
The Hypocrite

D&C 50:37–46

Parley P. Pratt, John Murdock, and other elders reported to the Prophet Joseph Smith of seeing spiritual aberrations in Church meetings. Pratt explained why the elders wanted the Prophet to know about the matter:

Feeling our weakness and inexperience, and lest we should err in judgment concerning these spiritual phenomena, myself, John Murdock, and several other Elders, went to Joseph Smith, and asked him to inquire of the Lord concerning these spirits or manifestations. After we had joined in prayer in his translating room, [Joseph] dictated in our presence the following revelation (D&C 50)—(each sentence was uttered slowly and very distinctly and with a pause between each, sufficiently long for it to be recorded, by an ordinary writer, in long hand.)¹

Church historian John Whitmer also wrote of “excessive spiritual aberrations” among early converts in Kirtland:

Some had visions and could not tell what they saw, some would fancy to themselves that they had the sword of Laban, and would wield it as expert as a light dragon; some would act like an Indian in the act of scalping; some would slide or scoot on the floor with the rapidity of a serpent, which they termed sailing in the boat to the Lamanites, preaching the gospel.²

¹ Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, Revised and Enhanced Edition* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 72.

² John Whitmer, *History*, 1831–circa 1847, 26–27. Joseph Smith Papers.

The Lord clarified in this revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith that “[He had] seen abominations in the church that profess my name” (D&C 50:4). The Lord admonished the missionaries to “be not deceived, but continue in steadfastness” (v. 23). The Lord said, “There are hypocrites among you, who have deceived some, which has given the adversary power; but behold such shall be reclaimed; But the hypocrites shall be detected and shall be cut off, either in life or in death, even as I will” (vv. 7–8).

The issue of hypocrisy was not new. In the Meridian of Time, Jesus didn’t want his followers to pray as the hypocrites, who “pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men” (Matthew 6:5). In synagogues, the hypocrites did not participate in public prayers. They stood and uttered aloud private prayers so that others would know of their devotion. Those who indulged in private prayers in the synagogues were also seen throughout the week standing for hours in marketplaces and on streets corners in the attitude of prayer, with head covered, eyes cast down, and facing Jerusalem. Jesus admonished His Twelve Apostles not to pray in this hypocritical manner.

In May 1831 the Lord was also concerned about hypocrites in the Church. He admonished the elders, “He that is ordained of me and went forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? And if it be some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:17–18).

How can we discern the difference between the words of a righteous man and the words of a hypocrite? Answer: “That which doth not edify is not of God” (D&C 50:23). That which instructs, uplifts, enlightens, and informs, edifies and is of God.