

THE ATTITUDE OF ZION

By

Curtis R. Porritt

www.curtporritt.com



PORRITT PUBLISHING

Special thanks go to my brother, Ron,
whose answers always kept me questioning.

PREFACE

I would like to make it clear to any who read this that the thoughts expressed here are my own and that I take full responsibility for them. I realize that there are people who will disagree with some of these ideas and that, in some cases, certain issues may be considered controversial or even offensive to some. However, it has never been my desire to offend anyone or to create contention.

It is important for the reader to understand that the purpose I write things is not necessarily to publish or even preach the doctrines, ideas, and concepts included in this or any other work I have written. I also have no interest in making any money from the things I write. I have never charged anyone more than the price it costs me to make them a copy. Often, I don't even charge them that. Chances are that if you have this work it is because you are a close friend, a relative, or because you have asked for it. That said, I would be less than honest if I didn't mention that I hope this work helps you in your personal search for truth. It would definitely please me to know that it helped you learn more about God and the truths he has revealed to us. I have no concerns if copies of this work are made and given to those who may benefit from the things I have written. My permission is hereby granted to the reader to make copies of this work for righteous purposes. My only request is that good judgment and wisdom are used before doing so.

My main motives for writing are, for the most part, purely selfish. I enjoy learning about the things of God. I enjoy trying to organize my thoughts and beliefs in such a way that I can discover how supportable they are or how well they fit in with the other things I believe. I have found that writing about my beliefs helps me to discover such things and gives me a greater understanding about them. There have been many times that I have written something about a given subject or belief, only to find that I could not support it very well or that it didn't match well with other things that I believe to be true. These are what I consider my "failures." Even though I have learned from these experiences, what I learned was that I was wrong. If you are reading this, then what follows is probably what I consider to be one of my "successes."

Another reason I write things is to see if anyone else can find fault or error in what I believe. I am not so naive as to think that if something works in my mind, it must be true. I believe a real "truth seeker" will seek out those who can teach him and correct him. He will want to hear what others have to say about his beliefs. I believe this is a very important part of learning. Often there are times when I revise or correct things in my writings because of something someone else has said to me regarding them. This is great and I welcome it.

I should also mention that I have definitely sought the inspiration of the Lord while studying and writing. This has produced some very interesting experiences for me. I believe in personal inspiration.

As you read the things that follow, I would ask you to open your mind a little bit and to think a little deeper into the subjects discussed and the ideas expressed. Most of what follows came

more by asking questions and following them through than by merely taking things at face value and accepting them. I am merely trying to answer some questions I have that have become somewhat important to me. I am seeking truth, and in this there is no fault of which I am aware. If someone can show me where I am wrong, I welcome that person, for it is the truth of the matter that I am after. However, until someone does so or through my own thoughts I come up with something better, I will, at least for the time being, tend to believe the ideas and theories of which I have written. In my own mind these things fit together very well. I hope I will be able to express them as well and as clearly as I see them.

Undoubtedly some people will claim that these writings deal with theories and/or mysteries of the gospel. Before we begin, I feel it is important to note what the Lord has told us about “theories” and the “mysteries” of the gospel. Regarding theories, the Lord has said,

And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand; (D&C 88:77-78, underline added. See also D&C 97:14.)

Now, depending upon your testimony, a theory can be defined as something that has not yet been fully revealed. It seems to me that if the Lord has revealed something to us, it can be removed from the realm of “theory.” Thus we see that the Lord has given us “a commandment” to teach one another in such a way that we become more familiar with those doctrines, ideas, and concepts that have not yet been fully revealed. I see nothing wrong with this so long as we appreciate the fact that not everything is “expedient” for us to understand. Sometimes it takes a little more humility than we possess to recognize when something is not expedient, either for ourselves or for someone else.

Regarding the mysteries of the gospel, the Lord has told us,

If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things--that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal. (D&C 42:61, underline added)

The Lord has also said,

But unto him that keepeth my commandments I will give the mysteries of my kingdom, and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life. (D&C 63:23, underline added)

Contrary to popular belief, of the many scriptures that talk about the mysteries of the gospel, only a few speak of them in a negative sense.¹ And these are usually talking about missionary work or preaching the gospel, which makes perfect sense.²

Joseph Smith has said,

I advise all to go on to perfection, and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness. (TPJS Pg. 364)

Joseph Smith also said,

It should be borne in mind that these wonderful mysteries, as they are suppose to be, are only mysteries because of the ignorance of men; and when men and women are troubled in spirit over those things which come to light through the proper channel of intelligence, they only betray their weakness, ignorance, and folly. (Millennial Star 15:825)

It seems that theories and mysteries of the gospel are not just “okay” to study, but rather, we are actually encouraged to study and learn about them. The key comes in following the inspiration of the Lord, knowing what to share or not share, and in being humble enough to change and admit the errors of our ways.

That said, there are doctrines referred to by many as “mysteries” which can often be found with great repetition among the words of the prophets, both ancient and modern. What many people refer to as a “mystery” is often only a mystery to them, because they have not taken the time to search the scriptures and the words of the prophets to see what they say about the topic. Referring to those who believe that a person should go “thus far and no farther” as far as the study of religion is concerned, Henry Drummond once said,

There is often a great deal of intellectual sin concealed in this old aphorism. When men do not wish to go farther they find it an honorable convenience sometimes to sit down on the outmost edge of the “holy ground” on the pretext of taking off their shoes. Yet, we must be certain that, making a virtue of reverence, we are not merely excusing ignorance; or under a plea of “mystery” evading a truth which has been stated in the

¹ See Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Romans 11:25; Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 1 Corinthians 13:2; 1 Corinthians 14:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51; Ephesians 1:9; Ephesians 3:3; Ephesians 3:4; Ephesians 3:9; Ephesians 5:32; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 1:26; Colossians 1:27; Colossians 2:2; Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; 1 Timothy 3:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Revelation 1:20; Revelation 10:7; Revelation 17:5; Revelation 17:7; 1 Nephi 1:1; 1 Nephi 2:16; 1 Nephi 10:19; Jacob 4:8; Jacob 4:18; Mosiah 1:3; Mosiah 1:5; Mosiah 2:9; Mosiah 8:19; Alma 10:5; Alma 12:9; Alma 12:10; Alma 12:11; Alma 26:22; Alma 30:28; Alma 37:4; Alma 37:11; Alma 37:21; Alma 40:3; Helaman 16:21; D&C 6:7; D&C 6:11; D&C 8:11; D&C 10:64; D&C 11:7; D&C 19:8; D&C 19:10; D&C 28:7; D&C 35:18; D&C 38:13; D&C 42:61; D&C 42:65; D&C 43:13; D&C 63:23; D&C 64:5; D&C 71:1; D&C 76:7; D&C 76:114; D&C 77:6; D&C 84:19; D&C 90:14; D&C 97:5; D&C 107:19.

² See Alma 12:9 and D&C 19:21.

New Testament a hundred times, in the most literal form, and with all but monotonous repetition. (Spiritual Law, pp. 89, 90. See also the Seventy's course in Theology, Pg. v by Elder B.H. Roberts.)

I hope that this work falls into this last category. I am very much an authoritarian as far as these writings are concerned. Great effort has been made to support the doctrines found within these pages. In most cases, whenever a concept is put forth, it will be accompanied with scriptures or quotes from general authorities.

If we are to obtain the Celestial Kingdom, I feel we must always strive to be open and teachable regarding our beliefs. This is important to understand as we ponder some of the thoughts that follow.

Curtis R. Porritt

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VII
INTRODUCTION	1
OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS OURSELVES	4
<i>CULTURAL STUMBLING BLOCKS</i>	6
<i>DEFINITIONS AND SEMANTICS</i>	7
<i>SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR SELF-ESTEEM</i>	11
<i>LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF</i>	14
<i>WORTH OF SOULS IS GREAT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD</i>	17
<i>WHAT ATTITUDE DOES THE LORD ACCEPT/REJECT?</i>	18
<i>WHAT IS THE WORTH OF MAN?</i>	22
<i>SELF-ESTEEM AND PRIDE</i>	26
<i>HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY</i>	27
<i>ARE WE LIVING A LIE?</i>	29
<i>THE LAW OF SACRIFICE</i>	31
<i>ARE WE PREACHING PRIDE TODAY?</i>	32
<i>WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT?</i>	33
<i>RELATED REFERENCES</i>	35
OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHERS	36
<i>OUR VIEW OF OTHERS</i>	37
<i>THE PROBLEM OF SELF-INTEREST</i>	38
<i>COMMUNISM AND SELF-INTEREST</i>	38
<i>SOCIALISM AND SELF-INTEREST</i>	39
<i>CAPITALISM AND SELF-INTEREST</i>	39
<i>ZION AND SELF-INTEREST</i>	40
<i>THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE</i>	43
<i>HOW DO WE GAIN UNSELFISH LOVE?</i>	46
<i>THE EXPRESSION OF OUR LOVE</i>	56
<i>IS IT A SIN TO BE RICH?</i>	56
<i>TWO TYPES OF "RICH"</i>	60
<i>EQUALITY IN RICHES AND THE LAW OF THE GOSPEL</i>	61
<i>ACCORDING TO OUR WANTS AND NEEDS</i>	63
<i>INEQUALITY IN RICHES</i>	64
<i>TO WHOM SHOULD WE GIVE OF OUR SUBSTANCE?</i>	67
<i>WHY AREN'T WE LIVING IT NOW?</i>	70
<i>WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT?</i>	75
<i>HOW DIFFICULT WILL IT BE?</i>	77
<i>RELATED REFERENCES</i>	79
OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD	81
<i>KNOWING GOD</i>	82
<i>ONLY ONE WAY TO TRUE HAPPINESS</i>	83

<i>GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS US</i>	83
<i>THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD</i>	85
<i>THE TRUE BLESSINGS OF GOD</i>	87
<i>WHY FOLLOW CHRIST?</i>	91
<i>OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD</i>	94
<i>WE OWE HIM EVERYTHING</i>	96
<i>CONVERSING WITH OUR FATHER</i>	99
<i>EXPRESSING FAITH IN GOD</i>	101
<i>WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT</i>	106
<i>RELATED REFERENCES</i>	109
CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS	110
<i>THE POWER OF THE PRIESTHOOD</i>	111
<i>BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF</i>	114
<i>THE TRUE TEST OF OUR ATTITUDE</i>	115

INTRODUCTION

Concerning the building of Zion, President Spencer W. Kimball has said,

May I suggest three fundamental things we must do if we are to “bring again Zion,” three things for which we who labor for Zion must commit ourselves.

First, we must eliminate the individual tendency to selfishness that snares the soul, shrinks the heart, and darkens the mind.

Second, we must cooperate completely and work in harmony one with the other.

Third, we must sacrifice whatever is required by the Lord. (“Becoming the Pure in Heart,” Ensign, March 1985)

These three “fundamental things” are what this book is all about. I believe that if the principles in this book are learned and lived, Zion will not be far away.

There are at least three types of beings with which we must deal in this life and in the life to come. They are ourselves, other beings like ourselves, and God or deity. As hard as we sometimes try to avoid it, the time will come when every individual in existence will have to deal with each of these three groups, whether in this life or in the life to come. It simply cannot and will not be avoided by anyone. The trick comes in figuring out how to deal with each of these groups in such a way so as to bring about the greatest amount of joy, happiness, and peace.

I should mention that this book discusses the ideal. The Celestial Kingdom or Zion is the ideal and that is what we should be striving for. Many of the principles contained in this book will be difficult to accept by those who are engrossed in or captivated by this telestial life in which we live. This earth life is not the ideal. It is telestial in nature. One step up, the Terrestrial Kingdom, is also not the ideal. We often believe that we are as righteous as we need to be if we do the minimum required to get a temple recommend. This is simply not the case. We all want to believe that we are going to the Celestial Kingdom and yet it has been my experience that we are seldom willing to even discuss the higher principles involved with such an exalted state. I have often asked myself, “Why do we believe we will end up in the Celestial Kingdom when in reality we are so far from it?” At least in part, this book is intended to show us just how far away from a celestial lifestyle we really are, and hence, how much more we must do to become celestial beings ourselves.

There is much contained in this work which I have personally experienced - things which I have tried and tested in my own life and have found to be of significance. I did not come to believe these things through only a little experience or a brief study. Many of the ideas contained in this book are things of which I had to be converted myself - doctrines which I have not always believed. One of my fears is that the reader will skim through the ideas expressed here without putting them to the test, or giving them further study. I encourage you not to take this route. If you find something offensive or difficult to accept, please take the time to study it out before discarding it completely. It is also important that you read the entire book. The first chapter will make much more sense in light of the other two chapters. The same is true of the second and

third chapters. If you read only a part of this book, you may not be able to gain the “big picture” I am trying to convey.

These chapters deal with attitudes, not just thoughts or actions. They attempt to discuss not only what we do or think, but what we are and what we can become. Together they try to describe a single attitude. Although the book is broken down into three separate “attitudes,” it should be recognized that, in reality, the three main chapters of the book are trying to convey the same attitude, just from three different perspectives. As mentioned above, I believe that when we incorporate all three attitudes within ourselves we will find one big picture. This big picture makes up who we are, and hence, what we think and do in this life. I believe the attitude expressed here is found at the core of the gospel message. It is found on almost every page of scripture. To a large extent, it is what the Lord is trying to accomplish with us.

Chapter One

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS OURSELVES

As we begin to discuss our dealings with these three groups (ourselves, others, and God) it should be recognized that no matter where we go or what we do the one person we can never get away from is ourself. No matter who I am, what I am, or what I do, I must always live with myself. I simply have no choice. The same is true for all people. No matter how hard we try we simply cannot get away from ourselves. With this in mind it seems only appropriate that we first ponder the questions which deal with ourselves. How should we deal with and view ourselves?

The first thing we should notice is how incredibly difficult it is to talk about ourselves without any reference to others. We assume, for example, that we all have certain things in common or certain similarities with each other. In many cases when I say that I have experienced something in this way or that way, I have no real means of knowing how others experienced the same thing. Yet we all believe that our experiences are similar enough to create common ground. When other people burn themselves, I believe I know what that feels like. This is because I have had the experience of burning myself. Although I did not feel what the other people felt, I take it for granted that my feeling is at least similar to theirs. The same holds true for any other type of experience whether physical, emotional, spiritual, or even intellectual. It seems fairly safe to say that we all have certain things in common, things that are basically the same for everyone. We all have things that affect us in pretty much the same way. We must assume that this is the case in order to even communicate with each other or make sense out of our relationships with each other. Thus, much of the conversation and thought we have concerning ourselves is only possible because others have had similar experiences. These similar experiences often serve as a basis for how we view ourselves.

In addition to the common denominators we all seem to have, we also must use the exceptions in order to talk about ourselves. We have a tendency to describe ourselves by listing those things about us that are different from the norm. If someone were to ask me what I look like, it would be silly for me to respond that I have two arms, a nose and a belly button. It is more likely that I would select those things for my description that are apart from the norm, things that separate me from the rest.

The point I am trying to make is that in order to even talk about ourselves we need other beings. There is simply no way for us to even begin a discussion about ourselves without making a comparison to other things or beings around us. To illustrate this point, try to think of yourself in terms of only you. Suppose no other being existed in the entire universe. In the first place you couldn't even describe yourself. To say that you are a tall, blue-eyed, blond-haired man with a large nose would lose all meaning. You are tall in comparison to what? You have blue eyes and blond hair as opposed to what? And by what rational could you call your nose big? Without someone else to compare yourself to, all of these things lose their meaning. The same is true for the intangible labels we give ourselves. Without other people to compare ourselves with, we could not be kind or evil, masculine or feminine, dumb or smart, righteous or wicked, etc.. In a very real sense we would all but cease to exist if others did not exist with us.

We need to realize that whenever we talk about or view ourselves in any way, all we are really doing is comparing ourselves to other things (usually people). If we could take away those things, we could no longer talk about or view ourselves. Likewise, and here is the key, if we simply avoid comparing ourselves to the things around us we would find it difficult to think

about ourselves at all. If other people continue to exist but we cease to compare ourselves to them, the outcome would be basically the same as if they didn't exist at all. The more we focus on the differences and similarities between ourselves and other people, the more self-conscious we become. The less we focus on those differences and similarities, the less self-conscious we become.

It is true that we have no other choice but to live with ourselves. However, we do have a choice concerning how self-conscious we are going to be. It is important to understand this when considering the arguments that follow.

CULTURAL STUMBLING BLOCKS

Throughout history, whenever people have tried to live the gospel, one of their greatest stumbling blocks has come from the influences of their culture. In every culture, man has seemed to develop his own ideas and beliefs concerning what is true and what is false. It is relatively easy to show that the influences of our society, both past and present, have an incredible effect on what we accept to be true or good. Apparently, man has a strong tendency to believe that philosophy and the sciences are the real truth finders in this world. We tend to believe that if we can “prove” something through science or logic, we need look no further for the truth. The stumbling block comes when these “proven” truths turn out to be false and even damaging to our society.

So great is this threat of cultural influence that the Lord has continually warned us to beware of “the philosophies of men, mingled with scripture.” Quite often, however, these “philosophies of men” seem so good and so inviting to us that we feel they simply must be a part of the gospel. We often have a tendency to think, “It must be true, therefore, it must be in the scriptures.” The great apostasy was caused largely due to this way of thinking.

It is important for us as Latter-day Saints to realize that we are not exempt from this “stumbling block.” We can safely assume that at least some misguided concepts of science and philosophy have crept into our beliefs in this dispensation, just as they have in past dispensations. We can also assume that some of these concepts are being “mingled with scripture,” in an effort to show that they are true and that they should be considered part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This seems to be the pattern in every dispensation of the gospel. To believe that we are somehow exempt from the same stumbling blocks that have crippled the saints in earlier dispensations, is to believe something that is simply not true.

Perhaps one of the best indications that a philosophy of man is being incorrectly mingled with scripture, is to ask the following three questions:

How popular is the concept (philosophy)?
Is it easy to believe?
How often does it appear in the scriptures?

Usually the philosophies of men that creep into the gospel do so because they have become very popular. They are generally very easy to believe and tend to have a great deal of evidence to back them up. Often they are flattering to us.³ They provide us with something that we want to believe.

If, however, there is little or no scriptural support for such a concept, we should begin to wonder why. If something is so good for us, why hasn't the Lord mentioned it to his prophets? Occasionally the advocates of these philosophies will find a few scriptures that can be interpreted to support their beliefs. As a general rule, however, the popularity of the concept or philosophy will be far greater than the scriptural support provided for it. We should also note that scripturally sound concepts, historically have been quite unpopular. Seldom is the gospel of Jesus Christ readily accepted by a society. This is especially true of the "higher" laws and principles. This is why so many prophets have been killed throughout the history of the world.

In short, we are looking for a set of beliefs that are very popular and easy to believe, but which receive little or no scriptural support.

I would like to discuss one philosophy that I feel fits the criteria above. It concerns what I believe to be the differences between the term "confidence," as spoken of in the scriptures, and what has come to be known as "self-esteem."

DEFINITIONS AND SEMANTICS

Through my discussions with others I have found that most people see no distinction between the terms "confidence" and "self-esteem." We have a tendency to view them as being one and the same. I have also found, however, that even though we tend to see no difference between these two terms, different people define these concepts in very different ways. In other words, the terms confidence and self-esteem generally have little distinction to us, but each person has a slightly different picture in their mind whenever these terms are discussed. Because of this, it is perhaps a good idea to define what I mean by the terms "confidence" and "self-esteem" as they will be used in this chapter.

It should first be noted that the reason I have chosen the terms "confidence" and "self-esteem" is that one appears in the scriptures and the other does not. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the word "confidence" is spoken of favorably in the scriptures while the term "self-esteem" does not appear at all. One of the points I hope to make is that there is a big difference between feeling good and feeling good about ourselves. Righteous confidence usually makes me feel good. Self-esteem usually makes me feel good about myself. I believe this difference is very significant.

³ It is interesting to note that the Book of Mormon contains 21 different references to flattery. In all but three of these references there is a direct connection between flattery and being deceived. In the Doctrine and Covenants there are four references to flattery. All four of these references are directly related to deception as well.

In defining our two terms it is important to note that regardless of the terms we use, there are indeed two very different concepts in existence concerning how we view ourselves. These concepts are revealed quite well in the scriptures. Possibly one of the best examples of this difference comes from the speech of King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon. After telling the people that in spite of their righteousness they will always be “unprofitable servants,” King Benjamin boldly declares the following:

And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth... (Mosiah 2:25)

Then King Benjamin goes on to speak of his own state or how he views himself:

And I, even I, whom ye call your king, am no better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust. (Mosiah 2:26)

By today's standards, we would probably say that King Benjamin had “low self-esteem.” We could even say with good argument that he was preaching low self-esteem. However, if we read on we find that even though King Benjamin “esteemed himself as naught” he had what I would call “confidence.”

Therefore, as I said unto you that I had served you, walking with a clear conscience before God, even so I at this time have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together, that I might be found blameless, and that your blood should not come upon me, when I shall stand to be judged of God of the things whereof he hath commanded me concerning you...that I might go down to my grave in peace, and my immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God. (Mosiah 2:27-28, underline added)

Here we see that even though King Benjamin views himself as lower than the dust of the earth, he feels comfortable about his relationship with God and looks forward to facing the judgments that await him.

Later in this chapter we will explore other scriptures that deal with the differences between confidence and self-esteem. For now, it is perhaps good to continue defining our two terms. Suffice it to say that there are many examples in the scriptures where men view themselves as “naught” or “nothing” and yet look forward to the time when they will return and live with God, free of guilt and sin.

I believe that the main difference between the two terms in question (as far as this work is concerned) is that “confidence” is concerned more about truth than the self, while “self-esteem” is concerned more about the self than the truth. The priorities for confidence are to place truth and God first, other people second and yourself somewhere after that. The priorities for self-esteem are to place yourself first and seemingly everything else (including truth) somewhere after that.

Self-esteem holds to the rule that you cannot love others unless you love yourself first. It seems to believe that our ability to care for others is directly related to our ability to care for ourselves. Confidence, on the other hand, maintains that true love involves forgetting yourself. In fact, confidence may go as far as to declare that loving yourself and loving others are two completely different things. They are, perhaps, even opposites. In order to gain confidence you must know that what you are doing is right. You must place truth and the needs of others first in your life, even if it means personal sacrifice. Confidence adheres to such principles as losing your life that you may find it,⁴ and as with charity or the pure love of Christ, confidence seeks not its own.⁵

Self-esteem, on the other hand, tends to suggest that as long as it makes you feel good, it's okay. It preaches that good mental health occurs when a person believes in himself and feels good about himself. It is inclined to seek things which may not be altogether true, but which make you feel better about yourself.

A good example of this kind of thinking was found in a newspaper article a few years ago. The article was entitled "In a divorce, blame others." It states how divorce can be a terrible and difficult situation. Then it goes on to say that one of the best ways for people to overcome these bad feelings is to "blame their spouses for the marriages' dissolution." The article quotes Helen Weingarten, a professor of social work at Ann Arbor's University of Michigan:

Blaming their partners rather than themselves may be a radical distortion of marital history, but it allows older women, who feel they don't have enough time or incentive to forge new identities, to preserve their integrity and sense of self worth.

This is what I mean by "self-esteem." Notice how truth takes second place (at best) to the feelings of the person. This kind of thinking is not at all uncommon today. In fact, it appears to be quite prevalent.

The great problem this presents for Latter-day Saints is that it seems to all but do away with any notion of repentance. One of the first steps of repentance is remorse or feeling bad about something you've done. Suppose we were to apply the above quote to a person who committed adultery. If this person were to follow the advice given above, he would not only be living a lie, he would be throwing away any notion of repentance. Though he may be preserving his "sense of self worth" (self-esteem) he would be throwing away any hopes of gaining confidence before the Lord or "walking with a clear conscience before God," as did King Benjamin.

Another general difference between confidence and self-esteem is that confidence is always the result of doing what is right. Self-esteem, on the other hand, is usually thought of as being a prerequisite to doing what is right. We tend to believe that if people feel good about themselves they will be more likely to succeed. With self-esteem, the good feeling must always precede the success. In gospel terms we might very well say, "Believe that you are righteous and you will become righteous." This "prerequisite" attitude is part of our definition of self-esteem.

⁴ Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; John 12:25

⁵ I Corinthians 3:5; Moroni 7:45

Because confidence deals with truth, it will always come after truth has been obeyed. It always comes after the success, never before. It is the natural result of obedience to truth. In gospel terms we might say, “Become righteous and you will know that what you are doing is right.”

Unlike self-esteem, confidence not only allows for repentance but demands it. While self-esteem tries to conform truth to the feelings of the self, confidence tries to conform the self to truth. The scriptures teach us that the way to gain genuine confidence is to love others and place God and truth first:

Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God... (Doctrine and Covenants 121:45, underline added)

This scripture tells us that if we want to gain confidence, the way to do it is to place virtue (truth, morality, good qualities, etc.) and charity towards others high on our priority list. There is no mention whatsoever concerning how we should view ourselves, nothing that would indicate self-esteem at all. Notice also that the scripture does not say, “Gain confidence first; then shall thy bowels be full of charity towards all men and virtue shall garnish thy thoughts unceasingly.” That type of philosophy simply cannot be found in the scriptures, yet it thrives in our modern culture. As Brigham Young has stated:

No man can gain influence in this Kingdom, and maintain himself in it, magnify his calling without the power of God being with him. Persons must so live that they can enjoy the light of the Holy Spirit, or they will have no confidence in themselves, in their religion, or in their God, and will sooner or later turn from the faith. (Discourses of Brigham Young, P. 33, underline added)

Brigham Young has also said,

I will take my own experience. When men and women bring their sick to me, if I had the power I would heal all that should be healed. And if I had perfect confidence in myself, and the Lord had that confidence in me which I should then have in Him, no power beneath the heavens could prevent the power of God from coming on them and healing them through me. But I have not yet attained to perfect confidence in myself in all circumstances, neither has God in me, for were such the case, He would answer every request I made of Him, every wish of mine would be answered to the letter. And this is the difficulty with the people, they have not attained to perfect confidence in themselves, neither have we as yet sufficient grounds for that degree of confidence. (Journal of Discourses 4:283-284, underline added)

President Ezra Taft Benson seems to echo these thoughts.

May I now discuss a subject of grave concern that deserves deeper development than we have time. It is the subject of pride.

In the scriptures there is no such thing as righteous pride. It is always a sin. We are not speaking of a wholesome view of self-worth, which is best established by a close relationship with God. But we are speaking of pride as the universal sin, as someone has described it. (Cleansing the Inner Vessel, Conference Report, May, 1986, underline added)

The proud depend upon the world to tell them whether they have value or not. Their self-esteem is determined by where they are judged to be on the ladders of worldly success. They feel worthwhile as individuals if the numbers beneath them in achievement, talent, beauty, or intellect are large enough. Pride is ugly. It says, "If you succeed, I am a failure."

If we love God, do His will, and fear His judgement more than man's, we will have self-esteem. (Beware of Pride, Conference Report, May, 1989)

Notice in these quotes that even though President Benson uses the terms "self-worth" and "self-esteem," the way he uses them is consistent with our definition of "confidence." In both cases President Benson uses these terms as a result of righteousness. His usage of the word "pride" more closely matches our definition of self-esteem. The problem of semantics is difficult, but I feel it is important if we are to understand the two concepts involved.

