



Type: Book Chapter

---

## False Teachings

Author(s): Joseph F. Smith

Source: *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*

Published: Salt Lake City; The Deseret News, 1919

Pages: 464-478

---

**Abstract:** The Devil's Knowledge—The Enemy of Truth Always Arrayed Against This Work—Why the Truth is Hated—Only Those Who Deny the Faith Contend—Beware of False Teachers—Where to Expect False Doctrines—Knowledge of Sin Unnecessary—Retreat from Evil—The Law of Recompense—Sympathy with Criminals—The Crime of Witchcraft and Other Superstitions—Superstitious Practices—The Messiah Craze—One Mighty and Strong

---

## CHAPTER XXI.

### False Teachings

THE DEVIL'S KNOWLEDGE. The devil knows the Father much better than we. Lucifer, the son of the morning, knows Jesus Christ, the Son of God, much better than we; but in him it is not and will not redound to eternal life; for knowing, he yet rebels; knowing, he is yet disobedient; he will not receive the truth; he will not abide in the truth; hence he is perdition, and there is no salvation for him. The same doctrine applies to me and to you and all the sons and daughters of God who have judgment and knowledge and are able to reason between cause and effect, and determine the right from the wrong, and the good from the evil and who are capable of seeing the light and distinguishing it from the darkness. Then this is the gospel of Jesus Christ, to know the only true and living God and his Son whom he has sent into the world, which knowledge comes through obedience to all his commandments, faith, repentance of sin, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands by divine authority, and not by the will of man.—*Apr. C. R.*, 1916, p. 4.

THE ENEMY OF TRUTH ALWAYS ARRAYED AGAINST THIS WORK. From the day that the Prophet Joseph Smith first declared his vision until now, the enemy of all righteousness, the enemy of truth, of virtue, of honor, uprightness, and purity of life, the enemy to the only true God, the enemy to direct revelation from God and to the inspirations that come from the heavens to man, has been arrayed against this work.—*Apr. C. R.*, 1909, p. 4.

WHY THE TRUTH IS HATED. Why should men be embittered against you because of this, because of your belief in Joseph Smith? Why should they become your enemies

because you declare your faith in a new revelation from the Father and from the Son to mankind for their guidance? Why should they? Let me tell you why: for the very same reason precisely that the embittered and unbelieving Pharisees and hypocrites of the Savior's time persecuted the Redeemer of earth, for the very reason that they later put to death the disciples of Jesus Christ, whom he ordained as apostles and as special witnesses of himself, who bore testimony of him and of the gospel to all the nations of the earth. They put them to death one by one, some of them in the most cruel manner, simply because they preached Jesus Christ, and him crucified and risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sitting with all glory and power and majesty and might at the right hand of his Father, God. The world felt injured by it. Why? Because it laid the ax at the root of the tree of error, of superstition, and of tradition, of lack of faith, and unbelief. It laid the ax at the root of the tree of wickedness, in the world, and of ignorance of God and his principles, and the plan of life and salvation, and the world hated the disciples because of it, and they hated the Son of God because of it, and they crucified him. They hated the disciples because of it, and they put them to death. That is why they hate you, for the same reason; that is, those who do hate you, those who have exercised their power, their will and their thoughts or minds sufficiently to be imbued with the spirit of persecution and hatred against the light and the truth.—*Oct. C. R.*, 1911, p. 5.

ONLY THOSE WHO DENY THE FAITH CONTEND. You find the spirit of contention only among apostates and those who have denied the faith, those who have turned away from the truth and have become enemies to God and his work. There you will find the spirit of contention, the spirit of strife. There you will find them wanting to "argue the question," and to dispute with you all the time. Their food, their meat, and their drink is contention which is abominable

in the sight of the Lord. We do not contend. We are not contentious, for if we were we would grieve the Spirit of the Lord from us, just as apostates do and have always done.—*Apr. C. R.*, 1908, p. 7.

BEWARE OF FALSE TEACHERS. I know that this is the work of God, and he is carrying it on. The honor of triumph over error, sin and injustice will belong to God and not to you or me, or any other man. Some men there will be who would limit the power of God to the power of men, and we have some of these among us and they have been among our school teachers. They would have you disbelieve the inspired accounts of the Scriptures that the winds and the waves are not subject to the power of God. That the claim of the Savior to cast out devils, raise the dead, or perform miraculous things, such as cleanse the leper, was only a myth. They would make you believe that God and his son Jesus Christ did not appear in person to Joseph Smith, that this was simply a myth, but we know better; the testimony of the Spirit has testified that this is the truth. And I say, beware of men who come to you with heresies that things come by laws of nature of themselves, and that God is without power. I am thankful that men who make such claims are few in number in the world, and I hope they will become fewer still.—*Logan Journal*, April 7, 1914.

