

## Helping RLDS to *Victory*

*“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”*

— 2 Corinthians 4:1–2

### **The Real Battle**

The battle for truth is a primarily a *spiritual* battle, but it is fought in the *minds* of men and women. The Apostle Paul makes this very clear when he says, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers” (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan was successful with Eve in the garden only by first corrupting her view of the Word of God. He began by bringing God’s Word into question, “Did God really say?” When it was clear that Eve completely understood God’s instructions, Satan then openly contradicted God’s word by introducing his own “spin”—“You will *not* surely die.” If Satan cannot keep us ignorant of God’s Word, his next strategy is to corrupt our understanding of it.

This is where Joseph Smith comes in. He so thoroughly corrupted God’s Word that his churches have had no choice but to follow in blindness, ignorant of God’s truth. We have discussed these corruptions throughout this book, particularly chapters 4 through 10. No Mormon or RLDS is exempt. For example, each member must be baptized and confirmed by a minister who is partaking of a corrupted priesthood which actually shows open contempt for the work of Christ. This is no small sin. (See chapters 11 through 15, particularly 13 and 14.) Do RLDS commit this sin knowingly? Of course not. They do it *ignorantly*, because they have relied on the corruption of Joseph Smith. They need to know that God will forgive them for the sin of perpetuating Joseph Smith’s heresies, if they are willing to confess it and turn therefrom.

The spiritual forces which propelled Joseph Smith to corrupt God’s Word are the same forces which are keeping his followers in blindness today. This is not merely a human battle. “*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (Eph. 6:12). In our work with RLDS, then, our battle is first against these *spiritual forces of evil*, and the misinformation they have proliferated through Joseph Smith.

## Winning the Real Battle

The good news of the gospel is that Christ has triumphed over these enemies of ours by the power of His shed blood on the cross, “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:15). Jesus makes His victory available to us when we commit our lives to Him and His purposes. So while we will continue to be surrounded by spiritual war during our lives, we can rest assured that the ultimate victory is ours, it has already been accomplished.

***Spiritual Weapons.*** Since this is a spiritual war we are engaged in, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that we do not use earthly, fleshly weapons, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, *they have divine power* to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against a knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3–5).

If the Lord has given you a burden to see a friend or loved one set free from the bondage of the RLDS church, the first spiritual weapon you should use is fervent and consistent prayer on their behalf, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). Your consistent prayer releases the power of heaven to move on behalf of this person. Pray that they might come across some person or perhaps some material which will shake their confidence in Joseph Smith so they will be more open to God’s real truth. This is most often the first step in a person leaving the RLDS church. As long as they remain convinced that they already have God’s ultimate truth they have very little incentive to look elsewhere. Other than your earnest and consistent prayer it is possible that the Lord may not use you to directly influence this person. But your prayer may very well set in motion some spiritual forces which will accomplish your righteous desire. It may subdue the spiritual forces which are working to keep this person blinded, and help open them up to consider the real message of the Bible. Prevailing in this spiritual battle is critical, it is foundational to any other thing you may do.

***The Battleground of the Mind.*** As we indicated above, RLDS have perpetuated Joseph Smith’s heresies because they simply do not know any better. They do not understand exactly how their church is un-Biblical. The Lord said of Israel, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). This same principle holds true for RLDS. You can help by preparing yourself to bring them this much needed knowledge.

If you have read this book you have already gone a long way toward this goal. This book contains much historical information of which most RLDS are simply unaware. The footnotes will allow you to point to many source documents which they already accept as legitimate. It also contains the Biblical analysis of their other scriptures, their priesthood structure and other doctrines which they have most likely never heard before.

But how do you go about bringing the subject up? Do you just knock on their door and say “Hi. I want to talk to you about some serious problems in your church.” Probably not. It might well create a level of defensiveness which might be difficult to overcome. If not this direct approach, then what else can you do? Well, depending on your relationship you might get an extra copy of this book and ask to go through it with them to see what they think of it. This will create a sense of accountability to you. If they decide to put their heads back in the sand, they will need to explain to you why they are doing so. This might encourage them to continue their quest

for truth. You might not only provide some accountability, but some much needed support for what may well be a very trying time in their life.