In short, confidence places truth and God first, others second, and the self somewhere after that. It comes as a result of recognizing and obeying what is true. Confidence allows for a broken heart and contrite spirit. It allows a person to repent by recognizing the truth about his fallen state and about God's endless mercy towards him if he will repent. Confidence is always directed away from the self. Confidence is based on Christ, the gospel, principles, ordinances, deeds, sacrifice, and service. It is never based on how the self feels.

Self-esteem places the self first, others second (on occasion), and truth or God somewhere after that. It is usually thought of as a prerequisite to achieving success. Because self-esteem is chiefly concerned with how the self feels, it does not allow for a broken heart or a contrite spirit. These things can make a person feel bad or sorrowful and hence are avoided. Because sorrow and bad feelings are avoided, a person possessing this definition of self-esteem will find it almost impossible to truly acknowledge their faults and repent of the mistakes they have made. Self-esteem is always directed toward the self. It is based on the principle that it is better to think highly of yourself, even if it isn't true, than it is to believe something that will make you feel bad about yourself. Self-esteem is always based on how the self feels.

SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR SELF-ESTEEM

Now that we have defined our two terms, let's move on to discuss the origins of self-esteem and confidence. I mentioned above that the term "self-esteem" does not appear in the standard works. I also suggested earlier that if a popular idea cannot be found in the scriptures, we should begin to wonder why. Some suggest that even though the term "self-esteem" does not appear in

the scriptures, the concept of self-esteem is found in the scriptures. Many claim that it is referred to in some other way using different terms. With this thought in mind, let's search through the scriptures to see what they say about self-esteem.

Try to place yourself in the following situation:

Suppose you are going to give a talk in church on self-esteem. You want to find some good, supporting scriptures for your talk, so you turn to the topical guide in the L.D.S. version of the Bible. Turning to page 461, you find the heading "Self-esteem, Self-image." You notice, however, that there are no scriptures under that heading. "That's strange," you think to yourself. You know that you've heard other people use scriptures to support the ideas of self-esteem. Pondering this problem you continue your search, "Perhaps one of the subheadings will help." Upon looking at the subheadings, you receive new hope. There are three subheadings, and they look promising. They are, "Man, a spirit child of Heavenly Father," "Man, Potential to become like Heavenly Father," and "Worth of Souls."

So, with rejuvenated faith you turn to the first subheading. Upon finding it, (p. 305) you look up and read all the scriptures listed. You find many references that confirm the fact that you are indeed a child of God, something you already knew. Nonetheless, to your dismay, you can't find a single scripture that even remotely implies the idea of having high self-esteem.

At this point you stop to think about what it means to be a child of God. Perhaps that truth, in and of itself, is reason enough to esteem oneself highly. As you consider this, however, the thought occurs to you that everybody on earth is a child of God. Hitler is as much a child of God as Abraham, Jack the Ripper as much as Moses. Though a great and important truth, perhaps being a child of God cannot, in and of itself, warrant one's having high self-esteem. To say the least, it seems awkward to suggest that Hitler and Jack the Ripper should feel good about themselves just because they know they are children of God. If anything, you would think that the knowledge of their relationship to God would make such men feel worse about themselves. With these thoughts in mind, you realize that this subheading probably doesn't support the idea of self-esteem very well.

This brings you to the second subheading, "Man, Potential to become like Heavenly Father." At this point you realize that the concept of self-esteem appears to encounter the same problems here as it did with the previous subheading. It would seem somewhat unfair to say that Hitler or Jack the Ripper did not have the potential to become like Heavenly Father. Though they apparently chose not to use that potential, it seems rather judgmental to say that they didn't possess this potential. Once again we are placed in the same position as before - having the potential to become like God, though undoubtedly a great truth, does not imply anything more or less than what it says. Potential is only worth something if it is properly used. Thus, just as before, having the potential to become like God, in and of itself, cannot give reason to one's having high self-esteem.

The question may now come to your mind, "What about those who have used their potential properly?" Perhaps your line of thinking goes something like this: "Perhaps if we use our potential to become like God...perhaps this would give us the right to possess high self-esteem."

After all, it seems fair to assume that if I'm doing everything I can to do what is right, I should be able to feel pretty good about myself. Right? Maybe this is where self-esteem comes into play. Perhaps I can base my talk on that thought.”

At this point a problem occurs to you. Your thoughts drift in a direction similar to the following: “Of course there will be those who are not using their potential properly and who will still esteem themselves highly. The Pharisees would be a good example of this. They esteemed themselves very highly but could not be considered righteous by any means.⁶ Another good example would be the Nephites in The Book of Mormon. There are plenty of examples where pride or thinking highly of themselves proved to be their downfall.⁷ In fact, it seems like almost all of the unrighteous people in the scriptures tended to think highly of themselves. Few, if any, considered themselves to be sinners or unworthy in any way. Korihor, Nehor, and others even went so far as to say that a man can do no wrong whatsoever.⁸ Certainly these can be considered cases where people esteemed themselves very highly, but obviously these people were doing so without warrant.”

Upon realizing that you have plenty of scriptures showing how self-esteem can be used improperly, you decide to get back to your original theme, “What I need now are some good scriptures that show how righteous people have high self-esteem or think highly of themselves. Perhaps that last subheading (Worth of Souls, p. 591) can help me here.” Upon reading the scriptures listed under this heading you find that they mostly refer to our worth in the eyes of someone else. Some refer to man as “precious” while other say he is “lost,” some say we are close to being angels while others say we’re “sinners.” Many of these scriptures speak of how God esteems us, but you will find that not a single scripture listed mentions anything about a righteous person esteeming himself highly.

As you continue your search for a righteous person who had high self-esteem, you are somewhat astonished at how many righteous people esteemed themselves as unworthy, unprofitable, sinners, or even as lower than the dust of the earth. “How can this be?” you wonder, “Not only don’t these people have high self-esteem, but they appear to think rather poorly of themselves.” About this time you happen to come across and read the following verses found in Mosiah:

I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that you should rejoice, and has granted that you should live in peace one with another

I say unto you that if you should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants. (Mosiah 2:20-21, underline added)

⁶ Luke 18:10-14

⁷ 2 Nephi 28:11-12, 15; Alma 1:32; Alma 31:16-18, 25-28; Helaman 4:13; Mormon 3:9

⁸ Alma 1:4; Alma 30:17; Helaman 13:27

And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you. (Mosiah 2:25, underline added)

And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to a knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken of by the mouth of the angel. (Mosiah 4:11, underline added)

These scriptures seem to crush any hope you might have had of finding a righteous person with high self-esteem. These verses boldly declare that even if you were so righteous that you could “render all the thanks and praise (to God) which your whole soul has power to possess,” and “serve him with all your whole soul;” even if you were so worthy that you knew of his goodness, had tasted of his glory, and received a remission of your sins, still you would be unprofitable, an unworthy creature, not able even to say aught of yourself. As you ponder these things, the discovery of Moses rings loudly in your mind,

*“Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed.”
(Moses 1:10)*

It is very possible that until now, you have never supposed that the concepts involved with self-esteem might not be in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. You realize that perhaps this conflict is something which deserves a little more attention than most Latter-day Saints usually give it.

Although this analogy is perhaps somewhat idealized, it introduces some of the problems encountered when we try to “mingle” the philosophy of self-esteem with the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are, of course, other arguments in favor of self-esteem upon which the analogy does not touch. However, it has been my experience that most people fall back on a few popular scriptures when trying to support the principles of self-esteem. Some of these scriptures deserve attention.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

Possibly the most popular scripture used by advocates of self-esteem is the one found in Matthew 19:19.⁹ This scripture tells us to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” Many people interpret this verse in such a way that it supports the concept of self-love. For many, this commandment implies that it is impossible to love someone else if you don't love yourself first. “Because of this commandment,” they say, “we are at least justified in loving ourselves, perhaps even required to do so.” However, further study will show that this is not the case.

In March of 1975, the Ensign magazine published an article entitled “Footnotes to the Gospel.” In this article the authors dealt with some of the scriptures in the Bible which are often misunderstood. One of these scriptures was the one just mentioned. Speaking of Matthew 19:19, the following was written:

The Greek version of this clearly draws a comparison between the feelings we should have for others and how we would feel if we were the recipient of the affection: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as if he were thyself” (in other words, love your neighbor as you would want your neighbor to love you). This, then, is a restatement of the “Golden Rule.” (See Matt. 7:12) There is no admonition to love oneself. (Ensign, March 1975; p. 34; underline added.)

From this article, we can see that the notion of loving yourself is not found in this scripture. Those who use it to support self-esteem or self-love are doing so incorrectly. President John Taylor offers us a little more insight into this issue.

We ought to have a heaven upon earth to be really the Zion of our God, the pure in heart, each one seeking another's welfare. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself.” We have hardly got to that yet; but supposing Paul were to come along and say a little further each one preferring his neighbor. That part of it we will let alone awhile. But if we could feel we are the children of God, all animated by that same Holy Spirit, producing peace and joy, and all welded together in one common brotherhood, in the bonds of the everlasting Gospel, all operating with God and the holy priesthood who have lived in other ages, to carry out his purposes upon the earth, and assisting to redeem the earth and establish his kingdom, never more to be thrown down. If we could feel like this, we should drop our individuality and self-esteem a little, we should seek to do not our own will, but the will of him who sent us. (Journal of Discourses 20:136, underline added)

I believe that loving yourself is an entirely different thing than loving others. When you love someone you put them first in your life. They matter to you more than other people or things. It stands to reason that if I love my wife, I will do things for her. If I love my children, I will do things for them. It follows then that if I love myself I will do things for myself. This last statement is not only in direct contradiction with the idea of loving others, but is also in direct contrast with the gospel itself. In order to truly love others, we must often sacrifice things we

⁹ Similar verses are found throughout the scriptures. For example: Mosiah 23:15; Mosiah 27:4; Matthew 22:39; Ephesians 5:28-33; D&C 59:6; D&C 112:11.

may want or need for ourselves. We have to give of ourselves and become truly unselfish. This, to me, seems to be the opposite of loving yourself. When a person declares that we cannot love others if we don't already love ourselves, they do so not understanding the differences between these two types of love. The logic is simple, if you love others you will do things for others. If you love yourself, you will do things for yourself. Christ taught that,

He that loveth his life shall lose it. (John 12:25)

The apostle Paul, in describing the apostasy of the last days declared the following about self-love:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

Having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

For this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

Ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 3:1-7, underline added)

Notice that Paul included loving yourself in a list of wicked things. He actually tells us to “turn away” from such people. With this in mind, doesn't it seem reasonable to assume that a person who loves himself would have a tendency to be just like the people described above, i.e. proud, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God (or anyone else), etc.? The people described above would likely care little or nothing for truth and others. They would try to place themselves first while placing truth and other people somewhere after that. It is also reasonable to assume that because they place themselves first, they will likely be very “successful” people. They will likely excel above others in many areas of life. Hence, “success” (especially worldly success) cannot be the only criteria we use to measure the value of self-love or self-esteem.

In contrast, true love, which is love for others, has nothing to do with love of self. The Savior commanded us to “love one another, as I (Christ) have loved you.”¹⁰ Christ gave everything of

¹⁰ John 13:34; 15:12

himself for us. This pure love of Christ is called charity.¹¹ The scriptures teach us that charity “seeketh not her own.”¹² Thus, in order to love as Christ loves, we cannot seek our own.

Listen to the words of Moroni and compare them to Paul's words above:

And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. (Moroni 7:45)

Notice how both Paul and Moroni begin by depicting a form of love and then describe the kinds of things associated with each type of love. Notice also the differences in what each form of love seeks. While love of self seeks only the self, charity seems to seek everything but the self.

The scriptures which speak of loving others as ourselves cannot be considered as support for the idea of self-love. If you believe that you cannot love another unless you first love yourself, you believe in a contradiction. The two are mutually incompatible. To the same degree that you possess one, you do not possess the other.

WORTH OF SOULS IS GREAT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 18, verse 10 we find another popular scripture that is often used by self-esteem advocates. In an attempt to show the great importance of repentance, the Lord makes the following statement:

Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; (Doctrine and Covenants 18:10)

People who use this scripture to support the ideas of self-esteem usually follow pretty much the same type of logic. We want to say, “All men are of great worth. I am a man. Therefore, I am of great worth.” But this leaves out an important part of the scripture. What the argument should say is, “All men are of great worth in the sight of God. I am a man. Therefore, I am of great worth in the sight of God.” Somehow we seem to get it into our minds that if God views us as being of great worth, then we should view ourselves as being of great worth. We seem to place our view of others and how we view ourselves in the same category. We treat them as if they were one and the same. That they are not can be easily demonstrated.

Can you imagine our concern if this scripture were to read something like, “Remember the worth of my own soul is great in my own sight.” This sounds amazingly similar to the ideas Paul was condemning earlier. To me that seems about as “un-godlike” as possible. Yet that is the logic we often use. Imagine Alma the younger (or any prophet) declaring, “I first learned that I was of

¹¹ 2 Nephi 26:30; Moroni 7:47; 8:17

¹² 1 Corinthians 13:5; Moroni 7:45

great worth. Then I repented and gained forgiveness of my sins.” The very notion of such a thing contradicts almost every account in the scriptures dealing with repentance. Most of the time it is the exact opposite approach that brings people to repentance. Yet many people teach this type of “repentance” today. We tend to believe, and even preach, that if we can view ourselves as being of great worth, we will naturally do the right things. I believe the scriptures show us that this is not true.

It is interesting that there are no instances of the Lord ever saying anything to us about viewing ourselves as being of great worth. Again, we must ask, “Why not?” Did He simply forget to put such an important truth into the scriptures? Or is it missing because He had no intention in the first place of ever teaching such a doctrine? Is it possible that he even taught the opposite of this? Isn't it true that the scriptures teach us to forget about our own “great worth?” I believe they do.

There is a great lesson to be learned in the tenth chapter of Mark. It is the story of the rich man who came to Christ “and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Notice what Christ's first response to this man was, “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.”¹³ Here we have the greatest prophet that ever lived, the very savior of all mankind. Certainly if anybody can consider himself “good,” it is Jesus Christ. And yet he would not allow it. Before even answering the man's question he made it perfectly clear that he didn't see (esteem) himself as being good in any degree. He saw only one person as being good, and that was God himself. If we are to follow this example and become as Christ is, then shouldn't we incorporate this same attitude into our own lives? Shouldn't we be saying something similar to, “Please do not refer to me as being good, I am not.” Today, we seem to want to say exactly the opposite.

If we continue further in this same chapter we find a similar situation. This time it involves Peter. After Christ told the apostles how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, it says that the apostles were “astonished out of measure.” At this point, Peter said to the Lord, “Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.” Upon explaining what it means to have “left all,” the Savior then rebuked Peter by saying, “But then there are many who make themselves first, that shall be last, and the last first. This he said, rebuking Peter...”¹⁴ Notice that at the first sign of self-recognition, the Lord rebukes Peter. It was surely true that Peter had left all and had followed him. That was not the point. It was the fact that Peter wanted to be recognized for his achievement that brought about Christ's rebuke.

WHAT ATTITUDE DOES THE LORD ACCEPT/REJECT?

Think for a moment about the kinds of people the Lord continually accepts and the kinds of people he continually rejects. Aren't the people that think highly of themselves the ones that the Lord always seems to condemn? Likewise, aren't the people who admit that they are unworthy

¹³ Mark 10:17-18

¹⁴ Mark 10:26-31, JST

and confess that they are sinners the ones who are constantly being forgiven and blessed by the Lord? This seems to be the case throughout the scriptures. Indeed, I would challenge anyone to find a single example of a righteous man who thought highly of himself or a meek and lowly person who was not blessed by the Lord.

Consider the following example in the book of Luke:

Two men went up to the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful unto me a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.
(Luke 18:10-14, underline added)

Compare the attitude of this Pharisee to that of Nephi.

Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me.

And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.

My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the nighttime.

And by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high; and angels came down and ministered unto me.

And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. And mine eyes have beheld great things, yea, even too great for man; therefore I was bidden that I should not write them.

O then, if I have seen so great things, if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions?

And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy?

Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.

Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation. (2 Nephi 4:16-30, underline added)

Isn't this attitude the one we find throughout the scriptures? The Lord always condemns those who approve of themselves while at the same time he blesses those who forget themselves and place God, truth, and others first in their lives. It is important for us to realize that much of what the Pharisee said was probably true. He probably did fast twice a week, he probably did give tithes of all that he possessed, and so forth. In contrast, it is also important to note that Nephi was a very righteous man. The "sins" he spoke of were probably very minor in comparison to those of most people. Yet he dwelt on his own inadequacies in humility and with a repentant attitude, rather than his strengths. Nephi could easily have said many, many positive things about himself that would have been true, probably more so than any Pharisee. However, to exalt himself in his own eyes, as did the Pharisee, whether true or not, is still wrong. It is just so with us. President John Taylor has said,

Remember the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong; but to those who trust in the Lord. When the Twelve were called to bear the gospel of this kingdom to the inhabitants of Europe, there were not many wise among them, speaking after the manner of men; yet we believed him faithful who had chosen us, and as little children we trusted in him for wisdom and understanding to do his will; for his will was our pleasure, and in the short space of two years, about two thousand souls were given to us in the ministry. I speak of these things that you may know in whom to put your trust and confidence; for should you desire self-esteem, and take the honor to yourselves, you soon would sink to

shame and disgrace. You are the heralds of salvation, and through your faithfulness, obedience and perseverance, you may be exalted to kings and priests unto God in the eternal worlds. (History of the Church, Vol.7, Ch.26, Pg.341, underline added. See also Times and Seasons, Vol.6, Pg.797.)

Listen to the words of Paul on the subject:

But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth. (2 Corinthians 9:17-18, underline added)

Once again, commending or approving of yourself is not the same as God or someone else commending or approving of you. One is accepted by the Lord, the other is not. Any scripture we may find which states that God or anyone else favors us, finds us of “great worth,” etc. cannot be interpreted to mean that we have the right to favor ourselves or find ourselves of “great worth.” They are two different attitudes. One should never justify the other.

Christ himself set the perfect example for us concerning how we should view ourselves, or perhaps how we should not view ourselves:

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgement is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. (John 5:30-31)

Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: (John 8:54)

We should strive to have this same attitude. We need to understand that of ourselves we can do nothing. By honoring ourselves in any way, we are fighting against this attitude. Yet because we forget or “lose” ourselves, we find that our judgments will be just and that our Father in Heaven will honor us. Such things bring true confidence. They come as the natural result of not honoring the self at all.

The great words of King Benjamin may serve as an exclamation point to the ideas we have just discussed. Let's read again what this prophet has said about how the righteous should view themselves:

I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that you should rejoice, and has granted that you should live in peace one with another

I say unto you that if you should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and

do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants. (Mosiah 2:20-21, underline added)

And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you. (Mosiah 2:25, underline added)

And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to a knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken of by the mouth of the angel. (Mosiah 4:11, underline added)

For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state

I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement...

I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement... (Mosiah 4:5-7, underline added)

It is difficult for me to imagine how King Benjamin could have said it any plainer. If you want to receive salvation, you need to view God as everything, yourself as nothing, and accept the fact that without the atonement of Jesus Christ, you can do absolutely nothing for yourself as far as progressing in the kingdom of God is concerned. This is the attitude the Lord accepts and the scriptures repeat it over and over again. Loving yourself or esteeming yourself highly can only be considered the opposite of this attitude.

WHAT IS THE WORTH OF MAN?

The questions now arise, “What, then, am I to do? Am I to walk around in this life doing nothing but thinking about how terrible I am? Is there any hope for me at all or should I simply give up and quit?” Just what should our attitude be towards ourselves? What do the scriptures teach about how we should view our “self?” In order to fully answer these questions, it is essential that we understand a few things about self-esteem and about how we should view mankind in general.

The first thing we should note is that there is a difference between speaking of myself as an individual and myself as a part of the whole of mankind. Many of the scriptures quoted in this work are speaking of mankind as a whole. When Christ said that “there is none good but one, that is, God,”¹⁵ it is evident that he was including everybody in this group, not just himself. His point was made that he did not want to consider himself “good” but he made it clear that this applied to everyone. When Moses uttered the words, “Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing,”¹⁶ he was not speaking of himself only, but rather he was referring to all of mankind. Likewise in King Benjamin's address, the plural was used instead of the singular. He said such things as, “can ye say aught of yourselves,”¹⁷ and “unprofitable servants,”¹⁸ always speaking to the group as a whole rather than the individual. We need to realize that as a whole we should view ourselves as being on the same level as everyone else, and we are all “nothing.” In the words of King Benjamin, “And I, even I, whom ye call your king, am no better than ye yourselves are; for I am also of the dust.”¹⁹ Even though King Benjamin is “esteeming” himself in this scripture, he is doing so as a part of the whole as opposed to apart from the whole. This is very important to realize when trying to understand the attitude we should have towards ourselves, as it is found in the scriptures. It is simply true that when compared to God, mankind can only be viewed as nothing and unworthy. We don't even come close.

But what about myself as an individual, apart from the group? How should I view myself apart from the whole of mankind? At this point I feel it is important to realize that I am not advocating “low self-esteem” for the individual. If an individual has low self-esteem it is just as much a sin, if you will, as it is for an individual to have high self-esteem. The problem comes in the word “self.” President Ezra Taft Benson has taught us that both “self-conceit” as well as “self-pity” are “common faces of pride.”²⁰ Whenever an individual possesses self-esteem, whether high or low, that person tends to think in terms of the word “I” instead of “we” or “you.” He will say such things as, “I am ugly or I am beautiful, I am dumb or I am smart, etc.” Both views of self-esteem are self-centered. It is important to understand that one is just as bad as the other. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, it is also important for us to understand that these kinds of judgments are really nothing more than comparisons of ourselves with other people. When we say that we are ugly, beautiful, dumb, smart, etc., what we are really doing is comparing ourselves to others. How can you be dumb unless someone else is smart? How can you call yourself beautiful if there is no ugly person with whom you can compare yourself? For example, by what criteria could you refer to yourself as beautiful if no one else existed? Indeed, we need other people in order to even make such claims or hold such beliefs. We can now begin to see some of the differences between the self as an individual and the self as a part of the whole. The whole compares itself to God while the individual tends to compare itself to other individuals.

15 Mark 10:17-18

16 Moses 1:10

17 Mosiah 2:25

18 Mosiah 2:21

19 Mosiah 2:26

20 “Beware of Pride,” Conference Report, Ensign, May 1989

These ideas concerning the group of mankind (or how we should view our relationship with other people) will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Suffice it to say for now that there is a difference between viewing ourselves as an individual and viewing ourselves as a part of the whole. Both can be considered a form of esteeming oneself, but one is very different than the other. As a part of the whole, no one individual should view himself as being any better or worse than anyone else. As a whole, we should consider ourselves as nothing, as unworthy sinners, as less than the dust of the earth. This is simply truth, plain and simple. Mankind as a group cannot say aught of itself. In this respect, we should view ourselves as part of a fallen and a lost people, our only possible hope being that of God and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

This brings us to the fallacy of self-esteem. Concerning how we view ourselves as individuals (not as part of the whole), we should seriously consider the ideas that follow. The following thoughts are extremely important to understanding the main points of this book. Quite often when we think of self-esteem, we believe that there are only two choices available to us. We believe that we can either have high self-esteem or we can have low self-esteem. We need to realize that this two choice way of thinking is false and incorrect. There is a third choice available. This third choice is to have no self-esteem. It is important to understand that by saying “no self-esteem” I am not implying “low self-esteem.” By “no self-esteem” I mean that we should not esteem ourselves at all, whether high or low. Simply forget about yourself completely. It is the idea of “losing yourself” that you may find yourself. It is placing God, others, and truth as central in your life and forgetting about your “self” almost completely. We should take the attitude of Alma and his brethren when they preached the gospel to the Mulekites, “taking no thought for themselves”²¹ It is the idea of “every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God.”²² Jesus Christ gave us the ultimate example of this attitude when he uttered, “not my will, but thine, be done”²³ and then freely gave everything he had to offer for God and others.

If we were to take this approach of no self-esteem, we would find that certain negative aspects of our lives would become meaningless to us. We would stop wrongly comparing ourselves to others. Because of this lack of comparing, people would no longer have the problem of thinking of themselves as inferior (or superior) to others. It would completely do away with low self-esteem. Our interests would be towards God, truth, and other people instead of toward ourselves. We would no longer worry about being ugly or beautiful, rich or poor, smart or dumb, etc. except where it would serve or please God and others. We would realize that we, as a group, are all in the same situation, and we would continually help each other to progress out of that situation.

We should realize that having confidence is good. However, we should also remember that the scriptures teach us that the way to truly gain confidence is to forget yourself and place God and truth first.²⁴ President Brigham Young has said,

²¹ Alma 31:37

²² D&C 82:19

²³ Luke 22:42

²⁴ D&C 121:45

Don't you know that I know whether you are good for anything, or not, without my praising you? I know all about you, without telling what great things you have done, and what you have not done. But the very spirit some have in them of pride, arrogance, and self esteem, has led men and women to die on the Plains, by scores, at least their folly has. And if they had not had any such spirit about them, God would have whispered to them to have held a council, and would have stopped them from rushing their brethren and sisters into such suffering. (Journal of Discourses 4:69-70, underline added)

All of us have our strengths and weaknesses. This is a simple truth with which everyone must learn to deal. God knows our weaknesses and I have found that other people are generally aware of them as well. The real problem that hinders our progress and our feelings of true confidence is that we do not recognize our own strengths and our weaknesses in honesty and humility. Personal repentance is vital to us as individuals. In order to repent of anything, we must first be able to recognize our need for repentance. In order to recognize that need, we must judge ourselves to some degree. We must say, “I need to stop doing this,” or “I need to do that better.” However, a significant, yet common, problem occurs when we think about ourselves more than we think about the truth. We need to forget about ourselves as much as possible and merely pursue truth and the welfare of others to the best of our ability. President Brigham Young said it well:

We all occupy diversified stations in the world, and in the kingdom of God. Those who do right, and seek the glory of the Father in heaven, whether their knowledge be little or much, or whether they can do little or much, if they do the very best they know how, they are perfect...”Be ye as perfect as ye can,” for that is all we can do, tho' it is written, “Be ye perfect as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” To be as perfect as we possibly can according to our knowledge, is to be just as perfect as our Father in heaven is. He cannot be any more perfect than he knows how, any more than we. The sin that will cleave to all the posterity of Adam and Eve is, that they have not done as well as they know how.” (Deseret News Weekly, August 31, 1954, p. 37 See also “Choose you This Day,” priesthood manual, p. 183)

We must understand that we will always need to repent, just in different areas. We will always have weaknesses, just in different areas. The key is in emphasizing the truth instead of the self. Avoid comparing yourself to anyone. There will always be someone better than you and someone worse than you in every category you can think of. C.S. Lewis once said,

Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man....It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone. (Mere Christianity, New York: Macmillan, 1952, pp. 109-110.)

If we can learn to repent of our sins, not because of the reward or punishment that awaits us, but because it would please God and others as well as conform to truth, we would be much closer to the attitude I am trying to convey.

