

But I must close this letter and resume the subject in another number.

In the bonds of the new and everlasting covenant
JOSEPH SMITH, jr.

To J. WHITMER, Esq.

ORDER OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH. No. I.

Brother J. Whitmer:—

I feel at this time like writing a letter for the Messenger and Advocate, on a subject which I shall call the order of the new testament church. A subject I conclude which is not very well understood, if I may have the privilege of judging from what passes before my eyes, and what is sounded in my ears.

The many persons who are traveling through every part of the country, passing to preach what they call the gospel, and to call men into the kingdom of God; saying that they have the right to do so, not only the right to do so; but are under the strongest obligation to do it, both as a duty to God and man, that they may glorify the former, and save the latter; and this duty and obligation, grows out of the commandment of the Savior, found recorded in the new testament, and reads thus. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.— He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not, shall be damned."

I feel a little disposed to inquire into the nature of this commission, and the circumstances attending its promulgation, to see how far they are bound by it, and are in danger of being cursed if they do not obey it, or in other words, who is able to obey it; for my part I think there is less danger of a curse by not attempting to act under it, than there is by attempting to act under it.

I should think that I was in greater danger of being condemned, to go forth into the world to preach the gospel, by virtue of that commission, than I would be to follow the plough, to shove the plain, to use the hammer or to pursue any other honest calling in life, and would benefit mankind more, and glorify God better. And so would any other man also.

It is a very common thing for men who are unlearned in the truth, to be very conscientious in advocating error, and exceedingly zealous in propa-

gating, and teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, and doing what the Lord never required at their hand, and leaving undone the things which he has required; this seems especially to be the case in relation to preaching the gospel, (as the people call it,) for while the order of things which the Lord established for the redemption of the world is left untouched, the order of things which men have invented for themselves, is propagated with the most untiring perseverance, and with a zeal worthy of the best cause in the world.

Men encompass sea and land to establish their opinions, and to give force and power to their doctrines, and to all appearance are as conscientious as if the Lord had called and commissioned them, and had sent them forth to do so, under the penalty of the perdition of ungodly men if they did it not. A looker on would be ready to conclude, that they were ordained from days of old to this ignorance. But notwithstanding all the zeal, and perseverance, and apparent consciousness of the many teachers of religion, still, when a man takes the new testament into his hands and begins to hunt for their authority, he is greatly difculted to find it, to be sure, we can there find it written "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned." But to whom was this said, to every man of every generation, who might start out of himself, or be sent out by others? no, but very far from this, to men who were called and chosen of God for this purpose, and called by name too, so that there could be no mistake about the matter. These men in this commission, were required to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; but none others: it was they and they only, whose names were there mentioned, who had to perform this duty, or see that it was performed, and none others were bound by it.

Let us suppose for instance that some of the other Jews, or Gentiles, or even some of the saints, had taken it into their heads in the days of the apostles to have acted on this commission; could they have done it? I answer they could not; there would not one solitary sign have followed them, it would

have been in vain for those who believed them to have undertaken to cast out devils, or to have spoken in other tongues, or to lay hands on the sick, with the idea of effecting any thing; and the reason would be that the persons who had administered unto them, were without power themselves, and a stream could not rise higher than its fountain; therefore, of necessity the persons administered to, would be without power also.

It was more than a windy business to execute this commission, it required power as well as wind; it required more than to go forth and be very ingenious, in proving to the people that they must be immersed for the remission of sins: the person who done that according to this commission, if he effected any good by it must have power, also to administer in the name of the Lord Jesus, not baptism only, but the Holy Spirit also.

The truth is, there were no persons on earth in the days of these apostles, nor have there been any since their day, who could act upon their commission, it was peculiar to themselves; for instance, there were in the primitive church, not only apostles; but prophets, and evangelists, pastors, and teachers, and each of these orders had other respective works assigned unto them, and each one must have a commission suited to his calling.

Out of these orders, it fell to the order of apostles, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature: suppose the pastors, or teachers, had taken it into their heads to go and act upon the commission given to the apostles. Could they have done it?—most assuredly they could not, and that because God had not called them to the work of apostles, and having not called them, he did not endow them with power, sufficient, and their attempt would have been vain; indeed it would have been worse than vain; for to apostles alone, God had given the power to act on a commission given to apostles.

To every candid reader of the new testament, it is very plain, that it required a power adapted to the nature of the commission, to enable any person, to act on a commission received from the most High, whether that commission required them to travel into all the world, or whether it did not;

the power given would be according to the work required. If a man or a number of men, were required to act in the office of evangelists, they would receive power, accordingly: or if to act in the office of apostles; their power would be proportionate to the work assigned to them. So that each one might be able to perform the duties of his own office.

