

A Mighty Change of Heart (<http://mightychangeofheart.com>)

"And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" Alma 5:14

Appendix

APPENDIX

My 54 Week Journey

I share this sacred account of my “born again” experience only that it may help another in his or her search to “come unto Christ.” (Moroni 10)

My quest for a difference in my life began in 1981. I knew there was more spiritually than I was getting through my church meetings. I was dissatisfied with my Sunday, only learning from other people, and began an in depth search of the scriptures. I read book after book, attended lectures, education weeks, and listened to devotionals. I had a hunger and thirst that could not be satisfied. I look back now and realize the yearnings I had were to lead me to the “mighty change.” I was so inexperienced in spiritual things I kept thinking my yearnings would be satisfied by books and other people’s ideas, rather than going to my Heavenly Father in prayer, and using the scriptures more.

The more I studied and learned with my head, deep in my heart I knew I knew nothing, especially about my Savior. There was more to the scriptures than stories and nice quotes, but they were sealed to me and they weren’t the sealed portion!!! They were sealed because my eyes were blind and my ears were dull of hearing.

In 1986 President Benson gave a talk about the Church being under condemnation. I was part of that and it made me feel very uncomfortable. I didn’t like being under condemnation from the Lord. This was the Lord’s servant and mouthpiece and I took very literally what He said. I wanted that lifted off me, not just me but my family, friends, and everyone. My study intensified. Some days I studied more than others. We had several children during this time so my days were hectic, but I spent time daily in study and prayer.

In the fall of 1992, after unending locked doors in my spiritual searching, feeling like I almost had it, but because I lacked pieces so I had nothing, I heard a talk that held the key. I learned about the children of Israel and how they, like us, were under condemnation. I learned what they lacked was the willingness to let the Savior's gift work for them, they wanted to do it themselves (That explains the 600 plus commandments). The Savior's gift-The Atonement-How did that apply in my life? Where did I fit in all of this? I knew a lot about the gift in my head, but my heart did not understand.

I had some traumatic family events shortly after this that stripped me naked spiritually. There was nothing there. I felt like a stained glass window that had been pushed out of its frame and lay on the floor in hundreds of pieces. I had been studying for 12 years. I had much head learning, but my heart had barely been used. The mourning all but stopped my progress. I was numbed emotionally. I was in a survival mode. I had no extended family support, my friends all left, I was alone. What I knew in my head really didn't matter much. I learned how "nothing" we are without our Heavenly Father and His Son, our Redeemer. I knew what King Benjamin's message to his people about out "nothingness." (Mosiah 2)

In December of '93 I read a talk about prayer and overcoming false beliefs. I realized I didn't know how to pray. I had a lot of false beliefs caused by "traditions of the fathers and disobedience." (D&C 93:39)

For Christmas I received a copy of the book "Experiencing The Mighty Change." I read this book. So many bits and pieces I had studied were all put together under one cover. This book literally saved me 20 more years of study. As I read this book, I realized this was what the Spirit, the study, and all the experiences were driving me towards. I didn't know what "born again" was. As I read the Book of Mormon, I discovered it was all through that holy book. No wonder President Benson was pushing us to read that book. No wonder we were under condemnation. The scriptures began to open.

On December 2, I began my journey-the day I heard the prayer talk. I began to pray about my false beliefs, the Savior, my condemnation. Three weeks later, when I received the "Mighty Change" book, I began to pray about born again also. I also began to fast. I didn't know until I read Mighty Change that I didn't know how to fast either.

This journey was a very lonely one. At the time I knew of no one who had had the born again experience except an author of one of the books I read. I called him several times (long distance so the calls were brief) to make sure I was on track, to see if the feelings I was experiencing were normal and other things. He was so kind to me. I could feel his goodness over the phone line. He strengthened me and I will be forever grateful to him for his help. I struggled so much because the path hadn't been cleared and very few people were willing to

speak to me about the subject. Now I know it was because of ignorance. We all have our own experience so it is a new path for each one. But I also feel to be strengthened by another is a great help during this most crucial and vulnerable time.

I decided I would fast every week. This was a challenge to me because I had blood sugar problems. I had to do it gradually but I now can fast a full 24 hours. Not only did I receive spiritual miracles, but physical miracles. What a blessing to have been healed from the blood sugar disorder I have been plagued with for years. What a wonderful blessing to participate in a true fast. It is a powerful testimony to me of the promises in Isaiah 58. Most important of all, the heavens were being opened to me.

I started getting up before my family every morning and start having “mighty prayer.” I used to think a mighty prayer was five minutes. What a privilege it is to talk to our Father at the beginning of every day and feel of His love for me revelation about original experiences which set them in place and tutored from on high and healed. (Talk about counseling!!!) I was made aware of my sins which were caused from these false beliefs (these come from disobedience or traditions of our fathers-D&C 93). I was made aware of all my sins. . .all of them. I knew of the hurt I had caused others and the impediment upon my own growth. I saw myself as Christ can see us, all the cover-ups, the sneakiness, the honors of men syndrome, my condemnation of others, all my self righteousness and everything that was my carnal man.

It was necessary for me to get some unlayering done. These were layers that were blocking the Spirit from being in full fellowship with me. It took a while for me to get through this process. I know now it was because I was mourning the deaths of three close loved ones and my heart had to go through the process slowly. I would feel the Spirit, the cleansing and all that comes with this for 1 -2 hours a day, 3-4 days a week. My husband, on the other hand, went through it in a few days with no let up.

I felt mourning for my errors and sins. This part of the experience was not very fun. I was mourning because of the distance they had put between me and my God. The mourning was physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. It was literal gut wrenching mourning and sorrow.

