

People and the Truths of Religion

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Introduction

There may be nothing more significant in the entire universe than the combination of truth and people. However, when separated from each other, truth and people are relatively worthless entities. Truth is of no value unless it is perceived by some intelligent being. Likewise, intelligent beings apparently cannot become anything more than “native element” without some ability to internalize truth. In fact, it can be argued from a certain point of view that there is no existence at all until truth is placed within an intelligent being.¹ Yet, when combined, intelligent life is created, joy and happiness can be experienced, problems are overcome, and progress is made. Only through this combination of truth and people can any portion of human experience exist. It is what makes life worth living. Indeed, it makes life exist in the first place.

From an LDS perspective, it could be said that the entire plan of salvation is nothing more or less than a method or process intended to combine truth and people. Based on scriptures and the words of the prophets, the fact that people must learn and conform to truth in order to be exalted can hardly be disputed. For example,

It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance. (D&C 131:6)

The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth. (D&C 93:36)

Knowledge saves a man, and in the world of spirits a man cannot be exalted but by knowledge. (TPJS, p. 357)

Yet, in spite of these plain and simple teachings, for some reason spiritual truth and people don't seem to blend well. In general, they seem to be like oil and water. Throughout the recorded history of the earth, God's efforts to combine the two have been met with a great deal of frustration. Perhaps the oldest and longest-lasting arguments known to man deal with such topics as who God is, what He expects from us, and why He expects it. Religious or moral truths, in all their varieties, have been debated since man had a beginning. For some reason, we can't seem to get a very solid handle on these types of truths. We could even go as far as to say that the gospel of Jesus Christ has actually been offensive to almost every group of people to whom it has ever been introduced. So much so that people have been more willing to kill the gospel messengers than they have been to merely disagree with them and let them go about their business like unwanted salesmen.

Joseph Smith described this problem all too well when he said,

But there has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle. Even the Saints are slow to understand. 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

¹ D&C 93:30

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. (DHC 6:183-185, Jan. 20, 1844.)

Notice in this quote that it is not suffering or persecution that makes the saints “fly to pieces like glass.” Rather, it is simply the “things of God” that make them fall. It is the spiritual or moral truths revealed by God that make people apostatize and flee the church. This seems to have been the case in literally every dispensation of the gospel.

In connection with how difficult it seems to be to get “anything into the heads of” people, it is somewhat amazing how little the Lord has actually revealed to us contrasted with how little attention we tend to pay to that small amount of information. From a doctrinal standpoint, it is really not very difficult to become a gospel scholar, especially in these days of the Internet and information technology. The total number of revealed doctrines of the gospel could probably be summarized within the pages of one modestly sized book. Yet, for the most part people are generally ignorant of those principles. What’s worse, people generally have little or no desire to learn them in the first place, especially those that are contrary to our cultural norms or require some sort of sacrifice.

In general, I believe that the problem of combining spiritual truth and people is not so much the result of a lack of information regarding spiritual truth as it is the nature of spiritual truth, combined with the nature of most people. To some extent, spiritual truth and people are like scales with truth on one side and people on the other – the more spiritual truths you introduce the fewer people will accept it. Likewise, the more people you introduce, the less truth will be accepted. It seems to be a delicate balance that the Lord is always trying to weigh and measure with as much “net positive outcome” as possible. For the most part, to appease or convert the masses generally means to preach the “milk.” To preach the “meat” generally means mass rejection by the majority of the people. There is almost a direct relationship between the two. It is a difficult problem indeed – one with which every prophet has struggled tremendously, including Christ himself.

This paper deals with the process of how truth is learned, what tools we use in our efforts to learn truth, and why it is so hard for people to teach spiritual truths to others. We’ll start by exploring what religious or spiritual truth is and is not as well as some of the fundamental issues surrounding our efforts to combine truth and people. Then we’ll discuss how people learn truth and why this understanding is important when trying to teach others or learn new spiritual truths ourselves.

Three Levels of Moral Truth

To some extent, moral truth and spiritual truth are all but synonymous. The gospel of Jesus Christ is largely comprised of moral maxims that teach us how to live in peace and harmony with others and to bring about the largest amount of good in this world and the next.

Throughout history there have been two fundamental institutions that have championed the cause of moral truth. These two institutions are government and religion. Although other organizations and movements have certainly had their influence in defining and implementing moral truths, over the centuries, few can claim to hold as much impact as government and religion. This is not to say that there have not been corrupt governments or religions. That moral truths have been under siege by both government and religion goes without saying. Yet, when moral truth is promoted and upheld by a group of people it is usually surrounded by either a political and/or religious movement of some kind.

It is important to note that the way in which governments and religion deal with moral truth is, and should be, very different. One way to demonstrate this difference is to define the different types of moral truths and to show the relationship that both government and religion have with each type. For example, we can define at least three levels or categories of moral truth. We shall refer to these three levels as follows:

- Imposing on the Rights of Others
- The Promotion of Good
- Religious Morality

In section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants we find a great deal of valuable information concerning how governments and religions should conduct themselves with regard to these three levels of morality. We will refer to this section frequently as we try to define the role of each. Again, by their very nature, government and religion should deal with these levels of moral truth in very different ways. Not only should their goals be different, but also the manner in which they encourage or promote moral acts within each category should be very different. Let's consider each of these categories in turn and analyze the roles of government and religion to each.

Imposing on the Rights of Others

Imposing on the rights of others is the lowest level of moral truth. It simply suggests that no person has the right to impose upon another or cause undue pain or suffering to other people without just cause. This class of moral truths generally deals with those things people should *not* do as opposed to things we should do. For example, most people would agree that it is wrong to kill, steal from, or injure another person in any way that unjustly imposes upon their rights.

We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life. (D&C 134:2)

To a large extent, this category of moral truth is the only category in which governments should be allowed to pass legislation or impose laws. It could be argued that the main, if not the only, role of government should be to protect these kinds of rights among the people it governs. Government's role then is primarily to protect us from each other. This, however, should never be confused with the concept of protecting us from

ourselves. This is important to understand. Government has no right to protect an individual from himself, so long as that individual is not imposing upon the rights of others. Again we turn to section 134:

We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul.

We believe that ... human laws being instituted for the express purpose of regulating our interests as individuals and nations, between man and man; and divine laws given of heaven, prescribing rules on spiritual concerns, for faith and worship, both to be answered by man to his Maker.

We believe that rulers, states, and governments have a right, and are bound to enact laws for the protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief; but we do not believe that they have a right in justice to deprive citizens of this privilege, or proscribe them in their opinions, so long as a regard and reverence are shown to the laws and such religious opinions do not justify sedition nor conspiracy. (D&C 134:4, 6-7, underline added)

Although governments often break this general rule by going way beyond protecting us from each other, this has been and always will be the proper role of government. In this way, governments should not pass any laws to prohibit a person from doing anything they want to do, whether we agree or disagree with the behavior, so long as it doesn't impose upon the rights of others. This concept has far reaching effects concerning our modern laws and society, effects that are uncomfortable for some, but which clearly define the proper role of government. For example, if we follow these rules it soon becomes clear that concepts such as prostitution, bigamy, homosexuality, etc. should be no concern of government whatsoever so long as they do not impose upon the rights of other individuals. These are issues of conscience and moral opinion that, according to D&C 134, should never be infringed upon, controlled, suppressed, deprived, or proscribed by government. This is a hard pill to swallow for many strict religionists. Yet, it is also clearly the right and just position to hold when assessing the proper role of government.

Like governments, religions are also quite often heavily involved with this level of moral truth. Most religions tend to preach against inflicting pain or suffering on others. Yet, there certainly are those religious movements that seem to stray from this as a general rule. Unlike governments, religion's role is not to enforce these rules upon the people except as it pertains to privileges and rights within their own community such as excommunication or restrictions in officiating and so forth. Religion should have no

authority to create or enforce laws that govern a society outside of simple restrictions concerning its own membership. This principle is also outlined for us in section 134.

We believe that all religious societies have a right to deal with their members for disorderly conduct, according to the rules and regulations of such societies; provided that such dealings be for fellowship and good standing; but we do not believe that any religious society has authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world's goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship. (D&C 134:10, underline added)

It is clear that throughout history many religions have exceeded their rights by imposing their views onto people. Yet, when viewed in its proper role, religion should never enforce laws or impose upon the rights of others.

The Promotion of Good

The second level of moral truth deals with more or less the opposite of the first level. Instead of not doing something that may cause the pain or suffering of another person, this level involves doing things that may bring increased joy or happiness to people. This category has everything to do with kindness and friendliness for the benefit of others. Where the first category dealt with avoiding wrong, this category deals with promoting good. Most people would agree, for example, that it is generally a “good thing” to help an old lady across the street, sacrifice your time to be a community volunteer, or help your neighbor paint his house. The definition of “good” in this case is anything that either eliminates pain and suffering or brings joy and happiness to others.

Government’s role in this level of moral truth changes dramatically. Although governments perhaps have the right to encourage this kind of behavior through advertising or other types of positive communication, incentives, and rewards, government has no right to punish or legislate against those who people who do not wish to do good on their own. Again, the only goal of civil laws and punishments should be focused on protecting the rights of people or protecting us from each other.

This level of moral truth is where many religions begin to shine and go way beyond what governments can generally do by themselves. For example, few can find fault with the Salvation Army’s efforts to care for the poor or the well-intentioned missionary’s attempts to improve the standard of living in third world countries. However, it is important to recognize that many organizations, religions, and cultures around the world have differing views regarding what is good and what is not. Again, the basic rule of thumb for what is or isn’t allowed by government is that people should be free to do whatever they want to so long as it does not impose upon the rights of others. Should a person or group of people choose to pursue some course or other that may not agree with others’ interpretation of “good or bad,” government should take no action to correct such situations unless the rights of the people are somehow at risk. As outlined above in D&C 134, people of any faith, or of no faith at all, should be allowed by government to the

“individual free exercise of conscience,” and the “rules of worship,” but government should “never suppress the freedom of the soul” or “proscribe them in their opinions,” unless those opinions “infringe upon the rights and liberties of others.”

At the same time, people should never be forced in any way to contribute to the Salvation Army or to accept the efforts of a missionary to improve their standard of living or accept their spiritual views. Whenever religion crosses these boundaries, government should step in and prevent such impositions upon the people, regardless of the religion or the cause. Government’s role, then, is not so much to define or dictate some version of right or wrong to its citizens as it is to protect those citizens from other people’s definitions of right and wrong should they choose to reject them. This can be a delicate tightrope to walk, but serves well as a general guideline for good government as it pertains to civil, religious, or cultural beliefs. While government is all about protecting people from the bad imposed on them by others, religion is often largely involved with promoting the good among people in non-threatening ways.

Religious Morality

The third level of moral truth is perhaps the most difficult to understand and accept. While most religions definitely delve heavily into the first two levels of moral truth described above, there is a third category of moral truth that falls outside of either of these first two categories and it seems to be directly tied to religion in most cases. This third level of moral truths involves those beliefs or behaviors that do not appear to either deprive anyone of their rights or promote any inherent good in and of themselves, at least none that we can readily detect. These moral truths deal with issues that are apparently believed in solely because “God said so.” For example, sexual beliefs and behaviors tend to fall squarely into this category. In today’s modern society, many people find it difficult to understand the restrictions surrounding “sexual morality” as defined in many religions. There simply doesn’t seem to be a reason to stay morally clean as long as you are respectful, smart, and careful about it.

In addition to sexual behaviors, there are religions that firmly believe in such concepts as a “chosen people” or that men and women should have distinctly different roles in life or that certain foods or drinks should not be taken into the body and so forth. All of these issues can easily be viewed as nonsense to the outside observer because we don’t often understand them very well. From all appearances, sexuality among consenting adults can be viewed as a very good thing, while absolute equality among races and sexes seems to be a given among most educated cultures. Likewise, if someone wants to enjoy certain foods or drinks that may or may not be harmful to them in some way, who’s business is that but their own? So long as they are not forced upon anyone in unjust ways, these types of beliefs and behaviors don’t seem to infringe upon the right of others in any way.

Even with our lack of understanding of the reasons behind such issues, it is reasonable to assume that most people on earth would define these types of issues as moral issues and, whether they realize it or not, most people will believe them to be good or bad based solely on religious foundations. Yet, as already mentioned, the honest truth seeker will immediately recognize the difference between these types of issues and those listed in the

first two categories. From a strictly non-religious standpoint, it is difficult to understand the reasoning behind such moral imperatives and, hence, it is often difficult for people to believe in and adhere to them on a regular basis. Simply stated, without religious influence, there is no reason to believe in these types of issues.

