the meeting took place some time in June. About fifty elders met, which was about all the elders that then belonged to the church. The meeting was conducted by Smith. Some curious things took place. The same visionary and marvelous spirits, spoken of before, got hold of some elders; it threw one from his seat to the floor; it bound another, so that for some time he could not use his limbs nor speak; and some other curious effects were experienced, but, by a mighty exertion, in the name of the Lord, it was exposed and shown to be from an evil source. (John Corill, A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1839, chapters 9-10, pages 16-18, available [here](#) and [here](#))

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