SELF-ESTEEM AND PRIDE

In the words of President Ezra Taft Benson,

Pride is a very misunderstood sin, and many are sinning in ignorance. (Beware of Pride, The Ensign, May, 1989)

I believe there are a great deal of similarities between the teachings of self-esteem in our day and pride as spoken of in the scriptures. In fact, in most respects, the two are all but synonymous. Let me repeat that, in most respects, the doctrine of self-esteem as taught by the world today and the principle of pride, as taught in the scriptures, are all but synonymous. Often, pride will creep into our religious life in very subtle ways. Usually we do not even realize its presence in our lives. Perhaps with a few examples we can more clearly see the connection between self-esteem and pride.

There are many different types of pride within the church today. We have all heard of intellectual pride. People who are intellectually proud often follow a similar pattern. They tend to criticize others who don't understand things as well as they "should." An intellectually proud person is seldom a doer or a server of others. He analyzes and judges the actions of other people. Often he justifies himself by making such observations as, "Yes, that person does a lot for others, but does he know why he is doing it?" He is convinced that if you do not know why you are doing something, you may be wasting your time.

The intellectually proud person does not usually leave his realm of knowledge and logic. It is too safe for him. He feels very secure so long as he remains in this area. His strengths do not lie in his ability to serve or work with other people. Therefore, he generally avoids those types of things. He spends his time serving the Lord through study, thought, prayer, and meditation.

We tend to criticize the intellectually proud person quite a bit within the church. Yet, we do not often realize the other types of pride which exist in the church. We often overlook the person who is proud in that he or she is a great server of others. If a person is a real doer in the church, they will often have the same problem of pride as the intellectual, only in reverse. Instead of emphasizing knowledge and study, they emphasize service and doing. It may very well be true that they do not understand why they are serving or even if what they are doing is correct and true. These things are not as important to them as the action itself. A doer will often criticize the intellectual for knowing and not doing, just as the intellectual criticizes the doer for doing and not knowing. Just like the intellectual, the doer is often proud. The doers remain within their realm of ability and will seldom venture beyond it. Like the intellectual, this realm of ability is safe and secure to them. It does not require repentance or remorse. A server's strengths generally do not rest in his ability to learn, explain, teach, or study. Therefore, he avoids these types of things just as the intellectual avoids the service. The doer serves the Lord through action, almost any kind of action.

Another type of pride within the church is emotional or empathetic pride. Many people are very good at understanding the feelings of others. They are quick to give a hug of comfort or to tell someone the words they need (or want) to hear. Like the two types of people mentioned above, the empathetic person will often criticize those who do not have these same abilities. They will wonder how the intellectual can be so cold or how the doer can be so tactless in their service. Just as the others, this type of person tends to bypass the other parts of the gospel. They serve the Lord through their ability to empathize and give comfort. Like the others, they emphasize their strengths and view their weaknesses as areas of lesser significance. Thus they avoid the bad feelings and repentant attitude necessary to eliminating their pride.

There are many other types of pride and we are all guilty of them to one degree or another. We should realize that the gospel includes all of the abilities or gifts mentioned above. To say that our particular gift is more important than someone else's gift is to misunderstand the purpose of those gifts.

For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the spirit of God.

*To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby.
(Doctrine and Covenants 46:11-12)*

Notice that even our strengths originate not from ourselves, but from God. Pride comes because we are concerned about ourselves and our own interests instead of the interests of God and others. It comes because we want to “feel” that we are worthwhile. We want to esteem ourselves highly. In short, we want the glory for ourselves. Nobody wants to admit that they are wrong or have weaknesses. We all want to preserve that good feeling about ourselves at almost all costs. We want to view ourselves as good and worthwhile people. Because of these desires, we all tend to emphasize our strengths and belittle our weaknesses. This is the concept of self-esteem. To feel good about yourself. To convince yourself that you are indeed a good person, whether it is true or not. Self-esteem teaches us to dwell on that which is good about ourselves and to all but forget about our negative elements. This is also pride in its most common form.

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

The real difficulty in obtaining the correct attitude about ourselves is in its practice. It is one thing to say “forget about yourself” and completely another to actually do it. “We are tempted daily to elevate ourselves above others and diminish them,” explains President Benson.²⁵ Placing God and truth first in your life, others second, and forgetting about yourself completely is not an easy task. Nor is it something that can be accomplished all at once. It takes a great deal of time and effort. There are, however, some guidelines and helps that can assist us on a daily basis.

²⁵ Beware of Pride, The Ensign, May, 1989.

Someone once told me an extremely helpful and important rule of thumb that can be used on a daily basis. It goes like this: “If person A is offended by what person B says about him, then person A has a problem.”²⁶ This can have great bearing on the attitude we want to acquire. I have seen it used successfully time after time, especially during my mission.

The reasoning behind this little saying comes from the fact that we should always consider truth before we consider ourselves. For example, suppose person B (whomever that may be) says something terrible about you. If what person B says about you is true, then perhaps you need to repent (in which case, you have a problem). If what they say is true, and you are concerned more about the truth than you are about yourself, you will not be offended. You will probably be grateful. Why should you be offended? It is true and you should try your best to conform to that truth. Don't worry about yourself, worry about the truth.

On the other hand, if what person B says about you is false, then ideally you should be more concerned about him than you are about yourself. If you are offended by a false statement, you once again have a problem, a problem of which you should repent. However, if you esteem truth very highly and forget yourself, there is no reason to be offended by the false statements of others. You can simply put them aside and try to do the best you can under the circumstances.

The key is placing our regard for the truth above our regard for ourselves. If it is true, recognize it and do your best to fix it. If it is not true, simply move on or even better, try to teach person B the real truth as best you can. The thing to avoid is the attempt to cover up or hide your problem.²⁷ Usually when we are offended it is because we are trying to maintain some sort of self image. In doing so, we usually end up deceiving ourselves and others. If the attempt to maintain a self-image is removed, the reasons that we take offense are also removed. President Harold B. Lee once said:

...we should let the finest things that God has wrought in us shine forth, so that we are not guilty of either of the two basic forms of hypocrisy: pretending to be better than we are, or letting ourselves appear worse than we are. (Priesthood manual “Come Follow Me,” p. 87)

We should always strive to be as honest with ourselves as possible. If we can place God and truth first in our lives, others second, and ourselves somewhere after that, we will find this task to be much easier. I think Jesus Christ was a great example of this type of honesty. Many times we find the Savior calling attention to himself. However, He did this not because he thought highly of himself, but because His statements were simply true and he knew he could bless others if they knew it also. It is true that Christ asked for the glory of the Father, but he did so only that he might be a blessing to others. It was always God, other people, and truth that were important to him. Notice Christ's attitude and motivation in the following examples:

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

²⁶ Author unknown

²⁷ D&C 121:37

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. (John 16:1-2, underline added)

As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:18-19, 22-23, underline added)

In these verses we see Christ seeking glory and sanctification for himself. But the reasons he sought these things had to do completely with others and with truth, not with himself. He thought of himself only as it pertained to blessing others and upholding truth. I believe we should strive to incorporate this same attitude into our own lives. We should not consider ourselves “good” to any degree, but should seek the blessings of God, that we, in turn, can bless the lives of others and uphold truth just as Christ has done. “Losing” ourselves, that we may “find” ourselves. The concept of self-esteem, whether high or low, can only hamper such pursuits, while at the same time, true confidence is the natural result of such an attitude.

By applying the simple rule of thumb mentioned above you will find that many situations in life can be judged and dealt with in a much better way. Any time you feel offended by something someone else has said, simply ask yourself the questions just discussed. If what they say is true, try to correct it as best you can. Realize that we all have weaknesses and that your job is to simply do the best you can. What more can you do than your best? If what they say is not true, don't worry about it. Once again, continue to do your best. What other choice do you really have?

By applying this rule of thumb on a continual basis you will fall into the habit of placing truth first in your life. You will find that bad or negative feelings towards others will naturally leave you. These feelings will leave because you are simply trying your best to follow truth and are no longer concerned about yourself.

ARE WE LIVING A LIE?

Whenever the concept of self-esteem comes into one's life, it has a tendency to do away with truth. The reason for this is that we tend to lie to ourselves according to how we view ourselves. For example, when a person has low self-esteem and thinks of himself as ugly or dumb, chances are that he is not close to being as ugly or dumb as he thinks he is. Likewise, those who have

high self-esteem may think of themselves as beautiful or smart and are usually not as beautiful or smart as they think they are.

In most cases, whenever such ideas get into our minds they tend to stay there, whether true or not. Once in our minds, we become concerned with ourselves more than with truth. We convince ourselves that we must be ugly or dumb, beautiful or smart. This is especially true with children. Children generally do not know what is true and what is not. In addition, you can usually tell them that they are this way or that way and they will believe you. The question we must ask is, "Is it a good thing to believe a lie about ourselves, whether positive or negative?" In most cases, I believe it is not. When we have self-esteem to any degree, whether high or low, we are usually convinced of something that is not wholly true.

Someone once offered the following outlook on life:

As you ramble on through life, dear brother, whatever be your goal, keep your eye upon the doughnut and not upon the hole! (Author unknown)

I believe this is a good way of explaining what I'm trying to say. If you have a doughnut in front of you, don't try to make it anything more or less than what it is. The person with high self-esteem or a "positive mental attitude" has a tendency to always tell you (and believe) that the doughnut is the biggest and best doughnut in the world. "It could feed you for a week!" he will say. On the other hand, the person with low self-esteem or a "negative mental attitude" is inclined to tell you that the hole is too big and the doughnut too small. "Why even eat it?" is often his reaction. Both are living a lie and neither is able to see the truth or deal with the reality of the issue.

We do the same thing when we have self-esteem in other areas of life. If someone can convince himself that he is handsome, he will usually believe it whether it is true or not. Likewise if someone believes he is ugly or dumb, he will have the same tendency, and will likely begin to look at himself more than looking at the truth. Whenever we look at ourselves instead of the truth we are most likely living a lie. Thus we see that self-esteem, whether high or low, usually does not look at the "doughnut" for what it really is. In most cases, if a person is esteeming himself at all, he is either fantasizing about huge doughnuts or complaining and giving up hope because it's not worth the effort. As far as the gospel is concerned, high self-esteem takes away from repentance while low self-esteem tends to make one lose hope. Both attitudes are usually fostering a lie and both should be avoided.

Thus, if someone says something negative (or positive) about you, forget about yourself. But don't forget about the truth. Ask yourself, first of all, if what they say really matters. Many times it doesn't. There is no sense in repenting of something that is meaningless to begin with. Next, ask yourself if it is true. If it is not true, don't worry about it. If it is true, do your best to correct it, always remembering to put truth above yourself. Look at the situation for what it is and avoid making it something that it is not. Simply accept what you are while, at the same time, doing your best to become better. Remember that of yourself you can do nothing. Only through the mercy and love of Jesus Christ and God the Father can you have any hope at all. We need to understand that the fact that we are "nothing" or "unworthy creatures" compared to God is

merely a truth that we all need to accept. It is neither optimistic or pessimistic, it is a plain and simple truth that all of us must come to embrace. Learning this truth will instill in you a broken heart and a contrite spirit. It will help you to be truly humble. Yet, coupled with an unselfish attitude, it will give you such hope and joy that you will naturally desire to do what is right and true. From this desire you will gain confidence before the Lord.

THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

One of the great laws which we are commanded to obey is the Law of Sacrifice. In old times this law was to sacrifice the firstlings of the flock in similitude of the sacrifice of Christ, who was yet to come. When Christ came to earth it changed the way we were to observe the Law of Sacrifice.

And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.

And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost... (3 Nephi 9:19-20)

That this law is still in force today can be clearly outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Thou shalt offer a sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. (Doctrine and Covenants 59:8)

But what does it mean to offer a sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit? To be brokenhearted usually indicates feeling some form of grief or sorrow. At least in part, it refers to feeling grief or sorrow because of our sins. It may also refer to feeling grief or sorrow because of the sins of the world. In any case, it is hardly comparable to the feelings associated with high self-esteem or positive mental attitude.

Likewise, the concept of a contrite spirit seems counter to the idea of placing ourselves in high regard. To have a contrite spirit is to have a spirit that is apologetic, chastened, penitent, remorseful, and repentant. It is a lowly or meek feeling that recognizes our lackings, not our achievements. And it is evident from the scriptures that we are supposed to feel this way on a continual basis. This is what the Lord wants us to do.

If we are to truly live the Law of Sacrifice, as it has been explained to us in our day, we must be willing to be brought down low by the recognition of our sins, rather than lifted up by the recognition of our greatness. This is what the Lord is trying to teach us about ourselves - that we have far to go still, that we should not dwell upon our accomplishments but rather on how much more there is for us to do. We must be willing to sacrifice all that we have, even our very lives if necessary, for God, truth, and others. If we are thinking of God, truth, and others instead of

ourselves, this will not be a negative lifestyle to us. On the contrary, it will become a source of great joy and humility. It will not cause us to lose hope, it will cause us to gain hope in Christ and the Father and to be eternally grateful to them for what they have provided for us. It is true, however, that this will definitely make us lose hope in ourselves. For without God we are truly nothing. We can say nothing of ourselves but what God has provided for us. The Law of Sacrifice teaches us to place God and truth first in our lives, and by so doing, sacrifice our pride and our vain ambitions. It teaches us to be meek and lowly in heart, willing to submit to the Lord in all things. For this is the only way we can return to live in the kingdom of our Father in heaven. The opposite of this attitude can only be to lift ourselves up in the pride of our hearts by believing that we are greater or worse than we really are.

ARE WE PREACHING PRIDE TODAY?

We began this chapter by claiming that the saints in this dispensation are just as vulnerable to the philosophies of men as the saints of past dispensations. It is reasonable to assume that at least some philosophies of men have crept into the gospel and the church today, just as they have in the past. To believe that we are somehow immune to such things is not only false but dangerous. In fact, getting us to believe that all is well and that we need not worry about such things is one of the main tools Satan uses to deceive us.

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. (2 Nephi 28:21; see also 2 Nephi 28:19-27 and Helaman 13:28)

I have tried to support the idea that many of the notions involved with self-esteem are little more than the philosophies of men, mingled with scripture. At this point I would go as far as to say that the concept of self-esteem, as it is most commonly taught today, is nothing more or less than pride. It is true that some people's definition of "self-esteem" may vary. However, if you compare the self-esteem philosophies of today with the concept of pride, as found in the scriptures, you will find an amazing similarity between the two. Both seek after the self more than the truth, both are usually living a lie, and both are incompatible with the doctrines the Lord has given us by revelation through his prophets.

The fact that we are, at least at times, teaching self-esteem in the church and in our homes seems only too obvious. We should be especially cautious of anything that teaches us to call attention to ourselves or praise ourselves in any way. We should be cautious of such statements as I am special, I (or you) have great individual worth, I love myself, I believe in myself, etc. Whenever we come across notions like these, whether they are quoted from a famous psychologist or taught in primary or sacrament meeting, we should ask ourselves these questions:

Are these notions popular beliefs among the general population of the world today?
Are they easy to believe?
Do they flatter me (or us)?

Is it true that there are no equivalent statements in the scriptures?
Are there any statements in the scriptures which seem to conflict with these ideas?

If the answers to these questions are “yes” then we need to open our minds to the possibility that we are dealing with little more than a philosophy of man or even of Satan himself. If we are not even open to this possibility, if we think that we are somehow immune to such things and that something this obvious could not have slipped past us, if this is our train of thought, then Satan has already claimed his victory. For if we believe in such invincibility, we are no different than the fallen Nephites or the proud Pharisees. Indeed we are no different than those early Christians who fell prey to the Greek philosophers during the great apostasy. These people also believed they were invincible and that something so obvious could not have slipped past them. Let us beware, lest we become (more) like them.

WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT?

What will be the result if we adhere to the ideas set forth in this chapter? Let's listen once again to the great words of King Benjamin:

And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.

And ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due. (Mosiah 4:12-13)

King Benjamin's list goes on. I encourage you to read it all.²⁸

You will find that if you can put truth first and forget about yourself, you will be one of the easiest people to get along with that the world has ever known. You will want to hear what others have to say and be able to judge what they say more accurately. You will seldom, if ever, be offended by others. Repentance will become a natural thing to you because truth will become more important than you are. You will never want to simply “give up” because you don't believe in yourself. You will be praising God, serving others, and conforming your life to truth as the scriptures tell us to do. In short, you will be closer to the type of “man who receiveth salvation,”²⁹ and closer to that which the Savior himself exemplified.

I realize that all points on this topic have not been covered and that there might very well be some good arguments against what has been put forth. I am always searching for such arguments and hope that they will indeed come forth. I would hope that I have not offended anyone with this work and that if I have, that they would worry more about me being wrong than

²⁸ Mosiah 4:10-16

²⁹ Mosiah 4:5-7

themselves being offended. If nothing else, I hope this chapter has opened our minds to the possibility that we, as Latter-day Saints, just might have need to repent in an area which we had not expected. To continually search for such areas can only be a worthwhile pursuit.

RELATED REFERENCES

For further study in this area I would suggest reading at least the following references:

- Psalms 8:4-5*
Proverbs 3:5-7
Matthew 7:12*
Matthew 10:39
Matthew 11:29
Matthew 23:11-12
Mark 8:35
Mark 10:17-18*
Mark 10:26-31 (JST)*
Luke 1:51
Luke 17:10
Luke 18:10-14*
Luke 18:18-19
Luke 22:42*
John 5:30-31*
John 8:54*
John 12:25*
John 12:42-43
John 13:34*
John 16:1-2*
John 17:18-19, 22-23*
1 Corinthians 3:18-21
1 Corinthians 13:5*
2 Corinthians 9:17-18*
Philippians 2:3-4
2 Timothy 3:1-7*
James 1:22, 26
1 John 1:8
2 Nephi 26:30*
Mosiah 2:20-21*
Mosiah 2:25-28*
Mosiah 3:19
Mosiah 4:1-16*
Alma 1:4*
Alma 26:12 (1-12)
Alma 29:9
Alma 30:17*
Alma 31:37*
Alma 32:8
Alma 38:10-14
Alma 45:24
- Alma 62:45
Ether 10:11
Ether 12:27
Helaman 4:13
Helaman 12:7
Helaman 13:27*
Moroni 7:45*
Moroni 7:47*
Moroni 8:17*
Moroni 10:22
D&C 18:10*
D&C 46:11-12*
D&C 76:61
D&C 82:19*
D&C 112:10
D&C 121:45*
Moses 1:10*
Moses 7:59
TPJS p. 297
Discourses of Brigham Young, P. 33*
“Beware of Pride,” President Ezra Taft Benson, The Ensign, May 1989.*
“Education: Doing Bad and Feeling Good,” Charles Krauthammer, Time Magazine, February 5, 1990.
“Self-esteem, Self Love and Salvation,” Dr. James Faulkner, Professor of Philosophy at Brigham Young University.
“Pride or Self-Esteem?,” Janice M. Allred, Sunstone Magazine, February, 1989.
“Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Ezra Taft Benson, The ensign, May, 1986
- * This reference was used (at least in part) within this chapter.*

Chapter Two

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHERS

In the last chapter we discussed the type of attitude we should have towards ourselves. In this chapter we will discuss what our attitude should be towards other people. You will find that the last chapter and this one are closely tied to each other. As mentioned in the introduction, they are actually one attitude, but they are explained from two different perspectives.

As with the last chapter, this chapter will discuss some issues that some people find very offensive and difficult to accept. I would hope that you would not find occasion to judge the author or his intentions. Rather, I hope you will judge the concepts and ideas presented in this chapter and strive to prove them right or wrong, good or bad. In this type of judgment we are justified, and only good can come from such judgments.

OUR VIEW OF OTHERS

If we can learn to forget ourselves as individuals, as described in the last chapter, and look at ourselves as part of the whole of mankind, we should begin to ask questions about our role as a part of that whole. We should begin to ask such questions as, “How do I fit in as a part of the whole?” “How should I view and act towards other people?” “To what degree and in what ways should we depend upon each other?” It is interesting to note that the majority of the scriptures deal with these types of questions. There are more scriptures dealing with our attitudes and actions towards other people than there are dealing with our attitude and action towards God (or perhaps any other subject). Even in the ten commandments the first four commandments deal with our interactions with God and the last six deal with our interactions with other people.³⁰ The abundance of scriptures concerning our interactions with others indicates that the Lord is very concerned about how His children associate with each other while here on earth. If we can learn to deal properly with other people and live with them in harmony and peace, we will have come a long way towards gaining salvation.

But how do we learn to deal properly with others? Just what should our attitude be towards other people? And what types of actions should be expected from these attitudes? In answering these questions, we, as Latter-day Saints, have a great advantage because of the vast amount of information given to us through revelation. We do not need to depend so much upon the theories of men, which are so prevalent among the societies of today. Though the Lord has not revealed everything to us, he has given us a significant head start in the area of dealing with our fellow man.

In this chapter we will first look at some of the problems encountered when dealing with other people. We will then discuss some of the Lord's solutions to these problems. Finally we will outline some of the actions that come as results of the Lord's solutions. I believe the solutions and actions we will discuss describe a zion society and at least touch on a celestial way of life.

³⁰ Exodus 20:2-17

THE PROBLEM OF SELF-INTEREST

As we discussed in the last chapter, the problem of self-interest is one of our chief concerns. How we view and deal with ourselves has a direct bearing on how we view and deal with others. One of the main duties of the various government systems is to deal with and control self-interest, whether at home or abroad. It could even be argued that the problem of self-interest is the main concern of governments all over the world. Government systems have a very difficult time trying to manage this problem. Whether it be democracy, socialism, communism or any other system, fighting self-interest is a continuous battle. The way most governments deal with self-interest is by establishing and enforcing laws. In most cases these laws are intended to make the individual do what is best for the whole, rather than for the individual. This can be done through punishments, rewards, incentives, or almost any other type of motivation. Perhaps a few examples will better illustrate the types of problems different forms of governments face. The following examples help to illustrate some of the problems created by self-interest. Though the examples are specific, they are intended to demonstrate a general problem and should be read in that light.

COMMUNISM AND SELF-INTEREST

In a Communist society the government will often try to regulate the quality of products being manufactured in their factories. To do this they will frequently set up certain laws or standards for the factories. In the absence of a free enterprise system, these laws (and their rewards or punishments) often become the main motivation for the workers in the factories. The problem arises when there is a conflict between the self-interest of the workers and the need to produce a quality product in sufficient quantities.

Let's take glass as an example. If a Communist government tells a glass factory that it must produce so many pounds of glass per day for the "common good" of the people, the factory begins to make windows that are extremely thick. In this manner they can meet the requirements of the law and still not sacrifice themselves too much. If the government tries to correct the problem by telling the factories to produce so many square feet of glass per day, the factory begins to make glass so thin it shatters with the slightest touch. Again, the factory satisfies the law but not the purpose or intent of the law. The workers take the easiest possible route. Finally the government must tell the factory to make the glass a certain thickness and to produce a certain amount of it each day. At this request the factory begins making glass that meets the requirements above but which is perhaps of very low quality. This process continues until the government must regulate almost every aspect of the factory (and hence, the people in the factory). A barrage of laws and rules must be created and enforced in order for the glass to be made properly. In addition, the government must strictly and consistently enforce these laws. If they do not enforce them, the people in the factories will take every opportunity to find a way around them. In most cases a communist government has difficulty trying to destroy the self-interest of its subjects, hence, instead of destroying it, they will try to control it. The result of this process is quite often an increase of control by the government and a decrease of freedom among the people.

This whole problem could be avoided if the people in the factory were not self-interested. If they were more interested in serving their community rather than serving themselves, the glass would be the best it could be with very few regulations and virtually no enforcement.

SOCIALISM AND SELF-INTEREST

Socialism is not exempt from this problem either. There are many who rightfully praise socialism because it provides many benefits to people who otherwise might do without. Things such as medical or dental benefits are usually available to everyone who needs them in a socialist system. The problem arises when a doctor or dentist receives basically the same pay or reward as others with far less education or skills. Why should he excel in his profession? What's in it for him? It also creates a problem when the doctor or dentist does not have to "win over" his patients. In many cases the doctor will get paid the same wages whether he goes the extra mile or only does the bare minimum, whether he has a lot of patients or only a few. Because of this, socialism has been criticized. Though it usually provides benefits for everyone, those benefits are often of lesser quality, less accommodating of individual needs, and less reliable.

Once again, it is self-interest that creates this problem. If these doctors were more interested in curing people or making new discoveries, these problems would not exist. I am not saying that all people are this way, but generally speaking, most people will have a problem with self-interest and it will hurt society in a socialistic form of government.

CAPITALISM AND SELF-INTEREST

Capitalism tries to create a situation where it is in your own self-interest to do what is good for others. It uses self-interest to benefit the whole. Within a capitalist society, if I am self-interested I want to buy the best product for the best price. As a producer of goods, I want to produce the best quality at the lowest price. If I do not produce good quality, at good prices, nobody will buy my products, and I will be out of business. In this manner, capitalism tries to overcome the problems mentioned above. It uses self-interest to counterbalance itself. In a capitalist society, it is in the best interest of the glass factory to produce quality glass at a good price. It is also in the best interest of a doctor to become a good doctor and truly care about his patients. In both cases it is a choice between doing a good job and losing business.

Although capitalism seems to deal with self-interest very well, it presents a few other problems. One of the problems with capitalism is that success is always measured by money or personal gain. Capitalism not only uses self-interest, it emphasizes it. In a capitalist society, you must either learn to be self-interested or be content to struggle financially for the rest of your life. This choice tends to make people put aside the more important issues in life. A capitalist society, for example, seldom produces great philosophers or artists. These types of people simply cannot make a living in a such a society. We could even go as far as to say that the

people who are rewarded the most by capitalism are those who are the most self-interested. Those people who are not self-interested are usually hurt by such a society.

We, as Latter-day Saints, are faced with some interesting dilemmas when we live in a society that upholds capitalism. Such commandments as, “Seek ye for wisdom not for riches”³¹ become very difficult for us to live. For the most part, Latter-day Saints tend to do what everyone else does - we seek for riches and not for wisdom. This can be easily confirmed by asking LDS students why they are going to college. The answer you will receive the majority of the time is that they want a good job that will pay them good money. Very seldom will you find a student who is studying a subject because he feels it is eternally important. At Brigham Young University the largest college is business and the smallest is philosophy.³² This should give us some idea concerning which goal we most often seek, wisdom or riches.

This way of thinking is caused largely by capitalistic views. Capitalism teaches us to “look out for number one.” It leads us to believe that success in society is a good, well-paying job and that education should deal with knowledge that will bring about a good, well-paying job. Schools in a capitalist society place little emphasis on topics about which the Lord would like us to learn. Such topics as humanities, political science, geography, and history are avoided because they do not make enough money. And yet, according to the Lord, topics such as these are the ones we should be studying the most.³³ Interestingly enough, all of these topics seem to deal directly with our associations or relationships with other people. They try to teach us about other people and about getting along with other people.

Another problem created by capitalism is that it establishes a society where inequality of possessions is the rule rather than the exception. Within socialism and communism people are encouraged to be more equal in their possessions. In such societies, it is more difficult to become very rich or very poor. Capitalism, on the other hand, promotes a situation where some people can become very rich while others remain very poor. As we will see later, this is a situation of which the Lord strongly disapproves.

