

(SERMON SERIES.)

SUPPLEMENT TO THE SAINTS' HERALD.

LAMONI, IOWA, APRIL 15, 1893.

[Reported for the Herald by E. Stafford.]

SERMON BY PRESIDENT JOSEPH SMITH,

DELIVERED AT LAMONI, IOWA, NOVEMBER, 13, 1892.

Subject, INDIVIDUALITY IN OBEDIENCE.

It has been a long time since I had the pleasure of addressing those who gather in this chapel to hear discourses on themes connected with the gospel, and I feel a great deal like a stranger before a strange congregation. It will be in that sense almost that I shall address you. The text, if it be needful to take one, will be found in 1 Corinthians tenth chapter and twenty-third verse: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." One of the reasons why I have chosen this text is this: The world (and I use the word *world* to signify the people that are in it) have fallen into strange ways, and there is an infinite variety of opinions or conceptions of things on almost all subjects; and no one may safely predict what may be the ruling thought that will be in any given direction for any length of time. And upon the subject of religion there has always been, there is now, and probably always will be, a great variety of opinions; and there will be a great deal of sentiment held and expressed in regard to all phases of it.

I know of no way in which I may settle the question of my duty to God and to man satisfactorily to myself and with benefit to others except by canvassing, so far as I may, what interest I may have in it and what may be required of me; and when I have decided that question I have decided,

and probably for others approximately, as to what is my duty and every other man's duty in the premises. The opinion seems to prevail (I have no objection to it specially) that men are under the necessity of obedience when they shall become so fully convinced that they cannot think otherwise than that which leads them to obedience. Possibly the only fault I can find with this proposition this morning, or at least that I feel to now find with it, is this: that from the amount that has been written, the amount that is being said, the wondrous variety of conclusions expressed in regard to it and its claims, there should seem to be, to those accepting this opinion, no other way by which individuals can be brought to that condition than that they have to be forced to obedience. But so long as we concede that religion has its basis in the human desire, in the human inclination, and its works are right in the human heart instead of in the mental regions only, I do not know as we can come to any distinct conclusion as to who or what shall exercise the power to compel our action in the premises. I do not propose that my individuality, my will, or volition, shall ever be brought into subjection to anything that shall dominate to the extent that I have no choice either in regard to the conclusions of my mind, or to the expression of what my conclusions may be. I remember how my heart revolted when I heard some

years ago of the singular dominating power of President Young among and over those who were his associates. It is related of him that on one occasion Elder Orson Hyde, one of the Twelve, was preaching in his presence; and like a good many others who think they must address the congregation as though it was a town meeting, he addressed his speech to President Young, turning toward him and seeming to be preaching at him, in the sense that a good many speakers are in the habit of doing. It enraged President Young, and he stopped him, saying, "Hold on, Brother Orson." (He was wearing at the time a broad-brimmed hat; he took his hat off and told a man in the congregation to go down to the end of the hall and put it on a chair, and when he had done so Elder Young said) "Orson, you preach at that hat." And Brother Orson did so. I remember that I thought that if I had been Elder Orson Hyde I would have taken my own hat and would have gone out of that hall. But, of course, being with the rest of his brethren under such domination, they had become like unto slaves; and the idea of salvation under such a rule, it seems to me, would be a mistake, and freedom a mistake also.

Now I read in the Scriptures that the Savior says in reference to the truth, that if any man should have it he should be "free indeed." And my conception of freedom is, privilege; and I use a strong term here, because I made a distinction between right and privilege. A man has the privilege to do wrong, but no right to do wrong; a man has the liberty to do wrong, but no right to do wrong; and my conception of liberty or privilege is to determine for myself, and subject myself to a measure rather than to be compelled by outside influences or that which may propose to dominate me. My idea of liberty and right in this

sense is to me an enlarged one, and opens up an extensive field, and it is that no man has the right to dominate over another as to what he should think, or speak, or do; but having the liberty to examine what is presented before him, should have the privilege to think about it, and the liberty to make up his mind for himself in regard to it; and having done that, to speak of it, and to make the best use of it he can. But having this right, if a man is guided by human wisdom alone, he may be led astray; and we find a great deal of unrest in the world that warrants this conclusion, especially on the subject of religion, one thinking this doctrine is right, another thinking an opposite one is right, etc.; and so constituted are we that when we think that a thing is right the most of us make the assertion that it is right.