As for government's involvement with such issues, it is difficult to suggest that two consenting adults engaging in pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, bigamy, prostitution, or homosexual activities are imposing upon the rights of others in any way. And even for religious groups, it is not intuitively clear that we are doing anything particularly "good" by avoiding these practices. In and of themselves, they do not seem to be good or bad, right or wrong. As shocking as this may sound to those who have been raised according to these religious rules of right and wrong, the sole reason we judge such issues as being morally right or morally wrong in the first place is almost wholly founded in religious belief. We simply believe that God said so and God is right, therefore we should obey, even if we don't fully understand it.

This is not intended to belittle the significance or reality of religious truths, on the contrary. Religious truths are an important part of literally every civilization. In addition, I personally believe there are very good arguments for believing and living according to "religious morality." I dare say that many people would agree that religious perspectives should be respected and adhered to. The only point made here is that religious morality only applies to those who believe that God has revealed these truths and not to those who have no such beliefs, and that governments should not get involved in such debates so long as they do not interfere upon the rights of others.

We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges, and the individual rights of its members, as citizens, denied. (D&C 134:9)

Examples of both religions and governments going beyond their rights in this regard are plentiful. What was accomplished, for example, when the pious Spanish forced the native inhabitants of South America to either confess Christianity or suffer unbearable torture? Likewise, what is accomplished by creating civil laws that punish or penalize consenting adults for being fornicators, bigamists, or homosexuals? The argument is the same in both cases. What good could possibly come from such absurd activities when the people being imposed upon simply don't believe in such things? Even God himself is unlikely to punish anyone for sinning in ignorance. That being the case, certainly his children have even less of a right to force their religious standards onto those who don't believe as they do on these subjects. When there is no imposition upon the rights of others, there should be no laws to either prevent or impede the free exercise of differing opinions. Perhaps, as in the cases of the great flood or Sodom and Gomorrah, God will see fit to intervene and punish man for violating religious morality. However, man clearly has no right to take this responsibility upon himself. Again, this is stated very clearly in section 134.

We believe that ... human laws [are] instituted for the express purpose of regulating our interests as individuals and nations, between man and man; and divine laws given of heaven, prescribing rules on spiritual concerns, for faith and worship, both to be answered by man to his Maker. (D&C 134:6)

This being the case, with regard to government, this means that,

... we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul.

We believe that rulers, states, and governments have a right, and are bound to enact laws for the protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief; but we do not believe that they have a right in justice to deprive citizens of this privilege, or proscribe them in their opinions, so long as a regard and reverence are shown to the laws and such religious opinions do not justify sedition nor conspiracy. (D&C 134:4, 7, underline added)

This also means, with regard to religion, that,

We believe that all religious societies have a right to deal with their members for disorderly conduct, according to the rules and regulations of such societies; provided that such dealings be for fellowship and good standing; but we do not believe that any religious society has authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world's goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship. (D&C 134:10, underline added)

These “rules of engagement,” if you will, are plain, simple and difficult to refute. They represent the just and righteous views concerning the roles of government and religion.

The fact that many issues surrounding religious morality don't seem to infringe upon the rights of others and don't seem to do any inherent good for mankind creates no small difficulty for preachers of the word of God. It is very difficult to preach the principles of religious morality when you don't know why they are moral truths in the first place. This makes it very difficult for many people around the world to live by these principles. Even those who are considered “very good” people by the standards set forth in our first two categories often find it difficult to live according to this third level of moral truth. In fact, it is sometimes because a person is so good at living according to the first two levels that they have difficulty believing in such religious principles. In many cases such religious principles may come across as being little more than racial or sexual discrimination, for example. If you don't understand the reasoning behind such principles and you don't believe in God, such beliefs can seem not only absurd, but down right cruel in some cases. Yet, so long as religious societies do not overstep their rightful

bounds, as outlined in D&C 134, nobody should be too upset with them. If someone doesn't like those rules, they are absolutely free to distance themselves from them without reproach.

Barring further revelation regarding "religious morality" that will tell us why we should live by these rules, and given that the world is becoming more "enlightened" and therefore likely to question such principles, it is reasonable to assume that more and more people will begin to live according to the first two levels of moral truth, but not according to this third level. This can be seen in many of the more educated cultures around the world. A good person with no faith in God or his word may understandably say, "I will not harm another living soul and I will do my best to help people in need, but I see nothing wrong in hiring a prostitute or engaging in homosexual activities." By all standards of an ideal government, this defines a good citizen, but a very poor member of most religions. From strictly a civil perspective, this is as it should be. The only meaningful rebuttal to such a person is to convince him that God exists and that God does not approve of such activities, therefore he should exercise faith in God by conforming to divine will on this subject. If a person truly cares about the word of God, they will likely conform. If a person could care less about the word of God, they will likely not conform, even if they otherwise live a very moral life according to the other two categories listed above.

This raises a very unique set of questions with regard to government's role in legislating religious morality. Yet, although unique in some ways, the same basic principles apply. Namely, if something imposes upon the rights of others then government should enforce laws to protect those people from their oppressors. However, if people choose to adhere to such practices of their own free will and choice, and if they harm or impose upon no other person by choosing that course in life, then government has no right to impede or prohibit such actions. In addition, if government offers certain privileges or rights to one person, it should offer them to all people regardless of their adherence to this third category of moral or religious truth. In short, government should protect the rights of individuals to practice their beliefs, whether religious or not, to the fullest extent, so long as those practices don't impose upon the rights of others. In addition, governments must not be exclusionary in their efforts to protect all peoples' rights, regardless of race, sex, sexual preference, religion, marital status, etc. At the same time, governments must allow religious and other groups to be exclusionary within and among their own societies. In other words, government must not interfere with the white supremacist religion that does not allow women, Jews, or homosexuals into their organization, regardless of how distasteful those values may appear to others. This is the correct and proper role of government. Government, by its very nature, should be organized and operated with different goals in mind than religion.

This difference of roles between religion and government has been widely misunderstood and remains a confusing topic for most people today. Prejudice and ignorance still seem to be the rule rather than the exception when discussing the matter. Yet, in its basic form it is one of the simplest issues to resolve. It is important to understand that when the government of God is implemented on earth during the millennium, these are the types of

governing principles that will be found on earth. Of this difference between the roles of religion and government, Elder George Q. Cannon had much to say. For example,

We are asked, Is the Church of God, and the Kingdom of God the same organization and we are informed that some of the brethren hold that they are separate.

This is the correct view to take. The Kingdom of God is a separate organization from the Church of God. There may be men acting as officers in the Kingdom of God who will not be members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On this point the Prophet Joseph gave particular instructions before his death, and gave an example, which he asked the younger elders who were present to always remember. It was to the effect that men might be chosen to officiate as members of the Kingdom of God who had no standing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Kingdom of God when established will not be for the protection of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints alone, but for the protection of all men, whatever their religious views or opinions may be. Under its rule, no one will be permitted to overstep the proper bounds or to interfere with the rights of others. (History of the Church, Vol.7, Ch.28, Pg.382, underline added. See also Collected Discourses, Vol.5, April 5, 1897)

Joseph Smith set the pattern; he taught the brethren who were with him better ideas; you well-informed Latter-day Saints know that there are two powers which God has restored in these the last days. One is the Church of God, the other the Kingdom of God. A man may belong to the Kingdom of God and yet not be a member of the Church of God. In the Kingdom of God, using it in a political sense, there may be heathens and Pagans and Mahommedans and Latter-day Saints and Presbyterians and Episcopalians and Catholics and men of every creed. Will they legislate for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints alone? Will the laws that they enact protect us alone and not protect others? No. Why? Because God is the Father of the Latter-day Saints as well as of every human being; God is the father of all, is the father of the Chinaman, the Hindoo, the African, the European, the American; is the Father of all the races of men and of every creed and nationality. When he establishes his kingdom it will protect all in their equal rights; I as a Latter-day Saint, will not have power to trample on my fellow-man who may not be orthodox in my opinion, because I am a Latter-day Saint; nor will my fellow-man to whom I am heterodox, have the power to trample upon me. Does not that look right? That is the kind of kingdom we have to contend for; that is the kind of kingdom we have to establish, and it is already provided for in the Constitution given unto us by God, and through the glorious labors of the fathers who aid the foundation of this government, who were inspired and raised by our Almighty Father for this express purpose. There is no liberty that a human being can desire, neither is there a right that can be exercised properly, that we do not have under the Constitution of our land. It needs no amendment about it; it is broad enough, if interpreted in its true spirit,

to cover the individual, the continent, and the entire globe and furnish freedom for all. (Journal of Discourses 20:202-203, underline added)

During an excellent defense of the constitutionality of plural marriage, Elder Charles W. Penrose added the following wisdom to this topic:

We consider that we have the right under the Constitution of the United States to believe anything which seems right to us, and not only to believe it, but to carry it out in our practice, so far as we can do so without interfering with the rights of other people. The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States says: "Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." We understand that amendment as it is written. We do not wish to interpret it, or to give to it any meaning other than the plain language conveys. The language is, "That Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion." With the establishment of religion, then, Congress has nothing to do. Congress cannot set up a religion, nor can it pass any law respecting an establishment of religion--that is, to prevent its free exercise...

Now, we consider that we have a perfect right under the Constitution of our country to believe what seems right to us, and then to carry it out. "Well," some one may say, "do you think there should be no restriction to this? Are people to be protected in any kind of religion they may have? Suppose a man were to come here from India who believed it religious duty, under some circumstances, to strangle a man, would he have the right under the Constitution of the United States, to strangle? Again, there are people who believe it is right, in India, to burn a widow on the funeral pile, that her spirit may be sent to keep company with her husband in the other world. Would that person, or those persons have the right, under the constitution of the United States, to carry out their belief in this country?" We say no. We say that the Thug has no right here to practice his faith. We say the Suttee could not be established in this country. "Why not? You believe it is right under some circumstances for a man to have more wives than one, and that those who thus believe are protected by the Constitution in the practice of their religion. Why should not those who believe it right to strangle, or to burn widows, have the right to practice their religion under the Constitution of the United States?" The dividing line is very simple, as truth generally is. It is very easy to be drawn. It is to be drawn in consonance with the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, and with the principles that underline our government. In the Declaration of Independence it is laid down that there are certain rights that cannot be alienated, that are natural, that are inherent, that are not imparted by governments: they do not belong to politics, but they are inherent in the individual--the right to life, the right to liberty, the right to property, and the right to the pursuit of happiness. These rights are inalienable. They belong to every individual. They are not conferred by law. They belong to us. They are born in us. They belong to every person who breathes the breath of life. Then, an act of any individual or any government which infringes upon these

natural rights is wrong in and of itself. If any individual interferes with the rights of his fellowmen he may be restrained by the secular law. The right to life, and to liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness, and to property belong to all individuals alike. One body of people professing one faith must not interfere with the rights of any other body of people professing another faith. The Latter-day Saints, as well as the Latter-day sinners, the Methodist as well as the Catholic, the Jew as well as the Gentile--all people alike in this great country must be protected equally in these natural rights which belong to them.