ZION AND SELF-INTEREST

The question now arises, “How does the Lord deal with self-interest?” How is self-interest handled in a zion society? We, as Latter-day Saints, should all be looking forward to the time when the city of Zion shall be established and the government of the Lord will reign again upon the earth.³⁴ It is this type of society and the attitude necessary to establish it, that the remainder of this chapter will discuss.

³¹ See 2 Nephi 26:31; Jacob 2:18; Alma 39:14; D&C 6:7; D&C 11:7.

³² It is also interesting to note that Brigham Young University does not offer a major in religion.

³³ See D&C 88:78-79; 90:15; 93:53

³⁴ Latter-day Saints often believe that the Constitution of the United States represents the “Lords government.” We should realize that the government system of the United States and its

The first thing we should note is that the Lord approaches the problem of self-interest in a completely different way than do the governments of man. In a zion society the Lord is not concerned with making laws that will control self-interest. Rather, He tries to eliminate self-interest altogether. In dealing with self-interest, Zion has a great advantage over the governments of man. This advantage comes from the fact that a zion society can only work if righteous people live in it. The governments of man have no choice but to deal with all men, whether self-interested or not. The government of God, on the other hand, is intended to deal only with those people who can live celestial laws. If we cannot learn to live like a celestial being, we simply will not be allowed to enter a celestial society.

And Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself. (Doctrine and Covenants 105:5)

Brigham Young had the following to say about those who will be allowed to live in Zion:

The Lord has declared it to be his will that this people enter into covenant, even as Enoch and his people did, which of necessity must be before we shall have the privilege of building the Center Stake of Zion, for the power and glory of God will be there, and none but the pure in heart will be able to live and enjoy it. (Journal of Discourses 18:263, underline added)

Whether you are talking about the Celestial Kingdom or a zion society here on earth, in this regard it is the same. In order to even be a part of it, we must eliminate self-interest and become solely interested in God, truth, and other people. This can be illustrated by the words of President Spencer W. Kimball.

Zion must be built up by the pure. For many years we have been taught that one important end result of our labors, hopes, and aspirations in this work is the building of a Latter-day Zion, a Zion characterized by love, harmony, and peace--a Zion in which the Lord's children are as one....

Unfortunately we live in a world that largely rejects the values of Zion. Babylon has not and never will comprehend Zion....

Zion can be built up only among those who are the pure in heart, not a people torn by covetousness or greed, but a pure and selfless people. Not a people who are pure in appearance, rather a people who are pure in heart. Zion is to be in the world and not of the world not dulled by a sense of carnal security, nor paralyzed by materialism. No,

Constitution are only stepping stones to something better. Though it is true that they are divinely inspired, they should not be considered the final goal of Latter-day Saints any more than the Law of Moses was to the Israelites. The Lord has “suffered” it to be established in our day for specific reasons. The Constitution, though a great and inspired document, is not a celestial law. (See D&C 101:77-80)

Zion is not things of the lower, but of the higher order, things that exalt the mind and sanctify the heart.

Zion is “every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God.”³⁵ As I understand these matters, Zion can be established only by those who are pure in heart, and who labor for Zion, for “the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish.”³⁶ (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 362)

Using this definition of Zion, we should note the complete absence of any interest in or glory-seeking for the self. As discussed in the last chapter, everything should be directed away from the self. This idea is expressed again by Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians:

Let no man seek his own, but every man another's good. (1 Corinthians 10:24, JST)

Unless this happens, Zion cannot be established.³⁷ President Ezra Taft Benson speaks boldly of the direct connection between self-interest, pride, and Zion.

Selfishness is one of the more common faces of pride. “How everything affects me” is the center of all that matters - self-conceit, self-pity, gratification, and self-seeking.

...we must prepare to redeem Zion. It was essentially pride that kept us from establishing Zion in the days of Joseph Smith....Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion. I repeat: Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion. (Ensign, May 1989, “Beware of Pride,” pp. 6-7)

If we truly live the gospel as we should, it will eliminate the problem of self-interest right from the start. When God organizes the ideal society He begins with the prerequisite that only those who can obey his laws will be able to be a part of that society. In fact, only those who obey His laws can make such a society work at all. If self-interest exists, a zion society will not exist and vice-versa. The two are simply incompatible.³⁸ In this way, a zion society eliminates, rather than controls, the problem of self-interest. Hence, right from the start it is way ahead of the governments of the world.

³⁵ D&C 82:19

³⁶ 2 Nephi 26:31

³⁷ See also Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pp.121-124

³⁸ People will often criticize the United Order and the Law of Consecration because they are incompatible with self-interest. They will not only claim that Zion societies did not work in the past, but will often go as far as to say that they can never work. These people need to understand that it was not the Law of Consecration or the United Order that failed, it was the people who tried to live these higher laws who failed. It is not God or his laws that are on trial, it is us. The Law of Consecration and the United Order can and will work, but only if the people are willing to live the higher laws of the gospel. As long as we remain at a lower level of righteousness, a zion society will be something to be looked forward to, but never achieved.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

Another thing we should notice about President Kimball's definition of Zion is that we need to be able to seek the interest or the good of those around us. This includes more than merely recognizing and supplying the needs and wants of others, though that is certainly a part of it. It involves a sincere love and concern for others. This love for others is the focal point of the gospel. When Christ was asked which commandment was the greatest, his response not only showed the importance of love, but it showed how all other commandments exist because of love.³⁹

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34, underline added)

The Apostle Paul explained this doctrine further in his epistle to the Romans:

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:8-10, underline added)

And again to the Galatians:

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (Galatians 5:14, underline added)

³⁹ Though this chapter does not deal directly with our love for God, it should be noted that love for God stands above love for others. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

We need to realize that love is not just one of the commandments, it is the fulfillment of all of the commandments. If we can learn to truly love one another, we will automatically begin to obey the rest of the commandments. If I love someone, I will not steal from him, I will not covet his property, I will not lust after his wife, I will not bear false witness against him, and so on. Not only will I avoid injuring him in any way, I will also try to bless him in any way I can. His needs will become my concern and his wants will be of great interest to me.

It is also crucial that we develop this love for all people, not just those who love us. We must learn to love all men, whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. If someone has dealt with us wrongfully, regardless of what they did, we should strive to forget about ourselves and continue to love, help, and be concerned for them. The idea is to be a blessing to others whenever possible and in whatever way we can. This often involves loving and blessing those that have hurt us in some way. In fact, learning to love and bless those who hurt us, though difficult, is one of the most important things we can learn in this life. This type of love is vital if we are to return to our Father in heaven.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not the publicans even the same?

And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:38-48)

Such thoughts are almost completely foreign to us in today's society. In today's world we are actively taught the opposite of these principles. How often do we wrongfully say that the words above do not apply in this situation or those circumstances? How many marriages, for example, end with spouses trying to justify their feelings of hatred toward each other? How many misunderstandings end up in law suits? How often do we require compensation for any work we may be asked to perform? We need to realize that even if someone else is to blame, if we cannot forgive and continue to love, we are just as much in the wrong as they are. This applies to any situation where someone has hurt or mistreated us. If we are concerned about others more than ourselves, we will do the right things and make the correct choices. If, for example, a husband is abusing his wife and the wife truly cares for him more than for herself, she will realize that his abuse of her is hurting him as well, perhaps even more than it is hurting her. Hence she will do something to help the situation. An entire chapter could be written on the topic of how these principles help marriage relationships alone, not to mention all other relationships. Suffice it to say that the answers to such problems are in the scriptures. If these principles are fully understood and obeyed, I believe they will eventually conquer any problem we may encounter. The answers found in the scriptures may not be easy to follow or obey, but I sincerely believe them to be true.

Notice in the examples above how completely disinterested in the self we must be. The concern is not for the self, it is completely directed towards others. Go ahead and let others sue you and hate you and use or persecute you. Let them do as they will. But do not let them influence the way you feel towards them. If someone has hurt you, you should feel bad for them, but you should not feel bad towards them.⁴⁰

If we can learn to love others unselfishly, we will begin to develop the attitude of the Savior. That is, we will become meek, humble, submissive, compassionate, caring, not easily offended, forgiving, serving, etc. If we add love of God to our love for others, we will begin to be faithful, repentant, hopeful, obedient, inspired, wise, thankful, etc. These things combine to create the ideal attitude and perspective of life. Imagine a world where nobody is concerned about themselves but rather their concern is for every other man's good. Then add to that world the knowledge, inspiration, and blessings of the Lord. In my opinion, this is Zion. This is what we should all be striving to accomplish. And it is possible if we are willing to pay the price and make the sacrifices necessary to bring it to pass. Love for God and others is the one most important thing we can gain or accomplish in this life. This is reflected clearly in the scriptures.

⁴⁰ It should be noted that this attitude may only be possible if a person has “no” self-esteem, as spoken of in the previous chapter. If you have self-esteem, whether high or low, you will most likely be influenced by what others say about you or do to you. This in turn will inevitably affect the way you act and feel toward them. You will have a tendency to put up barriers that will “protect” your self-esteem. On the other hand, if your focus is on God, truth, and others, rather than on the self, you will automatically gain confidence. This confidence, however, will not be “self-confidence”, it will be focused on love for God and others and on trying your best to do what is right in spite of how others view you or treat you. It is truth-centered and faith-centered confidence as opposed to self-centered confidence.

...he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity.

And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail--

But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and who is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with his love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. (Moroni 7:44-48)

Gaining the type of love for God and others, which Christ exemplifies, is our purpose in this life. It is not just one of the commandments, it is the fulfillment of all of the commandments. It is important to understand that this pure love of Christ is not the same type of love that our culture has so diligently taught to us. It is something quite different and quite unique in the world. It is not physical in nature, nor is it romantic. It is caring for others, giving of ourselves, and feeling a genuine respect for the being who created us and His children who surround us. I believe strongly that gaining this love for God and others is the key to our salvation.

HOW DO WE GAIN UNSELFISH LOVE?

The next question we should address is, “How do we gain this type of love?” It is one thing to talk about loving others but completely another to actually put it into practice. How can we become so unselfish and so loving that our thoughts and actions will automatically be centered around others? How can we teach this to ourselves and how can we teach it to others as well?

At this point an important question can be asked: “Do we obey the commandments because we love the Lord or do we love the Lord because we obey the commandments?” I believe the answer to both parts of the question is “yes.” If we obey the commandments, we will learn to love and if we learn to love, we will obey the commandments.

If we can express enough faith to obey the commandments of God, we will begin to truly love God and others. Orson Pratt tried to explain the blessings of obedience to the commandments.

To counteract these divisions strict laws are given, and authorities ordained to strengthen and succor the weak; to root out all evil-speaking; and to check every sinful thing on its first appearance. Those who give diligent heed will become habituated to keep the law of God, and will understand their duties, and perform them with cheerfulness and delight. Such will become more and more assimilated in their feelings; their love towards each other, and towards God, and His word, will grow stronger and stronger; and thus by habit they learn obedience to the law of oneness, until they are ready and willing to do anything which that law requires. While those, on the other hand, who do not give heed, find themselves more and more tempted, and their love growing colder and colder, and the faults and imperfections of their brethren and sisters still more magnified in their eyes; and at last, they become destitute of the spirit - destitute of good desires - destitute of the meekness and humility of the gospel; and the devil takes possession of them, and leads them captive at his own will and pleasure. These do not abide a celestial law; therefore they cannot be made one. (Gospel Themes, p. 626, underline added)

The very experience of obeying the commandments teaches us to love others.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. (John 15:10)

...[the Nephites] had appointed just men to be their teachers...who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men. (Mosiah 2:4)

If you keep not my commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with you, therefore you shall walk in darkness. (Doctrine and Covenants 95:12)

From these scriptures we can see that in order to develop true love for others we must learn to keep the commandments of God. By keeping the commandments of God we will automatically develop a godlike love for others.

It is interesting to note that most of the things we learn in this life, we learn in one of two ways. Either we learn something from the testimonies of others or we experience it ourselves. Obviously having the experience for ourselves is preferred, in most cases, to merely hearing it from others. The same is true when we speak of the gospel. We can bear testimony that something is true, and our testimony can build the faith and testimony of someone else. We do this all the time, both within the church as well as outside of the church. However, if we can encourage someone to experience the testimony we are bearing, we can only assume that this experience will do more to build a person's faith than the testimony alone could ever have done.

Thus we see how important obedience and faith are. If we do not experience the gospel, we may never be able to fully understand it. And, as the Lord has informed us, without this experience of obeying the commandments, the love of the Father shall not continue with us. If you want to gain the pure love of Christ within yourself, obey the commandments. The experience alone will teach you how to love others. I believe that forgetting yourself and serving others are

inseparably connected to obeying the commandments. If we find that we are not sacrificing ourselves and serving others, chances are we are not truly obeying God's commandments.

As already mentioned, we should also recognize that as we begin to love others, we begin to obey the commandments automatically. We begin to understand the intent and significance of the commandments. This, in turn, increases our desires to obey the them. Obedience to the commandments not only changes what we do, it also changes what we are. It changes us in such a way that, eventually, we will naturally desire to do what is right. This change of desire or heart is spoken of often in the scriptures.

And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also we know of their surety and truth, because of the spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually. (Mosiah 5:2, underline added)

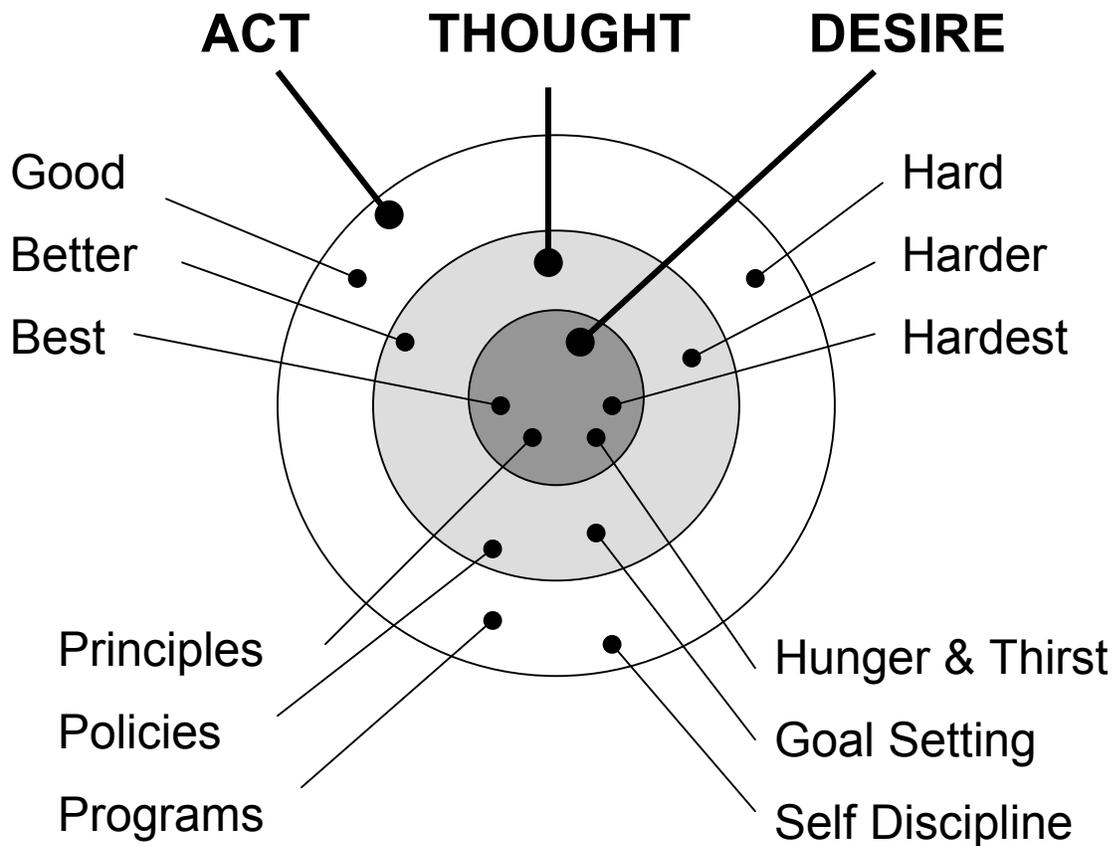
...and they did declare unto the people the selfsame thing--that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil. (Alma 19:33)

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and make our abode with him.

He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the words which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. (John 14:23-24)

If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments. (Doctrine and Covenants 42:29)

These scriptures inform us that the more we love God and others, the more we will naturally obey the commandments. In turn, the more we obey the commandments, the more we will love God and others. If we can exercise enough self-discipline to force ourselves to do what is right, over a period of time we will naturally desire to do what is right. This situation might be better explained with the use of the following diagram.



In this diagram you will notice three different sections. These sections represent the different phases we go through in living the gospel. They are labeled act, thought, and desire (across the top of the diagram). To the left of the diagram we see the words “good,” “better” and “best.” On the right we find the words “hard,” “harder,” and “hardest.” At the bottom left we have the words “principles,” “policies,” and “programs.” And at the bottom right we find the concepts of “hunger & thirst,” “goal setting,” and “self-discipline.” I believe that with almost everything we do in life we can place ourselves in one of the three circles above. However, this diagram applies especially to how we live the gospel and our relationship with the church and the gospel in general.

The outside circle represents the performance of the act alone. If someone tells you to do this or that, and you do it without really wanting to or without taking much thought concerning the matter, you are probably in this category. You may dislike the act and you may misunderstand it completely, but you do it anyway. This happens quite often when a boss or a church leader asks us to do something which is unappealing and we don't understand why we are doing it. If done for the wrong reasons, church programs such as home teaching or visiting teaching, often fall into this category. In most cases we simply force ourselves to do it, regardless of our desires. We will use self-discipline in order to accomplish the task. Situations like these are usually not very enjoyable, and it is often hard for us to do them. We usually do them because the

alternative seems worse to us than the act itself or because we feel somehow responsible or obligated to perform the act.

This situation is very applicable to the way we sometimes live the gospel. Often we will obey the commandments without really wanting to or understanding why we are doing it. We simply go to church, do our home teaching, pay our tithing, etc. without really enjoying it or seeing the purposes behind it. If we compare this situation with not doing the act at all, we usually agree that it is a good thing to at least make the effort. In general, most people believe that it is better to be in church and hate it than to not be there at all. In fact, this is often the approach parents take with their children. The Lord has told us quite clearly that this type of attitude can never bring salvation. In fact, such people are still considered evil by the Lord.

For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing.

For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness.

For behold, if a man being evil giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore he is counted evil before God.

And likewise also is it counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such.

Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. (Moroni 7:6-10)

It is true that a person will never gain salvation with such an attitude, but at least the “iron rod” is within reach. We can only assume that if the people in this category will continue forcing themselves to obey, their chances of someday gaining “real intent” will be greatly increased.

The next circle, the one labeled “thought,” is a step up from the first. It represents a person who is thinking about the act he performs. For the most part this person understands the reasoning behind the act but still doesn't have a true desire to perform the act. He sees that it is good and has a testimony of it, but sometimes he would rather watch the game on TV or stay in bed where it's nice and warm. People in this category are often great goal setters or rule followers. They see something out there that they want (or know they should want), but they don't really like the road that will take them there. People in this category often like to make and enforce policies that define and govern our actions or programs with a set reasonable rules and guidelines. If we are in this category, we will have a tendency to do such things as use planners, set goals, and have “to do” lists in order to be better organized. Though this person may not enjoy all that he does, he believes it is right and worth pursuing. He has studied the commandments or policies and has seen the good that can come from them. People in this category might well ask the question, “Why do I do what I do when I know what I know?” They don't ask this because they are terrible sinners, but because they don't always desire to do what they know is right and

sometimes their desire wins out over their thought. In some cases they will rigidly follow a policy that may actually do more damage than good for a person or situation rather than being able to be flexible and live by the spirit of the law instead of the letter.

Achieving this level of obedience is harder than achieving the first level. Understanding why you are performing an act or studying the policy handbook requires more time and experience than merely performing the act itself without an understanding of it. Much of the time a person will arrive at this level because he has endured the first level. He came to understand some of the commandments merely because he performed the act for an extended period of time. By doing it over and over again, an understanding as to the act's purposes or objectives can often be realized. Though the level of "thought" is not the highest level of obedience, I think we can safely assume that it is a step up from the level of "act" only. These people are probably entering the realm of having "real intent," but have not fully arrived yet.

The inner circle, the one labeled "desire," represents a level of obedience that far surpasses the other two levels. It is a level that understands the correct actions and thoughts behind a commandment or policy. It involves a change of heart, not just a change of mind or behavior. People within this category act and react almost automatically. They do what is right naturally and unconditionally. Because they desire to do what is right, they are easily called to repentance and have no problem with changing plans, programs, policies, or procedures if necessary. These people focus on the principles of the gospel and understand that all commandments and policies are only valuable because of the principles they try to promote – a difficult thing to learn, indeed. This level of obedience has more to do with one's attitude and perspective than it does with one's thoughts or actions. It deals more with what we are than merely with what we think or do or try to appear to be. This category deals with what I call "The Lists of the Gospel." These lists are found in the standard works and are at the core of the gospel plan. Notice that the lists in the following scriptures contain principles, not programs or policies. Notice also the results of either possessing or not possessing these principles within us as we make everyday judgments.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9)

And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work.

Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence. (D&C 4:5-6)

The decisions of these quorums, or either of them, are to be made in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity;

Because the promise is, if these things abound in them they shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord. (D&C 107:30-31)

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile-- (D&C 121:41-42)

I have often thought that even if a person never received a testimony of Jesus Christ or Joseph Smith, these lists (and others like them) could almost stand alone as a testimony to the truthfulness and goodness of the scriptures and the gospel in general. They are at the core of the gospel plan. All programs and policies exist only to promote principles such as these. In general, if they do not do so, then they should not be followed or implemented.

For people who fall into this innermost level of obedience, people who truly desire to do what is right, the tools of self-discipline and goal setting become somewhat obsolete. They are simply no longer necessary. To say, "I am going to force myself to do something I love to do," doesn't make much sense. It is true that you may make plans or try to be organized, but flexibility and inspiration will generally take the place of strict obedience. Living the spirit of the law or principle behind the policy/program will become much more important than living the letter of the law. If the plans, programs, or organizations have to change for some reason, a person in this category will be willing to do so immediately in order to accomplish the righteous principle. At the same time, people within the act or thought categories will likely have a difficult time making such judgments and/or adjustments. They are usually more rigid or strict in their accomplishments. Regarding this, Elder Dean L. Larsen has said,

An important distinction must be made between the potentially confining process of setting goals and objectives and the more encompassing need of having a general purpose in life...Without this purpose, life has no compass. Within the framework of such a purpose, there is an acceptable place for much spontaneity and flexibility. Indeed, without this freedom life can become stilted and sterile, and much of the potential for progressive inspiration and renewal can be thwarted. (Some Thoughts on Goal Setting, Objectives, and Measurements, BYU Devotional, May 13, 1980, underline added)

Along these same lines Elder Boyd K. Packer has said,

There is a spiritual element beyond the procedures in the handbook. It belongs to the priesthood and carries supernatural power. Unless you are familiar with it, unless bishops and stake presidents are familiar with it, they might implement programs and yet not redeem the saints. (Principles, The Ensign, March, 1985)

In a later address Elder Packer added,

The most dangerous side effect of all we have prescribed in the way of programming and instruction and all is the overregimentation of the church. This overregimentation is a direct result of too many programmed instructions. If we would compare the handbooks of today with those of a generation ago you would quickly see what I mean...

Local leaders have been effectively conditioned to hold back until programmed as to what to do, how, to whom, when, and for how long. Can you see that when we overemphasize programs at the expense of principles, we are in danger of losing the inspiration, the resourcefulness, that which should characterize Latter-day Saints. Then the very principle of individual revelation is in jeopardy and we drift from a fundamental gospel principle! (Let Them Govern Themselves, by Elder Boyd K. Packer, Regional Representative Seminar, March 30, 1990, underline added)

Let's consider the story of Nephi and his brothers trying to obtain the plates of brass. Lehi's sons went to Laban twice with specific goals and plans. Both times they failed and both times Laman and Lemuel complained and wanted to give up. Most people would not have blamed them if they had given up. They had risked their lives twice in their attempts to obey. They had planned and prepared for success both times. They had given up all of their possessions. The task just didn't seem possible. There was a key to their failure however. Though Laman and Lemuel tried to obey, they didn't desire to obey. Nephi, on the other hand, simply went and did, "not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do."⁴¹ Because Nephi had the desire to do what was necessary, he remained flexible in his task. There were no goals, no plans, and no positive mental attitude, none of the things we typically emphasize today. There were none of the modern-day, "business world" kinds of tools. He simply desired and did. Because of his great desire and faith, he was blessed by the Lord to accomplish his task.

We cannot overemphasize the great flexibility Nephi used to accomplish his task. His methods were very unconventional and even controversial. Judging Nephi from a very strict, "by the book" perspective, we find that in order to obtain the Brass plates, Nephi killed a man, lied to his servant, stole the plates, and then kidnapped the servant so as to not leave any witnesses. Yet, all of this was counted as righteousness. Why? Because of his honest and sincere desires to serve God and unselfishly do what is right.

Acts that are clearly wrong in some cases are clearly right in others. It is clear, for example, that two people can be doing exactly the same action, and yet one will be right and the other will be wrong, simply because of the desires of their heart. This righteous flexibility has been outlined in the scriptures in various ways. For example, the following verses from the Old Testament beautifully describe how many actions can be either right or wrong, depending on the circumstances.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

⁴¹ 1 Nephi 4:6

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

This kind of righteous flexibility comes with great responsibility. It is very easy to misuse and even abuse this principle. The wicked generally see such flexibility as either a way to justify their own unrighteous desires or a way to criticize the righteous for carrying out such seemingly inconsistent actions. The wicked seldom recognize or understand the real issues behind such flexibility and hence, are unable to make the same good judgments as those whose desires are pure and wholesome. They tend only see the act itself, rather than the motivation behind those actions. This makes all the difference in the world.

Interestingly enough, the scriptures suggest that the most wicked people on earth are not usually the unreligious fornicators, adulterers, thieves, etc. The most wicked people in the scriptures are generally the inflexible, strictly pious religionists who are unable or unwilling to express righteous flexibility in their spiritual pursuits. Hugh Nibley explained this problem well when he said,

The worst sinners, according to Jesus, are not the harlots and publicans, but the religious leaders with their insistence on proper dress and grooming, their careful observance of all the rules, their precious concern for status symbols, their strict legality, their pious patriotism. (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol.9, Ch.2, p.54)

The scriptures are full of examples of wicked people who strictly “obeyed the gospel” for selfish purposes. They are also filled with examples of “unrighteous people” who were loved by God simply because of their desires to do what was right. Consider again the example of the Pharisee and the Publican.

Two men went up to the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful unto me a sinner.

