

## ELDER SPENCER W. KIMBALL

*Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles*

**A** YOUNG INDIAN LAD in my presence recently bore his testimony, and he said: "I am proud that I am a Navajo. I am proud, more proud, that I am a Mormon, and I am still more proud that I hold the priesthood," and that is the way I feel today in this great assembly on this anniversary. One hundred and twenty-five years ago six people gathered together in the first conference; and at this conference some ten sessions have filled the building to its capacity. I bear witness that the work that we are engaged in is the work of the Lord in all its comprehensiveness, and I am grateful that I am a member of the Lord's Church. I have prayed much that what I say this morning might be beneficial to someone.

And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (Acts 9:5.)

The Lord was speaking to the powerful figure, Saul of Tarsus, Paul of Christianity. I often wondered just what this meant. I found one authority who offered this:

. . . Those who kick at the goad, that stifle and smother the convictions of conscience, that rebel against God's truths and laws, that quarrel with His providences, that persecute and oppose His ministers, because they reprove them . . . and fly in the face of their reprovers, they kick against the pricks, and will have a great deal to answer for. (*Commentaries* by Henry M. Scott.)

A goad is defined as a spear or a sharp pointed stick used to sting or prick. The burro who kicks the sharp instrument with which he is being prodded is kicking at the pricks. His retaliation does little damage to the sharp stick or to him who wields it but brings distress to the foot that kicks it.

I well remember in my youth a neighbor who moved about for some days on crutches. He was evasive when asked the cause of his misfortune, but an ear witness told me, as he chuckled: "John stubbed his toe on a chair in the night and in his quick, fierce anger, he

kicked the chair and broke his toe." The rocking chair rocked on and on, and perhaps smiled at the stupidity of man.

The first king of Israel quarreled with Providence. His stubbornness cost him his kingdom and brought forth the caustic denunciation from his prophet:

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king. (I Samuel 15:23.)

O foolish monarch! Given power, wealth, opportunity, why throw them all away? The Prophet Samuel denounced the independent, arrogant Saul; the superior, unhumble Saul; the proud, conceited Saul:

When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? (*Ibid.*, 15:17.)

There is the man who rebelled against the call of Brigham Young to go to southern valleys, saying: "Nobody is going to tell me where to go and what to do." Through his personal rebellion, he took his entire family out of the Church. How little he retarded the colonization program! The valleys were settled in spite of him. How little his disaffection injured the Church! It has grown steadily without him. But how he has suffered in his eternal progression. In contrast, there were many who pulled up stakes, moved to new worlds, and reared families of faith and devotion.

There are many who, because troubles come, cease praying to the Lord, letting loose of the very rod of protection at the precise moment when that hand-hold is so vital.

There is the man who, to satisfy his own egotism, took a stand against the Authorities of the Church. He followed the usual pattern, not apostasy at first, only superiority of knowledge and mild criticism. He loved the brethren, he said, but they failed to see and interpret as he would like. He would still love

the Church, he maintained, but his criticism grew and developed into ever-widening circles. He was right, he assured himself; he could not yield in good conscience; he had his pride. His children did not accept his philosophy wholly, but their confidence was shaken. In their frustration, they married out of the Church, and he lost them. He later realized his folly and returned to humbleness, but so very late. He had lost his children. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

The Prophet Ezekiel said:

The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. (Ezekiel 18:2)

There is the man who resisted release from positions in the Church. He knew positions were temporary trusts, but he criticized the presiding leader who had released him, complaining that proper recognition had not been given; the time had not been propitious; it had been a reflection upon his effectiveness. He bitterly built up a case for himself, absented himself from his meetings, and justified himself in his resultant estrangement. His children partook of his frustrations, and his children's children. In later life he "came to himself," and on the brink of the grave made an about-face. His family would not effect the transformation which now he would give his life to have them make. How selfish! Haughty pride induces eating sour grapes, and innocent ones have their teeth set on edge. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

When I was a child, we used the expression, "He cut off his nose to spite his face." To us, that meant that one was fighting against fate, rebelling against the inevitable, damaging himself to spite others, breaking his toe to give vent to his senseless anger.

Eight lovely children had blessed the temple marriage of a man and woman who in later years were denied a temple recommend. They would not be so dealt with by this young bishop. Why should they be deprived and humiliated? Were they less worthy than others? They argued that this boy-bishop was too strict, too orthodox. Never would they be active, nor enter the door of

that Church as long as that bishop presided. They would show him. The history of this family is tragic. The four younger ones were never baptized; the four older ones never were ordained, endowed, nor sealed. No missions were filled by this family. Today the parents are ill at ease, still defiant. They had covered themselves with a cloud, and righteous prayers could not pass through. (See Lam. 3:44.)

