

Trying to Serve the Lord Without Offending the Devil

JAMES E. FAUST

In the great universities of the world, one does not often choose to speak of the influence of Satan. Perhaps it is not cool to address this subject, but I choose to do so anyway. Someone said in these few words: "I have heard much about the devil. I have read a great deal about the devil. I have even done business with the devil, but it didn't pay." Your generation lives in a day when many things are measured against the standard of social or political correctness. Today I challenge that false doctrine of human behavior. The influence of Satan is becoming more acceptable. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said, "The devil is most devilish when respectable" (*Aurora Leigh*, book 7). However, as Shakespeare said, "He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf" (*King Lear*, act 3, scene 6, line 20).

It is not good practice to become intrigued by Satan and his mysteries. No good can come from getting too close to evil. Like playing with fire, it is too easy to get burned: "The knowledge of sin tempteth to its commission" (see Joseph F. Smith, *GD*, p. 373). The only safe course is to keep well distanced from him and from any of his wicked activities or nefarious practices. The mischief of devil worship,

sorcery, casting spells, witchcraft, voodooism, black magic, and all other forms of demonism should be avoided like the plague.

However, Brigham Young said that it is important to "study . . . evil, and its consequences" (*DBY*, p. 257). Since Satan is the author of all evil in the world, it would therefore be essential to realize that he is the influence behind the opposition to the work of God. Alma stated the issue succinctly: "For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil" (Alma 5:40).

My principal reason for choosing this subject is to help young people by warning them, as Paul said, "lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). We hope that young people, unfamiliar with the sophistries of the world, can keep themselves free of Satan's enticements and deceitful ways.

James E. Faust was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 15 November 1994.

I owe my text to Elder Marion G. Romney, who, at a BYU devotional in 1955, stated: “Now there are those among us who are trying to serve the Lord without offending the devil.” This is a contradiction of terms. President Romney goes on:

Must the choice lie irrevocably between peace on the one hand, obtained by compliance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith, and contention and war on the other hand? [Marion G. Romney, “The Price of Peace,” Brigham Young University student body, March 1, 1955, p. 7]

Yogi Berra is reported to have said, “If you come to a fork in the road, take it.” But it doesn’t work that way. The Savior said,

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. [Matthew 6:24]

Today many of us are trying to serve two masters: the Lord and our own selfish interests, without offending the devil. The influence of God, our Eternal Father, urges us, pleads with us, and inspires us to follow him. In contrast, the power of Satan urges us to disbelieve and disregard God’s commandments.

In another address President Romney continues:

The consequences of [mortal man’s] choices are of the all-or-nothing sort. There is no way for him to escape the influence of these opposing powers. Inevitably he is led by one or the other. His God-given free agency gives him the power and option to choose. But choose he must. Nor can he serve both of them at the same time, for, as Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters: . . . Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” [Marion G. Romney, CR, October 1962, p. 94]

In the October 1987 general conference I made this statement:

I think we will witness increasing evidence of Satan’s power as the kingdom of God grows stronger. I believe Satan’s ever-expanding efforts are some proof of the truthfulness of this work. In the future the opposition will be both more subtle and more open. It will be masked in greater sophistication and cunning, but it will also be more blatant. We will need greater spirituality to perceive all of the forms of evil and greater strength to resist it. [“The Great Imitator,” *Ensign*, November 1987, p. 33]

Abortion is one evil practice that has become socially accepted in our country and, indeed, in the world. Many of today’s politicians claim not to favor abortion, but oppose government intervention in a woman’s right to choose an abortion.

During a national prayer breakfast in Washington on February third of this year, Mother Teresa gave the most honest and powerful proclamation of truth on this subject I have ever heard. She is the eighty-three-year-old Yugoslavian nun who has cared for the poorest of the poor in India for years. She is now aged and physically frail, but courageous, with immense spiritual strength. Mother Teresa delivered a message that cut to the very heart and soul of the social ills afflicting America, which traditionally has given generously to the peoples of the earth but now has become selfish. She stated that the greatest proof of that selfishness is abortion. Cal Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* Syndicate reported on her speech. He said that Mother Teresa had tied abortion to growing violence and murder in the streets by saying,

If we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill each other? . . . Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence

to get what they want.["Mother Teresa Has Anti-Abortion Answer," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 15, 1994, p. A-11]

Then she alluded to the concern that has been shown for orphan children in India and elsewhere in the world, for which she expressed gratitude. But she continued,

These concerns are very good. But often these same people are not concerned with the millions who are being killed by the deliberate decision of their own mothers. And this is what is the greatest destroyer of peace today—abortion, which brings people to such blindness. [Ibid.]

Cal Thomas, commenting on this powerful message, said:

Why should people or nations regard human life as noble or dignified if abortion flourishes? Why agonize about indiscriminate death in Bosnia when babies are being killed far more efficiently and out of the sight of television cameras? [Ibid.]