*I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.
(Luke 18:10-14)*

Notice what was important in these verses. I doubt that Jesus would say that extortion, unjustness, or adultery are good things. Likewise, I doubt that He would say that fasting or giving tithes are bad things. I think the point the Savior is making is that the desires of a man's heart and the reasons behind his obedience to the commandments are far more important issues than his actions, whether those actions be good or bad. It is an unselfish change of heart that we are after, not just a self-justifying change of action. This is a difficult lesson for us to learn. It requires us to give up on the idea of exalting ourselves. We do this by placing God, truth, and other people first in our lives and ourselves somewhere after that.

The ability of righteous people to think correct thoughts and perform correct acts is a direct result of both their deeper understanding of the principles behind the commandments, as well as their strong desire to do what is right. It always involves what is right rather than who is right. Quite often their solutions are unorthodox and never would have been accomplished had they followed the letter of the law or their original goals and plans. Once you begin to forget about yourself and gain a true desire to do what is right, you will automatically begin to think and do the right things. Things will begin to happen naturally. It happens not because of force, self-discipline, or goal setting, but because it is your natural way of life. As mentioned earlier, when this change of heart occurs, you find that the gospel becomes not only what you do or what you think, it becomes what you are. You will begin to seek and conform your life to its principles automatically and will find great joy and flexibility in doing so.

Ironically, one way to accomplish this natural desire or change of heart is through knowledge of and obedience to the commandments. If you must use a rigid, "Law of Moses" type program of goal setting or self-discipline in order to gain the correct desires (as most people do) then so be it. But please understand that there is something much better than those tools. There is a level of obedience and righteousness that transcends such things. Such tools are little more than a means to a greater end. When this end is reached, the tools we used to get there often become obsolete and may actually hinder our spiritual progress.

Force yourself to study and obey the commandments until you obey them naturally. For by so doing, you will gain a genuine desire to follow truth, and you will learn to love God and others with an honest, sincere, and unselfish love. Through obedience to the commandments, you will gain the true love of Christ. If you allow it to become a part of you, this love will be exemplified in all that you do, think, and are. I don't think that the importance of gaining this love, or in other

words, this change of heart, can be overemphasized. As the scriptures indicate, “love is the fulfilling of the law.”⁴² It is everything.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. (Moroni 7:48)

THE EXPRESSION OF OUR LOVE

In addition to the commandment to love our neighbor, the Lord has given us many guidelines to follow concerning how we express that love. He has told us what types of things we should and should not do concerning our fellow man. Many of these guidelines deal with how we should use temporal and spiritual blessings to bless the lives of others.

The Lord's guidelines serve at least two purposes for us. First these guidelines show us the way we should go or what we should do. Second, they act as a measuring stick by which we can judge our actions. By learning the commandments of God, we not only learn the correct way in which we should deal with others, but we become familiar with the areas in which we need improvement. As spoken of in the previous chapter, the commandments are not given to us as a means of “patting ourselves on the back” because of our obedience to them. As king Benjamin declared:

And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast? (Mosiah 2:24)

We often feel that we are doing all that we should do in order to be counted righteous or obedient. Sometimes we get the impression that if we are attending our meetings, paying our tithing, doing our home/visiting teaching and have a current temple recommend, we are living the gospel to its fullest. We need to remember that the gospel is a gospel of progression. There are always more areas in which we need to progress. The scriptures seem to indicate that we still have far to go and that we should be looking towards overcoming our inadequacies rather than admiring our accomplishments. It is important to keep this in mind as we discuss the following topics.

IS IT A SIN TO BE RICH?

⁴² Romans 13:8-10

This is a question that can have a wide range of effects on people. Some people discount it completely, believing the very question is absurd. Others take a more cautious approach, not really committing to one side or the other. Still others have a very difficult time explaining the many scriptures which condemn the rich. That it is indeed a topic worth discussing can be easily illustrated by at least the following scriptures:

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. (Luke 1:52-53)

But wo unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24)

For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Luke 18:25)

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it parisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. (James 1:9-11)

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten.

Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. (James 5:1-3)

Behold ye, people of this great city, and hearken unto my words; yea, hearken unto the words which the Lord saith; for behold, he saith that ye are cursed because of your riches, and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them, and have not hearkened unto the words of him that gave them unto you. (Helaman 13:21)

There are many people today who obey the commandments very well and yet have many riches. These people are often spoken of during discussions about Zion, the Law of the Gospel, or the Law of Consecration. Often we try to defend or even endorse such people by saying that they are both rich and righteous at the same time. It is very likely that many such people do a great deal of good with their riches. It is possible that such a person is honest, faithful, pays more than a full tithe and is by no means immoral. In fact, many times we know of rich people who seem to obey the commandments better than most, and do so honestly and sincerely. It is difficult to imagine that such a person is not justified in his riches. And yet, with a single example from the

scriptures, I believe it is possible to show that the riches of such a person are very difficult to justify. Let's consider the following set of circumstances:

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? (Mark 10:17)

The first thing we should note is that this man recognized Christ as the “Good Master.” He was a believer in Christ. After correcting the man on a different point, Jesus went on to answer the man's question:

Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these I have observed from my youth. (Mark 10:19-20)

Notice that this man is, by all appearances, righteous. We have no reason to believe that he is not telling the truth about his righteous activities. Nor is he boasting of them. He simply wants to know what more he must do to inherit eternal life. Christ continues:

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. (Mark 10:21)

Notice that when Christ beheld this man's righteousness he was apparently moved by the man's desire to do good. The next thing we should note, however, is that even though the man obeyed the commandments, he was still lacking something. We should ask ourselves, “Lacking something in order to do what?” Remember his initial question, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” He was lacking something that would keep him from obtaining eternal life. We may conclude from this verse that in order to “inherit eternal life,” this man must give up his riches. If he does not, he shall not inherit eternal life.

And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had many possessions.

And Jesus looked round about, and said unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! (Mark 10:22-23)

In this verse we see the man not being able to give up the one thing that would have brought him eternal life. Observing this, Christ begins to explain to his disciples the incompatibility between riches and eternal life. In the next verse we see that the disciples responded much the same way that we respond today when we hear such doctrine. At their response the Savior re-emphasizes his point:

And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answered again, and saith unto them, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:24-25)⁴³

To show that these words are truly as strong as they sound, we need look no further than the response of those who were there and who heard the Savior speak these words in person.

And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? (Mark 10:26)

This is the same response that most Latter-day Saints have today. Surely such doctrine cannot be true! Christ goes on to explain this doctrine:

With men that trust in riches, it is impossible; but not impossible with men who trust in God and leave all for my sake, for with such all things are possible. (Mark 10:27, JST)

Once again we should remind ourselves of the question at hand, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Regarding our trust in riches, the Savior declares that it is simply “impossible” for a man who trusts in riches to inherit eternal life. On the other hand, the thing that makes eternal life a possibility is trusting in God and leaving all for Christ’s sake.

At this point many of us will declare that we do not “trust” in riches, we simply have them. We should note that in many of the scriptures above it was the mere possession of riches that was criticized, not only our trust in them. It might be well for all of us to take a good hard look at our lives. Remember the question about why we studied the things we studied in college? Was our main goal to build up the kingdom of God or to provide for our earthly “needs.” Were we trusting in God or the type of society/culture in which we live? Are we doing any better today than we were then? President Kimball helps us to gain a better perspective:

...I am afraid that many of us have been surfeited with flocks and herds and acres and barns and wealth and have begun to worship them as false Gods, and they have power over us. Do we have more of these things than our faith can stand? Many people spend most of their time working in the service of a self-image that includes sufficient money, stocks, bonds, investment portfolios, property, credit cards, furnishings, automobiles, and the like to guarantee carnal security throughout, it is hoped, a long and happy life. Forgotten is the fact that our assignment is to use these many resources in our families and quorums to build up the kingdom of God--to further the missionary effort and the genealogical and temple work; to raise our children up as fruitful servants unto the Lord; to bless others in every way, that they may also be fruitful. Instead we expend these blessings on our own desires... (President Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign June 1976)

⁴³ Regarding this, W.F. Albright notes, “In spite of the attempts of commentators and preachers to find small gates, or even camel-hair, in this saying, it seems certain that it is simply a proverb cast in hyperbolic form.” (Matthew, “Anchor Bible,” vol. 26, p. 233.) Jesus uses “camel” in another exaggeration found in Matthew 23:24: “strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.”

In the same article President Kimball quotes two scriptures in support of his statements about the saints:

*“Ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet ye suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not.”
(Mormon 8:39)*

*As the Lord himself said in our day, “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own God, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall.”
(Doctrine and Covenants 1:16)*

Notice that President Kimball is not only speaking in the present tense, signifying the problem exists right now, but he is also speaking about “us,” the saints of the church. The Latter-day Saints are the ones who are guilty of these sins. In the same message President Kimball boldly speaks out about the wickedness of the saints today:

...when I review the performance of this people in comparison with what is expected, I am appalled and frightened.

If we insist on spending all our time and resources building up for ourselves a worldly kingdom, that is exactly what we will inherit.

*In spite of our delight in defining ourselves as modern, and our tendency to think we possess a sophistication that no people in the past ever had--in spite of these things, we are, on the whole, an idolatrous people--a condition most repugnant to the Lord.
(President Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, June 1976)*

It is very important that we recognize the strength and gravity of these words from a latter-day prophet of the Lord. We should not try to justify ourselves as we so often do. Rather we should try to seek to learn and do what is true and right. At this point it might be beneficial to explore some of the specifics involved with seeking or possessing riches.

TWO TYPES OF “RICH”

As we discuss the righteousness or the wickedness associated with being rich it is important to understand that there are two, distinct types of being rich. It is apparent that these two types are described in the scriptures and looked upon very differently by the Lord.

The first type of being rich occurs when all people are equally rich or in other words when all people have an equal amount of the things they both need and desire. Under this first variety of rich, you cannot refer to individual people as either rich or poor because there can be no

distinction between the wealth of one man and that of another. This type of rich deals with the overall wealth of a people rather than the individual wealth of a person. Under this definition of rich the only way a person can become richer is when all the people around him become richer.

The second type of rich occurs when people are unequally rich. This is by far the more common of the two definitions and the one which we typically use in everyday speech. This type of richness occurs when one person “owns” more than another person. It is relative in nature because being rich in this way depends upon one person possessing more or less than others do. As an example, we can compare the “poor” people living in those countries which have a high standard of living with the poor living in underdeveloped countries. Although a person may be considered very poor by the standards of their own country, they may be considered very rich by the standards of another country. In fact the poor from one country may often be regarded as quite rich by those from another country. This type of distinction would not be possible under the first definition of rich.

In short, the first definition of rich occurs when all people possess the same amount of material wealth and all have enough of this wealth to provide for their needs and wants. The second definition of rich occurs when people are compared one to another and some are found to possess more material wealth than others. It is important to understand these two definitions of rich before we undergo a study of the righteousness or wickedness associated with being rich.

EQUALITY IN RICHES AND THE LAW OF THE GOSPEL

Let's first discuss the definition of rich in which all people are equally wealthy. The Law of the Gospel plays a large role in this definition of rich. For many Latter-day Saints the Law of the Gospel is somewhat confusing. We often think of it as simply a collection of specific commandments or parts of the gospel, but we usually have difficulty figuring out which ones. The Law of the Gospel, as it is explained in the scriptures, deals primarily with imparting our substance to those in need.

Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment. (Doctrine and Covenants 104:18, underline added. See also D&C 88:123)

Many times when we are discussing the Law of Consecration, we should really be referring to the Law of the Gospel. The Law of the Gospel is that part of the Law of Consecration which instructs us to give of our material wealth to those who are less fortunate. This law, along with the Law of Sacrifice (see page), are lower laws which lead us towards the higher law, that of consecration. The Law of Consecration goes beyond the Law of Sacrifice and the Law of the Gospel. It involves giving of ourselves completely - not just our substance but our time, talents, and everything with which the Lord has blessed us to the building up of God's kingdom. President Benson helps us to understand the relationships between these laws.

We covenant to live the law of consecration. This law is that we consecrate our time, talents, strength, property, and money for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God on this earth and the establishment of Zion.

Until one abides by the laws of obedience, sacrifice, the gospel, and chastity, he cannot abide the law of consecration, which is the law pertaining to the celestial kingdom. "For if you will that I give you place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you" (D&C 78:7). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p. 121)

Because the Law of the Gospel takes from those who have and gives to those who have not, it serves as a great equalizer of our material wealth. It creates a type of wealth in which all people become wealthy together and are equal in their material possessions. This kind of wealth occurs when people live the gospel of Jesus Christ to its fullest. It is the type of richness found when the Law of the Gospel is obeyed and lived. It was found in the city of Enoch⁴⁴ and among the Nephites after the visitation of Christ.⁴⁵

According to the scriptures, it is not wicked or sinful in any way to be rich if others are rich with you. The scriptures are quite clear in declaring to us that this type of wealth is exactly the type of life we should pursue. Whenever a people obey the Lord, the natural result is that they prosper and grow rich as a people. Scriptural support for this doctrine is abundant.

And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good--to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted. (Jacob 2:19, underline added)

And now I, Mormon, would that ye should know that the people had multiplied, insomuch that they were spread upon all the face of the land, and that they had become exceedingly rich, because of their prosperity in Christ. (4 Nephi 1:23, underline added)

And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having an abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need - an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of homely cloth.

And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefor they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.

⁴⁴ D&C 105:5

⁴⁵ 4 Nephi 1:3

And thus they did prosper and become far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their church. (Alma 1:29-31, underline added)

Notice in these verses from the book of Alma that even though the people who belonged to the church were more wealthy than those who did not belong to the church, every effort was being made to help all people share in the wealth and thus become equally rich. The only reason an inequality in riches existed in this instance was because those who did not belong to the church refused to live according to the commandments of God.⁴⁶ If the wicked people would have repented and begun to live their lives in the same manner as those who belonged to the church, they would have become rich as well.

Riches should be viewed as a great blessing bestowed upon us by the Lord according to our righteousness. However, an essential part of that righteousness is a willingness to share our riches with others who are less fortunate. If we do not impart of our wealth to the those in need, we cannot be counted as righteous and we will not be blessed of the Lord in gaining more riches. In the words of Orson Pratt:

Riches are not a curse, they are a great blessing; it is inequality in riches that is a great curse. God has made all the riches of the earth, and the riches of all worlds. He made the gold, and the silver, and the precious metals; He formed the flocks and herds, and all useful animals. He has made the earth exceedingly rich; and He has given man dominion over all these things; the more His people enjoy of these things the better he is pleased; it is impossible for His people to become too rich; if the whole world, with all the treasures thereof, were in the hands of the saints, the Lord would still be delighted for them to have more. But these blessings have become a great curse to man, because they have been unequally possessed. (Gospel Themes, p. 634)

ACCORDING TO OUR WANTS AND NEEDS

It is important to note that the Lord not only wants us to have all that we need, but he also wants us to have all that we desire.

...I would that ye should impart of your substance...according to their wants. (Mosiah 4:26)

...imparting to one another...according to their needs and their wants. (Mosiah 18:29)

...that every man who has need may be amply supplied and receive according to his wants. (Doctrine and Covenants 42:33)

...appoint unto this people...according to his circumstances and his wants and needs. (Doctrine and Covenants 51:3)

⁴⁶ Alma 1:32

And you are to be equal...every man according to his wants and needs, inasmuch as his wants are just. (Doctrine and Covenants 82:17)

We see from these scriptures that we are not only commanded to give to each other according to our needs but according to our wants as well, inasmuch as these wants are just. But what about those people who have unjust wants? How do we deal with them? Once again the absence of those people who are self-interested is of great significance. People who are self-interested will simply not be able to live the celestial laws necessary to bring about a zion society. However, I feel we should still try to help these people in any way we can. The scriptures are quite clear on this point.⁴⁷

In addition to the effect of self-interest regarding our wants, the equal sharing of wealth, in and of itself, has a great impact on what we desire. Many of the things we now desire would be of no value if all things were shared in common. Some things are only valued because of their unequal distribution among us. For example, if gold were shared by all and no single individual were to have any more or less of it than any other, it would quickly lose its value. People would no longer desire gold the way they do now because it would be equally scarce or plentiful among all people. The same would be true for many items considered to be valuable in our current system. Such things as gold possess no value in and of themselves, especially when there is no longer a comparison between those who have it and those who do not. Hence, the very desire for such things as gold, silver, precious gems, etc. would fade when these things are had in common among all people. This would help tremendously in ensuring that our wants are just.

When all people share things equally, there can be no comparisons made between us. The possibility of comparison is all but eliminated. The Lord wants us to enjoy all the riches the world has to offer, but He wants us to enjoy them equally.

INEQUALITY IN RICHES

Is it a sin to be rich if others are not rich with you? This is a very difficult question for most of us to answer. However, it is not difficult because the Lord has neglected to answer it for us, but because we usually don't like the answer that He has given us. As shown in the scriptures already cited, the rich are placed in a very uncomfortable position before the Lord. As hard as we sometimes try, we usually have a difficult time acknowledging what the scriptures tell us about being unequally rich. As mentioned earlier, our reaction to the scriptures concerning the rich is often similar to that of the original apostles of Christ when he explained, "how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God."⁴⁸ The apostles were "astonished out of measure"⁴⁹ at this bold doctrine. It is only reasonable that we would have a similar reaction. Not only are there many rich men who appear to be good men, but many of us have worked hard

⁴⁷ Alma 1:30-32; Mosiah 4:16-19

⁴⁸ Mark 10:24

⁴⁹ Mark 10:26

for the riches we possess. It seems unfair for us to give up our hard-earned riches when there are many people who simply did not work as hard or sacrifice as much as we did. Yet we will see that the scriptures are very clear on this subject.

Once again, our natural inclination is usually to find a way to explain that having riches and trusting in them are two different things. We want to believe that a person can possess great riches and yet not “trust” in them. Yet it is not merely our trust in riches that is the problem. The mere possession of riches, when it is an unequal possession, is very much condemned by the Lord. Those people who possess more earthly goods than others will find it very difficult to reconcile their actions before the Lord. The scriptures teach us that the very state of being richer than our brother is wrong and brings with it a need to repent. The very fact that we have more than our neighbor serves to persecute our neighbor in ways which are condemned by the Lord.

But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their God. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also. (2 Nephi 9:30, underline added)

They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up. (2 Nephi 28:13, underline added)

Through the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord has made it very clear that equality of temporal possessions is absolutely necessary if we are to obtain any celestial reward at all.

And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine.

But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.

For the earth is full, and there is enough to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.

Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment. (Doctrine and Covenants 104:15-18)

For, behold, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh from the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance.

But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin. (Doctrine and Covenants 49:19-20)

Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the spirit shall be withheld. (Doctrine and Covenants 70:14)

That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of earthly things.

For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things;

For if you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and require of you. (Doctrine and Covenants 78:5-7)

If we do not learn how to share our wealth equally in this life, we simply will not be able to live a celestial way of life. To answer our initial question, “Is it a sin to be rich if others are not rich with you?” The answer can only be a clear and straightforward “yes.”

We again repeat the word of the Lord to this church: “It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another; wherefore the world lieth in sin.” Unequal possession of that which God has made for the benefit of all His children is sin. All nations, kindreds, and people, are in sin because of this inequality. The saints are still in sin so far as they approve of this unequal possession; and we shall remain in sin until we make exertions to put this inequality away from us. We must be one, not only in heavenly riches, but one in earthly riches. (Orson Pratt, Gospel Themes, p. 634)

We often believe that the law of tithing and the welfare program of the Church are the “new ways” that the Lord has chosen to deal with inequality or providing for the poor. We need to understand that these types of programs are only used as a substitute for the higher laws of the gospel. These programs were only instituted when the saints refused to live the celestial laws given to them by the Lord. They are lower laws. It is true that these things will take us as far as the terrestrial kingdom. However, we will still be quite far away from a celestial way of life and a reward in that kingdom. As soon as we can live the higher laws again, these lower laws will be done away. If we would truly develop Christ-like love for others and share our wealth the way the Lord has indicated in the scriptures, the law of tithing and our current welfare program would quickly become things of the past. What is giving ten percent when compared with giving our time, talents, and everything with which we have been blessed? What is giving the money we saved by missing two meals once a month or working in a cannery every so often, when compared with possessing all things in common and having no more poor among us?

The point to be understood is that we are simply not living the way the Lord would like us to live, wherefore, we lie in sin. The recognition of this fact is the first step we must take if we are to correct the situation. We need to realize that it is not only the guy down the street or the man living up on the hill that needs to repent in this area, it is us. We all have need to repent of our material inequality. To the degree that we approve of and support the unequal possession of earthly goods, to that same degree we will be withheld from the celestial kingdom and all its

blessings. If we are willing to accept that judgment, then so be it. The choice is entirely ours to make.

TO WHOM SHOULD WE GIVE OF OUR SUBSTANCE?

In dealing with this topic it should be recognized that the righteous will inevitably use any substance given to them quite differently than the wicked. This is largely because of the desires of the righteous to do good with their substance, whether rich or poor. It is our desires that justify us before the Lord, even more so than our works. Concerning the righteous who were too poor to give of their substance, King Benjamin told his people that they can be justified if their desires are righteous.

And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.

And now if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless, otherwise ye are condemned; and your condemnation is just for ye covet that which ye have not received. (Mosiah 4:24-25)

It is important for us to acknowledge the fact that we must say these things in our hearts and not just our minds. It must truly be a part of us, an honest desire, not just a nice thought.

It is often quite difficult to determine what is a need and what is merely a want. This is especially true today because of all the luxuries we enjoy. Almost anyone without a television or stereo in their home is considered strange by today's standards. Yet these things can hardly be regarded as necessities of life. The more we gain a true love for others and experience a change of heart through obedience to the commandments, the better we will be able to judge our wants from our needs. The main difference in our ability to judge righteously will come in that we will begin to think more of other people than we do of ourselves. We will consider their wants and needs and how we can help them rather than thinking of our own wants or needs, thus aiding us in our judgments between our wants and needs. This in turn will not only bring about the giving of substance, but the giving of our service or ourselves as well.

There are some difficult situations in life concerning how or in what manner we should give of our substance. If we truly love another person and our purpose is to help him, it is reasonable to assume that there will be circumstances when it is best not to give, at least not to provide for certain wants. Take the example of an alcoholic asking for another bottle. Although such a person wants something, and to him it may even be looked at as a need, it is reasonable to assume that a loving, caring person might not provide another bottle (in some cases you just might). These, however, are difficult choices to make and should be viewed as such. Because of the difficulty of judging the needs and wants of others, we should always be worthy to receive the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in such matters. Just as the Holy Ghost can inspire us to say just the right thing to someone, whether they want to hear it or not, so also can He inspire us to

do just the right thing for another person, whether they want it or not. The keys to righteous judgment will include our own personal worthiness and whether or not our desires toward the other person are pure. As mentioned earlier, above all the programs, procedures, and goal setting, it is our desires that are of the greatest significance. It is the flexibility and inspiration that comes from having a pure heart that will enable you to make such judgments. It is not the strict adherence to goals, programs, and procedures. Although such things are often helpful, they can also bind us down to a path which may actually do more harm than good to the situation. For example, it is often the case that the Holy Ghost may tell us to do something which sounds very contrary to our own preconceived notions. Perhaps He will tell us to give another bottle to the alcoholic. To assume that we always understand the circumstances, and hence the wants and needs of others, is to claim more wisdom and insight than most people possess. If you are unsure as to whether or not you should give to someone according to their wants, it is probably best to follow the path of leniency by not judging and by giving whatever you can to help relieve that person's discomfort. In most cases it is probably better to give in an attempt to help the other person than it is not to give in the same attempt.

That said, it is reasonable to assume that there are at least some desires which are not in the best interest of the other person. In the same way that we wouldn't let our children satisfy their desires to play with fire or with a loaded gun, we may not want to help other people hurt themselves by satisfying their harmful desires. If every man is truly seeking the interest of his neighbor, and if there are some things in life which are not in our neighbor's best interest, then it follows that there must be certain wants which a Zion society would not provide for a person. Hence the qualifier in the Doctrine and Covenants:

And you are to be equal...every man according to his wants and needs, inasmuch as his wants are just. (Doctrine and Covenants 82:17, underline added)

The examples I have given are relatively easy ones with which to deal. There are many other examples which are not so easily discussed or dealt with - examples which make it difficult to judge right from wrong or what the best solution might be. As with all other parts of the gospel, we can receive great blessings for ourselves as well as others if our desires are pure and we remain flexible by following the inspiration of the Lord. I would like to offer two general rules or guidelines which I believe will help us to judge difficult questions concerning when (or what) we should give and when (or what) it may be best not to give. Both rules come in the form of scripture.

1. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31; 3 Nephi 14:12)⁵⁰*

⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that the action spoken of in this scripture equates to “the law and the prophets.” This follows the pattern given to us concerning love itself (see Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34). This indicates that we are talking about basically the same thing. This scripture may very well be viewed as a definition of love as given to us by the Lord.

2. *And all this for the benefit of the church of the living God, that every man may improve upon his talent, that every man may gain other talents, yea, even an hundred fold, to be cast into the Lord's storehouse, to become the common property of the whole church.*

Every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God. (Doctrine and Covenants 82:18-19)

There are a few things we should notice about this last scripture. Doctrine and Covenants 82:18 is apparently not talking about our substance becoming the common property of the church. It is either talking about people or the talents of people. I believe we should interpret this to mean that we, ourselves, are to be added to the Lord's storehouse to become the common property of the church right along with our substance. We should be willing to devote our time, effort, talents, and literally everything the Lord has given us to the blessing of His children and the building up of His kingdom. This is the greater law known as the Law of Consecration. If we are living the Law of Sacrifice and the Law of the Gospel, we will be very close to living the Law of Consecration. This comes largely through seeking the interest of our neighbor and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God. As President Kimball has said, this is what we mean by "Zion."⁵¹

If we apply these two basic guidelines in all that we do, we will begin to judge both our wants and needs as well as the wants and needs of others more righteously. Inevitably we will still encounter difficult situations, and there will still be mistakes made even if we do our best to follow these guidelines. We will still need to learn a great deal and be obedient to inspiration which we may not fully understand. However, there is really not much more we can do than forget ourselves, learn to love God and others, and seek the inspiration of the holy Ghost. These are the guidelines given to us by the Lord. And if we follow them sincerely, we will be justified. The Lord will know that we are truly trying to do our best to do what He wants us to do.

...for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law... (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14)

So far we have discussed when, how, and what we should give. We should also discuss "to whom" we should give of our substance. Many Latter-day Saints suggest that there are some people to whom we should not give of our substance or whom we should not help. Many people withhold their substance because they believe a person "deserves what they get," has sinned in some way, or has made bad choices time and time again. We need to understand that we are not the ones to judge such things. It is not given to us to say, "I will give to this person but not to that one." It doesn't matter whether a person is good or evil. We are commanded to share with all people who stand in need of our help, regardless of their status, situation, or position in life.

And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to

⁵¹ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, Pg.362

all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.

For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes; persecuting, lying, thieving, robbing, committing whoredoms, and murdering, and all manner of wickedness; nevertheless, the law was put in force upon all those who did transgress it, inasmuch as it was possible. (Alma 1:30, 32)

Notice that all people received according to their needs regardless of what type of person they were. It doesn't matter what type of person needs help. It only matters that they need help. The Lord has been very clear concerning the importance of giving to all people as opposed to only the righteous, well-liked, or "approved of" people.

And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.

