

Following the Prophet

Table of Contents

Obedience & Love.....	2
Prophets and Opinions.....	6
The Fragile Faith.....	13
Who Judges the Prophets?.....	17
How Far Do We Follow?.....	30
Priesthood and Obedience.....	49
A Real Representative of The Most High.....	57
Appendix	
The Simple Faith.....	65
Following the Prophet.....	74
The Sanctity of Dissent.....	102
Honoring the Truth-Teller.....	120
The Prophet & Weakness.....	130
Study Guides	

Obedience & Love

When I was visiting my in-laws a few years ago my wife found a copy of some cassettes she listened to as a child, which she played for me. The first thing that struck me was the 1970's style of music, but once I got over that I listened more carefully to the lyrics. They told the story of two children and their journey by train to the "Land of Obey" and their experiences there and on the way. The basic message was that if you do what your parents and teachers tell you to the world will be a perfect place.

I was lucky as a child that my parents were the type who really did care for me, and that sought my safety and well being. If anyone should have learnt the wisdom of obeying good parents it was me. I was also usually a compliant child who didn't see the sense in rebelling. However, there was something in the message that didn't sit quite right with me.

As an orthodox member of the LDS Church I took seriously the admonition to "follow the prophet" and looked forward to General Conference time to learn what counsel the Church President might give that I could apply in my life. I fully expected that at any time a new revelation could be given, although none had been for over 100 years. It wasn't until my mission that I began to question why the Mormonism restored through Joseph Smith was so different than what the Church today.

When I shared with my friends my questions I was warned I might study myself out of the Church. Some appealed to the fear of losing the blessing the Church offered, including their friendship. Others appealed to my sense of humility, asking how I could expect to know the truth better than our wise leaders. A few simply told me I should obey, that to do anything else than submit myself mentally was apostasy.

One particular phrase I heard on joining the LDS Church and several times since is that "obedience is the

first law of heaven.” Initially I never thought to question its origins. Hadn't the Lord given His will through “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not” from the very beginning? Wasn't the first thing God told his children to do was obey Him?

Indeed it seemed God told the elements what to do, from the moment he says “Let there be light.” Although others might argue that this was an invitation or even a request to the elements. But when it came to us he began by saying “do this” right? However, the King James Version of the Bible tells us that God first “blessed” us, and “said” - not told, or commanded - “Be fruitful and multiply.”

Was this an authorisation? Was God giving His permission? Even if it was - does that make it a commandment? The plants and animals had already given their example. Wasn't He saying it was good to follow nature in this way and at this time. They had been given the divine power to propagate. He had blessed them so they could be fertile too. The desires they had were were not sinful in this situation, and He was letting them know that He was happy with the prospect. There was no ultimatum, or no punishment affixed for not accepting the blessing. There was just an opportunity to accept.¹

Why did God bless them in this way? Because He loves them. He gave us life because of that love, and this earth on which to live, and His Only Begotten Son to suffer and die for us. His Son taught us that it is love which is the greatest commandment given to us, and that all good things come from this:

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first

1 The Book of Mormon tells us that they desired to carry this out and when separated had to break a law to carry this out.

and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”²

However, obedience has its place and when applied rightly is a true principle. Joseph Smith taught that “when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”³ Thus there are consequences for our actions. When we do what is right we are blessed, and when we do what is wrong we face the results of this (or at least lose out on the blessings we could have had).

So where does the idea that “obedience is the first law of heaven” come from? The first reference to it is from a talk by the Apostle Joseph F. Smith in 1873 in which he speaks of a wife honoring her husband, and angels and elements obeying the will of heaven. However, when it comes to us he makes it clear that he isn't speaking of blind or unquestioning obedience:

“We talk of obedience, but do we require any man or woman to ignorantly obey the counsels that are given? Do the first Presidency require it? No, never. What do they desire? That we may have our minds opened and our understandings enlarged, that we may comprehend all true principles for ourselves; then we will be easily governed thereby, we shall yield obedience with our eyes open, and it will be a pleasure for us to do so.”

Inasmuch as intelligent and inspired obedience can bring blessings, there are also situations in which earthly disobedience can sometimes be the pathway to progress, as our first parents showed us when they took a figurative bite out of the proverbial fruit of the tree of

2 Matthew 22:36-40.

3 D&C 130:21.

knowledge:

“And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.”⁴

Adam and Eve were obedient to their love for God and for each other. This is what motivated them and what they were rewarded for. Whether the story is literal or symbolic the lessons remain the same. Ultimately God will judge us for our obedience and our love, and it is hoped that through our service to Him and to others that we will not fall short.

