

THE END FROM THE BEGINNING

SOME THOUGHTS ON PROGRESSION

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INTRODUCTION

Before I begin I want 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 many people who will disagree with my ideas and that there are also many quotes from scripture and from general authorities that could be quoted and used against my thoughts. Many of these I have read while studying the subject.

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 the question “why” and following it 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 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 will speak. In my own mind it fits together very well. I hope I will be able to express it as well and as clearly as I see it.

THE PROBLEM

I would first like to express some events and thoughts that lead me to begin thinking about this subject. I do this in hopes that it will give the reader more understanding about my thoughts.

Throughout my latter teens and up to the present I have been intrigued by people. I quite often have looked at certain people and the things they do and have asked “why.” What makes that person do (or not do) what he or she is doing? Especially during my mission these questions came to me quite often, almost constantly at times. I wanted to know why people would react so differently to the same basic gospel message or even to basic gospel principles which they had never before even linked to the gospel or a church of any kind. What made them different? Naturally such things as wealth, language, customs, parental influence, etc. would take their toll. But it became apparent that there was something much deeper than this involved.

At this point I believe I turned my thoughts to myself and started to study my own life in comparison to others. It's sometimes not a wise thing to use yourself as an example (for various reasons), but I am sure that there are others who have asked these same questions about themselves. If not, maybe this is a good time to do so.

I looked at my life and myself and asked, “What is it that has made me different than others?” I'm going to try to be honest here and I hope no one will be too quick to judge me, but I used to look at others and not understand why they couldn't do certain things that seemed so simple to me. There were things that had never even been a temptation to me that seemed to be some of the greatest battles in life for others. I couldn't understand this. Nine times out of ten when I would find out what the right thing to do was, I would do it. And when I told others about it I would expect them to do it too. After all, wasn't it the right thing to do? Why couldn't everybody do it? It was easy enough for me or at least so it seemed. But to my irritation, not only wouldn't (or couldn't) they do it, but quite often they would as much as admit that it was right and still not change. This, to me, was total ignorance. It was something that I just couldn't understand or at that time accept. I believe my attitude caused quite a bit of problems at times and has done more damage to certain people than good. For this I am sorry.

As I looked back on my life and started to seriously study it, I became aware that several things were different about me that I had never stopped to think about until then. (Please bear with me as I speak of myself. If I were acquainted with someone else's life like I am with my own, I would gladly use theirs instead.) For example, when I was young I always had a desire to go to church. We didn't go very often but I always felt that it was the thing to do. As I looked back, I realized that I never had the desire to do the common things such as swear, tell or even listen to dirty jokes, etc. I wasn't a liar nor do I remember ever stealing anything. Obeying the word of wisdom has been a natural thing to me and at times, later in my teens, I couldn't understand why it wasn't that way for everyone. Those who have had gospel discussions with me know that though I'm not the most brilliant person on earth, I can usually enter into almost any discussion with at least a relatively good understanding and contribution. Yet I can list the number of books I have read cover to cover on the fingers of both my hands. (All but two of these books dealt with gospel subjects.) Why? Why had these things been such a part of my nature and yet apparently not a part of the nature of so many others? If these are important things and truly a part of the Lord's gospel of salvation, then why would they seem so much easier for me than for so many others? To me, if this truly was the case, it seemed somehow unfair.

By saying all this I do not wish to imply that there aren't those who, in my opinion, have obeyed the commandments or lived the gospel or whatever much better than I have. I merely want to express the problem as I have experienced it and hope that the reader will benefit from it. The fact that there are many other people who fit that category only tends to strengthen my argument all the more. The point is that there seems to be a basic difference between people concerning the gospel.

Now let's turn to some scriptural examples of what I'm talking about. Let's first consider the situation of Laman and Nephi. Here we have two brothers who most likely grew up under pretty much the same circumstances, with the same parents, etc. and yet as far as the gospel was concerned they seemed as different as night and day. Nephi, in describing his father, uses the word "goodly"¹ and shows a great respect for Lehi's visions and dreams. Laman, on the other hand, describes the same person quite differently and refers to Lehi's visions as "foolish imaginations of his heart."² Throughout the record we find Nephi doing all he can to do what's right, while Laman (and Lemuel), even after seeing and speaking with angels, can't quite seem to bring himself to do the things he should and at various times even desiring to kill his own father, Lehi, and Nephi, his brother.³ One brother turns out to be the spiritual leader of a righteous nation while the other leads his people in such a way as to receive a curse from the Lord. Quite obviously there was a difference between these two brothers that extended far beyond anything they had learned in mortality, something that seemed to be more a part of their very nature or being than something they had merely grown into. At one point along the way Nephi seems to ask the basically the same type of questions that I have asked about the differences between himself and others. After a rebellion of Laman, Lemuel, and others, Nephi asks the following questions, "Behold ye are mine elder brethren, and how is it that ye are so hard in your hearts, and so blind in your minds, that ye have need that I, your younger brother, should speak unto you, yea, and set an example for you? How is it that ye have not hearkened unto the word of the Lord?" Then Nephi continues to ask why they can't

¹ 1 Nephi 1:1

² 1 Nephi 2:11

³ 1 Nephi 16:37, 2 Nephi 5:2

understand certain things, which, to Nephi, even at his young age, seemed so obvious or to be such a part of him.⁴

Consider now Christ and Satan. Both were very influential spirits in the pre-mortal existence. Both had a great amount of knowledge and authority. Yet one turned out to be the most important man ever to be born while the other is described as “being an enemy to all righteousness.”⁵

I believe Elder Bruce R. McConkie touched on this difference I'm looking for when he said, “The devil has tremendous power and influence because of his knowledge, but he is entirely devoid of the least glimmering of intelligence. An intelligent person is one who applies his knowledge so as to progress in the things of the spirit: he glories in righteousness.”⁶

I believe this quality we're looking for is the very thing that makes a prophet (or any great servant of the Lord) fit to be called of God. It is the one most important quality that can be possessed. Consider the criteria for being a prophet. What is necessary? Obviously such things as popularity, fame, wealth, etc. make no difference. And how much knowledge did Joseph Smith have about things when he was called to be a prophet? What was it about the prophets that made them so different and trusted by the Lord?

What was it about Saul or Alma the younger that made it possible for the Lord to call upon them to be his servants? One moment they were persecuting the church of the Lord with all their might while the next moment trying their hardest to serve the Lord and his church. The only thing I can think of that would account for this is that they possessed this quality of which we are speaking, i.e. they had a desire or ability to follow truth once they learned it. It is interesting to note that both of these people were active in persecuting the saints before their conversions. This would indicate that they probably truly cared about it, and honestly believed they were doing what was true and right. Yet, once they were informed of their wrongdoings and learned what actually was true and right, they made a rapid and complete turnaround in order to conform to the new truths learned.