Here, then, is where the line must be drawn. Anything that persons profess to do under the name of religion, which interferes with the rights of others is wrong, and the secular law may step in and protect the citizens and restrain or punish those people who attempt to do this under the plea of religion. If I do anything which interferes with the life, the liberty, the happiness, or the property of my neighbor, the law has a right to step in and protect my neighbor and restrain me. But if my religion--that which I believe to be true, and which I try to carry out as a part of my faith--does not interfere with human rights, does not infringe in any degree upon the rights of my fellow man, neither Congress, nor any other law-making power on the face of the earth, has the right to interfere with me under the Constitution of the country. I have a right to the exercise of my religion so long as it does not infringe upon the rights of other people. (Journal of Discourses 25:218, underline added)

This is a difficult principle for some people to understand. Many would (and do) think that “God’s government” would legislate concerning religious morality. Yet it is clear that it will do no such thing. Its sole purpose will be to permit no one “to overstep the proper bounds or to interfere with the rights of others.” The problem some seem to have with this line of reasoning is that it will, of necessity, demand that people will be allowed to act upon all moral beliefs of a religious or non-religious nature so long as they don’t infringe upon the rights of others. This is the correct interpretation of this principle. The target of Elder Penrose’s remarks were clearly directed at plural marriage, which obviously does not infringe upon the rights of others any more than monogamy does. Yet, if we allow bigamy to exist, we must, by the same line of reasoning, allow other religiously moral beliefs to survive and be acted upon as well. Hence, the same rules that apply to bigamy also apply to homosexuality, adultery, fornication, and even prostitution. Although a person may find these practices in utter defiance of all they hold dear from a religious standpoint, we must admit that the right to practice one’s beliefs in these areas should be soundly protected from purely a political standpoint, so long as they do not impose upon the rights of others. Again, to use the words of Elder Cannon, God’s form of government will protect “all men, whatever their religious views or opinions may be,” even if I consider those views to be fundamentally heathen, pagan, unorthodox, sacrilegious, blasphemous, or any other personally offensive point of view. Government should pass no laws that prohibit or hinder any of these types of actions or views of life. Although a very difficult concept for many religionists to understand, including many Latter-day Saints, the argument is as clear and understandable as it can be. Simply put, if something infringes upon the rights of others, it should be against the law. If it does not

infringe upon the rights of others, then government should have no say in the matter, one way or the other. As Elder Penrose put it, “The dividing line is very simple, as truth generally is. It is very easy to be drawn.”

That said about the proper role of government, religion clearly must be allowed to go beyond the role of government by encouraging what it believes to be higher principles from God and by being protected in its rights of restricting people from certain privileges within its own organization. Religion must be allowed to believe in, exercise, and preach the promotion of moral principles above and beyond those found in either of our first two categories. Religion must be allowed to encourage the principles of religious morality, even if we don't fully understand why God has commanded such principles in the first place. A good government will allow literally any kind of religious or moral freedom that does not impose upon the rights of others. This includes everything from sexuality and sexism to racism and health codes and more. All people, whether religious or not, have a right to practice their views of religious morality as they see fit. However, as soon as any religion, group, or person begins to improperly impose their views on others, government should immediately prosecute that entity to the extent of the law.

The table below attempts to summarize the principles we've presented thus far.

THE "IDEAL" ROLES OF GOVERNMENT AND RELIGION		
	Government	Religion
Imposing on the Rights of Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavily involved • Main role of government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavily involved • Has a right to encourage people against such offenses, but not to punish or impose civil law • Has a right to remove those deemed "in the wrong" from certain religious privileges • Should never improperly impose upon the rights of others in order to promote their own view of "the bad"
Promotion of Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May encourage but not enforce "the good" • Must not punish those who don't promote the good • Must not restrict those who don't promote "the good" from enjoying common civil rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavily involved • Has a right to encourage people towards such actions, but not to enforce or impose them • Has a right to restrict those who don't promote "the good" from certain religious privileges • Should never improperly impose upon the rights of others in order to promote their own view of "the good"
Religious Morality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not involved at all except to protect the rights of others • Must not punish people regardless of their views on religious morality • Must not restrict people from enjoying civil rights due to religious practices (so long as those practices do not infringe upon the rights of others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavily involved • Has a right to encourage people towards such actions, but not to enforce or impose them • Has a right to exclude those deemed "in the wrong" from certain religious privileges • Should never improperly impose upon the rights of others in order to promote their own view of "religious morality"

Definitions of Truth

For the purposes of this paper it is important that we understand what we mean by the word "truth" as it applies to moral or spiritual truths as well as all other types of truth. There are basically two different definitions of "truth" that are commonly used within Mormonism. The first is simply that truth is "the sum of all existence" or "things as they really are." This definition suggests that regardless of whether or not something is

known or understood by any conscious being, if it exists in any form, it is a part of truth. Although this is perhaps the most commonly used definition of truth, the Lord has suggested another definition that is actually more comprehensive and makes more sense within the context of practical experience.

And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come. (D&C 93:24, underline added)

Simply put, this means that nothing can be true unless it is known by some conscious being. Without going into a lengthy and somewhat philosophical comparison of these two definitions of truth, I would propose that the Lord's definition is the more accurate and functional of the two. Of this position Elder B.H. Roberts once stated,

If this [the definition of truth as knowledge] is spoken with a divine sanction, under inspiration of God, then it ought to be the completest (sic.) definition of truth extant among men. I hold it to be so. It deals with truth under several aspects: relative truth,; absolute truth; and truth in the "becoming" or unfolding; and truth in the sum. (The Truth, The Way, The Life, p.22)²

The basic premise of this definition of truth seems to be that if there are things in the universe that exist outside the awareness of any conscious being, we would not be able to make any intelligent remark about those things. We could not even say that they exist in the first place, for we would know nothing about their existence. Hence, for all intents, purposes, and discussions, they would not exist. This, I believe, is the crux of the Lord's definition of truth.

Thus, under the Lord's definition of truth, truth has completely to do with knowledge, and hence, completely to do with beings who can know. Under this definition, there is nothing that is true that is not known. Regardless of any personal opinions or views we may have of truth, truth for the Lord exists only in the minds and/or hearts of conscious beings. Truth and knowledge are inseparable.

Given the Lord's definition of truth, we can reiterate the concept that the main purpose of the plan of salvation is nothing more or less than an effort to bring man and truth together in such a way that they will experience lasting joy. As simple as this sounds, I believe this view of the plan of salvation is fundamentally correct.

Spiritual Truth

That said, the Lord via the plan of salvation, seems to focus on certain kinds of truths. He emphasizes what might be called "spiritual" truths over what might be called "secular" or "physical" truths. For the purposes of this paper, our focus will be on these spiritual truths. For example, our focus will not be on such truths as "2+2=4" or what the

² For further reading on the subject of truth I highly recommend the writings of Elder B.H. Roberts as found in *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, pp22-25, and *Comprehensive History of the Church, Vol.2, Ch.63*, pp.383 -387

capital city of a given state might be. Rather, we will focus our attention on two distinct subsets of spiritual truths.

The first subset involves moral truths that define how we should act and how we should view or judge ourselves and others. This subset is more or less defined by our three levels of moral truth discussed earlier. This includes simpler issues ranging from stealing, killing and lying, to more complex issues such as homosexuality, abortion, plural marriage, and equality in riches.

The second subset of spiritual truth involves areas that don't necessarily define how we should act or how we judge our moral character, but which still have a strong connection with our understanding of God and spirituality in general. This includes issues such as whether or not God is progressing in knowledge or has a physical body, whether Christ was married or had children, etc. These types of truths don't necessarily tell us how we should act or what kind of person we should be, but are squarely and often intensely debated from a spiritual or religious point of view. This is not to say that these types of issues don't shed more light on our own existence or actions. They certainly do. However, they tend not to describe or define our moral actions as much as they give examples of or perspective to them. It is these two types of spiritual truths that are the main focus of this paper.

Ignorance, Belief, Faith, and Knowledge

It is possible to categorize the stages of learning truth into four distinct areas. These are:

- Ignorance
- Belief
- Faith
- Knowledge

Although definitions may vary concerning these four categories, especially with regard to belief and faith, for the purposes of our discussion, they are listed in order of progression, least to greatest.

Ignorance occurs when no information whatsoever is available about something. For example, if a person began a discussion by talking about an object called Gosmos, it is likely to be completely new information to the listener. Prior to this discussion the listener could make no intelligent remark whatsoever regarding Gosmos. And therefore, he would be considered completely ignorant about it. Until one comes in contact with some information about an object, they must remain in ignorance. It seems clear that no progress can be made in ignorance.

It is often the case that people believe in something in ignorance. As already mentioned, belief and faith are often confused. In most dictionaries belief is defined as the result of evidence or support for a conclusion, while faith involves a conclusion formulated without any reason for that conclusion. From a scriptural and LDS perspective, these definitions seem to be reversed. As defined in this paper, belief occurs when we

formulate an opinion about something without evidence or other supportive information – when we have no reason to believe, but we simply believe anyway. In the example above, for instance, our listener may take a wild guess that Gosmos is a type of rock formation that appears in the upper slopes of a remote Chinese mountain range. However, when asked why he believes this he would likely be at a loss for a reasonable response. He simply formulated a conclusion “out of thin air,” so to speak. Using this definition, belief is of little or no value to us, except for the possible action taken from this belief that can eventually either confirm or refute the belief.

Faith, on the other hand, as used in the scriptures, is always based on some sort of support or evidence in order to draw a conclusion. This is clearly outlined in the definition of faith found in the book of Hebrews.

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

Notice that the words “substance” and “evidence” are a part of the definition of faith as found in the Bible.

Likewise in the Book of Mormon, when Alma gives instruction about faith he clearly associates it with taking action by putting things to the test and looking for evidence to support a conclusion. Specifically, Alma compares faith to planting a seed to see if it will grow. The basic premise is that if it grows, your faith is substantiated and increased. If it does not grow, your faith is unsupported and therefore decreased.³ It is clear from this example that without a certain amount of experimentation, most people will likely remain ignorant of certain spiritual principles. The key here seems to be having the desire to find out if spiritual principles are true or not.⁴ If one has no desire for such things, they are unlikely to try such an experiment in the first place – hence the difficulty many people encounter when discerning spiritual truths.

Elder B. H. Roberts helps us to better define the kind of faith that is grounded in evidence and understanding.

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)

³ Alma 32:28-43

⁴ Alma 32:27

Using our definitions of faith and belief, Elder Robert's definition of "simple faith" is equivalent to our definition of "belief." As Elder Roberts explains, this is not faith at all. It is something completely different than that which is spoken of in the scriptures and which will eventually lead us to God.

To believe in something for no reason at all is to place your life in the hands of random chance. It is like trying to read an eye chart in a completely dark room. Your chances for success are extremely low, if there is any chance at all. This principle applies to spiritual truth as much as it does to any other kind of truth. We must find "substance" and "evidence" to support our spiritual faith or it will be of little or no value to us.

Applying this definition of "intelligent faith" to our example of Gosmos, the believer mentioned above did not have true faith in his conclusion, for his conclusion was not based on any evidence or understanding of the conclusion believed. However, suppose the listener became aware that the person telling him about this mysterious "Gosmos" was an astronomer. Based on this new information the listener may conclude that Gosmos has something to do with astronomy or the cosmos. He then learns that Gosmos orbits the sun. He now wonders if it is a planet or comet of some kind. At length he learns that Gosmos was built by NASA. He now determines that it must be a satellite or space probe of some sort. Finally, the astronomer tells him that Gosmos is a space probe that studies the asteroid belt within our solar system.

It is important to note that at no point along this path did our listener have knowledge about Gosmos. Yet, his conclusions became more and more reliable as he gathered more information about this object. Since he had no reason to doubt his teacher, he came to have more and more faith regarding his conclusions about Gosmos. Given this definition of faith we also see that there are different levels of faith. Faith is not an all or nothing principle. Faith always exists in various degrees of evidence and surety. From B.H. Roberts' point of view we might say that there is faith that is more rational and faith that is less rational.

Knowledge is the ultimate goal of faith. Ideally, faith always leads us in the direction of knowledge. By its strictest definition, knowledge is always true. By definition, all knowledge is absolute, with no chance of error. There is no belief or faith about it. Under this definition, few people really ever have much knowledge about anything. Knowledge, in its strictest sense, is an extremely difficult achievement. When most people say that they "know" something is true, what they are usually saying is that they have a high degree of faith that it is true based on some significant evidence or support. How we acquire this support and determine its value will be discussed later in this work.

Given this definition of knowledge it is difficult to understand the experience of the brother of Jared when he claimed to have left the realm of faith and came to a "perfect knowledge" of God.

And because of the knowledge of this man he could not be kept from beholding within the veil; and he saw the finger of Jesus, which, when he saw, he fell with

fear; for he knew that it was the finger of the Lord; and he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting.

Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus; and he did minister unto him. (Ether 3:19-20, underline added)

From purely a philosophical standpoint, it is reasonable to assume that the terminology used here is intended to indicate a higher degree of faith, rather than an absolute or “perfect” knowledge of God. The argument itself is somewhat circular. Notice, for example, that before he saw Jesus’ finger, it was because of his “knowledge” that he could not be kept within the veil. And yet, after he saw the finger he had faith no longer and knew, nothing doubting. Then the account again reiterates that it was his original “perfect knowledge” (not faith) that allowed him to see Jesus. Clearly there is a certain amount of ambiguity or inconsistency involved with the terminology chosen for this account. Before he beheld the Savior through the veil, did the brother of Jared have knowledge or was it merely faith? The account implies that he had both and seems to use the terms somewhat interchangeably.