This book is a collection of articles, some by LDS Church authors, some by myself, in which an attempt is made to answer the question of when it is right to obey, who we should obey, and to what extent it is right to obey. It looks specifically to what our response should be to the teachings of those we call prophets, but covers principles that can be applied to husbands, bishops, apostles etc.

Prophets and Opinions

Can Prophets Disagree on Different Points of View?

Everyone has opinions, points of view, or different perspectives. However we may phrase it we realize that there are some things we do not totally know or understand, and that we may speculate upon.

Opinions can be valuable, such as in the case of the views of someone who has great experience in his professional field upon a new project, or of a wise old grandparent who has seen or been through certain problems many times before in their life. Yet the conjecture of someone completely unacquainted with some situations might be considered of low value or worthless in comparison.

If a country's President has an opinion which is unpopular he is likely to have it seized by the media, and his character is likely to be judged upon it. If anyones opinions are in wide contrast to those around them they may be labeled "out of touch with reality," yet if they are in line with the majority they are more likely to be seen as a sage, and their words may be more easily accepted.

In all of these scenarios though no definite facts have been established by the giving or accepting of someones views, except that we learn that opinions are valued very differently depending on how close they are to conventional thinking, and upon who gives them and the position they are in.

For truth the world might look to scientists, historians, philosophers, and certain political ideologies. Religious peoples look however to sacred texts and personal spiritual experiences to define and judge the truth. Yet this begs the question, "did the writers of the scriptures ever give opinions within the texts they were inspired to write?" Is the Bible, for instance, solely God's words? A modern prophet had this to say on that subject:

“I believe that the Bible contains the word of God, and the words of good men and the words of bad men; the words of good angels and the words of bad angels and words of the devil; and also the words uttered by the ass⁵ when he rebuked the prophet in his madness.”⁶

When angels or men speak within the scriptures it is usually easily identifiable, and distinct from when God speaks, or when a prophet is speaking as inspired to do so. However, the sacred writ is primarily a compilation of those words intended to instruct us in true principles, whether through commandments, or good or bad examples for us to learn from.

Yet, just as we seek for wise counsel to guide us to meet the specific problems of our time, so too do some of the passage of scripture contain such 'advice' to the people of the time in which they wrote. This is a hard concept for some to accept. Some believe that all of the Bible is applicable to all of God's children in all ages and all verses are of the same weight, although some Jews may limit this view only to the Old Testament, and some Christians exclusively to the New Testament. Others view all commandments as relative to individuals, or groups of people at limited times, or consider the whole body of the revealed word to be only opinions.

The scriptures themselves cut a path between all of these views. They identify times when prophets gave their opinions and differentiate them as such. One prime example of this is Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. It seems that there was some controversy amongst the group of Saints to which he wrote, and some problems –

5 Referring to Balaam's donkey, see Numbers 22:28.

6 Brigham Young, 29 May 1870, JD, Vol.13, p.176. He expressed this same thought a couple of months earlier we stated, “The Bible contains the word of God, the word of Jesus, of angels, of good men, of those tolerably good, of wicked men, and the words of the devil, ...” (20 Feb. 1870, JD 13:235)

perhaps specific to them – that he felt he needed to give counsel upon.

Paul, although an inspired servant of the Lord did not claim to have revelation on the matter, but felt he had advice to share that may be of help to them. To make sure his readers understood this he began this section of his letter with the words, “I speak this by permission, and not of commandment,”⁷ or as a more modern translation has paraphrased it, “This is only my suggestion. It's not meant to be an absolute rule.”⁸

Through several of the subsequent verses he continues to remind them that his words are to be taken as opinion and not revelation. He does this with phrases such as “to the rest speak I, not the Lord,”⁹ “I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment,”¹⁰ and “I suppose therefore that this is good for the present.”¹¹

Some may say that this is only part of the imperfections of the Bible, and had it been translated or at least compiled correctly such a passage may have been left out, or that subsequent scribes changed his words to make them seem less certain. But us Latter-day Saints can settle this issue by an appeal to the Book of Mormon, which we believe to be the most correct of any book. Could it too contain opinions? We can let Alma answer that question:

“Now, my son, I do not say that their resurrection cometh at the resurrection of Christ; but behold, I give it as my opinion, that the souls and the bodies are reunited, of the righteous, at the resurrection of Christ, and his ascension into heaven.”¹²

7 1 Corinthians 7:6.

8 New Living Translation, *ibid*.

9 1 Corinthians 7:12.

10 1 Corinthians 7:25.

11 1 Corinthians 7:26.

12 Alma 40:20.

Alma's views in this case were later revealed to be true, but at the time he gave them it seems that this had not been revealed to him, although his speculation proved to be inspired.

