

ELDER MARION G. ROMNEY

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

My brethren, this is a great audience. It might be the largest attended General Priesthood meeting we have ever held. I have tried to prepare for this, my first assignment in such a meeting, but I am sure that if I say anything worthwhile, it will be by the Lord's help. Will you please, therefore, give me an interest in your faith and prayers.

For my text I have chosen the 43rd Verse of the 84th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants. It reads: "And I now give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life." As background I shall read a few verses which, in the revelation, precede the text.

In the forepart of the revelation the Lord, speaking of the Melchizedek Priesthood, says: "Which priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning of days or end of years.

"And the Lord confirmed a priesthood also upon Aaron and his seed, throughout all their generations, which priesthood also continueth and abideth forever with the priesthood which is after the holiest order of God." (D&C 84:17-18.)

Such is the nature of the Priesthood we bear.

"And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

"Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

"And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh." (D&C 84:19-21.)

And now I am going to skip a few verses and read the covenant that belongs to the Priesthood.

"For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

"They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and

the church and kingdom, and the elect of God." (D&C 84:33-34.)

The Prophet Joseph Smith used to repeatedly urge the brethren to make their calling and election sure. There is no way to do this except by receiving the Priesthood and magnifying it.

But to continue with the revelation: "And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord; "And he that receiveth my servants receiveth me." (D&C 84:35-36.)

This statement is worth emphasizing. "He that receiveth my servants receiveth me." Who are his servants? They are his representatives in the offices of the Priesthood—the General, Stake, Priesthood Quorum, and Ward officers. It behooves us to keep this in mind when we are tempted to disregard our presiding authorities, bishops, quorum and stake presidents, etc., when, within the jurisdiction of their callings, they give us counsel and advice. Remember that the Lord Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:40.) "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." (Matthew 10:41.)

But back to the covenant of the Priesthood: "He that receiveth me receiveth my Father;

"And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.

"And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood.

"Therefore, all those who receive the priesthood, receive this oath and covenant of my Father, which he cannot break, neither can it be moved." (D&C 84:37-40.)

Now, I am tempted to comment on this covenant at length, but since it is not the heart of my message, I will say only that, as I understand it, all of us who receive the Melchizedek Priesthood enter into an agreement with our Heavenly Father to magnify it. On

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condition that we magnify it, the Father undertakes to make us equal with him in the sense that "all that my Father hath shall be given unto him. . . . But whoso breaketh this covenant after he hath received it, and altogether turneth therefrom, shall not have forgiveness of sins in this world nor in the world to come." (D&C 84:38, 41)

When I first began to seriously think about this statement, I wondered if it would not have been better for me never to have received the Priesthood, if failing to magnify it would mean I would never receive forgiveness in this world or the world to come. Then I got to thinking about this next verse, which says: "And wo unto all those who come not unto this priesthood." (D&C 84:42.)

I finally came to the conclusion that I was between the horns of a dilemma and that my only hope was to receive and magnify the Priesthood.

Such is the background for our text: "And I now give unto you (bearers of the Priesthood) a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life.

"For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God." (D&C 84:43-44.)

Now why should we beware concerning ourselves? We should beware concerning ourselves because it now is and has always been the objective of Satan to destroy the Priesthood of God. As long ago as the war in heaven, he sought to usurp the power of the Priesthood. As a result of the conflict he there precipitated, he was cast out of heaven. He had to be cast out. There could be no peace in heaven until he was cast out.

Banishment from heaven did not, however, end his attack on the Priesthood of God. In the Garden of Eden he sought to deceive Adam. And he continued his diabolical purpose after the fall. When Adam and Eve received the Gospel and taught it to their children, Satan came among them and said: "Believe it not . . . and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish." (Moses 5:13.)

When "the presence of God withdrew from Moses" following the great

revelation He gave of Himself to Moses, Moses tells us that "Satan came tempting him, saying: Moses, son of man . . . I am the Only Begotten, worship me." (Moses 1:9, 12, 19.)

He sought to deceive even the Savior. You will all remember how he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, on the pinnacle of the temple, and on the high mountain.

Satan has sought in all ages to deceive the sons of God who have received the Priesthood. He has not been entirely unsuccessful either, for in all past dispensations he has finally succeeded in deceiving them to the extent that he has driven the Priesthood from the earth.

Now we know he is not going to drive the Priesthood from the earth in this dispensation because the Lord has said it is here to stay until the Savior comes. But there is no guarantee that he will not deceive a lot of men who hold the Priesthood. The Savior, talking about these days in which we live, said, "For in those days there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant (the covenant of the gospel and the Priesthood)." (Joseph Smith 1:22.)

