

## ENTER THE STRAIT GATE

Evan A. Fry, Radio Director  
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ  
of Latter Day Saints  
Independence, Mo.

Sunday, April 4, 1943  
10:00 p.m. KMBC, 980 KC  
Kansas City, Mo.  
All Rights Reserved

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7: 13-14

Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

\*\*\*\*\*

A great deal of progress has been made in the past generation towards the unity of Christian denominations. Professed followers of Jesus have looked at the denominationalism of the day with its bickerings, its jealousies, and its divisions, and have felt ashamed that the church of Christ should be so divided after he had commanded them all to be one, as he and his Father were one. More and more the tendency of the day is to compromise differences, to become more liberal and less strict about what used to be regarded as essentials. And now, although there is a better working unity and a finer quality of cooperation between denominations than ever before, the number of denominations is just about as great as formerly, and organizational unity seems as far away as ever.

Most churches are in favor of unity, if unity can be had by persuading everyone else to come to their opinion. But few of us are willing to achieve unity at the expense of our own convictions. We Latter Day Saints are no exception to this rule. In fact, at the risk of being considered old fashioned, fundamental, and somewhat steeped in tradition, we cling to certain beliefs which we regard as essential but which frequently stand between us and unity with other churches. We believe firmly in the right of every man to believe as he chooses, and to worship as he pleases, so long as his liberty does not infringe upon the liberty of anyone else. We try to be liberal enough to allow every man his own opinion, even if it clashes with ours. We are attempting, like all other churches, to build a closer working fellowship and cooperation with the universal Christian brotherhood, so that insofar as possible, we may be united.

But in addition to this freedom and this liberality, we are also very narrow at times -- just as you and your church are narrow in some respects. We believe that every church, including yours and mine, has a right to lay down certain terms of acceptance into that church, according to what we believe Christ taught and the Bible records. So far as I know, not a single church that calls itself Christian would admit to fellowship one who did not believe in the divinity of Jesus. Seen from the viewpoint of a Mohammedan, or a Buddhist, or a Hebrew, that is NARROW. But if you grant the right of a church -- or of any other organization for that matter -- to stipulate the conditions of membership, none of us should call others narrow for setting forth those stipulations and adhering to them strictly.

But, after all, is it so reprehensible to be "narrow?" Is there any easy, royal road, or short-cut to heaven? Can the goals of Christian living be achieved by a quick, magical hocus-pocus? Or are they

rather the result of long, painstaking, methodical, orderly growth and development -- the result of a lifetime of discipline and adherence to hard rules, and narrow, restrictive routine?

Success in any field comes as a result of at least a certain kind of narrowness, of rigid, unyielding discipline. Just to take one example at random -- if you want to become a physician or surgeon, you must submit yourself to certain preparation and study and training. You must first be able to meet certain entrance requirements, or you do not even get into the medical school. You may resent those requirements; you may think them too severe; you may believe you could make a good doctor in spite of them; but you have no choice. You must abide by them, or you do not even enter medical school. But entrance to the medical school is not the end; it is only the beginning. You must complete the prescribed course to the satisfaction of your instructors. You may resent their narrowness in telling you what you must study; you may regard part of the course as superfluous, or foolish; you may regard some of the rules of the school about dormitory hours and daily routine as needless restrictions and infringements upon your liberty; but you must abide by them if you wish to become a doctor.

Not only in preparing for a profession, but in practicing it, a certain narrowness, a certain attention to detail and meticulous regard for detail is absolutely essential. Certain techniques and routines must be adopted and rigidly adhered to. The doctor or surgeon who was careless about keeping his hands, his instruments, and the operative field sterile during a job of surgery might feel that he was exercising a justifiable freedom, but his patients would die, and his freedom would be the ruination of his medical career. The railroad engineer must learn his book of rules, and operate according to those rules, or he loses his job. Sometimes he may resent such intrusions on his personal liberty -- but experience has proved that certain routines are necessary in railroading for the safety and efficiency of operations (Many of you who are now working in munitions plants know how rigid the rules are where powder and explosives are being handled. You must abide by the rules, or blow yourself and perhaps others to kingdom come. There is no place for free-lancing or gay disregard of narrow, hampering restrictions and rules when you work in an ammunition factory.) And so we could multiply examples. But these should suffice to establish the point -- that safe results follow strict, slavish obedience to narrow, restrictive rules, in whatever line of activity you may be engaged.

Now let us transfer this principle into the field of religion. With it well in mind, we can unequivocally and without fear of successful contradiction make this statement: that we shall never make better Christians by liberalizing and broadening the requirements for church membership, any more than we shall have better doctors by liberalizing the entrance requirements and the courses of study in our medical schools. Some people deeply resent it when a church asks them to make certain preparation, to undergo certain rigid self-discipline, to submit to certain essential processes of soul, and to certain outward forms or rituals which symbolize the change within. They regard such requirements as narrow-- as an infringement on their personal liberty -- as non-essential -- as old fashioned. Instead of accepting gladly and willingly the routine and the discipline that will make them into the kind of people they want to be, they look for some easy, effortless, painless, overnight method of becoming a Christian.

