

# DETECTING THE PHILOSOPHIES OF MEN

By

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## 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.<sup>1</sup> And these are usually talking about missionary work or preaching the gospel, which makes perfect sense.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> See Alma 12:9 and D&C 19:21.

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 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

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## INTRODUCTION

We have heard a great deal about the “philosophies of men mingled with scripture.” Most Latter-day Saints recognize this as a danger sign that should be avoided. Yet, it is often more difficult than we think to recognize a philosophy of man. This is especially true if it can be effectively mingled with a scripture or two to give support to the philosophy. This book is intended to help us in our effort of recognizing the philosophies of men as well as of Satan. It is paramount that we learn how to separate these doctrines from the doctrines of God, as revealed to man throughout the history of this world. It was written with the hope of helping Latter-day Saints to ask serious questions about why they believe what they believe, and to help them to clearly understand the origins of their beliefs, whether they be of God, man, or Satan.

It is perhaps important to note at the beginning of this work that the word “philosophy,” in and of itself, is not a bad word. It comes from the Greek words “philo” and “sophia.” The word “philo” represents love<sup>3</sup> and the word “sophia” denotes wisdom. Hence, the word “philosophy” literally means “a love of wisdom.” I’m sure most people would agree that possessing a passion for wisdom is generally a good thing. Another definition of the word philosophy is simply a teaching or doctrine. With this in mind, the real problem with the phrase “the philosophies of men” is not the word “philosophies,” but rather the words “of men.” In other words, if we could successfully detect and separate the philosophies (doctrines) of men and Satan from the philosophies (doctrines) of God, and pursue the “philosophies of God,” our fear of the word “philosophy” would leave us. It is not philosophy that should be feared, it is the origin of a given philosophy that should be feared. This is important to note as we continue with our discussion.

I was once a teaching assistant for the Philosophy Department at Brigham Young University. During this time, part of my responsibilities included grading the papers submitted by students. Most of these papers consisted of two basic elements. The students had to 1) state a personal position or opinion on a given topic and 2) defend that position or opinion with reasonable arguments. In other words, the students were asked to tell us what they believed about a given topic and then tell us why they believed what they believed. It was very interesting to note that most people could easily submit the first part of their assignment. They would almost always have an opinion of some kind and most were not terribly afraid to express it when asked to do so. However, it was very interesting to see how many people floundered at the simple question, “Why do you believe that?” It became quite apparent that most of these students had never given much thought concerning the reasons for their beliefs. In fact, when directly confronted with the preceding question, many would rather boldly reply, “I don’t know. I just do.” It was as if having an opinion alone was quite sufficient for the world in which they lived.

There was another interesting event that occurred regularly in these classes (which may have dealt with their LDS upbringing and the fact that they were Mormons attending BYU). As often happens in such settings, there were occasions when the beliefs of the students were challenged or when very difficult issues were discussed - issues for which there are not always clear-cut answers. It was quite interesting to me how often the students would interrupt class and ask the teacher something like, “Well, what do we believe?” “We,” in this case, being members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. As sincere as their questions were, I couldn’t help but wonder, “If you don’t know what ‘we’ believe, how do you know whether or not you believe it?” I marveled at the power the teachers could have imposed upon those students if they would have chosen to do so. Whatever the teachers suggested as an answer to that question, almost regardless of the topic or the answer offered, would generally be taken at face value with no further questioning or research on the part of the student. If an answer was offered (wisely, many

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<sup>3</sup> Another well-known example of the root “philo” can be found in the word “Philadelphia,” which means “the city of love.”

times it wasn't), most students would take the attitude of, "Okay, now that I know the answer we can continue with class." To me, this seemed to be an extremely dangerous way to find truth, especially considering the difficulty of the topics being discussed.

Were these students such blind followers as to believe anything that they were told? At least in some cases, the answer was clearly "yes." The words of Elder B.H. Roberts were often brought to mind on this topic.

*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)*

This is often what I wanted to cry from the pulpit, so to speak, to these young students. "Find out why you believe what you believe! You may find that it isn't true after all!"

During my life I have experienced countless beliefs of my own which I could not support from a scriptural standpoint (once I finally made the effort to do so). I have often been amazed at how easily beliefs which I have held since childhood could be proven incorrect through simple questioning and scriptural research. Things that I had always thought were very much a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ had to be reconsidered in light of further scriptural studies into the topic. This has always been an exhilarating experience to me. I stand as a firm believer in (as well as a second witness of) the words of Elder Roberts, just quoted. "Blind faith" is not as good as "intelligent faith." I can only believe that questioning one's beliefs and continually trying to defend them is a good thing. By "questioning" I do not necessarily mean "doubting." Questioning indicates a continued search for further truth - for greater understanding. Doubting generally indicates a turning away from the belief or a discontinuation of further investigation. Questioning is generally open-minded while doubting is often closed-minded.

*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)*

We should be constantly putting our beliefs to the test and trying to find out if what we believe is really true. If we endure to the end, with humility, prayer, and an honest yearning to know what is true as our guides, truth will always come up triumphant in the end.

## **ARE WE REALLY IN DANGER OF BEING DECEIVED?**

The Book of Mormon clearly indicates that we live in a time when falsehoods will be the rule rather than the exception. Speaking of the latter days, the Lord has told us,

*Yea, they [the churches] have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted.*

*Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up.*

*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.*

*They wear stiff necks and high heads; yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men. (2 Nephi 28:11-14, underline added)*

According to these verses, even the “humble followers of Christ” can “err because they are taught by the precepts of men.” Using these verses, President Ezra Taft Benson has warned us of the dangers involved when we place our trust in anything other than the Lord.

*In the Book of Mormon the prophet Nephi exclaims: “O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.” (2 Nephi 4:34.) Prophesying of our day, Nephi said, “They have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men.” (2 Nephi 28:14.) Yes, it is the precepts of men versus the revealed word of God. The more we follow the word of God the less we are deceived, while those who follow the wisdom of men are deceived the most.*

*Increasingly, the Latter-day Saints must choose between the reasoning of men and the revelations of God. This is a crucial choice, for we have those within the Church today who, with their worldly wisdom, are leading some of the members astray. President J. Reuben Clark warned: “The ravening wolves are amongst us, from our own membership, and they, more than any others, are clothed in sheep’s clothing, because they wear the habiliments of the Priesthood. . . . We should be careful of them.” (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.354, underline added)*

President Benson has again stated,

*Not only are there apostates within our midst, but there are also apostate doctrines that are sometimes taught in our classes and from our pulpits and that appear in our publications. And these apostate precepts of men cause our people to stumble. As the Book of Mormon, speaking of our day, states: “They have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men” (2 Nephi 28:14). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89-90)*

Notice how President Benson associates this scripture with those who are in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He seems to interpret these verses as talking about our church, not just the other churches of the world, although that may certainly apply as well.

President Joseph Fielding Smith once recorded the following in his dairy:

*It is a very apparent fact that we have traveled far and wide in the past 20 years. What the future will bring I do not know. But if we drift as far afield from the fundamental things in the next 20 years, what will be left of the foundation laid by the prophet Joseph Smith? It is easy for one who observes to see how the apostasy came about in the primitive church of Jesus Christ. (from his diary, December 28, 1938)*

Elder H. Verlan Anderson, in his insightful book, “The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil,”

devoted an entire chapter to the “apostasy” of the latter days. In that chapter he states,

*To fail to consider the possibility that the members of the church are again “falling away” would be to ignore one of the most thoroughly documented lessons of history. Especially is this true in light of the fact that the cultural, political, and educational life of Church members has become so deeply and thoroughly involved with that of non-members that they are overwhelmingly influenced by the “ways of the world.” Through newspapers and magazines, motion pictures and television, schools and lecture halls, and a thoroughly integrated economic system, Church members come into close and continuous contact with those not of their faith.*

*Some may assume that a “Gentile apostasy” in these latter days cannot occur because Christ’s Church is here to stay this time. They may assume that widespread departure from gospel principles by Church members is contrary to prophecy. While the scriptures do assure us that the Church will continue to exist and be divinely led by prophets of the Lord right up until his Second Coming, they do not state that all, or even a majority of its members will follow those prophets. On the contrary, they foretell extensive, and in some cases, almost total defection from true principles. (The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil, pp. 169-170, underline added)*

From these quotes we can see that Latter-day Saints are by no means exempt from the influences of false doctrine. In fact, President Benson and others makes it quite clear that there are philosophies of men right “within our midst,” being taught in our classrooms, from our pulpits, and in our publications. Elder H. Verlan Anderson goes as far as to say that the scriptures “foretell extensive, and in some cases, almost total defection from true principles.” It is important to note that he is talking about members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He is not talking about other churches. We will discuss some of these scriptures later in this work.

If we believe that we are somehow exempt or immune to these false teachings, simply because we are members of the true church of Christ, we are not only sadly mistaken, but we are following the very path that Satan would like us to follow. Again, the Lord has warned us concerning this manner of deception by way of the Book of Mormon.

*Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!*

*Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!*

*Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost!*

*Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more! (2 Nephi 28:24-7)*

These verses in the Book of Mormon can easily be applied directly to us - the members of Christ’s church in the latter days. There are many, many Latter-day Saints who feel that they couldn’t possibly be deceived by those within the church. They tend not to see the ever-present danger of false doctrine within our midst. They feel very “at ease” and sure that “all is well” in Zion. President Benson, our most recent latter-day prophet, has explicitly told us that all is not well in our Zion of today.

*Watchmen - what of the night?*<sup>4</sup> *We must respond by saying that all is not well in Zion. (Conference Report, May 1986, Pg. 4)*

*“Don’t worry,” says the devil; “the Lord will protect you, and besides, the world is so corrupt and heading toward destruction at such a pace that you can’t stop it, so why try?” Well, to begin with, the Lord will not protect us unless we do our part. This devilish tactic of persuading people not to get concerned because the Lord will protect them no matter what they do is exposed by the Book of Mormon. Referring to the devil, it says: “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). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg. 660)*

It is clear that the Latter-day Saints are suffering from being deceived by false doctrines. All one needs to do to see this is prayerfully study the scriptures and the words of the prophets, and then listen to the things being “taught in our classes and from our pulpits and that appear in our publications” as President Benson mentioned. If this approach is taken, it becomes clear that false doctrine is being taught within this church, and on a fairly regular basis. It is often disguised by a few misused scriptures or “heart-warming stories” so that we don’t always see it, but it is there nonetheless.

We need to continually be on guard of being deceived and should never feel that we are completely protected from the misguided teachings of this world. It is safe to assume that all of us currently believe in false doctrines to one degree or another and of one form or another. The only real question is, “Which of our beliefs are false and which are true?” The search for truth and the need to continually correct our false beliefs are lifetime pursuits. Those who love truth and are humble enough to change their lives to conform to the new truths they have learned will be richly rewarded. Those who are not this way will likely be left behind to be deceived by the devil and his angels.<sup>5</sup>

## **CATEGORIZING OUR KNOWLEDGE**

It is interesting to note that most things we learn about or come to believe in this life generally fall into one of six areas. These six areas are:

MATH  
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. For example, we may use math to learn more about physical science or logic to learn more about ethics. However, I have found that most things we learn or

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<sup>4</sup> See Isaiah 21:11. See also Isaiah 21:6; Isaiah 52:8; Isaiah 62:6; Jeremiah 6:17; Jeremiah 31:6; Jeremiah 51:12; Ezekiel 3:17; Ezekiel 33:6-7; Mosiah 12:22; Mosiah 15:29; 3 Nephi 16:18; 3 Nephi 20:32; D&C 101:45-46, 53-54.

<sup>5</sup> D&C 29:37-39

come to “know” are usually associated with one of the general categories listed above.

Using these six categories, there is a relatively easy test that can help us identify the philosophies or doctrines of God, as opposed to those of Satan or men. The test comes in ranking these categories first according to our ability to prove them right or wrong and then according to their 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 of such a statement. Logic is generally next in line as far as provability is concerned. It is fairly easy, for example, to show the truth of a logical formula such as, “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 that has raged since the world began. Such topics as abortion, homosexuality, capital punishment, 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 these six 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 is true that we often 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 God tries to teach us. Generally, our education systems 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. This is largely because a teacher can’t demonstrate the truth or error of an ethical or religious issue in front of a class of students. Of necessity, most education systems must stick to those topics that are easily demonstrated. When called into question, they must be able to “show the masses” that what they are teaching is true. If they are to teach the masses, they simply have little choice but to follow this pattern.

The Lord, on the other hand, seems to try to keep us closer to the bottom of the list. He is always trying to teach us those things that don’t easily lend themselves to public demonstration or proof. It is very difficult to “show the masses” that the things found in the scriptures are true. It generally requires more faith and individual effort to learn the things of God. And, once learned, it is very difficult for a person to demonstrate or even describe their findings to others.

We should also notice that 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. For example,

*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;*

*Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms-- (D&C 88:77-79, underline added)*

*And set in order the churches, and study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people. (D&C 90:15, underline added)*

*And, verily I say unto you, that it is my will that you should hasten to translate my scriptures, and to obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion. Amen. (D&C 93:53, underline added)*

Examples of mathematics, logic, and physical science can be found in the scriptures, but not to any great degree. This is especially true when compared to examples of religious, ethical, or social science issues. In saying this, I do not wish to imply that we should not study math, logic, or physical science. It is my belief that we should learn as much as we can about almost any area of knowledge available to us. However, we should set and maintain certain priorities in the things we pursue. I believe most of our priorities are all mixed up. We usually end up spending most of our time pursuing areas of knowledge that are less important, while neglecting those areas which are more important. Our society and culture teach us to do this almost from birth, and certainly when we enter the public education system and work force.

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 a celestial reward. However, even though it is more important to learn about the affairs of people, as opposed to things, it is vital for us to realize that the Lord should be our primary source for any knowledge regarding our interactions with other people. President Ezra Taft Benson clearly warns us of the dangers involved with relying upon the philosophies of men when studying the social sciences.

*The world worships the learning of man. They trust in the arm of flesh. To them, men's reasoning is greater than God's revelations. The precepts of man have gone so far in subverting our educational system that in many cases a higher degree today, in the so called social sciences, can be tantamount to a major investment in error. Very few men build firmly enough on the rock of revelation to go through this kind of indoctrination and come out untainted. Unfortunately, of those who succumb, some use their higher degree to get teaching positions even in our church educational system, where they spread the falsehoods they have been taught. President Joseph F. Smith was right when he said that false educational ideas would be one of the three threats to the church within. (Conference Report, April 1969, p.12, underline added)*

So we see that even though topics such as history, language, political science, psychology, etc. are important and should be studied, it is critical to learn about such things with the help of scripture and inspiration. When left to the mere opinions of man alone, the social sciences may not only become meaningless, but often harmful as well.

## THE TEST OF QUALITY VS. QUANTITY/MEASURABILITY

In conjunction with the six categories just discussed, there is another general principle that seems to apply in most cases. Simply stated, it is this; The most important things in life are generally very difficult to quantify, measure, or define while those things that are least important are generally easy to quantify, measure, and define. This rule tends to pit quality against quantity.

I have found that our desire and/or ability to measure our pursuits is almost directly related to our misunderstanding of which pursuits are most 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. In fact, in some cases, that is their whole purpose for existing. Our world teaches us to love and seek 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 pursuits, however, are not those generally emphasized by God as being of great worth.

When we compare material pursuits to what I would call spiritual pursuits such as faith, testimony, love or charity, hope, mercy, compassion, knowledge, sacrifice, etc. we see a great difference. This latter set of pursuits 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 geographic 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 that 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 issues. If you can easily judge or categorize yourself or someone else by any criteria whatsoever, chances are that the issues you are dealing with are of less importance. This is perhaps why the Lord has continually cautioned us against judging others. Most of the time we judge others unrighteously, based on our own materialistic, temporal view of life, thus making us in need of being judged ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

I have found this little test of measurability to hold true in most cases. Whenever I encounter a set of potential truths, I often try to measure or quantify the truths discussed. If I am successful in this attempt, it is usually (not always) an indication that the truths are of lesser importance and potentially man-made instead of God-made.

Elder Dean L. Larsen gave an address at BYU in 1980 regarding goal setting, objectives, and measurements. Some of his comments are appropriate for this discussion.

*In a materialistic society much more attention and validity seem to be attached to quantitative goals, probably because they are more easily measured and reflect more directly profit and loss, material growth and production. This should not lead to the conclusion that attainments of a qualitative nature are less important... In fact, in the realm of moral and spiritual things, qualities may be much more significant than quantities. The nature of one's relationship with others may have more significance and more value than his "productivity."* (Some Thoughts on Goal Setting, Objectives, and

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 7:1; Luke 6:37; John 7:24; 3 Nephi 14:1

*Measurements, by Elder Dean L. Larsen, BYU Devotional, May 13, 1980, underline added)*

Later in the same speech Elder Larsen said,

*Spiritual qualities do not necessarily develop in the same environment as that which fosters the attributes upon which such high value is placed in the material world, nor can they always be accurately measured in a quantitative way. This is not to suggest that qualities of the spirit are not susceptible to assessment. But they must be assessed by spiritual means. They often reflect from individual lives in an observable way. They are closely associated with feelings, attitudes, commitments, and perceptions, but they are not always easily measured in a quantitative way at arbitrarily established audit periods. (Some Thoughts on Goal Setting, Objectives, and Measurements, by Elder Dean L. Larsen, BYU Devotional, May 13, 1980, underline added)*

This is what makes such things as goal setting or “easy steps to spirituality” so difficult and confining within a gospel setting. At the same time, such immeasurables as hungering and thirsting after righteousness are so very important. For the most part, the only things you can set specific goals for are the measurable, quantifiable types of things. The things that are the most important to us are those things that 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.” Such a goal would be meaningless. 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, including faith. It is a natural process rather than a forced accomplishment.

There are many examples that illustrate these points. For instance, the difference between making a goal to read one chapter a day in the Book of Mormon (a measurable achievement) and a heartfelt desire to know more about the messages contained in the Book of Mormon (an immeasurable achievement) is greater than we usually think. The contrast between getting good grades in school and a genuine desire to learn is usually overlooked as well. And the distinction between praying twice a day and praying with real intent can make all the difference in the world. Although such things are difficult to discuss outside of the realm of attitudes, desires, feelings, etc., this general principle can perhaps best be illustrated by the use of specific examples, such as those just mentioned. Below is a table that offers some of the specific qualitative issues commonly dealt with in the church along with their possible quantitative counterparts we frequently tend to substitute for the “real thing.”

QUALITY	QUANTITY
Pray with Real Intent Study to Learn Was It a Good Experience? Did I Feel the Spirit? Leadership Faith/Obedience Knowledge Charity/Love “Hunger and Thirst”	Pray Twice a Day Read for 15 Minutes Daily Did I Do My Home Teaching? Did I go to the Temple? Titles Awards Grades Service Charts Self Discipline/Goal Setting

The list can go on and on. In examples such as these, the quantifiable, measurable things (ie. a chapter a

day, good grades, praying twice a day, etc.) are generally 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, love, etc.). In other words, they are only good in so far as they help us to improve in the immeasurable areas. If they are not serving this purpose, then they are of little or no value. The same is true for almost all measurable or quantifiable goals. The more dependant we become upon the measurability of such things, the more danger there is of forgetting about the higher, spiritual blessings behind the measurable goals. Relying too heavily on such “yardsticks to spirituality” can actually hinder our spiritual progression. I feel this is important to understand as we pursue and try to discern the truths of God.

## CATEGORIZING OUR BELIEFS

It is very important note that literally all of our beliefs must originate from one of three major areas. They are,

THE PHILOSOPHIES  
OF GOD

THE PHILOSOPHIES  
OF MAN

THE PHILOSOPHIES  
OF SATAN

As I have discussed this topic with others, I have made it a point to ask if they could think of any other area from which their beliefs could possibly originate. I have yet to meet anyone who could suggest a fourth possibility. Literally everything we believe comes from God, man, or Satan. There are simply no other choices available to us. When looked at in this light, we can begin to get an idea of how many of our beliefs fall outside of the doctrines of God. Indeed, it should be clear that most of our beliefs come from one or both of the other categories, instead of the revealed word of God. This is an important realization that all of us must come to recognize. Most people on earth are taught far more about the philosophies of man and Satan than they are about the philosophies of God.