One day, as I was studying about the Savior, I saw Him in Gethsemane. This was my Lord struggling over the sins of the world. Struggling over my sins. I saw Him see me. I saw Him see my life. He saw all my filth and unworthiness and said, “Yes!!! I will do it!!! I love her!!!” He bought me with His blood. He did this for each person. As I watched Him I thought my heart would break. I felt as though my chest would explode. I sobbed as I felt His love and compassion for me. I felt His holiness, His goodness, His strength, His truth, His mercy. These words seem hollow to use to describe Him. I couldn’t bear to watch Him anymore. “Dear God” I cried, “Please, I cannot see this anymore.” I saw Him in agony a while longer, then the vision closed. I lay on the floor exhausted from what I had just witnessed.

My new life began with a wash of peace that filled and warmed my entire being. It was a feeling of burning throughout my whole body-but a sweet burning. The voice of the Lord came to me and said, "Your sins are forgiven." I didn't want to move. I could feel the warmth, the love, the joy, the total peace. I had the same experience the next morning and again on Sunday during the sacrament. December 16, exactly 54 weeks from the beginning of the journey. I turned it all over to the Lord. All of it I gave Him and He made me His. I knew my life was acceptable to Him. I was a new creature. I was gratefully His.

All the rest of my false beliefs He took. He took my sins. He took the condemnation I felt for myself and thus for others. He took all judgement from my heart, all the have to be's and need to be's and ought to be's. I remember these things and the accompanying state of being only when He brings it to my recollection. The guilt and torment, the heaviness and burden has been washed away.

I live for today. This moment of time and all is perfect in Him. I know the instant I do something offensive and take care of it or do not do or say it. The Spirit does a wonderful job tutoring. I have been blessed with the gift of joy, gratitude, compassion, and love. I have been blessed with discernment, to see into the hearts of people I interact with and know their motives, whether righteous or evil. The scriptures are being opened to me.

I am at the beginning of my walk with God (2 Nephi 9:41). I sing praises to Him. Without Him I am nothing, with Him I can do all He wants me to do. He is God. He is truth. He is no respecter of persons. He is merciful. This is a gift for all, to be bestowed on all. In order to know the attributes of God and have them burned into your heart, you must receive this gift. In The Lectures on Faith, Joseph Smith teaches about the attributes of God perfectly. This born again process teaches you these things about Him.

The world is a different place. I see it through new eyes and with the gift of a new heart. Everything is perfect. We all experience what we need to bring us to Christ if we allow it to happen. God is merciful!!! He pardoned me!!! a sinner, and truly I, as the weakest of all His disciples, He makes me strong.

I pray that the love, light, and joy of the savior may be with you. If you haven't had this experience, it is worth the journey. For me I had to go to Hell and back and it is worth it!!!!

I pray whoever may read this account may feel His Spirit upon you even as the warmth of the sunshine. I know God is our Father. I know by experience of this and also of our Savior Jesus Christ.

He Loves us!!! He died for us!!! He lives for us!!!!

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

The following experience is not that of any of the authors of this work. We obtained this copy of this person's experience just as we were completing our manuscript. We think you will find it very interesting and instructive.

A Personal Testimony of Jesus Christ
and the Reality and Power of His
Atonement in My Life

In June, 1974 I was baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was a glorious experience and I remember it well.

I never questioned the truthfulness of the gospel or of the Restoration. From the moment I heard the missionaries teach, I knew it was true. There was never even a flicker of doubt. It was like being reunited with an old and dear friend.

The spirit of repentance did not come upon me until the day I was baptized. Before that time I had received a testimony that the Gospel was true and that the Church of Jesus Christ had in fact been restored by the Prophet Joseph Smith. But the question of my sins had not been the object of my serious consideration until the day of my baptism. I was at the time, twenty-four years of age.

For me, the process of repentance began with my baptismal interview prior to my baptism. The interviewer was kind and considerate although his questions pierced my soul. I wept as I confessed my sins and admitted of my deep sorrow for my past life. My spirit was truly contrite as I entered into the waters of baptism. I wept openly throughout my baptism and confirmation as the spirit of the Lord testified to my heart of the tender mercies of a loving God. I had truly been born again to see the Kingdom of Heaven. I felt the burden of my sins lifted and I rejoiced with all my heart at my membership in Christ's true church.

Through it all I did not know that, although I had received the spirit of repentance prior to my baptism, I had not received the gift of full repentance; that, while I had been born again to "see" the Kingdom of heaven through the receipt of my testimony by the power of the Holy Ghost, yet I had not been born again to "enter" into the Kingdom of God and I had not actually received the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. While I had enjoyed a sanctifying experience that lifted the burden of my sins, yet I had not been sanctified unto a complete and unconditional remission of all my sins, including the effects of those sins. My knowledge of these heavenly truths did not come until later, in July of 1981.

For seven years, from 1974 until 1981 I was actively and zealously engaged in Gospel living. In December, 1975 my precious wife and I were married in the Arizona Temple. I was consumed with the desire to live the Gospel fully; to serve, teach, testify, study and pray fervently. And I did so continually. I was actively involved in missionary work, temple work and home teaching. I

strived to magnify all my church callings and took my membership in Christ's church very seriously, as I do to this day. I absorbed myself in Gospel and scripture study feeling that I couldn't read enough. I indeed hungered and thirsted after righteousness and truth and this hunger and passion has not subsided for even a moment, for even a heartbeat.

Through it all I enjoyed many spiritual experiences, sanctifying experiences. I have come now to describe such experiences as "contractions" leading to my spiritual birth. I felt the spirit of the Lord with me many times; I felt His love for me and felt a great love for Him and a desire to know Him. I was privileged to be an instrument in the Lord's hands several times in exercising the Priesthood. Miracles were performed and lives were blessed. It was a wonderful seven years; a time of growth, development and preparation; a time of gestation. Yet through it all I sensed that something was missing.

I could not describe what was missing in my life then, although now it is clear and understandable. Still, describing it to others is very difficult. It's like trying to explain the joy of parenthood to those who have never been parents.

In 1981 my life changed. For seven years the Lord had prepared my mind and my heart. My time was at hand. My Heavenly Father sent to me a son of God, a member of the church who was and is a true disciple of Christ, to draw me unto His Beloved Son. This blessed man carried within his soul the seed of Christ which he planted within my heart. Like all true endowments of the Spirit, only those who have the gift can confer it to others by the power of the Holy Ghost.

