

BUILT UPON THE ROCK



Orson F. Whitney was born on July 1, 1855, in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was ordained an Apostle on April 9, 1906, by President Joseph F. Smith. This article comes from an address he delivered in general conference on October 7, 1916.

By Elder Orson F. Whitney (1855–1931)

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In 1847 the Latter-day Saints, under the leadership of President Brigham Young, . . . [were commanded] to organize themselves into companies of hundreds, fifties, and tens, preparatory to the long and wearisome ox-team journey to the Salt Lake Valley.

And now I would like to ask a few questions: Would it be wise or sensible in anyone at this time to attempt to carry out the terms of that revelation? What would you think of a man, in a day of railroads and automobiles and airplanes, who would yoke up an ox team here in Utah, and make a start for the Missouri River? . . .

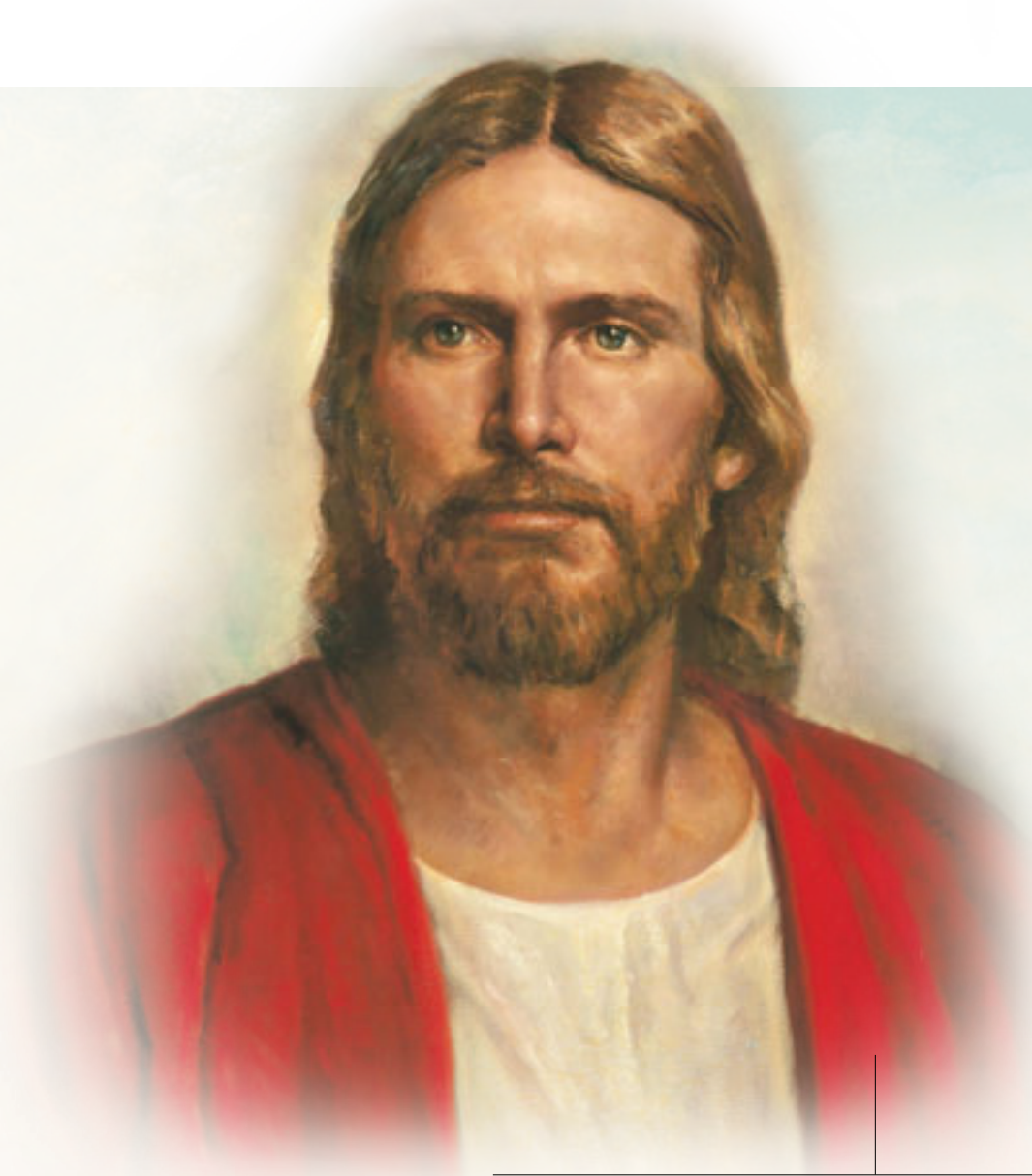
The lesson I wish to convey is this: we are a progressive people, for we are God's people, and as such we have the right to use these modern methods, these improved scientific facilities, which the Lord has provided and placed in our hands for the promotion of His marvelous work. . . .