As simple as this evaluation of our beliefs seems, it is apparently true. There are only three places from which our beliefs can possibly originate - God, man, and Satan. The scriptures seem to clearly pinpoint these three areas for us.

*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. (D&C 46:7, underline added)*

When looked at in this way, it is easier to see the folly of the world in which we live. As already discussed, our culture teaches us to rely heavily on the learning of man. Seldom do they discuss or teach openly the things of God. Religion is looked down upon to the point that you can hardly acknowledge God in public without being ridiculed or mocked. In fact, it is almost against the law in many ways. One of the main reasons our founding fathers migrated to America was because their European governments wouldn't allow them to discuss or practice their religion. Are we so far from that today? Are we heading in the same direction?

It is important to understand the significance of these three areas. Pick any belief you may have and you may know that it finds its origin in God, Satan, or man. Now, once you have chosen a belief, try to show

or give support to the notion that your belief comes from God. It makes for an interesting exercise - an exercise that should be performed frequently and continuously. If you are unable to give good reasons as to why you would place a particular belief in the “philosophy of God” category, it becomes a prime suspect for being either a philosophy of man or of Satan. By performing this simple exercise, we learn quickly that most of our beliefs are, in fact, philosophies of men (or Satan). It is important to understand that we learn almost everything we learn in this life from our society or culture. Although we can safely assume that God and Satan “have their hands” in our cultural beliefs, unless we can provide some form of evidence to show that they come from either Satan or God, it is only so much speculation on our part.

This should have the effect of simplifying our efforts of detecting the philosophies of God, Satan, and men. If we can’t establish that a particular doctrine or belief comes from God, then we must be open to the possibility that it comes from either Satan or men (at least until further evidence can be presented in favor of a divine origin).

## WHERE DO WE FIND THE “PHILOSOPHIES OF GOD”

Now that we have discussed the general tendencies or focus of the teachings of God vs. the teachings of man, as well as the limited origins of our beliefs, we may now discuss the specific places in which we can find the philosophies or doctrines of God.

The Lord has told us,

*For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. (D&C 84:44)*

If we plan to obey this commandment, it is vital that we know where to look in order to find the words which have truly proceeded forth from the mouth of God. We often think that most of our beliefs are probably okay or at least not that bad. Most people tend to take their beliefs for granted, without really questioning their truthfulness. It is important that we continually ask ourselves why we believe what we believe. What evidence do we have of the origins of our beliefs or of their truthfulness? If they originate in man, they are certainly questionable. If they originate in Satan, they are at best simply false and at worst very dangerous or destructive. The only truly safe route is found in discovering those doctrines that originate in God. However, as with the two lists already discussed, we find that the sources which provide the “philosophies of God” are surprisingly few in number.

President Benson gives us a head start in our attempt to identify the sources of God’s teachings.

*May I suggest three short tests to avoid being deceived, both pertaining to the freedom struggle and all other matters.*

*First, what do the standard works have to say about it? “To the law and to the testimony: If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,” said Isaiah (Isaiah 8:20; 2 Nephi 18:20). And Hosea said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). We must diligently study the scriptures. Of special importance to us are the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.*

*The second guide is this: What do the latter-day Presidents of the Church have to say on the subject--particularly the living President? The President can speak on any subject he feels is needful for the Saints.*

*The third and final test is the Holy Ghost--the test of the Spirit. By the Spirit we “may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5). ...Will this Spirit be needed to check actions in other situations? Yes, and it could be used as a guide and a protector for the faithful. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg. 405, underline added)*

So, according to President Benson, we have been given at least three sources for finding the word of God. They are the scriptures, prophets, and personal revelation. To these three, I would also add ordinances, especially the ordinances of the temple. This leaves us with four areas from which we may glean the “philosophies of God.” They are:

THE ORDINANCES  
(temple and others)

SCRIPTURES  
(past, present, and future)

OTHER INSPIRED PEOPLE

PERSONAL REVELATION

As with the origins of our beliefs, I have often asked people if they can think of any other source from which the word of God can be obtained. To this day, no one has been able to come up with any other source than the four just mentioned. Again, at first glance this seems oversimplified. However, until we can think of other sources for discovering the word of God, we must focus our efforts entirely on these four areas. When the ramifications of having only four areas from which to learn the word of God are fully considered, it seems quite remarkable. This proposes that literally everything that falls outside of these four areas are either the philosophies of man or the philosophies of Satan. On the one hand, this limits us greatly in our search for truth. However, on the other hand, it helps us greatly in this search by focusing our attention on the few areas that will bring us true and everlasting knowledge concerning those issues that are of most significance to us.

It is important to fully understand these four areas. We often make mistakes in our efforts to discover God’s word because we don’t understand one or more of these sources. It is interesting to me that relatively few people in the world seem to make more than a meager effort to understand any of these areas, let alone all of them. When we look at the general conditions of the world, we must conclude that there is far more that is not understood about these sources than there is that is understood about them. A discussion of each source is perhaps helpful in our attempt to use them properly during our search for the truths of God. We will approach them in the opposite order than is listed above.

## **PERSONAL REVELATION**

The following comments by President Brigham Young serve as a good introduction to this section:

*Were I to draw a distinction in all the duties that are required of the children of men, from first to last, I would place first and foremost the duty of seeking unto the Lord our God until we open the path of communication from heaven to earth--from God to our own souls...it is the only thing that can lead the people to a true knowledge of the reality of facts as they exist. (Journal of Discourses 8:339)*

Of the four areas or sources for finding the word of God, the area of personal revelation seems to be by

far the most important. This can be easily demonstrated by asking a few simple questions about the other areas. For example, how do we know which people are inspired and which are not? How do we know when the words of a prophet are from the Lord and when he is simply speaking his own opinion? How do we know what should be considered true scripture and what is not? How do we know that the ordinances of the church are true? Such questions as these should immediately show us the importance of personal revelation. As will be discussed, without personal revelation, all of the other areas lose much of their value to us. Men have always been led astray by false prophets, false scriptures, and false ordinances and rituals. However, men have never, ever been led astray by God himself. As Brigham Young puts it, personal revelation should be “first and foremost” in our minds when seeking the truths of heaven and is “the only thing that can lead the people to a true knowledge of the reality of facts as they exist.” If you have personal revelation you will likely not be led astray. If you don’t have it, your chances of being led astray increase dramatically. It is important that we understand this principle and its ramifications to us and to our search for truth.

### **The “Formula” for Receiving Personal Revelation**

The scriptures seem to offer us a “formula,” if you will, regarding how we may know the truth of all things. The following verses from the Book of Mormon are among the most oft quoted verses in the LDS church. Yet we frequently miss much of what is said in these verses. We also miss much of what is not said. Let’s look at them as they relate to our search for truth.

*Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down unto the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.*

*And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.*

*And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moroni 10:3-5)*

The first point to note is that this scripture does not give us a method to know the truth of “some things.” It is telling us how to know the truth of “all things.” The question may now be asked, “According to this scripture, what is necessary to know whether or not something is true?” Let’s outline the necessary steps and the results of these steps.

The first thing we are asked to do is “remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men.” In my mind, this seems to be closely tied to gratitude and humility. Also mentioned is the admonition to “ponder it in your hearts.” We must do more than just read it. We must care enough about it to give it some serious thought. In addition, this verse gives us the first person involved with this “formula.” It is us. If we don’t do our part, it simply will not happen. Personal revelation requires participation on our part.

The next thing we must do is “ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true.” This tells us that truth comes from God and offers us our second and third people who must be involved - God the Father and Jesus Christ. Without God and Christ, we can do nothing.

Coming back to our participation, we are then admonished to “ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ.” Christ is the mediator between us and the Father. Without this mediation, we

could not receive any truth from God.

The last part of the formula is the Holy Ghost. “[The Father] will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.” In its simplest form, these verses can perhaps be outlined as follows:

Criteria Involved:

- 1) Gratitude/Humility
- 2) Thought
- 3) Prayer
  - a) With a specific question
  - b) In the name of Christ
  - c) With a sincere heart
  - d) With real intent
  - e) Having faith in Christ

People Involved:

- 1) You
- 2) God the Father
- 3) Jesus Christ
- 4) Holy Ghost

That is all. Again, as simple as this formula seems, it is clear that the result can be a knowledge of “all things,” not just a few things.

I say this formula is “simple,” however, my own experience has been that it is quite difficult to gain and maintain such qualities as humility, prayer, faith, etc. sufficient to always obtain the inspiration we desire. Although the “formula” is simple, the implementation of that formula is usually quite difficult. Inspiration can and usually does elude us if we are not of the right heart and frame of mind. This is important to note as we discuss obtaining personal revelation. Perhaps more than any other single factor, personal revelation is dependant upon our righteous and earnest participation.

### **The Necessity of Personal Revelation**

Concerning personal revelation, the prophet Joseph Smith has said,

*...God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them, for the day must come when no man need say to his neighbor, Know ye that Lord; for all shall know Him (who remain) from the least to the greatest. How is this to be done? It is to be done by this sealing power, and the other Comforter spoken of, which will be manifest by revelation. (TPJS, Pg. 149, underline added)*

There are at least two major issues to notice about this quote. The first is that every Latter-day Saint may receive as much revealed truth as any prophet in the world. The deciding factors seem to rest with us, not with any other man. The second issue is that the day must come when we rely upon no man for our

knowledge of the Lord. In fact, the prophet seems to suggest that only those who know the Lord by personal revelation will “remain.” This should put the importance of personal revelation immediately before us. It is not simply a “good thing.” It is vital to our salvation. Concerning eternal life, the Lord has stated,

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

The Savior has also outlined for us how we come to know the only true God.

*All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. (Matthew 11:27, underline added)*

If we hope to ever come into the presence of our Father and live with him in his kingdom, we must have Him revealed unto us. It simply will not do to rely on the testimonies of others in this matter. We must learn for ourselves that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. Elder Amasa M. Lyman tells us of the importance of receiving personal inspiration from the Lord.

*“But,” says one, “Won’t it be good for us if we do as we are told?” Yes. What will be the result? You will not always be under the necessity of being so miserably poor that you have to go out in the night to your neighbours to borrow a candle. Do people live this way? Yes. I have lived on borrowed light. How long? Until I got a candle of my own. Until the principles of truth became established in me, I lived on the strength of the instructions and light of heaven that dwelt in others, reflected by them on my path,--I followed along by the light of a borrowed candle. How long? Until the Saviour’s words were fulfilled, and the promise verified in myself, and the light of inspiration was planted in my own soul; then the blessings of light and truth came rolling upon me like a river.*

*Would to God that all the Saints enjoyed this light. What would be the result? There would be more practical purity, more righteous actions, and less evil in the community,--more of the Spirit of God, as a natural consequence, because every Saint would be possessed of a living fountain of light and truth--that inspiration which inspires the Apostle, enlightens the mind of the Prophet, tears away the veil from the future, and enables man to look upon and contemplate the excellencies of our Father’s kingdom. (Journal of Discourses 5:36-37, underline added)*

Notice that the same light which “inspires the apostle, enlightens the mind of the Prophet, tears away the veil from the future, and enables man to look upon and contemplate the excellencies of our Father’s kingdom” is available to “every saint.” The great prophet Moses helps us to further understand this point.

*And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him [Moses], and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.*

*But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp.*

*And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.*

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them! (Numbers 11:25-29, underline added)

This is what we are after - to become prophets ourselves by conversing with the Holy Ghost, other heavenly messengers, and eventually even Christ and his Father through the veil. We must come to the point in which we rely upon no mortal man for our salvation. We must make it a matter between us and God.

Unfortunately, many people today have the same attitude that Joshua had in the time of Moses. Like Joshua, many people today would forbid any man other than the prophet of the church from prophesying. They would claim that no one else should be able or allowed to do such things. What could possibly be wrong with the idea of all people becoming prophets and prophesying with the Lord's spirit upon them? As Elder Lyman said, "Would to God that all the Saints enjoyed this light."

Elder Heber C. Kimball also warned us of the dangers of relying too much on others and not receiving a personal witness for ourselves.

Let me say that many of you will see the time when you will have all the trouble, trial, and persecution you can stand, and plenty of opportunities to show that you were true to God and his work. This Church will have many close places through which it will have to pass before the work of God is crowned with victory. To meet the difficulties that are coming, it will be necessary for you to have a knowledge of the truth of this work for yourselves. The difficulties of this work will be of such a character that a man or woman who does not possess this personal knowledge will fall. Remember these sayings, for many of you will live to see them fulfilled. The time is coming when no man or woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself. If you do not have it, you will not stand. (Life of Heber C. Kimball, pp. 446, 449-450, underline added)

President Joseph Fielding Smith seems to echo the words of Elder Kimball.

*One fault to be avoided by the Saints, young and old, is the tendency to live on borrowed light, with their own hidden under a bushel; to permit the savor of their salt of knowledge to be lost; and the light within them to be reflected, rather than original.*

*Every Saint should not only have the light within himself, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but his light should so shine that it may be clearly perceived by others.* (Gospel Doctrine, Pg.87)

Not only can't we live on borrowed light, but, according to Joseph Smith, we cannot even continue to learn the things we need to know unless we know them through personal revelation.

*As we have noticed before, the great difficulty lies in the ignorance of the nature of spirits, of the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known; if it requires the Spirit of God to know the things of God; and the spirit of the devil can only be unmasked through that medium, then it follows as a natural*

consequence that unless some person or persons have a communication, or revelation from God, unfolding to them the operation of the spirit, they must eternally remain ignorant of these principles; for I contend that if one man cannot understand these things but by the Spirit of God, ten thousand men cannot; it is alike out of the reach of the wisdom of the learned, the tongue of the eloquent, the power of the mighty. And we shall at last have to come to this conclusion, whatever we may think of revelation, that without it we can neither know nor understand anything of God, or the devil; and however unwilling the world may be to acknowledge this principle, it is evident from the multifarious creeds and notions concerning this matter that they understand nothing of this principle, and it is equally as plain that without a divine communication they must remain in ignorance. (TPJS, Pg.205, underline added)

Are we, as Latter-day Saints, becoming ignorant of the principle of revelation and its necessity in our lives? Are we becoming so dependant upon the testimonies and guidance of others that we are content to live solely on borrowed light?

Again, of the four areas we have discussed (ordinances, scriptures, other inspired people, and personal revelation), it seems obvious that the area of personal revelation is by far the most important. Every single avenue of finding the word of God is ultimately dependant upon our ability to receive personal revelation. Every method of knowing whether or not something is true pales in comparison to personal revelation. As Elder Heber C. Kimball suggests, if we do not have personal revelation, if we are content to be lead solely by others, we will eventually fall.

I was once confronted by a man who did not believe in personal revelation. This man professed to be a Christian and to believe in the Bible. I asked this man how he knew that God existed and that Christ was our Savior. He replied, "Because the Bible says so." When I asked him how he knew that the Bible was true, he answered, "Because it came from God." Not seeing the fallacy of his argument, I started over again, "Yes, but how do you know that it came from God?" "Because it says so," was again his reply. He never did see that his argument was circular and hence didn't prove a thing.

As obvious as this fallacy seems, we all tend to make this same mistake. A person claiming to be inspired will say, "I am God's representative." Our reply should be, "How do I know?" They might reply, "Because God said so." At which point we ask, "How do I know that God said so?" Again, they may reiterate, "Because I am God's representative and as such I wouldn't lead you astray." Clearly this is the same fallacious argument as before. The context has changed, but the argument is the same. If we are to know that any words are the words of God, we must know this from God himself. Joseph Smith has said,

*The best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching.* (TPJS Pg.190)

*Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.* (TPJS Pg.324, underline added)

I will now go as far as to say that without personal revelation it is impossible to know what is true and what is not. As Brigham Young put it, "it is the only thing that can lead the people to a true knowledge of

the reality of facts as they exist.” Personal revelation that the Bible is true would end the argument concerning the Bible’s truthfulness. Personal revelation as to whether or not a person is speaking as a representative of God will end any discussion about the truthfulness of his words. If I have any truth-seeking discussion, regarding any principle, and the person with whom I am speaking claims to know about the truthfulness of the topic through personal revelation, for all intents and purposes the debate has ended. I have no good comeback for that argument. The only thing left for me to do is to seek my own confirmation, through personal revelation, as to the truthfulness or error of the principle in question. Unless I obtain a witness for myself, I won’t know whether the other person has been inspired or not. I have no way to prove it, one way or the other. Likewise in all areas of our life, if we don’t have a confirmation from God that something is true or false, we are left unto ourselves to kick against the pricks, to persecute the true saints of God, and to fight against God himself.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Smith has clearly outlined his feelings on this subject.

*Salvation cannot come without revelation; it is in vain for anyone to minister without it. No man is a minister of Jesus Christ without being a Prophet. No man can be a minister of Jesus Christ except he has the testimony of Jesus; and this is the spirit of prophecy. Whenever salvation has been administered, it has been by testimony. Men of the present time testify of heaven and hell, and have never seen either; and I will say that no man knows these things without this. (TPJS Pg.160)*

Brigham Young seems to agree.

*Without revelation direct from heaven, it is impossible for any person to understand fully the plan of salvation. We often hear it said that the living oracles must be in the Church, in order that the Kingdom of God may be established and prosper on the earth. I will give another version of this sentiment. I say that the living oracles of God, or the Spirit of revelation must be in each and every individual, to know the plan of salvation and keep in the path that leads them to the presence of God. (Journal of Discourses 9:279, underline added)*

Without personal revelation, the scriptures cannot be unfolded to us. The truthfulness of the words of others, whether written or verbal, cannot be confirmed. As Brigham Young says, “the Spirit of revelation must be in each and every individual.” If it is not, we will fail.

Although it is true that other people will be inspired of God, and therefore be able to impart truth unto us, such people should be leading us toward a lack of dependence upon them and a greater dependence upon God through personal revelation. If they are not leading us in this direction, perhaps we should follow the outline above and ask God, our eternal Father, where they are leading us and if it is right.

Of this over-dependency upon others Elder Boyd K. Packer has said,

*For generations we have been taught that the temporal salvation of the saints depends upon independence, industry, thrift, and self-reliance. We would never stray from that in teaching about temporal things.*

*On the other hand, is it possible that we are doing the very thing spiritually that we have been resolutely resisting temporally; fostering dependence rather than independence,*

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<sup>1</sup> D&C 121:38 (37-38)

*extravagance rather than thrift, indulgence rather than self-reliance.*

*We send two diverging signals and the Lord has told us: "If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand..."*

*...The only safe course is to make sure that they know the gospel, that they are acquainted with the scriptures, with revelation, with repentance, with how the Holy Ghost functions, with the voice of the spirit. (Let Them Govern Themselves, Regional Representative Seminar, March 30, 1990, underline added)*

Along these same lines President Brigham Young has said,

*We read in the Bible that there is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. In the book of Doctrine and Covenants, these glories are called telestial, terrestrial and celestial, which is the highest. These are worlds, different departments, or mansions, in our Father's house. Now those men, or those women, who know no more about the power of God, and the influences of the Holy Spirit, than to be led entirely by another person, suspending their own understanding, and pinning their faith upon another's sleeve, will never be capable of entering into the celestial glory, to be crowned as they anticipate; they will never be capable of becoming Gods...They never can become Gods, nor be crowned as rulers with glory, immortality, and eternal lives. They never can hold scepters of glory, majesty, and power in the celestial kingdom. Who will? Those who are valiant and inspired with the true independence of heaven, who will go forth boldly in the service of their God, leaving others to do as they please, determined to do right, though all mankind besides should take the opposite course. (Journal of Discourses 1:312, underline added)*

It would be difficult to state the matter with more clarity. On another occasion Brigham Young stated,

*I do not want men to come to me or my brethren for testimony as to the truth of this work; but let them take the Scriptures of divine truth, and there the path is pointed out to them as plainly as ever a guideboard indicated the right path to the weary traveller. There they are directed to go, not to Brothers Brigham, Heber, or Daniel, to any apostle or elder in Israel, but to the Father in the name of Jesus, and ask for the information they need. Can they who take this course in honesty and sincerity receive information? Will the Lord turn away from the honest heart seeking for truth? No, He will not; He will prove to them, by the revelations of His Spirit, the facts in the case. And when the mind is open to the revelations of the Lord it comprehends them quicker and keener than anything that is seen by the natural eye. It is not what we see with our eyes they may be deceived but what is revealed by the Lord from Heaven is sure and steadfast, and abides for ever. We do not want the people to rely on human testimony, although that cannot be confuted and destroyed; still, there is a more sure word of prophecy that all may gain if they will seek it earnestly before the Lord. (Journal of Discourses 12:96, underline added)*

President Ezra Taft Benson has also warned us about the dangers of placing our trust in the "arm of flesh" instead of in the Lord.

*Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon left the Church. Three of Joseph Smith's counselors fell--one even helped plot his death. A natural question that might arise would*

*be that if the Lord knew in advance that these men would fall, as He undoubtedly did, why did He have His prophet call them to such high office? The answer is: to fill the Lord's purposes. For even the Master followed the will of the Father by selecting Judas. President George Q. Cannon suggested an explanation, too, when he stated, "Perhaps it is his own design that faults and weaknesses should appear in high places in order that his saints may learn to trust in him and not in any man or men." (Millennial Star 53:658, 1891) And this would parallel Nephi's warning, put not your "trust in the arm of flesh." (2 Nephi 4:34) (An Enemy Hath Done This, Pg. 290. See also Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89)*

When Nephi's brothers had difficulty understanding some the words which were spoken to them, Nephi gave them the best counsel he could have offered.

*And they said: Behold, we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles.*

*And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?*

*And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us.*

*Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?*

*Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?--If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you. (1 Nephi 15:7-11, underline added)*

The direction Nephi gave to his brethren is the direction all of us should go. Notice how Nephi didn't encourage them to simply believe in his words, even though he knew the answer to their question. He first encouraged them to go to the Lord. When they refused to do so, he had little choice but to remind them that this is the course the Lord has given us to know the things of God. He then tried his best to answer their question based on the light he had personally received from God. Laman and Lemuel were living on borrowed light. And just as we have outlined, they eventually fell. If we are not careful, the same thing will happen to us.

From these quotes, as well as the numerous scriptures on the topic, we can see that the Lord wants us to learn how to depend upon Him for our knowledge of truth. If we continue to trust in the arm of flesh, we will simply come up short in our efforts to learn about and inherit the Celestial Kingdom.

### **Imparting Revealed Truths to Others**

Whenever we discuss receiving personal revelation, it is important to note that gaining spiritual knowledge and talking about it with others are two different things. Although the scriptures seem to be quite clear concerning how much knowledge we can gain (ie. "all things"), they are also clear concerning the restrictions placed on us in sharing what we know with others. There seem to be at least two main reasons why the Lord doesn't want us to always impart our knowledge to others. The first is that others are not always prepared to receive new knowledge. Hence, in some cases, knowledge may actually do more harm than good. The second involves the fact that there are certain people called specifically to impart particular bits of knowledge. President Brigham Young has given us sound advice regarding the knowledge and mysteries of the gospel God reveals to us.

*You often hear people desiring more of the knowledge of God, more of the wisdom of God, more of the power of God. They want more revelation, to know more about the kingdom of heaven, in heaven and on the earth, and they wish to learn and increase.*

*There is one principle that I wish the people would understand and lay to heart. Just as fast as you will prove before your God that you are worthy to receive the mysteries, if you please to call them so, of the kingdom of heaven--that you are full of confidence in God--that you will never betray a thing that God tells you--that you will never reveal to your neighbour that which ought not to be revealed, as quick as you prepare to be entrusted with the things of God, there is an eternity of them to bestow upon you. Instead of pleading with the Lord to bestow more upon you, plead with yourselves to have confidence in yourselves, to have integrity in yourselves, and know when to speak and what to speak, what to reveal, and how to carry yourselves and walk before the Lord. And just as fast as you prove to Him that you will preserve everything secret that ought to be--that you will deal out to your neighbours all which you ought, and no more, and learn how to dispense your knowledge to your families, friends, neighbours, and brethren, the Lord will bestow upon you, and give to you, and bestow upon you, until finally he will say to you, "You shall never fall; your salvation is sealed unto you; you are sealed up unto eternal life and salvation, through your integrity."*

*Let every person be the friend of God, that whatever He reveals to you, you can wisely handle without asking Him whether you shall tell your wife of it or not. You can recollect the backhanded blow I gave to some of the brethren last winter. They were in pain, because they knew something which they could not tell to their wives. I would not trust such men out of sight of my dinner. God will not trust the least thing to such persons. Sisters, if you are in pain, because you cannot tell your husbands everything, you had better take a little catnip tea, and get over it, if you can. What will God reveal to such persons? Just enough to keep them from the gulf of despair, and lead them along until they get a little sense. I say this that you may learn to reveal that which you ought, and to keep the rest to yourselves. By so doing you prove to God that you are His friends, and will keep His secrets.*

*The world may howl around you and plead for the secrets of the Lord which he has given you, but they will not get them. When the Lord has proved His children true to what He has given into their charge, and that they will do His bidding, He will tell such persons anything that they should know. A great many desire just enough of knowledge to damn them and it does damn a great many. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.4, Pg.371, underline added)*

It is often very difficult for a person who truly loves the gospel to learn something new and still keep it inside them. I believe the natural inclination is to share this knowledge with others. Our desire to share what we have learned can come from many different sources. Sometimes we have an honest desire to bless others and we wish they were ready to hear what we have to say. Other times we simply love the truth and get so excited about it that we can't keep it to ourselves. Still other times, we reveal mysteries to others because of pride - we want to show them that we know something they don't know. Whatever the reason, it can be wrong and harmful to impart those certain truths which ought not to be imparted. That said, further discussion into each of the two areas mentioned above may help us to better understand our responsibilities regarding the truths the Lord imparts to us.

## Milk vs. Meat

As we have stated, because people are at different levels of understanding, truth can sometimes be as damaging to one person as it is edifying to another. The Lord has told us about this problem and the way in which we should deal with it.

*And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9, underline added)*

In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord has said,

*And I command you that you preach naught but repentance, and show not these things unto the world until it is wisdom in me.*

*For they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive; wherefore, they must know not these things, lest they perish. (D&C 19:21-22, underline added)*

The Lord always seems to impart only as much as his children can bear until “it is wisdom” in Him to give them more. In fact, as any loving parent would do, He sometimes offers us “partial truths,” knowing that we will misunderstand for a time, but that through faith on what he tells us we will eventually come to a more complete understanding of the principle. This is perhaps best demonstrated to us by an example found in section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

*Wherefore, I revoke not the judgments which I shall pass, but woes shall go forth, weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, yea, to those who are found on my left hand.*

*Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written endless torment.*

*Again, it is written eternal damnation; wherefore it is more express than other scriptures, that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name’s glory.*

*Wherefore, I will explain unto you this mystery, for it is meet unto you to know even as mine apostles.*

*I speak unto you that are chosen in this thing, even as one, that you may enter into my rest.*

*For, behold, the mystery of godliness, how great is it! For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore--*

*Eternal punishment is God’s punishment.*

*Endless punishment is God’s punishment. (D&C 19:5-12, underline added)*

The only way I can see to interpret these verses is to say that the Lord worded a particular doctrine in such a way that those with little faith and knowledge would not grasp the full meaning of the principle.

Only through further revelation was this “mystery” unfolded to us.

It is important to note a few things about the example above. First, it seemed definitely designed by the Lord for the specific purpose of “work[ing] upon the hearts of the children of men.” It was meant to affect us in a certain way. Although it wasn’t the whole truth, the Lord knew that it would lead us in the right direction. That’s why He did it.

Another important element to notice is that the Lord did not offer a false statement, it was simply incomplete information. When the revelation was given, He did not have to correct false information. All He did was add to the information already given to us. However, that new information changed the way we viewed things quite dramatically.

It is reasonable to assume that there are many other mysteries in the scriptures that can only be fully understood by receiving more revelation. For example, almost all of the commandments God has given to us have been “broken” by His command as well. Perhaps the best example of this comes to us with the set of circumstances surrounding the brass plates. Nephi clearly knew that the Lord had commanded us to not kill, steal, or bear false witness. Yet Nephi did all of these things in order to fulfill the commandments of the Lord and obtain the brass plates.<sup>2</sup> This, again, clearly demonstrates the importance of personal revelation in our lives. Personal revelation supersedes any other teaching or doctrine previously given to us by the Lord. Without more revelation, we will remain at a lower level of understanding regarding the doctrines which have already been revealed to us. In addition, the Lord wants to give us further light and knowledge. However, we must first be prepared to receive such blessings. If we are not prepared, the Lord may not give them to us. We should be mindful of the words of Joseph Smith when he said,

*If the Church knew all the commandments, one-half they would condemn through prejudice and ignorance. (TPJS Pg. 111)*

If we are to gain more understanding of the kingdom of God, we must begin to overcome our pride, prejudice, and ignorance. We must understand that there is so much more that the Lord would like to tell us if we would but prepare ourselves to receive it. However, until we do prepare ourselves to receive it, we will likely not be told all that there is to tell. This is as it should be. The Lord wants to exalt us by giving us line upon line and precept upon precept. He does not want to condemn us by giving us more than we are able to bear. Again, the burden remains with us. The Lord will give us more and lead us towards a celestial way of life only as we are prepared to receive such things. If we are valiant to the things the Lord has given us, even if they are lower laws or incomplete doctrines, He will follow up with greater laws and a greater understanding of the way things really are.

*For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (2 Nephi 28:30, underline added)*

May we receive the word of God with a cheerful heart that he will see fit to reveal more of the “meat” to us.<sup>3</sup> May we also make good judgments in sharing gospel truths, especially the mysteries, with others.

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<sup>2</sup> See 1 Nephi 4.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; D&C 19:22

We must understand that it is possible to do more damage than good with the truth we possess. That we should always seek more knowledge concerning the mysteries is clearly outlined in the scriptures.<sup>4</sup> That we should not always share what we have learned with others is just as clearly outlined for us.

### **Offending Others**

In light of what we just discussed, it should be mentioned at this point that the gospel seems to be naturally offensive to most people. It is difficult to preach the gospel in any depth at all without offending someone. This is why so many of the prophets have been killed. In our efforts to teach the higher principles, we should be careful not to withhold information simply for the reason that it may offend someone. Chances are that it definitely will offend someone, almost in every case. Even though it is usually wise not to teach everything you know, it is also not always the best choice to hold back the deeper doctrines merely because some people aren't ready for them. Sometimes the Lord wants or commands us to teach things that are difficult for people to hear or accept. Sometimes the same words that exalt some, condemn others. This all seems to be part of the way the Lord works. For example, in the days of Enoch, most of the people apparently rejected almost everything he said.

*And it came to pass that Enoch went forth in the land, among the people, standing upon the hills and the high places, and cried with a loud voice, testifying against their works; and all men were offended because of him. (Moses 6:37, underline added)*

Yet, while most people were disturbed by his words and rejected his message, others listened and eventually became the city of Zion. Imagine if Enoch had stopped preaching the higher laws necessary to create Zion merely because some people weren't ready to hear what he had to say. It seems apparent that if Enoch would have stopped teaching the higher doctrines, thus avoiding offending the people, the city of Zion would never have been established.

Likewise, what if Samuel the Lamanite were more concerned about the feelings of the people of Zarahemla than he was about obeying the will of God? What if Alma and Amulek had shied away from their teachings in Ammonihah, just because most of the people were not ready for them? In our dispensation Joseph Smith was always saying things that brought upon him the persecution of the mobs. Even Christ himself, the master teacher, offended so many people so often that they continually plotted to destroy him. Eventually their plotting paid off and they killed Him merely because of his teachings.

All of these examples (and the many others that could be given) show us that if we are truly following the Lord, we will often be called upon to say things that are not very popular. We will often be called upon to preach things which the people are not ready to hear and which will offend many of them. The fact that people may become upset at our teachings is not always a good reason to withhold the knowledge we have to impart. In all of the examples just given, even though most people chose to be offended and reject the words of these prophets, other people were affected positively and went on to greater things. It is important to realize that both types of people heard the exact same words from their respective prophet. The words of these prophets did not force any of these people to be offended. They chose to be offended through their own pride, prejudice, and ignorance. It is just the same today.

Again, the most important factor to consider is personal revelation. We absolutely must become acquainted with the spirit and how it works, so that we will recognize when we should teach the higher things and when we should keep them within ourselves. Only through following this path will we make good judgements regarding the preaching of the gospel to others. If the Lord tells us to speak, then we

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<sup>4</sup> See the preface to this work.

should speak in spite of what others will say or do. But if the Lord tells us not to speak, but to hold it within ourselves, then we must not speak, in spite of how true and wonderful the doctrine may be.

### **The Specific Callings of Some**

Another consideration in preaching the higher things of the gospel is the specific callings of others. For whatever reason, there are times when the Lord has called a certain person to impart a given set of truths. This can be illustrated by the experience of Nephi when he saw the vision of John.

*But the things which thou [Nephi] shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them.*

*And also others who have been, to them hath he shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity, according to the truth which is in the Lamb, in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel.*

*And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel.*

*And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw. (1 Nephi 14:24-28, underline added)*

It seems quite obvious that the Lord has a very detailed plan in mind. He has specific people and specific times chosen to impart certain truths. We should not automatically assume that it is our calling to impart everything to everyone.

This principle is true for holding and administering certain keys, powers, and ordinances as well.<sup>5</sup> Though a person may have all knowledge about a given principle, he may not have the authority to act upon the knowledge given to him.

If we have honest, sincere desires to preach the gospel, and we place the will of the Lord and the interests of others above our own desires, He will help us to know what we should do. The Lord had much to say to Hyrum Smith about his desires to preach the gospel. What was said to Hyrum is probably worthwhile for us as well.

*Behold, the field is white already to harvest; therefore, whoso desireth to reap let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God.*

*Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is called of God.*

*Therefore, if you will ask of me you shall receive; if you will knock it shall be opened unto you. (D&C 11:3-5, underline added)*

Notice the connection between the desire to preach and being called to preach. This seems to echo the words of the Lord in other verses of scripture.

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<sup>5</sup> D&C 132:7

*Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work; (D&C 4:3)*

Continuing with the admonition to Hyrum,

*Behold, I command you that you need not suppose that you are called to preach until you are called.*

*Wait a little longer, until you shall have my word, my rock, my church, and my gospel, that you may know of a surety my doctrine.*

*And then, behold, according to your desires, yea, even according to your faith shall it be done unto you.*

*Keep my commandments; hold your peace; appeal unto my Spirit; (D&C 11:15-18, underline added)*

Here we see that even though we are called to preach according to our desires, there are often reasons why the Lord wants us to hold our peace. A few verses later, the Lord adds,

*Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men.*

*But now hold your peace; study my word which hath gone forth among the children of men, and also study my word which shall come forth among the children of men, or that which is now translating, yea, until you have obtained all which I shall grant unto the children of men in this generation, and then shall all things be added thereto. (D&C 11:21-22, underline added)*

So, even though we have a desire to preach, and even though that desire largely determines our call to preach, we still need to follow the promptings of the Lord.

### **The Authority to Preach**

It is also important to note that in order to “go forth” and preach the gospel, one must be ordained under the proper authority.

*Again I say unto you, that it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church. (D&C 42:11)*

However, most people don’t realize who in the church meet these requirements. In the verse directly following the one just cited, the Lord begins to outline who has been called to preach the gospel of Christ.

*And again, the elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fullness of the gospel. (D&C 42:12)*

According to the scriptures, if you are ordained to any of the offices of the priesthood, you are called to

preach the gospel.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Lord has told us that we all have a certain responsibility to preach the gospel.

*And again, I say unto you, I give unto you a commandment, that every man, both elder, priest, teacher, and also member, go to with his might, with the labor of his hands, to prepare and accomplish the things which I have commanded.*

*And let your preaching be the warning voice, every man to his neighbor, in mildness and in meekness.* (D&C 38:40-41, underline added)

*Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor.* (D&C 88:81, underline added)

Of this last scripture President Spencer W. Kimball has said,

*Remember the slogan President David O. McKay gave us, "Every member a missionary."*

*This is your privilege. This is your duty. This is a command from the presidency of the Church and from your Lord. Listen to the Lord's command:*

*"Behold, I sent you out to testify and warn the people, and it becometh every man [every man!] who hath been warned to warn his neighbor. Therefore, they are left without excuse, and their sins are upon their own heads." (D&C 88:81-82.)*

*Each of us is responsible to bear witness of the gospel truths that we have been given. We all have relatives, neighbors, friends, and fellow workmen, and it is our responsibility to pass the truths of the gospel on to them, by example as well as by precept.* (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, Pg.552, underline added)

President Ezra Taft Benson has echoed these words.

*Our members need to understand their responsibility to do missionary work and then do it. I fully endorse the words of President Spencer W. Kimball: "Do we really believe in revelation? Then why cannot we accept fully as the revealed word of God the revelation of the Prophet-President David O. McKay, wherein he brought to the Church and to the world this valuable Church slogan, 'Every member a missionary'?" How else could the Lord expect to perform His work except through the Saints who have covenanted to serve Him? You and I have made such a covenant. Will we honor our sacred covenant?" (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.208)*

Here we have a prophet quoting a prophet, who is quoting another prophet. It's hard to get any more authoritative than that. We are to preach the gospel. And in spite of those who say we shouldn't, we should. However, we must do so under the direction of the Lord through personal inspiration. If we do not approach it in this manner, it will likely be only so much chaff in the wind.

It is important for us to understand that along with our fears of being deceived by the philosophies of man and Satan, we should possess another equally terrifying fear - that of deceiving others with those same

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<sup>6</sup> See D&C 20:42, 46, 58-59; 42:12; 84:111; 107:25.

philosophies. As already quoted, the Lord has told us how we should proceed as we strive to keep his commandment of preaching the gospel to the world.

*And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach. (D&C 42:14)*

May we all endeavor to avoid being deceived by philosophies of men and Satan while, at the same time, making sure we are teaching the doctrines of God ourselves. This is done by gaining and listening to the spirit of the Lord - personal revelation. The importance of personal revelation in all our doings simply cannot be overemphasized.

## **OTHER INSPIRED PEOPLE**

The importance of hearkening to the words of those who are inspired of God can be emphasized by a single scripture.

*What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same. (D&C 1:38, underline added)*

If we can find a person who speaks with the power, authority, and inspiration of God, and confirm that he is doing so through personal revelation, it can be just as helpful to us in our search for truth as if we had received the revelation ourselves.

We should note that, relative to our four areas in which we can find the word of God, the area of “other inspired people” is perhaps the most difficult to discern. As we look around us in the world today we see many people who claim to be “speaking for the Lord.” Some even claim to be the Lord himself. It is reasonable to assume that only a fraction of these people are actually true representatives of God. Trying to determine which are true and which are false can often be a very difficult and confusing experience.

The scriptures clearly prophesy that there will be false prophets who will lead many astray in the last days. Speaking of the last days the Lord has said,

*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. (Matthew 24:24)<sup>7</sup>*

It is important to note that these false prophets will be able to “show great signs and wonders.” They will not be powerless in their efforts to lead the posterity of Adam astray. It goes without saying that some of these alluring people will be all too irresistible to us. Many people have been, are being, and will continue to be deceived by such people.