These examples, and the many others that could be given, seem to show a basic difference in people, which seems to be a part of their very nature. It goes far beyond one's mere access to knowledge or even how much knowledge one has in his possession. It seems to be more pointed at one's desire to gain and/or ability to use knowledge, and it is different in all people. We can call it a number of things, but I know of no one word or phrase that describes it best. We could say intelligence, wisdom, integrity, or the ability to cling to and use knowledge properly, or maybe just describe it as a desire to do what's right. Whatever we call it, I firmly believe that it exists.

If this difference does exist, as I believe it does, it seems reasonable to assume that God did not give us this ability, but rather it is something we have carried with us into this life. Let's now try to trace where this quality comes from that makes such a difference in whether or not a person is progressing in the gospel.

⁴ 1 Nephi 7:8 (8-15)

⁵ Mosiah 4:14

⁶ Mormon Doctrine, p. 386; see heading “Intelligence”

BASIC INTELLIGENCE

One of the first ideas that always comes to mind when one talks about the differences of people here in this life is that we attained to different levels and became worthy of different blessings in our pre-mortal existence and that those have merely been carried on into this life. However true this may be it still leaves us with the same question, just at a different time. What made us different as spirit children in the pre-mortal world that enabled some but not all to be considered “noble and great ones?”⁷ I believe it is reasonable to assume that we were basically the same there, as spirits, as we are here as mortals on earth. It appears that in order to adequately answer our question we must go backward yet another step to what is known as our existence as intelligence.⁸ Here I believe we can adequately explain our problem of differences.

It is a difficult thing to describe what our existence was like at that time. The scriptures tell us that “there is no such thing as immaterial matter.”⁹ We can therefore assume that basic intelligence consists of matter of some kind. We also know that it was not organized by God but, unlike our spirit and body, has always existed. It is co-eternal with God and the elements.¹⁰ But what was it that God had to deal with when he began to fit us into his plan of salvation? What was, what we might call, “raw intelligence” like when God began to organize it and work on its progression?

I am acquainted with two basic theories concerning intelligence at that stage of our existence. One is that intelligence is just a substance, gathered together as a mass of some kind. The second theory suggests that intelligence has to do with separate and distinct entities. In the second theory it tends to change from “intelligence” to the plural, “intelligences.”

I believe that, as far as our argument goes, we can rule out the first theory by thinking it through. As far as my thinking goes, what basically would have happened under these circumstances is that God would take this mass (or masses) of intelligence and from it make separate, individual beings, now clothed with spiritual bodies for further progression. In this theory, I believe we have two choices that would have something to do with the differences I have discussed. One is that within this mass of intelligence, for one reason or another, there would be different concentrations of intelligent matter. Thus, when God created spirit children he would have known which would be the more diligent or better-prepared spirits as he created them.

This idea is a difficult one for me to accept or believe. It would seem that God could overcome this somehow and be able to work with it better so as to make it more even or equal. It also seems more reasonable to assume that a mass of some kind would be basically the same all the way through, with very little if any differences between one part of it and another. This brings us to our second choice.

⁷ Abraham 3:22; D&C 138:55

⁸ D&C 93:29

⁹ D&C 131:7

¹⁰ D&C 93:29, 33; Abraham 3:18

If this mass of intelligence was the same all the way through and God took sections of it to create spirit children, then would not all the spirit children be the same in almost every way, if not perfectly the same in all ways? Where, then, do we begin to be different? I find it difficult to believe that God would train some to be above others or give unequal privileges to some and not others.

To give an example of what I'm talking about, let's compare our mass of intelligence with a bucket of water, the water being the same degree of purity throughout the bucket. If someone were to take an eyedropper and from this mass of water, make separate, individual drops of water, would not each drop be the same? Would they not act the same under the same conditions or circumstances? Indeed it seems that the only thing that would allow them to become different would be a change brought upon them by an outside influence. I agree that water and intelligence are two different things but I believe the point I am trying to make is evident. There just seems to be something missing in these ideas that would adequately account for the differences that exist between individual beings. I also have found no scriptural support at all for the idea of a mass of intelligence. Nor have I been able to find it very much among the sayings of latter-day prophets and apostles. To me it just won't fit into the picture of things logically and has received no real support of which I am aware.

Now let's explore our second possible theory of intelligence, or rather intelligences. Let's suppose there is no mass at all but that throughout all eternity, going backward in time, we have always been separate, distinct, individual beings. It would seem reasonable to assume that as separate beings that have always existed, there would be a great chance of us being different in certain areas. We would not be different because God had made us different, for, in the first place, God has told us that he cannot create or make intelligence.¹¹ In the second place, there was a time when God himself was an intelligence just as we were. It appears obvious that there was a specific time in which God, our Father in heaven, began to be involved with us in working out our progression. Joseph Smith said, "The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God himself, finding He was in the midst of spirits and glory, because He was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have the privilege to advance like himself."¹² The Lord told Abraham, "I came down in the beginning in the midst of all the intelligences thou hast seen."¹³ Though definitions may vary as to the meaning of "the beginning," it appears that these statements by the prophet and then by the Lord are very likely speaking of God the Father's first encounter with us. It is interesting to note that in both statements the plurals are used in describing us. No mention or hint of any kind is given concerning a mass of intelligence. Concerning our eternal nature, the prophet Joseph Smith taught that "intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it."¹⁴ Commenting on this statement, Elder B. H. Roberts said, "a spirit from age to age' not 'spirit from age to age' but 'a spirit', that is, an entity, a person, an individual." Elder Roberts goes on to say, "this paragraph in the prophet's remarks may well be taken as an interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants, section 93:29."¹⁵

¹¹ D&C 93:29; Abraham 3:18

¹² TPJS p. 354

¹³ Abraham 3:21

¹⁴ TPJS p. 354

¹⁵ Ibid. (footnotes)

Let's now explore some other evidences that we have indeed been separate and different throughout eternity. In the book of Abraham we find an interesting and meaningful conversation between Abraham and the Lord. The Lord informs Abraham of the following, "If two things exist, and there be one above the other, there shall be greater things above them,...." Then Abraham, obviously pondering this idea, makes the statement, "if there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other, yet these two spirits, notwithstanding one is more intelligent than the other, have no beginning; they existed before, they have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnoiaum, or eternal." The Lord then replies, "These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they;...."¹⁶ It appears to me that the Lord in this passage is trying to explain to Abraham that spirits (intelligences) have always been different. "These two facts" just plain "do exist." They weren't created or made but are "eternal." "They have no beginning" and "they shall have no end" as Abraham puts it. He is trying to show Abraham that we have always been at different levels of intelligence. That's just the way it is. Joseph Smith, in commenting on these passages of scripture, said, "Intelligences exist one above another, so that there is no end to them."¹⁷ (Notice again, he uses the plural "intelligences" rather than "intelligence.") The prophet also said that "He (God) has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another..."¹⁸ We must ask ourselves, "In what way are they weaker?"

