

BE NOT TOSSEL TO AND FRO

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Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter Day Saints
Independence, Mo.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Ephesians 4: 11-15

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we, in the unity of the faith, all come to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

One day I stood at a window, looking idly and absent-mindedly out at the busy traffic of a main thoroughfare. As I looked, my attention was attracted to a large double sheet of old newspaper, which had probably been carelessly tossed from some passing motor car. When I first noticed it, it was almost at rest in the middle of the street -- flapping slightly at the corners, but not really moving out of its place. Then a string of cars approached, and drawn by the sweeping suction of their passing, the paper lifted itself and zoomed quite vigorously in the direction of the departing cars. But just then another line of speeding cars came from the other direction, and the paper found itself caught in another current of air from the opposite direction -- so it changed course, and blow back in the direction from which it came. About the time that flurry was over, the south breeze, which was blowing across the road, gave a sudden little gust, and the paper whirled out of the street, got caught in a sort of aerial whirlpool, and in the general run-around finally landed back in the street, ready for the next sweeping line of cars.

I have discovered that just a lot of good people -- a very great many of them professed Christians and church members -- are just like that piece of stray paper. They are tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Because they have never digged deep, and made their foundations sure -- because they have never taken root and gone deeply into the soil of spiritual growth, the least gust of wind is able to send them scurrying away in some new direction, after some new fad, or new idea. It is people like that who follow a new cult every year, or who attach their spiritual allegiance first to one man and then another, or who find themselves continually possessed by this or that or the other new philosophy which blows them this way and that, but never lets them find a firm anchorage or an abiding peace.

Christ never intended that his followers -- the members of his body on earth, the church, should thus be blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine. He did not intend that they should be following each new fad, each new cult, each new philosophy, each new idea that came along -- deserting all the old every time they sought the new. He did not ever intend that his followers should be as those people against whom Paul warned Timothy -- "ever learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth." He intended that his disciples should be rooted and grounded in love; that they should have certain basic, fundamental knowledges and truths and experiences which would keep them firm and steady in the face not only

of little gusts of windy doctrine, but in the face of the wildest and most violent of spiritual storms.

To the end that his people might be grounded, and established, and kept safe from those forces which would carry them to and fro, hither and yon, Christ set certain officers in his church. Paul enumerates them for us in the Scripture lesson we have read from the 4th chapter of Ephesians -- apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. To these and others of the church's overseers was entrusted the task of keeping the people of Christ's church and kingdom free from the forces and elements which would disturb, which would scatter, which would toss to and fro, which would lie in wait with craftiness and sleight and cunning to deceive and draw away. To those officers of the church, and to the church itself, it was given to speak with authority, to establish sound doctrine, to unify the faith of the saints by bringing all of them to a full knowledge of Christ, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The specific purpose of setting these officers in the church was that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by sleight of men, by cunning craftiness, but that following their teaching and their authoritative doctrine, we should grow up together in love, until we all became one with Christ.

Some people have supposed and believed that if Authority is given to the church and to God's representatives in the priesthood of the church, that this sets aside man's intellect and his right to think for himself. Some people have supposed that if one consented to the authority of the church, it meant that he had to agree mechanically with those above him in authority, so that all might think alike. I believe it is Walter Lippman who says, "Where all think alike, no one thinks very much." There is no more positive and speedy way of stifling all thought than demanding that all men think and believe according to a certain authoritarian pattern.

Latter Day Saints do not believe that the authority of the church demands that man surrender his intellect, his right to reason with that intellect, his right to demand that authority be tested in the light of reason. We respect, and honor, and under all normal circumstances obey the direction of those who are placed above us in the church. But we demand the right to check and test and prove their authority democratically, before we obey. If the church commands, or one of its officers commands, we test that pronouncement against the authority of that which is written, against the authority of common sense, and against the authority of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, which should rightfully be in the bosom of each one of us. If a command, or an interpretation of doctrine is given which is directly contrary to the written Scripture, or which is obviously and patently wrong, tyrannical, dictatorial, unsound; or which we cannot in conscience agree to because of what we believe to be the leadings of the Holy Spirit, we reserve the right to re-examine that command or that re-interpretation, in love, in kindness, in fellowship and forbearance one with another.