So far as Satan's war against the Priesthood is concerned, he is making no exception in this last dispensation. His objective is still to deceive every one of us he can and to drive the Priesthood from the earth. Satan is very real. His power is very real. His influence is felt everywhere. He literally stalks the earth. "The powers of darkness prevail upon the earth . . . and, behold, the enemy is combined." (D&C 38:11, 12.)

You no doubt heard what President McKay said in his opening address yesterday morning about the power of the Evil One trying to deceive and deprive men of their agency. Free agency is the principle against which Satan waged his war in heaven. It is still the front on which he makes his most furious, devious, and persistent attacks. That this would be the case was foreshadowed by the Lord when he said to Moses: "That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from

the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.” His plan was to save us all by depriving us of free agency and subjecting us to his will.

“But, behold,” continued the Lord, “my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

“Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power. . . .” Priesthood is God’s power. That is what Satan is after—power. He wants it in the form of dictatorship. “Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

“And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.” (Moses 4:1-4.)

You see, at the time he was cast out of heaven, his objective was (and still is) “to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will.” This he effectively does to as many as will not hearken unto the voice of God. His main attack is still on free agency. When he can get men to yield their agency, he has them well on the way to captivity.

We who hold the Priesthood must beware concerning ourselves, that we do not fall into the traps he lays to rob us of our freedom. We must be careful that we are not led to accept or support in any way any organization, cause, or measure which, in its remotest effect, would jeopardize free agency, whether it be in politics, government, religion, employment, education, or any other field. It is not enough for us to be sincere in what we support. We must be right!

As to Satan’s direct attack upon the

restored Church and its Priesthood, you will remember this account of the Prophet as to what happened in the Sacred Grove as he knelt to pray:

“I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

“But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—” (Joseph Smith 2:15, 16)

Before the Church had been organized six months the Devil was foisting his counterfeits upon its members. In his history of September 1830, the Prophet says:

“To our great grief, however, we soon found that Satan had been lying in wait to deceive, and seeking whom he might devour. Brother Hiram Page had in his possession a certain stone, by which he had obtained certain ‘revelations’ concerning the upbuilding of Zion, the order of the Church, etc., all of which were entirely at variance with the order of God’s house, as laid down in the New Testament, as well as in our late revelations.” (D.H.C. 1:109-110)

The Prophet was greatly concerned about it because Oliver Cowdery and the Whitmers were sympathetic with Hiram Page and began to believe his spurious revelation. In response to the Prophet’s inquiry, the Lord gave him the revelation recorded in the 28th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants. This revelation was directed to Oliver Cowdery. In it the Lord said to him: “Thou shalt take thy brother, Hiram Page, between him and thee alone, and tell him that those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me, and that Satan deceiveth him;

“For, behold, these things have not been appointed unto him, neither shall

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anything be appointed unto any of this church contrary to the church covenants." (D. & C. 28:11-12)

This revelation straightened Hiram Page out, but it did not end Satan's efforts to deceive the brethren. You will remember how they (including some of the leaders of the Church) fought the Prophet in the days of Kirtland. At the time of one attack on the Prophet when Brigham Young was present, he arose and said that Joseph was a Prophet and he knew it, "and that they who rail and slander him . . . could but destroy their own authority and cut the thread that bound them to the Prophet of God and sink themselves to hell."

Referring to the occasion after coming to Utah, he said: "Some of the leading men at Kirtland were much opposed to the Prophet meddling with temporal affairs, thinking that his duty embraced spiritual things alone and that the people should be left to attend to their temporal affairs without any interference whatever from prophets and apostles. In a public meeting, I said: 'Ye elders of Israel: Now, will some of you draw the line of demarcation between the spiritual and temporal within the Kingdom of God, so that I may understand it? Not one of them could do it. When I saw a man standing in the path before the Prophet, I felt like hurling him out of the way and branding him as a fool.'

Brigham Young was never deceived. There were those who were, however, right up until the end of the Prophet's life. Among them you will remember the Laws and the Bennetts. Even the Three Witnesses were deceived. You know, of course, what happened after the Prophet was gone and Brother Brigham took over. Lyman Wight and many of the others, strong men who stood by the Prophet, were deceived and left the Church.

And so it has gone all through the years. Today is no exception. We have people now who yield to the temptations and follow the counterfeits of Satan. Their sad situation reminds us of the statement of the Prophet Joseph who, after recounting some of the workings of evil spirits in his day, said: "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." (D.H.C. 4:573)

A paramount consideration for us bearers of the Priesthood today is "How may we combat these onslaughts of Satan? How can we distinguish between his counterfeits and divine truth?" John the Revelator gave the people of his day this test: "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." (1 John 4:2) Such a test was adequate then, for the good reason that to accept Christ at that time was a capital offense. In light of such a penalty, obviously no non-believer would confess him. It will not do for us today, however, because there is no such penalty. The situation now is that although great numbers of people confess Christ, most of them, judged by their beliefs and practices, deny him.