What was this seed of Christ? It was the blessed gift of pure testimony that enlivened within my soul the need and will to live spiritually. This is the endowment that ultimately induced the labor of the second birth.

The Spirit of the Lord bore witness to me that this man knew Christ. As we sat in my home one evening I felt the power of his testimony of the Savior as I had never felt it before. My soul was aflame with the desire to know the Lord as this man did, and I told him so.

The next morning as we were about to depart, my new friend boldly invited me to come to Christ. He urged me to pray more fervently until I received the baptism by fire; he called me to repent until I received a complete remission of my sins. His words were bold but kind and they sunk deeply unto the core of my heart. The seed of Christ had been planted. Little did I know what all of this would mean. This was a very difficult time in my life. At the time I was serving as the Stake Mission President in my stake. I was immersed in my calling and was enjoying a good measure of success. But I was self-employed at the time and my consulting practice was very slow. In fact, at the time I had no clients and was financially without means to provide for my family.

It was during this time that I was called to come home to Christ. Shortly after my friend departed I found myself in my office alone and without work. The Spirit called me one day as I sat behind my desk and prompted me to pray. I instructed my secretary that I did not want to be interrupted under any circumstances and then locked myself in my office and began to pour out my heart unto God.

I prayed that day and for two succeeding days. I prayed long and hard and for many things. But the primary intent and focus of my prayers was to know the Lord and to understand and appreciate the personal implications of the Atonement in my life.

On the third day, July 21, 1981, I found myself kneeling again by my chair in fervent prayer to know the Lord. Suddenly I saw myself praying and the presence of the Lord was beside me. As I watched, the Lord spoke to my mind and said, "Look." I looked and for the first time in my life I saw myself as I really was, through the eyes of Christ.

What I saw I cannot fully describe in words. My whole soul was illuminated and I saw with complete clarity and understanding the deepest recesses of my subconscious mind. I saw within the hidden nooks and crannies of my soul the effects of all my sins as well as all my sins of commission and omission which had been repressed into the hidden regions of my mind. I was completely transparent. Everything was now so painfully clear, my sinful motives, intentions and desires, all cleverly disguised and rationalized through years of self-talk. Even the good things I had done for the wrong reasons were flashed before my all-seeing eye. No act, word or deed escaped my view. I saw everything.

As I beheld myself thus, my mind was, to use Alma's words, "racked with torment" and "inexpressible horror." Several times I tried to shut out the vision but the Lord would not allow it. Each time I tried to turn away the Lord would say, "Look," and I continued to look into my soul. I wept and pleaded for the Lord to stop the vision. When I had finally seen everything the vision ended and there was darkness. I turned to find the Lord but He was no longer beside me.

The scene instantly changed and I found myself behind the brush on the outside of a garden clearing. Again a voice came to my mind and instructed me to look. My eyes turned to the garden clearing and there, in the midst, I saw my beloved Redeemer. Suddenly it became clear to me that I was witnessing His act of Atonement. But what transpired I was not prepared to see.

How can one explain with mortal words the agony of a God. Anything I say or write somehow diminishes the impact.

Be that as it may, I saw the love and suffering of the Christ and am a personal witness of it. I don't know how it is possible, but I was in Gethsemane on the day of His Agony and I saw in great and terrible detail with my eyes and heard in awful clarity with my ears that which is too sacred to describe to unprepared ears.

His sobs and His cries pierced my soul and I felt the wrenching of my heart with each audible groan or quivering convulsion of His body. Then came the revelation that broke my heart: “Behold the love of God for you and His suffering for your sins.”

It was too much to bear. As I became aware that He was suffering such agony for because of my.. sins, because of His love for a “soul so rebellious and proud as mine”, my heart broke and I thought I would die. Never had I sobbed and wept so violently and with such bitterness of soul. I never knew the body could sob as mine did. I never knew a heart could break as mine did. I never knew a broken heart would hurt as much as I hurt. I was in agony as never before. I thought my heart would stop and my head and chest would explode. I cried out and begged the Father to stop the suffering of my Friend and Elder Brother. “Stop it! Stop it! Please stop His suffering!” I wept, I sobbed and my body convulsed in anguish as I attempted to reach through the brush to hold Him, to somehow comfort Him. But His suffering did not stop and there was nothing I could do to help Him.

Finally, resolving myself to this hopeless state and wishing only to die for what I had done to Him, I cried out through my choking sobs, “Please forgive me! Please, dear God, forgive me for what I have done to my Savior. I am sorry, so very, very sorry for hurting Him so. It is enough,” I continued, “please stop His suffering. I will never again do anything to hurt Him. Never! Never!”

I continued to sob and plead for forgiveness until I was totally exhausted and lay slumped on the floor weeping hot tears of anguish and pain. My strength was exhausted and I was prepared to die when the vision stopped and the voice of the Lord said unto me, “My son, thy sins are forgiven thee.”

When I heard these words from my Savior I was filled with fire, which I later came to know was the endowment of charity. Never had I felt such love, such peace. I was overcome again unto great sobbing, but this time with joy.

So intense was the outpouring of God’s love through the fire of His Spirit that I felt as though my very life would end and my flesh would be consumed. I came to know by the spirit of revelation that my life was acceptable to the Lord; that I had been completely and unconditionally cleansed of all my sins and the effects of my sins; that I had been made holy, without spot — clean every whit — by His precious blood. I had been truly born again to enter into the Kingdom of God; I was redeemed from the fall; sanctified by the endowment of His perfect love, even charity. Through this experience I came to understand the meaning of total conversion; of justification and of sanctification; of full repentance.

I now know with a perfect knowledge that all men must be born again, or sanctified of the spirit, in order to receive their salvation and obtain their exaltation. I know now that only those who are truly born again can enjoy the blessings of the sanctified and can develop to the full stature of Christ. I know now that there is a difference between the righteousness of God and the righteousness of man; between full repentance and partial repentance; between a broken heart

and a contrite spirit; between receiving forgiveness from one's sins and a complete and unconditional forgiveness from the effects of the fall or the natural man; between an awakening of conscience which cultivates a sense of duty to God and man and a mighty change of heart which bears the fruit of charity toward God and all men.