Perhaps thou shalt say: The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just--

But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God. (Mosiah 4:16-18)

It would be difficult to state it more plainly and with more force than King Benjamin did. It is clear that our job is not to judge whether or not someone is worthy of our help. Our job is only to judge whether or not someone is in need of our help and how we can help them the most. We should be no respecter of persons by giving of ourselves to all people who may stand in need. Although it may, at times, be difficult to judge how or what to give, whether or not to give to someone in need should seldom, if ever, be an issue.

WHY AREN'T WE LIVING IT NOW?

The main reason we are not living these higher laws now is because we, as a people, are not willing to do so. We are not waiting for the Lord, the Lord is waiting for us.

Throughout the scriptures, every time the Lord's children have lived according to celestial laws they have been greatly blessed by him. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the city of Enoch. A city of people so prepared for a celestial way of life that it was "taken up into heaven" and

became the very abode of the Lord himself.⁵² Such blessings are as available to us today as they were to the people in the city of Enoch. The people of Enoch were righteous in spite of the wicked world around them. So must we be as well. Speaking of the conditions during the time of the city of Enoch, the book of Moses informs us of the following:

And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.

And Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness unto the people of God. And it came to pass in his days, that he built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even ZION.

And it came to pass that Enoch talked with the Lord; and he said unto the Lord: Surely Zion shall dwell in safety forever. But the Lord said unto Enoch: Zion have I blessed, but the residue of the people have I cursed.

And it came to pass that the Lord showed unto Enoch all the inhabitants of the earth; and he beheld, and lo, Zion, in process of time, was taken up into heaven. And the Lord said unto Enoch: Behold mine abode forever.

And Enoch also beheld the residue of the people which were the sons of Adam; and they were a mixture of all the seed of Adam save it was the seed of Cain, for the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them.

And after that Zion was taken up into heaven, Enoch beheld, and lo, all the nations of the earth were before him;

And there came generation upon generation; and Enoch was high and lifted up, even in the bosom of the Father, and of the Son of Man; and behold, the power of Satan was upon all the face of the earth.

And he saw angels descending out of heaven; and he heard a loud voice saying: Wo, wo be unto the inhabitants of the earth.

*And he beheld Satan; and he had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced.
(Moses 7:18-26, underline added)*

From these verses we can conclude that even though the city of Enoch was living celestial laws, the rest of the world was in a state of extreme wickedness. The point is that the wickedness of the world had no effect on the ability of the saints to live even the highest laws of the gospel. In spite of the great power of Satan and the intense wickedness of the world, Zion flourished because of its righteousness. Another example of this is given to us in the book of Alma.

⁵² See Moses 7:21.

But it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church of God began to persecute those that did belong to the church of God, and had taken upon them the name of Christ.

Yea, they did persecute them, and afflict them with all manner of words, and this because of their humility; because they were not proud in their own eyes, and because they did impart the word of God, one with another, without money and without price.

Now there was a strict law among the people of the church that there should not any man, belonging to the church, arise and persecute those that did not belong to the church, and that there should be no persecution among themselves.

Nevertheless, there were many among them who began to be proud, and began to contend warmly with their adversaries, even unto blows; yea, they would smite one another with their fists.

Now this was in the second year of the reign of Alma, and it was a cause of much affliction to the church; yea, it was the cause of much trial with the church.

For the hearts of many were hardened, and their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among the people of God. And also many withdrew themselves from among them.

Now this was a great trial to those that did stand fast in the faith; nevertheless, they were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God, and they bore with patience the persecution which was heaped upon them.

And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength.

And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely.

And thus they did establish the affairs of the church; and thus they did begin to have continual peace again, notwithstanding all their persecutions.

And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceedingly rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need - an abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth.

And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need. (Alma 1:19-30, underline added)

Notice in these verses that even though the righteous were persecuted and suffered all manner of hardships, they continued in righteousness. The only people who were restricted from being righteous or from receiving the blessings of the Lord (verse 24) were those who chose this path themselves. Note also that it was not easy to live righteously amid wickedness. The names of many were “blotted out” while others left the church of their own accord. Some even gave in to fist fights and other forms of contention. The message to be recognized is that even though it was difficult to live the higher laws, these people did it under the worst conditions and were successful in spite of those conditions.

It is important for us to understand that if we obey the Lord's commandments he will bless us, regardless of the circumstances which may surround us. The people of the world may live as they please, and it will make no difference concerning our ability to obey the will of the Lord. We may be encircled about by corrupt governments and laws, by culturally accepted philosophies of men, by thieving, robbing, murdering, and all manner of wickedness; and still the Lord will bless us and provide a way for us if we will but follow his council and live his laws. It may be difficult, but it will always be possible.

Latter-day Saints often have a tendency to believe that all we are waiting for is the “go-ahead” from the Lord and we will begin to live the Law of Consecration. Many believe that as soon as the prophet speaks, we will immediately change our lives and bring about a zion society. If we believe such things, we are greatly mistaken. There are probably few things the Lord would like more than for his saints to begin living the Law of Consecration. I'm sure there are few announcements the prophet would rather give than the one telling the saints to begin creating a zion society. The fact of the matter is, the prophets have already told us to do so.⁵³ We need to realize that it is not the Lord, the prophet, or the wickedness of the world that prevents these things from happening. The reason we are not living the Law of Consecration right now is because the saints are not ready or willing to do so. For the most part, the members of the church are not even willing to live the Law of Sacrifice or the Law of the Gospel, let alone the Law of Consecration. It is the members of the church that are keeping the celestial laws from becoming a reality. Do we really believe that the Lord or the prophet would hold us back from the righteousness and blessings offered by a zion society? Is it really reasonable to assume that the Lord would not establish Zion merely because of the wickedness of the world? This has never stopped the Lord before. Why should it stop Him now? As soon as the saints are prepared to

⁵³ See the article “Becoming the Pure in Heart,” in the Ensign of March, 1985 by President Spencer W. Kimball and President Ezra Taft Benson's book “A Witness and a Warning,” pages 9 and 73.

live celestial laws, we will begin to live them. As soon as we are ready, the Lord will prepare the way for us. And as President Kimball points out, the sooner the better.

*As important as it is to have this vision in mind, defining and describing Zion will not bring it about. That can only be done through consistent and concerted daily effort by every single member of the church. No matter what the cost in toil or sacrifice, we must "do it." (Pres. Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, March 1985, p. 4, *Becoming the Pure in Heart*)*

In the earlier times of the church President Brigham Young seemed to have the same view:

Will this people ever come to this order of things? Are they now prepared to live according to that patriarchal order that will be organized among the true and faithful before God receives His own? We all concede the point that when this mortality falls off, and with it its cares, anxieties, love of self, love of wealth, and love of power, and all the conflicting interests which pertain to this flesh, that then, when our spirits have returned to God who gave them, we will be subject to every requirement that He may make of us, that we shall then live together as one great family; our interest will be a general, a common interest. Why can we not so live in this world? (Journal of Discourses 12:153, underline added)

I will first say that the Lord Almighty has not the least objection in the world to our entering into the Order of Enoch. I will stand between the people and all harm in this. He has not the least objection to any man, every man, all mankind on the face of the earth turning from evil and loving and serving him with all their hearts. With regard to all those orders that the Lord has revealed, it depends on the will and doings of the people, and we are at liberty, from this Conference, to go and build up a settlement, or we can join ourselves together in this city, do it legally - according to the laws of the land - and enter into covenant with each other by firm agreement that we will live as a family, that we will put our property into the hands of a committee of trustees, who will dictate the affairs of this society. (Journal of Discourses 16:8, underline added)

The Lord has told us time and time again that He will bless us and take care of us if we are not of little faith. Indeed it is clear that we are not waiting for the Lord; the Lord is waiting for us. I believe the Lord would love nothing more than to bless us with all the riches of heaven, and he would do so if we would only accept these blessings by obeying his commandments.

O, ye nations of the earth, how often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!

How oft have I called upon you by the mouth of my servants, and by the ministering of angels, and by mine own voice, and by the voice of thunders, and by the voice of lightnings, and by the voice of tempests, and by the voice of earthquakes, and great hailstorms, and by the voice of famines and pestilences of every kind, and by the great sound of a trumpet, and by the voice of judgment, and by the voice of mercy all the day long, and by the voice of glory and honor and the riches of eternal life, and would have

saved you with an everlasting salvation, but ye would not! (Doctrine and Covenants 43:24-25)

We must realize that though we have the true gospel of Jesus Christ with all of its prophets, ordinances, and principles, we still have much to do and far to go before we are even close to Zion, the Celestial Kingdom, and eternal life. The Lord and His prophets have done their part. It is up to each Latter-Day Saint to bring to pass a zion society.

WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT?

If we can eliminate the problem of self-interest in a society and gain a righteous love for others, the results will be incredible. We would need far fewer laws to govern us because the people would automatically do things that are best for society. We could center our attention on what is right rather than the protection of our rights.

The scriptures have given us a great deal of information about the kind of life we can enjoy through following God's council and obeying His commandments. By gaining a true love for God and others and by living the laws and principles the Lord has given us to accompany that love, we can experience joy and happiness which far surpass anything the present world has to offer. The blessings spoken of in the scriptures can be ours if we so desire. They are the natural result of the things we have discussed in this chapter. In the words of President Brigham Young:

I have looked upon the community of Latter-day Saints in vision and beheld them organized as one great family of heaven, each person performing his several duties in his line of industry, working for the good of the whole more than for individual aggrandizement; and in this I have beheld the most beautiful order that the mind of man can contemplate, and the grandest results for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God and the spread of righteousness upon the earth. (Journal of Discourses 12:153)

I believe the following verses may well be viewed as a natural consequence of conforming our lives to the things we have discussed:

Verily I say, that inasmuch as ye do this, the fullness of the earth is yours, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which climbeth upon the trees and walketh upon the earth;

Yea, and the herb, and the good things which come of the earth, whether for food or for raiment, or for houses, or for barns, or for orchards, or for gardens, or for vineyards;

Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart;

Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul.

And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion. (Doctrine and Covenants 59:16-20)

By gaining the correct attitude and desires toward ourselves and others, as taught to us in the scriptures, we will find that the blessings of the Lord will be poured upon us. Great happiness and joy can be ours if we will but follow the Lord's council in these matters. Evil will flee and goodness will flourish. Life will be simple and pure. It will be wonderful!

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings;... (4 Nephi 1:15-17, underline added)

Imagine a world where people care more for others than for themselves, where hunger and sickness are always returned with food and loving care. Imagine a world where doors are not locked, strangers are not feared, and people may freely receive all that they need in life and more. All feelings of jealousy, envy, and hate will be replaced with feelings of trust, charity, and thoughtfulness. Imagine if we were to incorporate the attitude found in the verses of the following song:

*Because I have been given much I too must give;
because of thy great bounty, Lord, each day I live
I shall divide my gifts from thee with every brother that I see
who has the need of help from me.*

*Because I have been sheltered, fed by thy good care,
I cannot see another's lack and I not share
my glowing fire, my loaf of bread, my roof's safe shelter over-head,
that he too may be comforted.*

*Because I have been blessed by thy great love, dear Lord,
I'll share thy love again according to thy word.
I shall give love to those in need; I'll show that love by word and deed:
Thus shall my thanks be thanks indeed.⁵⁴*

⁵⁴ LDS Church Hymnal, Pg. 219

Notice how this song encourages us to give all of ourselves. We should learn to not only to share of our “loaf of bread,” but also our “gifts” and our “love” with those around us. We should be willing to share everything which we have been given, whether temporal or spiritual. And we should do so by both word and deed, never recognizing ourselves but always recognizing others and the person from whom we received these gifts in the first place, even God, our Eternal Father in Heaven.

In such a society, a zion society, there would no longer be a need for most occupations, as our current society requires. Jobs in such areas as law enforcement, law firms (lawyers), life or health insurance, retirement organizations, social services, the stock market, etc. will find no place in a zion society. Because so many of today's professions would be useless in such a society, we would be able to spend far less time at work and far more time doing those things which truly deserve our attention.

It would be a life without crime or injury. It would be without hurt feelings or people who are easily offended. Truth could be discussed openly and honestly without the fear of offending or insulting others, or being persecuted by them. People will be accepted and loved regardless of who or what they are, while at the same time helped to become better than they are. The self would be lost as truth and the love for God and others begin to thrive.

This is Zion! It is the way life is supposed to be. And it is ours for the taking. It is a free gift from God, given to all those who will but accept it and live it.

HOW DIFFICULT WILL IT BE?

Elder Orson Pratt helps us to gain perspective in our attempts at forming a zion society and a celestial way of life.

What kind of a revolution would it work among the Latter-day Saints if the revelation given in March, 1831, were carried out by them “It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin?” How much of a revolution would it accomplish in Salt Lake City if this order of things should be brought about? I think it would work a greater revolution among this people than has ever been witnessed amongst them since they had an existence as a Church. (Journal of Discourses 15:355-356)

When I look at my own life, I can see immediately that I am not living the way that I should be. The Celestial Kingdom seems distant and almost unattainable to me. I don't know if I can ever live such high laws. But at rare moments, when I can forget myself almost completely and when I feel that strong love for others, I realize that I have no choice but to continue to try. If I do not continue to try, then I have quit. And if I ever quit, then I am surely thinking only of myself. For if I truly love others I will always continue to try. I will not concern myself with what happens to me or whether I am a success or a failure. It doesn't matter whether I am a success or

a failure. Perhaps I will never be able to live a celestial way of life. Perhaps the Celestial Kingdom is completely out of my reach and all of my hopes of some day living there are in vain. This is very possible in my view. Perhaps the same is true for you as well. At least I want to be able to do as much good as I can do, regardless of how much or how little that may be. When I die and am judged, the very least I want to be able to say is that I tried to do my best. I want to know that I was trying my hardest to do what I honestly believed was right. If I fail, then so be it. Forget about me or my “self.” At least I tried. This is all that anyone can ever hope to say about himself. “I tried to do my best.” Nothing more can be said of us, nothing more can be hoped for by us, and nothing more can be expected of us. However pitiful our efforts may be, to do our best is all that any of us have to offer.

...for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

It is my hope and prayer that I will always be able to do my best and that the Lord may judge my best to be sufficient at the last day. I hope and pray that some day, through the grace of God and the atonement of Jesus Christ, I may be found worthy enough to be allowed to dwell in a place where these higher laws are lived as the rule. May the same be true for you as well.

RELATED REFERENCES

For further study in this area I recommend reading at least the following references:

Proverbs 21:26
Proverbs 22:9
Matthew 5:38-48*
Matthew 6:19-21
Matthew 7:12*
Matthew 19:16-26 (JST)
Matthew 22:36-40*
Matthew 25:34-46
Mark 10:17-27 (JST)*
Mark 12:28-34*
Luke 1:52-53*
Luke 6:24-42*
Luke 12:32
Luke 14:33
Luke 16:19-31
Luke 18:18-30 (JST)*
John 15:10*
John 14:23-24*
Acts 2:44-45
Acts 4:32-35
Romans 13:8-10*
1 Corinthians 10:24 (JST)*
2 Corinthians 5:13-14
2 Corinthians 9:6-7
Galatians 5:14*
Ephesians 4:28
1 Thessalonians 3:11-12
1 Timothy 6:10
James 1:9-11*, 27
James 2:2-9, 14-16
James 5:1-3*
1 Nephi 8:27
2 Nephi 26:29-31*
2 Nephi 28:8-9, 13
2 Nephi 9:30*
2 Nephi 26:31
2 Nephi 28:13*
Jacob 2:13-19*
Mosiah 2:4*, 17
Mosiah 4:13-27*
Mosiah 5:2*
Mosiah 12:29
Mosiah 18:8-9, 27-29*
Mosiah 23:7
Alma 1:19-32*
Alma 4:6-9, 12-15
Alma 5:53-56
Alma 19:33*
Alma 32-2-5
Alma 34:28-35
Alma 38:13-14
Alma 39:14*
Alma 45:24
Alma 62:48-50
Helaman 3:33-36
Helaman 4:11-12
Helaman 6:9-17
Helaman 13:20-23*
Helaman 13:25-27
3 Nephi 6:10-15
3 Nephi 12:-38-45
3 Nephi 13:24
3 Nephi 14:12*
3 Nephi 26:19
4 Nephi 1:3
4 Nephi 1:7, 15-17*, 23-26*, 43
Mormon 8:37-40*
Ether 9:16, 21-22
Moroni 7:44-48*
D&C 6:7*
D&C 11:7*
D&C 38:39
D&C 42:20-40*, 55
D&C 44:6
D&C 49:10, 19-20*
D&C 51:3*
D&C 56:16-19
D&C 59:2-3, 16-20*
D&C 70:7-15*
D&C 76:55, 59
D&C 78:5-7*
D&C 82:17-19*

D&C 84:38
D&C 88:22, 78-79, 123-126
D&C 90:15
D&C 93:53
D&C 95:12*
D&C 104:15-18*
D&C 105:3-5*
D&C 121:34-35
D&C 132:5, 21
Moses 7:18-26*, 41-52, 67

Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson,
pp. 121, 123-124

Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 362*
TPJS p. 216

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Discourses of B. Young pp. 306-307

Journal of Discourses 12:153*

Gospel Themes, O. Pratt, pp. 624-649*

“Some Thoughts on Goal Setting,
Objectives, and Measurements,” by Elder
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1980.*

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Chapter Three

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD

This chapter includes not only a discussion concerning God the Father, but Jesus Christ as well. Because they are both so heavily involved with the plan of salvation and have done so much for us, it seems inappropriate to consider one without the other.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part deals with God's attitude towards us, his children. The second part deals with what our attitude towards God should be. I feel that in order to fully appreciate what our attitude towards God should be, we first need to understand his attitude towards us. It is by understanding God and getting to know him better that our attitude towards him is developed.

KNOWING GOD

The Savior has said,

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)

Thus we see how important it is to know the attributes and characteristics of both God the Father and his son Jesus Christ. Understanding God, his attributes and characteristics, his purposes and plans, is not easy. It does not generally come with only a little study and a few prayers. Without revelation, it is impossible. Yet without this understanding of God it will be difficult for us to return to his presence. Joseph Smith proclaimed the following,

I am going to inquire after God because I want you all to know God and be familiar with him. If I can get you to know Him, I can bring you unto him.

If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves...It is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how he became God...The first principle of the gospel is to know for a certainty the character of God, and that we may converse with him. ("The King Follett Discourse, A Newly Amalgamated Text," by Stan Larson, BYU Studies, winter 1978, pp. 193-194, 201)

It is important for us to understand that a knowledge of God and the fact that we may communicate with him are key elements in being able to be brought unto him. If we are going to church, paying our tithing, doing our home teaching, attending the temple, etc. and yet are not gaining more understanding and knowledge of the being who is our God, perhaps we should ask ourselves if we are really progressing at all. It is possible to do all of these things and yet be standing still in the eternal work of our God. If we are to live with him, we must become like him. If we are to become like him, it only makes sense that we must first come to know what He is like. We must understand who He is and how He became so. This chapter is written with hopes that we will better understand what God is like, and hence, what we should try to be like.

ONLY ONE WAY TO TRUE HAPPINESS

Perhaps the first thing we need to understand is that a means to true happiness has been given to us by God. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been provided for us and is the only way on earth to obtain true and lasting joy. It is important for us to understand that there is no other way to obtain true happiness than the way God has given us. He has provided the way for us to find truth about life itself, not just life here on earth, but all life throughout the universe.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

The gospel of Jesus Christ, his atoning sacrifice, his laws, principles, and ordinances are the only way we have of finding true meaning in life and happiness throughout eternity. The fact that this is the only way to find true happiness has been taught to us rather clearly in the scriptures.

And moreover, I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent. (Mosiah 3:17)

And now, my son, I have told you this that ye may learn wisdom, that ye may learn of me that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. Behold, he is the life and the light of the world. Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness. (Alma 38:9)

To the degree that we honestly seek and accept these things, to that same degree we will find truth and eternal happiness. Likewise, to the degree that we shun the things of God and Christ and seek or accept the “pleasurable” things of this world or our own incorrect beliefs, to that same degree we will lose truth and eternal happiness. The choice is ours and we have no alternative but to make it.

GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS US

One of the first things we should understand about God's relationship to us is that He is wholly concerned for our welfare. His feelings and knowledge stretch out, away from his being, in order to help those around him. The entire plan of salvation has been created and implemented for our benefit. It seems that a major part of God's very purpose for existing is to bring about a better way of life for us.

God himself, finding He was in the midst of spirits and glory, because He was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have the privilege to advance like himself. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith p. 354)

For behold, this is my work and my glory - to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (Moses 1:39)

If we think about this scripture in Moses for a moment, it is easy to see that this is just about the best relationship between us and God that we could ever hope for. This scripture tells us that it is the very work or purpose of God to give us as much joy and happiness as he can. This joy and happiness comes in the form of immortality and eternal life, the greatest gifts of God.⁵⁵

This scripture also tells us that caring for our welfare is the very thing that gives God his glory. This can perhaps be understood to mean that the very thing that makes God a god, his glory, is the fact that he cares for and serves others. Perhaps this is why charity is so important - you simply can't become a god without it.⁵⁶

Because of the world in which we currently live, I believe this kind of relationship is difficult for us to even comprehend. In our world of worshipping the dollar bill above all things, we could compare our relationship with God to a friend whose purpose or job it is to give us as much money as he possibly can, and this friend is a billionaire. Our friend's whole purpose in life, and the very thing that makes him a billionaire in the first place, is based upon him giving us as much money as we will accept. Wouldn't that be a friend worth having? And when we consider that the reason we seek money in this life is to experience more joy and happiness, God becomes our ultimate friend. God bypasses the money as a means to happiness and takes us directly to the happiness itself.

That God is limited in his efforts to bless us is only too obvious. For as we read the scriptures, it seems quite clear that not everybody will enjoy the blessings of eternal life.⁵⁷ This limitation, however, is created or caused by us, not by God. As strange as it sounds we are the ones stopping God from giving us his greatest gift. The Lord has told us time and time again that he is trying to give us these great blessings and we simply reject them.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. (Revelations 3:20)

And again, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, who have fallen; yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not.

O ye house of Israel whom I have spared, how oft will I gather you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if ye will repent and return unto me with full purpose of heart. (3 Nephi 10:5-6)

Imagine our rich friend saying similar words to us about the money he wants to give us. Suppose we were standing in great poverty, almost starving to death and our friend comes to our home to give us money. He knocks, but we don't even let him in the house. He calls to us,

⁵⁵ D&C 14:7; D&C 93:33

⁵⁶ Moroni 7:45-48; Moroni 10:21

⁵⁷ Matthew 7:14; D&C 132:22

asking to help us, and trying to give us the money we so desperately need, and we want nothing of it. The same is basically true with us and the Lord. We stand in great need of spiritual wealth and happiness. The Lord has it to give in abundance. He stands at our door, as it were, and knocks. He asks us to allow him to help us. Most people on earth don't even want to open the door, let alone accept what he has to offer us. As a caring hen gathers her chickens to care for and protect them, so God has extended his great love and blessings to us, and we will not. It is true that the only thing standing in God's way is us. Hence, the only thing standing in our way is us. We are the only ones preventing him from giving us the greatest gift He has to offer, that of eternal life. It only makes sense that this gift far exceeds any joy or happiness we can imagine. And yet, we are as a whole hesitant to accept it. Just as a small child is often hesitant to take the medicine that will save its life, so are we hesitant to express our faith in and obey God's commandments that we may have eternal life. It is important for us to understand that the Lord is always knocking at our door. He is always there for us. It is us who are keeping him from blessing us.

THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

This brings us to the commandments themselves. I believe the commandments of God, as given to us by revelation, are some of the most misunderstood parts of the gospel. Once again our culture and the world around us have given us a misperception of what the commandments of God really are. The commandments of God are not forced upon us, as in some military institution. Nor are they given to us entirely for God's benefit. They are also not given by God with the attitude of, "You do this for me and I'll do this for you," as we are often led to believe. Although blessings are often a natural result of obeying the commandments, as will be explained, I firmly believe that the kingdom of heaven does not work that way. The commandments are not the work we need to do in order to obtain a reward in heaven. They are the way in which heaven is shown unto us and the way in which we become heavenly beings. Through the commandments we are able to better understand what life in heaven is like. By obedience to the commandments, our life begins to change and conform to the way of life God would like us to have - the way of life that will bring us true happiness and lasting joy.

It is essential for us to understand that the commandments have been given to bless us, not to hinder us. They are blessings themselves.

Yea, blessed are they whose feet stand upon the land of Zion, who have obeyed my gospel; for they shall receive for their reward the good things of the earth, and it shall bring forth in its strength.

And they shall also be crowned with blessings from above, yea, and with commandments not a few, and with revelations in their time--they that are faithful and diligent before me. (Doctrine and Covenants 59:3-4, underline added)

Notice in these verses that commandments are included in a list of blessings the Lord will give to the faithful and diligent. He wants to give us commandments because they will be blessings to

us if we accept them. The more we accept and obey the commandments we currently have, the more commandments He will be able to bless us with. The commandments are not a necessary evil we must endure to obtain heaven, they are blessings given to us by our God in hopes that we will accept them, thus being able to return to his presence. Brigham Young has said,

By obeying the ordinances of God, mankind glorify God, but if they do not obey him, they do not detract one particle from his glory and power. The commandments of God are given to us expressly for our benefit, and if we live in obedience to them we shall live so as to understand the mind and will of God for ourselves, and concerning ourselves as individuals. (Journal of Discourses 12:126, underline added)

King Benjamin also tried to teach us that the commandments are given for our benefit and blessing.

And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it. (Mosiah 2:41)

As looked upon in their true light, the commandments are gifts from God, free for the taking. They are not earned by us, they are given to us freely by God.⁵⁸ It is true that we must put forth the effort of taking or accepting these gifts, but they are nonetheless free to all who will take them. Just as our billionaire friend might hold out a \$50.00 bill and say, “Here, this is for you. It will help you.” So also our God holds out his commandments, making a similar plea:

And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God. (Doctrine and Covenants 14:7)

The commandments of God are gifts from him to us and they are free for the taking. All we have to do is accept or obey them. And the more we accept them, the more the Lord is able to give us. Just as with the money, the commandments of God are not forced upon anyone. It is true that they are sometimes withheld from us by our wise and loving parent, but this is usually because we are not yet ready to for them.⁵⁹ Our God, in the words of the billionaire friend, is basically saying, “Here is \$5.00. If you accept it and use it well I will be able to give you \$10.00. If you accept that and use it well I will be able to give you \$20.00. I will continue in this process as long as you continue to accept the gifts I offer you. The more you accept, the greater the blessings will become. Eventually, you may have all that is mine.”

⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that the words “earn”, “earns”, “earning”, or “earned” do not appear in the scriptures. The idea of earning blessings from the Lord simply does not exist in any of his revelations.