A Modern Example

In our day prophets and apostles are not exempt from having points of view either. They are mortal men with minds that grasp after the things of eternity, who sometimes see more clearly from their position than we do from ours, but who are still able to have moments of speculation.

The role of the head of the Priesthood on the earth is to teach the doctrine necessary to exaltation and to dispense and oversee those ordinances necessary to obtain it, but this does not mean that every word he speaks is revelation. That is not something which any prophet has ever claimed. Brigham Young who gave sermons that he called scripture, would still – on some occasions – make it plain he was speaking as Brigham Young – the Man.

One subject over which prophets, apostles, and saints have wondered and imagined over is that of “daughters of Perdition.” They have long asked, “were only men cast out of heaven?”, and “is it possible for a woman to become one?”

The scriptures only ever speak of “sons of Perdition,”¹³ yet contain accounts of some very wicked women. This is a subject Joseph himself never weighed in on in any public discourse or any contemporarily recorded account. Although we have the word of Mosiah Hanock that the Prophet Joseph believed his vision (of the pre-existence in which only men were cast out) to be

13 There are eight references in scripture to Sons of Perdition, but none to daughters of Perdition, although there is one reference to a woman escaping hell (not necessarily outer darkness) in Alma 19:29.

accurate.

Brigham Young on the other hand stated his belief that no woman “will never become an angel to the devil”¹⁴ and he said he doubted “there is a female in all the regions of hell.”¹⁵ Yet Wilford Woodruff had a different idea and had “no doubt” “that there will also be daughters of Perdition.”¹⁶ Some years later President Joseph F. Smith also weighed in on the issue, and gave his own view that, “there would be no daughters of Perdition.”¹⁷

One day we will probably know the answer to this question for ourselves. Perhaps we will be able to get a glimpse into the outer darkness of hell and see for ourselves, or perhaps by that point we may not worry or wonder about it.

In Conclusion

Prophets are entitled to their own views. They struggle with their own weaknesses, and yet the Saints are often guilty of expecting a degree of perfection from them that the Saints themselves do not possess. This was a tendency the Prophet Joseph faced in his day.

“This morning ... I visited with a brother and sister from Michigan, who thought that ‘a prophet is always a prophet;’ but I told them that a prophet is a prophet only when he was acting as such.”¹⁸

“I was introduced to a man from the east. After hearing my name, he remarked that I was nothing but a man, indicating by his expression,

14 “A Few Words of Doctrine,” 8 October 1861, Church Historians Office.

15 Journal of Discourses 8:222.

16 29 Nov 1893, D. Michael Quinn, Extensions, p. 795.

17 26 Mar. 1903, D. Michael Quinn, Extensions p. 806.

18 History of the Church 5:265.

that he had supposed that a person to whom the Lord should see fit to reveal His will, must be something more than a man.”¹⁹

Yet at the moment there are many people who worry about the differing opinions of prophets, and take issues of little consequence to them personally and focus on them to the exclusion of principles of far more importance and relevance to their lives. They throw such quotes out as stumbling blocks for others to trip over, or use them as an excuse not to take inspired counsel or even revelations so seriously.

Some justify apostasy and claim authority based on such issues. But they and their followers fail to realize that whatever disagreements we have with them gives us no more authority or power, or make us right in undermining their difficult role. If we believe someone to be wrong in doctrine are we not as obliged to go to him personally, as the scriptures instruct us that we should do if we “have ought against”²⁰ him?

Whether the question is “was God a Savior in mortality” or “were Blacks neutral in the war in heaven?” or “where are the ten lost tribes?” we will find differing views from Apostles on these matters, and yet – despite individual imperfections - true Prophets have always been consistent on the requirements for exaltation, on the moral and ethical laws God expects of us, and have held the keys of the Priesthood in uninterrupted succession.

There are many matters we have no obligation to know and God has no obligation to tell us. We are free to speculate, but remain responsible if we place too much faith in our speculations. Perhaps we should be rejoicing in the fact that our prophets have “like passions”²¹ and wonder about the same things we do. Maybe in their thoughts we can sometimes find glimpses of higher

19 History of the Church 2:302.

20 Matthew 5:23-25.

21 Acts 14:15; James 5:17.

truths, and insights into minds often focused on the infinite. Could it be that hearing their views could sometimes be a privilege, and we should be honored they have placed the trust in us to share them?

The responsibility of the head of God's Priesthood on the earth is to ensure that those doctrines, ordinances, and laws essential to our exaltation are carried out exactly how God gave them. In this mission there has always been absolute consistency between true prophets past, present and future. Beyond this role, however, there may be as many opinions as there have been prophets, and they have as much a right to their views as anyone else.