I know now that the only way to Christ is through the offering of a broken heart and that the only way to offer such a sacrifice acceptably is to experience, in a personal way, the power and reality of the Atonement in our life; to understand and appreciate sufficiently the personal implications of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins and fallen nature. Perhaps this may come in different ways to different people, but the substance and results of the experience will, of necessity, always be the same. The greatest manifestation of God's love for us is in the Savior's suffering for our personal sins. It is the power of His suffering for us that draws us to Him in a complete sense and changes our heart totally. When our sacrifice of a broken heart has been accepted (i.e., justified) by the Lord, when we have fully repented of all our sins, then is our life acceptable (i.e., justified) unto the Lord. Sanctification, which is the effect or fruit of justification, totally cleanses and purifies the spirit and endows the person with a faith and hope in Christ, and with charity.

In his Appendix the following accounts from church history of the baptisms of fire of Heber C. Kimball, Lorenzo Snow and some others. While the accounts of their experiences as they have come down to us are nowhere near as detailed or as dramatic as the "Personal Testimony" they are certainly precious and edifying concerning this tremendous blessing that the Lord has for those who seek it.

The following is from "The Life Of Heber C. Kimball" by Orson F. Whitney, Bookcraft, 1943. Heber C. Kimball was baptized on April 16, 1832 in or near Mendon, New York joining a congregation in that area of approximately thirty souls that included John and Mary Young, Sen.; Brigham and Miriam Young; Phineas H. and Clarissa Young; Joseph Young; Lorenzo D. and Persis Young; and Fanny Young.

Heber C. Kimball described his baptism of fire in the following words:

"Under the ordinances of baptism and the laying on of hands, I received the Holy Ghost, as the disciples did in ancient days, which was like a consuming fire. I felt as though I sat at the feet of Jesus, and was clothed in my right mind, although the people called me crazy.

I continued in this way for many months, and it seemed as though my body would consume away; at the same time the scriptures were unfolded to my mind in such a wonderful manner that it appeared to me, at times, as if I had formerly been familiar with them." "The Life Of Heber C. Kimball", pp. 22—3.

After recounting Heber C. Kimball's experience, Orson F. Whitney then wrote the following:

“The branch in Mendon began to flourish, and the gifts of the spirit were poured out upon its members. This branch is reputed to have been the second in the Church to receive the gift of tongues. One of the branches in Pennsylvania was the first in which that gift was manifested.

Such a pentecostal renewal could scarcely take place without a corresponding movement of opposition on the part of the powers of darkness. The inevitable was at hand. Satan commenced to rage, and the Saints were annoyed and persecuted. Heber’s former friends turned against him. His creditors combined to push him to the wall. During one week five or six executions were taken out against him. His brother Solomon was the only one outside the Church, willing to lend him a helping hand in his financial troubles, resulting from the inimical actions of his neighbors and old—time associates. His brother Charles, who had formerly befriended him, was dead. But the Lord opened his way, much to the chagrin of his persecutors, and he obtained money to meet his liabilities, so that none of his property was sold at auction.” Ibid, pg. 23.

· Others also enjoyed similar spiritual blessings. Some time after being baptized and ordained an Elder by Joseph Young, Heber began laboring in the ministry as a missionary with both Joseph and Brigham Young. They labored with others in Avon, Genesee, and Lyonstown with significant success. Heber recounted the spiritual blessings that some of the new converts enjoyed on one occasion, thusly:

“Brother Ezra Landon preached in Avon and Genesee, baptized eighteen or twenty, and being afraid to confirm them and promise the Holy Ghost, he requested me to confirm them, which I did according to the best of my knowledge, pronouncing but a few words on the head of each one, and invariably saying, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost in the name of Jesus Christ.’ Immediately the Holy Ghost fell upon them, and several commenced speaking in tongues before they arose from their knees, and we had a joyful time. Some ten or twelve spoke in tongues, neither of whom had ever heard any person speak in tongues before, they being the first baptized in that place.” Ibid, pg. 24

The following account by Lorenzo Snow of his baptism of fire was taken from “The Presidents Of The Church” by Preston Nibley, Deseret Book, 1945.

“I was baptized by Elder John Boynton, then one of the Twelve Apostles, June, 1836, at Kirtland, Ohio. Previous to accepting the ordinance of baptism, in my investigations of the principles taught by the Latter—day Saints, which I proved by comparison to be the same as those mentioned in the New Testament taught by Christ and His Apostles, I was thoroughly convinced that obedience to those principles would impart miraculous powers, manifestations and revelations. With sanguine expectation of this result, I received baptism and the ordinance of laying on of hands by one who professed to have divine authority; and having thus yielded obedience to these ordinances, I was in constant expectation of the fulfillment of the promise of the reception of the Holy Ghost. The manifestation did not immediately follow my baptism as I had expected, but although the time was deferred, when I did receive it, its realization was more perfect, tangible and miraculous than even my strongest hopes had led me to anticipate.

Some two or three weeks after I was baptized, one day while engaged in my studies, I began to reflect upon the fact that I had not obtained a knowledge of the truth of the work – that I had not realized the fulfillment of the promise, ‘he that doeth my will shall know of the doctrine,’ and I began to feel very uneasy. I laid aside my books, left the house and wandered around through the fields under

the oppressive influence of a gloomy, disconsolate spirit, while an indescribable cloud of darkness seemed to envelope me. I had been accustomed, at the close of day, to retire for secret prayer, to a grove a short distance from my lodgings, but at this time I felt no inclination to do so. The spirit of prayer had departed and the heavens seemed like brass over my head. At length, realizing that the usual time had come for secret prayer, I concluded I would not forego my evening service, and, as a matter of formality, knelt as I was in the habit of doing, and in my accustomed, retired place, but not feeling as I was wont to feel.