It is also important for us to understand that there will be true prophets along with the false. Unfortunately, the true prophets of God are generally rejected by the world around them. They are usually quite unpopular and are often looked upon as if they were false prophets. This has been true in

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<sup>7</sup> See also Matthew 7:15, Matthew 24:11, Mark 13:22, Luke 6:26, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1, Words of Mormon 1:16, 3 Nephi 14:15, 4 Nephi 1:34, Joseph Smith Matthew 1:9, and Joseph Smith Matthew 1:22.

almost every dispensation of the gospel.

With regards to the difficulty we have in discerning the true prophets from the false, Samuel the Lamanite clearly warns us of our folly. As you read the following verses, please liken them unto ourselves to see if there is any possibility that they might be applicable to us in our day (or even in the near future).

*And now when ye talk, ye say: If our days had been in the days of our fathers of old, we would not have slain the prophets; we would not have stoned them, and cast them out.*

*Behold ye are worse than they; for as the Lord liveth, if a prophet come among you and declareth unto you the word of the Lord, which testifieth of your sins and iniquities, ye are angry with him, and cast him out and seek all manner of ways to destroy him; yea, you will say that he is a false prophet, and that he is a sinner, and of the devil, because he testifieth that your deeds are evil.*

*But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth-- and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.*

*Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him. (Helaman 13:25-28)*

It has been my experience that Latter-day Saints are usually no different than anyone else in this regard. We all tend to believe that if we had lived in the days of the prophets, or even Christ himself, that we would have accepted their messages and followed their counsel. We should, however, ask ourselves if we really would have been willing to sell all we have, give it to the poor, and follow Christ.<sup>8</sup> Would we do this right now if He were here today? Would we have followed Joseph Smith as he introduced such controversial doctrines as plural marriage<sup>9</sup> or equality in riches?<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, how eager are we (in general) to follow those who tell us how wonderful we are? To what degree do we seek those people who recognize our strong points and build our “self-esteem” rather than showing us our weaknesses and telling us that we need to change? These should be serious questions for us today, especially if we feel satisfied with our personal righteousness.

In addition, Latter-day Saints generally want to believe that “all is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth.”<sup>11</sup> We want to believe that everything is fine and that we are on pretty much a direct course to the Celestial Kingdom. And we often seek to associate ourselves with and listen to those people who tell us that all is well and that we are great people. Unfortunately, most true prophets are here to declare just the opposite

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22

<sup>9</sup> D&C 132:61-66

<sup>10</sup> D&C 49:19-20; D&C 70:14; D&C 78:5-7; D&C 104:15-18

<sup>11</sup> 2 Nephi 28:21

of these things. Most true prophets carry the message that all is not well in Zion and that we need to repent. This can be easily seen on almost every page of scripture. Of this cry for repentance, President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

*As I have sought direction from the Lord, I have had reaffirmed in my mind and heart the declaration of the Lord to “say nothing but repentance unto this generation.” (D&C 6:9; 11:9) This has been a theme of every latter-day prophet, along with their testimony that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God.*

*Repentance was the cry of our late and great prophet, Spencer W. Kimball. This theme permeated his talks and the pages of his writings, such as his marvelous book the Miracle of Forgiveness. And it must be our cry today, both to member and to nonmember alike - repent.*

*Watchmen - what of the night?<sup>12</sup> We must respond by saying that all is not well in Zion. (Conference Report, May 1986, Pg. 4.)*

As harsh as it sounds, in general, Latter-day Saints don't like to be called to repentance any more than anyone else. We much prefer the cute little stories or sweet poems that tell us how well we are doing, rather than a bold cry that we're going in the wrong direction. We, along with the rest of the world, like to believe the doctrine that “I'm okay and you're okay.” From a scriptural standpoint, this is not too different from the words of Korihor when he said, “Whatsoever a man [does it is] no crime.”<sup>13</sup> This is why false prophets are so popular. They tell us what we want to hear, instead of what we need to hear. Whether they come under the guise of religion, pretending to speak for the Lord, or in a suit and tie, representing the business or educational world, they are false prophets all the same. And more often than not, we will pay them plenty for the flattering, but false, teachings they have to offer us.

Joseph Smith clearly recognized the problem of discerning true prophets from the false.

*The world always mistook false prophets for true ones, and those that were sent of God, they considered to be false prophets and hence they killed, stoned, punished and imprisoned the true prophets, and these had to hide themselves “in deserts and dens, and caves of the earth,” and though the most honorable men of the earth, they banished them from their society as vagabonds, whilst they cherished, honored and supported knaves, vagabonds, hypocrites, impostors, and the basest of men. (TPJS Pg. 205)*

If we are to avoid being deceived by such people, as were the Nephites in the time of Samuel the Lamanite, we must first know what we are looking for. How do we discern true prophets from false ones? The Savior offers us some help in our effort to discern false prophets.

*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

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<sup>12</sup> See Isaiah 21:11. See also Isaiah 21:6; Isaiah 52:8; Isaiah 62:6; Jeremiah 6:17; Jeremiah 31:6; Jeremiah 51:12; Ezekiel 3:17; Ezekiel 33:6-7; Mosiah 12:22; Mosiah 15:29; 3 Nephi 16:18; 3 Nephi 20:32; D&C 101:45-46, 53-54.

<sup>13</sup> Alma 30:17. See also Alma 18:5.

*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

*Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*

*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

*Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

*Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*

*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:15-23)*

This approach to discerning false prophets is much more difficult than we often realize. We must define what the Savior means by “fruits.” It is clear from these verses that the false prophets will do such things as prophesy, cast out devils, and perform many wonderful works, all in the Lord’s name. These things are not enough to discern a false prophet from a true one.

The Lord does make it clear that a person must do the will of the Father in order to be found worthy before God. If this is the “fruit” referred to by the Savior and if we are to use this as a tool for discernment, it is apparent that we must first know the will of the Father for ourselves. We cannot judge whether or not someone is doing the will of the Father unless we first know what the will of the Father is. This seems to place gospel scholarship and personal revelation high on our list of priorities and prerequisites. Barring personal revelation, I don’t know of any other sure formula for discerning prophets, whether true or false. President Benson once said,

*It takes revelation to perceive revelation. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.114)*

If we are to know whether or not another person is speaking by the power and inspiration of God, we must possess the power and inspiration of God ourselves. If we are to perceive revelation, we must receive revelation ourselves.

In addition to personal revelation, which is by far the best method of discernment, I believe there are some rules of thumb that we can look for and which are generally true. For example, Satan is very good at countering the efforts of the Lord. In connection with the idea of “opposition in all things,”<sup>14</sup> it seems that whenever true prophets come among any given people, Satan is allowed to send false prophets to deceive. Again, Joseph Smith helps us to understand this principle.

*False prophets always arise to oppose the true prophets and they will prophesy so very near the truth that they will deceive almost the very chosen ones. (TPJS Pg. 365)*

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<sup>14</sup> 2 Nephi 2:11

The opposite of this principle seems to be true as well. True prophets will almost always arise to oppose the false prophets. This principle teaches us that whenever we see what we consider to be false prophets among us, we may with good reason believe that there are also true prophets among us. Likewise, if we believe there are true prophets among us, we should expect to see false ones as well. Whenever we see an increase of “prophets” among us, whether true or false, we should generally expect to see an increase of both rather than just one type or the other. The importance of this statement can be easily seen by the number of “prophets” we see in the news lately. With each of these occurrences we should be careful that we 1) don’t judge too quickly, 2) that we remain open to the idea of true prophets appearing with what seem to be equally “radical” teachings as the false, and 3) that we continually ask ourselves why these people are showing up with such frequency. We need to be careful that we don’t follow false prophets. But we need to be equally careful that we recognize and follow the true ones, whether they hold positions in the church or not. If we see any prophets appear at all, we should immediately begin to look for their counterparts.

### **The Importance of the Prophet of the Church**

Now that we have discussed the possibility of being deceived by confusing false prophets with true and vice-versa, let’s turn our discussion to the importance of the prophet and president of the church. Of the value of having a living prophet to lead us, President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

*We are admonished to “seek out of the best books words of wisdom” (D&C 88:118). Surely these books must include the scriptures. Alongside them must be the words of the Presidents of the Church. The Lord said of the President of the Church, “His word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth” (D&C 21:5). These books make up what has been referred to as “the Lord’s library”--namely the standard works and the various volumes that contain the words of the different Presidents of the Church. Of the latter volumes, that which would be of greatest importance to you would be the words of the current President of the Church, for his words are directed to our day and our needs. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.137-138, underline added)*

President Benson has also stated,

*All men are entitled to inspiration, but only one man is the Lord’s mouthpiece. Some lesser men have in the past, and will in the future, use their office unrighteously. Some will use it to lead the unwary astray; some will use it to persuade us that all is well in Zion; some will use it to cover and excuse their ignorance. Keep your eye on the prophet--for the Lord will never permit His prophet to lead this Church astray. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.142, underline added)*

I believe these words spoken by President Benson. I do not believe that the Lord will allow the prophet and president of the church in this last dispensation to lead the church astray. I believe He will take him from us before He would allow that to happen. As President Benson submits, other authorities in the church have and will lead us astray from time to time. But the prophet and president of the church will not be allowed to do so. This testimony has continued to grow within me as I have read, studied, and prayed about the words of our prophets.

This point being made, it is important that we understand what it means for a prophet to lead someone astray. For example, we know that not all true prophets have told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The example in 2 Kings 13 tells us that some true prophets will test us with information that isn’t always true. D&C 19:6-12 is quite clear in describing how the Lord sometimes uses true prophets to communicate things that are not wholly true in order to “work upon the hearts of the children of men,

altogether for my name's sake." Alma 22:9-11 informs us that prophets will sometimes use terminology or concepts that aren't exactly correct in order to better communicate with their target audiences. And then there is simply a limitation of knowledge among true prophets. Alma 40:20-21 teaches us that prophets don't know everything when it comes to gospel scholarship. They are still very much in the learning process, just like the rest of us. While it may offend those with sensitive testimonies, it seems obvious that being called as a true prophet of God doesn't include instant knowledge of all doctrines or all truth. There are many examples of prophets not understanding what many Latter-day Saints would consider as basic doctrine.

In addition to these examples, it is reasonable to believe that motive plays a large part of what God tells us through his prophets. For example, if a mother is having difficulty keeping her small child from playing in the busy street, she may resort to an outright lie for the benefit of the child. When all her explanations about the dangers of moving vehicles fail, she may finally tell the child that there are big invisible snakes in the road that will bite him if he goes out there. Assuming this tactic works, did the mother "lead the child astray?" I think not. She was still leading him down a path that was both beneficial and necessary to the child's welfare and growth. Neither does a prophet or the Lord himself lead us astray when he adheres to similar practices.

While these scriptures and examples may bother people who don't like to be treated as children, children we are and proud children at that. It is often necessary to deal with us in this manner in order to fulfill God's purposes and to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. It is clear that being lead astray is not only about telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Oh that it were that simple! There is far more involved than that.

It is also important to note that the prophet is still allowed to offer his opinion on things. He is not always bound to speak as a prophet. Of this, Joseph Smith has said,

*This morning I...visited with a brother and sister from Michigan, who thought that "a prophet is always a prophet;" but I told them that a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such. (TPJS, Pg.278)*

This should lead the thoughtful person to ask, "How do we know when a prophet is speaking as a prophet and when he is not?" Again, the answer must be "through study and personal revelation." In the following passages, President Brigham Young offers us an interesting perspective regarding our relationship to the prophet and president of the church, as well as other authorities of the church.

*What a pity it would be if we were led by one man to utter destruction! Are you afraid of this? I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by Him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation, and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. This has been my exhortation continually. (Journal of Discourses 9:151, underline added)*

And again,

*I do not want men to come to me or my brethren for testimony as to the truth of this work; but let them take the Scriptures of divine truth, and there the path is pointed out to them*

*as plainly as ever a guideboard indicated the right path to the weary traveller. There they are directed to go, not to Brothers Brigham, Heber, or Daniel, to any apostle or elder in Israel, but to the Father in the name of Jesus, and ask for the information they need. Can they who take this course in honesty and sincerity receive information? Will the Lord turn away from the honest heart seeking for truth? No, He will not; He will prove to them, by the revelations of His Spirit, the facts in the case. And when the mind is open to the revelations of the Lord it comprehends them quicker and keener than anything that is seen by the natural eye. It is not what we see with our eyes they may be deceived but what is revealed by the Lord from Heaven is sure and steadfast, and abides for ever. We do not want the people to rely on human testimony, although that cannot be confuted and destroyed; still, there is a more sure word of prophecy that all may gain if they will seek it earnestly before the Lord. (Journal of Discourses 12:96, underline added)*

In a newspaper interview with Brigham Young, he also stated,

*“[Do] you, like the old prophets, receive direct revelation from God?” He answered, “Yes, and not only me but my brethren also.” “Does that extend to all the church without reserve or rank?” “Yes, and it is just as necessary for the mother to possess this spirit in training and rearing her children as for anyone else.” “It is not absolutely necessary, then, that each person receive revelations through you?” “Oh, no; through the spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost; but to dictate to the church is my part of it.” (Interview with Brigham Young, Deseret News, May 23, 1877, underline added)*

I feel it is important to note at least three things from these quotes. First, that we are to go to the Lord for our surest information, not to any man on earth, even the prophet. Second, though we should not “rely on human testimony,” it cannot be confuted or destroyed. And third, even though all of us are entitled to the revelations of God as much as any prophet, it is not necessarily our calling to “dictate to the church” the revelations we receive. That charge belongs to those who are specifically called to do so.

We should never throw away any testimony, but should seek to know whether or not that testimony is inspired and true. It is up to us to determine whether the words of the prophet are prophetic or not. This is done via a knowledge of the scriptures and through personal inspiration. I believe that there is simply no other comparable substitute for these two tools of discernment.

President Joseph F. Smith also spoke of the danger of bypassing scripture and revelation when judging the words of our leaders.

*I know of but One in all the world who can be taken as the first and only perfect standard for us to follow, and he is the Only Begotten Son of God. I would feel sorry indeed, if I had a friend or an associate in this life who would turn away from the plan of life and salvation because I might stumble or make a failure of my life. I want no man to lean upon me nor to follow me, only so far as I am a consistent follower in the footsteps of the Master. (Gospel Doctrine, Pg.4, underline added. See also the Juvenile Instructor, 1915, Vol. 50, pp. 738, 739.)*

Again, how would we know if Joseph F. Smith, or any prophet of the church, was a “consistent follower in the footsteps of the master?” Only by gaining an understanding of the Master and his footsteps for ourselves can we know such things. This is our responsibility, not theirs. We should strive to be continually guided through study, prayer, and inspiration.

Elder Boyd K. Packer has said,

*If we fail to teach them [the members of the church] correct principles, teach them the doctrine, they will not know how to govern themselves.*

*If we do [teach them correct doctrine and principles]...there will come a safe and virtuous dependency. Latter-day Saints will come to depend upon the Lord instead of upon the headquarters of the church. (Let them Govern Themselves, Regional Representative Seminar, March 30, 1990, underline added)*

Suffice it to say that we have a living prophet of God among us. It is my testimony that he speaks with God and Christ. His words, along with the words of the other presidents of the church, should never be taken lightly. These men are prophets of God. However, we should always remember that it is up to us, not them, to discern the words of the Lord's servants. We do this by seeking personal inspiration concerning their words and by comparing their words with the words found in the scriptures.

### **The Importance of Other Prophets**

As Latter-day Saints we are blessed to have a specific position in the church that we can look to and say, "That person is a true prophet of God." The blessings of this cannot be overemphasized. However, it is also important to note the difference between "the" prophet and "a" prophet. As President Benson said,

*All men are entitled to inspiration, but only one man is the Lord's mouthpiece. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.142)*

"The" prophet serves as president of the Church. However, there are many men today who can truthfully claim to be "a" prophet. When asked if he believed he was a prophet, Joseph Smith once responded,

*Yes, and every other man who has the testimony of Jesus. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Revelation, 19:10th verse. (TPJS, Pg. 119, underline added)*

On another occasion Joseph Smith said the following in response to the question, "What constitutes a prophet?"

*If any person should ask me if I were a prophet, I should not deny it, as that would give me the lie; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore, if I profess to be a witness or teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; but if I be a true teacher and witness, I must possess the spirit of prophecy, and that constitutes a prophet; and any man who says he is a teacher or a preacher of righteousness, and denies the spirit of prophecy, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; and by this key false teachers and impostors may be detected. (TPJS, Pg. 269, underline added)<sup>15</sup>*

According to these statements, any man who has the spirit of prophecy is a prophet.<sup>16</sup> There are many

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<sup>15</sup> See also TPJS, Pg. 160.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that the "spirit of prophecy" and the "testimony of Jesus" are one and the same thing. However, I believe this entails much more than merely believing that Jesus is the Christ. For further study see Revelation 19:10; D&C 76:51; D&C 76:74; D&C 76:79; D&C 76:82; D&C 76:101; D&C 138:12; 2 Nephi 25:4; Jacob 4:6; Alma 3:27; Alma 4:13; Alma 5:47;

prophets today, as in every dispensation in the past, who truly speak the word of God. Again, it is truth that we are after. Regardless of truth's source, we should be pleased to find it whenever it comes our way.

There are many servants of God today who do good works and who are not found among the general authorities or even the general membership of the church. This may be a bold declaration to some. However, it seems to be true. Of this doctrine the Savior has taught us the following.

*And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us.*

*But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.*

*For he that is not against us is on our part.*

*For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. (Mark 9:38-41)<sup>17</sup>*

This is an important principle for us to understand. What most of us would like is a nice, neat, little package of prophets that are easily identifiable and easy to understand and follow. This has the tendency to take the responsibility of finding truth away from us and place it onto them. As we study the scriptures, this does not seem to be the case. There seem to be many servants of God throughout every dispensation of the gospel. And apparently the Lord is free to call them anytime he sees fit and to any people He sees fit.

Many people have mistaken the true prophets for the false and visa-versa.<sup>18</sup> Even Christ himself was accused of being a servant of Satan.<sup>19</sup> It is a difficult test for us to determine which people are speaking under the direction of the Lord and which are not. However, I feel it is a test that must be taken if we are to be true followers of Christ and the truths of his gospel plan.

We have many specific examples of multiple prophets in the scriptures. For example, just before the coming of Christ in the Book of Mormon, we read that the Lord inspired many people to preach the gospel and call the people to repentance.

*And there began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth, standing among the people in all the land, preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people, and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people, or in other words, the resurrection of Christ; and they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings. (3 Nephi*

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Alma 6:8; Alma 9:21; Alma 10:12; Alma 12:7; Alma 13:26; Alma 16:5; Alma 17:3; Alma 25:16; Alma 37:15; Alma 43:2; Helaman 4:12; Helaman 4:23; D&C 11:25; D&C 131:5; Joseph Smith History 1:73.

<sup>17</sup> See also Luke 9:50.

<sup>18</sup> Helaman 13:23-29; Helaman 16:21 (10-23); 3 Nephi 2:2 (1-3)

<sup>19</sup> Mark 3:22

6:20)

Later in this same chapter, these “men inspired from heaven” are referred to as prophets.<sup>20</sup> These men did not take away the authority of Nephi, the official prophet of the church at this time. Instead, they added to his calling. They were not against either Nephi or the Lord. Rather, these inspired men were “on their part.”

In light of this scripture, it is interesting to note that President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

*The record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior’s visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior’s second coming. (A Witness and a Warning, p. 37)*

Perhaps we should be looking for “men inspired from heaven” in our day as well - men who do not necessarily hold positions in the church but who are nonetheless sent by God.