Suppose we always have been separate, distinct beings with "no beginning" and having "no end." And add to that the idea that "intelligences exist one above another," "one being more intelligent than the other." Wouldn't that explain a great deal about the differences discussed earlier in our various examples? We need to realize that this difference, described in the scriptures as intelligence, is not merely knowledge but includes more than that.

The Lord said that "the glory of God is intelligence...."¹⁹ Isn't it interesting that He would use the same word to describe our earliest known existence as he does to describe His very glory? It seems that we are all basically intelligences, just at different levels of growth and progression, even unto godhood. However, I feel it is more difficult to know what that last statement means than we usually give it credit for.

PROGRESSION

If we are merely intelligences, just at different levels of progression, and this quality I have spoken of is what largely determines what level we are at, it seems reasonable to assume that we can progress in this quality. As already quoted, the prophet Joseph Smith has said that God "has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself...."²⁰ And again,

¹⁶ Abraham 3:16-19

¹⁷ TPJS p. 373

¹⁸ TPJS p. 354

¹⁹ D&C 93:36

²⁰ TPJS p. 354

“God...saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have the privilege to advance like himself...all minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.”²¹

Though it appears very likely that all intelligences have the ability to progress and advance unto godhood, it is reasonable to assume that the “weaker intelligences” would have a more difficult time at it than the stronger ones. Thus creating a difference between them concerning, very probably, their reaction to gospel principles, or in other words, spiritual truth. As already pointed out, a person can possess a great deal of knowledge and still not obey it properly.²² From this we could very easily conclude that a stronger intelligence would be one that could cling to and/or obey truth better than a weaker intelligence. Thus, in the examples mentioned earlier, this would explain why Satan, though he possesses great knowledge and influence, is still about as far from godhood as he can be. It would also explain why Laman struggled so much in hearkening unto the words spoken to him by heavenly messengers, while Nephi obeyed them readily. It would explain to a large degree why some people are “ready” to hear the gospel when others appear not to be. Indeed, it would seem to explain almost perfectly why there are differences in all people concerning their reaction to the gospel or basic truths.

An interesting question at this point might be, “How does one advance in this quality so as to be able to cling to and obey truths that exist?” I can suggest one possible answer. The Lord defines “intelligence” as “light and truth,”²³ and in another place as “the light of truth.”²⁴ The word “truth” can be defined as the sum of all existence or things as they really are. However, the word “light” and especially “the light of truth,” may be more difficult to explain. Note that it does not say that the light is truth, but it says “the light of truth.” It's almost as if it's not truth itself but rather something having to do with truth. It is difficult to say exactly what “the light of truth” means but it appears at least possible that the words light and truth may not be as synonymous as they appear in the Lord's definition of intelligence. Whether synonymous or not, these two words are almost inseparably connected throughout the scriptures and it appears that these are at least two of the things we must advance in if we are to progress unto godhood.

With this in mind, we turn to a scripture which states, among other things, that “intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence,...truth embraceth truth,” and “light cleaveth unto light.”²⁵ This seems to raise the possibility that by the natural laws that exist, things such as intelligence, light, truth, wisdom, knowledge, etc. naturally attract more intelligence, light, truth, wisdom, knowledge, etc.. Thus, the more a person may possess of these qualities, the more he will attract or be attracted to them. In other words, a weaker intelligence would not be able to cleave unto (and thereby gain more) intelligence like a stronger intelligence would, merely because he has not progressed to that stage yet. A weaker intelligence would still be learning and progressing, just not at the same rate as a stronger intelligence. This occurs mostly because he does not yet have the capacity to do so.

²¹ TPJS p. 354

²² 3 Nephi 6:18; 3 Nephi 7:18; 3 Nephi 14:26 (20-27); 4 Nephi 1:38

²³ D&C 93:36

²⁴ D&C 93:29

²⁵ D&C 88:40

Some may say that this theory is unjust or might take away our free agency to choose higher laws in some way. But when thought about it really isn't that way at all. It would be comparable to a young child studying math in elementary school while his dad works on complex mathematical problems for the N.A.S.A. program. The son quite obviously can't do or understand what his father is doing because he is not on the same level as his dad. Speaking to the son about his father's doings in anything but a very simple way would be futile and of no avail. However, the fact remains that both are doing basically the same thing, just at different levels. If the correct information is made available to the son and he chooses to accept it, he also can progress to where his father is. The more the child learns, the faster and more easily he is able to learn. However the choice is his. The same might be basically true about our progression in this quality to cling to or obey truth. The more we obey, the more we are able to obey. The more light we receive, the more capable we are to receive more light.

This presents nothing more than an idea about progressing in this quality. I realize that it is weak and receives little support. It is, however, interesting to think about. The important thing is that we can progress, all of us, apparently at different levels but it is still possible.

Allow me to present a problem that I hope will stress the importance of the quality I'm discussing. Consider for a moment, the knowledge of God. If God the Father possesses all knowledge in the literal sense, meaning He knows the infinite, the highest number, though there is none, the universe in all directions, though it doesn't end. If God knows these things then His knowledge must have been given to Him in an instant. The reason being that the highest number cannot be reached as long as one is learning line upon line, precept upon precept. It simply cannot be done. The highest number in any given set can be known in this way, but to understand anything infinite, which has no end, one would have to gain this kind of knowledge instantly. This raises the question, "If knowledge can be given instantly, what then, determines one's readiness or worthiness to receive this knowledge?" To say it is based on other knowledge is foolish for it would seem that any prerequisite knowledge could be given in an instant as well. Wouldn't the determining factor be how one would use this knowledge once it was given? If one progressed in his ability to obey knowledge until he obeyed it perfectly, then and only then could he be trusted with it. Thus, knowledge or truth itself becomes secondary to the ability to use it correctly, at least as far as our progression is concerned.