The Gospel is like a beautiful painting on an enormous canvas, on which we can only focus parts of our vision on at any one time. Others may have focused elsewhere, and maybe some may have been able to step back a little further to see a larger section, but we all "see in part and know in part" and through our mortal eyes "look through a glass darkly."²² The day will come when the light will shine in those dark places and our minds will be illuminated, but until that time we can often see more and understand more by trying to focus together as a people.

22 1 Corinthians 13:12.

The Fragile Faith

Faith itself, is a gift from God, but as with any gift it can be lost. Fortunately for us God seems to have an inexhaustible supply. However developing faith takes time and effort. (When we speak of faith, we are not referring to a specific religion, but of an individual's belief in and devotion to it, and most importantly to God.)

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because no matter what good a person does if they do not recognize the being that made them and that without Him they can achieve nothing that will last throughout the eternities. Whatever is built by human hands will one day fall, but faith will never fail those who put their trust in it.

Faith is not a gift to be forgotten about, or to be only used when convenient. It is like a tool, which those who use it most often and most wisely can become skillful in. When a person uses it that much and that well they are far less likely to misplace it, and they are far more likely to understand the power of faith, and have a more complete knowledge about what they have faith in.

Some seem scared to use faith too much though, or they are very delicate in its use as if they are afraid of breaking it. Some it seems do indeed hold a fragile faith which is less able to cope with some challenges, whilst those whose faith is built on a firmer foundation that can stand up to and pass through such difficulties. This happens either because they let their fears weaken their faith, or because they don't put forward the effort to increase their faith. In avoiding anything they perceive may challenge their faith, they also avoid that which would strengthen it. A fragile faith fears challenge, it limits itself to thinking within certain constraints, and never considering some possibilities.

Those leaders of religions who wish to protect

others with a fragile faith may try to limit what their members read, and what their historians and scholars write. However, those with a fragile faith usually will self-censor themselves, not just against the immoral, but also the controversial. They are very unlikely to read the books of religious historians or scholars, unless they are novelizations, or are highly sanitized versions recommended or published by their religious leaders.

Some hold the assumption that the founders of their religion and early followers were perfect, or very near so, and that suggestions otherwise are blasphemous at worst or at least highly disrespectful. But the Bible presents us with a faithful history, one inspired by God, and yet in it are accounts of prophets who fell from grace, the faults of those who served God, and how His people sometimes became wayward.

Always catering to those weaker in the faith can leave those whose faith is strong without an avenue to express themselves, afraid they will have action taken against them by their ministers or be seen as troublemakers. They know that the faithful men and women of the past were similar to them, and take solace and strength from learning how they went through similar challenges, whereas others might falter if they were to find out such information.

Should we always be protecting those weak in the faith against the 'strong'? Indeed, how will the weak ever become strong if they are constantly protected, and who will be left to defend the faith if no-one is allowed to read others criticisms against it? What would be the result of such a stance? The outside world will see a people afraid of challenge, those for whom misunderstandings prove a stumbling block, who will never have those concerns removed, because no member can contemplate them.

This is not to suggest though that we should go out of our way to instruct members in every controversy, as our faith cannot be merely a response to others accusations against us, nor should it be centred on the

verbal persecution we receive. But if we ignore completely such things then we may be encouraging falsehoods and misinterpretations to continue.

But some members take offense so easily and take such offenses so seriously that they can lose what little faith they had very quickly. Those with a fragile faith sometimes also confuse different opinions with apostasy, and disagreement with persecution. A discussion might be mistaken as an attack by such a person, and they will avoid the very appearance of controversy like the plague. Thus the very study and resultant knowledge that might strengthen their faith is ignored or even condemned.

Sometimes the seeming need to create a good impression to those weaker in the faith and those outside investigating it, can lead to sins being overlooked or covered up that could draw negative attention to the Church. Thus this gives the impression to the perpetrator (although unintentionally) that he is either approved of, or that he is immune to serious repercussions, and gives the victim the impression that what happened was alright, or even that they were wrong to bring attention to it. When protecting the good name of a religion becomes paramount, evil ends up being overlooked or allowed.

Of course there are sins that have become common (if they have not always been so) in the world, and which also happen far too often amongst all religious societies, no matter how strict. Those religions that look better, that seem to be exempt from such problems, may just be more effective at public relations or may have a larger influence in politics or the media.