When I say that I believe a thing is so, I have gone to the extent of my privilege, not having the right to say that this or that is right, unless there is something or some power which is over and above me that has decided what is the standard of right in the premise, and I bring myself in subjection to it. When I have done that I can conceive of what the work is, and give my credence to it; I am not the author of it, but become subject to it by choice. And in the question of religion there is no organized body extant on the face of the earth—I believe I speak advisedly so far as history is concerned—that can trace its authority back to Jesus Christ in the line of perfect succession; and there are some men who have gone so far as to say that there are no human organizations among men, called churches, that are of divine origin. One of the ablest ministers in the East conceded that church organizations were something like your town organizations—nothing divine about them, they being all of

human origin, established for the purpose of supplying human necessity; and that while they served that purpose they were acceptable to man and to God. Your speaker is not inclined to accept that idea, unless it be said that there is no religion only that which is due to human origin. And if that be true, then obedience to the law of God for citizenship in the kingdom of God is a mistake, and all things so far as God is concerned would be lawful to me; that is to say, if there be nothing in conflict to God, then everything which I have the power to do is lawful for me to do—there is no law against it. But the Apostle Paul said that there was a law against sin; and under its operation he found that sin had revived, and he had died. What did he die to? He did not die to human necessity, to the wants of the flesh, nor did he die to the obligations of the law of the land where he dwelt. He was the same physically as he was before, but in him sin revived when the command, the law of God came; and we understand that the consciousness of sin revived, and he died—was dead in sin; but through obedience to the law of righteousness he became dead to sin, and was made alive in righteousness; was made a free man in Christ Jesus.

I have always thought that the Apostle Paul was a wonderful character; and one of the most wonderful qualifications in his character was that he made a close examination of all things around him, and was very zealous in the performance of that which he thought was his duty, what he thought was right. When he had decided, he marched forward without reference to what anybody else might say in regard to him, and proposed to be judged of God, and of him only. And what did he do under such a condition as this? He did what

every man ought to do. "But, Brother Smith, the Apostle Paul had something to move him on that you and I have not," says one. I admit, in a sense, that that is true; but do you not know that when the apostle had heard the voice, unless he had consented that it was the Lord, unless he had subjected his intellect to the thought that it was the Lord that spoke to him, he never would have gone down to the street "called Straight" to inquire for Ananias, the servant of Christ, whom he was instructed would tell him what to do to be saved. Paul was educated in and was imbued thoroughly with the Jewish philosophy, and he would have said, "This is not God's voice; there is no such thing as a Christ; he is an imposter;" and he would have gone on his way, and would not have ceased to persecute the Christians. But when he was arrested in his career he stopped; when he saw this vision and learned that it was not his duty to persecute the saints he cried, "Who art thou Lord?" "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest," was the reply; and when this had come to him, the difficulty arose with him, "What shall I do?" All things were lawful to him then; he had gone down with writs in his pocket to serve them on persons, agreeably to the Jewish law. I am thankful that we have not now the same political power joined with the same religious intolerance, although we have some who would make good Puritans, and would persecute the Quakers and others if it were in their power. I presume Paul's mind had been worried before that, and when he became satisfied in his own mind in regard to the matter, his anxiety was to know what he should do. I believe that the apostle thought, and thought with a great deal of intelligence. Now he says, "This man whom I have despised is the Christ;

he it is that was to come, the Messiah; I will go and do that which he tells me to do; I will bring myself into subjection to the law proclaimed by him. Did he wait to consult his brethren of the council as to what he should do? No, he did not; he immediately began to preach Jesus, to prove out of the Scriptures that he was the Messiah. It was a wonderful thing; I have thought about it a great many times, —I think about it now,—the readiness with which he went forth, and the indefatigable integrity and zeal which that servant of Christ manifested in the service of his Master are simply admirable.