The Book of Mormon is full of examples of multiple prophets preaching and prophesying to the people at the same time. For instance, the fact that Samuel the Lamanite spoke under the direction of the Lord to the people of Zarahemla in no way undermined the authority or preaching of Nephi. Likewise, at the same time Mosiah was preaching to the people in his day, it was not a contradiction at all that Abinadi was speaking as a prophet to the wicked people of King Noah or that Alma was preaching and baptizing at the waters of Mormon. We are told that during the time Lehi was in Jerusalem there came “many prophets” who prophesied and taught repentance unto the people.<sup>21</sup> The same thing clearly happened during the time of Enos<sup>22</sup> and among the Jaredites.<sup>23</sup>

Although there is only one person on earth who is given certain keys of the kingdom and who is the official spokesman for the whole church, there have been and always will be others who righteously prophesy and preach in the name of the Lord. Even among those who “followeth not us” we can expect to find inspired men of God who are doing exactly what the Lord wants them to do. We should be careful that we do not shun such people too quickly, as John the apostle and Joshua were rebuked for doing.

Concerning the fact that God has had and will have many prophets and that he speaks to many people through these prophets, the first presidency, under the direction of President Spencer W. Kimball, has stated,

*Based upon ancient and modern revelation, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gladly teaches and declares the christian doctrine that all men and women are brothers and sisters, not only by blood relationship from common progenitors, but also as literal spirit children of an Eternal Father.*

*The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the*

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<sup>20</sup> 3 Nephi 6:25

<sup>21</sup> 1 Nephi 1:4

<sup>22</sup> Enos 1:22

<sup>23</sup> Ether 11:1; 11:12; 11:20

Reformers, as well as the philosophers including Socrates, Plato and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.

*The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel.*

Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come. (Statement of the First Presidency, February 15, 1978, underline added)

Elder B. H. Roberts of the first quorum of the seventy made a similar statement.

*While the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is established for the instruction of man; and is one of God's instruments for the making known the truth, yet God is not limited to that institution for such purposes, neither in time or place. He raises up wise men and prophets here and there, speaking to them through means that they can comprehend; not always giving a fullness of truth such as may be found in the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ; but always giving that measure that the people are prepared to receive. Mormonism holds then that all the great teachers are servants of God among all nations and in all ages. They are inspired men, appointed to instruct God's children according to the conditions in the midst of which he finds them. Hence it is not obnoxious to Mormonism to regard Confucius, the great Chinese philosopher and moralist, as a servant of God, inspired to a certain degree by him to teach those great moral maxims which have governed those millions of God's children for lo these many centuries. It is willing to regard Gautama Buddha, as an inspired servant of God, teaching a measure of the truth, at least giving to those people that twilight of truth by which they may somewhat see their way. So with the Arabian prophet, that wild spirit that turned the Arabians from worshipping idols to a conception of the Creator of heaven and earth that was more excellent than their previous conception of Deity. And so the sages of Greece and of Rome. So the reformers of early protestant times. Wherever God finds a soul sufficiently enlightened and pure; one with whom his spirit can communicate, lo, he makes of him a teacher of man. While the path of sensuality and darkness may be that which most men tread, a few, to paraphrase the word of a moral philosopher of high standing, have been led along the upward path; a few in all countries and generations have been wisdom-seekers, or seekers of God. They have been so because the divine Word of Wisdom has looked upon them, choosing them for the knowledge and service of himself. (Defense of the Faith and the Saints, Art. "Revelation and Inspiration," Vol. I, Part II, Ch. IV., underline added)*

These statements clearly outline the fact that the Lord can speak through whomever he pleases and whenever he pleases to do so. They also teach us that many people are simply on different levels of understanding and righteousness. This truth, coupled with the fact that all people must learn line upon line, precept upon precept, suggests that there are likely many inspired teachers throughout the world who are taking people to God in the Lord's own given pace and manner. In fact, the Lord has told us that there are righteous people in the world of whom we are unaware.

*Wherefore, I will that all men shall repent, for all are under sin, except those which I*

*have reserved unto myself, holy men that ye know not of. (D&C 49:8, underline added)<sup>24</sup>*

In this verse the Lord seems to point out that we are included with the rest of those who are “under sin” while these people of whom we know not appear to be more righteous - without sin. Wouldn't it be interesting to know who these people are and where they live? Perhaps, if we are faithful, the Lord will tell us someday.

It is a wonderful blessing to have the Lord's church and all of its offices restored to the earth. This organization has provided us with countless books and discourses that were inspired of God and cannot be overlooked in the least. However, it is important for us to understand that the Lord can inspire whomever he wants to and whenever he wants to do so. This takes nothing away from the general authorities or president of the church. In fact, it adds to them. If it is really truth we are after, this doctrine should not be offensive to us at all. In my mind, this doctrine should give joy to our hearts and caution to the way in which we judge others who speak of Christ and his gospel. For the most part, we want to avoid judging others, while, at the same time, constantly judging the words of others to see whether they be true or false. In this type of judgment there is no sin of which I am aware.

### **The General Authorities of the Church**

I believe that the general authorities of the church are often called to fill specific missions for the Lord. The Lord is in charge of his church and knows of the goings on within it. It is important to note, however, that just as with other inspired men on earth, we are not to place our faith in the general authorities of the church. Remember the words of President Joseph F. Smith quoted earlier in this work?

*I know of but One in all the world who can be taken as the first and only perfect standard for us to follow, and he is the Only Begotten Son of God. (Gospel Doctrine, Pg.4)*

I believe it is true that most general authorities will be faithful, righteous leaders of the church and humble servants of God and man. It is reasonable to believe, however, that others will be as Judas or King David of old - they will falter and give in to the weaknesses of the flesh. As bold as this statement may seem to some, no one has taught this doctrine and warned us of its accompanying dangers as well and as clearly as President Ezra Taft Benson.

*The Lord strengthened the faith of the early Apostles by pointing out Judas as a traitor, even before this Apostle had completed his iniquitous work (see Matthew 26:23-25; Luke 13:21-26). So also in our day the Lord has told us of the tares within the wheat that will eventually be hewn down when they are fully ripe. But until they are hewn down, they will be with us, amongst us. (See D&C 86:6-7.) (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89)*

As quoted earlier, President Benson has also said,

*Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon left the Church. Three of Joseph Smith's counselors fell--one even helped plot his death. A natural question that might arise would be that if the Lord knew in*

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I have often wondered if this could be a reference to the third group of people spoken of in the allegory of the vineyard, as found in the fifth chapter of Jacob. In this allegory we are told that the Lord separated four groups of people from the main body. (Jacob 5:20-25) We are then told that all but the third group had become corrupt. (Jacob 5:39) Who and where is this third group of people?

*advance that these men would fall, as He undoubtedly did, why did He have His prophet call them to such high office? The answer is: to fill the Lord's purposes. For even the Master followed the will of the Father by selecting Judas. President George Q. Cannon suggested an explanation, too, when he stated, "Perhaps it is his own design that faults and weaknesses should appear in high places in order that his saints may learn to trust in him and not in any man or men." (Millennial Star 53:658, 1891) And this would parallel Nephi's warning, put not your "trust in the arm of flesh." (2 Nephi 4:34) (An Enemy Hath Done This, Pg. 290, underline added. See also Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.89)*

It is important to note in this quote that President Benson (with the help of President George Q. Cannon) actually equates the general authorities of the church with the "arm of flesh." Again, our faith is to be placed in God and his Son, not in any man or group of men. According to President Benson, if we place our trust in men, whether they appear in "high places" of the church or not, we are placing our trust in the arm of flesh. President Benson offers 2 Nephi 4:34 as a reference to his remarks regarding the arm of flesh. In its entirety, that verse reads as follows:

*O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm. (2 Nephi 4:34, underline added)*

In light of this scripture, these are incredibly strong words spoken by one of our modern prophets. The implications should be almost frightening to us. If I understand President Benson correctly, our faith should rest in God and Christ, never in the leaders of the church. And whosoever places their faith and trust in them shall be cursed. That the general authorities can help us and have helped us come unto God through Christ goes without saying. However, if we believe that all we have to do is to blindly "follow the brethren" to be saved, if we believe they have no faults, or if our faith rests in them instead of God and Christ, I believe we will come up short of our desired goal. Again, President Benson clearly outlines this for us.

*Certain individuals within the Church may go astray and even fall away. This may happen even to a person in the Church who is in a position of some influence and authority. It has happened in the past. It will happen in the future. If our faith is in Jesus Christ and not in the arm of flesh, then we will know that we are members of the Church of Jesus Christ and not the church of men. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg. 90)*

These quotes point out with unwavering clarity how President Benson feels about this topic. It is hard to misunderstand his teachings in this regard. He teaches us clearly that "the brethren" (as well as every other person on earth) are the arm of flesh and hence are not perfect - something we all say from time to time but often do not really want to believe.

By saying all of this I do not wish to suggest that we should not listen to the general authorities of the church. I would never encourage anyone to take such a course. There are prophets among them who are inspired of God. All I wish to point out is that these men are not to be worshipped. Nor are they to be placed before us as the objects of our faith in and knowledge of the gospel. Their mission is to lead us to God and his son, Jesus Christ, and to help us to understand the doctrines of the gospel. It is important for us to understand that the responsibility of judging them, as people, rests with God. However, the responsibility of judging their words rests wholly with us as we pray and receive personal inspiration concerning the things they teach us.

I, for one, believe in the words of President Benson (and others) pertaining to this issue. Obviously

readers will have to draw their own conclusions in this regard. May God bless you in your efforts.

### **The “All or Nothing Rule”**

Now that we have discussed the fact that any person on earth can be either inspired or uninspired, regardless of who they are or what position they may hold, I feel it is important to address a common error made by most people. This error is usually made when we are trying to judge whether or not a person is inspired of God. And it is an error that can absolutely cripple our efforts of discerning true prophets from false ones and inspired words from uninspired words. I call it the “all or nothing rule.”

The all or nothing rule can be summarized by saying that we will often accept either all of a given person’s words or none of them. We have a tendency to either believe everything a person says or none of what a person says. We often believe, for example, that if a person is occasionally wrong, we should never listen to him again. Or we believe that if a person is generally right, he will always be right. In this manner, we tend to judge the person instead of the words or teachings of the person. This often has the end result of having us believe something that is not true or rejecting something that is true, simply because of our opinion regarding the person who said it.

Unfortunately, most of us are so afraid of false prophets and being deceived that we end up rejecting almost every person who is not a general authority of the church but who claims to be a prophet or to speak through the inspiration of God. On the other hand, there are others who tend to believe almost anything anyone says, so long as they hold a certain position in the church. People who do these things are guilty of the all or nothing rule.

We must recognize the fact that Satan is just as pleased with results such as these as he is with any of his other efforts to lead us astray. If he can get us to completely accept or completely reject the words of any given person or group of people, regardless of what those words might be, he has won a battle of tremendous consequence. For, as we have outlined above, men make mistakes. The tares are among the wheat. It is the truth of God we are after, regardless of who gives it to us.

The “all or nothing rule” occurs whenever we decide that a person or group of people is either all false or all true. It doesn’t matter who the person or group is or what organization they represent. All people have some truth in them and all people have some false in them. There is no one on earth who is always right and there is no one on earth who is always wrong. It is not necessarily the discernment of people that we are after, but the discernment of truth. That is the important issue at hand. As mentioned earlier, in this type of judgment - the judging of principles, there is no sin of which I am aware. The Lord has warned us time after time about the dangers of judging people instead of principles.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the Lord told Joseph Smith at one point that even he could not always tell the righteous from the wicked.

*But as you cannot always judge the righteous, or as you cannot always tell the wicked from the righteous, therefore I say unto you, hold your peace until I shall see fit to make all things known unto the world concerning the matter. (D&C 10:37)*

If Joseph Smith could not always judge the wicked from the righteous, I think that perhaps we should maintain reservations about our own abilities to do so as well. Brigham Young had the following to say about judging people. His words echo the problems people have when they are guilty of the all or nothing rule.

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6:36-37; 3 Nephi 14:1-5

*Judge not, that ye be not judged. Let no man judge his fellow being, unless he knows he has the mind of Christ within him. We ought to reflect seriously upon this point; how often it is said--"Such a person has done wrong, and he cannot be a Saint, or he would not do so." How do you know? We hear some swear and lie; they trample upon the rights of their neighbor, break the Sabbath by staying away from meeting, riding about the city, hunting horses and cattle, or working in the canyons. Do not judge such persons, for you do not know the design of the Lord concerning them; therefore, do not say they are not Saints. What shall we do with them? Bear with them. The brethren and sisters from the old countries frequently place great confidence in the American Elders who have been their pastors, but some trifling thing occurs that does not appear right to them, and they say in a moment, "That Elder is not a Latter-day Saint." Judge no man. A person who would say another is not a Latter-day Saint, for some trifling affair in human life proves that he does not possess the Spirit of God. Think of this, brethren and sisters; write it down, that you may refresh your memories with it; carry it with you and look at it often. If I judge my brethren and sisters, unless I judge them by the revelations of Jesus Christ, I have not the Spirit of Christ; if I had, I should judge no man. (Journal of Discourses 1:339, underline added)*

As long as we judge the words instead of the person, we will likely be free from the problems caused by the all or nothing rule. On the other hand, anytime we make it a pattern to believe all or none of the words of any given person (or group of people), we are in danger of being deceived or not learning as much as we otherwise could have learned. Whenever we say such things as, "I'll never listen to so and so again" or "All you have to do is follow the teachings of so and so," we are probably making the mistake of the "all or nothing rule." We are judging people instead of principles. There are many, many people who have left the church because they disagreed with some person or other. There are also many people who simply reject the teachings of anyone who is not a general authority of the church. Some people believe that anything any general authority says is always true and that anything any apostate says is always false. Others believe just the opposite. And there are all types of variations in between. All of these examples, and many more that could be given, are classic examples of the all or nothing rule.

We can also be guilty of the all or nothing rule in judging principles and doctrine, as opposed to people. There are those, for example, who, when they find a new truth that pleases them, spend all of their energy learning about, talking about, and pursuing that truth almost exclusively. This they do at the expense of almost all other truths of the gospel. I know those, for example, who take the word of wisdom so seriously that they spend almost their whole time trying to become "perfect" in the principles of health and nutrition. While their fervor regarding this one area of the gospel manifests itself in almost every action and conversation, they are often much less interested in many of the other important doctrines of the gospel. I know others who are so concerned about the events of the last days that they spend almost all of their time building up food storage and becoming survivalists. Their concern over the upcoming calamities is well founded. That's not the problem. The problem is that they will often overlook or neglect many of the other important parts of the gospel in lieu of their interest in "surviving." There are also many other examples of how the all or nothing rule applies to judging doctrine as well as people. Though I have chosen these two doctrines as examples, it should be noted that almost any doctrine could have been chosen. The point is that there are people who focus on only one part of the gospel, while leaving many other important truths by the wayside. We should make sure that we are interested in and searching for all the truth we can, even if it is not our "forte" in life. I believe it is true that different people will have different gifts, missions, and interests. However, these are given to us "that all may be edified of all."<sup>26</sup> They are not given so that we will remain isolated in our own little "doctrinal corners."

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<sup>26</sup> D&C 88:122; D&C 84:110

I know people who have the ability to focus on certain aspects of the gospel while still maintaining a genuine interest in and a growing knowledge of other points of doctrine. Interestingly enough, these same types of people generally have no problems with wrongly judging other people. They are usually open to listen to both the apostle and the apostate. They certainly have their priority list, as all of us should. But they seem to be open to truth wherever it may be found. These people are usually very well-rounded and can intelligently discuss almost any part of the gospel with genuine interest. I feel this is how all of us should be. We should be interested in learning all truth, whatever its source may be. Someone once said that it's often worth it to read 99 falsehoods in order to find one truth of great value. I not only believe this to be true, but I believe we often have no choice in the matter. The gift of discernment and a genuine desire to know the truths of God are two of the main keys to finding those truths. Practicing the all or nothing rule in regard to either people or doctrine may very well be the opposite of this attitude.

In my opinion, this problem of accepting all or nothing is as prevalent (and as dangerous) as any problem with which the Latter-day Saints must deal. We have to understand that both truth and error can come from anyone, at any time. As we have discussed, there will obviously be those who can be relied upon with much better results than others. However, anytime we completely throw out a person or group of people because we feel they are never right about anything, we are in the wrong. Likewise, whenever we completely accept a person or group of people because we feel they are always right, we are equally in the wrong. We should always seek to find the truth of God (i.e. from God), regardless of the person who relays it to us. Only if our faith is in Christ and our Father in heaven, through prayer and inspiration, will we be able to discern the good from the evil.

### **Dealing With False Doctrine**

We should get used to the idea that false doctrine abounds in these latter days. It is all around us and many people are preaching it with great success and regularity. With all the controversy in the last few years about such things as study groups, teachers of false doctrine, books being taken off the shelves of book stores, etc., there are a few questions that have weighed heavily on my mind. For example, how should we view and/or deal with people (or groups of people) who are supposedly teaching false doctrine? What should our attitude be towards them? If we fear that someone is teaching false doctrine, what should we do? The following is intended to provide some guidance from the scriptures and latter day prophets regarding such difficult situations. It should be noted that we will likely see more of these types of concerns before we see less of them. Because of this, I feel it is important to know what the prophets have said about such matters, lest we make mistakes in dealing with the teachers of false doctrine.

To begin with, it is important for us to recognize that we are not always the best judges of what is false doctrine and what is not. I have been confronted many, many times with what I thought was false doctrine, only to be "converted" through further study and prayer. There have been times when an idea or concept was presented to me that I flat out rejected at first, only to find that it was repeated with almost redundant repetition throughout the scriptures. Such experiences have taught me that we should be a little more cautious when judging the beliefs of others. The mere fact that we have never heard of such doctrine before is by no means an indication that the doctrine is false. I am reminded of a story a friend of mine told me concerning one of Hugh Nibley's religion classes at Brigham Young University. One time Brother Nibley was touching on some of the "deeper doctrines" of the church. Upon hearing the doctrine, a perplexed student raised his hand and when called upon said, "But Brother Nibley, I have never heard of such doctrine before." Brother Nibley replied, "It's called 'ed-u-ca-tion.' It's why you paid so much money to come here."<sup>27</sup> I feel the whole of mortality should be viewed in this way. One of

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<sup>27</sup> I was not present when this happened so this is likely a paraphrase of the actual event.

the major reasons we are here is to learn new things. If we shy away from all of the doctrines that are new or unpopular, chances are we will waste much of our reason for being here in the first place.

Before judging any concept or doctrine as true or false we should always perform our own inquiry first. If we have not studied it out for ourselves, perhaps we should simply learn to “postpone judgment” on those doctrines with which we are still unfamiliar, always seeking to learn more about them as time passes. I would think that this approach is much preferred over potentially rejecting a true principle merely because it “sounds bad” to us, or accepting a false one merely because it “sounds good” to us. We should realize that in most cases, what is culturally acceptable generally sounds good to us and what is culturally unacceptable generally sounds bad to us. We are taught far more by our culture and society than we are by the prophets and the scriptures.

We should use caution in our judgments of any doctrine and those who believe or preach it. It was largely those who judged too quickly who were responsible for the deaths of the Savior, Joseph Smith, and many others like them.

### **Teachers of False Doctrine are to be Corrected, Not Condemned**

Whenever we hear of people who are teaching false doctrine, we often think that they must be bad people. This is an incorrect view on our part, largely brought about by the “all or nothing rule” spoken of earlier. It is true that we should avoid false doctrine. It is also true that there will be false prophets and other wicked people who teach false doctrines. Some of these people will teach incorrect principles solely to accomplish Satan’s evil purposes. However, in spite of this, it is important that we judge and correct the doctrines instead of the people.

There are several examples in the Book of Mormon when the church had a problem with false doctrine. In these cases, the situation was dealt with by “attacking” the false teachings, not necessarily by condemning the teachers. It should be noted that in some of these examples the teachers of false doctrine were good people trying to do what they thought was best. Hence, the attack on their doctrines rather than on them seems to be entirely appropriate.

Before we discuss the specific, scriptural examples of how to deal with teachers (or believers) of false doctrine, I feel it is important to understand how Joseph Smith felt about the topic. His words seem to counter the attitude we often find in the members of the church today.

