

“BE NOT DECEIVED, BUT CONTINUE IN STEADFASTNESS”

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Consider the following phrases:

“A cup of milk”

“A mis-spelled name”

“No available seating at the Kirtland Temple dedication”

“Correction by the Prophet on the manner of praying.”

What do you suppose these phrases have in common? In fact they are all things that caused people to apostatize from the church. How do you feel about the value of such things as an excuse for leaving the church? These reasons seem foolish, but are there any good reasons for turning away from the truth? Today’s lesson is on individual apostasy.

The phrases above and the stories that go with them will be explained later in lesson.

1. WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THE DECEPTIONS OF SATAN THAT LEAD US INTO APOSTASY.

Turn to D&C 50:2,3. What activity are the false spirits mentioned here engaged in?

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. And also Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you.

Why does Satan want to deceive us? Consider what the phrase “overthrow you” means in these verses. Might it mean more than overthrowing the

Church? What implications do these verses have for individual members?

One instance of members being deceived by Satan in the *Doctrine and Covenants* is found in D&C 28. Hiram Page, a member of the Church and one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon, had a stone and professed to be receiving revelations for the Church by its aid. Several members had been deceived by his claims, including Oliver Cowdery, to whom this revelation is directed. What was Oliver directed to tell Hiram Page about his “revelations”? (D&C 28:11) Why was it inappropriate for Hiram Page to receive revelations for the Church? (D&C 28:12)

In D&C 43, the Lord again speaks to the elders of the Church about this matter because of disturbances caused by people making false claims as revelators. The Lord here gives important instructions to the Church. What was his purpose in giving these instructions?

And this I give unto you that you may not be deceived, that you may know they are not of me.(D&C 43:6)

What had happened to cause the Lord to speak of this problem again in D&C 50:7?

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;

Explain that Satan has great power and a terrifying desire to “overthrow” us and thereby make us miserable. (See 2 Nephi 2:18,27) In 2 Corinthians 11:13, Paul wrote of those who were “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.” He also indicated that we should not be surprised at such things for Satan has great power. What particular Satanic power does Paul mention in 2 Corinthians 11:14? (He can transform himself “into an angel of light.”) Direct class members to read and consider D&C 128:20. Where did the event mentioned by Paul take place in this dispensation? (On the banks of the Susquehanna river)

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2. WE CAN REMAIN VALIANT IN OUR TESTIMONIES AND AVOID

DECEPTION.

The adversary has always been willing and able to use any means at his disposal to lead the disciples of the Lord astray. Consider the stories below:

THOMAS MARSH, PRESIDENT OF THE QUORUM OF THE TWELVE

. . . the wife of Thomas B. Marsh. . .and Sister Harris concluded they would exchange milk, in order to make a little larger cheese . . .it was agreed that the milk and strippings should all go together

. . . Mrs. Marsh, wishing to make some extra good cheese, saved a pint of strippings from each cow. . .

A quarrel arose and the matter was referred to the home teachers. They found Mrs. Marsh guilty of failing to keep her agreement. She and her husband were upset and, “an appeal was taken from the teacher to the bishop, and a regular Church trial was held. . . they [the bishop’s court] decided that . . . the woman had violated her covenant.

Marsh immediately took an appeal to the High Council . . . Not being satisfied [with their decision], he took an appeal to the First Presidency of the Church, and Joseph and his counselors had to sit upon the case, and they approved the decision of the High Council.

. . . Thomas B. Marsh then declared that he would sustain the character of his wife, even if he had to go to hell for it.

. . . and what next? He went before a magistrate and swore that the ‘Mormons’ were hostile to the state of Missouri

That affidavit brought from the government of Missouri an exterminating order, which drove some 15,000 Saints from their homes and habitations, and some thousands perished through suffering and the exposure consequent on this state of affairs.”

(President Gordon B. Hinckley, C.R., April 1984, pp.110,111; citations from *Journal of Discourses*, 3:283-284)

SIMONDS RYDER

The initial point of his apostasy is . . . interesting. It appears that some time after his baptism he was ordained an Elder of the Church (*Far West Record*, p. 4); and somewhat later informed by a communication signed by the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon, that it was the will of the Lord made known by the Spirit, that he should preach the gospel. Both in the letter he received and in the official commission to preach, however, his name was spelled R-I-d-e-r, instead of R-y-d-e-r, and is soberly stated in the *History of Disciples on the Western Reserve* (Hayden), that he thought if the "Spirit" through which he had been called to preach could err in the matter of spelling his name, it might have erred in calling him to the ministry as well; or, in other words, he was led to doubt if he were called at all by the spirit of God, because of the error in spelling his name! . . ." (*History of the Church*, 1, p. 261, note)

Simonds Ryder thereafter apostatized from the church. It may be of interest to class members to note that Mr. Ryder's name is spelled wrong still, on his tombstone.

