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## Letter II

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when we received under his hand the holy priesthood, as he said, "upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer this priesthood and this authority which shall remain upon earth, that the sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness!"

I shall not attempt to paint to you the feelings of this heart, nor the majestic beauty and glory which surrounded us on this occasion; but you will believe me when I say, that earth, nor men, with the eloquence of time, cannot begin to clothe language in as interesting and sublime a manner as this holy personage. No; nor has this earth power to give the joy, to bestow the peace, or comprehend the wisdom which was contained in each sentence as they were delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit! Man may deceive his fellow man—deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may have power to seduce the foolish and untaught, till naught but fiction feeds the many, and the fruit of falsehood carries in its current the giddy to the grave; but one touch with the finger of his love, yes, one ray of glory from the upper world, or one word from the mouth of the Saviour, from the bosom of eternity, strikes it *all* into insignificance, and blots it forever from the mind! The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel—the certainty that we heard the voice of Jesus—and the truth unsullied as it flowed from a pure personage, dictated by the will of God, is to me past description, and I shall ever look upon this expression of the Saviour's goodness with wonder and thanksgiving while I am permitted to tarry, and in those mansions where perfection dwells and sin never comes, I hope to adore in that DAY which shall never cease.\*

I must close for the present; my candle is quite extinguished, and all nature seems locked in silence, shrouded in darkness, and enjoying that repose so necessary to this life. But the period is rolling on when *night* will close, and those who are found worthy will inherit that city where neither the light of the sun nor moon will be necessary, "for the glory of God will lighten it, and the Lamb will be the light thereof."

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## LETTER II.

DEAR BROTHER,

IN the last *Messenger and Advocate*, I promised to commence a more particular or minute history of the rise and progress of the church of the Latter-day Saints, and publish for the benefit of

\* I will hereafter give you a full history of the rise of this church, up to the time stated in my introduction; which will necessarily embrace the life and character of this brother. I shall therefore leave the history of baptism, &c., till its proper place.

inquirers and all who are disposed to learn. There are certain facts relative to the works of God worthy the consideration and observance of every individual and every society:—they are, that he never works in the dark—his works are always performed in a clear, intelligible manner; and another point is, that he never works in vain. This is not the case with men, but might it not be? When the Lord works, he accomplishes his purposes, and the effects of his power are to be seen afterward. In view of this, suffer me to make a few remarks by way of introduction. The works of man may shine for a season with a degree of brilliancy, but time changes their complexion; and whether it did or not, all would be the same in a little space, as nothing except that which was erected by a hand which never grows weak, can remain when corruption is consumed.

I shall not be required to adorn and beautify my narrative with a relation of the faith of Enoch, and those who assisted him to build up Zion, which fled to God—on the mountains of which was commanded the blessing, life for ever more—to be held in reserve to add another ray of glory to the grand retinue, when worlds shall rock from their base to their centre; the nations of the righteous rise from the dust, and the blessed millions of the church of the first born, shout his triumphant coming to receive his kingdom, over which he is to reign till all enemies are subdued.

Nor shall I write the history of the Lord's church, raised up according to his own instruction to Moses and Aaron; of the perplexities and discouragements which came upon Israel for their transgressions; their organization upon the land of Canaan, and their overthrow and dispersion among all nations, to reap the reward of their iniquities, to the appearing of the Great Shepherd in the flesh.

But there is, of necessity, a uniformity so exact, a manner so precise, and ordinances so minute, in all ages and generations whenever God has established his church among men, that should I have occasion to recur to either age, and particularly to that characterized by the advent of the Messiah, and the ministry of the apostles of that church; with a cursory view of the same, till it lost its visibility on earth, was driven into darkness, or till God took the holy priesthood unto himself, where it has been held in reserve to the present century, as a matter of right, in this free country, I may take the privilege. This may be doubted by some, indeed by many, as an admission of this point would overthrow the popular systems of the day. I cannot reasonably expect, then, that the large majority of professors will be willing to listen to my argument for a moment, as a careful, impartial, and faithful investigation of the doctrines which I believe to be correct, and the principles cherished in my bosom and believed by this church, by every honest man, must be admitted as truth.

Of this I may say, as Tertulian said to the emperor when writing in defence of the Saints in his day, "Whoever looked well into our religion that did not embrace it?"

Common undertakings and plans of men may be overthrown or destroyed by opposition. The systems of this world may be exploded or annihilated by oppression or falsehood, but it is the reverse with pure religion. There is a power attendant on truth that all the arts and designs of men cannot fathom; there is an increasing influence which rises up in one place the moment it is covered in another, and the more it is traduced, and the harsher the means employed to affect its extinction, the more numerous are its votaries. It is not the vain cry of "delusion" from the giddy multitude; it is not the sneers of bigots; it is not the frowns of zealots, neither the rage of princes, kings, nor emperors, that can prevent its influence. The fact is, as Tertullian said, no man ever looked carefully into its consistency and propriety without embracing it. It is impossible; that light which enlightens man is at once enraptured; that intelligence which existed before the world was will unite, and that wisdom in the Divine economy will be so conspicuous, that it will be embraced, it will be observed, and it must be obeyed.