*I will endeavor to instruct you in relation to the meaning of the beasts and figures spoken of. I should not have called up the subject had it not been for this circumstance: Elder Pelatiah Brown, one of the wisest old heads we have among us, and whom I now see before me, has been preaching concerning the beast which was full of eyes before and behind; and for this he was hauled up for trial before the High Council.*

*I did not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. It looks too much like the Methodist, and not like the Latter-day Saints. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be asked out of the church. I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammelled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine.*

*The High Council undertook to censure and correct Elder Brown, because of his teachings in relation to the beasts. Whether they actually corrected him or not, I am a little doubtful, but don't care. (History of the Church, Vol.5, Pg.340, underline added)*

We should notice a few important messages from this quote. First, the prophet started his remarks by stating his intention to instruct the people concerning the doctrine in question. He was there to teach correct doctrine concerning the matter. His approach was to teach and correct, not to condemn. The next thing to notice is the prophet's apparent dislike for the judgment passed upon the person who they thought was teaching the false doctrine. He didn't like the man being "hauled up for trial before the High Council" simply because he was teaching something that was not true. The fact that this man was "called up for erring in doctrine" was not right in the prophet's eyes. Joseph obviously felt that people should have "the liberty of thinking and believing as" they please without being "asked out of the church" because of their beliefs. These are interesting comments by the prophet.

Another thing we want to be sure to learn from the prophet is that "it does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine." Joseph seems to have viewed his job (and the church's) as one of correcting doctrine, not necessarily attacking the teacher of false doctrine. I feel these teachings by the prophet are extremely important for us to remember as we approach the difficult and confusing times ahead. There will definitely be teachers of false doctrine. There are now. However, we must be sure to criticize the doctrines instead of the people.

President Brigham Young has taught us similarly concerning those who honestly believe in false doctrines.

*No matter whether we are Jew or Gentile, as the two classes of people are called; though Gentile signifies disobedient people; no matter whether we believe in the Koran as firmly as we now believe in the Bible; no matter whether we have been educated by the Jews, the Gentiles, or the Hottentots; whether we serve the true and the living God, or a lifeless image, if we are honest before the God we serve.*

*Brother George Q. Cannon brought me a god from the Sandwich Islands, made out of a piece of wood. If all the people bow down to such a god as that, it is in accordance with their laws and ordinances, and their manner of dealing among themselves; the Lord permits them to do as they please with regard to that matter, and this illustration will apply to all the nations upon the face of the earth. People who fall down beneath the wheels of Juggernaut, and are crushed to death; who sacrifice their children in the worship of idols; if they act according to the best of their knowledge, there is a chance for their salvation, as much as there is for the salvation of any other person.*

*"Do you suppose the Hindoos have the light of the Spirit of Christ?" I know they have; and so have the Hottentots, and so has every nation and kingdom upon the face of the earth, even though some of them may be cannibals, indulging in a practice the most repugnant to our refined feelings of any we know of among any people; yet that is a practice which the religious, refined, and polished inhabitants of our lovely country shudder at. But let me place any member of this congregation, or the whole of them, in such a state of suffering, from year to year, that they shall never see one day or one hour's comfort, nor satisfaction of human life; when compared with a condition of that kind, the sin of killing and eating a human being would not be as great as many sins committed by the so-called Christian nations.*

*Can I refer your minds to circumstances of this kind among the people of our lovely country? Yes, brethren and sisters, ladies and gentlemen, scores of them. When a man has power over his neighbour, over his fellow-being, and puts him in torment, which is like the flames of everlasting fire, so that he never dares to speak his mind, or walk across the street, or attend to any branch of business, without a continual fear of his*

oppressor, and of the rod hanging over him for punishment, it is worse than to kill and eat him. That is as the torment of hell, do you know it? Now do not be scared when you hear of the heathen engaging in loathsome practices, for I defy you to bring up meaner or more degraded set than now exists among the so-called civilized nations of the earth.

*When I heard brother George Q. Cannon speak about the traditions of the people where he has been, I thought that some of their traditions were no worse than some of ours. They believe that no one is better capable of teaching the inhabitants of the earth than they; and I defy them to believe that stronger than we believe it of ourselves. It is what we have been taught, and what we verily believe; they have been taught the same idea, and believe it with all their hearts; then don't cast them down to hell for their honest belief.*

But when the light of the knowledge of God comes to a man and he rejects it, that it is his condemnation. *When I have told all I have been authorized to declare to him in the name of the Lord, if he does not have the visions of eternity, it is all nonsense to him. To know the truth of my testimony he must have the visions and revelations of God for himself. And when he gets them, and turns aside, becoming a traitor to the cause of righteousness, the wrath of God will beat up on him, and the vengeance of the Almighty will be heavy upon him. This comes, not because their fathers lived in darkness before them, and the ancestors of their fathers before them; not because the nations have lived and died in ignorance; but because the Lord pours the spirit of revelation upon them, and they reject it. Then they are prepared for the wrath of God, and they are banished to another part of the spirit world, where the devil has power and control over them. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.2, pp. 139-140, underline added)*

Brigham Young has also said:

*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)*

Notice that Brigham Young's definition of perfection is a relative definition. It is dependant upon one's relationship to the knowledge they possess. Notice also that he boldly defended the rights of those who honestly believed in their gods of wood as well as many other, false religious beliefs. He teaches that "the Lord permits them to do as they please with regard to [such] matter[s]." Our mission and attitude towards people who believe false doctrine should be to teach them the truth, as far as we are able to do. It is not to condemn or chasten them. There is no sin in believing something that is not true, if it is an honest belief - an honest attempt to do what is right and to serve God to the best of one's current knowledge. The sin that will cleave to all of us, whether apostle or apostate, is that we do not honestly seek truth and live according to the truths given to us. If a man knows that something is true according to "the visions and revelations of God for himself," and then rejects it, then and only then can the judgements of God be passed upon that person. It is not our false beliefs that condemn us. It is our lack of diligence regarding our beliefs that condemn us. In this regard, the Latter-day Saints are probably no

better than any other people to whom any truth has been given.

As we will see, the scriptures seem to be in harmony with the manner in which Joseph Smith and Brigham Young handled those who believe in and preach false doctrine. The first example we will study is found in the book of Helaman.

*And also they had peace in the seventy and eighth year, save it were a few contentions concerning the points of doctrine which had been laid down by the prophets.*

*And in the seventy and ninth year there began to be much strife. But it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi, and many of their brethren who knew concerning the true points of doctrine, having many revelations daily, therefore they did preach unto the people, insomuch that they did put an end to their strife in that same year. (Helaman 11:22-23, underline added)*

We see here that even though there was a problem with false doctrine in the church, the leaders chose to deal with the problem by preaching and informing the people what the true doctrine was. There is no mention of censuring, criticizing, rebuking, or condemning the people who were involved with the false doctrine. Their whole “attack” seemed to be centered on the doctrine, not the people.

We see another example of this approach to false doctrine in the book of 3 Nephi.

*And there were no contentions, save it were a few that began to preach, endeavoring to prove by the scriptures that it was no more expedient to observe the law of Moses. Now in this thing they did err, having not understood the scriptures.*

*But it came to pass that they soon became converted, and were convinced of the error which they were in, for it was made known unto them that the law was not yet fulfilled, and that it must be fulfilled in every whit; yea, the word came unto them that it must be fulfilled; yea, that one jot or tittle should not pass away till it should all be fulfilled; therefore in this same year were they brought to a knowledge of their error and did confess their faults. (3 Nephi 1:24-25, underline added)*

Here we see again the same approach as before. When false doctrine came among the people, those who knew the true doctrine stood up and preached it unto the people. And again we see that those teachers of false doctrine were basically good people who were willing to repent and change in order to conform to the truths being taught. I feel this should be our approach as well. If we think false doctrine is being taught among the people, we should first study it out for ourselves. If we still determine that the teachings are false, we should try to correct them by teaching the true doctrine. People make mistakes. And those who are the most interested in the gospel will likely make the most mistakes. Sometimes we should perhaps praise such people for their interest in the scriptures and the gospel, rather than condemn them for the fact that they are human.

This said, there are other examples in the scriptures in which the false teachers did not respond well to the preaching of the true doctrine. Let’s look at one such example found in the book of Alma.

*And it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of Alma in the judgment-seat, there was a man brought before him to be judged, a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength.*

*And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be*

*the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people.*

*And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.*

*And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money.*

*And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel, yea, and even began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching.*

*And it came to pass as he was going, to preach to those who believed on his word, he met a man who belonged to the church of God, yea, even one of their teachers; and he began to contend with him sharply, that he might lead away the people of the church; but the man withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God.*

*Now the name of the man was Gideon; and it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage.*

*Now, because Gideon withstood him with the words of God he was wroth with Gideon, and drew his sword and began to smite him. Now Gideon being stricken with many years, therefore he was not able to withstand his blows, therefore he was slain by the sword.*

*And the man who slew him was taken by the people of the church, and was brought before Alma, to be judged according to the crimes which he had committed.*

*And it came to pass that he stood before Alma and pleaded for himself with much boldness.*

*But Alma said unto him: Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people. And behold, thou art not only guilty of priestcraft, but hast endeavored to enforce it by the sword; and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction.*

*And thou hast shed the blood of a righteous man, yea, a man who has done much good among this people; and were we to spare thee his blood would come upon us for vengeance.*

*Therefore thou art condemned to die, according to the law which has been given us by Mosiah, our last king; and it has been acknowledged by this people; therefore this people must abide by the law.*

*And it came to pass that they took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti, and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death.*

*Nevertheless, this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land; for there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor.*

*Nevertheless, they durst not lie, if it were known, for fear of the law, for liars were punished; therefore they pretended to preach according to their belief; and now the law could have no power on any man for his belief. (Alma 1:2-17, underline added)*

Here we have an example of what may have been a good man who “began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart” because of the false things he believed and the way he lived. Even when the true doctrine was preached to him, he still would not repent and conform to the truths being taught. We should notice that when he could not refute the true word of God, he resorted to attacking the man (Gideon), instead of the doctrine. This is the very attitude we want to avoid. In fact, if Nehor would not have attacked the man, he would not have been brought before Alma at all. Even though Alma attempted to correct his false teachings of priestcraft, the only reason Nehor was brought before Alma to be judged was because he committed murder, not because he taught false doctrine. For “the law could have no power on any man for his belief.” It was true that Nehor was guilty of preaching false doctrine. But even though he erred in doctrine, that was not why he was judged or punished. Again, it is important that we not punish people for their beliefs, but that we try to correct their beliefs by preaching the word of God to them, as did Gideon and Alma.

There are also other examples in the scriptures where wicked men were teaching false doctrine. The examples of Sherem<sup>28</sup> and Korihor<sup>29</sup> are great examples of wicked people who knowingly preached false doctrine. Neither of these people repented of their false teachings until the Lord stepped in and silenced them himself. However, in these cases as well, we find that the approach taken by the Jacob and Alma (respectively) was to preach the true word of God to them and their followers. And again we see that the law could have no hold upon them because of their beliefs or preaching.

*Now there was no law against a man’s belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds.*

*For thus saith the scripture: Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.*

*Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; or rather, if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him. (Alma 30:7-9, underline added)*

Even though there was a strict law allowing a man to believe as he will, it is still possible that the names of some of these people were stricken from the records of church. It is important to note, however, that they saw freedom of belief as a commandment of God, not just a matter of civil law.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the

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<sup>28</sup> See Jacob 7.

<sup>29</sup> See Alma 30.

<sup>30</sup> It is also interesting to note that there was a punishable law among the Nephites for committing adultery. (See Mosiah 2:13 and Alma 30:10.) The commandments of God apparently had a strong influence on Nephite laws. This increases the possibility that men would have been

fact that no mention is made of striking their names from the records of the church seems to reduce this to mere speculation on our part.

Sometimes we feel that the way to combat the problem of false doctrine within the church is to so thoroughly keep track of and “control” the members of the church with organized activities that they cannot stray from the truth. We must remember the words of Joseph Smith in this regard.

*Teach them correct principles and let them govern themselves. (Messages of the First Presidency, Pg. 54)*

Elder Boyd K. Packer once said,

*I quickly admit that there are risks involved when we simplify instructions or loosen up on regimentation. It is no different than what we face when our own children begin to mature and venture out into the world. Wise parents loosen the apron strings and help children to leave the nest to start anew the cycle of mortal life.*

*If we teach them correct principles rather than overburden them with too many instructions and programmed activities, they can be both free and spiritually safe in any nation, among any people, in any age. If we indulge them too much, or make them too dependent, we weaken them morally, then they will be compelled by nature itself to find the wrong way.*

*The only safe course is to make sure that they know the gospel, that they are acquainted with the scriptures, with revelation, with repentance, with how the Holy Ghost functions, with the voice of the spirit.*

*A knowledge of right and wrong does not automatically result from programmed activities. It must be taught. (Let them Govern Themselves, Regional Representative Seminar, March 30, 1990, underline added)*

Instead of controlling the writings or teachings of those who may be involved with false doctrine, we should try to correct the doctrines being taught. We should try to teach the correct doctrines, that all those involved with the false teachings may know concerning their error. Then we should allow them to “govern themselves.” We should not try to govern those people or control their books and teachings.

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punished for their beliefs if the Nephites thought God approved of it.

## The Problem of People and Pride

It is important to note that even if we can learn how to judge principles instead of people, problems will still occur as we try to teach others and learn from them. Whenever we teach the gospel to others, many people who are guilty of not living those principles will occasionally believe we are judging them, instead of judging the principles. People who love themselves more than truth will often react the same way to a discussion about principles as they do to a discussion about people. We saw an extreme case of this in the example of Nehor slaying Gideon, as mentioned earlier. In fact, it has been my experience that the reaction of some people will often be worse when you discuss doctrine rather than people. Some people seem to have the ability to simply reject a person who says, "You are wrong." Many times they can just walk away and could care less what you or anyone else may think of them. However, it is often much more difficult for some people when they are taught what is right and true and then left to themselves to judge whether or not their lifestyle is in harmony with the truths they just learned. If it is simply your opinion against mine, it is generally easy for me to stick to my opinion and reject yours. If, however, I say that I believe in the scriptures and you show me a principle from my own standard works that clearly teaches something contrary to my lifestyle or system of beliefs, I am left to choose between pride or humility. If I choose pride, I will generally reject either you or the scripture and stick with "me." If I choose humility, I will generally admit my fault and thank you for pointing it out to me, thus placing my search for truth above my desires for self-justification. It does not matter who is right. It matters what is right. Unfortunately, most people tend to get these two confused.

## SCRIPTURES

Scriptures, in whatever form they may come, are probably used by more people of the world to find the doctrines of God than any other source. By "scriptures" I mean the word of God in written form, as revealed to His servants here on earth.

For Latter-day Saints there are four major "standard works" which we hold as true scripture. They are the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. These are the books that are officially recognized by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as the written word of God. As far as other peoples are concerned, there have been many types of scripture in the world. There are and have been people all over the world who believe in such works as the Talmud, Koran, Bhagavad-Gita, Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi library, etc. as sacred writ. As Latter-day Saints we know that God has spoken to many people in many different places and that those people often wrote down these revelations. The Book of Mormon helps us to better understand this principle.

*Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth? (2 Nephi 29:7, underline added)*

As will be discussed, Latter-day Saints should be willing to accept the fact that there can be other scripture in the world which is genuinely from God. The fact that the church has not officially adopted a given set of writings should by no means imply that those writings are false or not inspired from God. However, we should also note that many of the writings which found their origins in God have likely suffered from the same types of mistranslation and misinterpretation problems as the Bible. Caution should obviously be used when studying any religious writings which are purportedly from God. The simple fact that they claim to be from God provides no real assurance that such is the case.

## Past Scripture

For Latter-day Saints, the Bible may be viewed as a set of scripture which has been “handed down” to us from the past. It was not produced during our time, nor did it originate with us, as did our other three sets of scripture. In fact, it is interesting to note that the Bible is the only set of scripture officially accepted by the church which was compiled by “non-mormons.” The word “Bible” comes from the latin word “biblia,” which means “books.” The Bible, then, is simply a compilation of books written by various people and then compiled into one volume.

The Bible contains many great and wonderful truths of God. It has blessed countless lives and has been a tremendous tool in the hands of God and his servants. However important the Bible is, we must always keep in mind the large number of errors that have crept into its pages over the years. Again, the Book of Mormon helps us to understand the difficult history of our current Bible.

*Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God.*

*And after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles; and after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea, even across the many waters which thou hast seen with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, thou seest--because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God--because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them. (1 Nephi 13:28-29, underline added)*

Though extremely valuable to us as a source of God’s word, additional revelation is often necessary in order to come to a true understanding of the passages found within the Bible. It is also of value to note that Joseph Smith and other early leaders of the church were continually referring to the original Greek or Hebrew meanings of the passages in the Bible.<sup>31</sup> If a prophet as great as Joseph Smith found it valuable to learn Greek and Hebrew in order to better understand the word of God, I have every reason to believe that this course would help the rest of us as well.

I have often wondered how it would have changed our view of things had the compilers of the Bible decided to include different books into the Bible than the ones they chose. What if, for example, some of the books currently found in the Dead Sea Scrolls or Nag Hammadi Documents found their way into the Bible? On the other hand, what if other books, such as Revelation or Isaiah, were not included in the Bible? The possibilities are certainly intriguing, to say the least.

The Bible is and should be revered as the holy word of God. It is a collection of inspired writings that were handed down to us via uninspired men. As we study its pages we must not be content with simply accepting the translation given to us at face value.

We should also be very interested in those books which were written by the same prophets spoken of in

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<sup>31</sup> For examples of Joseph Smith’s interest in the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Bible, see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* pages 262, 290, 300, 309-310, 348-349, 351, 361, 364, 371-372.

the Bible, but which were not included within that volume. If we hold the Bible to be true, even with its imperfections, then we must also admit a vested interest in such things as the Dead Sea Scrolls and other such records. Many of these records were apparently written by some of the same prophets spoken of in the Bible. And though they are often likely to be translated and given to us by the uninspired, this seems to separate them little from the writings found within the Bible itself.

In saying all of this I should mention that my intent is to encourage people to study all good books,<sup>32</sup> especially those which may find their origins in the known prophets of God. If we are truly hungering and thirsting after the things of God, we should be very eager to read and study the many records found over the last few centuries, whether they come through the church or not. We should desire to add these volumes to our libraries and to compare their teachings with the other records we already know to be true. My feeling is that these other records will add greater depth and understanding to the scriptures we already have and, perhaps, especially to the Bible itself.

### **Present Scripture**

By “present scripture” I mean those volumes which have already come forth, but which have come forth in our time by means of the restoration of the gospel. This includes the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Though much of these volumes speak of past peoples and events, all of them are the direct result of revelation to modern prophets.

President Ezra Taft Benson has said the following about the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants:

*The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants are bound together as revelations from Israel's God to gather and prepare His people for the second coming of the Lord. (A Witness and a Warning, Pg. 29)*

*The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion, and the Doctrine and Covenants is the capstone, with continuing revelation. (A Witness and a Warning, Pg. 30-31)*

Since these books have not gone through the same uninspired translation process as the Bible, and since they are often focused directly at the people living in this dispensation, they should generally be viewed as being of greater worth to us than the Bible.

Concerning the importance of the Book of Mormon and our general neglect of it, President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

*Presently the Book of Mormon is studied in our Sunday School and seminary classes every fourth year. This four-year pattern, however, must not be followed by Church members in their personal study of the standard works. All scripture is not of equal value. The book that will get a man “nearer to God by abiding its precepts, than by any other book” needs to be studied constantly.*

*The Lord declares that the whole Church and all the children of Zion are under condemnation because of the way we have treated the Book of Mormon. This condemnation has not been lifted, nor will it be until we repent. (See D&C 84:51-81.)*

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<sup>32</sup> D&C 90:15

The Lord states that we must not only say but we must do! We have neither said enough nor have we done enough with this divine instrument--the key to conversion. As a result, as individuals, as families, and as the Church, we sometimes have felt the scourge and judgment God said would be "poured out upon the children of Zion" because of our neglect of this book (D&C 84:58).

