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Why I Left the Baptist Church.

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WHY I LEFT THE BAPTIST CHURCH.

BY ELDER W. H. KEPHART.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is not by choice that I am your speaker this evening, for had I been consulted I would not have appeared before you. I was thinking while I was sitting here that perhaps some of the congregation before me would feel like I heard of a deacon once. The college was very near to the church and they were often supplied with the young students from the college, and it was noticed that when some of the young brethren would preach, that one of the good old deacons would always get up and go out of doors. Finally some of them took him to task for it, and asked

why he did it, he said, "I don't like to have them practice on me." Now with my youth in this great work, if I practice on some of you old Latter Day Saints a little this evening, I beg you to bear with me.

"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ." Commencing with the 6th verse:

"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one; and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God; ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon, for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall

be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward."

This in connection with Hebrews 6: 1:

"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ let us go on to perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of the laying on of hands and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

Now we discover here that the apostle in the first text is addressing the Corinthian brethren and he charges them with being carnal and walking as men, and he gives forth as reasons that there is division among them. I have sometimes thought if a soul could live in our age of the world, and could then be carried back to the age when he found one or two divisions in the church, he would rejoice to think that he

lived in that day and not in ours, when we find that division is everywhere; and we also find men who would tell us that they have the salvation of the human family at heart, and yet, as the Rev. Moody at Des Moines last summer when he was about ready to take up a collection, say, "I thank God for the division in the churches today." Now I discover that there is a great difference between the opinion of the Bible and the opinion of the Rev. Moody. We find there is division, and the apostle declares that because of this division, they are yet carnal; then the apostle says that he, as a wise master builder, hath laid the foundation, another buildeth thereon, but he tells us to be careful how we build, and what we build with. Now we find in a portion of our text in Hebrews 6: 1, where he says, "Therefore leaving these principles"—and these are the principles of foundation, leaving them—I am glad that I don't see

that matter of leaving as I did some years ago—when I would see them coming forth and receiving them into the church by the tens and fifties, and I would receive them in the winter, and they would go out in the summer; I could receive them in the summer, and they would go out in the winter. This is not what I understand by leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, but when you brethren here built this church, the first thing you did was to build your foundation, and when that was built, you left that foundation, but how did you leave it? By building this great structure upon the foundation, and as you left it and went up higher, the great structure went up with you; I believe this is the way we should leave the principles there laid down, we should leave them by growing stronger, and coming higher, and becoming more familiar with the gospel of Christ. Add to our faith, virtue, etc.

The text says, "Every man's works shall be tried as by fire, whether we build of hay and stubble, of gold or of silver." Now I understand that the hotter the fire—the greater the heat—the more it will cleanse the metal; it will cut away the dross from it, by coming in contact with severe heat, but if we would take hay or straw, something that would be destroyed by fire, it will be consumed. Now our works are to be tried by fire. I discover here that the gospel plan of building upon the foundation, is to build with that which would be represented by gold and silver; that the greater the flame, the purer the metal would flow from the oven, but we are not to build with that which would be destroyed in the fire. I understand that where they are melting the gold in the furnace that there is a strong heat, and the worker will stand before the furnace and watch the crude ore as it is working under the heat, until he finds the metal

beginning to flow in a liquid form, and finally he will open the doors, and the metal will begin to run off. How does he know when it is sufficiently tried? When he sees his image in it, when it has become so pure that it will reflect his likeness and his image. So I want to say here we want to go on; do well these principles and then go on in perfecting our lives in passing from one to the other and going on until in our life, the likeness of our Master may be revealed. And since every man's works shall be tried, then surely there will be no way for you and me to escape. Our work will be tried even if it is to be tried with fire. Would it not be necessary that we should examine and see of what kind of material we are building? I sometimes think when I look back over my past life, especially since I have had the privilege of being in this conference, that it is painful after many years of traveling, for one to discover that we are on the

wrong road, and that we must retrace our steps and go back and acknowledge to the world that we have been wrong. I will acknowledge before you tonight, it is painful to be compelled to acknowledge that we have been wrong, but we are told here that we should build with gold and silver in order to stand the flame, or if we should build with straw or stubble or hay that it would be destroyed.