I would like now to suggest some tests which can safely be used to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit. I have already indicated that many organizations, causes, and measures may be tried by applying the test of free agency.

Anything purporting to pertain to the Gospel of Jesus Christ may be put to the following four simple tests:

1. *Does it purport to originate in the wisdom of men, or was it revealed from heaven?* If it originated in the wisdom of men, it is not of God. Remember what the Savior said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see . . . (nor) enter . . . the kingdom of God." (John 3:3, 5) He also said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me." (John 7:16) Even Jesus himself did not purport to originate gospel doctrine. One cannot arrive at truth by

reason alone. We have already heard this theme developed in this Conference. I need not stress it further.

In the Book of Mormon the Prophet Jacob said: "O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness of 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." Then he adds this lovely sentence: "But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God." (2 Nephi 9:28-29)

You are all acquainted with Paul's great doctrine that the things of God are understood by the power of God, and that the things of men are understood by the wisdom of men. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Corinthians 2:14)

We never need to be deceived by the learning of the world. We can always with safety reject those doctrines which are founded in the wisdom of men.

2. *Does the teaching bear the proper label?* You will remember that when his Nephite disciples inquired of Jesus what they should call the church, he "said unto them: Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing?

"Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day;

"And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day.

"Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake.

"And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses' name then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of

a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel." (3 Nephi 27:4-8)

From the foregoing it is perfectly plain that if any teaching purporting to be from Christ comes under any label other than that of Jesus Christ, we can know it is not of God.

3. The last phrase of the above quotation gives us the third test. "But if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel." *The teaching must not only come under the proper label, but it must also conform to the other teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

4. Now the fourth and last test I shall mention is: *Does it come through the proper Church channel?* We read in the 42nd Section of the Doctrine and Covenants: "Again I say unto you, that it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church." (D. & C. 42:11.) In the light of this divinely established order, how can any man accept the doctrine of authority from some secret source unknown to the Church? The Lord could not have made it any plainer that one's authority must come through the established order of the Church, and the President of the Church stands at the head of that order. The Lord has placed him there.

"The duty of the President of the office of the High Priesthood," He says, "is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses—" (D. & C. 107:91) Now one of Moses' greatest callings was to be a law-giver, to declare the Word of God. Only the President can declare the doctrines of the Church.

The revelation continues: "The duty of the President of the office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses—

"Behold, here is wisdom; yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church." (D. & C. 107:91-92.)

In the revelation the Lord gave to the Prophet in answer to his inquiry about the stone which Hiram Page had, he said, speaking of the president of the Church: "Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

"For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith." (D. & C. 21:4-5)

Such is the obligation of this Priesthood with respect to our present Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, President David O. McKay. "By doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory." (D. & C. 21:6)

Now, brethren, if we will keep these things in mind, we shall not be deceived by false teachings. I remember years ago when I was a bishop I had President Grant talk to our ward. After the meeting, I drove him home. At that time there was a great deal of criticism against the President of the Church because of a front-page editorial some of you may remember. We talked about it. When we got to his home I got out of the car and went up on the porch with him. Standing by me, he put his arm over my shoulder and said: "My boy, you always keep your eye on the President of the Church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it." Then with a twinkle in his eye, he said, "But you don't need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray."

I have thought much about that. I remember that counselors in the Presidency have been deceived. I remember that members of the Twelve have been deceived and left the Church, and men in every other Council in the Church have been deceived. But there has never been a President of the Church, and according to President Grant, and I believe him, there never will be a President of this Church who will lead the people astray.

We need not be led astray, my brethren. The safest way to avoid being led astray is to magnify our Priesthood. We should go on our knees, each one of us, morning and evening, and plead with Almighty God to keep us in the way of magnifying our callings in this great Priesthood. We should live righteously. We should resist every temptation of lust. When we harbor lustful thoughts and participate in lustful practices, we cannot see these great principles clearly, and we get into the dark.

If, in addition to living righteously, we will study and learn what the Lord has said and apply the tests I have suggested, we shall never go astray. God help us, I pray, that we shall remain true and faithful ourselves, and help all of the members of the Church to see clearly, thereby placing themselves among those who take the Holy Spirit for their guide and are not deceived, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President David O. McKay:

Our next speaker will be Elder Mark E. Petersen, a member of the Council of The Twelve.

ELDER MARK E. PETERSEN

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

I am very grateful, my brethren, for the marvelous opportunity of addressing you this evening, and I sincerely and humbly pray that the Lord will guide me and inspire me because I, with my Brethren, have learned long since that I can do nothing of myself. I have

memorized and said over and over again so many times that scripture wherein the Lord said, "Without me ye can do nothing," and I pray earnestly tonight that he will guide me and help me, because it is a tremendous responsibility to address so many men. It is a tre-