The Lord inspired His servant Lorenzo Snow to reemphasize the principle of tithing to redeem the Church from financial bondage. In those days the General Authorities took that message to the members of the Church. So too in our day the Lord has inspired His servant to reemphasize the Book of Mormon to get the Church out from under condemnation--the scourge and judgment. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.63-64, underline added; See also A Witness and a Warning, Pg. vii-viii)

In the eighty-fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord decreed that the whole Church was under condemnation, even all the children of Zion, because of the way they treated the Book of Mormon. Zion cannot fully arise and put on her beautiful garments if she is under this condemnation. (A Witness and a Warning, Pg. 9, underline added)

Two things are clear from these quotes - 1) we can rank our scripture in order of importance or value and 2) the Latter-day Saints are under condemnation for not treating the Book of Mormon as we should.<sup>33</sup> These remarks should be regarded as quite serious, especially since they come from a living prophet of God. Imagine if similar words were uttered by Alma to the church in his day regarding the way they were treating the brass plates. If Alma had said that the church in his day was "under condemnation," we would likely view it as a very serious situation - a situation of great apostasy and wickedness. When viewed in this light we can perhaps better understand the direct language our prophet has used with us in our time. Are we heeding his cry for repentance or are we content to remain under this condemnation? It is perhaps well for us to be reminded of the words of the Lord through the prophet Hosea regarding the fate of those who lack gospel knowledge.

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. (Hosea 4:6)*

Are we rejecting the knowledge that the Lord has given us? If President Benson's words are any indication, the answer must be "yes." It is quite obvious that there are many passages contained within latter-day scripture that are difficult for most Latter-day Saints to accept, let alone live. We seem to have removed ourselves so far from such inspired doctrines as plural marriage<sup>34</sup> or equality in riches<sup>35</sup> that we are seldom able to even discuss such things in the church today without offending someone or creating

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<sup>33</sup> I was told that a survey taken by the church a few years ago indicated that only about 30% of the adult membership of the church had read the Book of Mormon and only about 5% could "intelligently" discuss it. If this is true, is it any wonder that we are under condemnation, as President Benson expressed?

<sup>34</sup> D&C 132

<sup>35</sup> D&C 49:19-20; 70:14; 78:5-7; 104:15-18

difficult feelings. Yet they, along with many other higher doctrines, are taught with great clarity within the pages of modern scripture. Our failure to try to better understand these doctrines surely places us on shaky ground before the Lord. However, to not even be able to openly discuss them without offending people probably suggests a rather complete rejection of the knowledge God has given to us. It is reasonable to assume that the Lord will deal with us in much the same way he has dealt with his people in past who have rejected the knowledge he has given them. This condemnation and the tribulation it brings will be discussed in greater detail later in this work.

The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price were given to us by the inspiration of God through his servants of the latter days. They were given to us specifically for living in this dispensation. They are true. We must become more serious in our efforts to become acquainted with the doctrines they contain. If we do not, then we must admit that we fall into the all too familiar category of those who have been given much, but who have returned little. We will be (are) as the salt of the earth, which has lost its savor.

*When men are called into mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men;*

*They are called to be the savor of men; therefore, if that salt of the earth lose its savor, behold, it is thenceforth good for nothing only to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. (D&C 101:39-40)*

Indicating how much the Lord would like to give us in contrast to how much we have allowed him to give us, Joseph Smith has said,

*If the Church knew all the commandments, one-half they would condemn through prejudice and ignorance. (TPJS Pg. 111)*

Let us not be such a people that we are good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot. Let us not lose our savor any more than we already have. Rather, let us gain more savor by keeping our covenants and by learning and obeying the revealed word of God. We must do more than simply read the scriptures. We must eagerly study these volumes and strive to live by their precepts. If we do, the Lord will surely bless us, even to the point that he will give us more scripture to add to that which we have already been given. We have so much more to learn - so much farther to go if we are to establish Zion and inherit eternal life. Let us not forfeit our opportunity to learn these wonderful truths by neglecting those things we have already been given.

## **Future Scripture**

As already mentioned, if we can become worthy of them, the Lord has told us that we can expect many more sets of scripture in the future. He has explained to us that if we are faithful to the information we have already been given, He will bring forth new scripture. However, if we have no desire for more scripture or if we mistreat or neglect the scriptures we already have, even they will be taken away from us. I believe the following verses apply to Latter-day Saints today as much as they did to Christians in general at the time of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

*Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!*

*For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts,*

and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (2 Nephi 28:29-30, underline added)

And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever. (2 Nephi 29:9, underline added)

The Lord has not ceased to speak to us by means of past (or future) prophets. Our current scriptures are quite clear on this subject. We know, for example, that we will someday receive the sealed portion of the gold plates<sup>36</sup> as well as the “greater things” from the records of the Nephites<sup>37</sup>. We know that if we are faithful, the fullness of the record of John will someday be revealed to us.<sup>38</sup> The brass plates<sup>39</sup> and the great vision of the brother of Jared<sup>40</sup> can also be included in our future canon of true scripture. If we are faithful we may also expect to receive the Book of Enoch.<sup>41</sup> It is clear that there will be many more records coming forth in the not too distant future. It is also clear that the Lord plans on sharing these records with his faithful children.

For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.

And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews. (2 Nephi 29:11-13, underline added)

Notice in verse twelve that the Lord mentions He will speak to “all nations of the earth and they shall write it.” In all likelihood, the records mentioned above are only a few of the many records that will be

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<sup>36</sup> 2 Nephi 27:6-11, 20-21

<sup>37</sup> See 3 Nephi 26:6-11, Mormon 8:12, and Ether 4:13. Notice that Mormon refers to the Book of Mormon as the “lesser part” and declares that it does not contain the “greater things” spoken of.

<sup>38</sup> D&C 93:6, 18; Ether 4:16

<sup>39</sup> Alma 37:3-4

<sup>40</sup> Ether 4:1-7

<sup>41</sup> D&C 107:57 (53-57)

revealed to us during this last dispensation.

*Wherefore, the things of all nations shall be made known; yea, all things shall be made known unto the children of men.*

*There is nothing which is secret save it shall be revealed; there is no work of darkness save it shall be made manifest in the light; and there is nothing which is sealed upon the earth save it shall be loosed.*

*Wherefore, all things which have been revealed unto the children of men shall at that day be revealed; and Satan shall have power over the hearts of the children of men no more, for a long time. And now, my beloved brethren, I make an end of my sayings. (2 Nephi 30:16-18)*

It is reasonable to believe that at least some of these marvelous records may not come to us until after the second coming of Christ. Some will come forth at a time when the earth will be cleansed from its wicked inhabitants, leaving only those who are prepared to receive the greater things God would have us know.

*Yea, verily I say unto you, in that day when the Lord shall come, he shall reveal all things--*

*Things which have passed, and hidden things which no man knew, things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof--*

*Things most precious, things that are above, and things that are beneath, things that are in the earth, and upon the earth, and in heaven. (D&C 101:32-34, underline added)<sup>42</sup>*

We must remain open to the idea that other scriptures exist and that we have to prepare ourselves for the time when these “greater things” shall come to light. One of the best ways to prepare ourselves for these future records is to become extremely familiar with our current set of scriptures. This generally comes through humility, prayer, earnest study, and a genuine desire to know more about the things of God. Merely reading them will not suffice. If we are not familiar with the doctrines the Lord has already given to us, how can we possibly be prepared for the further light and knowledge he still wants to give us? It is reasonable to assume that most people will reject these future records when they come forth, just as they did with the Book of Mormon when it came forth. Latter-day Saints are by no means exempt from rejecting true scripture. Chances are that these new scriptures will contain doctrines that will be very difficult for many of us to accept and live. As President Benson says, we are already “under condemnation” for the way we are treating the Book of Mormon. What are the chances of us treating the new records with any greater respect?

## **THE ORDINANCES (temple and others)**

The Lord has said,

*And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations--*

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<sup>42</sup> See also D&C 121:26-32.

*Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances.*

*He that speaketh, whose spirit is contrite, whose language is meek and edifieth, the same is of God if he obey mine ordinances. (D&C 52:14-16, underline added)*

Rather than attempting to offer an explanation of what types of things are taught in the ordinances of the temple, which of necessity would be quite lengthy and sacred, it is perhaps better to simply admonish the reader to attend, gain a testimony of, and learn more about the ordinances of the holy temple of God. In doing this I will merely quote some of the latter-day prophets on the subject.

President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

*The temple ceremony was given by a wise Heavenly Father to help us become more Christlike. The endowment was revealed by revelation and can be understood only by revelation. The instruction is given in symbolic language. The late Apostle John A. Widtsoe taught, “No man or woman can come out of the temple endowed as he should be, unless he has seen, beyond the symbol, the mighty realities for which the symbol stands” (“Temple Worship,” address given in Salt Lake City, 12 October 1920). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.250-251, underline added)*

*Everything we learn in the holy places, the temples, is based on the scriptures. These teachings are what the scriptures refer to as the “mysteries of godliness” (see I Timothy 3:16; D&C 19:10). They are to be comprehended by the power of the Holy Ghost, for the Lord has given this promise to His faithful and obedient servants: “Thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things” (D&C 42:61). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.245, underline added)*

President Brigham Young has explained the endowment as follows:

*Let me give you a definition in brief. Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell. (Discourses of Brigham Young, Pg. 416)*

We have been given some serious warnings about taking these ordinances, and the knowledge that comes with them, too lightly. In the quotes that follow, it is evident that both President Brigham Young and President Ezra Taft Benson believe that this will be to our condemnation.

*A great many of you have had your endowments, and you know what a vote with uplifted hands means.*

*It is a sign which you make in token of your covenant with God and with one another, and it is for you to perform your vows. When you raise your hands to heaven and let them fall and then pass on with your covenants unfulfilled, you will be cursed.*

*I feel sometimes like lecturing men and women severely who enter into covenants without realizing the nature of the covenants they make, and who use little or no effort to fulfil them. (Discourses of Brigham Young, Pg. 396, underline added)*

*Giving endowments to a great many proves their overthrow, through revealing things to them which they cannot keep. They are not worthy to receive them. (Discourses of Brigham Young, Pg. 397)*

*There are many Latter-day Saints who do not understand the nature of the obligations they are assuming in the temple. The late Elder George Q. Cannon said that young people go to the temple “with no particular desire, only to get married, without realizing the character of the obligations that they take upon themselves or the covenants that they make and the promises involved in the taking of these covenants. The result is that hundreds among us go to the house of the Lord and receive these blessings and come away without having any particular impression made upon them.” (George Q. Cannon, Gospel Truths, 1:227-28.) What is said about the young people may be said today concerning some of the older ones as well. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.250)*

As far as discussing or teaching the principles found in the temple is concerned, President Benson offers this advice:

*I would like to direct my remarks to you parents and grandparents. I would like to share with you what I would hope you would teach your children about the temple. The temple is a sacred place, and the ordinances in the temple are of a sacred character. Because of its sacredness we are sometimes reluctant to say anything about the temple to our children and grandchildren. As a consequence, many do not develop a real desire to go to the temple, or when they go there, they do so without much background to prepare them for the obligations and covenants they enter into. I believe a proper understanding or background will immeasurably help prepare our youth for the temple. This understanding, I believe, will foster within them a desire to seek their priesthood blessings just as Abraham sought his. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.251, underline added)*

I add my testimony to those just given. The ordinances of the temple are things which should be understood, not simply taken part of or attended for attendance’s sake. Because “everything we learn in the holy places, the temples, is based on the scriptures,” we should earnestly endeavor to learn as much as we can about what happens there. Then we should teach these things to our children and others, using the scriptures as the source and foundation of those teachings. Oh, that someone had done so for me before I entered the house of the Lord for the first time. Oh, that we would do so for each other, whether we have been to the temple or not.

If we do not earnestly seek to understand the mysteries of the temple, we will be missing out on a major portion of divine insight and knowledge. Some synonyms of the word “endow” are bequeath, bestow, confer, grant, equip, provide, and supply. The endowment is a gift from God to his children. Are we accepting it? Or are we blindly attending, treating the sacred teachings and covenants as things of naught? In the Book of Mormon the Savior prophesied that if the gentiles of the last days reject the fullness of the gospel of the Father, the fullness of that gospel will be taken away from them and given to another people.<sup>43</sup> As we consider our general neglect of the doctrines and covenants offered to us in the house of the Lord, we can hardly keep ourselves from pondering the possibilities this prophecy presents to us in our day.

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<sup>43</sup> See 3 Nephi 16:7-15. For a further explanation of verse 15, see also D&C 101:39-40.

It is my humble prayer that we will continually strive to gain a better understanding of the ordinances found in the house of the Lord, and that the Lord will bless us with the further light and knowledge promised to those who are true and faithful to the things He has given us.

## **A FEW IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO CONTINUALLY ASK YOURSELF ABOUT YOUR BELIEFS**

In conjunction with all we have discussed, there are some general guidelines that we should consider on a regular basis. These guidelines can be presented in the form of questions. The answers to these questions can help us to make better judgments regarding our beliefs. Indeed, they will usually help us to understand our beliefs to a much greater degree. Anytime we encounter a new doctrine which seems controversial or questionable to us, we should ask ourselves the following questions about the doctrine.

All of these questions are intended to be general guidelines which apply in most cases. However, it should be noted that there will definitely be some exceptions. I'm afraid the nice, neat, formula we often desire for finding spiritual truths is still quite illusive to us. However, in general, I have found these questions to be very helpful in my pursuit of the truths of God.

### **Is the Belief Popular Among the General Population of the World Today?**

The Savior has said,

*...Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15, underline added)*

Generally speaking, the principles of the gospel have not been very popular. This is especially true for the higher principles. We should take particular notice of the fact that true prophets, including Christ himself, are almost always persecuted because of the things they teach. The true principles of God are almost always offensive to the general population of the world. President Benson has said,

*The Book of Mormon is the great finder of the golden contact. It does not contain things which are "pleasing unto the world" (1 Nephi 6:5), and so the worldly are not interested in it. It is a great sieve. (A Witness and a Warning, PG. 5-6, underline added)*

I think we could even take this one step further and say that if the things found in the Book of Mormon are of no interest to the worldly, many of the things found in the Doctrine and Covenants would be considered downright offensive to the worldly.

We must understand that Zion is the exception, not the rule. It is only on very rare occasions that a group of people have become so humble and submissive to the will of God that they are able to accept and live the higher laws of the gospel. The gospel is generally offensive to the "natural man." This is why they always want to kill the prophets. It's never the case that the prophets are tyrants or involved with oppressing people. That's not why they want to kill them. It's usually because they teach things that are very difficult for most people to accept.

Anytime we begin to truly live the laws of the gospel, especially the higher ones, we will find opposition and persecution from the people of this world. I would even go as far as to say that if we are not suffering from ridicule and persecution because of our beliefs, we are probably not very involved with the higher

principles of the gospel - those principles which can easily be found among the words of the prophets in our own church. President Brigham Young felt so strongly about the differences between the principles of God and the principles of the world that it prompted him to express the following concerns:

*There is nothing that would weaken my hope and discourage me as to see this people in full fellowship with the world and receive no more persecution from them because they are one of them. In such an event, we might bid farewell to the holy priesthood with all its blessings, privileges, and aids to exaltation, principalities, and powers in the eternities of God...When we see the time that we can willingly strike hands and have full fellowship with those who despise the kingdom of God, know ye then that the priesthood of the Son of God is out of your possession. (Journal of Discourses 10:32, underline added)*

*And when the spirit of persecution, the spirit of hatred, of wrath, and malice ceases in the world against this people, it will be the time that this people have apostatized and joined hands with the wicked, and never until then; which I pray may never come. (Journal of Discourses 4:327, underline added)*

*I look at this, and I am satisfied that it will not do for the Lord to make this people popular....What is the reason of this? Christ and Baal can not become friends. When I see this people grow and spread and prosper, I feel that there is more danger than when they are in poverty. Being driven from city to city or into the mountains is nothing compared to the danger of our becoming rich and being hailed by outsiders as a first-class community. (Journal of Discourses 12:270-271, underline added)*

Mosiah Hancock has also expressed Brigham Young's views on the topic by stating,

*He (Brigham Young) conversed freely on the situation of the saints in the mountains, and said that he dreaded the time when the saints would become popular with the world; for he had seen in sorrow, in a dream, or in dreams, this people clothed in the fashions of Babylon and drinking in the spirit of Babylon until one could hardly tell a saint from a black-leg. (Life Story of Mosiah Hancock, p. 73., underline added)*

These are strong words from a prophet of the Lord. We must continually ask ourselves if this time has already arrived for us. Are we currently in full fellowship with the world? Do we currently seek to be part of the world more than we seek to be part of the kingdom of God? Is there anything about us that is so odd or different from the rest of the world that we are persecuted for it? Professor Harold Bloom, a non-Mormon scholar of religion from Yale University, recently made this statement regarding "modern Mormonism."

*It has become somewhat of a commonplace to observe that modern Mormonism tends to reduce itself to another Protestant sect, another Christian heresy, while the religion of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley and Orson Pratt and other leading early Mormons was a far more radical swerve away from Protestant tradition. (The Annual David P. Gardner Lecture, Kingsbury Hall, University of Utah, November 15, 1990)*

This is an interesting observation coming from an "outsider" who has studied Mormonism from its inception to the present. Is there any truth to these words? If there is, I fear we are in grave danger.

Joseph Smith had much to say about the difficulty people generally have in accepting the word of God.

*Many men will say, "I will never forsake you, but will stand by you at all times." But the*

moment you teach them some of the mysteries of the kingdom of God that are retained in the heavens and are to be revealed to the children of men when they are prepared for them, they will be the first to stone you and put you to death. It was this same principle that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, and will cause the people to kill the prophets in this generation. (History of the Church 5:424, underline added)

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. (TPJS Pg.331, underline added)

If the Church knew all the commandments, one-half they would condemn through prejudice and ignorance. (TPJS Pg.111, underline added)

Notice in these quotes that it is not the common worldly person that the prophet is worried about. It is the Latter-day Saints - the members of the church who have the revelations, who concern Joseph Smith in these quotes.

We simply must understand that most people almost always reject the truths of God given to us by revelation. They are almost always a cause of persecution and harassment. We should not be too concerned or surprised to find that there are things in the scriptures that, if taught or lived openly, will bring upon us the judgments of the world. If we are sincerely interested in the truth that is revealed from God, we should expect our beliefs to be radical and far away from the norms of the world. This has always been the case. If they are not radically different, then chances are that our beliefs have been reduced to little more than the philosophies of men, mingled with scripture.

### **Is the Belief Easy to Believe?**

Along with the idea that the truths of God are generally offensive to most people, we must also accept the fact that the “truths” of men and Satan are generally very appealing, convincing, and easy to believe for most people. We may again fall back on the earlier discussion regarding measurability. Usually, the things of man are more easily demonstrated than are the things of God. We tend to believe that if it can’t be measured or demonstrated before an audience, it should have no place in our belief system. Our education system, of necessity, is overflowing with this type of ideology. I say “of necessity” because the school systems now seem wholly opposed to the idea of teaching the things of God. Gospel teachings, as well as any notion of revelation whatsoever, have not only been cast out of our school systems, but are ridiculed as being a thing of naught, outdated, or, in most cases, downright silly. Under such circumstances our education system can only turn to the philosophies of men or Satan for their teachings. Where else could they possibly go? As discussed earlier, there are no other alternatives available to them.