The question that it leaves me to solve is this: that if there be a superior Intelligence that rules in the heavens above and in the earth, how may I bring my intelligence into service with his? I have said that I ought not to wait to be compelled to do my duty. We have in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants a teaching handed down to us which says that he that waiteth to be commanded in all things is a slothful servant. You are aware that to escape this charge a man must bring himself to be a living sacrifice, which is his reasonable duty. When I was a boy my idea of a sacrifice was that it was something slain which was offered upon an earthly altar; and I thought the Apostle Paul's was something of that character when he asked, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" I have heard an explanation of this in this wise; that malefactors had something bound to them, a dead body of some kind, and they were obliged to carry it with them until its decay was completed. But the apostle's statement is, "a living sacrifice," which is a "reasonable service." To me the idea of a dead sacrifice pleasing the living God is a great mistake. It may have been the case in ancient

times that when a man did that which was wrong that he had to bring to the altar a propitiatory offering and do sacrifice for that wrong. If a man has transgressed several of the ordinances of the town of Lamoni, the officer puts his hand upon him and brings him around to the justice of the peace; and when tried they fine him and exact a penalty. If he transgress again, they do not bring all the charges at once, but try him upon each specific charge, and then when he is tried on another they may assess a fine as a penalty, or confine him in jail for the one crime; they cannot measure all the crimes and assess the extreme punishment at once. They were a little wiser under the Mosaic economy; they measured each crime, and for one required a dove, for another a heifer, according to the greatness of the crime; and for specific ones they stoned a man to death. We have grown more tender-hearted, and do not take a man's life; but we put him in the penitentiary, and take care of and suffer nothing to annoy or to hurt him. We do not do here as they did in those olden times.

All things being lawful unto Paul, all are equally as lawful unto me, under the same circumstances. Why? Because all thing that are lawful tend to edify, and the expediency of which is of that importance that it aids, strengthens, and builds up in a mental or philosophical sense. But the word *expediency*, letting me have the interpretation of it for the purpose of this morning's discourse, is of a broader significance than that, and signifies that which takes hold of what is good and true, and enables us to obtain a knowledge of it, and when we have learned what it is to appropriate it, and make good use of it. When we make inquiry as to what things are lawful, there are many things that are lawful, so far as the absolute law of

the State is concerned, but are not expedient for me, for the reason that I have made up my mind to live by the better covenant, the higher law. It was very lawful for me to vote for Mr. Harrison, but it has proved to be very inexpedient. [This remark producing a smile on the faces of the congregation, the speaker said: "I want to wake these folks up; people go to sleep under religion who will be wide awake under politics."]

I examine this question with the thought that I have a soul at stake; not that my soul has ever yet been condemned, but that having a consciousness of something that is higher and better, if I do not reach out after it voluntarily but abide till it descends upon me, then I am under this strange condemnation. I call it condemnation because of that which brings to me that which is of a blessed character, and I am condemned because I have waited till I was compelled or forced into obligations to that which is good. Now a brother that I met, not a great many years ago, (there was a little discussion took place in this room, yes, a little discussion,)—the brother was endeavoring to show that the religion which was instituted by the "Palmyra Seer" was of such a character that it was faulty in its nature, instituted by a man of blood, and had a revengeful characteristic in it; and as an offset to this statement, though it was not proved, it was stated that Jesus Christ would come, "taking vengeance on them that know not God." If God decides that which is right, we must take into consideration that he has the right to command; and he has said that if we wait to be compelled in order to serve him, or to make up our minds to the obedience of his law, then we are under condemnation. There is no merit attaching to people who are compelled

to obey. If there is a reward, what is the reward to be given for?

I admit, that so far as intoxicating drinks are concerned, my body is free from any influences of that kind; I enjoy physical freedom from them because my flesh is free from the effects of alcohol; but is there any moral excellence attaching to me for that? I say no. My brother here may have served his appetite for alcohol until he had become a perfect slave to it, subject to all the misery and woe consequent thereto; but he becomes satisfied that this condition must be removed, and he ceases to serve his appetite in this direction until his flesh becomes free from the taint and influence of stimulants of any kind. Unto him attaches a great degree of moral excellence because he has overcome and brought himself under subjection to the law; but while I have received physical freedom from that which comes upon the flesh, without any effort of mine, he also has come under that condition through strenuous effort to overcome an evil appetite, and moral excellence is accredited to him, but none to me.