Sour grapes! Such unhappy food!

The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught. (D. & C. 3:1.)

But the individual who fights them finds disillusionment, disappointment, and misery. The Lord said: ". . . the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow." (*Ibid.*, 1:3.) He outlines further the fate of the fighters.

As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream. . . .

Why are so few chosen?

Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—

That the rights of the priesthood . . .

. . . may be conferred upon us it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition . . . in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood and the authority of that man.

Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God. (*Ibid.*, 121:33-38.)

Of such who defy the Lord, trample upon his sacred ordinances, fight his leaders, the Lord has this to say:

Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them.

But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves. . . .

Wo unto them; . . . they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house.

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... they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them.

They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation. (*Ibid.*, 121:16-17, 19, 21.)

In the last century the Lord condemned a Brother Almon Babbitt:

... behold, he aspireth to establish his counsel which I have ordained, even that of the Presidency of my Church; and he setteth up a golden calf for the worship of my people. (*Ibid.*, 124:84.)

He was like those Romans of whom Paul spoke:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. . . .

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, . . . but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:18, 21, 22.)

For although a man may have many revelations, and have power to do many mighty works, [the Lord said] yet if he boasts in his own strength, and sets at naught the counsels of God, and follows after the dictates of his own will and carnal desires, he must fall and incur the vengeance of a just God upon him. (D. & C. 3:4.)

Martin Harris was chastised by the Redeemer as

... a wicked man, who has set at naught the counsels of God, and has broken the most sacred promises which were made before God, and has depended upon his own wisdom. (*Ibid.*, 3:12-13.)

Only the transgression of His people can nullify the work of the Lord, He says. And Jacob laments:

... O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. (2 Nephi 9:28.)

Men continue to try to create God, to control God, and to thwart his purposes but:

His purposes fail not, neither are there any who can stay his hand.

From eternity to eternity he is the same, and his years never fail. (D. & C. 76:3-4.)

But men in their egotism continue to try. Against men like these, Paul warned his colleague:

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called. (1 Tim. 6:20.)

The Caesars burned the early Saints as torches, subjected them to the claws of wild beasts in the coliseums, drove them underground into the catacombs, confiscated their property, and snuffed out their lives, but all to no avail, for the fires of devotion and sacrifice were only intensified thereby.

The persecutors decapitated John the Baptist, ran a lance through the Apostle James, and according to tradition martyred the missionary, Paul, and crucified the mighty Simon Barjona. They failed of purpose. Where a relatively few contemporaries ever heard them, hundreds of millions have since been enlightened by their doctrines and inspired by their testimonies.

"Mormonism will fail if we kill their prophet," they said a century ago as they murdered Joseph Smith in cold blood. Undoubtedly their fiendish grins of satisfaction at such a foul deed changed to perturbed grimaces when they came to realize that they had been but kicking against sharp points, injuring only themselves. Mormonism was not destroyed by the cruel martyrdom, but here was its vitality. The bullet-torn flesh fertilized the soil; the blood they shed moistened the seed; and the spirits they sent heavenward will testify against them throughout eternities. The cause persists and grows.

Gamaliel, the noted Pharisee doctor of the law, teacher of Saul of Tarsus, had deeper perception than did his associates, the chief priests who would have slain the Apostles. He warned:

... take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. . . .

Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. (Acts 5:35, 38-39.)

What sagacity! How wise this learned man! "Take heed to yourselves," he warned. It was a boomerang. He reminded them of the fate of the influential Theudas with his great swelling words, his vaunted knowledge, his brilliant mind, his superior logic, who with his following of hundreds kicked "against the pricks," resisted truth, fought against God, and "came to nought."

He spoke of Judas of Galilee and his vain philosophies and his flattering words which brought him and his following oblivion. Early leaders whose names are linked with those of Joseph and Hyrum have come and gone. Heavens opened, revelations flowed, and holy angels ministered to them. Positions of trust were given them, but with it all there came arrogance, jealousies, and disaffections.

For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps. (Deut. 32:32-33.)

Are not these the self-planted, self-nourished, and self-harvested grapes of wrath? O stupid man, O egotistical man! Thinking only of self he profanes the way of the Lord and brings sorrow to his posterity whose roses turn to ashes, whose fruit becomes only skin-covered stones. The grapes are so sour. How terrifying such a responsibility! "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, and that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his statel (2 Nephi 9:27.)