⁵⁹ D&C 19:21-22

THE TRUE BLESSINGS OF GOD

Another part of misunderstanding the commandments of God deals with misunderstanding his blessings. Once again Satan has deceived us with our culture and the ways of the world in general. The greatest blessings of God come not in material or even measurable quantities. The greatest blessings come in the form of the change that we experience when we obey the commandments. The very act of obeying the commandment is the blessing itself. This is because it “rubs off” on us, making us more celestial and Christ-like as we obey. It is important for us to understand that the Celestial Kingdom is more a lifestyle than it is a place, more a quality of being than a quantity of material blessings. We should not look forward to such things as “streets paved with gold.” As discussed in the previous chapter, the Lord has told us many times that these types of things are not the keys to true happiness. It is not the material possessions in the Celestial Kingdom that make it a place to be sought after, it is the quality of the attitudes, desires, feelings, and thoughts within the beings who can be found there that make it a Celestial Kingdom. It is important to note that the greatest gift of God is not referred to as a place. It is referred to as a life, as “eternal life.” What kind of life is “eternal life?” It is God's way of life.⁶⁰ It is a quality of life, not a quantity of life. Though it is true that quantity of life will always follow quality, as far as the gospel is concerned, the opposite has never been true.

We often believe that we are “being good” in order to achieve something completely different than or apart from the good itself. This is not true in the gospel. For example, here on earth we work at a job and provide a service of some kind. We typically do this in order to be paid for our services, usually in money. It is generally not the work itself nor the qualities we gain from working that we are after, it is the money or “reward” that we are after. In most cases, that is the whole reason we work. If you take away the reward, most people would stop working. In this case the work and the reward are two completely separate things. This is not true of the gospel however. Though it is true that the end result of our righteous labors will be a place in a kingdom of glory, the real reason we obey the commandments is not to obtain a reward but to create a change within ourselves. This change is naturally brought about by obedience to the commandments. Obeying the commandment is the reward in and of itself. The change that occurs in us because of our righteous labors is not only the work we do, but the blessing as well. This is because it builds in us the traits we need to live happily with others. These traits, in turn, make us celestial beings. For example, we have not been asked to obey the law of tithing because it will make us rich or even because it will make the church rich. The real reason we obey it is because it will create a change within us that will bring us closer to that celestial attitude or lifestyle. The tithing itself is unimportant compared to the change in our lives that comes through obedience to this commandment.

Now we can understand more fully the words and purposes of the Lord when he said,

Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created. (Doctrine and Covenants 29:34)

⁶⁰ D&C 19:10-11 (6-13)

The Lord gives us the laws and principles that will create a lifestyle which naturally brings happiness and joy. The blessings come in that every time we adhere to these laws and principles, we develop a little bit more of that lifestyle within us. Hence, any time we are obedient or righteous to any degree we are immediately blessed. We cannot help but be blessed under such circumstances. Inasmuch as we perform a righteous act, thus making that act more a part of us, to that same degree we are blessed by being that much closer to the type of attitude, feelings, and thoughts that will bring joy and happiness. And joy and happiness is the great and final blessing and purpose of our existence.⁶¹

If we can understand the real blessings that come to us through obedience to the commandments, we will also understand why King Benjamin's words ring so true and have such great significance to us.

And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you.

And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him.

And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast? (Mosiah 2:22-24)

One of the problems we must overcome is that we usually don't understand or see the blessings of the Lord in our lives. This comes largely because we want to view blessings as material, quantifiable, or measurable. The true blessings of the Lord, and the reasons we are here on earth, have little to do with material, quantifiable, or measurable things. It is true that the material or measurable blessings will usually follow us if we are righteous.⁶² However, the true blessings (those that will naturally bring the material, measurable blessings) deal more with desires, qualities, attitudes, and lifestyles. The true blessings are difficult, if not impossible to measure or quantify.

I have found that our desire and/or ability to measure our blessings is almost directly related to our misunderstanding of which blessings are truly important. For example, such things as money, degrees, financial stability, awards or trophies, material possessions, promotions, titles, etc. are all things we can measure, quantify, or classify. Our world teaches us to love and pursue such things and we usually end up doing so. By dwelling upon these measurable blessings we can judge or categorize both ourselves and others quite easily. These types of blessings, however, are not the true blessings we should be seeking.

⁶¹ 2 Nephi 2:25

⁶² Jacob 2:18-19; Alma 1:29; D&C 6:7

When we compare material blessings to what I would call “true blessings” such as spirituality, faith, testimony, love or charity, hope, mercy, compassion, knowledge, sacrifice, etc. we see a great difference. This latter set of blessings is very difficult, if not impossible to measure, quantify, or categorize. If, for example, I were to ask you to measure your monetary wealth on a scale from one to ten, ten being the richest in any given geographical area, you would probably be able to do so with relative ease. If, however, I were to ask you to measure your faith on a scale from one to ten, ten being the most faithful in the same geographic area, you would probably fail at this attempt. Not only would it be impossible for you to determine who the most faithful person in the area might be, but it would also be impossible for you to accurately measure your own faith. With riches you could come up with figures and percentages which would be quite accurate, assuming your data was correct to begin with. With faith, any number you assign to yourself would be at best little more than a lucky guess, at worst, not even close to reality. So it is with most truly important blessings. If you can easily judge yourself or someone else by any criteria, chances are that the criteria you are using is of less importance. This is perhaps why the Lord has continually cautioned us against judging others. Most of the time we judge unrighteously and are in need of being judged ourselves.⁶³

I have found this little test of measurability to hold true in most cases. Whenever I desire a blessing of the Lord I try to measure or quantify the blessing I am seeking. If I am successful in this attempt, it is usually (not always) an indication that I am seeking for the wrong type of blessing. This is what makes goal setting so difficult and confining, while hungering and thirsting after righteousness is so important. For the most part, the only things you can set specific goals for are the measurable, quantifiable types of things. The things which are the most important to us are those things which cannot be specifically measured and hence, they cannot have a specific goal made for them. You cannot say, for example, “My faith is currently at level six. By the end of the year I want to be at level seven.” On the other hand, if we come to a point where we simply desire or “hunger and thirst after” righteousness, we will continually and naturally progress in all of the important qualities of godliness. It is a natural process rather than a forced accomplishment. The difference between making a goal to read one chapter a day in the Book of Mormon and the desire to know more about the messages contained in the Book of Mormon is greater than we usually think. The contrast between getting good grades in school and learning a great deal about important topics is often overlooked as well. The distinction between praying twice a day and praying with real intent can make all the difference in the world to us. In examples such as these, the quantifiable, measurable things (i.e. a chapter a day, good grades, praying twice a day, etc.) are generally considered good things to pursue or accomplish. However, they are seldom good in and of themselves and can rarely be included as part of the real blessings God would like us to receive (i.e. testimony, faith, knowledge, sincerity, etc.). The same is true for almost all measurable or quantifiable programs, goals, policies, desires, procedures, or blessings. The more dependant we become upon such things, the more danger there is of never being able to leave them behind in pursuit of higher blessings. Such things can hinder our future progression as much as they have helped it in the past.

⁶³ Matthew 7:1; Luke 6:37; John 7:24; 3 Nephi 14:1

In conjunction with this test of measurability, I have discovered another test which I have found very useful. Ironic as it seems, this test deals with categorizing the things we learn. Most things we learn or come to know about in this life fall into one of six categories. The six categories are:

- Mathematics
- Logic
- Physical Science
- Social Science
- Ethics
- Religion

There will obviously be some areas of learning which do not fall neatly into any of these categories and others which fall into more than one of them. However, I have found that most things we learn about are usually associated with one of the general categories listed above.

The test comes in ranking these categories first according to our ability to prove them right or wrong and then according to relative importance. If we rank them according to our ability to prove or demonstrate our findings to others, we find that the list above is pretty much in the correct order already, easiest to most difficult. For example, it is generally very easy to prove or demonstrate mathematical formulas to others. If I say “ $2+2=4$ ” and someone denies it, it is usually very easy to demonstrate the truth or falsehood of such a statement. Logic is generally next in line as far as provability is concerned. It is fairly easy to show, for example, that “If A then B, if B then C, therefore, if A then C.” However, the closer we get to the bottom of the list, the more difficult it generally becomes to prove or demonstrate our findings to others. It is very difficult to prove that God exists, for example. And what should be considered ethical or moral and what should not is a debate which has gone on since the world began. Such topics as abortion, homosexuality, etc. are very difficult to discuss or come to any definite conclusions about, one way or the other.

Now if we look at the same list and rank the categories according to relative importance, we find that exactly the opposite order is appropriate. Even though a statement such as “ $2+2=4$ ” can be easily proven, when compared to a statement such as “God exists,” I believe the difference in importance becomes quite apparent. The closer we stay to the top of the list, the less important the issues usually are. The closer we stay to the bottom of the list, the more important the issues usually are. It can be the case that we use the categories toward the top of the list in order to better understand those closer to the bottom. However, it should be noted that even in these cases, the thing that makes the top of the list important is its relationship to the bottom of the list. Logic, for example, can aid us greatly in understanding things of an ethical or religious nature. Nevertheless, logic loses importance when it is not associated with such things. Logic, in and of itself, is relatively unimportant.

An interesting thing happens when we use this list to compare what the world tries to teach us with what the Lord tries to teach us. In our education systems we usually tend to stay towards the top of the list. Seldom do our school systems offer a great deal of courses in areas such as religion or ethics. The Lord, on the other hand, seems to try to keep us closer to the bottom of the list. Besides the obvious religious and ethical topics we find in the scriptures, the Lord

encourages us to learn somewhat in the area of the social sciences as well.⁶⁴ Examples of mathematics, logic, and physical science can be found in the scriptures but not to any great degree, especially when compared to examples of religious, ethical, or social science issues.

Another interesting note is that the top of the list deals more with things or objects, whereas the bottom of the list deals more with people. I think this is a significant difference. One which I feel we need to recognize if we ever hope to obtain celestial glory.

As we can see, in order to better understand God's relationship with us it is important for us to understand the types of blessings he is trying to give us. Most of the time I feel we are praying and looking for the number 2 while He is trying to give us the letter B. If we can come to understand His list of priorities instead of dwelling upon our own, we will begin to recognize His blessings all around us. We will better understand what it is He is trying to do for us. Through a better understanding of what is truly important and what is not, we can begin to understand the greatness of God, the ignorance of man, and how we are eternally indebted to Him for all that we have and are. He has literally done everything for us. He has offered us every gift we need in order to obtain the greatest gift of all - that of eternal life and exaltation. All we have to do is accept what has been freely offered to us. To all such people is given eternal life.

If the idea of obeying commandments of God seems too harsh or confining to you, perhaps you simply need to better understand what is happening. Instead of “obeying commandments,” think of it as “accepting blessings.” There is no difference between the two.

WHY FOLLOW CHRIST?

Another example of God's love towards us and his desire to bless us is given in the model of Jesus Christ. If we want to know what type of being God is, we should look at the type of being Christ is. If we can understand Christ, we can understand God the Father. The Savior has said,

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

*Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.
(John 14:7-10)*

⁶⁴ D&C 88:77-79; D&C 90:15; D&C 93:53

From this scripture we can see that Christ exemplifies the Father. If we can come to understand Christ's motivation behind the things he did while here on earth, it only makes sense that we will better understand the things God the Father has done for us.

Why did Christ do the things he did? Why did he take such risks, knowing that he would be persecuted and eventually killed for his actions? Perhaps the first key to understanding His motivation comes in understanding that he loved us.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (John 15:9-15)

Notice the chain of examples that exists in these verses. Just as the Father loves Christ, Christ loves us and commands us to love each other. Being concerned for our welfare, Christ wants to teach us about this love that our “joy might be full.” There is joy and happiness to be found in this idea of loving each other. Hence the commandment “That [we] love one another, as [Christ] has loved [us].” Once again, the commandment is the blessing. It brings joy and happiness to us. We are to use Christ as our example just as He has used the Father as his example. We, then, are to become examples to each other. The Savior then indicates to us just how much he loves us by sacrificing all, even his very life, for his “friends.” His plea to us then and today is that we be willing to do the same - to sacrifice ourselves for others, even our very lives, if necessary. Only through gaining this self-sacrificing love for others can we find true happiness and joy. The significance of the following scripture is clear when we understand the importance of placing ourselves last on our list of priorities:

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 16:24-25; Matthew 10:39)

The only way to find true and lasting joy for ourselves is to do what Christ did, namely, forget ourselves, love God and our fellow man, and do our Father's will, that we may continue in this love.

It is interesting to note that whenever Christ asked the Father for anything for himself, he always did so with the interest of others in mind. In essence He said, "Bless me, that I in turn will be better able to bless others." Scriptural examples of Christ's unselfish desire to be blessed by God are abundant.

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. (John 16:1-2, underline added)

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:19, 22-23, underline added)

Just as with God the Father, everything Christ has done has been for the benefit of others. The one potentially selfish utterance He ever gave was just previous to suffering for all the sins of the world and being nailed to the cross by his hands and feet.

And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. (Matthew 26:39)

Even then He succumbed and did his Father's will for our benefit. None of us have ever had to go through the torment Christ went through for us. And he did it for God and us, not for himself. This is the great key - that He loves us, that he will do anything in order to help us and bless us. He is willing to sacrifice all that is possible for a being to sacrifice, and do so in behalf of God, truth, and others.

Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit--and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink--

Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. (Doctrine and Covenants 19:18-19)

What does He ask of us in return for his great sacrifice on our behalf?

And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you. (Mosiah 2:22)

All that He asks of us is that we accept his blessings so that he may give to us the gifts of eternal life and exaltation. In my opinion, this is a pretty good deal.

This is true and pure love - the pure love of Christ. I think it is difficult for us to completely understand how much Christ has given of himself in support of God, truth, and others. If you can, try to put yourself in Christ's shoes for a moment. Consider what your existence and your attitude would be like if you had done all that Christ has done. In the pre-mortal existence Christ sacrificed himself for us and the will of the Father (truth) when he said "Here am I, send me."⁶⁵ He knew full well what kind of hardships that would bring him. He gave of himself on our behalf when he created the world and prepared all things for our progression. Christ then came to earth himself and sacrificed his time, talents, and literally everything with which he was blessed in order to do the will of the Father and to teach and bless others. He sacrificed himself in Gethsemane, bleeding at every pore, in order that we might be able to repent and be forgiven of all our mistakes in life. He then sacrificed his own life in a most painful manner in order to teach and bless us. And after His death he continued to teach and bless, paving the way for immortality, that we may "receive a fullness of joy."⁶⁶ We know that for our sakes He will return again to live on earth for a thousand years. All this and more has Christ sacrificed for us. I think it is safe to say that everything He is and does is focused around giving of himself in order to serve others. Surely this is a being worth worshipping! Surely this is a being we should seek and in whom we should place our trust! And surely, this is the sacrificing example we should emulate in our own lives. We should place God and truth first, others second, and ourselves last. Only in this manner will we find power in the priesthood, lasting joy, and happiness.

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD

In its simplest form, our mission and purpose is laid before us; we should do what God the Father and Jesus Christ have done - be able to sacrifice all that we have and are for God, truth, and others. This sacrificing attitude will be both a blessing to us as well as to other people. However, and this is the grand key and paradox, to the degree that we do it for ourselves, to that same degree we fall short of fully achieving the righteous attitude of which I speak. To the degree that we seek to glorify or serve ourselves we will be withheld from the kingdom of God and from the full blessings He has to offer us. Likewise, to the degree that we serve unselfishly and are willing to sacrifice ourselves for that which is right, to that same degree we will be blessed by the Lord. If we can forget or "lose" ourselves in lieu of God, truth, and others, we

⁶⁵ Abraham 3:27

⁶⁶ D&C 93:33-34

will, in turn, be added upon in the areas of knowledge and priesthood power.⁶⁷ The less we care about ourselves, the more the Lord will be able to give to us. It is truly a paradox. The only way to find yourself is to lose yourself. The only way for us to find joy and happiness is through our willingness to give it up in the service of God, truth, and others. President Brigham Young has tried to explain this paradox.

Man may think, and some of them do, that we have a right to work for ourselves; but I say we have no time to do that in the narrow, selfish sense generally entertained when speaking about working for self. We have no time allotted to us here on the earth to work for ourselves in that sense; and yet when laboring in the most disinterested and fervent manner for the cause and Kingdom of God, it is all for ourselves. Though our time be entirely occupied in laboring for the advancement of the Kingdom of God on the earth we are in reality laboring most effectually for self, for all our interest and welfare, both in time and eternity, are circumscribed and bound up in that Kingdom. (Journal of Discourses 14:101)

Indeed, it is true that if we can learn to love the Lord our God with all our hearts He will lead us in the ways of truth and light. If we could break down our great purpose and mission in life into its most elementary form, it may be possible to express most of it within the following two passages of scripture:

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40)

And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.

Behold, this is according to the law and the prophets... (Doctrine and Covenants 59:21-22)

This should be our attitude towards life itself - to give our all for God and his kingdom. It is an attitude directed not only towards God, our Father, but also includes his posterity as well. It is humble, faithful, righteous, unselfish, and if done properly, it allows us to be honest with ourselves, with God, and with others (if others will adopt the same attitude). If we can

⁶⁷ Further thoughts concerning the importance of these statements in connection with the priesthood will be discussed in the “Conclusion and Final Remarks” section, following this chapter.

incorporate this attitude into all areas of our life we will begin to recognize the truthfulness of the gospel, the greatness of God, the brotherhood of man, and the insignificance of the self. We will live the Law of Consecration and all other celestial laws of eternal life and exaltation. These things are what the commandments and the ordinances of the gospel are trying to teach us.

We covenant to live the law of consecration. This law is that we consecrate our time, talents, strength, property, and money for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God on this earth and the establishment of Zion.

Until one abides by the laws of obedience, sacrifice, the gospel, and chastity, he cannot abide the law of consecration, which is the law pertaining to the celestial kingdom. "For if you will that I give you place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you"⁶⁸ (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p. 121)

Unless we obey truth, give of ourselves, serve others, and display proper relationships in our families, we will never be able to live the laws required of us for entrance into the Celestial Kingdom. It is a process leading us toward perfection. The end result of this process is losing yourself through becoming one with others in light and truth. This is what the atonement or "at-one-ment" is all about. The question is often asked, "What are we required to give of ourselves in pursuit of truth and the service of our fellow man?" The answer remains constant, "Everything."

WE OWE HIM EVERYTHING

It is interesting that one of the things that offends God is not recognizing His hand in all things. The Lord apparently wants us to recognize the fact that literally everything we are and have has been provided for us by him. He wants us to recognize that without Him we would have never progressed this far, nor would we be able to progress any further. If you have given much thought to the gospel, you should be able to honestly ask yourself, "What am I without God?" and, "What am I without the atonement of Christ?" If you accept the true gospel of Jesus Christ, as taught by the scriptures of his true church, you must also accept the fact that without God you simply would not have anything. As you begin to understand the great plan of God, you begin to realize the fact that you are nothing by comparison.⁶⁹

Throughout the ages our prophets have tried to teach us that all things we possess (or believe we possess) come from God. Whenever we look at ourselves as brilliant or whenever we believe that a man prospers according to his own strength⁷⁰ or leave God out of this picture of progress, we are in error. As Brigham Young explains:

⁶⁸ D&C 78:7

⁶⁹ Moses 1:10

⁷⁰ Alma 30:17

Our religion measures, weighs, and circumscribes all the wisdom in the world--all that God has ever revealed to man. God has revealed all the truth that is now in the possession of the world, whether it be scientific or religious. The whole world are under obligation to him for what they know and enjoy; they are indebted to him for it all, and I acknowledge him in all things. (Journal of Discourses 8:162)

There is no ingenious mind that has ever invented anything beneficial to the human family but what he obtained it from the one Source, whether he knows or believes it or not. There is only one Source whence men obtain wisdom, and that is God, the Fountain of all wisdom; and though men may claim to make their discoveries by their own wisdom, by meditation and reflection, they are indebted to our Father in Heaven for all. (Journal of Discourses 13:148)

Regarding these thoughts, there are basically three kinds of people in this world, those who do not yet know that these statements are true, those who know that they are true but who are too proud to accept or live their lives in accordance with such doctrine, and those who know of the truthfulness of these statements and reflect that knowledge in the way they live their lives. Of the three types of people, the second of the three is the worst off. The second category of people is usually proud and often hypocritical.

As far as the members of Christ's church are concerned, we have been taught these things plainly. The scriptures are laid before us and the way to know of their truthfulness has been made known unto us. If we ever boast of ourselves in any way other than that which includes God as the main force behind our achievements, we may very well fall into the category of the proud and hypocritical.

I say unto you, that there are not any among you, except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things, but what knoweth that ye are eternally indebted to your heavenly Father, to render to him all that you have and are;... (Mosiah 2:34)

These words of King Benjamin are as true for most of us today as they were for the saints in his own time. They are true for all people who come to a knowledge of God and his purposes.

The scriptures teach us that sooner or later all of God's children will come to a knowledge of the truthfulness of these things.⁷¹ At the time when people come to this knowledge of God and his purposes, when they have the knowledge of the eternities and of the greatness of God, the only thing left that will keep them out of the kingdom of God is their own pride and lack of obedience to the knowledge they have been given. It is just so with the saints of God's church here on earth. Quite often the members of the church of God become proud because of all of our blessings. Indeed, we have many blessings for which we should be thankful. We truthfully claim to have prophets and apostles in our midst. We accurately proclaim to the world that we have great knowledge and the power of God at our fingertips. And yet, at the very moment we begin to shift the praise and recognition for these things from God to ourselves, at that very

⁷¹ Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10; Mosiah 27:31; D&C 88:104

instant we are immediately in the wrong and the Lord withdraws many of the blessing of which we boast. The Lord has told us plainly that we are not to use his gifts for our own purposes or for our own praise. They can only be used in the humble service of God and others. Anytime we use the things of God to recognize ourselves instead of God, we instantly fall into the category of the proud and remove ourselves from the attitude of the gods, and hence, from eternal life with the gods - we refuse the gifts God is offering to us.

Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?

Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson--

That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins; or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God.

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

Hence many are called, but few are chosen. (Doctrine and Covenants 121:34-40)

Someone once said, "True greatness comes in recognizing how great you are, and realizing that it doesn't make you any greater than anybody else."⁷² This is the attitude we, as Latter-day Saints, must have. It is true that we have had the gospel of Jesus Christ conferred upon us, along with the priesthood of God. However, when we begin to be puffed up in pride to any degree because of these great blessings, when we begin to judge those who do not have these things or think of ourselves as better than they in any way, with that same thought we deny the power of God that has brought these things to us. God himself becomes anguished or grieved because, once again, we are not accepting the great gifts he is freely offering to us. We withhold ourselves from the higher blessings that God wants us to possess.

⁷² Author unknown

CONVERSING WITH OUR FATHER

There are times when the communication between God and yourself will seem almost non-existent. Sometimes, even if you feel you are trying to do everything you can to receive an answer to your prayer, you just seem to be left alone, to yourself. I believe this is often part of the plan of our progression. This is part of our growth process. Often there are decisions to be made and actions to be taken which we can handle ourselves. As we grow in righteousness and become more and more pure in heart, the Lord expects us to make some of our own decisions and to learn from them.

For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.

Verily, I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.

But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned. (Doctrine and Covenants 58:26-29)

Although we are commanded to do many things of our own free will, I do not believe we are to do much of anything without prayer, study, and earnest listening for instruction from the spirit. Because we are so ignorant and because we have so far to go before our hearts and minds are perfect enough to always make good decisions, the Lord has asked us to pray always about the things we want to do. We should always include the Lord by inviting inspiration to be a part of all our thoughts, acts, and decisions. It is not so much that the inspiration will always be there for us, but that the council of the Lord should always be sought after and his inspiration never be looked at as a thing of naught.

But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally; and that which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men; for some are of men, and others of devils. (Doctrine and Covenants 46:7)

But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (2 Nephi 46:9)

If you have prayed earnestly and studied it out in your mind as well as in the writings of the prophets, if you have fasted and done all things you know how to do and still you can recognize no answer, come up with your own answer as best you can and tell the Lord what you plan to do. If your heart is humble and your desires are sincere, the Lord will not forget you. If you can honestly say that you know of nothing else you can do that would bring down an answer from heaven, other than that which you have already done, it is perhaps time to act for yourself on the matter, praying all the while that God will bless your efforts and not allow you to be led astray or to do something contrary to his will. It has been my experience that this is often the time when true answers and inspiration come.

Often there will be times when you think you have received an answer but you are not sure. Sometimes we answer our own prayers because of our strong desires for a certain answer. Other times we are simply not sure about the answer we feel we may have received. In such cases you should follow the same pattern as outlined above. Make sure you have done all things you can think of to obtain an answer from God. If you believe you have received an answer, approach Him in prayer and tell him that. Express to Him your honest desires to do what is right and that to the best of your understanding you have received an answer. Tell Him that, barring any further developments, you plan to express faith in the answer you believe you have received by pursuing that course the best you can. If you are humble, sincere, and willing to subject yourself to whatever the Lord wants you to do, He will not allow you to be led astray. Just do your best. What more can you do?

Perhaps the most important and yet most difficult part of obtaining an answer from God is being humble enough to do whatever God wants, instead of what you want. Usually when we pray, we pray for selfish reasons. We are usually concerned about things affecting our own life and seldom do we see the big picture. We are usually as children, constantly asking our parents for candy instead of vegetables. We should realize that though these prayers are often answered, if we are placing our selfish desires before God's desires, our prayers may not always be heard or answered in the manner we would like them to be. By prayerful and sincere study of the scriptures and other good books we can come to know what God desires. By coming to know what God desires we can come to know what is best for us. Just as with the child asking for candy, it is often difficult for us to learn what we should ask of our Father in heaven. Most people on earth don't want to learn what God desires. Those who do learn it, often find it difficult to accept or follow. The main reason we find it difficult to accept or follow is because we are proud and selfish instead of meek and humble. We usually love ourselves more than we love God and truth.

If we pray for something from God, we should first be honest and humble enough to realize that we may be praying for the wrong thing - that our knowledge and understanding is little and that His is great. We then need to be able to express our faith in the answer He sends us. We do this by accepting and following whatever answer He gives us, even if it is difficult. We must place God and truth above ourselves in every way. If we sincerely follow these guidelines, or in other words, develop this attitude within us, our prayers will be heard and eventually answered.⁷³

⁷³ 1 Peter 1:7; Ether 12:6; D&C 105:19

EXPRESSING FAITH IN GOD

The scriptures offer us two basic definitions of faith.⁷⁴ They are as follows:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

And now as I said concerning faith--faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true. (Alma 32:21)

In addition to these two definitions, we know that true faith is very dependant upon works.

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:26)

It is important that we realize the implications of these statements. Quite often we use definitions of faith which are different from those found in the scriptures. Recognizing what true faith is and how to apply it in our lives must be one of our chief concerns if we are to approach God in a manner which is pleasing unto Him.⁷⁵ It is well that we discuss the definitions of faith as given to us by our Heavenly Father.