Some religions seem so afraid of offending their members or potential converts that they fail to condemn many sins, especially common ones that may be socially acceptable in the world. In seeking acceptance they fail to stand up for God's standards, and fearing persecution they cease to proclaim the truth. By taking such a course a religion may ultimately end up as fragile as the faith of

its members.

There is no lasting substitute for a faith based on a firm foundation, that comes through meeting - rather than avoiding - the challenges life brings, and the awkward questions that encourage one to consider their beliefs more deeply. But sadly some will realize too late, that the confidence that comes with strong faith, the spirituality that attends it, and its blessings and ultimate rewards, will forever remain elusive to those who live by and die with a fragile faith.

Who Judges the Prophets?

It is a common belief amongst many Church members that the Church President is incapable of publicly making mistakes on matters of doctrine, as the Lord would take his life before he did so. They believe that this is what Wilford Woodruff meant, when he told the Saints, “the Lord will not permit me or any other man who stands as President of the Church to lead you astray. ... If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so he will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty.”²³

There are many Latter-day Saints, however, who would reject such an interpretation, as they believe that it renders the President of the Church perfect, to the point where he cant make mistakes, or without sufficient free agency to do so. The concept of a religious leader being incapable or prevented from making doctrinal errors is known as infallibility, and has been an accepted belief of the Catholic Church since 1870: “Catholics believe the Pope, be he saint or sinner, is preserved by God from leading the church into doctrinal error. This is referred to as his infallibility.”²⁴

Such a belief has been condemned by latter-day Prophets of God, such as John Taylor, who said: “No person was ever dismissed from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for disbelieving in the infallibility of President Young. I do not believe he is infallible, for one; and I have so taught publicly. I am in the Church yet. Neither have I ever heard President Young make any such pretensions.”²⁵ Indeed Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., went as far as saying that, “infallibility is a fabrication devised by the powers of

23 General Conference, 6 October 1890, p. 2

24 Religions of America, Leo Rosten, p. 43

25 John Taylor Papers, 1:259

darkness to act as a counterfeit for revelation.”²⁶

President Woodruff's statement, however, is not clear or definite enough by itself to support the claim that he was trying to convince the Saints that he was infallible, although those antagonistic to Mormonism often level that charge. His words do not clarify what would be necessary to lead the Saints astray, or whether he refers only to someone leading most or all of them away. Many people do indeed set out with the intention of leading Saints away from the Church, and many seem to succeed in this. Yet Brother Wilford's words say that “any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray” will be removed out of their place. However, we do not see even 'successful' anti-Mormons being removed from this life, although we would undoubtedly see them removed from membership in the Church, or at least the privileges thereof. We might also wonder too whether his remarks refer just to Church members, or to all “the children of men”.

This leaves us with the question of what 'place' would a Church President (or any one else) be removed from if they were to attempt to “lead the children of men astray”? Interestingly the scriptures describe the results of the President of the Church himself falling or failing in his mission, and the result of such a course. From the Old Testament to the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord has given examples and outlined procedures to follow when such a sad event occurs.

There are certainly examples of Prophets being literally killed by God for disobedience and unrighteousness. The Lord warned the ancient Israelites of how he would destroy fallen prophets, and also how he would punish them for following such prophets:

“And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my

26 Religious Truths Defined, p. 183.

people Israel.

And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh [unto him];

That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord God.²⁷

It seems then that the ancient Saints had the individual responsibility of finding out for themselves whether their prophet had fallen, and if they did not recognize this and continued to follow, then they were liable to be held accountable for doing the wrong things their leader had told them to do. An official Church publication from the last century warned the Saints then of making the same mistake: “We have heard men who hold the Priesthood remark, that they would do anything that they were told to do by those who presided over them, even if they knew it was wrong: but such obedience is worse than folly to us; it is slavery in the extreme.”²⁸

Joseph Smith referred to such a time in the Bible when the people of God placed too much confidence in their leaders, and that they “were darkened in their minds,” because, “they were depending on the Prophet.”²⁹ Likewise, his successor, Brigham Young told of the results of continuing mindlessly upon such a path and how to avoid the possibility, “How easy it would be for your leaders to lead you to destruction,” he said, “unless you actually know the mind and will of the Spirit yourselves.”³⁰ And should the Saints not judge for

27 Ezekiel 14:9-11, See Deuteronomy 18:20 & Isaiah 9:15-16

28 Millennial Star 14:594, 1852

29 Teachings, p. 237

30 Journal of Discourses, p. 438

themselves, with the Spirit, the truthfulness of what they were taught? “Without taking this course, a people or nation is liable to be led astray by their leaders” And the solution? “when the people understand for themselves - when they know and understand the things of God by the Spirit of revelation, they are not only satisfied, but safe.”