In a page from the journal of the Prophet Joseph, we find this: "At 3:30 p.m. I met with Brigham Young [and others whom he named] in my office." And then this: "Write to Oliver Cowdery and ask him if he has not eaten husks long enough? If he is not almost ready to return, be clothed with robes of righteousness, and go up to Jerusalem? Orson Hyde hath need of him." (*History of the Church*, Vol. 5, pp. 366, 368.)

This is likely reminiscent of the prodigal son whose sad fate brought him to the eating of husks with the swine after he had turned from the luxurious board of plenty at his father's table. And like him, the modern man of rare opportunity fought against his conscience, stifled his best impulses; and finally when the earthly powers were near an end, his influence in the world largely terminated, he "came to himself" back to the program he had resisted. Many teeth had been set on edge in the years of his unproductive, sterile years. His brother-in-law, David Whitmer, said of him as he was restored to the Church late in life:

"Oliver died the happiest man I ever saw. After shaking hands with his family and kissing his wife and daughter, he said: 'Now I lay me down for the last time. . . .' And he died with a smile on his face."

Peace, sweet peace, finally comes to all men when they humbly yield to the gentle pressures of the Spirit.

The story of the transformation of Alma is not unlike that of Paul. With his companions he set about to "steady the ark," to set straight the leaders of the Church, and to take over the minds of the people. These young men were brilliant, eloquent, impressive. The angel of the Lord in a cloud spoke "as it were with a voice of thunder which caused the earth to shake," and the astonished men fell to the earth, Alma becoming dumb and lifeless. Carried helpless to his father he was recovered after long fasting and prayer by those who loved him. In his remorse he cried out:

I was in the darkest abyss but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was wracked with eternal torment, but I am snatched and my soul is pained no more.

It took courage for Alma and the princes to admit they were wrong, but they went about "zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church." (See Mos. 27:35.)

We quote Paul again:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (Col. 2:8.)

The antediluvians were a law unto themselves and locked doors against themselves. Jonah, in his egotism, took offense when the repentance of Nineveh rendered unnecessary the fulfillment of his prophecy. Judas fought against God and suffered the buffetings of Satan. Sherem with his learning, his eloquence and his flattery, sought to turn away people from the simple faith, and he died in remorse and humiliation. Nehor tried to advance his own cause, increase his popularity, and lead a following with his criticisms and flatteries, and came to ignominious death. Korihor, with his teachings of intellectual liberty and his rationalizations, followed his temporary popularity with begging in the streets. The Jonahs and Almas and Korihors live on and undertake to cover their sins, gratify their pride, and vain ambitions. They grieve the Spirit of the Lord, withdraw from holy places and righteous influences, and in the words of the Savior:

Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints and to fight against God. (D. & C. 121:38.)

But be it said to the everlasting glory of men, numerous good people who have tasted of and recovered from offense, having come to realize that so long as mortality exists we live and work with imperfect people; and there will be misunderstandings, offenses, and injuries to sensitive feelings. The best of motives are often misunderstood. It is gratifying to find many who, in their bigness of soul have straightened out their thinking, swallowed their pride, forgiven what they had felt were personal slights. Numerous others who have walked critical, lonely, thorny paths in abject misery, have finally accepted correction, acknowledged errors, cleansed their

hearts of bitterness, and have come again to peace, that coveted peace which is so conspicuous in its absence. And the frustrations of criticism, bitterness, and the resultant estrangements have given place to warmth and light and peace. And all those who have come into the warmth of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and his program, could shout with the Prophet Joseph Smith:

. . . Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. . . .

And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing together, and let all the sons of God shout for joy. And let the eternal creations declare his name forever and ever! And again I say, how glorious is the voice we hear from heaven, proclaiming in our ears, glory, and salvation, and honor, and immortality, and eternal life; kingdoms, principalities, and powers! (*Ibid.*, 128:22-23.)

May God bless us all that we may live near him always, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### President David O. McKay:

Elder Spencer W. Kimball of the Council of the Twelve has just concluded speaking. Before we hear from Elder S. Dilworth Young, the Choir and Congregation will join in singing, "O Ye Mountains High," conducted by Brother J. Spencer Cornwall.

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Singing by the congregation and Singing Mothers, "O Ye Mountains High."

#### President David O. McKay:

Elder S. Dilworth Young, one of the presidents of the First Council of Seventy, will now speak to us. He will be followed by Elder George Q. Morris of the Council of the Twelve.

### ELDER S. DILWORTH YOUNG

#### *Of the First Council of the Seventy*

**I** ASSURE YOU, my brethren and sisters, that it is an easy thing to be a follower of Brother Spencer Kimball, both in making addresses and in the work of the Church. His gentleness and

kindness to those with whom he conducts affairs is known by all of you and shared by me. Likewise, it is easy to follow the lead of the Presidency. There have been times in my life when I have