Another reason to question the use of the word “knowledge” in this scripture involves the nature of the experience. Unless there was an unmentioned spiritual or supernatural experience that somehow increased the brother of Jared’s understanding to the level of knowledge, it appears that the brother of Jared was relying mostly on his sense of sight to suggest that he had faith no longer, but knew, nothing doubting. In this case we might elevate the old saying “seeing is believing” to “seeing is knowing.” That said, some difficult questions can be asked about this experience. How did he know for sure that the person he saw was Christ and not some other being? How did he know he wasn’t being deceived by some evil being? At the very least, it is difficult to understand how this experience resulted in perfect knowledge as opposed to simply a much higher level of faith.

As we search for spiritual truth, clearly the best, and in most cases only, place to be is within the realm of supportable, intelligent faith. Whether we like it or not, most of our conclusions are based on faith as defined above, whether spiritual or not. Faith is the building block for all learning. But, it cannot be blind faith or mere belief without reason or cause. In order to be truly valuable, our faith must be dependant upon some form of evidence and substance. Otherwise, it may only be belief, and hence, of little or no value to us in our search for spiritual truth.

Thought and Feeling

The famous philosopher Rene Descartes once said, “I think therefore I am.” The intent of this statement was to suggest that the only thing we can “know” for sure is that we think or have thoughts and, therefore, we can know that we exist in some form or other. Those who have watched and understood the popular movie “*The Matrix*” will likely appreciate this concept. It is impossible to disprove the notion that we are nothing more

than brains within a test tube on some remote planet galaxies away from here, or that life as we know it is merely a lengthy dream from which we will someday awake. We simply cannot prove that these possibilities are not the case, thus reducing almost all of our supposed knowledge to nothing more than mere belief and faith. The single exceptions to this general rule seem to be that of thought and, therefore, existence. In other words, even if one of these seemingly fantastic scenarios turned out to be true and all we perceive to be real was merely an illusion, Descartes' argument suggests that we would still have thoughts and therefore, still know that we exist in some form or other. Descartes concludes from this that thought is the one key element of our existence that we can depend upon and use to assess our experience.

It should be noted that there is a direct relationship between Descartes' philosophy and the Lord's definition of truth. In both cases, our very existence, as well as what we define as truth, depend on our ability to think or accumulate knowledge. Perhaps this is more than just a coincidence.⁵

However, as convincing as Descartes' argument is, I believe he left out a vital component. He left out the experience of feeling or emotion. Just as with thought, whatever we are or whatever other deceptions may exist, we still know that we feel things. Therefore, I believe Descartes' statement should be expanded to say, "I think and I feel, therefore I am."

Although it could be argued that feeling depends upon thought for its existence, it cannot be argued that we don't feel emotions or other intuitive sensations. We know that we have feelings. Just as with thought, there is no way around it. It also can't be argued that feeling and thought are one and the same thing. Perhaps feeling is a subset of thought, for it is difficult to conceive of feelings without conscious thought.⁶ However, since we can clearly conceive of thought existing without feeling, they must be separate entities – certainly overlapping in some way, but just as certainly not one and the same thing.

Using the strictest of definitions, the only three things we can "know" for sure are these two experiences (thought and feeling), and because of them, our very existence. Literally nothing else can be "proven" to exist, thus making all other experience little more than a faithful assumption on our part. Because these are the only things we can know for sure, it is safe to say that we should pay a great deal of attention to these two indicators and interpreters of our experience. When all is said and done, they are the only two tools we have at our disposal to both interpret our existence and come to any conclusions or beliefs about it. As far as learning truth is concerned, there simply is nothing else for us to call upon except thought and feeling. Those who claim that this view of learning is too simplistic or narrow will find it difficult to come up with a third element that doesn't fall squarely into one or both of these two camps. Simply try to do so and you'll quickly see how difficult it is.

⁵ D&C 93:24, 30

⁶ For example, assume a flower has no capacity for thought but felt sad. How would it know it felt sad? Since there could be no conscious awareness of sadness, how could it be sad in the first place?

Interestingly enough, the Lord seems to acknowledge this fact and therefore uses both thoughts and feelings to teach us literally all new truths. Consider the following scriptures and notice how the Lord uses both thought and feeling in light of our current discussion:

Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? (D&C 6:23, underline added)

Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. (D&C 8:2, underline added)

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me. (D&C 9:8-9, underline added)

Notice the interaction between thoughts and feelings in these verses. Both are clearly important to the Lord as he tries to impart new truths to us. Both can clearly be used as a tool to gather and discern new spiritual truths. Indeed, it may be difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins.

That said, it is important to note that the purpose of such feelings and thoughts is to gather more information or knowledge. And the purpose of gathering more knowledge is to experience more positive feelings in the form of joy, happiness, peace, etc. It is an ironic situation indeed. Notice in the following scripture the purposes behind the Lord speaking to both our hearts and minds.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy; (D&C 11:13, underline added)

Notice the direct connection between enlightening our minds and filling our souls with joy. Joy seems to be the ultimate result of enlightenment or learning spiritual truths. Unfortunately, when people think of the mission of the Holy Ghost, they often think only in terms of feelings or emotions. Many people seem to want the joy without gaining the knowledge first. Because of this, seldom do we associate the Holy Ghost with thoughts or the mind. Yet, we learn from Joseph Smith that although the Holy Ghost often uses feelings to teach us, as far as the house of Israel is concerned, the Holy Ghost's sole purpose deals with the mind or, in other words, with gathering knowledge.

This first Comforter or Holy Ghost has no other effect than pure intelligence. It is more powerful in expanding the mind, enlightening the understanding, and storing the intellect with present knowledge, . . . for as the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; and his whole soul and body are only exercised by the pure spirit of intelligence; . . . (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Three 1838–39, p.149)

Notice how strongly Joseph Smith states that the Holy Ghost “has no other effect than pure intelligence.” Lest there be any doubt in this, the Lord has defined “intelligence” for us as light and truth, or in other words, knowledge.⁷ Hence, it can be said that the Holy Ghost has no other effect than knowledge transfer. However, he clearly uses both thought and feeling as tools to transfer that knowledge.

The fact that thought and feeling overlap with each other seems to be a given. Often it is difficult to tell them apart. It is also a given that they influence each other in very direct ways. The way we feel about a subject often influences our thoughts about it. Likewise, the way we think about an issue certainly influences our feelings towards it. If we can break down how each of these tools of thought and feeling function we can better understand how to efficiently use them in our search for truth.

Thought as a Truth-Finder

There are at least two categories of thought that we should consider as truth-finding tools. The first is simply that of stored thought or memory. Our minds have the ability to gather and store information. This information can then be recalled to help us understand and get the most out of our experience.

The second major category is reason or logic. Briefly defined, logic is the act of combining two or more assumptions (stored thoughts/memories) in order to create a third thought or “conclusion” based on those assumptions. As far as thought is concerned, logic seems to be the greatest tool we have for identifying, defining, and comprehending truth. It is sure, explainable, demonstrable, and obvious to those who have a good ability to reason. For those who understand it, it is difficult to get around the strength of logic as a truth finder. In fact, nobody has thus far found a way to do it. Those who don’t understand logic or have little ability to reason often have difficulty understanding the strength and impact of logic as a truth finding tool. When the logician states that there can be no such thing as a perfectly round square, or a married bachelor, or winning a game of chess after my king has been checkmated, we are at a loss to counter such statements with anything other than a change in accepted definitions or assumptions. It is simply true that regardless of our feelings or emotions about the argument, when A equals B and B equals C, A will always equal C. There is simply no other choice in the matter of which we can conceive.

In addition to the strength and advantage of logic as a truth finding tool, or perhaps as a subset of it, logic has the strength of being explainable or verifiable in most cases while emotions or feelings often do not, other than perhaps merely stating their existence. It

⁷ See D&C 93:36 and D&C 93:24.

could even be said that in order to adequately interpret feelings, one must apply sound thought and analyze the feelings before one draws any conclusions based on mere feelings alone. Otherwise, one might have difficulty identifying inspiration from indigestion or intuition from mere insecurity, for example. For these reasons, it seems that of the two, thought is preferred over feelings as a tool for finding and teaching truth.

The one apparent flaw of logic as a truth-finding tool is that it must always depend upon assumptions or stored information in order to draw conclusions. Logic can only draw a true conclusion if the premises or assumptions are true. As stated earlier, it may be the case that everything but thought, feeling, and existence involve nothing more than assumptions. Hence, it is difficult, if not impossible, for logic to “prove” anything. This fact, however, does not lower its rank as the top truth-finding tool of which we are aware. For if we make no assumptions about our existence, then it would be impossible to learn anything at all or draw any conclusions whatsoever.

The simple fact of the matter is that we don’t know of anything that defines and discovers truth better than logic and reasoning. Many have proposed that there are better ways to discover truth than logic, but when asked what those better ways are, answers that can be understood and/or acted upon are seldom, if ever, produced. Even direct revelations must be interpreted and analyzed before they can serve as a tool for learning new truths. For example, take the experience of Moses when he encountered both God and Satan on mount Sinai. Notice in the following verses how much logical reasoning Moses applies to the situation in order to draw conclusions about his revelatory experience.

And it came to pass that when Moses had said these words, behold, Satan came tempting him, saying: Moses, son of man, worship me.

And it came to pass that Moses looked upon Satan and said: Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?

For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him. But I can look upon thee in the natural man. Is it not so, surely?

Blessed be the name of my God, for his Spirit hath not altogether withdrawn from me, or else where is thy glory, for it is darkness unto me? And I can judge between thee and God; for God said unto me: Worship God, for him only shalt thou serve. (Moses 1:12-15, underline added)

Notice that Moses did not merely accept the experience he was having. He questioned it. Notice also that he was not relying upon a conclusion that God told him. He was collecting his stored information, based on the experience he just had with God, and drawing a brand new conclusion based on those assumptions. This is logic and it is apparently how he determined that he should not worship Satan.

In addition to specific scriptural accounts like the one just mentioned, the mere fact that Joseph Smith was taught various methods of discerning between true and false messengers is evidence that revelatory experience must be put under further scrutiny before it is completely accepted as being from God.⁸

Although some may not be totally comfortable with the idea, until someone can come up with a better alternative, thought and logic seem to produce the best truth-finding tool currently known to man. All experiences, feelings, inspiration, revelation, and testimonies of others – in short, all sensory input whatsoever, should be judged and conclusions drawn by the use of sound reasoning. The simple point being made is that if you're not using sound reasoning, then what are you using? What other alternatives are there?

Feeling as a Truth-Finder

The power and strength of thought notwithstanding, feeling and intuition are also great tools for finding truth. In fact, as already mentioned, feelings seem to be the only other tool we have for discovering truth. Yet, as already stated, it should be recognized that when compared to thought, feeling and intuition are less sure, less explainable, and not as convincing to others with whom they are discussed. In many cases, feelings simply exist without a rational basis or readily apparent reason behind their existence. Thus making them harder to use and generally less reliable as a truth finding tool. As a result, people who depend on intuition and feeling more than reason frequently tend to make mistakes. Their conclusions are often faulty or unable to be adequately supported or explained to others. However, as already outlined in the scriptures above, the Lord clearly uses feelings as a way to communicate truth. In addition, if we place the scriptures aside for a moment, it is clear that our experience with feelings can be reasonably assessed to determine their value as a truth-finding tool in and of themselves.

Perhaps the best or most obvious example of feeling as a truth-finding tool involves instinct. For instance, when babies are born, they simply “know” certain things. One might accurately say that they “feel intuitively” what is true regarding certain issues. The baby doesn't say, for example, “I need milk to survive. Mother has milk in her breasts. Therefore I need to suck on mother's breasts.” The baby simply knows instinctively to suck on its mother's breasts. Nobody taught this to the baby, nor did the baby use reasoning or logic to come to this life-preserving conclusion. There are many such examples like this one that clearly indicate another way to know or learn that falls outside the scope of reasoning or logic.