So the responsibility lies with us to judge for ourselves whether we are being led along the right path, and to be watchful and mindful, and to have the Spirit with us that we will know the very moment someone is trying to lead us in another direction than the path God wants us to follow. We have seen from the examples and counsel given that we cannot wait for a prophet to be removed before finding out whether they are in the process of trying to lead us astray. We have also read the remarks of two of the founding Prophets of this dispensation stating that such a situation is possible in our own day.

“For it shall come to pass that the inhabitants of Zion shall judge all things pertaining to Zion. And liars and hypocrites shall be proved by them, and they who are not apostles and prophets shall be known.”³¹

The Fate of those Who Seek to Lead the Saints Astray

Scriptural examples of the Lord removing false prophets from this life are also complemented by other passages in which God has allowed them to live and carry on their work, and give some indications of why He has done this. Thus showing that the Lord does not always remove a Prophet at the point they will lead the Saints astray, and sometimes there is a purpose in mind behind some of God's people mistakenly veering off the path of righteousness. Their punishment may be more gradual than immediate death, but eventually they will receive the chastising hand of the Lord.

31 D&C 64:38-39

“Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit.”³²

There is a fate worse than death to a false prophet and to those people who follow him, which is the loss of one of the greatest gift God granted them in this life - revelation. He is without true direction, as are his followers, who wander in the wilderness. Joseph himself was warned that if he failed in his mission this gift would be taken from him: “Except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift.”³³ Joseph would have perhaps remained in his Church office for a little while, as our Heavenly Father does not speak of him dying, although he would lack the power of revelation, and be removed from his 'place' as Prophet, at least as far as the heavens are concerned. As Micah says of such a man, “ye shall not have a vision .. for there is no answer of God.”³⁴ Which explains the statement of President Woodruff regarding any man who should seek to lead the Saints astray; they shall have their spiritual gifts removed, and their 'place' in the heavens will become vacant.

Some might suppose that the Saints would quickly be informed of such a result, but the Lord has given us the responsibility to judge, and should we judge wrongly we must learn the result of our actions, and so we may continue following someone who is no longer following God's word and will. When this is what the people want, the Lord allows it, and if we look around the world today we will see many people following their own false prophets. None of us are exempt from this danger if we do not maintain a continuing witness of who the Prophet of the Lord is and if he remains so.

Others could still argue that the Lord would not allow such an occurrence in our day, yet, speaking of our

32 Proverbs 28:10, see Jeremiah 23:11-12

33 D&C 3:11

34 Micah 3:5-7

day it was prophesied that, “God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.”³⁵ In other words, he will allow people to believe what they want to, to receive what they want if they ask for it enough, and to have messages from the Adversary if they will not receive and take heed to what he has to say. As Brother Brigham reminded the Saints, “if they would not believe the revelations that God had given, He would suffer the Devil to give revelations that they - priests and people - would follow after. ... if they would not have the truth they would have error sent to them, and they would believe it.”³⁶ In fact the Lord has on occasion given His people what they have desired even when it is against His will:

“But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”³⁷

Safeguards and Guidelines

However, the Lord has provided other safeguards and guidelines to help us ensure that we remain faithful to him, whilst supporting those leaders He appoints when necessary to do so. He has given us a canon of his sacred word which we are in the habit of calling the standard works. Within it's volumes are contained the selected words of many prophets that are considered to be relevant to us today for instruction, example, encouragement, and to enable us to judge the truth. President Joseph Fielding Smith gave it as the standard by which the Saints could judge his words: “If I

35 2 Thessalonians 2:11

36 Deseret News, 18 June 1871, p. 308

37 1 Samuel 8:6-7, See Jeremiah 5:31

ever say anything which is contrary to the scriptures, then the scriptures prevail.”³⁸ And in this statement he was but mirroring the views of Joseph Smith himself: “If any man will prove to me by one passage of holy writ, one item I believe to be false, I will renounce it [and] disclaim it as far as I have promulgated it.”³⁹

Joseph stands in a unique position amongst latter-day Prophets, he is the head of this dispensation, and presides over the Priesthood keys for it. His teachings are also a standard by which to judge his successors in the office of Church President. For he warned, “if any man preach any other Gospel than that which I have preached, he shall be cursed;”⁴⁰ And told the Saints, “I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught.”⁴¹

So the teachings and revelations from the first prophet of this dispensation serve as a foundation stone on which the Church was built, and so the Church and its members will not succeed in building up Gods kingdom if they try to build upon anything other than that firm foundation. Disagreement between present and past leaders then is a sure test of whether their remarks are made by revelation or are personal opinion, as Brigham Young points out:

“Do you know why some men give counsel different one from another? Because they undertake to give counsel without the Spirit of the Lord to dictate them. But when the Spirit dictates, then each one knows what to do, and their counsel will be the same. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, all the Patriarchs and Prophets, Jesus and the Apostles, and every man that has ever written the word of the Lord, have written

38 Church News, 23 August, 1975

39 Words of Joseph Smith, 15 Oct 1843; Teachings, p. 327

40 Joseph Smith, Historical Record 7:548, see Words of Joseph Smith, 12 May 1844

41 Teachings, p. 368

the same doctrine upon the same subject; and you never can find that prophets and Apostles clashed in their doctrines in ancient days; neither will they now, if all would at all times be led by the Spirit.”⁴²

So, if a modern Church President should contradict a doctrine revealed through the scriptures or his predecessors then it will be apparent that he is speaking as a man, rather than a revelator regarding that point, whatever else he might be inspired upon. This is an important test which several passages of scripture and quotes from prophets testify to:

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word,[it is] because [there is] no light in them.”⁴³

”And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”⁴⁴

..

”I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”⁴⁵

”Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrines which ye have learned; and avoid them.”⁴⁶

”The gospel in its simplicity, is to be found in

42 Journal of Discourses 5:329

43 Isaiah 8:20

44 1 Corinthians 14:32

45 Galatians 1:6,8

46 Romans 16:17

the revelations, the teachings of the prophet and the early leaders of the Church. We shall make no mistake if we follow them.”⁴⁷

”How, it may be asked, was this known to be a bad angel? by his contradicting a former revelation.”⁴⁸

”The Holy Ghost does not contradict its own revealings. Truth is always harmonious with itself.”⁴⁹

”None of the revelations of the prophets either past or present have been repealed ... These revelations received by our prophets and seers are all of God, and we cannot repeal or disannul them without making God out a liar, and God cannot lie.”⁵⁰

A prophet is a Prophet “only when he was acting as such.”⁵¹ Even the Church President when acting as President of the Church is not always acting as a Prophet. Does he need a revelation to restate a policy, or to tell the Saints to keep the commandments God has already given? We should remember that he is also a representative of the Church and it's members, as well as the Lord, and will sometimes be their spokesman as well as His. The Church President is also someone who has opinions, which the Lord does not prevent him from sharing. As President of the Seventy and Church Historian, B.H. Roberts pointed out:

“We believe in an inspired Priesthood for the

47 Pres. J. Reuben Clark, *Immortality & Eternal Life*, p. 156

48 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 214

49 *First Presidency Message*, Joseph F. Smith, 2 August 1913

50 Lorenzo Snow, *Smoot Investigation*, 1904, 1:8

51 *Joseph Smith, Teachings*, p. 278

Church; we believe in inspired teachers; but that does not require us to believe that every word that is spoken from the pulpit is the very word of God. Sometimes they speak merely from their human knowledge, influenced by passions; influenced by interests of men, and by anger, and vexation, and all those things that surge in upon the minds of every servant of God. When they so speak, then that is not scripture; that is not the word of God, nor the power of God unto salvation; but when they speak as moved upon by the Holy Ghost, their voice then becomes the voice of God.”⁵²

The only way we know if he is acting as a Prophet is if: a) he reveals the words of the Lord, b) he states that a particular course of action or direction is the will of the Lord, c) he does not contradict the scriptures or revelations from his predecessors, d) the Spirit witnesses to us that what he has said is true. Although it does not necessarily follow that because we feel the Spirit accompanying his sermon that his words are a revelation to the whole Church. I am sure that most of us have heard talks from other Latter-day Saints in our ward or branch, and thought to ourselves, “the Lord wanted me to hear that.”

Unless there is a direct statement that what he says is the word of the Lord, then whatever else we may assume or feel about it, it remains only a personal assumption that he was acting as a Prophet instead of as a representative of the Church, encouraging us to keep the commandments and avoid evil like any other Church member would. First Presidency member, Charles Penrose, went even further, “President Wilford Woodruff is a man of wisdom and experience, and we respect him, but we do not believe his personal views or utterances are revelations from God; and when 'Thus saith the Lord' comes from him, the Saints investigate it: they do not

shut their eyes and take it down like a pill.”⁵³ He was not alone in his remarks, but was expanding on the counsel of the Prophet Joseph, who taught, “If anything should have been suggested by us, or any names mentioned, except by commandment, or thus saith the Lord, we do not consider it binding.”⁵⁴

President Hinckley has gone to pains to point this out. For example when he warned people about the need to prepare for emergencies and get out of debt (and what could happen if they didn't) he stated, “this is not a prophecy”. When speaking about whether he had personally received any revelations, he maintained that, “We don't need much revelation,” and “We don't need a lot of continuing revelation”⁵⁵ President Hinckley has also seemed to admit that there are times he is uncertain of his communications with his Father in heaven when he said, “I think He answers my prayers, ... I think He answers them.” Nor does he pretend to know all things, even on matters of doctrine. For example, when asked about why blacks weren't allowed to have the Priesthood previously, he stated, “I don't know what the reason was.”