Another approach, which may be the best of all, is to ask them to explain their church to *you*. Many RLDS are eager for a chance to explain themselves, especially with the prospects of making a convert. As they explain things you can ask how they reconcile them to clear Biblical statements to the contrary. While this will most likely be frustrating for them, it may well plant some seeds for them to research later. You never have to alienate them by saying “That’s wrong! It’s clearly un-Biblical!” You encourage them to discover that for themselves as you continue to ask irreconcilable questions.

I cannot overstate the fact that as you take an active interest in your RLDS friend or loved one, you are providing a much needed ministry. Throughout my time in the RLDS church I would often promote the church to Christians. I never once came across a Christian who would (or could) tell me why I was wrong. Not once. An RLDS friend of mine and I once spent multiple evenings presenting the church to owners of a Christian bookstore with whom we had struck up a conversation. Not only were they not able to tell us why we were wrong, we actually felt that they were beginning to accept *our* story. My friends, this should not have been. Instead, we should strive to be, “a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). In so doing we pay active heed to the admonition of James, “My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: *Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins*” (James 5:19–20).

As Christians we should not shrink back from this kind of service, for in so doing we only stand to strengthen our own knowledge and faith in the Lord Jesus. The historic Christian faith was forged in the face of just such opposition, from both inside and outside the church. Much of the New Testament was written to establish the truth of the gospel against the inroads of just such heresy. You do much good for the cause of Christ when you lovingly, but *firmly* stand against the heresies assaulting today’s church.

### **Once the Battle is Won — Fully Occupying the Promised Land**

We must always remember that our ultimate goal is not simply to dissuade RLDS from following Joseph Smith, *but to embrace Jesus Christ*. Joseph Smith is *wrong* only because the Bible is *right*. Many RLDS leave their church because they become disenchanted with Joseph Smith for one reason or another. But, sadly, far too many of these same people never fully embrace the Christian life. This is a tragedy. There are a number of reasons for this, which we will discuss below.

***If This Isn’t True, Then Nothing Else Can Be.*** Realizing that the church you have given your life to is a fraud creates a devastation which is simply beyond words. Not only do you find yourself beyond the pale of family and friends you once held dear, it also shatters your personal confidence to discern right from wrong. You were fooled once, you could be fooled again. Many former RLDS decide it is not worth the risk to “love again,” so to speak. They conclude that if the RLDS is not true, then no other church can be either. Besides, many RLDS once considered all those other churches as the enemy, and they simply cannot join the other side. Unless they experience a change of heart along the way, these people will live out their days in spiritual

wounding and isolation, with many lingering questions and fears.

**From the Frying Pan Into the Fire.** Remember, RLDS are in their predicament because they do not have a solid understanding of the Bible. Unless they are in a position to get some reliable Bible teaching they may be susceptible to getting involved in another aberrant group after leaving the RLDS church. These people are willing to confess that there are problems with Joseph Smith. But they miss the camaraderie of like-minded people pursuing a common goal. Perhaps because of their RLDS involvement they remain suspicious of mainstream Christianity. It is easy for these people to merely trade one set of heresies for another. They have not yet established a strong enough base of Biblical understanding to effectively steer them clear of such involvements. Quite often these people will get burned a second time.

**Spiritual Paralysis.** Thoughtful RLDS often do enough research to uncover perplexing problems which trouble them. They then often engage in a process which I call “peeling the onion.” Onions seem to have an endless numbers of layers which must be peeled off before the core becomes visible. These people remove one “layer” of problems at a time from their belief system. They theorize that the problems they continue to uncover cropped up later in the church’s history, but were not there in its beginning. Examples might be the problems with the church’s *Doctrine & Covenants* which we discussed in chapter 8, or the more extreme doctrines Joseph Smith introduced in Nauvoo such as baptism for the dead or polygamy. While this process generates enough problems for them to leave the present RLDS church, it takes them only so far and generally leaves them with a core belief in the early Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. These people peel the onion back far enough to realize there are many serious problems, but they do not peel it far enough to discover that, in actuality, it is rotten to the core: that Joseph Smith himself is the real culprit and that the Book of Mormon is the problem which paved the way for all the rest.