In conclusion, Mother Teresa pled for pregnant women who don't want their children to give them to her. She said, "I am willing to accept any child who would be aborted and to give that child to a married couple who will love the child and be loved by the child" (ibid.). What consummate spiritual courage this remarkable old woman demonstrated. How the devil must have been offended! Her remarkable declaration, however, was not generally picked up by the press or the editorial writers. Perhaps they felt more comfortable being politically or socially correct. After all, they can justify their stance by asserting that everyone does it, or it is legal. Fortunately the scriptures and the message of the prophets cannot be so revised.

I speak next of the present-day challenge to the words of the Lord recorded in Genesis: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the

earth" (Genesis 1:28). All my life I have heard the argument that the earth is over-populated. Much controversy surrounded a recently concluded United Nations International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, Egypt. No doubt the conference accomplished much that was worthwhile. But at the very center of the debate was the socially acceptable phrase "sustainable growth." This concept is becoming increasingly popular. How cleverly Satan masked his evil designs with that phrase.

Few voices in the developed nations cry out in the wilderness against this coined phrase "sustainable growth." In *Forbes* magazine of September this year, a thoughtful editorial asserts that people are an asset, not a liability. It forthrightly declares as preposterous the broadly accepted premise that curbing population growth is essential for economic development. The editorial then states convincingly that "free people don't 'exhaust resources.' They create them" (*Forbes*, 12 September 1994, p. 25).

An article in *U.S. News & World Report* entitled "Ten Billion for Dinner Please," states that the earth is capable of producing food for a population of at least eighty billion, eight times the ten billion expected to inhabit the earth by the year 2050. One study estimates that with improved scientific methods the earth could feed as many as one thousand billion people ("Ten Billion for Dinner Please," *U.S. News & World Report*, 12 September 1994, pp. 57-60). Those who argue for sustainable growth lack vision and faith. The Lord said, "For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare" (D&C 104:17). That settles the issue for me. It should settle the issue for all of us. The Lord has spoken.

The Church's stand on homosexual relations provides another arena where we offend the devil. I expect that the statement of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve against homosexual marriages will continue

to be assaulted. Satan is only interested in our misery, which he promotes by trying to persuade men and women to act contrary to God's plan. One way he does this is by encouraging the inappropriate use of sacred creative powers. A bona fide marriage is one between a man and a woman solemnized by the proper legal or ecclesiastical authority. Only sexual relations between husband and wife within the bonds of marriage are acceptable before the Lord.

There is some widely accepted theory extant that homosexuality is inherited. How can this be? No scientific evidence demonstrates absolutely that this is so. Besides, if it were so, it would frustrate the whole plan of mortal happiness. Our designation as men or women began before this world was. In contrast to the socially accepted doctrine that homosexuality is inborn, a number of respectable authorities contend that homosexuality is not acquired by birth. The false belief of inborn sexual orientation denies to repentant souls the opportunity to change and will ultimately lead to discouragement, disappointment, and despair.

Any alternatives to the legal and loving marriage between a man and a woman are helping to unravel the fabric of human society. I am sure this is pleasing to the devil. The fabric I refer to is the family. These so-called alternative lifestyles must not be accepted as right because they frustrate God's commandment for a life-giving union of male and female within a legal marriage as stated in Genesis. If practiced by all adults, these lifestyles would mean the end of the human family.

I suggest that the devil takes some delight every time a home is broken up, even where there is no parent to blame. This is especially so where there are children involved. The physical and spiritual neglect of children is one of the spawning grounds for so many of the social ills of the world.

I now turn to milder ways of not offending the devil. Nephi has given to us the pattern or formula by which Satan operates:

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance. [2 Nephi 28:21–22]

C. S. Lewis gave us a keen insight into devilish tactics. In a fictional letter, the master devil, Screwtape, instructs the apprentice devil Wormwood, who is in training to become a more experienced devil:

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. . . . It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. . . . Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts. [The Screwtape Letters (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 56]

So-called small sins include the challenge to the "sin laws" that seek to control forms of gambling, alcohol, and drug consumption. Some who wish to appear broad-minded say, under the guise of not imposing religious belief, "I don't drink or gamble, but I don't think we ought to have any laws to control others that wish to." This completely ignores the health and social costs to society of the vices. They foolishly argue that laws cannot control human behavior. My long legal career has led me to conclude that all criminal laws have a moral basis.

I now come to some even milder forms of trying to serve the Lord without offending

the devil. Having a temple recommend and not using it seems mild enough. However, if we live close to a temple, perhaps having a temple recommend but not using it may not offend the devil. Satan is offended when we use that recommend, going to the temple to partake of the spiritual protection it affords. How often do we plan to go to the temple only to have all kinds of hindrances arise to stop us from going? The devil has always been offended by our temple worship. As President Brigham Young once said about the building of temples, there are Saints who say, "I do not like to do it, for we never began to build a temple without the bells of hell beginning to ring." His answer was, "I want to hear them ring again. All the tribes of hell will be on the move, if we uncover the walls of this temple" (DBY, p. 410). President Howard W. Hunter said that we should "look to the temple of the Lord as the great symbol" of our membership ("Exceeding Great and Precious Promises," *Ensign*, November 1994, p. 8).