Another idea is that God is still progressing in knowledge. The possibility exists that we just continue to progress throughout all eternity. The deciding factor concerning godhood possibly being a certain point along the way of progression where one is considered to be a god. Once again, in this situation as in the first, the most important quality to be possessed is the one we've been discussing, ie. the ability to cling to and to obey knowledge or truth. Without this quality, one's progression would stop, no matter what level he was at. It would be the only real difference between those who are gods and those who are not. The only way we can progress throughout eternity is to continue to seek for and live in accordance with new truth. Thereby making that ability more important and precious than any amount of knowledge we may have during any given time in our progression.

An interesting thing to consider when discussing the criteria, if you will, for becoming a god is the creation story found in the book of Abraham.²⁶ Continually it refers to "the Gods", plural, as creating the earth. Now, with the information we have concerning who was involved in the creation, we need to ask, "In what way were they considered to be Gods?" None except God the Father had a body of flesh

²⁶ Abraham, chapters four and five

and bones. Did the rest have the same power or knowledge that he did? Everything I've ever been taught tells me they couldn't have. Was it their knowledge that made them gods or was it their potential or ability to gain and obey it that made them gods? Another possible answer is that the verses were prophetic, referring not so much to those who were gods at that time but rather to those who would later become gods. Once again, however, we must ask, "What is it about them that made them different than the others and so sure that they would reach godhood?" The answer comes back to me, "Their ability to seek out and obey truth." There may be, and probably is, another possible answer to this, but thus far in my studies I have not found it.

PROGRESSION FOR ALL

The inevitable time has come to ask the question, "If every intelligence in existence has the ability to progress in this quality, and if there is no limit to our capacity to grow or progress, then, given all eternity in the future, doesn't it seem reasonable to assume that sooner or later, no matter how frustrated or slow one's growth may be, we will all still grow and continue to progress?" I have often asked myself the question, "Is it truly impossible for a person who is cast into outer darkness to ever change or in some way begin to conform his existence to truth, any truth?" It seems to me that the only justification for keeping someone in outer darkness forever would be if they simply didn't have the capacity to ever progress out of that stage. For, if any individual could progress in outer darkness, what could possibly be the reasoning behind keeping him there?

It is a very frightening idea to me to think that some intelligences just plain don't have the capacity or ability to progress past such a low existence and I dare say I find it difficult to believe. In my thinking all intelligences are made up of at least some light and truth. If that light and truth "cleaveth" to more light and truth, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant it may be, sometime along the way there must be room for progression of some kind. And it seems that any progression or growth one receives would help us in some way to receive more growth and progression.

One might ask, "Aren't the scriptures on this subject explicit enough as to the punishment of those cast into outer darkness?" Let's see what the scriptures say concerning sons of perdition. "Wherefore, he (Christ) saves all except them - they shall go away into everlasting punishment, which is eternal punishment, to reign with the devil and his angels in eternity, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, which is their torment."²⁷ At first glance this whole situation sounds pretty permanent. However, in the L.D.S. edition of the scriptures we find an interesting cross reference given for the scripture just quoted. It states, "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 on the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name's glory. For, behold, the mystery of godliness, how great it is! 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."²⁸ This creates a very real possibility that outer darkness might not be as permanent as we sometimes think it is.

²⁷ D&C 76:44

²⁸ D&C 19:6-12 (underline added)

If this is the case, then what exactly is going to happen to them? For the scriptures tell us that “(Christ) who glorifies the Father, and saves all the work of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him.”²⁹ One might ask, “How, then, will they be saved?” Brigham Young has said, “Jesus will redeem the last and the least of the sons of Adam, except the sons of perdition, who will be held in reserve for another time.”³⁰ What other time? Consider for a moment the plight of a god throughout eternity. What does he do? Is this group of intelligences the last ones that will ever be ran through the plan of salvation? How many saviours have there been in the eternities behind us and how many will there be in the eternities to come? Won't Christ still create more worlds in the future? Won't Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph Smith, in short, all those who attain godhood be doing the same thing that God the Father has done with us, only with new intelligences and new worlds? Elder Bruce R. McConkie suggests that one definition of the word “eternity” might be a set period of time. It possibly refers to the the time it takes for a group of intelligences to go through the plan of salvation. He states, “...from one eternity to the next he (Christ) is the same. From pre-existence to pre-existence his course goes on in one eternal round, and so it will be with all exalted beings.”³¹ I believe this creates the very real possibility that another “eternity” might be the other time to which Brigham Young referred. To me this seems to fit very well.

An interesting idea that pops into mind is that this might explain to some degree the origins of the well known belief of reincarnation. Perhaps, just like many other doctrines, it is simply an apostate form of a once revealed truth. At least it is an interesting idea.

Is it such a strange doctrine to believe that all men have an inherent capacity to grow and learn? Doesn't it make sense that even though we all may be at different levels of progression, there is no such thing as some intelligences not being able to progress past a certain point, while others possess that ability? Indeed, I struggle very much with the idea that an individual just plain cannot learn and obey new truths that he does not currently know or obey.

That I am not alone in this theory is evident by the many statements by general authorities. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. once said, “I am not a strict constructualist, believing that we seal our eternal progress by what we do here. It is my belief that God will save all of His children that he can; and while, if we live unrighteously here, we shall not go to the other side in the same status, so to speak, as those who lived righteously; nevertheless, the unrighteous will have their chance, and in the eons of the eternities that are to follow, they, too, may climb to the destinies to which they who are righteous and serve God, have climbed to those eternities that are to come.”³²

If a son of perdition can be “held in reserve for another time” and continue to progress at some time in the future, then it is reasonable to assume that those in lower kingdoms (ie. telestial and terrestrial) can also continue to grow, learn, and progress. President Brigham Young believed that, “none would inherit this earth when it became celestial and translated into the presence of God but those who would be crowned as gods...all others would have to inherent another kingdom...(yet) they would eventually have

²⁹ D&C 76:43 (underline added)

³⁰ Discourses of Brigham Young, p. 29 (underline added)

³¹ Mormon Doctrine, p. 240; see subheading “Eternity to eternity”

³² Church News, week ending 23 April, 1960, p. 3

the privilege of proving themselves worthy and advancing to a celestial kingdom but it would be a slow process.”³³ Note that he says a celestial kingdom instead of the celestial kingdom. As will be shown later, I believe this difference is important.