I had no sooner opened my lips in an effort to pray, than I heard a sound, just above my head, like the rustling of silken robes; and immediately the spirit of God descended upon me; completely enveloping my whole person, filling me from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, and O the joy and happiness I felt! No language can describe the almost instantaneous transition from a dense cloud of mental and spiritual darkness into a refulgence of light and knowledge, that God lives, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and of the restoration of the Holy Priesthood, and the fulness of the Gospel. It was a complete baptism – a tangible immersion in the heavenly principle or element, the Holy Ghost; and even more real and physical in its effects upon every part of my system than the immersion by water; dispelling forever, so long as reason and memory last, all possibility of doubt or fear in relation to the fact handed down to us historically that the “babe of Bethlehem” is truly the son of God; also the fact that He is now being revealed to the children of men, and communicating knowledge, the same as in Apostolic times. I was perfectly satisfied, as well I might be, for my expectations were more than realized; I think I may safely say, in an infinite degree.

I cannot tell how long I remained in the full flow of the blissful enjoyment and divine enlightenment, but it was several minutes before the celestial element which filled and surrounded me began gradually to withdraw. On arising from my kneeling posture, with my heart swelling with gratitude to God, beyond the power of expression, I felt – I knew that He had conferred on me what only an omnipotent being can confer – that which is of greater value than all the wealth and honors worlds can bestow. That night as I retired to rest, the same wonderful manifestations were repeated, and continued to be for several successive nights. The sweet remembrance of those glorious experiences, from that time to the present, brings them fresh before me, imparting an inspiring influence which pervades my whole being, and I trust will to the close of my earthly existence.” “The Presidents Of The Church”, pp. 173—176.

“TRY THE SPIRITS”

from the “Times and Seasons” by the Prophet Joseph Smith, April 1, 1842

Documentary History of the Church Vol 4:571-581; TPJS pp 202-215

Recent occurrences that have transpired amongst us render it an imperative duty devolving upon me to say something in relation to the spirits by which men are actuated.

It is evident from the Apostles’ writings, that many false spirits existed in their day, and had “gone forth into the world,” and that it needed intelligence which God alone could impart to detect false spirits, and to prove what spirits were of God. The world in general have been grossly ignorant in regard to this one thing, and why should they be otherwise – for “the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”

The Egyptians were not able to discover the difference between the miracles of Moses and those of the magicians until they came to be tested together; and if Moses had not appeared in their midst, they would unquestionably have thought that the miracles of the magicians were performed through the mighty power of God, for they were great miracles that were performed by them—a supernatural agency was developed, and great power manifested.

It would have been equally as difficult for us to tell by what spirit the Apostles prophesied, or by what power the Apostles spoke and worked miracles. Who could have told whether the power of Simon, the sorcerer, was of God or of the devil?

There always did, in every age, seem to be a lack of intelligence pertaining to this subject. Spirits of all kinds have been manifested, in every age, and almost among all people.

If we go among the pagans, they have their spirits; the Mohammedans, the Jews, the Christians, the Indians—all have their spirits, all have a supernatural agency, and all contend that their spirits are of God. Who shall solve the mystery “Try the spirits,” says John, but who is to do it? The learned, the eloquent, the philosopher, the sage, the divine—all am ignorant. The heathens will boast of their gods, and of the great things that have been unfolded by their oracles. The Mussulman will boast of his Koran, and of the divine communications that his progenitors have received. The Jews have had numerous instances, both ancient and modern, among them of men who have professed to be inspired, and sent to bring about great events, and the Christian world has not been slow in making up the number.

Ignorance of the Nature of Spirits

“Try the spirits,” but what by? Are we to try them by the creeds of men? What preposterous folly—what sheer ignorance—what madness! Try the motions and actions of an eternal being (for I contend that all spirits are such) by a thing that was conceived in ignorance, and brought forth in folly—a cobweb of yesterday! Angels would hide their faces, and devils would be ashamed and insulted, and would say, “Paul we know, and Jesus we know, but who are ye?” Let each man of society make a creed and try evil spirits by it, and the devil would shake his sides; it is all that he would ask—all that he would desire. Yet many of them do this, and hence “many spirits are abroad in the world.”

One great evil is, that men are ignorant of the nature of spirits; their power, laws, government, intelligence, etc., and imagine that when there is anything like power, revelation, or vision manifested, that it must be of God. **Hence the Methodists, Presbyterians, and others frequently possess a spirit that will cause them to lie down, and during its operation, animation is frequently entirely suspended; they consider it to be the power of God, and a glorious manifestation from God—a manifestation of what?** Is there any intelligence communicated? Are the curtains of heaven withdrawn, or the purposes of God developed? Have they seen and conversed

with an angel—or have the glories of futurity burst upon their view? No! but their body has been inanimate, the operation of their spirit suspended, and all the intelligence that can be obtained from them when they arise, is a shout of “glory,” or “hallelujah,” or some incoherent expression; but they have had “the power.”

The Shaker will whirl around on his heel, impelled by a supernatural agency or spirit, and think that he is governed by the Spirit of God; and the Jumper will jump and enter into all kinds of extravagances. A Primitive Methodist will shout under the influence of that spirit, until he will rend the heavens with his cries; while the Quakers (or Friends) moved as they think, by the Spirit of God, will sit still and say nothing. Is God the author of all this? If not all of it, which does He recognize? Surely, such a heterogeneous mass of confusion never can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Discerning of Spirits by Power of Priesthood