Look at pure religion whenever it has had a place on earth, and you will always mark the same characteristics in all its features. Look at truth (without which the former could not exist), and the same peculiarities are apparent. Those who have been guided by them have always shown the same principles; and those who were not have as uniformly sought to destroy their influence. Religion has had its friends and its enemies; its advocates and its opponents; but the thousands of years which have come and gone have left it unaltered; the millions who have embraced it, and are now enjoying that bliss held forth in its promises, have left its principles unchanged, and its influence upon the honest heart unweakened. The many oppositions which have encountered it; the millions of calumnies, the numberless reproaches, and the myriads of falsehoods have left its fair form unimpaired, its beauty untarnished, and its excellence as excellent; while its certainty is the same, and its foundation upheld by the hand of God.

One peculiarity of men I wish to notice in the early part of my narrative. So far as my acquaintance and knowledge of men and their history extends, it has been the custom of every generation to boast of, or extol the acts of the former. In this respect I wish it to be distinctly understood that I mean the righteous—those to whom God communicated his will. There has ever been an apparent blindness common to men, which has hindered their discovering the real worth and excellence of individuals while residing with them; but when once deprived of their society, worth, and counsel, they were ready to exclaim,

“how great and inestimable were their qualities, and how precious is their memory.”

The vilest and most corrupt art not exempted from this charge; even the Jews, whose former principles had become degenerated, and whose religion was a mere show, were found among that class who were ready to build and garnish the sepulchres of the prophets, and condemn their fathers for putting them to death, making important boasts of their own righteousness and of their assurance of salvation, in the midst of which they rose up with one consent, and treacherously and shamefully betrayed and crucified the Saviour of the world! No wonder that the inquirer has turned aside with disgust, nor marvel that God has appointed a day when he will call the nations before him, and reward every man according to his works.

Enoch walked with God, and was taken home without tasting death. Why were not *all* converted in his day and taken with him to glory? Noah, it is said, was perfect in his generation; and it is plain that he had communion with his Maker, and by His direction accomplished a work, the parallel of which is not to be found in the annals of the world! Why was not the *world* converted, that the flood might have been stayed? Men, from the days of our father Abraham, have talked, boasted, and extolled his faith; and he is even represented in the scriptures—“the father of the faithful.” Moses talked with the Lord face to face; received the great moral law, upon the basis of which those of all civilized governments are founded; led Israel forty years, and was taken home to receive the reward of his toils—then Jacob could realize his worth. Well was the question asked by our Lord, “How can the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the bridegroom is with them?” It is said that he travelled and taught the righteous principles of his kingdom three years, during which he chose twelve men, and ordained them apostles, &c. The people saw and heard—they were particularly benefitted, many of them, by being healed of infirmities and diseases, of plagues and devils—they saw him walk upon the water—they saw the winds and waves calmed at his command—they saw thousands fed to the full with a pittance, and the very powers of darkness tremble in his presence, and like others before them, considered it as a dream, or a common occurrence, till the time was fulfilled and he was offered up. Yet while he was with them he said, you shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and shall not see it. He knew that calamity would fall upon that people, and the wrath of heaven overtake them to their overthrow; and when that devoted city was surrounded with armies, well may we conclude that they desired a protector possessing sufficient power to lead them to some safe place aside from the tumult of a siege.

Since the apostles fell asleep all men who profess a belief in the truth of their mission, extol their virtues and celebrate their fame. It seems to have been forgotten that they were men of infirmities and subject to all the feelings, passions, and imperfections common to other men. But it appears that they, as others were before them, are looked upon as men of perfection, holiness, purity, and goodness, far in advance of any since. So were the characters of the prophets held in the days of these apostles. What can be the difference in the reward, whether a man died for righteousness' sake in the days of Abel, Zacharias, John, the twelve apostles chosen at Jerusalem, or since! Is not the *life* of one equally as precious as the other? and is not the truth just as true?

But in reviewing the lives and acts of men in past generations, whenever we find a righteous man among them, there always were excuses for not giving heed or credence to his testimony. The people could see his imperfections; or, if no imperfections, supposed ones, and were always ready to frame an excuse upon that for not believing. No matter how pure the principles, nor how precious the teachings—an excuse was wanted, and an excuse was had.

The next generation, perhaps, was favoured with equally as righteous men, who were condemned upon the same principles of the former, while the acts and precepts of the former were the boasts of the multitude; when, in reality, their doctrines were no more pure, their exertions to turn men to righteousness no greater, neither their walk any more circumspect—the grave of the former is considered to be holy, and his sepulchre is *garnished*, while the latter is deprived a dwelling among men, or even an existence upon earth! Such is a specimen of the depravity and inconsistency of men, and such has been their conduct toward the righteous in centuries past.