If these intuitive instincts exist in babies, then why not in adults as well? Is it so far fetched to assume that people of all ages can know certain things intuitively? Given our own personal experiences as well as the observations of others, it is reasonable to believe that adults often have the ability to know things intuitively or to “feel” a situation and instinctively know what to say or do. One example of this might be when people are tactful because they simply “feel” what should or shouldn't be said in a given situation. Another example may be when some people are under stress or must make decisions very

⁸ See D&C 129.

quickly. It is often the case under such circumstances that people make better decisions than they would have, had they the time to stop and analyze the situation before coming to a “reasonable” conclusion. In addition, situations appear to exist in which a person simply knows what is true and is very accurate in their assessment of things merely because they are able to “feel” and directly discern the facts presented to them. This seems to be the case with certain gifts of the spirit. For example, the scriptures seem to indicate that some people will simply “know” certain things about God, Christ, or the gospel via the Holy Ghost.

To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.

And again, to some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know the differences of administration, as it will be pleasing unto the same Lord, according as the Lord will, suiting his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men.

And again, it is given by the Holy Ghost to some to know the diversities of operations, whether they be of God, that the manifestations of the Spirit may be given to every man to profit withal. (D&C 46:13-16)

It seems unlikely that the knowledge spoken of in these verses is the result of logically coherent arguments. Nonetheless, it is given to these people to “know” something through some kind of direct experience or intuitive feeling about it.

Likening this to the sense of taste, I believe Joseph Smith may have touched on this principle when he said,

This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.355)

Using more direct wording, Elder B. H. Roberts once spoke of this ability this way:

There is a power in man by which he may intuitively cognize truth. His spirit is native to the inspiration of God. And as two flames when brought nearly together seem to leap forward, each to meet the other and blend in one blaze, so the spirit that is in man, being native to the truth and the inspiration from God, leap forward to unite and bear witness of that truth. (Liahona, Vol 20, No. 23, p. 437)

I believe this type of experience happens all the time. The difficulty comes in that this kind of knowledge or learning generally cannot be explained very well to others, or even to ourselves for that matter. In addition, the source of such experiences usually cannot be easily identified. Often, these feelings are difficult to discern from false or misleading emotions or personal desires that can lead us into error. It doesn't seem to be an exact science by any means. However, the fact that truth can and does come to people in this manner can hardly be disputed.

Interestingly enough, even with all of its apparent uncertainties, most people tend to make decisions or draw conclusions based more on feelings than on thoughts. This tendency is clearly evident in the business and consumer world. Advertisers, for example, learned long ago that the best way to get people to buy a product is not by appealing to a person's sense of logic or reasoning. Rather, much better results are achieved by appealing to a person's emotions or feelings. Seldom do we see commercials on television that provide a reasonable basis for buying a given product. In fact, advertisements in general can perhaps be viewed as little more than a handbook for teaching the logical fallacies learned in any basic course on formal logic. They are that bad. Yet, they work and work well. Any good salesman will tell you that, all things being equal, people generally buy based on emotion, not reason.

Unfortunately, this rule of thumb seems to apply in the realm of spiritual issues as well. In general, the charismatic teller of half-truths will receive more of a following from his listeners than the mono-toned, but absolutely accurate, lecturer. In many cases the most favored teachers are those who appeal to our emotions by exciting us in some way or another. Hugh Nibley warns us of the results often experienced when we take this course of action.

The quality in which the Saints have always excelled is zeal. Zeal is the engine that drives the whole vehicle: without it we would get nowhere. But without clutch, throttle, brakes, and steering wheel, our mighty engine becomes an instrument of destruction, and the more powerful the motor, the more disastrous the inevitable crack-up if the proper knowledge is lacking. There is a natural tendency to let the mighty motor carry us along, to give it its head, to open it up and see what it can do. . . . We have the zeal but not the knowledge, so to speak. And this the Prophet Joseph considered a very dangerous situation in the Church. Speaking to the new Relief Society, "[he] commended them for their zeal, but said sometimes their zeal was not according to knowledge." What good is the power, he asks, without real intelligence and solid knowledge? (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol.9, Ch.3, p.68)

It should go without saying that the human tendency to act upon emotion more than reason is one of the primary contributors to deception. Temporary feelings of enthusiasm or excitement often make us miss subtle points or omissions that otherwise would be noticed had the feelings not been present. However, the opposite is also true. Important points that may have been missed during a mono-toned lecture may be better understood

if you can touch the person's heart on an emotional or intuitive level. The attention paid to emotions and feelings should not, and indeed cannot, be overlooked or underestimated if we are to effectively teach new spiritual truths. In some cases it is somewhat of a necessary evil to getting our points across, but it is simply a fact of life that must be recognized, appreciated, and respected.

Although valid and vitally important, given the relative uncertainty of feelings as a truth-finder, it is important that we always try to apply reasoning and thought to our feelings in order to either validate or abandon them. On occasion this seems impossible and we must make a judgment call to decide whether or not we should follow our feelings on a given topic. Often our reasoning must be based on our experience with past feelings of a similar nature. This often involves the less sure "inductive reasoning" instead of the more sure "deductive reasoning." It is often tantamount to saying, "Every goose in the world is white. At least every one I've seen so far has been." However, for better or for worse that may be the only evidence we have regarding certain topics. And, as already stated, we have no choice but to go with the evidence available to us. In the absence of other reasoning or logic, what else is there for us to rely on?

The Importance of Valuing Both Thought and Feeling

One of the interesting things about thought and feeling is that some people seem to all but lack the ability to use one or the other of these tools as a method to discovering new truths. I used to believe, for example, that anybody could learn to be logical and use reason to learn new truths. To me it simply makes sense and is somewhat obvious. However, I have since come to believe that some people simply cannot do it. For whatever reason, their brains just don't work that way and, in fact, they seem entirely incapable of working that way. Hence, such people tend to rely on the only other tool available to them to draw conclusions and discover truth, namely, that of feelings, intuition, emotions, etc. As already mentioned, this seems to be a handicap, as such people are generally known for making certain kinds of mistakes on a fairly regular basis and drawing questionable conclusions throughout much of their lives. Yet, due to their inability to think clearly, they seldom even recognize the weakness of their conclusions until it hurts them in some way. Even then, many such people have difficulty analyzing their experience and will continue to make similar mistakes over and over again, being continually led by faulty, emotional influences. In many cases, this does not appear to be a choice, but simply an inherent inability or weakness.

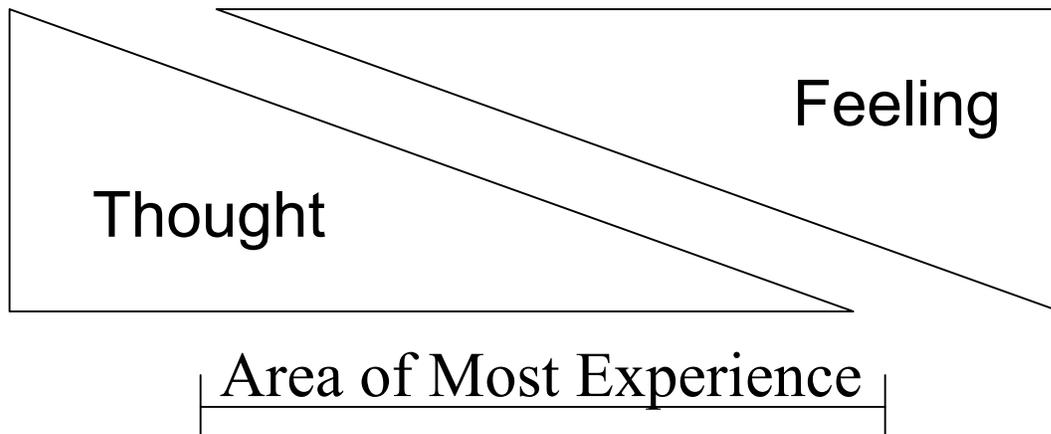
Likewise, there are those people who cannot seem to accept any form of feeling or intuition as a source of knowledge. They don't seem to have the same ability as others to "feel" truth or know intuitively what is right or wrong in a given situation. These people are sometimes characterized as tactless intellectuals – analyzing a situation to perfection but misunderstanding the overriding intent, motivation, and/or value of it. Often these people cannot see the forest for the trees. They sometimes have difficulty, for example, enjoying a sunset or noticing that a mountain, which is clearly made up of mostly green and brown hues, turns a delightful shade of purple when viewed from a distance. As strange as it sounds to some, their analytical brains don't seem to be able to see the purple

because their analysis of the mountain is telling them something different than what their eyes clearly see.

These people also have difficulty experiencing things that are not easily explained, such as certain gifts of the spirit. To say that someone can intuitively know that Jesus is the Christ may not make any sense at all to such people and they will tend to flatly reject such a concept. Likewise, they have difficulty accepting the fact that someone may be able to speak in or interpret tongues because they can't figure out how it works or how they know that what they're saying is accurate and true. They may also have difficulty directly perceiving the thoughts and feelings of others and knowing how to respond in a productive, tactful manner. In many cases their response will be true and accurate, but perhaps inappropriate for the specific occasions or circumstance. Many types of pure, spiritual experience, without reason or logic to support the experience, are hard for these people to accept, even when they have the experience for themselves. They are often less trusting of the experiences of others, and hence, have difficulty learning from or experimenting with the testimonies of others. The bottom line is often something akin to, "If I can't logically understand it, then I see no reason to trust or believe in it." Which, of course, makes perfect sense to any self-respecting logician and no sense at all to the intuitive, emotionally based artist.

Just as with those who cannot reason well, whether or not such extreme thinkers have the ability to use intuition or feelings in the first place is in question. Perhaps they don't and are thus hindered in their search for truth by this handicap just as those who cannot reason well are hindered by their handicap. The inability to employ one method or the other would seem to be a disadvantage. Clearly some combination of both thought and feeling is desirable. If nothing else, the mere fact that the Lord uses both to teach us the truth seems to substantiate the value of each. Yet, even without that reassuring evidence, this can be concluded from our own reasoning and experience. Even if a person is unable to fully appreciate or comprehend one or the other of these tools, they should at least be open to the concept that there is a worthwhile portion of life's experience that they may be missing and that this will affect their ability to learn and discern new truths. The recognition of this fact should allow any honest truth seeker to become more open to both their own weaknesses, as well as the potential value found in the thoughts and feelings of others. They should accept that people can and should use both thought and feeling as legitimate sources of gaining knowledge. An open mind and an honest desire to know what is true can help us to better appreciate both of these important truth-finding tools as well as the people who are able to employ them with reasonable accuracy.

It should also be noted that it is difficult to determine where thought ends and feeling begins. This is outlined in the chart below. The two seem to overlap and affect each other in ways that are difficult to define. Clearly there are two ends of the spectrum with many experiences residing more deeply in one camp or the other. Yet, we should not deny either our dependency upon or our allegiance to either influence as a valid source of interpreting our existence.



It should also be mentioned that, in general, the honest, truth-seeking person will find some differences between men and women in these two areas. For whatever reason, men in general seem to be the more logical and rational of the two sexes. Likewise, women seem to be the more feeling and intuitive of the two. There are certainly exceptions to this general classification. However, I feel any honest observer can hardly dispute this as a general rule. The reasons for this difference are still largely a mystery. However, it should make us reflect why men and women are meant to be together and what we can learn from each other as we experience the world around us.

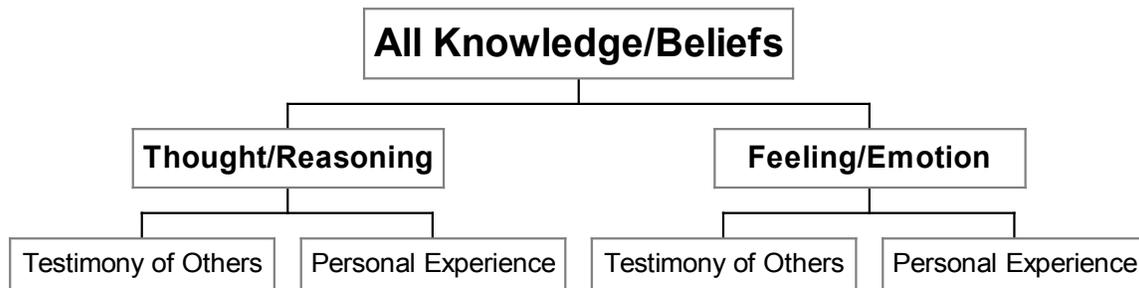
If we view the two tools of thought and feeling as requirements to becoming a whole being, then we ought to apply them to God as well and wonder what manner of being He is. How does God deal with these tools of thought and feeling? How do they work upon Him in order to represent the ideal embodiment of spiritual truth and learning? What would it be like to become perfect in our application of these two truth-finding assets and how can we strive to become perfect in each area? Perhaps we can only speculate about some of these issues. However, if done properly, our speculation may someday yield fruitful experiences that will strengthen our faith and increase our understanding. I suspect that Alma's method of trying an occasional experiment may be worth the risk of potential deception and disappointment, just ask any sincere investigator who is reading the Book of Mormon for the first time. Should we not apply this same principle to all spiritual truths?