FRAZIER EATON

When the [Kirtland] Temple was completed, there was a great manifestation of power. The brethren gathered together to its dedication. We considered it a very large building. Some nine hundred and sixty could be seated, and there would be room for a few to stand, the congregation had swelled to a little over a thousand persons . . . not all could get in; and when the house was full, then, of course, the doors were closed, and no more admitted. This caused Elder Frazier Eaton, who had paid seven hundred dollars towards building the house, to apostatize, because he did not get there early enough to the meeting. (George A. Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:09)

A GENTLEMAN FROM CANADA

I recollect a gentleman who came from Canada, and who had been a Methodist, and had always been in the habit of praying to a God who had no ears, and as a matter of course had to shout and halloo pretty loud to make him hear. Father Johnson asked him to pray in their family worship in the evening, and he got on such a high key, and hallooed so loud that he alarmed the whole village. Among others, Joseph came running out, saying, "What is the matter? I thought by the noise that the heavens and the earth were coming together," and said to the man, "that he ought not to give way to such an enthusiastic spirit, and bray so much like a jackass." Because Joseph said that, the poor man put back to Canada, and apostatized; he thought he would not pray to a God who did not want to be screamed at with all one's might. (George A. Smith, Journal of Discourses, 2:214)

These stories are a tiny sample of many that are available describing the apostasy of members of the Church who have been deceived. Ponder these accounts and identify the attitudes and weaknesses that enabled Satan to deceive these people. The following quote from President Gordon B. Hinckley might help you teach this concept.

President Hinckley said the story of the apostasy of Thomas Marsh

is worth telling to illustrate to all of us the need to be careful in dealing with small matters which can lead to great consequences." (C.R. April 1984, p. 110)

An official statement of the First Presidency addressed this problem.

From the days of Hiram Page . . . at different periods, there have been manifestations from delusive spirits to members of the Church. Sometimes these have come to the men and women who because of transgression became an easy prey to the Arch-

Deceiver. At other times people who pride themselves on their strict observance of the rules and ordinances and ceremonies of the Church are led astray by false spirits (Improvement Era, September 1913, pp. 1148-49)

In our own day the prophets continue to warn us about attitudes that will lead us away from the safety of our covenants and our prophetic leadership. President Lee warned

There are those in the Church who speak of themselves as liberals who, as one of our former presidents has said, “read by the lamp of their own conceit.” (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 373) One time I asked one of our Church educational leaders how he would define a liberal in the Church. He answered in one sentence: “A liberal in the Church is merely one who does not have a testimony. (*Ensign*, June 1971, p. 7)

The experience of the Church in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois teaches us that the worst enemies of the church are those who once belonged, then turned away from and against it. Invite class members to briefly give examples of those who left the church and then turned against it. Such names as Simonds Ryder, Warren Parrish, Ezra Booth, William Phelps, Thomas Marsh, John Whitmer, and William Law are a few of the many that might be mentioned. Joseph Smith commented on the increased danger of opposition from one who belongs to the Church and then opposes it. He said:

I am exposed to far greater dangers from traitors among ourselves than from enemies without, although my life has been sought for many years by the civil and military authorities, priests and people of Missouri . . . I have had pretended friends betray me. All the enemies on the face of the earth may roar and exert all their power to bring about my death, but they can accomplish nothing, unless some who are among us and enjoy our society, have been with us in our councils, participated in our confidence, taken us by the hand, called us brother, saluted us with a kiss,

join with our enemies, turn our virtues into faults, and, by falsehood and deceit., stir up their wrath and indignation against us, and bring their vengeance upon our heads. (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, VI, 152)

Why do apostates so often attack the organization to which they once belonged?

These are only a few of the warnings that have been given over the years. We must be constantly attentive to the counsel of those whom the Lord has placed over us to guide us along the straight and narrow path. What kinds of challenges or deceptions have caused people to leave the church in our own day?

The revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants, and those received through living prophets, give us sufficient information and direction to avoid deception and apostasy. The major points are:

a. Practice the Law of Common Consent

What commandment did the Lord give to the Church in D&C 26:2? (All things must be done by common consent). The term *common consent* refers to the practice in the church by which all actions must be approved by the vote of those who be affected. The vote is sustaining in nature, not nominating. The proposals are made by the leaders, under the influence of the Spirit. Members affected by those proposals signify their willingness to be so led through the use of common consent. What must happen before any one is ordained to any office in the Church? (D&C 20:65)

There are at least two major purposes for this requirement that all things be done by the vote or the voice of the Church. First, our sustaining vote makes us accountable for our actions with regard to our leaders and their counsel. President Harold B. Lee taught, “When you vote affirmatively you make a solemn covenant with the Lord that you will sustain, that is, give your full loyalty and support, without equivocation or reservation, to the

officer for whom you vote. (Harold B. Lee, C.R., April 1970, p. 103)

A second purpose for this order of things in the true Church has to do with the opportunity it presents to Church members to know those who are called to preside and administer in the affairs of the Church. What requirement is made of those who go forth to preach the gospel? (D&C 42:11) Why is it important that “it is known to the Church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the Church”? If someone were to take the stand in your branch or ward and claim to be a local leader or a member of the presiding quorums of the Church, how would you know if he was or was not telling the truth? Display for class members the page in a recent Conference Issue of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* [are these photos published in the *Liahona*?] which shows photos of all General Authorities. Allow class members to comment on the purpose of these photos.