These people take their partially peeled onion with them wherever they go, never knowing quite what to do with it. They may go on to join a legitimate Christian church but they engage with the Christian life only in a limited way, and from a distance. Because their lingering questions about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon have not been resolved they become stuck, spiritually paralyzed. The result is that their spiritual growth in Jesus becomes stunted. Sometimes these people find adequate resolution to their questions only over a period of several years, perhaps even decades. Other times their questions follow them to the grave, and they are never able to fully let go of Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon. This is a tragedy.

**Victory.** As we said above, our goal is not simply to dissuade RLDS from following Joseph Smith, *but to embrace Jesus Christ*. Joseph Smith was a false prophet, and his scriptures and teaching represent a deplorable spiritual pollution in one’s mind and life. It is very unfortunate that people become entangled with him at all. But it is hard to believe that anyone would *willingly* follow a false prophet; remember, they do so out of ignorance.

Once people have embraced Joseph Smith and his teaching they will continue to live with the spiritual effect of his pollution until it is effectively dealt with. Since people become entangled with Joseph Smith through ignorance of Biblical truth, their path to freedom is just the opposite: *a solid understanding of Biblical truth*. Do not misunderstand me here. I am not suggesting that merely acquiring knowledge is the ultimate solution. Rather, it points us to the solution: a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, through faith, and in truth. This is exactly what Paul prescribed for

Timothy “The holy Scriptures, ...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). The very best antidote for Joseph Smith is a strong dose of Biblical theology. The heresy of Joseph Smith is thus replaced by the truth of God’s Word. To merely dispose of the heresy of Joseph Smith without replacing it with the truth creates a spiritual vacuum into which a variety of equally unhealthy things can intrude.

In the last chapter we said that RLDS often have a high degree of zeal for their church and way of life, but that it is a “zeal not based on knowledge.” God wants to reclaim this zeal for His own purposes, just as he did with the Apostle Paul. You will remember that it was Paul himself who said “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that *they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge*” (Rom. 10:1–2). Paul knew all about this kind of zeal, for it had once been very true of himself. But God reclaimed Paul’s zeal for the service of the gospel. Instead of a zealous persecutor of the Christian church, he became one of its most zealous defenders. This is what God wants to do for RLDS members.

In Luke chapter 7 a formerly “sinful woman” lavishes her love on Jesus to the horror of His host. Jesus, however, uplifted this woman as a perfect picture of repentance, “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for *she loved much*. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47). In the same way I believe Paul was even more zealous after his conversion, which led him to say, “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and *his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me*” (1 Cor. 15:9–11). In like manner, God wants to reclaim the zeal of RLDS for His own purposes.

## Summary and Conclusion

When we look at world events in the light of Biblical prophecy it seems clear that we are truly in the “latter days.” Jesus predicted that these times would be fraught with false prophets in order to “deceive the elect—if that were possible” (Mark 13:22). It may well be that Joseph Smith is one of the greatest of these end-time false prophets. His teachings have led millions of people into forbidden paths and have blinded them to God’s truth. Jesus further predicted that these end-time false prophets would be accompanied with supernatural power (Mark 13:22). Accordingly, we have seen throughout this book that Joseph Smith was certainly propelled by “a power not his own.”

While RLDS are among those who have been blinded by Joseph Smith’s deception, the Lord wants to reclaim them for His service. As Christians endeavor to help RLDS people they must realize that this battle is primarily a *spiritual* one, fought in the *minds* of men and women. We are not fighting against “flesh and blood.” Accordingly, we must use the spiritual weapons of fervent intercessory prayer and the undistorted truth of God’s Holy Word. Indeed, a solid understanding of the Bible is the only effective antidote to the false teachings of Joseph Smith. Only then can former RLDS develop a mature and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

While Joseph Smith certainly qualifies as one of the end-times false prophets, he was not the antichrist who will be ruling at the moment of Christ’s return. The supernatural power and deception with which this antichrist will rule far overshadows even that of Joseph Smith. On

account of this antichrist “many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other” (Matt. 24:10; see also 2 Thess. 2:3–12). This “great falling away” will amount to nothing less than a defection from Christ *en masse*. As Christians engage in the battle for RLDS people, they not only “snatch [them] from the fire and save them,” (Jude 23) they also “prepare [their] minds for action,” (1 Peter 1:13) getting their own selves ready against the even more “powerful delusion” (2 Thess. 2:11) which is coming on the earth.

“My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: *Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*” (James 5:19–20)