In the commission given immediately after the resurrection of the Savior, we have the work set forth which belonged to the office of apostles, and every person who acted under that commission, acted in the office of an apostle. Now to prepare men to act under this commission, required a great deal of teaching, as well as divine manifestation. It was impossible for the apostles to act under this commission, without revelations being given unto them directly from heaven, for their own direction, as well as the direction of those who believed on the Savior through their word.

Let us inquire how it was that the apostles were enabled to fulfill this commission; *enabled* we say, for it has been the lot of few men to be able to perform the duties of the commission given to the twelve apostles, who were commissioned immediately after the resurrection of the Savior.

Let us inquire, what preparation was necessary to enable the apostles themselves to fulfill the duties of their office, and how it was that they became qualified to be apostles, agreeable to the commission given to them.

We are told that at a certain time the Savior inquired of the apostles to know what men said about him.—“Whom say men that I the son of man am?” They answered some say that you are Elias, others Jeremias, or one of the ancient prophets. By this we understand most clearly, that the miracles which he had wrought among the people, had failed to give them a true understanding of his character.

The highest notions which they entertained of him was, that he was a prophet, such as had been on earth before, with this exception probably, that some might have thoughts that he was one of the prophets who was raised from the dead. But it does not appear that there was any other thought of his being the Son of God: so that all his miracles had failed to give the peo-

ple a correct idea of his true character.

Neither do we think, that miracles could produce this effect alone: there must be something else: indeed if we are left to draw our inference from what follows, it will be seen, that there was but one thing that could give the idea that he was the Son of God, and that was a revelation from God. For the Savior again says to the apostles. "But whom do ye say that I the Son of man am." Peter answered and said, "thou art Christ the son of the living God." What was the answer the Savior made to his declaration? It was this. "Blessed art thou Simon Barjonah; for flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee; but my Father which is in heaven:" as much as to say: it is not the miracles which I have wrought in your presence, neither the casting out devils, nor yet healing the sick; but a revelation from my Father who is in heaven.

If we are left to draw a conclusion from these premises, what would that conclusion be? would it not be that a knowledge of the Son of God, was not to be denied from the working of miracles? for if this could have been done, the disciples would have found it out, and it would not have been said as it was to Peter. "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to thee; but my Father which is in heaven." But on the contrary, it would have been said. "Blessed art thou Simon Barjonah for thou hast discovered my true character from the miracles which I have wrought in your presence." **R.**

PERSECUTION OF OLD TIMES.

One great blessing the church of the Latter Day Saints enjoy above those of former ages, is, a knowledge of the persecution of olden times; For the which purpose we extract the 2d chapter from Fox's Martyrs.

Chap. II.

FROM THE DEATH OF ST. JOHN, AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE.

The malignant spirit of the Jews was ever predominant, and the apostles, as their Master before them, were

on all occasions, and in every place where that spirit could shew itself, violently persecuted. The apostle Paul was by this means, driven from Antioch to Iconium; yet there were the apostles opposed by Jews and Gentiles, until they found it expedient to escape to Lycaonia. At Lystra, notwithstanding the partiality of the Gentiles for them, on account of curing the impotent man, the Jews to such a degree prevailed, that Paul was even stoned by them. This induced them for a time to remove to Derbe, though they afterwards visited both Lystra and Antioch, to confirm the disciples of Christ in the profession of the gospel. Though the apostle Paul received a divine intimation to extend his labors, in propagating the gospel into Macedonia, an insurrection was here stirred up, and both Paul and his adopted companion, Silas, were cast into prison. Here we have a very different account of this Gentile apostle's deliverance to that of Peter. The prison-doors and the gates were not thrown open, as on that occasion, at least, though the doors were opened as an effect of the earthquake, they were not commanded to go out, and conducted thence by an angel, as in the other case. The providence of God had other ends to serve on the present occasion. Here was no escape, as on the former interposition. "We are all here; do thyself no harm," says Paul to the terrified jailor. Conversion followed this extraordinary scene. The jailor was convinced of their innocency, made profession of their faith, and "was baptized, he and all his straightway." This advantage to the cause of the gospel was obtained by this short imprisonment, though the rulers, ashamed of their conduct, sent orders the next morning for their release; and at last, on Paul's asserting that they had grossly violated their privileges, he being a Roman citizen, with much submission they persuaded him to accept of a discharge.

Going to Lydda, and from thence to Thessalonica, the Jews, as usual, stirred up a commotion against them, so that Jason and others were obliged to enter into a recognizance to keep the peace. Escaping by night to Berea, the Jews of Thessalonica pursued him, and he was compelled to take a circuitous route to Athens. His dispute at Athens, and his being brought before the