Now for a little while tonight I am going to give you some of the reasons why I am here. Many have asked me, "Why is it, sir, that you have left the Baptist church and come into this latter day work?" and I will try and answer that question tonight as well as I possibly can. Within the past two months letters have come to me from far away, Saints having seen it advertized that I had left the Baptist church and embraced this work, the question has come, "Will you tell us why you did it? Give us some

reasons for so doing." In the first place, one reason was because I was convinced that I was building of the wrong material, that I was building with material that would not stand the flame when God should come to test it. Then the question may be asked me, "How does it come that for all these long years you were building of this kind of material? Why did you not stop sooner?" Well, if some one can tell me why it is that the sun doesn't rise sooner in the morning, then I can, perhaps, tell you; if some one can tell me why Almighty God didn't see fit to send one who is here tonight, Elder J. S. Roth, to me before, I can tell you. He came and found me in darkness and building with the wrong material. Pardon personalities, but I thank God tonight that he has come to me, and that God has seen fit to allow me the privilege of going and bearing the glad news, and pointing others to this glorious light that has come into

the world in these latter days, to bring light to those who are walking in darkness. So then when he came to me, it was not all happiness with him in our country. Some individuals came to me as pastor of the church there and said, "Let us shut that Mormon out of the church." I said, "No, I will not do that, but I will take my Bible, and I will go out and hear him, and I will whip him out on the Bible right before his congregation." And now, friends, I thought I was handling my brother very carefully; I invited him to my home, and went with him to church, and went there prepared, as I supposed, to defeat him on the Bible; but friends, after attending the meetings for a week or ten days, with this same good old Bible you see, and doesn't it look like it had gone through something?—and my creed didn't look much better—that is one of the reasons why I am here before you tonight. Because God saw fit to turn the

light in, upon the sacred pages, and I glory in God tonight, that from my youth up, I have been one of those that has been liberal, that has always wanted to have the reason, that has always been willing to investigate for myself, prove all things and hold fast that which is good.

Now, I don't know that even reading my Bible after it had received such hard usage, that even then I would have submitted, but the brother had pictured on the blackboard, and there he had declared by the authority of high heaven that God was the same yesterday, today and forever, and that God changed not, and when he began to declare that these signs should follow the believer, and that our God would appear to man and speak to his children today, I began to ponder this over in my mind, and finally I saw that my foundation, so far as the Bible was concerned, was greatly lacking, and that the last prop was

knocked out from under me; but I kept this to myself, and I endeavored to keep it away from my companion, but I was troubled and was disturbed over the fate of my doctrine; finally I said, I will make this a matter of prayer, and if this God that my brother has been representing has met with him and the church that he represents, he will meet with me, if I am honest in heart. I retired to my room to study from time to time, to prepare my sermons, but I want to say to you tonight, I had no time now to prepare a sermon, my mind was disturbed and troubled, and in place of sitting there with the library around me, I was sitting there meditating in prayer, asking God to help me out of the terrible dilemma in which I was. Finally, one afternoon when sitting in my room, I plead with my God, I took my open Bible and I fell down before him and I said, "Now, O God, if it is thy will that I should leave the church I am in, and this is

the true church of Christ, give me the evidence and I will obey, or if not, I never will." While in this condition, I seemingly was carried away from where I was, and led down by the river's side, there along by the river, standing by the edge of the stream (which went gradually in the water, and the bank was high on the other side) I saw many fish white and beautiful, the most beautiful fish I ever saw in all my life, and they were coming up and going into the deep water. I looked at them for a while, and I raised my eyes, and on the other side of the stream, there stood three personages, and they were dressed in white, they seemed one a little larger than the other and seemed to be looking down the stream. Almost in front of me there seemed to be a large stump, and there was a spear on the stump, and I turned and said to these personages before me, "Why don't you spear these fish?" and one of them

said to me, "Why don't you spear them?" I said, "Give me the spear and I will." His beautiful white hands came out from under his garment, he took that spear and handed it across the stream to me, and by this time the fish seemed to be all gone, but I thrust that spear into the water where I had seen the fish, and when I came to take it out, I had a large fish upon it, one of the clearest in the world. Then all seemed to pass away from me, and the scripture seemed to run in my ears, "Follow me, I will make you a fisher of men." No longer did I doubt that this was the true church of God, but then, on the bended knees of my body I said, "Now, O Father, I will obey thy will," and blessed be God tonight, that I have been blessed in it; many and many of these beautiful fish have I been permitted to take out of the river of the world, and I rejoice in that tonight.