There are at least two major tools that men and Satan rely upon greatly in order to influence others. They are logic and feelings. These tools are not bad things in and of themselves. In fact, it seems obvious that they are used by the Lord as well in His attempt to teach us the things of God. But they can also be easily misused in order to promote things which are not true. I have seen many people give up a great many of their true beliefs simply because they relied more upon “logic” than prayer and revelation. I have also seen many, many people do the same thing because they gave in to their feelings rather than combining these feelings with the other, more thoughtful, ways of determining truth. We should note that logic and feeling are very powerful tools. They can and should be used in our efforts to find the truths of God. But if we rely too heavily upon one or the other by giving in to every whim of doctrine simply because it

“sounds good” or “feels good” at the time, we will likely pay the price for such folly.

We should be careful of believing something simply because it sounds good or is appealing to the rest of the world. This is especially true if we cannot find the belief among the four sources of finding the philosophies of God, as mentioned earlier.

### **Does The Belief Flatter Me?**

Elder Orson Hyde once said,

*Flattery is food for the silly and shallow brained, but a wise heart and pure hand will never administer it. (Journal of Discourses 4:258)*

It is interesting to note that the Book of Mormon contains 21 references to flattery. In all but three of these references there is a direct connection between flattery and being deceived.<sup>44</sup> In the Doctrine and Covenants there are four references to flattery. All four of these references are directly related to deception.<sup>45</sup> This is surely more than a coincidence.

Flattery is one of the greatest deceiving tools in existence. Because of our pride, all of us usually want to believe that all is well in Zion and that we are all going to the Celestial Kingdom. We want to believe that we are on the right path and that all will be well with us. The truth of the matter has been given to us all too clearly in the scriptures.

*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)*

*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)*

As we can see, the true teachings of God, through his prophets, are generally not very flattering to us. Repentance is almost always the cry of true prophets. The world has given us the admonition, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” If, however, we applied this counsel to the teachings of God, our current canon of scripture would be reduced to a mere pamphlet. God chastens those he loves.<sup>46</sup> His words of love are often expressed to us through harsh “spankings.”

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<sup>44</sup> See 2 Nephi 28:22; Jacob 7:2; Jacob 7:4; Mosiah 11:7; Mosiah 26:6; Mosiah 27:8; Alma 17:31; Alma 20:4; Alma 30:47; Alma 46:5; Alma 46:7; Alma 46:10; Alma 50:35; Alma 52:19; Alma 61:4; Helaman 1:7; Helaman 2:5; Helaman 13:28; 3 Nephi 1:29; 3 Nephi 7:12; Ether 8:2.

<sup>45</sup> See D&C 10:25; D&C 10:26; D&C 10:29; D&C 121:20.

<sup>46</sup> Helaman 15:13

We should be very cautious of people or doctrines that tell us “all is well in Zion” and that we are wonderful people doing all the right things. We should be careful of those who flatter us. If we fall for such short-sighted teachings, it is likely due to the fact that we love ourselves more than we love the truths of God.

### **Are There Any Equivalent Concepts in the Scriptures?**

If someone is teaching you a “new” doctrine or something that sounds real good to you, you should always ask if there are any equivalent teachings in the scriptures. If there aren’t, you must ask yourself, “Why not?” If it is really important, why did the Lord forget to include it in his teachings? Quite often we are taken in by concepts or doctrines which sound so good and which we feel are extremely important to our happiness and well being. Such teachings are prevalent in the world in which we currently live. Yet, if these doctrines are not found among the teachings of the prophets, how important can they really be? What assurity do we have that they are even true in the first place, let alone important?

Again, if we are faithful to what we have been given, the Lord will give us more. Until then, it is important that we not commit ourselves too heavily into any belief or conviction that cannot be found within the word of God. This is not to say that we totally neglect such doctrines or beliefs, merely because we cannot find them in the scriptures. But we should at least be cautious of such things and make sure that we don’t get too wrapped up in them without some form of confirmation that they are approved of by the Lord.

### **Are There any Concepts in the Scriptures Which Seem to Conflict with Your Beliefs?**

In addition to asking if a given doctrine can be found in the scriptures, we should also get into the habit of asking or searching to see if there are any scriptures which seem to contradict the teachings we encounter. We need to be open to the idea that even though some scriptures seem too “radical” or too “idealistic,” perhaps that is just what the Lord meant to say. Again, the doctrines of God and the doctrines of the world are generally more opposite in nature than we think. Be open to “radical” concepts by the Lord. The scriptures are full of them. If you find something in the scriptures which seems to contradict an idea or concept you have been taught, you should at the very least be skeptical of the idea being taught. It is very important that we use the word of God as our guide to truth, with the teachings of the world serving as more of an appendix or supplemental reading. Unfortunately, most of the time we tend to do just the opposite.

Often when we are studying the scriptures we find doctrines that are just too weird to believe. The doctrines of plural marriage or equality in riches are perhaps good examples of this. Frequently our reaction to such passages is simply one of apathy. “I don’t understand this,” we will say to ourselves, “but rather than stop to research it, I’ll just continue reading and assume it means something other than what it apparently says.” **DON’T JUST THROW SUCH SCRIPTURES AWAY! INVESTIGATE THEM! THEY ARE IMPORTANT! THAT’S WHY THE LORD SAW FIT TO REVEAL THEM TO US!**

## **CONCLUSION**

The Lord has given us the following warning about the last days - the days in which we currently live:

*For behold, at that day shall he [Satan] rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.*

*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.

And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none--and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.

Yea, they are grasped with death, and hell; and death, and hell, and the devil, and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!

Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!

Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost!

Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more!

And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God! For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness; and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth lest he shall fall.

Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!

For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.

Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost. (2 Nephi 28:20-31, underline added)

I think that these verses can serve as a summary of what we have discussed. Notice the three specific ways Satan plans to deceive us in the last days. Satan wants to:

- 1) Stir us up to anger against that which is good. (Examples of this may include such things as the right to pray in public places, abortion, plural marriage, equality in riches, the roles of men and women, and many more issues clearly taught among the words of the prophets. These teachings are often bitterly rejected by much of the world around us.)
- 2) Pacify us into believing that all is well, that there is no problem with “Zion” to speak of. (We see this in almost every other church meeting we attend. We simply don’t want to believe that anything might be wrong with our country or with us - the church members.)
- 3) Use our own pride and vanity to flatter us into believing things which are not true, but which

sound very appealing to us. (This has a great deal to do with number two, just mentioned. As a general rule, Latter-day Saints seem to be no different than anyone else in this regard. We love to be flattered and told that we have the best place to live in the country, that our universities are achieving great recognition in the world, that “I’m okay and you’re okay,” etc.)

As we move through these verses of the Book of Mormon, we should ask ourselves direct questions about their content and message to us in the latter days. Do they apply to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints? If so, to what extent? Are we at ease in Zion? Do we often cry that all is well in “Zion” (regardless of how we define “Zion”), and that we are prospering? Are we encouraged and eager to hearken unto the precepts of men (whether they are taught within the church or out) instead of seeking the power of God and exercising the gift of the Holy Ghost? Do we feel that we need no more revelation from God because we have enough already? Are we perfectly content with the amount of information that has been given to us? Do we ever want or seek more? Are we in a position that we can bear more revelation, even the higher truths, or are we in a position that the Lord has begun to take away even that which we have been given? Do we seek to rely upon the Holy Ghost to tell us who is speaking the truth and who is not? These are important questions for us as we continue to approach the calamities of the last days, the building of the New Jerusalem, and the second coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Towards the beginning of this work I offered a few quotes indicating that we, the Latter-day Saints, are definitely in danger of being led astray by the precepts of men and Satan. It is my personal belief that the Lord will not suffer us to continue in the downward path we are currently traveling. He will have to all but start over again before we will be prepared as a people to be re-introduced to the higher laws He wants us to live. This belief seems to be easily supported by the scriptures and by many latter-day prophets. For example, speaking of our apparent inability to live some of the higher laws, Elder Orson Pratt once said,

*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)*

Orson Pratt has also said,

*There must be a reformation. There will be a reformation among this people, but He will plead with the stronger ones of Zion, He will plead with this people, He will plead with those in high places, He will plead with the priesthood of this church, until Zion shall become clean before him. I do not know but what it would be an utter impossibility to commence and carry out some principles pertaining to Zion right in the midst of this people. They have strayed so far that to get a people who would conform to heavenly laws it may be needful to lead some from the midst of this people and commence anew in the regions round about in these mountains. (Journal of Discourses 15:360, underline added)*

Both of these quotes seem to be even more applicable for the church today than they were in Elder Pratt’s time. We must ask ourselves, “Are we closer to living the principles of a Zion society now than they were then, or are we even further away from those principles today than they were in the time of Orson Pratt?”

More recently, Elder Boyd K. Packer expressed his concerns to a group of Regional Representatives.

*In recent years I have felt, and I think I am not alone, that we are losing the ability to correct the course of the church. You cannot appreciate how deeply I feel about the importance of this present opportunity unless you know the regard, the reverence, I have for the Book of Mormon and how seriously I have taken the warnings of the prophets, particularly Alma and Helaman.*

*Both Alma and Helaman told the church in their day. They warned about fast growth, the desire to be accepted by the world, to be popular, and particularly they warned about prosperity. Each time those conditions existed in combination, the church has drifted off course. All of those conditions are present in the church today.*

*Helaman repeatedly warned, I think four times he used these words, that the fatal drift of the church could occur in the space of not many years. In one instance it took only six years. (Helaman 6:32; 7:6; 11:26) (Regional Representative Seminar, March 30, 1990, underline added)*

In light of Elder Packer's comments, it is again interesting to note that President Ezra Taft Benson has said,

*The record of the Nephite history just prior to the Savior's visit reveals many parallels to our own day as we anticipate the Savior's second coming. (A Witness and a Warning, p. 37)*

Perhaps we should read the books of Helaman and 3 Nephi and ask ourselves, "Which events in these two books parallel our own days? To what parallels was President Benson referring?"

The Lord has clearly told us that there will be significant problems within His church and that the calamities of the last days will actually begin among those in the midst of His own house.

*Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth, a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation; and as a whirlwind it shall come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord. And upon my house shall it begin, and from my house shall it go forth, saith the Lord; First among those among you, saith the Lord, who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house, saith the Lord. (D&C 112:24-26, underline added)*

According to Elder L. Tom Perry, the prophecies of Moroni concerning the problems of the latter-day church of Christ are currently being fulfilled. Notice how Elder Perry associates the warnings of Moroni with those who are in the church, not those who are out of it.

*He [Moroni] realizes that the record will be a voice of warning to future generations of what occurs when nations like his own turn away from the teachings of the Lord. It is from the depths of his heart that Moroni cries out to those who will eventually receive the record. He wants to spare those who read his account the heartache and misery which comes from disobedience.*

*He writes first to the members of the church and then to those who have not embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. Moroni's last words to the members of the church are written as a voice of warning. He writes as one who sees the history of his people repeating itself in*

the future. From the Book of Mormon we read:

*“Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you.*

*“Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.*

*“And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.*

*“For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.*

*“O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? Why do ye not think that greater is the value of an endless happiness than that misery which never dies--because of the praise of the world?”*  
(Mormon 8:34-38)

*I guess one of the greatest mysteries of mortality is why mankind fails to learn from history. Why do those who profess to be true followers of Christ so often become victims of the enticements of the world? The evidence is so strong regarding the blessings which accrue to those who trust in and follow the ways the Lord has prescribed for us.*  
(Conference Report, Ensign, November, 1992, underline added)

Elder H. Verlan Anderson seems to agree with Elder Perry’s interpretation of Moroni’s warning.

*Moroni was similarly explicit in predicting false teachings among the Saints. Reflect upon the unmistakable implications of this point-blank indictment of members of the “holy church of God:”*

*“O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God?”* (Mormon 8:38)

*Since there is only one “holy church of God” on earth, and since it is being polluted, the blame therefore appears to rest upon the teachers and hypocrites within that church.*  
(*The Great and Abominable Church of the Devil*, pp. 170-171, underline added)

As already mentioned in section 112 of the Doctrine and Covenants (quoted above), the presence of such pride, ignorance, and wickedness among the members of the Lord’s church is almost always followed by the chastening hand of the Lord. Generally this comes in the form of calamities upon the inhabitants of the earth. This chastening and the calamities that follow have been clearly prophesied by latter-day scripture.

*And in that day shall be heard of wars and rumors of wars, and the whole earth shall be in commotion, and men’s hearts shall fail them, and they shall say that Christ delayeth*

*his coming until the end of the earth.*

*And the love of men shall wax cold, and iniquity shall abound.*

*And when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fullness of my gospel;*

*But they receive it not; for they perceive not the light, and they turn their hearts from me because of the precepts of men.*

*And in that generation shall the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

*And there shall be men standing in that generation, that shall not pass until they shall see an overflowing scourge; for a desolating sickness shall cover the land.*

*But my disciples shall stand in holy places, and shall not be moved; but among the wicked, men shall lift up their voices and curse God and die.*

*And there shall be earthquakes also in divers places, and many desolations; yet men will harden their hearts against me, and they will take up the sword, one against another, and they will kill one another. (D&C 45:26-33, underline added)*

Notice in these verses that it is the gentiles to whom the gospel was given who “receive it not” and “perceive not the light.” This they do “because of the precepts of men,” or in other words, the philosophies of men. Then shall “the times of the gentiles be fulfilled” and, as the Savior himself taught to the Nephites, the fullness of the gospel of the Father will be taken away from the gentiles and given back to the house of Israel.

*And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fullness of my gospel from among them.*

*And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.*

*And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fullness of my gospel. (3 Nephi 16:10-12, underline added)*

By reading all of 3 Nephi, chapter 16, it is easy to see that the Savior is talking about the last days, after the gospel has been restored through Joseph Smith. By comparing 3 Nephi 16:15 with D&C 101:39-40 we can also see that the Gentiles spoken of here are the covenant people. Notice how the Lord refers to the Gentiles in this verse as “salt that hath lost its savor.”

*But if they [the Gentiles] will not turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, I will suffer them, yea, I will suffer my people, O house of Israel, that they shall go through among*

*them, and shall tread them down, and they shall be as salt that hath lost its savor, which is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of my people, O house of Israel. (3 Nephi 16:15, underline added)*

To help us better understand these words, the Lord has given us a definition of “salt that hath lost its savor.”

*When men are called into mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men;*

*They are called to be the savor of men; therefore, if that salt of the earth lose its savor, behold, it is thenceforth good for nothing only to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. (D&C 101:39-40, underline added)*

We can clearly see from these verses that the Gentiles spoken of by the Savior are not those who reject the missionaries, they are those who have made an everlasting covenant with God and then reject that covenant. The Savior seems to be referring to us, the members of the “holy church of God” in the latter-days.

Elder Orson Pratt has said,

*What says the Book of Mormon in relation to the building up of the New Jerusalem on this continent--one of the most splendid cities that ever was or ever will be built on this land? Does not that book say that the Lamanites are to be the principal operators in that important work, and that those who embrace the Gospel from among the Gentiles are to have the privilege of assisting the Lamanites to build up the city called the New Jerusalem? This remnant of Joseph, who are now degraded, will then be filled with the wisdom of God; and by that wisdom they will build that city; by the aid of the Priesthood already given, and by the aid of Prophets that God will raise up in their midst, they will beautify and ornament its dwellings; and we have the privilege of being numbered with them, instead of their being numbered with us. It is a great privilege indeed (and we are indebted to their fathers for it,) that we enjoy of being associated with them in the accomplishment of so great a work. (Journal of Discourses 9:178, underline added)*

This is all according the word of the Lord.

*For behold, the Lord hath said: I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them.*

*And again, he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the chaff thereof in the whirlwind; and the effect thereof is poison.*

*And again he saith: If my people shall sow filthiness they shall reap the east wind, which bringeth immediate destruction. (Mosiah 7:29-31)*

If we repent and do what is right, we may be numbered among the righteous of the house of Israel, to whom the fullness of the gospel will be given. If we do not repent, however, the same fate awaits us that has been given to many others in the past.

*Wherefore, all those who are proud, and that do wickedly, the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, for they shall be as stubble.*

And they that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up, saith the Lord of Hosts; and mountains shall cover them, and whirlwinds shall carry them away, and buildings shall fall upon them and crush them to pieces and grind them to powder.

And they shall be visited with thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and all manner of destructions, for the fire of the anger of the Lord shall be kindled against them, and they shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall consume them, saith the Lord of Hosts. (2 Nephi 26:4-6, underline added)

*And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath, and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations; (D&C 87:6)*

I believe it is difficult for us to understand the extent and severity of the calamities which the Lord plans to send upon the earth to cleanse it of the wicked. In order to give some kind of picture of the magnitude of the tribulation which lies ahead of us, we should note the words of President John Taylor as he recounts a vision given to him concerning these calamities.

*I cannot paint in words the horror that seemed to encompass me round about. It was beyond description or thought of man to conceive.*

*I supposed this was the end [of the vision], but I was here given to understand that the same horror was being enacted all over the country, north, south, east and west, that few were left alive, still there were some.*

*Immediately after, I seemed to be standing on the west bank of the Missouri River opposite the City of Independence, but I saw no city. I saw the whole states of Missouri and Illinois and part of Iowa were a complete wilderness with no living human being in them. (Unpublished Revelations, Pg. 122)*

Most of us cannot understand such complete devastation. We usually think that such things couldn't possibly happen or that we are so righteous that the Lord will protect us. President Ezra Taft Benson has clearly addressed his concern about how we as a people are dealing with these latter-day issues.

Too often we bask in our comfortable complacency and rationalize that the ravages of war, economic disaster, famine, and earthquake cannot happen here. Those who believe this are either not acquainted with the revelations of the Lord, or they do not believe them. Those who smugly think these calamities will not happen, that they somehow will be set aside because of the righteousness of the Saints, are deceived and will rue the day they harbored such a delusion. The Lord has warned and forewarned us against a day of great tribulation and given us counsel, through His servants, on how we can be prepared for these difficult times. Have we heeded His counsel? (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.706, underline added)

We will finish this work on detecting the philosophies of man in much the same way we began - by proposing that we are definitely in danger. As President Benson has said,

*Should the Lord decide at this time to cleanse the Church--and the need for that cleansing seems to be increasing--a famine in this land of one year's duration could wipe out a large percentage of slothful members, including some ward and stake officers. Yet we cannot say we have not been warned. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, Pg.265, underline added)*

It has been my experience that few people seem to be concerned about the dangers facing us now or in the near future. According to President Benson, such people “are either not acquainted with the revelations of the Lord, or they do not believe them.” I can only say that I whole-heartedly agree with President Benson’s assessment of the situation. Unfortunately, most people seem to be, for the most part, either unfamiliar with the word of God or they simply do not want to believe what is written there. Most people seem to be much more concerned about the knowledge offered by man than they are about the knowledge offered by God. Unfortunately, the knowledge of man is generally false and will not take us very far. And unless we stop rejecting the knowledge of God, he will certainly reject us in the last days.

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. (Hosea 4:6)*

May we cease to reject the knowledge of God and his gospel. May we seek earnestly the true word of God and pray with all our whole souls that we will not be deceived by men or devils. May we search the words of the prophets diligently and continually seek to obtain personal revelation from God, that we may have confirmed in our hearts and in our minds what is true and what is not true. Then, may we stand strong in defense of that which is true and right, according to the will of the Lord concerning each one of us - not according to our own will and the pride of our own hearts, but according to the will of the Lord and his desires concerning each person.

I testify that the scriptures are true and that God has sent wise and inspired prophets among us to teach us of his ways. I testify that one of these wise and inspired prophets is President Ezra Taft Benson. I testify that the prophecies found among the words of the prophets concerning the latter days will all be fulfilled. The question you and I must ask is, “Which portion of the prophecies will I help to fulfill?” Will I be one of the few who remain true to the Lord and his doctrines, in spite of whatever difficulties may arise, or will I be one of the many who will gladly go along with the reasoning of rest of the world?

It is my hope that all who read this will be encouraged to make great efforts to avoid deception and prepare for the difficult times that are upon us now as well as those still ahead of us. This is my prayer and admonition in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.