WHERE TO EXPECT FALSE DOCTRINES. Among the Latter-day Saints, the preaching of false doctrines disguised as truths of the gospel, may be expected from people of two classes, and practically from these only; they are:

First—The hopelessly ignorant, whose lack of intelligence is due to their indolence and sloth, who make but feeble effort, if indeed any at all, to better themselves by reading and study; those who are afflicted with a dread disease that may develop into an incurable malady—laziness.

Second—The proud and self-vaunting ones, who read by

the lamp of their own conceit ; who interpret by rules of their own contriving ; who have become a law unto themselves, and so pose as the sole judges of their own doings. More dangerously ignorant than the first.

Beware of the lazy and the proud ; their infection in each case is contagious ; better for them and for all when they are compelled to display the yellow flag of warning, that the clean and uninfected may be protected.—*Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 41, p. 178.

KNOWLEDGE OF SIN UNNECESSARY. It has been very wisely said that “the knowledge of sin tempteth to its commission.”

It has been said that now and then the morbid curiosity of a missionary leads him into questionable places, and the only excuse he has for visiting these dens of vice is that he would like to see the shady side of life in some of our great cities that he may know thereof for himself. He wants to see “Paris by night” in order that he may know something of the actual life of vast numbers of his fellowmen. Such knowledge can have no beneficial effect upon the thoughts or feelings of the missionary who seeks it. It does not strengthen him in the duties of his calling. It is a peculiar sort of knowledge that is enticing to the feelings and imaginations, and tends in some measure to degrade the soul.

It is not necessary that our young people should know of the wickedness carried on in any place. Such knowledge is not elevating, and it is quite likely that more than one young man can trace the first step of his downfall to a curiosity which led him into questionable places. Let the young men of Zion, whether they be on missions or whether they be at home, shun all dens of infamy. It is not necessary that they should know what is going on in such places. No man is better or stronger for such knowledge. Let them remember that “the knowledge of sin tempteth to its commission,” and then avoid those temptations that in time to come may

threaten their virtue and their standing in the Church of Christ.— *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 37, May, 1902, p. 304.

RETREAT FROM EVIL. Sometimes in life, we are brought face to face with an enemy whose evil ways are beyond our power of combat, a victory over which cannot be hoped for. There is only one escape from moral annihilation and that is in retreat. The man with accumulated and unforgiven wrong behind him may find all retreat cut off and his condition in the world hopeless; and he who recklessly cuts off every opportunity of retreat by the neglected evils of the past is most unfortunate.

The daily practice, then, of seeking divine mercy and forgiveness as we go along, gives us power to escape evils, that can be overcome only by a safe retreat from them.— *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 44, August, 1909, p. 339.

THE LAW OF RECOMPENSE. Let me impress it upon you that one never can hold quite the same relation to a law of God which he has transgressed, as if one has lived in conformity with its requirements. It is unreasonable to expect it, and contrary to the laws of nature to conclude that you can. If a person has determined that sin can easily be wiped out, and hence, that he will enjoy unlawful pleasures in youth, repenting in later life with an idea in his mind that repentance will blot out completely the results of his sin and debauchery, and place him on a level with his fellow who has kept in virtue the commandments, from the beginning—time will wake him up to his serious and great mistake. He may and will be forgiven, if he repent; the blood of Christ will make him free, and will wash him clean, though his sins be as scarlet; but all this will not return to him any loss sustained, nor place him on an equal footing with his neighbor who has kept the commandments of the better law. Nor will it place him in the position where he would have been, had he not committed wrong. He has lost something which can never be regained, notwithstanding the perfection, the

loving mercy, the kindness and forgiveness of the Lord God.—*Improvement Era*, Vol. 7, January, 1904, p. 225.