What Makes Us Different?

Many years ago there came to Utah a learned prelate of [another] church . . . , and I had a conversation with him. He had been to a "Mormon" sacrament meeting and had much to say in criticism of our method of administering the Lord's

Supper, particularly our use of water instead of wine on such occasions. He said it made him shudder when he saw the people sipping the water; and he pointed out the fact, for it is a fact, that according to the Bible the Savior, when He instituted the sacrament among the Jews, used wine, declaring that it was His blood or that it represented His blood. I could add that the Book of Mormon also states that the Savior used wine when He introduced the sacrament among the Nephites.

My . . . friend, whether he knew it or not, had hit upon the great distinguishing feature that differentiates God's Church from all other churches under the sun—is this, that while they are founded upon books and traditions and the precepts of men, this Church is built upon the rock of Christ, upon the principle of immediate and continuous revelation. The Latter-day Saints do not do things because they happen to be printed in



a book. They do not do things because God told the Jews to do them; nor do they do or leave undone anything because of instructions that Christ gave to the Nephites.

Whatever is done by this Church is because God, speaking from heaven in our day, has commanded this Church to do it. . . . That is the constitution of the Church of Christ. If we use water instead of wine in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, it is because Christ has so commanded.

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God's Work Moves On

Divine revelation adapts itself to the circumstances and conditions of men, and change upon change ensues as God's progressive work goes on to its destiny. There is no book big enough or good enough to preside over this Church.

In saying this, I speak with all due reverence of the written word of God, that which is printed in the books, part of which may be obsolete, having fulfilled its purpose and been laid upon the shelf, while the other part is virile, full of life, and applicable to our present state—our present degree of development. But even this part must be interpreted aright. No man ought to contend for what is in the books, in the face of God's mouthpiece, who speaks for Him and interprets His word. To so contend is to defer to the dead letter in preference to the living oracle, which is always a false position.

What the Lord said to the Jews and Nephites 2,000 years ago or what He said to the Latter-day Saints 50 or 60 years ago has no force whatever at this time unless it agrees with present-day revelation, with the Lord's most recent instructions to His people through His chosen or appointed servants or servant; and they who ignore this fact are liable to get into trouble. It is the latest word from God that must be heeded, in preference to any former revelation, however true.

The same God who says do thus and so today can repeal that commandment tomorrow, without being changeable or



inconsistent. The legislature, meeting every two years, repeals old laws or such of its former enactments as have served their purpose; but no one thinks of charging the lawmakers with inconsistency or self-contradiction. How then can God be considered inconsistent if He says one thing today and changes it tomorrow or next month or next year in order to suit altered circumstances?

He commanded Abraham to slay his son, and Abraham was about to do so when the same God said, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad” [Genesis 22:12]. Abraham was under obligation . . . to obey the second command instead of the first; and he would have been a transgressor had he failed.

We Must Keep Up

I might continue the theme indefinitely but will close now with this thought. God’s work is progressive. It changes its appearance but never its principles. The truths upon which it is founded

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are eternal, unalterable, but there are many regulations that change and change and change, as the work of God goes on. The everlasting gospel is something more than a fire escape, the way out of a perilous situation. It is the

divine plan for human progress, the pathway to perfection; and the spirit of the gospel is the spirit of improvement, of advancement.

God’s work will go on, but will you and I go on with it? . . . How can we go along with the Lord’s work? There is but one way, and that is to do the things which He has commanded and leave undone the things which He has forbidden. . . .

O my brothers and sisters of the Church of Christ! Let us be awake and up and doing. . . . Keep on doing something for God, that the spirit of His work may abide in you and guide you along that path “growing brighter and brighter unto the perfect day” [see D&C 50:24]. ■

Punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and capitalization modernized; subheads added.