This idea we present in illustration of the obedience that is required to the gospel that is imposed by Jesus Christ, by reason of which we may bring ourselves to a condition of relationship with him. God does not now require any human sacrifices like Abraham was commanded to perform in the offering of Isaac, neither does he ask any services that are unlawful or inexpedient. From the fact that when the Apostle Paul says all things are lawful to him but not expedient, he simply means that he brought himself to the expediency of the law, and did that which was expedient and also lawful, and let that which was unlawful go; and nothing that was inexpedient could be lawful to him under that

condition of mind. In this sense we bring ourselves into subjection to the law of Christ.

This morning we have had an exhibition of the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit. I knew the individual who has been baptized, before confirmation. I have known her for years, and it must be by her own understanding that she has reached the conclusion to render obedience to the law of God. And did she wait to be compelled? O no! She brought herself into subjection unto the law of the Spirit of life, and is entitled to the reward, entitled to the service, and all that the service brings. How is it with the rest of us? How shall it be when the time comes when it is said in the Scriptures that "every knee should bow, . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"? I think if I am to wait till my child is compelled to obey me by absolute punishment, that the obedience so obtained brings reward, I don't feel to reward him if his obedience is at the end of the rod. I think that the glory that shall attach to the Christian is greater to him that voluntarily brings himself unto the law of Christ than to him that waits till he is compelled or forced to give glory to God because of his universal power brought to bear upon mankind. I for one think that willing service is the most acceptable in my religious warfare. I remember that a reverend gentleman speaking to me in regard to my religious belief said, "Mr. Smith, I wonder that an intelligent man can believe as you do." I said, "Sir, do you know what I believe? Did you ever hear me preach? Did you ever have any man representing me to tell you what I believed?" I said, "How do you know?" He said, "I heard one of your elders speak once." "Well,

what did he say?" "Why, I heard him give a dissertation upon the resurrection." "So, then," I said, "because you heard one of the elders of the church discuss the doctrine of the resurrection, and never heard me say anything about what our people believe, you receive that as a reason why you say you wonder that I believe as I do, do you? You don't know what I believe." Here is a sample of how the Latter Day Saints are judged by many concerning their belief; he expressed his astonishment that an intelligent man as I appeared to be should believe what I did, and he did not know what I believed. He had formed his belief from the general idea entertained by the religious world.

It has been said by some that when a man brings himself into obligation to the church, he puts himself into servitude, and he becomes a slave. I never experienced anything of that kind. It has never been expressed to me, in any sense in any obligation to God, that I was a slave. When I have been striving to put forth an effort in the service of Christ I have felt the greatest liberty. I have felt that all that was true in the universe was mine to use; and along with that there was the assurance, the absolute assurance, that no truth, wherever it might be found, would conflict with the truth I had received or would ever receive; that every truth came from God, whence all truth emanates; and that there never can be any single truth that can be brought together with any other truth but what they will agree, and this by reason of its being a part of one grand chain of truth, every separate part of which will agree with every other when the connecting link is found. No one man or set of men upon the earth are in possession of all truth; but the day may come when we shall become con-

scious that that which is not discovered by man will be revealed, and all the truths will be linked together in one unspeakable whole; and for that reason the apostle could urge, "All things are lawful unto me."

These truths that we as a people teach were taught by the ancient saints, by Christ and his apostles; and he has given us the right to use them. And it is a fortunate circumstance that we have never been obliged to take back one single truth, neither from the Holy Scriptures nor from the revealed truths given direct to us as a people. This being the case, I can say to you in confidence, whoever you may be, Lay hold on the promises in the Scriptures by reason of which you may feel able and willing to bring yourselves into relation with that divine truth developed by Jesus Christ, your Lord and Master, and go up the shining way; and the light of God shall shine down before you to show you how to go onward and upward, unto the effulgence of the perfect day.