SYMPATHY WITH CRIMINALS. There is a deplorable tendency among the people of this nation to sympathize with murderers, bank defaulters, evil adventurers, and a hundred other classes of criminals who are at large or who have been arrested or convicted for breaking the law. Such a tendency is not alone manifest among the people of the various states and territories of our nation, it is also apparent among the Latter-day Saints. This sympathy for criminals is entirely abnormal, and has a tendency to lower and destroy the moral sentiment of any people who indulge in it. For a Latter-day Saint to sympathize either with crime or with criminals, is a burning shame, and it is high time that the teachers of the community should stem such tendency and inculcate a sentiment that would make it extremely abhorrent to commit crime. Young men may please God by thinking right, by acting right, by shunning, as they would destruction, not only every crime, but the spirit to either see or sympathize with the criminal, or to hear or read the detail of his damnable acts. It is an old saying, that we are what we think; then, to be a good Latter-day Saint it is necessary to think pure thoughts, to imbibe pure ideas, and to let the mind dwell continually upon the noble things, and the good deeds, and the exalted thoughts of life, discarding all sympathy or interest for crime and criminals, and all thought of evil. The man or woman who will resort to the court room, who will visit criminals with flowers, who will read and constantly discuss every detail of crime, should be condemned, frowned upon, and their actions should be made detestable in the eyes of the pure in heart. When a murderer is condemned, he should be detested, dropped, and forgotten; and so also should criminals of other classes who sin grievously against law and the commandments of God.—*Improvement Era*, Vol. 5, August, 1902, p. 803.

THE CRIME OF WITCHCRAFT AND OTHER SUPERSTITIONS. After all the horrors, persecutions, and cruelties that have been brought about by the senseless belief in witchcraft, it seems strange in this age of enlightenment that men or women, especially those who have received the gospel, can be found anywhere who believe in such a pernicious superstition. The Bible and history alike conclusively brand this superstition as a child of evil. In ancient times, God required the Israelites to drive the Canaanites from their land, and witchcraft was one of the crimes which he laid at the door of the Canaanites, and for which they were adjudged unworthy of the land which they possessed.

Witchcraft has not infrequently been the last resort of the evil doer. Men bereft of the Spirit of God, when the voice of the Lord has ceased to warn them, have frequently resorted to witchcraft, in the endeavor to learn that which Heaven withheld; and the people of God from very early days to the present have been troubled with superstitious and evil-minded persons who have resorted to divination and kindred devices for selfish purposes, and scheming designs. In the middle ages it rested like a nightmare upon all Christendom.

Let it not be forgotten that the evil one has great power in the earth, and that by every possible means he seeks to darken the minds of men, and then offers them falsehood and deception in the guise of truth. Satan is a skilful imitator, and as genuine gospel truth is given the world in ever-increasing abundance, so he spreads the counterfeit coin of false doctrine. Beware of his spurious currency, it will purchase for you nothing but disappointment, misery and spiritual death. The "father of lies" he has been called, and such an adept has he become, through the ages of practice in his nefarious work, that were it possible he would deceive the very elect.

Those who turn to soothsayers and wizards for their



information are invariably weakening their faith. When men began to forget the God of their fathers who had declared himself in Eden and subsequently to the later patriarchs, they accepted the devil's substitute and made for themselves gods of wood and stone. It was thus that the abominations of idolatry had their origin.

The gifts of the Spirit and the powers of the holy priesthood are of God, they are given for the blessing of the people, for their encouragement, and for the strengthening of their faith. This Satan knows full well, therefore he seeks by imitation-miracles to blind and deceive the children of God. Remember what the magicians of Egypt accomplished in their efforts to deceive Pharaoh as to the divinity of the mission of Moses and Aaron. John the Revelator saw in vision the miracle-working power of the evil one. Note his words: "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; \* \* \* and he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth, by the means of those miracles," etc. (Rev. 13:11-14.) Further, John saw three unclean spirits whom he describes as "the spirits of devils, working miracles." (Rev. 16:13-14.)

That the power to work wonders may come from an evil source is declared by Christ in his prophecy regarding the great judgment: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22-23).

The danger and power for evil in witchcraft is not so much in the witchcraft itself as in the foolish credence that superstitious people give to the claims made in its behalf. It is outrageous to believe that the devil can hurt or injure an innocent man or woman, especially if they are members of the Church of Christ—without that man or woman has faith

that he or she can be harmed by such an influence and by such means. If they entertain such an idea, then they are liable to succumb to their own superstitions. There is no power in witchcraft itself, only as it is believed in and accepted.—*Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 37, p. 560.

**SUPERSTITIOUS PRACTICES.** It is needless to assert that to those who are intelligent, and not bound by old notions and superstitions, there is no truth in what people call witchcraft. Men and women who come under the influence of a belief therein are bewitched by their own foolishness, and are led astray by pretenders and mischief-makers who “peep and mutter.” It is really astonishing that there should be any to believe in these absurdities. No man or woman who enjoys the Spirit of God and the influence and power of the holy priesthood can believe in these superstitious notions; and those who do, will lose, indeed have lost, the influence of the Spirit of God and of the priesthood, and are become subject to the witchery of Satan, who is constantly striving to draw away the Saints from the true way, if not by the dissemination of such nonsense, then by other insidious methods.