Testimony and Experience

In addition to the two tools of thought and feeling, we should also look at the process or ways that information is fed to our thoughts and feelings. When broken down to its simplest form, there are really only two ways that anyone acquires new beliefs or learns new truths. The first way we learn is via the testimony of others. The second is by personal experience. As simple as it sounds, literally everything we have come to know or believe in life has come to us via one or both of these two avenues.

Both of these avenues of learning are subsets of thought and feeling. In other words, whenever a new thought or feeling comes to a person, it always comes by way of either the testimony of others or a personal experience. We simply don't know of any other way to learn new truths. Even intuition or things that we simply believe for no apparent reason should be considered a personal experience. In addition, when a person reasons through a problem first-hand and derives a new conclusion, it should be viewed as a personal experience. This concept will be discussed more fully later in this paper.

The following chart tries to outline how we learn all new truths. Starting from the bottom, we always begin with either a testimony or an experience. All potential truths come to us in one or both of these two avenues. Then this testimony or experience is assessed and interpreted through our thoughts and feelings. For most people, it is usually assessed by at least some portion of both thought and feeling. However, as we've already discussed, some tend to rely more heavily on one than the other. Finally, the information is formulated into what we come to believe as true.



As simple as it sounds, it is important to understand that this chart outlines the only way we know of to learn new truths, whether spiritual or secular. There is no other path. Literally all learning comes to us in this way.

Of these two avenues to truth, clearly the stronger or surest knowledge is gained through personal experience. Although the testimony of others is usually the most common type of learning and adds a lot to our understanding, it pales by comparison to actually encountering something with our own senses of touch, sight, sound, etc. Hence, the search for personal experiences should be paramount to our search for truth. Yet, these experiences are often impossible without some testimony steering us in the right direction or presenting a new possibility to us in the first place.

Quite often religious belief is criticized because of a lack of evidence in its favor. This is a worthy criticism, as things of a religious, spiritual, or moral nature tend to be more difficult to prove or demonstrate in front of a group than are things of a secular or physical nature. It is simply harder to experience spiritual things first hand. Hence, relying on the testimonies of others tends to become a key element within religious belief. Faith in the experiences of others seems to be a necessary evil to spiritual progress and further learning. However, the pattern for learning new truths remains the same, regardless of what kind of truths we're discussing.

For example, if a person has never been to Australia, then it might accurately be said that he has never personally experienced it. Yet, he will likely believe it exists merely because of the testimonies of other people, many of whom have not personally experienced Australia either. Because of these testimonies, if someone offers this person an all expense paid vacation to Australia, they would most likely have complete confidence that it does, indeed, exist and they will act upon that belief with all but complete confidence. Why? One reason is that it is something that can be easily demonstrated. You just need to go there to find out and therefore you tend to believe the testimonies of others when they talk about Australia. It is easy to accept that they or someone else has actually been there before. However, the point should be made that, whether we like it or not, this person is still relying on mere faith in the testimonies of others with regard to the existence of Australia. The fact of the matter is that most of our lives are spent in the realm of faith in the testimonies of others, not in knowledge based on personal experience.

On the other hand, if this same person has never experienced God or spoken to a resurrected being who once lived on this earth, they may have difficulty believing someone else's testimony on the subject. The difficulty is not merely this person's lack of personal experience, for, as already indicated, we deal with that problem all the time in life and do so with relatively good success. The real problem comes in that it is more difficult to openly demonstrate or "prove" these types of truths in front of a crowd. One cannot, for example, simply jump on an airplane and go visit God. Nor can he walk down to the local church and discuss theology with an angel. This being the case, it is more difficult for us to believe in the testimonies of those people claiming personal religious experience. Generally, we have to express more faith in these types of claims than we do in other, more verifiable testimonies.

Thus we see that although it is more difficult to experience spiritual truths, as opposed to secular or temporal truths, the process for learning and accepting truth is the same regardless of whether it is a spiritual issue or not. This is important to understand as we discuss combining truth with people.

That the Lord uses these methods of testimony and personal experience to combine truth with people is clear. Alma apparently understood this principle very well as he tried to convince the Nephites to repent. Notice how Alma emphasizes the importance of using testimony in order to bring people to action of some sort.

Now Alma...delivered the judgment-seat unto Nephiah. And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them. (Alma 4:18-19, underline added)

And, in fact, Alma was correct. In many cases there is no other way for one person to teach another person about certain spiritual truths other than to bear down in pure testimony to them. This is also the approach taken in Alma, chapter 32. As pointed out earlier, Alma instructed the people to listen to his testimony with the intent to try an experiment on his words to see if they were true or not. Simply stated, Alma was using his testimony in an effort to get the people to have a personal, spiritual experience. It could be argued that most spiritual learning comes in this manner.

Throughout the scriptures the Lord continually refers to the testimony of others as a key weapon leading us towards action, personal experience, and further knowledge. Yet, the goal of a testimony is clearly to get people to a higher form of knowledge that can only be achieved via personal experience. Notice the importance the Lord has placed on personal experience as a tool for learning new truths.

And no man receiveth a fulness [of truth] unless he keepeth his commandments.

He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93:26-27)

To some extent, this is merely a restatement of Alma's experiment of planting the seed. If one obeys the commandments or "plants the seed," they will receive truth and light that can only be realized in that manner. The scriptures clearly teach us that the higher forms of spiritual faith must involve action or an experience of some kind in order to accomplish the greatest amount of good, change our character, or achieve the next level of evidence and learning.⁹

Hence, it is not just testifying of the commandments that will bring a full understanding of spiritual truth. One must personally experience these commandments for himself in order to fully understand them. This provides us with the pattern, the chronology, if you will, for learning new truths. No man can complete his learning without personally experiencing or doing certain things first hand. However, it is often impossible for people to know what to do or how to experience things without some sort of testimony given to them. If nobody ever bore testimony of Australia, no one would ever go there. Likewise, if nobody ever bore testimony of God, no one would ever pray. Why would anyone act on absolutely no evidence whatsoever? It would be like looking for a city that you have never heard of and know nothing about. It is a fool's errand that would only

⁹ See James 2:14-26.

yield results against extreme odds of sheer luck. Testimonies are required to move people forward to the next level. Yet, beliefs acquired solely from the testimonies of others are simply not as good as beliefs that are validated via personal experience. Of this principle, Joseph Smith once said,

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)

Brigham Young seemed to echo this sentiment when he said,

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. (Journal of Discourses 1:312)

Thus we see not only how important it is to listen to and bear honest testimonies, but we also see the importance of moving beyond that step to action and personal experience – to putting those testimonies to the test. Both are vital elements in the process of learning new truths. In fact, these two elements make up the only process of which we are aware to discover new truths. Yet, due to the difficulty of experiencing or initially recognizing the fruits of things spiritual, it is often necessary to express more faith in order to achieve the desired results. As Alma put it, you may need to simply try an experiment or two based on the testimonies of others.

But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words. (Alma 32:27, underline added)

Sometimes religious experience requires somewhat of a “leap of faith” in order to obtain the desired experience and substantiate the testimonies of others. Often we have to simply experiment with the commandments or with prayer and inspiration until we encounter testimonies and experiences worthy of our beliefs and convictions.

The Importance of Desire

Perhaps the most important element in bringing truth and people together is simply desire. Faith, hope, and charity all have a great deal to do with the desires of our heart. If thought, feeling, testimony, and experience are the wheels that take us to our destination, desire is both the engine and the steering mechanism that drives and directs our path.

The basic concept behind the importance of desire as it applies to spiritual truth is simply this: Some people hope the principles of the gospel are true while others hope they are false. Those who love truth, God, and people - those who cherish the principles of virtue, unselfishness, brotherly kindness, moral purity, knowledge, patience, etc. are motivated by something completely different than those who despise such principles and desire only selfishness and pride.

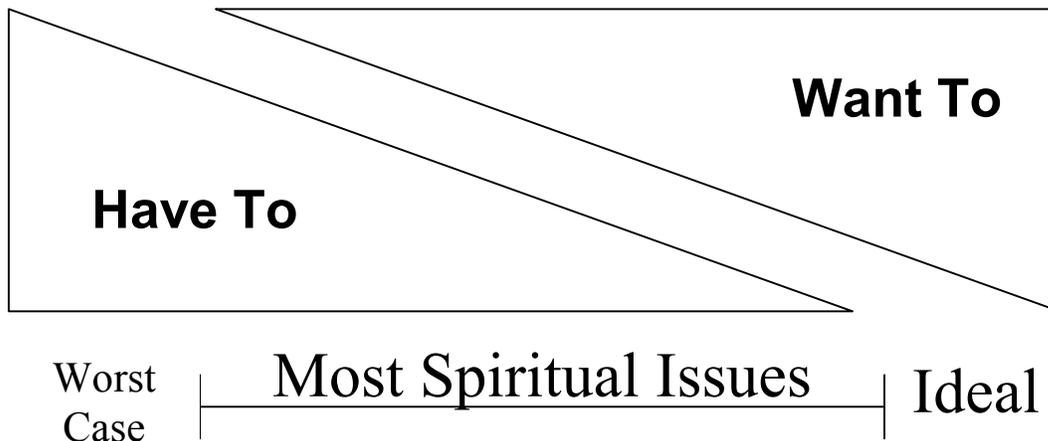
Given the difficulties involved with achieving true spiritual experiences, the only way many people will ever attempt such an experiment in the first place is if they truly desire those principles to be true. Although this may taint their objectivity, it also serves a great purpose as well. As Alma put it:

But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good. (Alma 32:27, 33, underline added)

As Alma explains, it is often this desire of our hearts that enables us to express enough faith in the gospel to learn whether or not it is true in the first place. Without that desire a person may never “experiment” with the gospel and hence, may never move on to the next level of progression.

If we look at obedience to the gospel as a continuum, with “have to obey” at one end and “want to obey” at the other end, we would find that there are very different reasons why people obey different portions of the gospel. People tend to look at gospel principles as either pleasant or unpleasant, depending on their motivation and desires.



Clearly the best scenario occurs when people naturally desire to adhere to righteous principles. It is reasonable to assume that the Celestial Kingdom is not made up of people who have merely perfected the qualities of self-control or self-discipline. That would only result in a place of miserable righteousness. In order for Zion or the Celestial Kingdom to be a desirable place to live, one would have to find joy in living the principles espoused there. One would have to naturally desire those righteous principles. This is perhaps the ultimate goal of all true followers of Christ. Once that desire is firmly planted in our hearts there are a multitude of sins that can be forgiven. Indeed, if we combine that desire with a certain amount of knowledge we may find the key to having one's calling and election made sure. If one has a sincere desire to do what is right and the knowledge of right and wrong to go along with that desire, there is little that can keep such a person from the Celestial Kingdom. However, having "zeal without knowledge" or knowledge without zeal is unlikely to produce a celestial being. Both are clearly required for spiritual progression.

Desire as a Truth Finding Tool

For whatever reason, the Lord has clearly not given us massive amounts of evidence when it comes to verifying religious claims. It is reasonable to assume that He could do so if he wanted to. Yet, as much as we seek for philosophical or scientific evidence to support our religious beliefs, for the most part these confirmations simply aren't there. Interestingly enough, this seems to be true of all religions. The question that haunts many people is, "Why would the Lord not provide us with physical evidence of spiritual truths?" If His goal is merely to convert us, why not send more angels or provide more archeological evidence or whatever to promote a higher degree of knowledge and faith? The only answer we appear to find is that it seems to be by design that God wants us to dwell in the realm of faith and uncertainty. It seems clear that God doesn't want us to have that kind of evidence to support our faith. This was implied in the answer God gave to Moses when he asked why we are here on earth.

And he [Moses] beheld many lands; and each land was called earth, and there were inhabitants on the face thereof.

And it came to pass that Moses called upon God, saying: Tell me, I pray thee, why these things are so, and by what thou madest them?