Many people believe that faith is something you express blindly, without “substance” or “evidence.” As we just read in Hebrews, our faith should include such things. It has never been God's intent that we believe in ignorance or with no support for our belief. Concerning this matter, Elder B. H. Roberts has said,

I maintain that 'simple faith' -- which is so often ignorant and simpering acquiescence, and not faith at all -- but simple faith taken at its highest value, which is faith without understanding of the thing believed, is not equal to intelligent faith, the faith that is a gift from God, supplemented by earnest endeavor to find through prayerful thought and research a rational ground for faith -- for acceptance of truth; and hence the duty of striving for a rational faith in which the intellect as well as the heart -- the feeling -- has a place and is a factor. (B.H. Roberts on the Intellectual and Spiritual Quest, Seventy's Course in Theology, vol. 5)

It is important for us to understand that the Lord wants us to know why we are doing the things he asks of us. He wants us to understand his will, his commandments, his plan for the salvation of man - everything that we are ready to understand, even the mysteries.⁷⁶ It is not His intent to

⁷⁴ See also Alma 32:26; Ether 12:6; James 2:18; James 2:20; Alma 26:22

⁷⁵ D&C 63:11

⁷⁶ This may well have been phrased, “especially the mysteries.” See Mosiah 2:9; Alma 12:9; Alma 26:22; D&C 6:7; D&C 8:11; D&C 42:61; D&C 76:7; D&C 90:14; D&C 107:18-19.

keep us in the dark or to lead us blindly, without reason or purpose. Although there are times when we must simply depend upon the Lord for things we cannot yet understand, it is always His intent to teach us as much as we are prepared to learn. Once again, it is us who stops Him from giving us more, not Him.

Another misconception about faith is the belief that we must have a perfect knowledge about something before we can accept or act upon it. The fact that faith is not knowledge has stopped many people from progressing further in the gospel. Many people will terminate their religious or spiritual pursuits merely because they cannot “prove” their findings one way or another. This is one of the worst mistakes we can make. Ironically enough, most things in life depend upon faith, not knowledge, whether religious or not. There is very little in life that we “know” to be true. Almost everything we do in this life is governed by and depends upon faith. As we grow and learn we find that many of our previously held beliefs fall by the wayside as they are replaced by a more complete understanding of things. For example, many things we “knew” to be true as teenagers have somehow found their way to a spot in our brain which is seldom used anymore. The basic process and the reality of our situation is not much different for us now than it was then. We still don't “know” much, but we still believe that we know quite a bit. In reality, we are the teenagers of the Lord. We are overconfident, self-centered, proud, and we almost always want to do things our own way instead of the way He wants us to do things. Joseph Smith once taught that,

If the Church knew all the commandments, one-half they would condemn through prejudice and ignorance. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, P. 111)

We must understand that this statement by the prophet refers to us, the members of Christ's church. Joseph Smith has also said,

I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, P. 331)

We obviously do not have all the Lord would like us to have, but it is our own silly preconceptions and proud stupidity that keeps us from the rest.

If we can make this teenage comparison in our minds we will begin to realize how much patience the Lord has with us. He must deal with us in much the same way that a loving parent deals with a teenager. It's a tough job. If we are to help the Lord in His effort to teach us, we must first come to understand that we are ignorant - that we know very little. We must also come to understand that God is our parent. He is the one with the answers we need and He is trying to explain to us what we are going through and how to handle our various difficulties in life. If we seek His council and listen to Him, we will find the answers. If we rely upon our own wisdom, we will be as frustrated as any confused teenager on earth.

I have found a system which helps me to understand the relationship between knowledge and faith. Although it is not an exact system, I have found it to be quite useful in my search for truth. It works like this: whenever I encounter a possible truth (and I have found that most things are possible) I use a rough percentage system to categorize my belief of or faith in that possible truth. For example, I may believe in something on a 60-40 relationship. This means that with my present understanding of the issues at hand, I believe in the possible truth about 60 percent and disbelieve it about 40 percent. Using this system I ask myself several questions. Would I bet my next paycheck on a 60-40 belief? I probably would not. Would I continue to act upon and believe the evidence that has led me to a 60 percent belief? Sure I would. Why not? Do I completely throw away my evidence which led me to 40 percent of unbelief? I absolutely do not. As I continue my learning and add more “substance” and “evidence” to my faith, I find that my numbers will usually change. A year from now I may view this same issue on a 70-30 relationship or I may become more confused and view it on a 55-45 relationship. If a decision must be made, I will always try to act upon the higher percentage of belief, always making a constant and deliberate effort to add to my understanding of the issue at hand. My goal is always 100-0, which is the point at which I feel knowledge occurs. However, I have found that the accomplishment of a 100-0 relationship is extremely difficult to achieve. There are several areas in which I feel I am in the 90's, but relatively few that I feel are 100 percent certain. The further away from the 50-50 relationship I can become, the more inclined I am to act upon and support my beliefs. The closer to a 50-50 relationship I am, the less inclined I am to take a stand on or act upon my beliefs.

When using this system it is important to understand that there are many different things which can give substance or evidence to our faith. Never discount such things as feelings, thoughts, or natural inclinations. Such things as these can lead you astray, but they can also be messages to you from God. Promptings of the spirit (whether feelings or thoughts), visitations, scriptures, reasonable arguments, personal experiences, testimonies from other people, and the writings found in all good books can and should be used to give substance to your faith. In addition, there are many other forms of confirmation. We should use almost all things at our disposal to find truth, keeping in mind that some are of more importance than others and that the Lord has outlined many ways for us to obtain answers to our prayers. These should have first priority. Be open-minded and allow the Lord to talk to you in His own way. I believe that all too often we discount some form or other of evidence merely because we are too closed-minded to see what the Lord is trying to tell us or in what manner. Brigham Young has offered some good advice along these lines.

The Saints who live their religion will be exalted, for they never will deny any revelation which the Lord has given or may give, though, when there is a doctrine coming to them which they cannot comprehend fully, they may be found saying, “The Lord sendeth this unto me, and I pray that he will save and preserve me from denying anything which proceedeth from him, and give me patience to wait until I can understand it for myself.”

Such persons will never deny, but will allow those subjects which they do not understand, to remain until the visions of their minds become open. This is the course which I have invariably pursued, and if anything came that I could not understand, I would pray until I could comprehend it.

Do not reject anything because it is new or strange, and do not sneer nor jeer at what comes from the Lord, for if we do, we endanger our salvation. (Journal of Discourses 3:266)

As you learn more about God and his commandments, try this system I have found. Always try to add to your understanding, realizing how basically ignorant you are. As you gain more understanding or “substance” for your belief, it has been my experience that you will generally find evidence for both sides of the issue. Always act upon or express your faith in the greatest amount of substance or evidence, but never throw away the evidence which supports the opposite view. If you use this system and your numbers are not continually changing as you seek and learn more, you are probably doing something wrong. It is very important that you are open to the idea of your percentages changing on a regular basis. They most certainly will.

The next thing to discuss about faith is that it necessarily depends upon works in order to be faith. As the scripture says, “faith without works is dead.” Although you may believe something with all your heart, until you act upon it you are not exercising true faith. Faith, as a form of action, will always bring greater substance or evidence concerning the thing believed. To sit back and say, “I believe I can get an answer to my prayer,” and yet to never pray, is to be on a dead end road. Your belief is of little or no value in such cases. By acting on your belief you can gain experience, whether positive or negative, which will serve to give you more evidence. Even if nothing happens as a result of your actions, that still adds more substance to your belief than you had before, it may just be in a direction that you had not anticipated or desired. By not acting upon your beliefs, you often deny yourself the opportunity to learn by experience. Few testimonies given to you from other people will ever be as convincing to you or mean as much to you as your own personal experiences. By continually putting your beliefs to the test, your faith will become a living faith, changing continually but always growing stronger because of new experiences and hence, new evidences.

If you have come to a point at which you believe the commandments of God, see that you obey them.⁷⁷ It is one of the Lord's primary methods of teaching us more truth, or, in other words, of giving us greater substance or evidence for our faith. Ofttimes the Lord will ask things of us which we cannot yet understand or for which we have little or no evidence upon which to base our faith. At times such as these, if we are obedient to Him, we will usually gain an understanding of things because of the experience that comes from acting upon our belief. If works always accompany our beliefs, our faith will always grow and develop, and we will learn things that can often be learned in no other way.

Many of the thoughts I have expressed can be illustrated with the use of the chart below. This box can serve as a guide for us in judging our faith in a particular topic. It weighs our action against our evidence in an attempt to indicate areas of weakness. The ideal is found in box “A.” This box represents both a great deal of support or evidence for our belief as well as a strong disposition to act upon that evidence or belief. A person found in box “A” will always be rewarded with a greater and greater understanding of things. People found in boxes “B” or “C”

⁷⁷ Mosiah 4:10

will usually be able to progress and add to their evidence, but they will never be equal to those in box “A.” Box “B” may very well represent the blind or “simple” faith spoken of earlier. Box “C” often discloses our proud intellectuals - those who find it much more appealing to know and not do than to do and not know. In box “D” we find those people who are dependant almost solely upon other influences than themselves for any kind of greater understanding. They have not learned much and they do not act upon that which they have learned. They are all but standing still in their progression and their faith is all but dormant. Their faith cannot increase much, if at all, until they begin to act or learn or (preferably) both.

	Strongly Supported (Much Evidence)	Weakly Supported (Little Evidence)
Strong Disposition To Act	(Box A) Celestial	(Box B) Terrestrial
Weak Disposition To Act	(Box C) Terrestrial	(Box D) Telestial

As you study the boxes, think of a commandment of the Lord (i.e. tithing, chastity, consecration, celestial marriage, etc.). Now, with the commandment in your mind, place yourself in the appropriate box to represent where you think are in regard to this commandment. Do you understand it more than you obey it? Do you obey it, even though you do not understand it? I have found this exercise to be especially helpful to me when I am struggling with a particular commandment. Usually when I am having difficulty accepting some part of the gospel I find that either I have not spent much time studying the topic or I have not put it to the test by acting upon it or both.

You will notice that I have placed a kingdom of glory in each of the four boxes. An interesting thing occurs when you compare the boxes above with scriptures discussing the kingdoms of glory. When you match the scriptures below with the their corresponding box, an interesting parallel is found.

- BOX A - Doctrine and Covenants 76:51-53
- BOX B - Doctrine and Covenants 76:75
- BOX C - Doctrine and Covenants 76:79
- BOX D - Doctrine and Covenants 76:82, 101, 103

Interestingly enough, Brigham Young's definition of perfection seems to correspond with the concept of box “A.”

We all occupy diversified stations in the world, and in the kingdom of God. Those who do right, and seek the glory of the Father⁷⁸ in heaven, whether their knowledge be little or much, or whether they can do little or much, if they do the very best they know how, they are perfect... "Be ye as perfect as ye can," for that is all we can do, tho' it is written, "Be ye perfect as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." To be as perfect as we possibly can according to our knowledge, is to be just as perfect as our Father in heaven is. He cannot be any more perfect than he knows how, any more than we. The sin that will cleave to all the posterity of Adam and Eve is, that they have not done as well as they know how." (Deseret News Weekly, August 31, 1954, p. 37, underline added. See also "Choose you This Day," priesthood manual, p. 183)

I feel it is important to recognize that both Brigham Young as well as the idea of box "A" indicate a direction, course, or path instead of a destination, conclusion, or result.

WHAT WILL BE THE RESULT

I feel that King Benjamin sums up the thoughts of this chapter very well,

For behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state--

I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body--

I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation, through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind, which ever were since the fall of Adam, or who are, or who ever shall be, even unto the end of the world.

And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you.

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.

⁷⁸ D&C 93:36

And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.

And again I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel.

And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true. (Mosiah 4:5-12)

The plans are laid before us. The commandments are there for all to partake. The ordinances of the temple have been revealed to us to teach us how to regain God's presence and blessings, both in this life as well as the life to come. Are we taking them seriously? When all is said and done, will the Lord have every right to say the following to us, the members of His church?

But what could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slackened mine hand, that I have not nourished it, Nay, I have nourished it, and I have digged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it; and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the end draweth nigh. And it grieveth me that I should hew down all the trees of my vineyard, and cast them into the fire that they should be burned. Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard? (Jacob 5:47; see also Isaiah 5:4; 2 Nephi 15:4)

And what will the answer be to His last question, "Who is it that has corrupted my vineyard?" The only possible answer is "me." As far as God's plans for me are concerned, I am the only being in the universe who is allowed to thwart His desires to give me His kingdom. The same is true for all of us.

I testify in the name of Jesus Christ that God lives, that He loves us, and will do all within His power to help us if we will but accept the things He offers us. His arms are stretched out still towards all of us, His children.⁷⁹ Surely we can express enough desire and faith to forget ourselves for a moment and to kneel down before Him and ask Him, "What is true? Please make it known unto me." And then, after receiving His answer, to follow up in sincerity with, "What would you have me do about it?" When you receive this second answer, please do whatever it is He asks of you, no matter how difficult it may be. It is the only way in all the universe to obtain true, lasting peace and happiness. I know that these things are true. There is no doubt in my mind that they are true for all the inhabitants of the world.

⁷⁹ Isaiah 5:25; 9:12-21; 10:4

It is my humble prayer that I will always be able to accept the gifts of God to the best of my ability, and to do so with faith, reverence, and humility, that I may return into his presence and live in a world where peace and love are the rule rather than the exception. I pray the same for all who read this. May you learn about God. May you believe that He is and that you are dependant upon Him for all that you have and are, for this is verily true. And may you diligently act upon those beliefs all the days of your life.

RELATED REFERENCES

For further study in this area I recommend reading at least the following references:

Isaiah 5:4*	D&C 58:26-29*
Matthew 10:8	D&C 59:3-4*
Matthew 10:39*	D&C 59:20-22*
Matthew 16:24-25*	D&C 88:32-33 (22-35)
Matthew 22:38-40*	D&C 121:34-40*
Matthew 26:39*	D&C 136:27
John 14:6-10*	Moses 1:39*
John 15:9-15*	Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p. 123
John 16:1-2*	TPJS p. 354*
John 17:3*	TPJS, P.111*
John 17:19-23*	Journal of Discourses 8:162*
Romans 3:24	Journal of Discourses 14:101*
Romans 8:32	Journal of Discourses 12:126*
1 Corinthians 2:12	Journal of Discourses 13:148*
Hebrews 11:1*	
James 2:26*	“Some Thoughts on Goal Setting, Objectives, and Measurements,” by Elder Dean L. Larsen, BYU devotional May 13, 1980.
Revelations 3:20*	
Revelations 21:6	
Revelations 22:17	
2 Nephi 2:4	
2 Nephi 15:4*	“Principles,” by Elder Boyd K. Packer, <u>Ensign</u> , March, 1985.
2 Nephi 26:24-33	
2 Nephi 46:9*	
Jacob 5:47*	“Let them Govern Themselves,” by Elder Boyd K. Packer, Regional Representatives Seminar, March 30, 1990.
Mosiah 2:22-24*	
Mosiah 2:34*	
Mosiah 2:41*	
Mosiah 3:17*	
Mosiah 4:5-12*	
Alma 32:21*	* <i>This reference was used (at least in part) within this chapter.</i>
Alma 38:9*	
3 Nephi 10:5-6*	
Ether 12:8-9	
4 Nephi 1:3	
Moroni 7:48	
Moroni 10:8	
D&C 10:66	
D&C 14:7*	
D&C 19:18-19*	
D&C 29:34*	
D&C 46:7*	

CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

I mentioned at the beginning of this work that the three chapters of this book really only portray a single attitude. When the proper attitudes are obtained in the areas of self, others, and God, we find that it develops into one grand perspective. When achieved and maintained, this grand perspective governs our actions, thoughts, and desires completely, leading us in the ways of truth and light. It is no small matter. It is salvation. It is the uniting of yourself, others, and God. For the most part I have found that salvation is a direction, an attitude, or course, not a destination or end target. It is my hope that the doctrines portrayed in this book have come close to placing us on that true path or in that true direction.

THE POWER OF THE PRIESTHOOD

It is important to note at the conclusion of this work that the very power of the priesthood depends upon this attitude we have discussed. The priesthood is not some unknown “force” or mysterious power in the universe. At least no such thing has been mentioned to us. The scriptures teach us what the power of the priesthood is.

And it came to pass that Adam, being tempted of the devil--for, behold, the devil was before Adam, for he rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which is my power; and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me because of their agency; (Doctrine and Covenants 29:36, underline added)

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal. (Abraham 2:11, underline added)

Priesthood power comes in that intelligent beings honor each other by covenanting with full purpose of heart to love and serve each other. The power of the priesthood is people, or in other words, intelligences acting for the benefit of each other. Satan knows this truth as well anyone. This is how he gains his priesthood power as well. However, he does it through force, secret combinations, selfishness, and works of darkness. These things bind men down to him and put them in situations that selfishly force them to obey instead of lovingly persuading them to accept. Satan uses fear and secret combinations in order to obtain the honor and respect of men. God on the other hand uses charity, agency, and covenants, along with works of light and pure love to bind men together and bring strength to the whole through righteous service and the patriarchal order.

It is vital that we understand that true priesthood power comes from seeking the interest of the other, that all may be edified, strengthened, and built up. The moment we begin to do it for ourselves, as Satan and his followers do, we have lost the true priesthood of God. Doing something for yourself and doing something with the true priesthood of God are opposites. This again is the great irony and paradox of the situation. If you seek the honor of men for yourself,

you are serving Satan. If, however, you seek the glory of God in truth and light and strive to lose yourself in the service of God and others, the honor of men will come unto you naturally and eternally. Why do intelligent beings trust and honor God? It is because they know He will always do what is best for them. When a whole group of such beings exist together it is called Zion or a celestial kingdom. Listen to the words of the Lord concerning priesthood power and how it works.

Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?

Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson--

That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. (Doctrine and Covenants 121:34-36)

Notice first the selfish aspiring to the honors of men. This is Satan's plan - to obtain power for the self in spite of others. Second, notice the inseparable connection between the priesthood and the powers of heaven. What are the powers of heaven? They are people or rather, intelligent beings.⁸⁰ They are the things which act rather than the things which are acted upon.⁸¹ Let's continue,

That they [the rights of the priesthood] may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins; or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. (Doctrine and Covenants 121:37, underline added)

Notice that all of the sins just listed deal with doing things for the self rather than the other or the whole. Why do the heavens withdraw themselves when we do such things? Because the righteous beings can no longer honor us. We are no longer a part of them for we are no longer looking out for their interests. And when the being known as "the Spirit of the Lord" withdraws itself from us, our last bits of priesthood power go with it or in other words, we are left to ourselves.

Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God.

⁸⁰ At least the following works from the Nag Hamadi library contain references describing people as powers: The Gospel of Philip; The Apocalypse of Adam; The Concept of Our Great Power. See also 3 Nephi 20:22; 3 Nephi 28:7; Moses 7:27.

⁸¹ 2 Nephi 2:14

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

Hence many are called, but few are chosen. (Doctrine and Covenants 121:38-40, underline added)

The Lord continues by instructing us in the proper way to obtain priesthood power, or in others words, the proper way to obtain the honor of men in this world and the world to come. Notice how it all deals with how we treat other beings.

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile--

Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.

Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever. (Doctrine and Covenants 121:41-46, underline added)

Notice the natural “flow” of priesthood power coming to us when we deal with others the way we should. Notice also that, unlike Satan, we are trying to obtain it “without compulsory means.” In a zion society, as in the Celestial Kingdom, we are not compelled to do anything. We simply do it for the love of God, truth, and other people.

All of these things concerning the proper use of priesthood power deal with the relationships between ourselves and other people (intelligences). True priesthood power is only gained by the principles of righteousness. For this is the only way to truly gain the loving trust or honor of others. Performing priesthood functions for ourselves or simply because the priesthood has been conferred upon us demonstrates the opposite of the true doctrine of priesthood power. Indeed, if we want to become as the gods and have the power of the priesthood flow unto us and to our children after us, we need to learn these lessons of dealing properly with ourself, others, and God. The ordinances found in the temple of God and the scriptures He has given us outline what

our purpose and desires should be towards our fellow beings. Anything we do for the self or for “me” brings us closer to being left to ourselves.⁸² It takes us further down the path of being left in our “own place”⁸³ or in other words, alone, by ourselves. On the other hand, anything we do for God and others brings us closer to at-one-ment with other beings. It brings us closer to becoming one with God and other righteous beings.

Oh that we could all face each other and with all sincerity of heart repeat the words given to us by the Lord in these latter days.

Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, forever and ever. Amen. (Doctrine and Covenants 88:133, underline added)

This is godhood. This is immortality, Eternal life and exaltation. It is what brings us to God and to become gods ourselves. It is what the temple and the scriptures are trying to teach us. It is glorious and eternal.

For thus saith the Lord--I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:5, underline added)

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Learn to be honest with yourself, God, and others. To be honest with yourself is one of the most difficult things you will ever do. This is because it often hurts to be honest. Being honest with ourselves will continue to hurt so long as we nurture the least degree of pride. Because of this feeling of hurt, we try to hide so much from ourselves. And we often do this without even realizing we are doing it. If we are not honest with ourselves, how can we possibly be honest with God or others? It is no small detail that the beings in the Celestial Kingdom “see as they are seen, and know as they are known.”⁸⁴ Look at yourself for what you really are, whether good or bad, weak or strong. Forcing yourself to feel good about yourself is not the answer. Recognizing the truth about yourself is a large part of the answer. For some reason, we always want to believe that we are something we are not. Be willing to accept others for what they really are. For they are in the exact same boat as you. This recognition of our true self will naturally bring either confidence before God or remorse, meet for repentance. Both of these attitudes are necessary and both are good when done in honesty and purity of heart. A broken heart and a contrite spirit requires, as a prerequisite, that you let yourself go - that you give up

⁸² D&C 121:38

⁸³ See Acts 1:25; Jacob 5:77; Jacob 6:3; D&C 88:32; D&C 88:114

⁸⁴ D&C 76:93

hope in yourself and gain hope in God and Christ. Sometimes we need to allow the hurt to happen. This, in turn, will make room for humility and remorse. Admit your faults freely, that you may overcome them and progress. Know that you, like everybody else in the world, have many faults. Admit your strengths cautiously, that you may bless others and serve God with them. Know that if you ever admit your strengths with the intent of feeling or placing yourself above or below others, you are in the wrong path.

...we should let the finest things that God has wrought in us shine forth, so that we are not guilty of either of the two basic forms of hypocrisy: pretending to be better than we are, or letting ourselves appear worse than we are. (President Harold B. Lee, Priesthood manual "Come Follow Me," p. 87)

Learn to love and serve God and other people with a love that will not die or fade away. Strive to understand how much God loves and cares for you, that He has given you everything and hopes with all his heart that you will do the same for others. The inspiration of one of our hymns rings loud and true concerning these doctrines.

*Savior, may I learn to love thee, walk the path that thou hast shown,
pause to help and lift another, finding strength beyond my own.
Savior, may I learn to love thee - Lord, I would follow thee.*

*Who am I to judge another when I walk imperfectly?
In the quiet heart is hidden sorrow that the eye can't see.
Who am I to judge another? Lord, I would follow thee.*

*I would be my brother's keeper; I would learn the healer's art.
To the wounded and the weary I would show a gentle heart.
I would be my brother's keeper - Lord, I would follow thee.*

*Savior, may I love my brother as I know thou lovest me,
find in thee my strength, my beacon, for thy servant I would be.
Savior, may I love my brother - Lord, I would follow thee.⁸⁵*

Oh that we could all follow the Savior by doing the things He has done.

THE TRUE TEST OF OUR ATTITUDE

If you knew you were assigned to the telestial kingdom or even outer darkness and you knew there was nothing you could do to change it, would it change your behavior in any way? How about if you knew you were going to the celestial kingdom? Would that change the way you act, feel, and think, or the desires of your heart? If you said "yes" to either of these questions, then you do not yet possess the proper attitude. The attitude we are seeking forgets about the self. It

⁸⁵ LDS Church Hymnal, Pg. 220

doesn't care what happens to "me." If I have the proper attitude, I will seek God and truth the best I can in spite of what happens to me. I will realize that truth and God are more important than I am. I will be willing to sacrifice all for God and truth, including my time, talents, even my very life, if necessary - literally everything that I have been blessed with or with which I may yet be blessed. For I will realize that it is all God's to begin with. To think about myself and fight against God and the gospel is futile and senseless. We need to fully realize that we have only two options - we can think of ourselves and by so doing fight against God, truth and others or we can forget ourselves and accept God's way of life, the truths of the universe, and bless the lives of others in any way we can. The first option leads to pride, sorrow, bondage, and solitude while the latter leads to honor, glory, happiness, the freedom of eternal life and at-one-ment with the gods. Listen to the words of President Brigham Young as he expresses his feelings on this subject.

The Lord has blessed me; he has always blessed me; from the time I commenced to build up Zion, I have been extremely blessed. I could relate circumstances of so extraordinary a character in regard to the providences of God to me, that my brethren and sisters would say in their hearts, "I can hardly give credence to this." But my heart has been set in me to do the will of God, to build up his kingdom on the earth, to establish Zion and its laws, and to save the people; and I can say truly and honestly that the thought never came into my mind, in all my labors, what my reward will be, or whether my crown would be large or small, or any crown at all, a small possession, a large possession, or no possession. I do not know that I shall have a wife or child in the resurrection. I have never had any thoughts or reflections upon this, or cared the first thing about it. All that I have had in my mind has been that it was my duty to do the will of God, and to labor to establish his kingdom on the earth. I do not love, serve or fear the Lord for the sake of getting rid of being damned, nor for the sake of getting some great gift or blessing in eternity, but purely because the principles which God has revealed for the salvation of the inhabitants of the earth are pure, holy and exalting in their nature. In them there is honor and eternal increase, they lead on from light to light, strength to strength, glory to glory, knowledge to knowledge, and power to power; and the opposite reduces any individual or any nation on the earth to imbecility, ignorance, slothfulness, and to the loathsome state of degradation in which we see some of the inhabitants of the earth now. It is purely for the love of holy principles, that will exalt the people, that we may receive and gain more and more, and keep receiving for ever and ever, that I serve the Lord, and try to build up his kingdom. (Journal of Discourses 16:69-70)

I believe that the attitude we have discussed is, for the most part, what the Lord has been trying to teach us from the foundation of the world. If we can incorporate all of these principles into our very nature, if we can develop the attitude spoken of in this book, I truly believe we will be close to the attitude of which God approves and which will bring us everlasting peace, joy, and happiness. These are the principles that will bring about Zion, in all her glory.

In conclusion, let us remind ourselves that we can begin to establish Zion as soon as we are willing to do so and that most of us have already made covenants to do so. We are not waiting for the Lord in these matters, He is waiting for us. May we write the words of President Spencer W. Kimball upon our hearts and live up to them as God would have us do.

*As important as it is to have this vision in mind, defining and describing Zion will not bring it about. That can only be done through consistent and concerted daily effort by every single member of the church. No matter what the cost in toil or sacrifice, we must "do it." (Pres. Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, March 1985, p. 4, *Becoming the Pure in Heart*)*

I testify of the truthfulness of the gospel. I know that God lives and that He hears and answers prayers. I know that He provides protection to those who will strive to accept and live his laws. I know that Satan is strong and is striving to lead the posterity of Adam astray. To this end he will be very successful. I pray that all will make the time to study the doctrines of our Lord and pray about them to know if they are true. I hope and pray that we will come to a greater understanding of the doctrines and mysteries contained in scriptures, and that we will have the faith to live them. May we all be faithful to these doctrines and incorporate them into our lives in such a manner that they will become a part of us, that we may become like God, and hence become gods ourselves, to enjoy immortality and eternal life with all those glorious beings of Zion and the Celestial Kingdom. This is my humble prayer and testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.