One individual can not place an affliction upon another in the way that these soothsayers would have the people believe. It is a trick of Satan to deceive men and women, and to draw them away from the Church and from the influence of the Spirit of God, and the power of his holy priesthood, that they may be destroyed. These peep-stone-men and women are inspired by the devil, and are the real witches, if any such there be. Witchcraft, and all kindred evils, are solely the creations of the superstitious imaginations of men and women who are steeped in ignorance, and derive their power over people from the devil, and those who submit to this influence are deceived by him. Unless they repent, they will be destroyed. There is absolutely no possibility for a person who enjoys the Holy Spirit of God

to even believe that such influences can have any effect upon him. The enjoyment of the Holy Spirit is absolute proof against all influences of evil; you never can obtain that Spirit by seeking diviners, and men and women who "peep and mutter." That is obtained by imposition of hands by the servants of God, and retained by right living. If you have lost it, repent and return to God, and for your salvation's sake and for the sake of your children, avoid the emissaries of Satan who "peep and mutter" and who would lead you down to darkness and death.

It is impossible for anyone possessing the spirit of the gospel and having the power of the holy priesthood to believe in or be influenced by any power of necromancy.—*Improvement Era*, Vol. 5, September, 1902, p. 896-899.

THE MESSIAH CRAZE. Your communication has been received. In response, I send you a few of my reflections on the subject of the so-called "Messiah craze" among the Lamanites.

Just what these manifestations have been is a matter of some doubt, in my mind, not as to their evident purpose, judging from the many newspaper reports of the main features of the manifestations so much talked about, for it seems clear that the purpose or object thereof has been to awaken in the benighted minds of these degenerate people a belief and faith in and ultimately a knowledge of a crucified and risen Redeemer, and the righteous precepts which he taught.

That God will manifest his purposes to the Lamanites in his own time and way there can be no doubt in the minds of those who believe in the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon—for in that book this fact is made unmistakably clear, but just how he will do so in every particular, and just what agencies he will use to bring about his purposes in this regard, may be matters of conjecture beyond what has actually been revealed. One of the agencies, we

know will be the Book of Mormon itself. Through the medium of the holy priesthood, which has been restored to the earth in these latter times, God will also operate to accomplish his will. So far, however, but little of good has been effected through either of these channels, on account of the extremely benighted condition of the minds, and the wild, nomadic habits of the red men. And for many other sufficient reasons they have not been susceptible to the impressions of the Holy Spirit, nor capable of rising to the comprehension of its power.

The time had not come, and is not yet come, for them to receive the message and the work bequeathed them by their fathers, as designed of God—but the time will come, and may be nearer at hand than many anticipate. That these supernatural manifestations, if they indeed are such, indicate the beginning of that time may without inconsistency be believed. To suppose that the work will be accomplished in a day—or in any very brief period—would be folly. God has not heretofore worked, nor will he be likely to so work among this remnant of his people. Their fall and degradation came slowly, by degrees, and in like manner will their redemption, doubtless, come to pass. Yet he will cut his work short in righteousness, and it behooves the Saints to be always ready.

That the Lord will hasten their enlightenment by means of dreams, visions, and heavenly manifestations, when the time shall come, and that holy messengers may appear to them from time to time and that among them shall yet be inspired men of God raised up as teachers to instruct them in the truth, we cannot doubt, for these things have been promised in the last times both in the Book of Mormon and in the Bible, and also in the revelations to Joseph Smith the prophet. But all these things will come to pass as God has determined, in his own time and way. And blessed will he be who shall be worthy to bear the message of good tidings

and the offering of peace, the word of God and the means of redemption to the seed of Joseph, to whom the promises are made, and woe to him who shall despise and scoff in the day of God's power.

With reference to who the personage is (one or more) who is claimed by the Lamanites to have visited them, there appears to me to be room for grave doubts. From all the reports I have seen upon this subject, it is not at all conclusive to my mind that he was indeed the Messiah. Upon this point we must consider the sources of our information; it has come to us second handed, through interpreters and writers whose knowledge of the Lamanitish tongues may or may not be very imperfect, who have absolutely no knowledge of the ancient history of the race, and of the purposes and promises of God concerning them. That they know the scriptural account of Jesus, the Son of God, his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension on high, with the promise to come again in like manner as he ascended, and this only, we need not question; but knowing only this and nothing more respecting this matter, they might easily be misled by the reports coming from persons far removed from the actual witnesses.