I remember one time,—I have told it to some of you, most of you may have heard it,—that a gentleman by the name of Wright, (his wife was one of the best friends that mother had in Nauvoo,) the old lady, his wife, used to come down to our meetings where we held them, from 1861 to 1864, and the old gentleman was very much put out about it, so he undertook to ridicule her out of it. He said he had dreamed a dream—his house stood where he could look down the slope to

the river, one of the most beautiful sites on the banks of the river. He said that in his dream he looked down to the foot of Main street, and saw a great multitude of people assembled together. After awhile he saw two persons wade out into the river, and in a little while he saw a ladder that had its top in the sky and its foot down in the water. He saw a person, a fleshy woman, try to climb the ladder, and said that he saw that I was boosting her. This was not the peculiar part of the dream. He said he saw these people standing in the water, and they looked like ordinary people; but as they climbed the ladder they began to change, and their clothing began to be white, and when they reached the top their clothing shone like the sunlight in its brightness. I got hold of the dream, and one time when I found him present in the meeting I told about a man who dreamed a dream and related how that he said that he saw a ladder, like unto Jacob's, whose foot rested in the water and the top in the sky; "And" I said, "that is the gospel ladder; for its foot is in the water, and all those who attempt to climb that ladder must first go through the waters of baptism before they can climb to heaven." And as they climb up that ladder their clothing shall shine, their obedience to God shall make their clothing shine pure and white, which is "the righteousness of saints," which we are counseled to buy and forsake it not.

KEEP OUT OF DEBT.

ELDERS in the field, representative men, should bear in mind that not only are the spiritual and intellectual standing and honor of the church intrusted to them, but the moral and material or financial standing and honor are also confided to them.

The church is to them who are without what the representative men make it to be; and if by any chance an elder is a good preacher, an apparently devoted and spiritual-minded man in his public discourses and professions, and is a careless, indifferent man in his care of private or public finances, the cause he represents is largely measured by his course in temporal affairs, to the disparagement of his professions and his public speech.

If he is a persistent borrower of moneys which he fails to repay, for any cause unexplained, or unexplainable; a continuous beggar for personal favors, gifts of moneys or goods, by actual request, or innuendo, no matter how small or how great the value of the thing asked for, he will sooner, or later find that he is not well received, or an unfavorable reputation will follow him everywhere.

The Saints are a peculiar people, sensitive in regard to personal affairs, and jealous almost to a fault of the reputation of the traveling and presiding ministers. Many have great pride in a brilliant, taking talker; but the most favor a careful, painstaking, consistent man, one whose life out of the pulpit commends him both to them within and without. An elder who borrows money carelessly, or recklessly, and fails to make payment, or to give satisfactory reason for his failure to pay; who spends money foolishly or recklessly for personal gratification, ease, or pleasure, impressing himself upon the people as one who does not care for either his own good financial standing, or that of the church, soon creates among the people a sentiment which clearly prevents him from reaching them to any good purpose.

An elder, who by careful observation,

learns how to take advantage of favorable opportunities to reach the attention of the people; and who will conduct himself properly both in and out of the pulpit when he has so attracted attention will impress himself upon them as being a man who is honest in his religious convictions and has a regard for his fellow men something like the "Savior's love for man." Such a man is not only considerate and wise in his pulpit discourses, but is also considerate of the personal courtesies and social amenities which in conduct commend a man to the favorable attention of those among whom his labors lie.

Debt is a burden for either minister or layman, and should be strenuously, positively avoided. A healthy German proverb is opposite, "Spend less than you earn; and you will always have enough and to spare." A thrifty man will of his daily income always put aside something to a reserve fund, however small that income may be. A great many of us brethren are not wise in this particular. Let us take a new warning from the portentous tokens of impending trouble in the commercial, monetary, and political world, and be ready when the crash comes. If any are in debt, get out as soon as possible; and where it is impossible to get out fully, do so as far as can be, and then make satisfactory terms with creditors for the remainder. Times will be so hard that if a man shall be made to pay by an enforced sale of what property he may have, he will be compelled to bear heavy sacrifices in values.

Traveling and presiding officers of the church are all admonished that one of the problems in human destiny which it is hoped the gospel will help man to solve, is the economic one of how a man shall maintain himself and help to sustain others less able or less fortunate than himself. One of the business maxims by which this can be done is, Keep out of debt; or if in debt, get out as soon as possible, and then keep out.