I find again, that my creed

taught one thing, and the Bible taught another, and when I went out and declared to my brethren the doctrine of the church, I supposed I was established in my doctrine, as many believe they are thoroughly established; but when the brother began to preach and say, "We have apostles and prophets in the church; we have gifts of healing in the church, the gift of tongues, the gift of interpretation of tongues; we have all these blessed things now that were away back yonder." Well, I began then to examine into the matter, and when I turned to my Bible I found myself in such a dilemma as I understand that the Hon. Robert Ingersoll has placed some of the Christian world in today. I heard a little while ago that Robert in one of his new lectures has got out two large charts that he hangs up before the congregation, and on one of them is written, "And these signs shall follow them that believe," and on the other chart,

“These signs do *not* follow them that believe.” Now he says, “You say that Robert Ingersoll is an infidel. Why is it? Because he doesn’t believe the Bible? No.” And then he turned around and said, “Here is something near a thousand churches in the world, and they say signs do not follow the believer; now all the difference in the world between the infidelity of Robert Ingersoll and the so-called Christian world, is that Robert doesn’t believe *any* of the Bible, and they believe only what suits them.” So I was left a good deal in this condition myself. I turned to my creed and found it again differed with the Bible, for when I turned to John 3: 5, I was told there, “You must be born of water and of the Spirit,” and in Acts 2: 38 Peter says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of your sins,” and when I turned to my creed it said, “Be baptized for the outward sign of an inward grace.” I tried to get

around this as best I could, but I am not the only one that gets into such a dilemma as this. After having resigned my pastorate to the church, they sent for, and got a pastor from New York, and when he came he cast a reflection on the old Mormon. I watched my opportunity, and caught him before as large a congregation as I could. When I said, "How does it come when you have come clear from New York here to fill this pulpit that you don't teach the Bible?" "We do," he said. "I beg leave to differ with you," said I, "I see things in a different light from what I did a few months ago. Do you believe the Bible?" "Yes." "Do you believe that Peter voiced the word of God on the day of Pentecost?" "Yes sir, I believe all that." Then I called his attention closely to Acts 2:38, he squirmed just as I did, and tried to get away from it, but I held him there; and then he did differently from what I did; he said,

“Peter was off a little that one time.” I didn’t lay it on to Peter.

Now, I find the Bible tells me in Mark 16:15, 16: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned,” but I found by turning to my United Brethren discipline, which I first carried with me, that it said, on page 85, “The brethren who shall persuade another contrary to their views in regard to the matter of baptism, shall be considered traducers of the brethren, and answerable to the conference for the same.” Now, I found there was a great deal of difference between the position I held and the one that Peter, James and John had, so I found my creed was again crippled.

Then I found in the Bible again, that it taught the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost, and when I

turned to my creed, I found that laying on of hands was for ordaining of the ministry only, and when I saw that the Bible taught it I was no longer permitted to do away with that part of it, and I found it was practiced for different purposes, and when this was portrayed so clearly before me, what could I say? I either had to be dishonest with myself, and with my God, or I had to acknowledge that the Bible was right, and my creed was wrong. I found I was deficient again.

The Bible says that they spoke in tongues and in interpretation of tongues, and all those things, and my creed says it didn't. And I want to say right here, that there isn't an individual in this congregation that has felt as I have done since I have been in this conference. As I said a few days ago when I saw the sick coming forward here to be presented to the Lord, I looked back to all those many conferences

and Baptist associations I attended for years, and they were so different. When in our associations, if a brother or sister was taken ill, we found a good place for them to stay, we secured a good nurse and the very best doctor we could find, and we left them there to take care of them; but here, instead of coming and getting a doctor, I see them coming and presenting them to the Great Physician. My heart was filled with joy, my soul was made to rejoice, and I want to say in this, you have drunk at the fountain head. It will be hard for you ever to realize my feelings at this time.