b. Know the order of the Church

From time to time, members of the Church, or former members, have made claims of secret revelations or secret ordinations. What is wrong with these claims? What principle does the Lord emphasize in D&C 28:2 regarding this matter? Who is to receive revelations and commandments for the Church? What does the Lord say to anyone who attempts to give direction to the man who presides in this Church? (D&C 28:6) Joseph Smith said that

it is contrary to the economy of God for any member of the Church, or any one, to receive instructions for those in authority higher than themselves; therefore you will see the impropriety of giving heed to them. (*History of the Church*, 1:138)

What law does the Lord give concerning this matter in D&C 43:5? What do you think the Lord means when he says that “he that is ordained of me shall come in by the gate . . .”? (D&C 43:7--People who preside and teach in this Church must receive authority to do those things in the way the Lord has revealed)

c. Be familiar with the scriptures and know the doctrine.

Many times the Lord has directed his people to study the scriptures. How does Psalms 119:105 describe the scriptures or the word of the Lord? What can the scriptures help us learn? (D&C 11:16) For what purpose are the scriptures (the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon) given? (D&C 33:16) President Harold B. Lee taught the Regional Representatives, "If we are not reading the scriptures daily, our testimonies are growing thinner, our spirituality isn't increasing in depth." (Cited in *Ensign*, June 1971, p. 109)

What danger are we in if our testimonies are shrinking or our spirituality is not increasing? President Lee also gave counsel about where we must look for answers to our questions when he said, "I don't dare answer any of your questions unless I can find an answer in the standard works or in the authoritative declarations of presidents of the Church." (*Ensign*, December 1972, p. 3) Invite class members to ascertain the truthfulness of the things they teach or are taught by checking sources and documentation whenever possible. President Lee's counsel is a powerful antidote to deception.

Elder Joseph F. Smith explained why a lack of knowledge of the truth is so dangerous:

Bless your souls, apostates speak in tongues, apostates prophesy; apostates claim to have marvelous manifestations. And what is that to us? The trouble is, we know so little of the truth ourselves and we . . . live by it so poorly that almost any little jackanapes [a conceited, impertinent, presumptions person] in the country may rise up and claim he has had a vision, or some marvelous dream, and however absurd or untrue it may be, he may find believers and followers among those who profess to be Latter-day Saints. (C.R. April 1900, p. 40)

In D&C 50, the Lord gives important instructions about how to recognize teachings that are not from him. How must the word of truth be preached? (D&C 50:17,18) How must this preaching be received? (D&C 50:19,20)

What other qualities must divine teachings have? (D&C 50:23,24) In addition, teachings in the Church must conform to the doctrine and standards of the Church. Elder Harold B. Lee explained:

I don't care what his position is. If [someone] writes something or speaks something that goes beyond anything that you can find in the standard Church works, unless that one be the prophet, seer, and revelator—please note that one exception—you may immediately say, “Well, that is his own idea.” And if he says something that contradicts what is found in the standard Church works . . . you may know by that same token that it is false, regardless of the position of the man who says it. (“The Place of the Living Prophet, Seer, and Revelator,” Address to Seminary and Institute Personnel, BYU, 8 July 1964)

d. Be obedient and do your duty so that the Spirit can guide and direct you.

After giving instructions about Satan's efforts to deceive and overthrow us, and about deceivers and hypocrites in this the true Church, what warning does the Lord give to help us avoid deception? (D&C 50:9) How will a commitment to righteousness and truth assist us in keeping ourselves and our families safe from deception? Read the following quote given by Elder Heber J. Grant:

There is but one path of safety to the Latter-day Saints, and that is the path of duty. It is not a testimony, it is not marvelous manifestations, it is not knowing that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true; that it is the plan of Salvation. It is not actually knowing that the Savior is the Redeemer, and that Joseph Smith was his prophet that will save you and me; but it is the keeping of the commandments of God, the living the life of a Latter-day Saint. (C.R., April 1915, p. 82)

Conclusion

Turn to D&C 6:34.

Therefore, fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail.

What will protect us from the combined efforts of earth and hell? Two homes were built on the edge hill in a small community in Arizona. Because the soil contained so much clay, special precautions were in order. One of the builders refused to drive a nail or pour a cup of concrete until he had driven huge metal posts through the soil to the bedrock below. Only then did he build. His neighbor, saved both time and effort by laying a shallow foundation and raising the walls quickly. But rains came. The area was deluged, the soil soaked. The house built on something other than rock settled and cracked, with three-inch gaps between the bricks of two walls. But the other house stood firm. It was built on the rock. If we want to be safe from the efforts of Lucifer and his followers to deceive and to overthrow us, we must build our lives on the rock—the gospel—of Jesus Christ, by doing our duty; by doing the things the Lord has commanded.

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