In the first edition his book of “The Articles of Faith”, James E. Talmage wrote, “It is reasonable to believe, in the absence of direct revelation by which alone absolute knowledge of the matter could be acquired, that, in accordance with God's plan of eternal progressions, advancement from grade to grade within any kingdom, and from kingdom to kingdom, will be provided for. But if the recipients of a lower kingdom be enabled to advance, surely the intelligences of higher rank will not be stopped in their progress; and thus we may conclude, that degrees and grades will ever characterize the kingdoms of our God. Eternity is progressive; perfection is relative; the essential feature of God's living purpose is it's associated power of eternal increase.”³⁴ That's quite a statement and we will return to it later on.

To me the idea of progression for all appears to be logically sound and well supported by many latter-day general authorities. There are those who disagree with this idea quite strongly. Their thinking I do not understand.

We might well ask why, then, the scriptures tell us that those who inherit a lower kingdom “shall be servants of the most High; but where God and Christ dwell they cannot come, worlds without end?”³⁵ We need to note that it says nothing in this scripture about them not being able to progress. Sometimes we read things in that aren't there. What it does say is that “where God and Christ dwell they cannot come.” Remember Brigham Young's statement? He spoke of them reaching a celestial kingdom rather than the celestial kingdom. I do not believe that they will be granted the privilege of living in the presence of our Father in heaven. I believe this great privilege and blessing will only come to those who inherit the celestial kingdom at the final judgement of this particular “eternity,” if you will. This loss in and of itself, would bring great remorse and grief to all who did not attain this celestial glory.

GODHOOD

All these thoughts have brought a few questions to my mind that to me are both interesting and important. First of all, if it is possible for those in the lower kingdoms to eventually progress to a celestial kingdom, and thus exaltation, then why would it be impossible for them to go where God and Christ dwell? Wouldn't it appear that they would share the same glory and have the same power, etc.?

Another question I have, which is not so dependent upon my thoughts expressed so far, is, “If those in the terrestrial kingdom can enjoy the presence of the Son but not of the Father,³⁶ (as I have always been taught) then what is the difference between the Father and the Son that makes this possible? I remember in the mission field teaching quite often how those in the terrestrial kingdom may enjoy the presence of Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost but not the presence of God the Father. And those who

³³ Wilford Woodruff Journal, August 5, 1855 (underline added)

³⁴ Articles of Faith, 1899 edition, pp. 420-421

³⁵ D&C 76:112

³⁶ D&C 76:77

inherit the telestial kingdom would only be able to enjoy the presence of the Holy Ghost. Yet at the same time, those who attain to the celestial kingdom will enjoy the presence of all three members of the godhead. As far as my thinking takes me, it could only follow that it is not so much that our Father in heaven is not willing to visit those in lower kingdoms, for he loves them all, but rather he is somehow unable to visit them. This because His glory is greater than they can bear.³⁷ How, then, can Jesus Christ visit them? What enables those in the terrestrial kingdom to bear Christ's presence but not the presence of the Father? Could it be that Christ's glory is not at the same level or the same kind of glory as that of God the Father's? Is it possible for Christ to have all glory and still not possess as much as God, his Father? I believe it is not only possible but highly probable. I hope I can relay the following thoughts and fit them together on paper as well as I have done so in my mind. I hope to answer both of these questions in doing so.

There are at least two scriptures that become important at this time and which have direct bearing on the subject at hand. Christ said, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."³⁸ Thus we see how important it is to know the attributes and characteristics of both God the Father and his son, Jesus Christ.

Christ also said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."³⁹ I emphasize the "even as" part of that scripture because it would appear that in order to obey that commandment we would first have to know just how our Father in heaven is perfect. What is it that makes God perfect? It seems that getting to know God would be a prerequisite to becoming perfect "even as" He is perfect. Joseph Smith said, "I am going to inquire after God because I want you all to know God and be familiar with him. If I can get you to know him, I can bring you unto Him."⁴⁰ And again, "If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves...It is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how He became God...The first principle of the gospel is to know for a certainty the character of God, and that we may converse with Him."⁴¹

With this in mind I hope that no one will be offended or disturbed in any way by what I have to say, but that they will accept this as my effort to better understand the being who is my God, that, hopefully, I may be brought unto Him. Because I believe something by no means suggests that it is absolutely true. Nor do I wish to make such a declaration. However, I do believe my comments deserve at least some thinking about and looking into with an open mind.

In the lectures on faith it states that God is "omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient."⁴² In one's attempt to learn to know God these three terms seem to be used over and over again in describing Him.

³⁷ D&C 67:12-13; 76:118; 84:24; Moses 6:57

³⁸ John 17:3

³⁹ Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48

⁴⁰ "The King Follet Discourse, a Newly Amalgamated Text," by Stan Larson, BYU Studies, winter 1978, pp. 193-194

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 201

⁴² Lectures on Faith, second lecture, verse two

Yet we must realize that definitions vary as to the exact meanings of these terms. If, for example, I were to discuss God's omnipotence with a modern Christian-Hebrew theologian and suggest to him that God cannot create something from nothing, as a great portion of the world believes He can, this theologian may likely become very disturbed and think of me as a blasphemer, or an anthropomorphite being led astray. Yet L.D.S. doctrine is quite clear about this and other, similar doctrines which teach us about God's omnipotence. Many of which differ quite a bit from the generally accepted definition. It should be noted that our theologian could use a great many quotes from L.D.S. scripture and general authorities to support his definition of omnipotence rather than the one I have offered.⁴³ I feel this is important to realize and understand.

Likewise when discussing the omnipresence of God, certain comments must be made to define what is meant by "omnipresence." Obviously the L.D.S. definition varies quite a bit from that of the world. If I were to tell our theologian that I believed that God "has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's"⁴⁴ that can only be in one place at one time, his reaction would most likely be negative again. Then, if I were to quote to him the following L.D.S. belief that "all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever,"⁴⁵ the chances are very good that our good scholar would be quite confused about what mormons believe on the subject. Obviously God is both omnipotent and omnipresent in a different way than that which is normally used and accepted in the world today. It becomes quite clear that under the definitions that the world gives to these terms, the true God, as taught by the prophets and the scriptures, is neither omnipotent or omnipresent. This is something that Latter-day Saints, whether they realize it or not, believe.

An interesting thing happens, however, when one begins to talk about omniscience. When one says that "God is omniscient," the general definition of the world (ie. Hebrew-Christian theology) which is given is that God knows all things that exist in the literal and infinite sense. He knows the absolute truth, the sum of all existence. It is interesting to me that in light of the different definitions given to omnipotence and omnipresence already discussed, most Latter-day Saints hold to the same definition of omniscience as the rest of the world. Even more interesting is that the response received from most Latter-day Saints when one suggests that God may not be omniscient in the generally accepted way, is very similar, if not identical to that of the non-mormon scholar. Is it possible that, just as with omnipotence and omnipresence, God might be omniscient in a different way than normally thought of?