When I asked my brother why it was that I didn't see these wonderful things in all these years of my service in other churches, the brother said: "Have you ever had any sick in your family?" "Oh yes." "Have you sent for the doctor?" "Yes sir." "Did you ever call for the elders of the church?" "No sir." "Did

they ever come to pray over your family?" "No." "Then you just tell how you could expect the blessing when you were disobedient to God's law." And so another prop was gone out from under me, and before I got through I found I had but very little to my old foundation. But as I said awhile ago, it is very painful to discover that we have started out wrong in life, or that we have been wrong and must retrace our steps, but when tonight I look yonder, I see these many years that I was building with straw, with stubble and with hay; and now the Scripture comes to me and says, "If your works wont stand the fire, they shall be destroyed." O, my friends, how I rejoice in God tonight, though I should lose the fruit of those many years, though I know that my reward has gone largely. But some say, "Were you not honest and sincere?" I was just as sincere, just as honest as I am today; but I

found that sincerity, something that I had loved and cherished, sincerity alone was not sufficient, that it was necessary for me to comply with law, and when I complied with the law, then I found that God did come to me; and I don't know but what I may weary some of you Saints by telling you these things, but I want the world to know why it is that I stand tonight where I am. I want to say that God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform, and in one of these he came to me. I will acknowledge to you tonight, that when I first came into the church that I was not as thoroughly grounded in the faith as I am tonight, but at that time I had a child that I had been expecting to die for a long time, one that had the asthma so bad that it could not lie down. I had taken it to all the doctors I knew of in the country that I supposed could do her any good. Two or three weeks after we came into the

church, this same good brother, in company with another, came back to our place again, and while they were there, our little one went off in one of her severe spells, and it seemed as though she was dead. My companion took the little one in her arms, she rushed into the room where we were sitting and said, "Elder, I want you to administer to my child." The elders arose and administered to that child, and I stand tonight to tell you that the child is living today, and she has never wheezed from that hour to this, nor have we given her a dose of medicine. So God came to me and sealed this to me. So as far as that was concerned, there was no more doubt left in my mind at all; and then since I came here, I have found everything in accordance with the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 where it says God set in the church, first, apostles, prophets and teachers, and so on, I have found this according to the Bible.

Now, when I examined my creed I found I had elders and deacons only, while the Bible had a number more. Then I asked some of my friends how this was. The answer was, they were not needed any longer, and when I appealed to my brother who came to me with the light of this gospel, he did not say that we do not need them any longer, we have the written word, we have the record of these men and why do we need to be encumbered with this number of officers in the church? Well, of course you have the record, we could get along with that all right. If you can get along and build your church and run the machinery of that church with but elders and deacons, why don't you do without them too, and save expense? This knocked another prop from under me and I was left again. And while I accepted this doctrine and I became convinced of it largely, I want to say, when I

saw those twelve men standing there, and heard what I did, oh, I wonder could I ever, no, I never imagined, I never thought that I'd ever see the day when I could realize what it was—something like a foretaste of Pentecostal day. And then to think of me, a man wandering as I was, to be permitted here—under the power and influence of God to see the church fully organized as it was by Him who said, when he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men, and he set in the church, apostles, prophets, etc. Oh, it has filled my soul with joy.

I was building upon this foundation. You see the kind of material I was building with? Well, there is one promise comes to me that is a comfort to my poor soul: "If his work is destroyed, he himself shall be saved." I rejoice in this tonight; although I traveled these many years in the wrong direction, though I built with material

that could not stand to be tested by the Son of God, though I built as though with chaff, yet I have the privilege now of coming forward and with my brethren taking hold of this great work, and building now with the precious material of the gospel, and with apostles, prophets, etc., Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

There is yet a thought here, not for me only, that was outside of the church, but my brethren of the Saints also. When we have the foundation built, we do not quit there, but we go on and build thereon, and as it goes on, and the structure rises higher and higher all the time, as Saints of God, tonight I ask, Let us examine ourselves, what are we building with? Is it love to God and our neighbor as ourself, is it in living up to these Christian graces, is it in obedience to God's will, or is it something else? What are we building with? We will be called upon to give an

account, we are told, of our work, and by turning to Psalms 11:3, "If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?" We discover that the church was destroyed, that our foundation was removed by sin and transgression, and what was the world doing? Doing just what I was doing. They were building upon sandy foundations, with the theology of men. When the foundation was removed, and men came in and took it, the church was free and independent of God, then they built upon a sandy foundation. We were building in this way, of this material that would not stand the storm. I have sometimes been reminded when I was talking of this, of one time when I was down in Missouri before the war. There was a certain lead mine in that country, and when the ore was taken out of the ground you would scarcely know it was lead at all, but it would be in large chunks. Then