And behold, the glory of the Lord was upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God, and talked with him face to face. And the Lord God said unto Moses: For mine own purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me. (Moses 1:29-31, underline added)

But why wouldn't God want us to know such things? Why wouldn't He want us to have more evidence to either confirm or refute our spiritual or religious beliefs? Why would He purposely withhold confirming information from us? One possible answer is that He doesn't merely want to convert us. He doesn't want us to simply use self-discipline to obey his commandments. Mere conversion alone may actually be a secondary goal of all He has revealed. Rather, perhaps God wants to see how we will react to spiritual truths when left almost entirely unto themselves. In other words, perhaps He wants to see what we naturally desire – what is naturally in our hearts to pursue. Since the gospel is mostly concerned with moral principles of conduct rather than physical principles of nature, mortality may be little more than a test to see what we honestly desire in our heart of hearts. This would also explain the need to forget our previous existence. If we strip away all previous knowledge and provide little verifiable evidence to support our conclusions, we are mostly left with our character and the natural desires of our heart to motivate and steer us down our spiritual or moral paths. It is this test of character or “heart” that separates the truly righteous from the hypocritical wicked, regardless of their ecclesiastical positions or perfectly disciplined morality.

If there is just enough evidence to present the principles of righteousness without “proving” their truthfulness, then a real test is created. On the other hand, if we had sufficient evidence to “absolutely verify” these spiritual teachings, it is reasonable to assume that many people would obey them and/or force them upon others in very unnatural ways. This seems to be the “disease” of the Pharisees, for example. They cared more about who was right than they did about what was right. They loved religion more than they loved righteousness. If God were to provide more evidence to verify spiritual truths, it is reasonable to believe that this problem would only be enhanced. Yet, as it is now, those who gain a testimony of spiritual truths must generally do so based on their love and desire for those principles themselves instead of any other external evidence. In other words, their faith and knowledge must be placed in the principles of love, patience, knowledge, virtue, etc. and not in some scientific discovery that supports the Book of Mormon.

It's not that such discoveries are bad, in and of themselves. It's just that they are not what the gospel is all about or how the Lord apparently wants us to experience and learn spiritual truths. The gospel is all about character and moral principles. It is about unselfishly assessing and changing our hearts and minds so that we can actually become a certain kind of being. In the end, there can be no faking or “forced righteousness.” In fact, there is no such thing as forced righteousness. It is a contradiction in terms. If a

worthwhile and sincere experiment is to be undertaken regarding the testimonies given to us in the scriptures, it will, of necessity, be based on our own desire to verify and pursue the spiritual principles discussed within those pages. Any other motivation than this will likely yield poor, hypocritical results. In addition, anyone whose testimony is based on anything other than righteous, moral principles will either be in it to gain power or to satisfy some inner insecurity or need to be right. Sooner or later this type of person will either become a thorn in the side of true righteousness or simply fall by the wayside due to lack of evidence that “makes them right” or puts them on the “winning team.” They have no true love for the principles of righteousness, and hence, no sincere place among those who do.

On the other hand, those who are expressing faith in order to honestly discover what is right and wrong, or because they honestly love the principles of righteousness, will have a completely different experience. These people will tend to look for very different types of “evidence” to support their testimonies. They will tend to experiment and come to conclusions based on the goodness of the principles involved, rather than the external evidence verifying their truth, whether they like that evidence or not. These people tend to care more about what is right than they do about who is right.

In this manner, desire becomes a vital tool in our efforts to obtain spiritual knowledge. Through experimentation and personal experience, those who naturally love and desire righteousness will be able to verify that the principles of charity, patience, virtue, compassion, etc. are true and that, therefore, God exists and the gospel and the scriptures in general are true. This is the essence of true spiritual conversion and testimony. It is based on the goodness of the principles themselves as opposed to any other goal or objective. It is a testimony that is grounded in what has been revealed (principles) rather than what hasn't been revealed (physical evidence). If you love the principles of righteousness, then you will love God and the scriptures as the source of those principles. If you love God and the scriptures, then you will obey or experiment with the testimonies provided by them to see if they produce good experiences. You will trust that since the first principles of the gospel “tastes good” to you, God and his prophets can lead you to higher and higher principles of righteousness that you may not now understand – principles that serve to explain and enhance those first principles to a higher degree.

In this way, the very manner in which God has dispersed information becomes a true test of our character and natural desires for righteousness. Hence, our desires will largely determine not only our spiritual beliefs, but also our ability to verify those beliefs as being true or false. Without this desire, one is unlikely to put these testimonies to the test or make the sacrifices necessary to experience the gospel first hand. Hence, their spiritual experience is limited to mere words, which are relatively easy for most people to reject due to the lack of external evidence in their favor.

On a personal note, I believe a time will come when more evidence will be available to the masses. This evidence will serve to both confirm the truthfulness of the gospel and righteous principles, as well as completely discourage and even anger those who despise such things. It will be a time when those who are naturally righteous will find great

rejoicings in the confirmation of the principles they love, while those who desire selfishness and unrighteousness will groan under the pain of realizing that their natural desires do not conform with those values that bring lasting joy and God's way of life. It is these latter people who will likely "curse God and die"¹⁰ in spite of having ample evidence that God exists and that the gospel is true. This is simply not what they desire.

Teaching Others

Since we have simplified the process of learning truth into the major categories of testimony, personal experience, thought, and feeling it becomes easier to identify how we should approach teaching other people. Even though our main weapon when teaching others is almost always our words or testimony, we should be mindful of the effect words can and should have on people as a force leading them to further thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences. Our words should usually focus on moving people towards some sort of personal experience, even if that experience involves nothing more than promoting reasonable thoughts and/or effective feelings within our listeners. If our testimonies don't accomplish any further thought, feeling, or other personal experience, then no further learning will occur. It is as simple as that.

Thought and Feeling as Personal Experiences

Quite often when we think of personal experiences we think only in terms of information delivered to us via our five senses. We experience salt by tasting it, heat by feeling it, fragrance by smelling it, etc. Yet, there are other ways to experience certain truths that have little or nothing to do with our five senses. They involve direct experiences with thoughts and feelings. For example, when a certain amount of relatively random information is presented to a person, it is possible for the human mind to organize that information into logical sequences or conclusions without the aid of any further sensory experience. In this manner, learning occurs via what might be called "internal experience."

There are many specific examples of "internal experiences," especially in the realm of spiritual things. For instance, as a person learns about God, they frequently develop a belief in the following set of assumptions:

1. God exists and is all powerful, all knowing, perfectly good, and created every living being from "nothing."
2. To be all powerful means that God can do anything that is logically possible.
3. To be all knowing means that God knows the sum of existence.
4. A perfectly good being prevents all the evil it can.

At this point a person may use their reasoning ability to draw a logical conclusion from these assumptions:

¹⁰ D&C 45:32

5. Therefore, if God exists, evil does not exist.
6. Evil exists, therefore God, under this definition, must not exist.

A person undergoing such a process of thought may not have used his or her five senses to experience any of the assumptions or conclusions listed above. Yet, learning has occurred. They know more about the being they call “God” than they did before because of this sequence of thoughts. This is because they internally experienced something first hand that lead them to a higher understanding of truth. Even if they haven’t completely dealt with all of the aspects of this apparent contradiction or answered the problem to their satisfaction, they are still narrowing truth down to a smaller set of possibilities by experiencing these thoughts directly. As such, it is a form of personal experience. Likewise, a teacher who introduces these thoughts to a person may be helping that person to internalize, and hence, experience these concepts directly. The key is that the listener must not merely memorize these thoughts. They must also comprehend them. Mere memorization is little more than data storage. However, a higher form of learning and experience comes from actually understanding the thoughts and concepts behind the words.

The same can be said of feeling or emotion. It may be possible to feel something first hand as an experience that excludes the five senses and perhaps thought as well. When we experience such things as “peace” in our minds, a burning bosom, or a stupor of thought,¹¹ we may be experiencing something quite different than our minds or senses can accomplish alone. It is an experience that may not be altogether understood, but also cannot be denied.

The point to be noted here is that these “internal experiences” of thought and feeling are often just as convincing or educational to us as “external experiences” encountered via our five senses. They can be just as useful in learning new truths as other types of experiences. In fact, they are perhaps even more useful when assessing certain spiritual truths. Hence, one of the main goals of teaching or bearing testimony should be to help your students have these internal experiences of thought and feeling. If all we accomplish by teaching is data transfer or memorized information, then all we are doing is setting up a student to experience something on their own at some later time. It has been my experience that many students in such circumstances will never put two and two together in order have an internal experience. They usually need help this effort. Every gospel principle has a purpose or reason for its existence. Most gospel principles are difficult to understand without some sort of key that links them to our existence and the purpose of life. Hence, a good teacher will try to use the principles of the gospel to ask and answer the question “why?” Merely asking and answering “what,” as most teachers tend to do, will seldom bring about an internal experience, and hence, will seldom have the true learning effect required for progression. It is not until a student internalizes a principle in his heart and/or mind that true learning occurs. This, then, should be the goal of every teacher of spiritual principles.

¹¹ D&C 6:23, D&C 9:9

Agency and Capacities

It should be noted that when all is said and done, there is only so much a teacher can do to help another person learn new spiritual truths. It is impossible to “control” the thoughts and feelings of other people. In fact, the Lord has been very direct on this point.

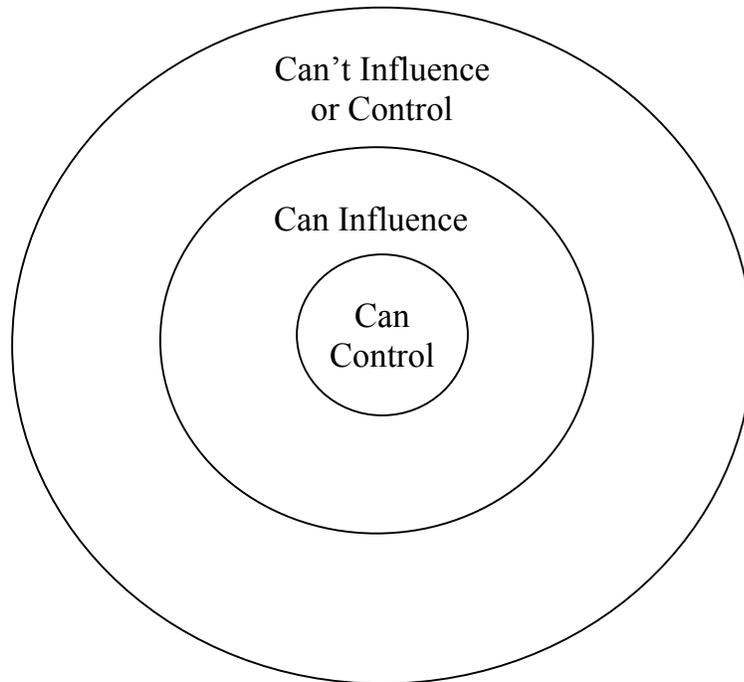
No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

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

Notice in these verses that the Lord doesn’t stop at saying we “ought” not to use priesthood power to influence other people, he also says that no power “can” be maintained in this manner. Given this scripture, it is conceivable that Satan’s plan to take away our agency was simply impossible. This seems to suggest that there is no way we can force anyone to learn or progress, even if we wanted to - that if there were a way to force people, that power or influence over them could not be maintained over time. This is perhaps why Satan’s plan failed and why God’s plan succeeded.

If we outline the things we can control in this life, as opposed to things we can merely influence, we begin to see that there are very few things that we can actually control. Of those things we can’t control, other people are high on the list. However, it is equally obvious that we do have the ability to influence other people, sometimes in very powerful ways.

The following diagram indicates how our power to control or influence others may look. Our smallest circle of power involves those things that we can control. It could be argued that the only person we can control is our self. The next largest circle includes those people we can influence in one way or another. The largest circle indicates those people who are outside of either our control or influence. Realistically, the third circle is by far the largest, while the first circle is by far the smallest. In other words, the nature of life shows that our realm of control is very small while the realm of no control or influence over people is very large. This realization should tend to make us want to focus on the area of influence or middle circle.



Some may say that it is easy to control other people. All you have to do, for example, is threaten them by pointing a gun at their head. Yet, history is replete with examples of people who are unwilling to succumb to such influences, regardless of how threatening they may be. In the end, we are still free to choose the outcome of such situations.