Let us bring a concrete example. I trust that you already know that members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have always condemned polygamy. Our history proves to our satisfaction that Joseph Smith never taught polygamy; that he had only one wife; that up to the month of his death he was publicly on record as opposed to anything but a monogamous marriage relation. We say that it is impossible that he should have presented any revelation commanding polygamy. We deny that he did, but if he ever had, it must needs have been checked against that which is already written -- and the Bible, and the Book of Mormon which Joseph Smith translated, and the revelations which he gave to the church between 1829 and 1844 all advocate monogamy, and condemn polygamy

in any form. If polygamy was wrong once, it will always be wrong, and no pronouncement or interpretation or revelation from the highest in authority in the church could ever make it right. So do we today demand and reserve the right to test the leadership of our ministry, even up to and including the prophet and spiritual head of the church.

We test the authority of our leaders by the written, scriptural record, by the principles of reason and judgment, and by the Holy Spirit which is given to each member who has been truly born into Christ's church and kingdom. We test each experience, each bit of leadership, each pronouncement of doctrine, because every man, no matter how good or how exalted his position, is fallible, mortal, human. And there is no church, which is not also fallible at times, because the church is made up, from top to bottom, of fallible, mortal, human creatures, whose powers of reasoning and judgment and spiritual apprehension are sometimes pitifully poor. The person or the church which seeks for a static finality in religion -- a final statement which is supposed to include ALL the sum total of religious truth, is poor indeed. For no truer words were ever spoken for America in the Mayflower: "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from his word." In each age, as men grow into the ability to perceive more and more of God, their conception of him grows, their interpretation of his doctrine changes. This does not mean that we should flutter about from place to place, as does the paper when it blows, but rather that we should build our foundations, send down our roots deep into spiritual soil, anchor ourselves firmly in what we know to be right, and then spread out and advance from there, testing each new bit of knowledge, each new revelation of God, each new dictum of authority in the light of the fundamental, stabilizing knowledge which we know.

The men who are set apart in God's church to be his ministers, are special repositories of God's spirit -- leaders, revelators, interpreters of God's will -- stabilizers of his church. But they may make mistakes. They may prove false, as did Judas. They may be honestly but humanly mistaken, as Peter was when Paul made a special trip to Jerusalem to withstand him to his face, and won his case before a special church council. (See Galatians 2:11) They may prove neglectful, as did the men who deserted Paul and left him to defend himself in a time of great need. So the people who follow the leadership of the ministry have a right -- a God-given, inalienable right -- to think for themselves, to choose, to compare, to judge in charity, to accept and approve, or reject and disapprove of whatever leadership their ministry gives.

This is not to say that we should be suspicious, or critically fault-finding, or vindictive, or rebellious. If both ministry and laity are led by the Spirit of Christ, there will be no clash between them. But if one departs, each is set to support and strengthen the other. It is the function of the officers of the church to lead, guide, direct, receive new revelation of God's will, to set in order, to watch for iniquity and discipline it when it appears, being governed always by the Spirit of God. It is the function of the officers of the church to see that the church to see that the membership is firmly rooted and grounded, so that they will not be carried about by every wind of doctrine. It is their function to seek after and bring back those whose foundations are not secure, and who do drift at the first gust of breeze.

But the laity has a responsibility too. We must undertake part of the task of building our own foundation, so that we shall not be blown away. We should follow our guides, respecting them, honoring them, strengthening them, upholding them in faith and prayer that they may lead aright. But always we should have within us the witness of the Holy Spirit that we are being led aright. We should keep a loving, kindly, watchful eye on those whose God-given task it is to lead

us, lest they too should some day be shaken from their firm foundation and likewise be carried to and fro. We must assume some of the responsibility for following wrong leadership, for Paul admonished. "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let them be accursed." He was reminding his hearers of their responsibility in watching to see that even he preached the gospel in purity, for even he was mortal, fallible, capable of making mistakes or embracing error.

We Latter Day Saints are thankful to have in our church all the officers Christ set there for the perfecting of the saints, such as apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors, and teachers. We are striving with our leaders to bring Christ's church to a unity of the faith, and each member to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We are striving together, mutually assisting each other, that we may all become firmly grounded in love and faith and doctrinal unity, that we henceforth may be no longer children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. We pray that you, with us, may receive of that Holy Spirit of promise, which shall fix our minds and hearts on things eternal, but shall also lead us to expand our understanding until we have been led into ALL truth.