those who dug it out would build large fires and would lay this lead on top of that fire, and when it got hot, this shell, or the stuff that was on the outside, would burst and the lead would come out pure. And so I understand no matter how we sugar-coat our works with the theology of men, no matter how we may cover it up with our creeds, when it comes before the fire of God, all the sugar-coating will be thrown away, and our works will appear there before God.

I remember some years ago when I was leaving my home, there was a man in our country building a large store when I was going away, and I remember in standing and watching as they were building, when they dug down for the foundation about one-third of the building rested upon a solid rock and the remainder of that great structure was built with heavy masonry. I was gone a number of years, and when I returned I expected

to see that great building there, but I found the structure was broken in two, and two-thirds of the building had gone down over the bank, and I stood and wondered why this was, and very quickly it came to my mind; here one-third of the building was built upon the solid rock, and the masonry was the remainder. The result was, that the masonry settled and gave way, and the other stood firm upon the rock and broke the building in two. I want to say when we come here and build upon this foundation, and we build one-third upon the foundation as I did when my creed took out the laying on of hands, and baptism for the remission of sins, and I built upon that foundation leaving part of my structure rest upon the solid rock, what would be the result? It broke in two. Man's work will yield, will settle and give.

Again, right here in this state, I remember along about 1870,

when you were building your State House here, when they had got on a ways with their foundation, it was discovered that they had rock in that foundation that would not stand the storm, and when the sun came and beat on those stones, and the rain and cold they began to crumble, and the legislature was compelled to remove a portion of that foundation at a great expense; it would not stand the storm at all. Oh, my brothers and sisters, tonight, how will it be with you and me? What are we building with? We are building upon that foundation. Will the material with which we are building stand the test? It must come under the scrutinizing eye and be tested, for Jesus says, "I will sit as a refiner's fire." We have to look well to our lives. I want to build on that foundation. I want to build with material that will stand the test. I want to build something that the greater the heat the purer it

will be. I don't want to build here of that kind of material, and then when I come to stand before the judgment bar of God, there to discover that I have built of material that would not stand. I want the material that will stand when the storm comes upon it.

Since I have entered this work and since God by his Spirit has given me the strong evidence of the work I feel now that there is no jar. I can now stand and rest my all and all in this world and the world to come on the promises of God. I fear not those promises there, but that is not saying that I do not fear. I have one thing to fear, and that is self. If I can only keep self right, if I can stand upon the precious promises of God, I know that they will never fail. Like a little maid I heard of one time that was shipwrecked out in the ocean, and while the storm was roaring, the little one was washed up on a large stone and the

waves beat upon that rock near her, and the friends stood off on the distant shore, they could not get nearer, and when the storm ceased, the life boat ran in and they brought the little one in. And they said to her, "Were you not afraid while you sat there?" "Oh yes, I was afraid; O how I trembled when those waves would lash up so near to me, but the rock did not move, the rock was solid." Oh my friends, I am glad that I can come tonight and know that my feet have been lifted from the mire and clay, and I can stand on that rock, and I know the rock will not move, and we are built upon the true foundation of God. Let us stand there, brothers and sisters, let come what will. In my youth in this work I have had a little experience. I have heard men testify in this room since came here that they were in this work before I was born. In less than six weeks after I came into this

work in the same building that I preached in for over six years unmolested and there men of the congregation threw stones in the window cutting the sash and cutting the hair on my head. I realize it costs something to come out from the world and take a stand, and I thank God that though all these things may come, that we can stand upon that rock; we wont move no matter how the waves may wash or lash around us if only we will be true and keep our feet upon the solid rock.

May God help us all to examine our lives and see whether we are standing upon the true rock. Let us see what we are building with, let us examine the structure as it goes up little by little from day to day, and examine it well. Take God's word as our guide and let us look to Jesus that he may help us, that he may give us all the help that we need, and may the Holy Spirit guide us and lead us in future life and prepare us for the work which lies before us, is the prayer of your servant. Amen.