It should also be noted that there are many ways to influence other people. The scriptures tell us there is a right way and a wrong way to influence other people. Notice in the verses above that we should influence other people “only” via such tactics as persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, pure knowledge, etc. There are several similar lists in the scriptures that teach us how to properly influence other people.¹² Each of these lists agrees with the others and offers us what may be considered the bulk or core of the gospel. They teach us how to properly interact with other people in such a way that they will be positively influenced or taught. The opposite of this approach seems to be that of coercion, threats, force, intimidation, cruelty, etc. This is Satan’s plan, which can be very effective for a time among the selfish or insecure, but will always succumb in the long run to the righteous principles of love and unselfishness.

That said, even if we righteously try to influence or teach others, the bottom line is that some people will adopt truth and others won’t. That’s just the way it is. We often marvel at the likes of Laman rejecting the voice of the angel or Pharaoh refusing to acknowledge the plagues of Egypt. Yet, it seems that this attitude is blatantly among us on a regular basis, especially when spiritual or moral truths are involved. Those who enjoy stealing

¹² See 2 Peter 1:5-8, D&C 4:5-6, D&C 88:123-126, D&C 107:30, etc.

tend to steal. Those who enjoy lying tend to lie. The selfish tend to remain selfish, and so forth. In general, those who have decided that they don't want to live the kind of life that Jesus proclaimed, tend not to be very interested in your testimonies of repentance and moral purity, regardless of how those testimonies are delivered. While those who like what they hear from the scriptures and are naturally drawn to such things will tend to be much more influenced by your testimony and teachings.

This rejection of what are often plain and simple truths is spoken of often in the scriptures. For example, on many occasions the Lord has uttered the following concern:

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

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

And again,

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

In these cases the Lord clearly seems to blame others for the difficulty of combining spiritual truth and people. He sees nothing else he could have done to convince some people to accept and conform to the higher moral laws He is advocating. These people seem to be bent on following their own desires regardless of how these truths are introduced to them.

As harsh as it sounds, in the end most people tend to believe and pursue what they want to be true. They tend to love themselves more than they love God, truth, and/or others. Those who honestly desire unrighteousness will tend to disbelieve the gospel and pursue other paths, usually trying to conform truth to themselves. On the other hand, those who honestly desire righteousness will tend to believe and pursue the gospel by conforming themselves to those truths and principles espoused in the scriptures. This should make us wonder even more about the concepts of the "golden contact" and the sheep that hear the Lord's voice.

As mentioned earlier, perhaps the plan of salvation is designed this way on purpose. Perhaps God has revealed just enough truth to give those who seek righteousness hope,

but not enough to really prove anything or completely satisfy their curiosities. In this manner, the purpose of earth life becomes an exercise to see what we truly desire in our heart of hearts, not what we can force ourselves to become through discipline or sheer self-control. It is perhaps a test to discover who we really are and what we really want in life, not how well we can obey something that we honestly hate.

In every day practice, thought and truth are generally secondary forces to emotion and the desires of our hearts. In many cases people will tend to follow their hearts, regardless of the direction it leads them, simply because it “feels good” to them. In the long run, this can be either good or bad, depending on the heart. In some cases, knowledge simply makes us more of what we already are by helping us to better justify our particular cause, whatever that cause may be. Many people lose objectivity by selectively choosing which “truths” they prefer to promote over those they hope will never surface again. I believe this is one of the main reasons anti-Mormons exist. Why should anyone hate Mormonism so much or spend so much time and effort attacking it? Why not just let it go, like so many other unwanted institutions on earth? In many cases, it seems to be because they are so afraid that Mormonism might be true that they spend all their time looking for stones to throw at it. The bottom line is that they don’t want it to be true. They desire other principles. The same could be said of most other religious persecutors throughout history. It is reasonable to believe that many of the prophets in history, including Christ himself, were persecuted and killed because of this fear that what they were preaching might actually be true and they simply don’t want it to be so.

A person’s real desires will almost always emerge in the end. Hence, true spiritual learning may only occur when the right type of person encounters the right type of testimony or experience. This conclusion should help us as we try to focus our testimonies to bring about the greatest amount of learning and least amount of wasted time or frustration.

Perhaps the hardest thing for a teacher of spiritual truths to accomplish is to instill desire into the hearts of his audience. It is fairly easy to convey knowledge, especially mere facts without thought, feeling, or understanding. But to ignite the spark of honest desire and internal experience within the human heart is truly an accomplishment. Unfortunately, it is all too rarely achieved. One of the signs of a great teacher occurs when a student goes home after the lesson and does extra study on his own – just because he wants to know more. This is usually the result of an internal experience of some kind brought about by a questioning teacher. It has been my experience that in most cases this is a spark that already existed within the student. It just needed to be ignited by the right words spoken in the right manner. If that spark is not there to begin with, it may be impossible for even the best of teachers to truly convey the spiritual truths of the gospel and bring about a meaningful internal experience among their listeners.

It seems clear that there are those who are open to spiritual teaching and influence and those who are not. However, like most other things, this seems to involve various shades of gray rather than an easy-to-judge, black and white system of some sort. In the end, teachers of spiritual truths often experience great frustration as they try to teach those

within their realm of influence, sometimes pushing harder than they should and other times not pushing hard enough. The table below helps to illustrate this point and how we should deal with this difficulty.

This table outlines the fact that some people simply have different levels of desire and capacity regarding spiritual truths. This is often difficult to discern in some people, but seems to clearly be the case. This desire to learn is then weighed against the action we take as teachers to teach or bear testimony to these people and lead them down the path of experience and further progress.

	PERSON DESIRES SPIRITUAL TRUTH	PERSON DOES NOT DESIRE SPIRITUAL TRUTH
TEACH	(Box A) Spiritual Learning and Progress Occurs	(Box B) Frustration - Often a Wasted and Worthless Effort
DON'T TEACH	(Box C) Lost Opportunity (What could have been?)	(Box D) No Wasted Effort & No Frustration

Clearly the best scenario is found in box A. If a person honestly desires to know what is right and naturally yearns for those principles found in the gospel, teaching that person about spiritual truths can be an extremely worthwhile and meaningful endeavor. When approached with persuasion, love, pure knowledge, etc. as outlined in the scriptures, the end result will usually be a great deal of personal experience, learning, and spiritual progress.

However, when a person does not desire to learn and/or live spiritual truths (box B), our efforts to teach them often result in little more than frustration and discouragement. Because of our love for them and the truths of the gospel we may continue trying to lead them along the path of testimony and personal experience. However, in most cases this effort will be largely in vain and should perhaps be diverted more towards those who are more open to the testimony being offered. It should also be noted that people who are not prepared to receive the things of God should not receive them. We may actually be doing

more harm than good if we teach things that a person is simply unprepared to hear the message. The scriptures teach this principle as clearly as any other.

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

This brings us to box D. Box D represents a scenario in which there is little or no desire among the listener and no action or teaching taking place from the teacher. Although no teaching or progress is being made here, at least the teacher has been able to “let go” of the situation and move on, thus avoiding any unnecessary frustration or wasted effort as well as perhaps redirecting their focus to people who desire to hear the message being offered. Although this may sound like a cold-hearted solution to the problem, it is clear that the scriptures contain examples of this approach. For example, when the Lord instructs missionaries to go into the world to preach the gospel there is often an admonition to not bother with those who have no desire or who reject the message.

Require not miracles, except I shall command you, except casting out devils, healing the sick, and against poisonous serpents, and against deadly poisons;

And these things ye shall not do, except it be required of you by them who desire it, that the scriptures might be fulfilled; for ye shall do according to that which is written.

And in whatsoever place ye shall enter, and they receive you not in my name, ye shall leave a cursing instead of a blessing, by casting off the dust of your feet against them as a testimony, and cleansing your feet by the wayside. (D&C 24:13-15, underline added)

Notice again in these verses that the Lord does not want to prove the truthfulness of the gospel via miracles. One would think the use of miracles would provide a clear advantage in obtaining converts. Yet, this is clearly not the focus of missionary work. Notice also that even those miracles that are allowed are only allowed when people “desire it” and when it is a miracle that will actually bless the converted person (as opposed to merely converting them in the first place). Desire is the grand key to successful teaching. We are to find and teach those who honestly desire the principles of righteousness. In fact, we even seem to be commanded not to share the gospel with those who don’t care to receive it. For example,

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)

He that receiveth my law and doeth it, the same is my disciple; and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, the same is not my disciple, and shall be cast out from among you;

For it is not meet that the things which belong to the children of the kingdom should be given to them that are not worthy, or to dogs, or the pearls to be cast before swine. (D&C 41:5-6, underline added)

This brings us to box C. If there are those who honestly desire to know and love the principles of God and we do not take action by testifying to them of our personal, spiritual experiences and knowledge, then we have potentially missed a great opportunity. These are the people we should watch for and make sure we're approaching in the manner suggested by the Lord. It may be said that box C is the worst case scenario for it involves people who are actively open and usually searching for more spiritual guidance, but who are not finding it due to our lack of approach, judgment, or effort.

The difficulty here seems to be our inability to determine who is worthy or open and who is not. It is not always easy to determine if you're dealing with a Laman vs. an Alma the younger. Surely without an absolute adherence to the voice of the spirit we will not be able to accurately make such judgments. However, the point to made here is that it is sometimes appropriate to "let go" of those who simply aren't interested and move on to those who are. Regardless of our efforts, there seem to be certain people who are unlikely to ever respond positively to the gospel message and its principles.

In the end we don't want to stay in boxes B or C. We always want to try to move from box B to box D, and from box C to box A.

Summary

Spiritual knowledge is vital to our existence and to our experience of joy or sorrow. However, there seems to be a natural barrier of sorts between many people and spiritual truths as revealed by God. For the most part, it is fairly difficult to bring the two together.

Moral or spiritual truths can be categorized into three different levels. Both government and religion play a vital role in defending or promoting moral truth at each level. However, their roles are very different for each level and are often confused. Government's main role should be to create and enforce laws to protect the rights of people, including the right to believe and practice anything that does not impose upon the rights of others. Religions have the right to promote whatever moral truths they see fit, so long as they do not impose upon the rights of others.

Truth, as defined by the Lord in the Doctrine and Covenants, is inseparable from knowledge. Knowledge is inseparable from beings who can know. Therefore, if there is no consciousness, there is no knowledge. If there is no knowledge, there is no truth. If there is no truth, there is no existence. Therefore, all existence, as all joy within that existence, depends upon the combination of truth and people. Hence, there is nothing more important than the combination of truth and people. This combination clearly must incorporate both knowledge and action. The plan of salvation itself is little more than a process by which truth and people are combined.

Most of what we claim to “know” is really little more than faith, not knowledge. Real faith, as defined and used in the scriptures, should be supported by evidence or reasons for that faith. “Blind faith” is no part of God’s plan for salvation and can never produce positive results. The main difficulty involved with religious faith is that religious claims are more difficult to demonstrate or “prove” to other people, thus making religion largely a personal quest. It is possible that this is by design, as the Lord may want to test our true desires and character much more than he wants to merely convert us to principles we naturally detest.

The tools we use to learn spiritual truth seem to be the same for everyone and can be broken down into the general categories of thought and feeling. In fact, thought and feeling are the only two tools we have at our disposal to recognize and assess our experience. Both thoughts and feelings are legitimate tools to learn new truths.

The only two methods we know of to introduce new truths to our thoughts and feelings are the testimonies of other people and personal experiences. All beliefs have come to us via one or both of these two avenues. It is vital that we seek worthwhile evidence to support our beliefs, either in the form of testimonies or, preferably, personal experience.

In the end, however, it may be our desires that have the largest effect on our spiritual progression or ability to learn spiritual truths. Due to the lack of verifiable evidence in support of religious claims, we are often left to our own desires to lead us down various paths of experimentation and personal experience. Those desires usually control both our beliefs and our pursuits in life. It may be that the Lord has sent us here largely to determine what it is that we honestly desire in our heart of hearts. The most difficult aspect of true teaching comes in trying to get people to honestly desire to learn about and live spiritual truths.

Given the relatively small set of tools involved with the learning process, it is impossible to teach others without leading them to new thoughts, feelings, and experiences via our testimonies. All of our efforts to teach should be focused on these few areas. However, if people have no desire to learn spiritual truths, teachers should perhaps move on and direct their efforts towards those who have a sincere desire to learn and live the principles of righteousness.