Every one of these professes to be competent to try his neighbor's spirit, but no one can try his own, and what is the reason? Because they have not a key to unlock, no rule wherewith to measure, and no criterion whereby they can test it. Could any one tell the length, breadth or height of a building without a rule? Test the quality of metals without a criterion, or point out the movements of the planetary systems, without a knowledge of astronomy? Certainly not; and if such ignorance as this is manifested about a spirit of this kind, who can describe an angel of light? If Satan should appear as one in glory, who can tell his color, his signs, his appearance, his glory, or what is the manner of his manifestation? Who can detect the spirit of the French prophets with their revelations and their visions, and power of manifestations? Or who can point out the spirit of the Irvingites, with their apostles and prophets, and visions and tongues, and interpretations, etc. Or who can drag into daylight and develop the hidden mysteries of the false spirits that so frequently are made manifest among the Latter-day Saints? We answer that no man can do this without the Priesthood, and having a knowledge of the laws by which spirits are governed; for as no man knows the things of God, but by the Spirit of God, so no man knows the spirit of the devil, and his power and influence, but by possessing intelligence which is more than human, and having unfolded through the medium of the Priesthood the mysteries operations of his devices; without knowing the angelic form, the sanctified look and gesture, and the zeal that is frequently manifested by him for the glory of God, together with the prophetic spirit, the gracious influence, the godly appearance, and the holy garb, which are so characteristic of his proceedings and his mysterious windings.

A man must have the discerning of spirits before he can drag into daylight this hellish influence and unfold it unto the world in all its soul-destroying, diabolical, and horrid colors; for nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God. Thousands have felt the influence of its terrible power and baneful effects. Long pilgrimages have been undertaken, penances endured, and pain, misery and ruin have followed in their train; nations have been convulsed, kingdoms overthrown, provinces laid waste, and blood carnage and desolation are habiliments in which it has been clothed.

The Spirit of God the Spirit of Knowledge

As we have noticed before, the great difficulty lies in the ignorance of the nature of spirits, of the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known; if it requires the Spirit of God to know the things of God; and the spirit of the devil can only be unmasked through that medium, then it follows as a natural consequence that unless some person or persons have a communication, or revelation from God, unfolding to them the operation of the spirit, they must eternally remain ignorant of these principles; for I contend that if one man cannot understand these things but by the Spirit of God, ten thousand men cannot; it is alike out of the reach of the wisdom of the learned, the tongue of the eloquent, the power of the mighty. And we shall at last have to come to this conclusion, whatever we may think of revelation, that without it we can neither know nor understand anything of God, or the devil; and however unwilling the world may be to acknowledge this principle, it is evident from the multifarious creeds and notions concerning this matter that they understand nothing of this principle, and it is equally as plain that without a divine communication they must remain in ignorance. The world always mistook false prophets for true ones, and those that were sent of God, they considered to be false prophets and hence they killed, stoned, punished and imprisoned the true prophets, and these had to hide themselves "in deserts and dens, and caves of the earth," and though the most honorable men of the earth, they banished them from their society as vagabonds, whilst they cherished, honored and supported knaves, vagabonds, hypocrites, impostors, and the basest of men.

The Gift of Discernment of Spirits

A man must have the discerning of spirits, as we before stated, to understand these things, and how is he to Obtain this gift if there are no gifts of the Spirit? And how can these gifts be obtained without revelation? “Christ ascended into heaven, and gave gifts to men; and he gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers.” And how were Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists chosen? By prophecy (revelation) and by laying on of hands-by a divine communication, and a divinely appointed ordinance-through the medium of the Priesthood, organized according to the order of God, by divine appointment. The Apostles in ancient times held the keys of this Priesthood-of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, and consequently were enabled to unlock and unravel all things pertaining to the government of the Church, the welfare of society, the future destiny of men, and the agency, power and influence of spirits; for they could control them at pleasure, bid them depart in the name of Jesus, and detect their mischievous and mysterious operations when trying to palm themselves upon the Church in a religious garb, and militate against the interest of the Church and spread truth. We read that they “cast out devils in the name of Jesus,” and when a woman possessing the spirit of divination, cried before Paul and Silas, “these are the servants of the Most High God that show unto us the way of salvation,” they detected the spirit. And although she spake favorably of them, Paul commanded the spirit come out of her, and saved themselves from the opprobrium that might have been heaped upon their heads, through an alliance with her, in the development of her wicked principles, which they certainly would have been charged with, if they had not rebuked the evil spirit.

The Gift Held by the Prophets

A power similar to this existed through the medium of the Priesthood in different ages. Moses could detect the magician’s power, and show that he [himself] was God’s servant-he knew when he was upon the mountain (through revelation) that Israel was engaged in idolatry; he could develop the sin of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, detect witches and wizards in their proceedings, and point out the true prophets of the Lord. Joshua knew how to detect the man who had stolen the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment. Michaiah could point out the false spirit by which the four hundred prophets were governed; and if his advice had been taken, many lives would have been spared, (2 Chronicles 18) Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many other prophets possessed this power. Our Savior, the Apostles, and even the members of the Church were endowed with this gift, for, says Paul, (1 Corinthians 12), “To one is given the gift of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discerning of spirits.” All these proceeded from the same Spirit of God, and were the gifts of God. The Ephesian church were enabled by this principle, “to try those that said they were apostles, and were not, and found them liars.” (Revelation 2:2.)

Difference Between Body and Spirit

In tracing the thing to the foundation, and looking at it philosophically, we shall find a very material difference between the body and the spirit; the body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit, by many, is thought to be immaterial, without substance. With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ, and state the spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body; that it existed before the body, can exist in the body; and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be mouldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection be again united with it.

Spirits Eternal

Without attempting to describe this mysterious connection, and the laws that govern the body and the spirit of man, their relationship to each other, and the design of God in relation to the human body and spirit, I would just remark, that the spirits of men are eternal, that they are governed by the same Priesthood that Abraham, Melchizedek, and the Apostles were: that they are organized according to that Priesthood which is everlasting, “without beginning of days or end of years,”-that they all move in their respective spheres, and are governed by the law of God; that when they appear upon the earth they are in a probationary state, and are preparing, if righteous, for a future and greater glory; that the spirits of good men cannot interfere with the wicked beyond their prescribed bounds, for Michael, the Archangel, dared not bring a railing accusation against the devil, but said, “The Lord rebuke thee, Satan.”

