

Section 46

Like several other revelations Joseph received shortly after relocating to Kirtland, Ohio, section 46 fights deception. The revelation is known for its list of spiritual gifts, but the Lord presents them as part of a larger rationale that may not be easy to grasp. The Lord's command for us to earnestly seek the gifts of the Spirit is so that we will not be deceived. If Saints live in the light of the Holy Ghost, they will not be deceived. If they do not have the Spirit, they will be deceived. Joseph taught that someone "who has none of the gifts has not faith; and he deceives himself if he supposes he has."¹

The revelation arose from a conflict between missionaries. Some returned to Kirtland from Cleveland having had an awful experience. They were preaching when a deceiver came forward and knelt as if to pray but then led an attack. His cohorts blew out the candles and threw inkstands and books at the speaker. Some missionaries understandably wanted to restrict attendance at their meetings as a result of this abuse. Others opposed this idea, citing 3 Nephi 18:22 where the Lord commands the church "not to forbid any man from coming unto you when ye shall meet together." Both positions seemed justified. The Saints needed further light. "Therefore," wrote John Whitmer, "the Lord deigned to speak on this subject, that his people might come

¹ "History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843]," p. 1434, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 28, 2020.

to understanding, and said, that he had always given to his Elders to conduct all meetings as they were led by the spirit.”²

The Lord knows very well what the Book of Mormon says in 3 Nephi 18:22–34 about allowing everyone who wants to worship with the Saints to do so. However, it is always the case that the elders should conduct meetings by the Holy Ghost. There may be times when exceptions to what the Book of Mormon says are in order. How will those exceptional cases be known? By the Spirit.

The Saints must prayerfully, gratefully seek the Holy Spirit in holiness, with honest motives, a clear conscience, and concern about eternal consequences. Otherwise they are likely to be seduced by evil spirits, doctrines of devils, or commandments of men. Section 46 commands Saints to beware of these deceptions and promises them they will not be deceived if they seek earnestly the gifts of the Holy Ghost and always remember their intended purposes to benefit those who love the Lord and keep all his commandments—and those who seek to do so. The gifts of the Spirit are not given to satisfy selfish motives. They are to be shared, the Lord explains. Not all Saints have every gift, but all have at least one gift. Some have one, some another, and thus by sharing everyone gains access to all the gifts.

When asked by one skeptic whether one could be saved simply by repenting and being baptized but not seeking the Holy Ghost, Joseph made an analogy.

Suppose I am traveling and am hungry, and meet with a man and tell him I am hungry; and he tells me to go yonder, there is a house for entertainment, go and knock and you must conform to all the rules of the house, or you cannot satisfy your hunger; knock, call for food, sit down and eat and I go and knock and ask for food and sit down to the table, but do not eat, shall I satisfy my hunger? No! I must eat: the gifts are the food.³

² “John Whitmer, *History, 1831–circa 1847*,” p. 23, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 28, 2020.

³ “*Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 1, 21 December 1842–10 March 1843*,” p. 46, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 28, 2020.