Consider, for a moment, a being who knows all that there is to know in the infinite sense. Consider a being who, for all eternity in the past, has learned line upon line and precept upon precept; then, for some reason, this being was able to "plug in" to an infinite knowledge of all things; unable to advance or progress forever more. What would such a being desire and why? I ask you to put yourself in such a position. What would your existence be like if all progression were stopped except for the possible advancement of your kingdoms, about which you would know every detail for all the eternities to come? There would be nothing new and nothing to look forward to. I present the question, "Is happiness found at the end of the road or is it found along the way?" Does our joy in the gospel come more by knowing

⁴³ 1 Nephi 7:12; 17:50; Mosiah 4:9; Alma 26:35; D&C 61:1; Joseph Fielding Smith, Ensign, May 1971, p. 3; Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, "Omnipotence"

⁴⁴ D&C 130:22

⁴⁵ D&C 88:41

and/or living those parts of the gospel we already have or does it come by progressing and conquering those things still ahead of us? The only plea we seem to come up with is that of ignorance, ie. there's just too much we don't know or understand about godhood to be making such judgements. This might very well be the case, I don't know. It's possible that my opinion may change, but at least for now, with my present knowledge, the description above does not sound as bright to me as some make it up to be. That I am not alone in my opinion can be supported rather well I believe.

Let's go back to the words of Elder James E. Talmage, "...if the recipients of a lower kingdom be enabled to advance, surely the intelligences of a higher rank will not be stopped in their progress; and thus we may conclude, that degrees and grades will ever characterize the kingdoms of our God."⁴⁶ The question could be raised, "What kind of progress and what kind of degrees and grades characterize the kingdoms of our God?" I invite you to hear the words of Elder B.H. Roberts on the subject, "God's immutability should not be understood to exclude the idea of advancement or progress of God...an absolute immutability would require eternal immobility--which would reduce God to a condition eternally static...which from the nature of things, would bar him from participation in that enlargement of kingdom and increasing glory that comes from redemption and progress of men. And is it too bold a thought, that with this progress, even for the mightiest, new thoughts and new vistas may appear, inviting new adventures and enterprises that will yield new experiences, advancement and enlargement even for the most high?"⁴⁷

I raise basically the same question, "Is it too bold a thought to suggest that God is not omniscient in the generally accepted way?" Is it wrong to suppose that no other way to learn truth has been suggested to us than that of line upon line, precept upon precept? Would I be wrong in suggesting that there is no other way to learn than line upon line, precept upon precept, on into all the eternities to come?

The Lord told Abraham that those "who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads forever and ever."⁴⁸ What is glory? The Lord has defined it as "intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth."⁴⁹ Does that mean that truth is to be continually added upon them? Brigham Young, commenting on Abraham 3:26 (just quoted), said, "All organized existence is in progress to an endless advancement in eternal perfections,...there is no point in all the eternities, where organized existence will become stationary, that it cannot advance in knowledge, wisdom, power, and glory. All things that have come within the bounds of man's knowledge--the things he naturally understands--teach him that there is no period, in all the eternities, where organized existence will become stationary, that it cannot advance in knowledge, wisdom, power, and glory."⁵⁰ Lorenzo Snow seemed to agree when he said, "...we will continue on improving, advancing and increasing in wisdom, intelligence, power and dominion, worlds without end."⁵¹

⁴⁶ Articles of Faith, 1899 edition, pp. 420-421.

⁴⁷ Seventy's Course in Theology, "The Atonement", (Deseret News, 1911), pp. 69-70.

⁴⁸ Abraham 3:26

⁴⁹ D&C 93:36

⁵⁰ Journal of Discourses 1:349

⁵¹ Conference Report, April 1901, p. 2

George Q. Cannon believed that “there is progress for our Father and for our Lord Jesus. There is no such thing as standing still in the eternal work of our God. It is endless progress, progressing from one degree of knowledge to another degree.”⁵²

A section of the Doctrine and Covenants that I believe has great bearing on this subject was given by the prophet on April 2, 1843. Concerning things of a celestial nature this section informs us that “this earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto crystal and will be a urim and thummim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon, whereby all things pertaining to an inferior kingdom, or all kingdoms of a lower order, will be made manifest to those who dwell on it; and the earth will be Christ’s.” Notice that the earth only manifests those things pertaining to a lower order or the lower kingdoms. Continuing on, “Then the white stone mentioned in Revelations 2:17, will become a urim and thummim to each individual who receives one, whereby things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms will be made known; and a white stone is given to each of those who come into the celestial kingdom,...”⁵³ I don’t know of any other way to adequately interpret this scripture than to say that there are higher kingdoms than the celestial kingdom, and that those who enter into the celestial kingdom will be continuing their learning process. It seems to me that this scripture indicates something that is in direct contrast to the idea of not being able to progress any further once we receive our exaltation. I would suggest that the white stone mentioned does not instantly give a being knowledge of all things, but rather it gives him access to all the knowledge that all the gods have ever attained to throughout all eternity.

What has the Lord told us about how he knows all things? “Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ...the same which knoweth all things, for (because) all things are present before mine eyes;...”⁵⁴ I believe that the Lord, in this verse, has provide for us what it truly means to be omniscient - it is not to have all knowledge, as is generally thought, rather, it is to have access to all the knowledge possible at present.

“These celestial bodies,” says John A. Widstoe, “as they are now called, connect the intelligence with all parts of the universe, and become mighty helps in the endless search for truth.”⁵⁵

Through the law of consecration (and united order), which must be lived before entering the celestial kingdom,⁵⁶ all things will be shared in common among all who live there. Nothing will be withheld from anyone. Hence, the answer to our previous question, “Is it possible for Christ to have all glory or to be equal with the Father and yet not have as much glory, in the literal sense, as his Father?” Yes it is. He would have all glory for he would have access to it all. There is no part of it that He could not obtain under the law of consecration and united order. Yet it would appear that growth, personal growth, is still possible for both Christ and also God the Father. Both are entitled to all that there is but both are still at different levels of progression - learning continually about the “things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms” spoken of earlier.