I wonder how much we offend Satan if the proclamation of our faith is limited only to the great humanitarian work this Church does throughout the world, or to our beautiful buildings, or to this great university, marvelous as these activities are. When we preach the gospel of social justice, no doubt the devil is not troubled. But I believe the devil is terribly offended when we boldly declare by personal testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that he saw the Father and the Son; when we preach that the Book of Mormon is another witness for Christ; when we declare that there has been a restoration of the fullness of the gospel in its simplicity and power in order to fulfill the great plan of happiness.

We challenge the powers of darkness when we speak of the perfect life of the Savior and of his sublime work for all mankind through the Atonement. This supernal gift permits us, through repentance, to break away from Satan's grasping tentacles.

We please the devil when we argue that all roads lead to heaven; therefore, it does not matter which road we take, we will all end up in God's presence. And when we contend that "we are all God's children; therefore, it makes no difference to which church a person belongs; we are all working for the same place."

This man-made philosophy—for such it is—sounds good, but the scriptures do not support it. I assure each of you that the road to God's presence is not that easy. It is strait and narrow. Elder Delbert L. Stapley said,

I feel certain that the devil chuckles whenever this false opinion is expressed, for it pleases him that the minds of men have been so blinded to revealed truth by his cunning craftiness and deceit that they will believe any religion to be acceptable to God regardless of its tenets and ordinances or how or by whom those ordinances are administered. [Delbert L. Stapley, CR, April 1958, p. 115]

We need not become paralyzed with fear of Satan's power. He can have no power over us unless we permit it. He is really a coward, and if we stand firm, he will retreat. The apostle James counseled: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). And Nephi states that "he hath no power over the hearts" of people who are righteous (1 Nephi 22:26).

We have heard comedians and others justify or explain their misdeeds by saying, "The devil made me do it." I do not really think the devil can make us do anything. Certainly he can tempt and he can deceive, but he has no authority over us that we do not give him.

The power to resist Satan may be stronger than we realize. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt

at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power. [Teachings, p. 181]

He also stated, “Wicked spirits have their bounds, limits, and laws by which they are governed” (HC 4:576). So Satan and his angels are not all-powerful.

Satan has had great success with this gullible generation. As a consequence, literally hosts of people have been victimized by him and his angels. There is, however, an ample shield against the power of Lucifer and his hosts. This protection lies in the spirit of discernment through the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift comes undeviatingly by personal revelation to those who strive to obey the commandments of the Lord and to follow the counsel of the living prophets.

This personal revelation will surely come to all whose eyes are single to the glory of God, for it is promised that their bodies will be “filled with light, and there shall be no darkness” in them (D&C 88:67). Satan’s efforts can be thwarted by all who come unto Christ by obedience to the covenants and ordinances of the gospel. The humble followers of the divine Master need not be deceived by the devil. Satan does not sustain and uplift and bless. He leaves those he has grasped in shame and misery. The spirit of God is a sustaining and uplifting influence.

I emphasize that fasting and prayer is a great way to receive the moral strength and spiritual strength to resist the temptations of Satan. But you may say this is hard and unpleasant. I commend to you the example of the Savior. He went into the desert, where he fasted and prayed to prepare himself spiritually for his ministry. His temptation by the

devil was great, but through the purification of his spirit he was able to triumph over all evil.

Work is another deterrent to evil. The symbol of this state is the beehive. Our forefathers fostered industry and work. Elder John Longden quoted Herndon as saying: “Satan selects his disciples when they are idle; Jesus selected his when they were busy at their work either mending their nets or casting them into the sea” (John Longden, CR, April 1966, p. 39).

I testify that there are forces that will save us from the ever-increasing lying, disorder, violence, chaos, destruction, misery, and deceit that are upon the earth. Those saving forces are the everlasting principles, covenants, and ordinances of the eternal gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. These same principles, covenants, and ordinances are coupled with the rights and powers of the priesthood of Almighty God. We of this church are the possessors and custodians of these commanding powers that can and do roll back much of the power of Satan on the earth. We believe that we hold these mighty forces in trust for all who have died, for all who are now living, and for the yet unborn.

I pray that we will dedicate our lives to serving the Lord and not worry about offending the devil. I also pray that through the spreading of righteousness, the evil hands of the destroyer might be stayed and that he may not be permitted to curse the whole world. I also pray that God will overlook our weaknesses, our frailties, and our many shortcomings and generously forgive us of our misdeeds. I further pray that he will bring solace to the suffering, comfort to those who grieve, and peace to the broken-hearted, and I leave this witness and testimony and blessing with you in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.