Wicked Spirits Restricted in Power

It would seem also, that wicked spirits have their bounds, limits, and laws by which they are governed or controlled and know their future destiny; hence, those that were in the maniac said to our Savior, “Art thou come to torment us before the time?” and when Satan presented himself before the Lord, among the sons of God, he said that he came “from going to and fro in the earth, and from wandering up and down in it;” and he is emphatically called the prince of the power of the air; and, it is very evident that they possess a power that none but those who have the Priesthood can control, as we have before adverted to, in the case of the sons of Sceva.

Having said so much upon the general principles, without referring to the peculiar situation, power, and influence of the magicians of Egypt, the wizards and witches of the Jews, the oracles of the heathen, their necromancers, soothsayers, and astrologers, the maniacs or those possessed of devils in the Apostles’ days, we will notice, and try to detect (so far as we have the Scriptures for our aid) some few instances of the development of false spirits in more modern times, and in this our day.

False Prophets

The “French Prophets” were possessed of a spirit that deceived; they existed in Vivaris and Dauphany, in great numbers in the year 1688; there were many boys and girls from seven to twenty-five; they had strange fits, as in tremblings and faintings, which made them stretch out their legs and arms, as in a swoon; they remained awhile in trances, and coming out of them, uttered all that came in their mouths. [see Buck’s Theological Dictionary]

Now God never had any prophets that acted in this way; **there was nothing indecorous in the proceeding of the Lord’s prophets in any age**; neither had the apostles nor prophets in the apostles’ day anything of this kind. Paul says, “Ye may all prophesy, one by one; and if anything be revealed to another let the first hold his peace, for the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets;” but here we find that the prophets are subject to the spirit, and falling down, have twitchings, tumblings, and faintings through the influence of that spirit, being entirely under its control. Paul says, “Let everything be done decently and in order,” but here we find the greatest disorder and indecency in the conduct of both men and women, as above described. The same rule would apply to the fallings, twitchings, swoonings, shaking, and trances of many of our modern revivalists.

Johanna Southcott professed to be a prophetess, and wrote a book of prophecies in 1804, she became the founder of a people that are still extant. She was to bring forth, in a place appointed, a son, that was to be the Messiah, which thing has failed. Independent of this, however, where do we read of a woman that was the founder of a church, in the word of God? Paul told the women in his day, “To keep silence in the church, and

that if they wished to know anything to ask their husbands at home;” he would not suffer a woman “to rule, or to usurp authority in the church;” but here we find a woman the founder of a church, the revelator and guide, the Alpha and Omega, contrary to all acknowledged rule, principle, and order.

Jemimah Wilkinson was another prophetess that figured largely in America, in the last century. She stated that she was taken sick and died, and that her soul went to heaven, where it still continues. Soon after, her body was reanimated with the spirit and power of Christ, upon which she set up as a public teacher, and declared that she had an immediate revelation. Now the Scriptures positively assert that “Christ is the first fruit, afterwards those that are Christ’s at His coming, then cometh the end.” But Jemimah, according to her testimony, died, and rose again before the time mentioned in the Scriptures. The idea of her soul being in heaven while her body was [living] on earth, is also preposterous. When God breathed into man’s nostrils, he became a living soul, before that he did not live, and when that was taken away his body died; and so did our Savior when the spirit left the body, nor did His body live until His spirit returned in the power of His resurrection. But Mrs. Wilkinson’s soul [life] was in heaven, and her body without the soul [or life] on earth, living [without the soul, or] without life.

Irvingites

The Irvingites are a people that have counterfeited the truth, perhaps the nearest of any of our modern sectarians. They commenced about ten years ago in the city of London, in England; they have churches formed in various parts of England and Scotland, and some few in Upper Canada. Mr. Irving, their founder, was a learned and talented minister of the Church of Scotland, he was a great logician, and a powerful orator, but withal wild and enthusiastic in his views. Moving in the higher circles, and possessing talent and zeal, placed him in a situation to become a conspicuous character, and to raise up a society similar to that which is called after his name.

The Irvingites have apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and angels. They profess to have the gift of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, and, in some few instances, to have the gift of healing.

The first prophetic spirit that was manifested was in some Misses Campbell that Mr. Irving met with, while on a journey in Scotland; they had [what is termed among their sect] “utterances,” which were evidently of a supernatural agency. Mr. Irving, falling into the common error of considering all supernatural manifestations to be of God, took them to London with him, and introduced them into his church.

They were there honored as the prophetesses of God, and when they spoke, Mr. Irving or any of his ministers had to keep silence. They were peculiarly wrought upon before the congregation, and had strange utterances, uttered with an unnatural, shrill voice, and with thrilling intonations they frequently made use of a few broken, unconnected sentences, that were ambiguous, incoherent, and incomprehensible; at other times they were more clearly understood. They would frequently cry out, “There is iniquity! There is iniquity!” And Mr. Irving has been led, under the influence of this charge, to fall down upon his knees before the public congregation, and to confess his sin, not knowing whether he had sinned, nor wherein, nor whether the thing referred to him or somebody else. During these operations, the bodies of the persons speaking were powerfully wrought upon, their countenances were distorted, they had frequent twitchings in their hands, and the whole system was powerfully convulsed at intervals: they sometimes, however, (it is supposed) spoke in correct tongues, and had true interpretations.

Under the influence of this spirit the church was organized by these women; apostles, prophets, etc., were soon called, and a systematic order of things introduced, as above mentioned. A Mr. Baxter (afterwards one of their principal prophets) upon going into one of their meetings, says, “I saw a power manifested, and

thought that was the power of God, and asked that it might fall upon me, and it did so, and I began to prophesy.” Eight or nine years ago they had about sixty preachers going through the streets of London, testifying that London was to be the place where the “two witnesses” spoken of by John, were to prophesy; that they the church and the spirit were the witnesses, and that at the end of three years and a half there was to be an earthquake and great destruction, and our Savior was to come. Their apostles were collected together at the appointed time watching the event, but Jesus did not come, and the prophecy was then ambiguously explained away. They frequently had signs given them by the spirit to prove to them that what was manifested to them should take place. Mr. Baxter related an impression that he had concerning a child. It was manifested to him that he should visit the child, and lay hands upon it, and that it should be healed; and to prove to him that this was of God, he should meet his brother in a certain place, who should speak unto him certain words. His brother addressed him precisely in the way and manner that the manifestation designated. The sign took place, but when he laid his hands upon the child it did not recover. I cannot vouch for the authority of the last statement, as Mr. Baxter at that time had left the Irvingites, but it is in accordance with many of their proceedings, and the thing never has been attempted to be denied.