⁵² Gospel Truth 1:118

⁵³ Doctrine and Covenants 130:9-11 (6-11)

⁵⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 38:1-2

⁵⁵ Rational Theology, pp. 30-31

⁵⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 78:5-7

“And so in every inhabited world, and in every system of worlds, a God presides. Deity in his own right and person, and by virtue of the essence of him; and also by virtue of His being the sign and symbol of the collectivity of the Divine Intelligences of the universe. Having access to all the councils of the Gods, each individual Deity becomes a partaker of the collective knowledge, wisdom, honor, power, majesty, and glory of the Body Divine,...”⁵⁷ (B. H. Roberts)

You will notice that most people who support omniscience in the literal sense will very often use a phrase similar to “from the beginning to the end.” They suggest that if God knows things from the beginning to the end, He knows everything there is to know. It amazes me that most people will never stop to think that knowing something from the beginning to the end suggests a very finite knowledge. I have no problem at all believing that God knows what will happen to us as He takes us through the plan of salvation, from beginning to end. But ten seconds of thought will bring you to the conclusion that this is most likely a finite knowledge and not an infinite knowledge at all.

Hyrum Andrus sums it up well, “Though God knows all things within His vast domain and has access to the truth and power of higher realms within the divine patriarchal order of eternity, He is continually progressing in truth as he advances from one level of celestial glory and power to a higher one. Those within that celestial system are continually moving upward into greater and greater degrees of refinement and power, and to higher and higher realms of celestial life.”⁵⁸ To me, this fits perfectly!

Herein have I found a possible answer as to why God the Father cannot visit the terrestrial kingdom, while Christ can. This may be why those in this kingdom can “receive of his glory, but not of his fullness. These are they who receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fullness of the Father.”⁵⁹ If the fullness of the Father's glory is too much for them to bear, it is possible that the fullness of Christ's glory might not be too much for them. And because all are continually progressing to higher kingdoms and thus more glory, it only fits that even if those in lower kingdoms (e.g. telestial) can and do progress to higher kingdoms, as we discussed earlier, it will still be the case that “where God and Christ dwell they cannot come, worlds without end.”⁶⁰ Thus as a terrestrial being advances in glory, so will a celestial being advance. Hence there will be a separation between them for ever and ever.

Joseph Smith said, speaking as Christ, “My Father (Elohim) worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to my Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt him in glory. He then will take a higher exaltation and I will take his place, and thereby become exalted myself.”⁶¹

Just as it is difficult for some people to even consider God not being omnipotent or omnipresent in the literal sense, so is it also difficult for most people to think that God is not omniscient in the literal

⁵⁷ Doctrine on Deity, p. 198

⁵⁸ Doctrinal Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price, p. 507

⁵⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 76:76-77

⁶⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 76:112

⁶¹ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 347-348

sense. I believe this is one reason why it would not be well known and taught within the church. Nevertheless I believe it is true and rather well supported. I have found a very small amount of what I consider good, rational support for the idea of God being omniscient in the literal sense. Most, I believe, is largely self-contradictory or seems somehow to have possible hidden implications which only a few would look for and think about.

It is also important to realize that some have even been publicly reprimanded by the first presidency of the church for claiming that those who receive their exaltation will not progress any further in knowledge and wisdom.⁶²

At least for the time being, I can only say that I agree fully with Wilford Woodruff when he said, "If there was a point where man in his progression could not proceed any further, the very idea would throw a gloom over every intelligent and reflecting mind. God himself is increasing and progressing in knowledge, power, and dominion, and will do so, world without end. It is just so with us."⁶³

WHAT IS IT TO BE A "GOD"

One question that always seems to arise when one suggests that there are things that God does not know is whether or not it is possible for Him to make mistakes. People always suggest that if God is not omniscient, then he might learn something that will thwart the plan of salvation or he might find something that he overlooked. I don't think this can be the case for at least three reasons. First of all, we must take into consideration that God has access to all the information of all the gods there have ever been throughout all eternity. I believe it is difficult to realize how much knowledge that is. How many gods have gone before Elohim and paved the way and proven the plans, truths, principles, etc. that he is now bringing to pass? There is very little, if any, room for doubt under such circumstances.

Secondly, as far as we are concerned, I believe very much that God does indeed know "the end from the beginning."⁶⁴ I believe He knows what will happen during the plan of salvation from the first time He encountered us as intelligences, clear up through the final judgement, and probably far beyond that point as well. He knows all the possibilities and potential choices of all His children and has already made plans to either act or react to them appropriately in order to bring about His plans and purposes. There is nothing that any of us could do that will thwart God's plans. In working out our salvation, we need not fear that God's designs and purposes are flawed or faulty in any way. Things will happen exactly the way they have always happened in the past, and thus, just as God has told us they will happen.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, is the idea of complete coherence to light and truth spoken of earlier. Of necessity, God must cling to and completely obey truth. This quality would have to be a part of every being to whom access to all knowledge would be given. Indeed, the possession of this quality would seem to be the qualifying factor in deciding who is a God and who is not. How much knowledge is necessary to be a God? Relatively little I believe, if you are completely and honestly truth

⁶² Messages of the first Presidency, vol. 2, pp. 234-235, (see also "The Lord's University" by Eugene England)

⁶³ Journal of Discourses 6:120

⁶⁴ Abraham 2:8

seeking, obedient, and faithful. Is it possible to know that something is true, and correctly act upon it, without knowing all there is to know about it? If not, we have a great many hypocrites within the church. Indeed, I would suggest that few, if any, know everything there is to know about any one principle of the gospel. Yet it is possible to know that the principle is true and to act upon it correctly. Is it too far fetched to suggest that God does the same?

As I said earlier, the one most important quality and factor in determining the different levels of progression, even unto godhood, is that of our reaction to truth. An interesting comparison can be made between this quality I speak of (ie. that of clinging to and acting upon truth) and the principle of faith. Indeed the true definition of faith, as I understand it, seems to be all but synonymous with this quality. If one possesses faith, then he seeks out, clings to, and acts upon truth. If I had this quality, regardless of my knowledge, I could be president of the church tomorrow and never lead the people astray. Indeed it makes it possible for fourteen year old boys with third grade educations to bring into the world some of the greatest truths ever known to man. And not only to bring them into the world, but to live them.

When the Lord refers to the great and noble premortal spirits as “Gods,”⁶⁵ I do not believe that it was their knowledge that made them gods so much as it was their ability to cling to and act upon truth. I believe that when this ability is perfected we will be entitled to all the blessings that exaltation can offer us, regardless of whether or not we know more or less than other gods. Hence, we will be gods.

I do not wish to downplay knowledge. For knowledge is absolutely necessary to our salvation. Joseph Smith said, “Everyone that does not obtain knowledge sufficient to be saved will be condemned.”⁶⁶ “Without knowledge we cannot be saved.”⁶⁷ “A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge...”⁶⁸ And the list goes on. But knowledge (truth) is co-eternal with God and the elements. It is self-existent. Because of this we must realize that the mere presence of knowledge, in and of itself, will not save us. Rather our ability to apply that knowledge is the attribute that will save us.