And yet to a Latter-day Saint, who knows something of the history of those people and of the promises made to them by their forefathers, hearing the same story, would conclude that perhaps one or more of the three Nephite disciples who tarried, whose mission was to minister to the remnants of their own race, had made an appearance to Porcupine and perhaps to many others, and taught them Jesus and him crucified and risen from the dead, and that he was soon to come again in power and great glory to avenge them of their wrongs upon the wicked and restore them to their lands and to the knowledge of their fathers and of the Son of God.

This would be a very natural conclusion and not at all

inconsistent with the established principles of the gospel and our knowledge of the manner of God's dealings with the children of men. While it is more than likely that Christ might send messengers to the Lamanites to prepare the way for his coming in the fulness of time, it is highly improbable that Christ himself would appear to a people so utterly unprepared to receive and comprehend him.

True, the Father and the Son appeared to the boy Joseph in the beginning of this dispensation, but he was a chosen instrument from eternity to open up the last dispensation of the gospel, and God had prepared a chosen band to join him in that work. But Moroni, John, Peter, James and John, and diverse other messengers were sent to open the way and prepare the foundations of this great work and restore the records of the ancient people of this continent to the world. The foundations of that work having been laid, the authority of God established, the order of the Priesthood and the laws of the Church revealed, shall we look for these things to be ignored, or for the knowledge of God to come through the appointed channels?

While they will come in harmony with revealed and established truth, and not in conflict therewith, nor in conflict with the order of heaven which exists on the earth, the object to be attained by such manifestations as the Lamanites claim to have had, admitting the same to be true and from God, can be no other than to begin the preparation of the Lamanites to receive a correct knowledge of God and of their fathers, and of the holy gospel already revealed and established among men, that they might believe, obey and be saved thereby.

Far be it from me to wish to close the channels of communication between the Savior of the world himself and the remnants of Lehi. No one can be more free to admit his perfect right and power to visit whom he pleases, at his pleasure, for the channels of communication between God and

man cannot be cut off nor closed by man, nor ever will be while God has a purpose to accomplish by revealing himself. But that we may not be deceived, led into error, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, the foolish vagaries or the cunning craftiness of men, or follow the false cry of, Lo here is Christ, or there, God has instituted the true order of communication between himself and man, and has established it in his Church, and to this truth all mankind will do well to take heed, lest they be deceived. That which is in harmony with this is of God, that which is contrary to it is from beneath. It is in perfect harmony with the order of heaven for ministering spirits or messengers from God or Christ to visit the Lamanites or any other people, as Cornelius of old was visited, and as Christ visited Saul, and for the same purposes.—Letter to Editor of *Young Woman's Journal* in answer to question regarding reported visitations to Indians. *Young Woman's Journal*, Vol 2, 1890-1891, pp. 268-271.

ONE MIGHTY AND STRONG. In conclusion we would say that the Latter-day Saints by this time should be so well settled in the conviction that God has established his Church in the earth for the last time, to remain, and no more to be thrown down or destroyed; and that God's house is a house of order, of law, of regularity, that erratic disturbers of that order of men of restless temperament, who, through ignorance and egotism, become vain babblers, yet make great pretensions to prophetic powers and other spiritual graces and gifts, ought not to have any influence with them, nor ought the Saints to be disturbed in their spirit by such characters and their theories. The Church of Christ is with the Saints. It has committed to it the law of God for its own government and perpetuation. It possesses every means for the correction of every wrong or abuse or error which may from time to time arise, and that without anarchy, or even revolution; it can do it by process of evolution—by develop-

ment, by an increase of knowledge, wisdom, patience and charity.

The presiding quorums of the Church will always be composed of such men, they will be chosen in such manner, that the Saints can be assured that solid wisdom, righteousness, and conscientious adherence to duty, will characterize the policy of those who are entrusted with the administration of the affairs of the Church. While, from time to time, as the work of the Lord may have need of their services, men of exceptional talents and abilities, will develop among the people of God; and without disorder or eruption or excitement, they will be called of the Lord through the appointed agencies of the priesthood and Church authority, to positions that will afford them opportunity for service. They will be accepted by the Saints in the regular order, appointed by the law of the Church, just as Edward Partridge was called and accepted, and just as the "one mighty and strong" will be called and accepted when the time comes for his services.

JOSEPH F. SMITH,  
JOHN R. WINDER,  
ANTHON H. LUND,  
First Presidency.

—*Improvement Era*, Vol. 10, 1906-7, pp. 929-943.