Constantine is one of the outstanding examples of one who tried to liberalize the church, and to invent a short cut to church membership. He thought it was too much trouble to convert the minds and the wills of people; that took too long. So he converted thousands of them with the sword. He offered a simple choice -- become a Christian or become a corpse, and most people willingly or unwillingly took the first choice. Under such an influx of converts the church found it very troublesome to baptize by immersion, so they adopted a short cut to that. Within a few decades after this liberalization program had gotten under way, the Christian church bore little resemblance indeed to the church of Christ and the apostles.

"But," some people say, "I don't understand why the church makes some of its requirements. I don't understand, for instance, how baptism can remit sins, or how the laying on of hands can bring the gift of the holy ghost." Well, there are many things we do not understand. Some of them we gradually grow to understand; others forever remain a mystery to us; but if we know that a certain method if meticulously followed gets the results we want, would we not be foolish to deviate from the method simply because we did not understand a part of it, and still expect to achieve the same results? The chemical principle of catalysis is a case in point. Chemists do not understand it. They cannot explain why it should be. But it works, and if you change the conditions, it will not work. A catalyst, in case you are not familiar with the word, is a substance or an agent whose presence is necessary for the completion of a chemical reaction. The catalyst is seemingly not involved in the reaction. It remains the same, while chemical substances all about it are changing. It can usually be used over and over again. But if you take the catalyst out of the equation and leave everything else the same, nothing will happen. Ask a chemist why a substance that does not dissolve or change or absorb anything should be essential to the completion of a chemical reaction, and he will not be able to tell you. But he knows that a catalyst is essential to catalysis, and that without it, the process won't work. So he uses it, and gets results.

As we look at Christianity today, and discover how easy it is to become a Christian, at least in name -- (how effortless the Christian life seems as exemplified in most of its adherents) how lacking in the fruits of Christian living much of our Christian world seems to be, it occurs to us to wonder whether we have not left something out of the process or formula, in an attempt to make Christianity easy. Have we tried to find forgiveness for sin by some ~~easy~~ short-cut, only to find that we did not achieve the results we had looked for? (Have we tried to effect a catalysis without a catalyst?) Have we attempted to attain to the full measure of the stature of Christ by shaking hands with a preacher and confessing Christ? It can't be done, any more than we can learn to be a good physician or surgeon over one week-end, or any more than we can learn to play the piano in ten easy lessons delivered to our door by the postman.

God has set up certain minimum requirements for admission to his kingdom. He has laid down certain acts and processes and disciplines to which we must adhere if we wish to attain to the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ. Paul lays down some of the requirements or preliminaries to an acceptable Christian life in the 6th chapter of Hebrews, namely: repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptism of water and of the spirit by the laying on of hands,

and finally, the resurrection of the body and the eternal judgment.

But in these days of easy admission into Christism churches, we are told that faith is all right, and repentance necessary, but baptism can be skipped, and the laying on of hands is no longer required for the reception of the holy ghost. (Religious teachers quote "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved," and accept such a profession of Christianity as the sole requirement for church membership, choosing to ignore Jesus' statement that "He who believeth and is baptized" shall be saved, or Peter's "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of your sins," or the verse "Arise and wash away thy sins," and many others equally plain and clear.)

Latter Day Saints are narrow. When the Bible speaks, or God says "This is the way, walk therein," or when definite requirements are ~~laid down~~ for admission to church fellowship and rigid restrictions and self-disciplines are prescribed for those who would attain the Christian life in its abundance, we believe that men should hew to the line, and be exceedingly narrow and strict and exacting. Results can be achieved in no other way. We dare not eliminate what is inconvenient, or not to our liking, or too much trouble, or a bit beyond our comprehension, and expect to achieve the promised results that follow obedience. We dare not take isolated passages of scripture, and use them as the sole guide to Christian character and fellowship. We must take all, or none. If we want to be a doctor, or a surgeon, or a railroad engineer, or a lawyer, or a munitions worker or a musician, or anything else worth while, we must follow the prescribed course of study, obey the rules, abide by the discipline. Dare we expect Christianity to be any easier?

Jesus said, Enter ye in at the strait ( i.e. narrow, restricted, constricted) gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." The easy way of life, the liberal, the ~~free and easy~~, the broad-minded, the way where it doesn't make any difference what you do or how you do it, is the way chosen by the great multitudes of earth who do not like the idea of any restrictions on their freedom. But "strait is the gate, and narrow the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it," because only a few are willing to give up a portion of their freedom of thought and of action, and discipline themselves until they are capable of enjoying the larger freedom of everlasting life. He who would be free must first become a slave. He who desires the freedom of life eternal must enter God's kingdom not on the broad highway or through the wide gate of his own liberal thinking and broad minded freedom, but through the strait gate and the narrow way, which allows no deviation or shadow of turning from him who sets his feet to walk therein.