Perhaps the following example will shed more light on the subject. Suppose you live in the middle of the largest forest in the world. Trees of every kind and size are all about you in an extreme abundance. One day the keeper of the forest commands you to build several items out of the wood in order to make your life more comfortable and joyful. What would keep you from building these things? Surely there is enough wood present, and it is free for the taking. You are actually commanded to take it. The keeper of the forest is willing to show you step by step how to build these items he has requested of you. The only thing left for you to do is act upon it. Everything else has been provided. The wood, in and of itself, will not make you more comfortable and joyful. It is your desire and/or ability to seek out the wood and use it properly that will truly make the difference.

The same is true with knowledge (truth). It is all around us and is given freely to us. It is provided by God in extreme abundance. “Ask and ye shall receive.” But in order for it to produce effects of great worth, it must be sought after and acted upon. The Law of Moses was not given because a higher law of

⁶⁵ Abraham, chapters 4 and 5

⁶⁶ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 297

⁶⁷ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 217

⁶⁸ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 217

truth and knowledge was not available. It was given because it was all the people could handle at that time.

Our ability to seek truth and act upon it will be the deciding factor of our salvation and, as discussed earlier, I believe this quality is different in all people. I also believe, however, that it can grow and progress unto perfection, when we will encounter no truth we will not obey. I believe this is what makes God a god. And those who do not possess it unto perfection, cannot yet be allowed access to all knowledge, as spoken of earlier.

Ponder carefully these scriptures and see if they could apply to what I have said, "...He received a fullness of truth, yea, even of all truth; and no man receiveth a fullness unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and light and knoweth all things."⁶⁹ "That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light and continueth in God, receiveth more light, and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day."⁷⁰ I can't help but wonder what exactly is meant by "the perfect day." Does it refer to the instantaneous receiving of all knowledge, or does it refer to the achievement of perfecting one's ability to obey truth absolutely? I believe I would tend to lean towards the latter explanation.

Concerning perfection, Brigham Young has 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 as 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."⁷¹ Notice that there is no sin in not possessing knowledge. The sin comes in not acting upon or obeying it. And this is what prevents us from being gods.

Along these same lines, President Spencer W. Kimball has stated, "Of all the treasures of knowledge, the most truly vital is the knowledge of God, of his existence, his powers, his love, and his promises. Through this knowledge, we learn that our great objective in life is to build character. In fact, we learn that the building of faith and character is paramount, for character is higher than intellect, and perfected character will be continually rewarded with increased intellect. Thus, our real business on earth is to master self. And as we master ourselves, we will learn to master the earth and it's elements...And let us remember that it is not so much what we know that is important, as what we do and what we are. The master's plan is a program of doing, of living, not merely knowing. Knowledge itself is not the end. It is how we righteously live and apply that knowledge in our lives and how we apply it to help others that describes our character."⁷²

⁶⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 93:26-28

⁷⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 50:24

⁷¹ Deseret News Weekly, 31 August, 1854, p. 37 (See also "Choose you This Day," priesthood manual, p. 183.)

⁷² "Seek Learning Even by Study and also by Faith," Spencer W. Kimball, Ensign, September, 1983.

In the words of the Lord himself, the very reason for our coming to earth is to see how well we will react to truth and knowledge. “And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”⁷³ Why is this so important? Because until we can reach the point where we can obey truth perfectly, as given to us by higher beings than ourselves, we cannot be trusted with the great responsibilities and duties of being a god. For, of necessity, a god must seek and obey truth absolutely if he is to save any soul throughout the entire universe.

SUMMARY

In summary, I believe that all the intelligences in existence possess the capabilities to grow, learn, and progress. I struggle very much with the idea that certain intelligences can only go so far and no farther. However, I also believe that throughout eternity we have been separate, distinct beings, and that part of that “distinctiveness” includes the idea that we are at different levels of progression, “one above another.” Because of this self-existent difference, we come into the world with different capabilities concerning our reaction to truth. One of the major purposes of the plan of salvation being, to help us to progress in this “quality” of obeying truth once it is learned. I believe that once we have mastered this ability unto perfection, we will be entitled to the position of godhood. And when we reach a state of godhood, we will not know all things in the literal sense, but rather we will have access to all knowledge and hence will be continually learning and progressing from one glory to another, worlds without end. Thus, as those of lower orders and kingdoms progress, so also will those of higher orders or kingdoms. The difference being that those who obey truth better, even unto perfection, will learn and grow many times more rapidly than those who are not yet able to obey it as well. Nevertheless, their progression is not stopped. Hence, forever more there will be an eternal separation between those in higher kingdoms and those in lower kingdoms; all of them moving upward to higher truths and greater joy. It is reasonable to assume that our agency will take its toll on our progression, but it should be noted that we are only free to do those things we are capable of doing.

If I were to be asked, “Does it really make a difference? Does it really matter whether you're right or wrong concerning these things?” I would have to answer “yes.” If what I have said is true, then we have made great strides in getting to know and better understand not only God, our Eternal Father in heaven, but also ourselves and our purpose here on earth. What could be more important than that?

Joseph Smith has said, “There are but a very few beings on earth who understand rightly the character of God. The great majority of mankind do not comprehend anything, either that which is past, or that which is to come, as respects their relationship to God...If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves.”⁷⁴ “Here, then, is eternal life - to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Abraham 3:25 (24-26)

⁷⁴ Joseph Smith, King Follett Sermon, *Millennial Star*, vol. xxiii, p. 245 (see also Mormon Doctrine of Deity, B.H. Roberts, p. 226.)

⁷⁵ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 346-347

Consider also how these theories, if true, would affect our relationships with other people. Would it be easier to judge more righteously? Would it be easier to love a wicked man and to continually strive to teach and help him, even if it were only little by little?

I doubt very much that everything I have said is true. The chances are probably rather good that there is fault to be found in some of my logic or that I have misinterpreted a quote or scripture. I am very much interested in knowing these faults. I would like very much to be corrected or upheld (as the case may be) in the thoughts and ideas I have expressed and I more than welcome such things. To me, thus far in my life, these things fit together better than anything else I have heard. And, at least for the time being, I can only say that I tend to believe them.

Although these thoughts have raised more questions in my mind, they have answered just as many, if not more. I am very much desirous to continue on with my learning of and obeying truth. Only by doing these things can we obtain godhood and find joy and happiness in our existence.