All This Is Wrong

It may be asked, where is there anything in all this that is wrong?

First. The church was organized by women, and God placed in the Church (first apostles, secondarily prophets) not first women; but Mr. Irving placed in his church first women (secondarily apostles) and the church was founded and organized by them. A woman has no right to found or organize a church-God never sent them to do it.

Second. Those women would speak in the midst of a meeting, and rebuke Mr. Irving or any of the church. Now the Scripture positively says, “Thou shalt not rebuke an Elder, but entreat him as a father;” not only this, but they frequently accused the brethren, thus placing themselves in the seat of Satan, who is emphatically called “the accuser of the brethren.”

Third. Mr. Baxter received the spirit on asking for it, without attending to the ordinances, and began to prophesy, whereas the scriptural way of attaining the gift of the Holy Ghost is by baptism, and by laying on of hands.

Fourth. As we have stated in regard to others, the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets; but those prophets were subject to the spirits, the spirits controlling their bodies at pleasure.

But it may be asked how Mr. Baxter could get a sign from a second person? To this we would answer, that Mr. Baxter’s brother was under the influence of the same spirit as himself, and being subject to that spirit he could be easily made to speak to Mr. Baxter whatever the spirit should dictate; but there was not power in the spirit to heal the child.

Satan May Give Manifestations in Tongues

Again it may be asked, how it was that they could speak in tongues if they were of the devil. We would answer that they could be made to speak in another tongue, as well as their own, as they were under the control of that spirit, and the devil can tempt the Hottentot, the Turk, the Jew, or any other nation; and if these men were under the influence of his spirit, they of course speak Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Italian, Dutch, or any other language that the devil knew.

Some will say, "try the spirits" by the word. "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." 1 John 4:2, 3. One of the Irvingites once quoted this passage whilst under the influence of a spirit, and then said, "I confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." And yet these prophecies failed, their Messiah did not come; and the great things spoken of by them have fallen to the ground. What is the matter here? Did not the Apostle speak the truth? Certainly he did-but he spoke to a people who were under the penalty of death, the moment they embraced Christianity; and no one without a knowledge of the fact would confess it, and expose themselves to death, and this was consequently given as a criterion to the church or churches to which John wrote. But the devil on a certain occasion cried out, "I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God!" Here was a frank acknowledgment under other circumstances that "Jesus had come in the flesh." On another occasion the devil said, "Paul we know, and Jesus we know"-of course, "come in the flesh." No man nor sect of men without the regular constituted authorities, the Priesthood and discerning of spirits, can tell true from false spirits. This power they possessed in the Apostles' day, but it has departed from the world for ages.

False Spirits in the Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has also had its false spirits; and as it is made up of all those different sects professing every variety of opinion, and having been under the influence of so many kinds of spirits, it is not to be wondered at if there should be found among us false spirits.

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. But when the authorities returned, the spirit was made manifest, those members that were exercised with it were tried for their fellowship, and those that would not repent and forsake it were cut off.

At a subsequent period a Shaker spirit was on the point of being introduced, and at another time the Methodist and Presbyterian falling down power, but the spirit was rebuked and put down, and those who would not submit to rule and good order were disfellowshipped. We have also had brethren and sisters who have had the gift of tongues falsely; they would speak in a muttering, unnatural voice, and their bodies be distorted like the Irvingites before alluded to; whereas, there is nothing unnatural in the Spirit of God. A circumstance of this kind took place in Upper Canada, but was rebuked by the presiding Elder; another, a woman near the same place, professed to have the discerning spirits, and began to accuse another sister of things that she was not guilty of, which she said she knew was so by the spirit, but was afterwards proven to be false; she placed herself in the capacity of the "accuser of the brethren," and no person through the discerning of spirits can bring a charge against another, they must be proven guilty by positive evidence, or they stand clear.

There have also been ministering angels in the Church which were of Satan appearing as an angel of light. A sister in the state of New York had a vision, who said it was told her that if she would go to a certain place in the woods, and angel would appear to her. She went at the appointed time, and saw a glorious personage descending, arrayed in white, with sandy colored hair; he commenced and told her to fear God, and said that her husband was called to do great things, but that he must not go more than one hundred miles from home,

or he would not return; whereas God had called him to go to the ends of the earth, and he has since been more than one thousand miles from home, and is yet alive. Many true things were spoken by this personage, and many things that were false. How, **it may be asked, was this known to be a bad angel? By the color of his hair; that is one of the signs that he can be known by, and by his contradicting a former revelation.**

We have also had brethren and sisters who have written revelations, and who have started forward to lead this Church. Such was a young boy in Kirtland, Isaac Russell, of Missouri, and Gladden Bishop, and Oliver Olney of Nauvoo. The boy is now living with his parents who have submitted to the laws of the Church. Mr. Russell stayed in Far West, from whence he was to go to the Rocky Mountains, led by three Nephites; but the Nephites never came, and his friends forsook him, all but some of the blood relations, who have since been nearly destroyed by the mob. Mr. Bishop was tried by the High Council, his papers examined, condemned and burned, and he cut off the Church. He acknowledged the justice of the decision, and said “that he now saw his error, for if the had been governed by the revelations given before, he might have known that no man was to write revelations for the Church, but Joseph Smith,” and begged to be prayed for, and forgiven by the brethren Mr. Olney has also been tried by the High Council and disfellowshipped, because he would not have his writings tested by the word of God; evidently proving that he loves darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil.

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