When John the son of Zacharias came among the Jews, it is said that he came neither eating bread nor drinking wine. In another place it is said that his meat was locusts and wild honey. The Jews saw him, heard him preach, and were witnesses of the purity of the doctrines advocated—they wanted an excuse, and they soon found one—"He hath a devil!" And who, among all generations, that valued his salvation, would be taught by, or follow one possessed of a devil?

The Saviour came in form and fashion of a man; he ate, drank, and walked about as a man, and they said, "Behold, a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" You see an excuse was wanting, but not long wanting till it was found. Who would follow a dissipated leader? or who, among the *righteous* Pharisees would acknowledge a man who would condescend to eat with publicans and sinners? This was too much—they could not endure it. An individual teaching

the doctrines of the kingdom of heaven, and declaring that that kingdom was nigh, or that it had already come, must appear different from others, or he could not be received. If he were athirst he must not drink, if faint he must not eat, and if weary he must not rest, because he had assumed the authority to teach the world righteousness, and he must be different in manners and in constitution, if not in form, that all might be attracted by his singular appearance—that his singular demeanour might gain the reverence of the people, or he was an impostor, a false teacher, a wicked man, a sinner, and an accomplice of Beelzebub, the prince of devils.

If singularity of appearance, or difference of manners would command respect, certainly John would have been revered and heard. To see one coming from the wilderness, clad with camel's hair, drinking neither wine nor strong drink, nor yet eating common food, must have awakened the curiosity of the curious to the fullest extent. But there was one peculiarity in this man common to every righteous man before him, for which the people hated him, and for which he lost his life—he taught blindness, proclaimed repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, warned the people of the consequences of iniquity, and declared that the kingdom of heaven was at hand—*all* this was too much! To see one dressed so ridiculously, eating no common food, neither drinking wine like other men, stepping in advance of the learned and reverend Pharisees, wise doctors, and righteous scribes, and declaring at the same time that the Lord's kingdom would soon appear, could not be borne—he must not teach, he must not assume, he must not attempt to lead the people after him—“ he hath a devil ! ”

The Jews were willing (professedly so) to believe the ancient prophets, and follow the directions of heaven as delivered to the world by them ; but when one came teaching the same doctrine, and proclaiming the same things, only that they were nearer, they would not hear. Men say if they could see they would believe, but I have thought the reverse in this respect—if they cannot see they will believe.

One of two reasons may be assigned as the cause why the messengers of truth have been rejected—perhaps both. The multitude saw their imperfections, or supposed ones, and from that framed an excuse for rejecting them ; or else in consequence of the corruption of their own hearts, when reproved, were not willing to repent but sought to make a man an offender for a word, or for wearing camels' hair, eating locusts, drinking wine, or showing friendship to publicans and sinners !

When looking over the sacred scriptures, we seem to forget that they were given through men of imperfections and subject to passions. It is a *general* belief that the ancient prophets were perfect—that no stain or blemish ever appeared upon their

characters while on earth, to be brought forward by the opposer as an excuse for not believing. The same is said of the apostles ; but James said that Elias [Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as themselves, and yet he had that power with God, that, in answer to his prayer, it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and a half.

There can be no doubt but those to whom he wrote looked upon the ancient prophets as a race of beings superior to any in those days, and in order to be constituted a prophet of God, a man must be perfect in every respect. The idea is, that he must be perfect according to their signification of the word. If a people were blessed with prophets, they must be the individuals who were to prescribe the laws by which they must be governed, even in their private walks. The generation following were ready to suppose that those men who believed the word of God were as perfect as those to whom it was delivered supposed they must be, and were as forward to prescribe the rules by which they were governed, or rehearse laws and declare them to be the governing principles of the prophets, as though they themselves held the keys of the myteries of heaven, and had searched the archives of the generations of the world.

You will see that I have made mention of the Messiah, of his mission into the world, and of his walk and outward appearance ; but do not understand me as attempting to place him on a level with men, or his mission on a parallel with those of the prophets and apostles—far from this. I view his mission such as none other could fill ; that he was offered without spot to God, a propitiation for our sins ; that he rose triumphant and victorious over the grave and him that has the power of death. This, man could not do ; it required a perfect sacrifice—man is imperfect ; it required a spotless offering—man is not spotless ; it required an infinite atonement—man is mortal !

I have then, as you will see, made mention of our Lord, to show that individuals teaching truth, whether perfect or imperfect, have been looked upon as the worst of men. And that even our Saviour, the great shepherd of Israel, was mocked and derided, and placed on a parallel with the prince of devils ; and the prophets and apostles, though at this day looked upon as perfect as perfection, were considered the basest of the human family by those among whom they lived. It is not *rumour*, though it is wafted by every gale and reiterated by every zephyr, upon which we are to found our judgments of one's merits or demerits : if it is, we erect an altar upon which we sacrifice the most perfect of men, and establish a criterion by which the "vilest of the vile" may escape censure

But lest I weary you with too many remarks upon the history of the past, after a few upon the propriety of a narrative of the description I have proposed, I shall proceed.