There lies with us the personal responsibility to judge the President of the Church, although we should seek to not be judgmental towards other members views about what he has said or done, nor feel obligated to share a similar view. We must realize also that being in a position to judge does not mean that we are in a position of authority, or that our judgments do not come without consequences, as the Lord spoke of the need to not judge unrighteously. We must remain respectful of the office and authority he does hold.

The Old Testament records that on one occasion the Lord actually instructed a Prophet to tempt one of the tribes of Israel with wine, but they held firm to the

53 Charles Penrose, *Millennial Star* 54:191

54 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* 3:295

55 Interviews, *San Francisco Chronicle & Compass TV Show*, 13 April 1997 & 9 November 1997.

covenants they had made, and disobeyed the Prophet, and were blessed by God for doing so. President Lorenzo Snow related this story to the Saints in his day:

“I will refer again to the Rechabites, and the strong temptation that they were under when invited to the Temple of God, and there, in one of the apartments, asked by Jeremiah, one of the greatest prophets, to drink wine; or, in other words, to do something they had been instructed by their father not to do. But they could not be moved, the teaching of their father had found an abiding place in their hearts, and the consequence was that they utterly refused to do what the Prophet of God told them to do. The Lord Himself admired the course that they took in this matter and was led as I before said, to make such a glorious promise to the house of Rechab;”⁵⁶

Would we have the same courage to stand up for a true principle no matter what a leader might ask of us, or whatever decision the majority took? Joseph had such courage, and proclaimed, “I will always maintain a true principle, even if I stand alone in it.”⁵⁷

Whilst the current President of the Church is undoubtedly a man of integrity and wisdom, we should also remember not to put our trust in him as a man, for even he could fall or fail in moral or ethical matters. The scriptures even describe the procedure for trying him in a disciplinary council should he do so.⁵⁸ It is not man we should put our trust in, not trust in the “arm of flesh” that the sacred canon warns us against,⁵⁹ but in God alone, and everyone and everything else should be put to the

56 Lorenzo Snow, Journal of Discourses 23:192, See Jeremiah 35.

57 Teachings, p. 332.

58 D&C 107:81-82.

59 2 Nephi 4:34, 28:31.

test, and should never be trusted above what God has stated.

Ultimately, the heads of homes, holding the Priesthood, and presiding over their families, should be revelators to their children and wives. Being worthy to administer the blessings of the Gospel, and to be a Christ-like example. Every individual will need to know and discern the voice of the Spirit for themselves if they hope to be exalted, for “no man can live on borrowed light.”⁶⁰

“And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD’S people were prophets, [and] that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!”⁶¹

“God has not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them.”⁶²

“We often hear it said that the living Oracles must be in the Church in order that the Kingdom of God may be established and prosper on the earth. I will give another version of this sentiment. I say that the living Oracles of God, or the Spirit of revelation must be in each and every individual, to know the plan of salvation and keep in the path that leads them to the presence of God.”⁶³

60 Life of Heber C. Kimball, Orson F. Whitney, 1888 ed., p. 461; Conference Report, April 1906, p. 76

61 Numbers 11:29

62 Joseph Smith, Teachings, p. 149

63 Discourses of Brigham Young, p. 58

How Far Do We Follow?

There is a debate that has often arisen in classrooms throughout the Church - How far do we follow our leaders? Are we ever justified in disagreeing with them or disobeying their counsel? In an Elders class I attended when this subject arose, it seemed like there was auction going on - with several men trying to outbid each other on how far they would go to agree and obey in increasingly difficult circumstances - until someone said they would kill for the prophet, and another - seeking not to be outdone - said they'd go to hell for him. Some seemed to give similar loyalty to any Authorities, even down to their local Bishop.

Whilst their intentions probably came from their desire to serve the Lord and help His servants it raises the question of "how far does the Lord want us to follow our leaders?" It may seem presumptuous to consider judging the actions of those who preside over us, but as we will see this is exactly what the Lord asks us to do in certain situations, and through the scriptures and modern prophets, He has given us clear criteria for doing so.

Sadly, there remains a tradition amongst many of the Saints that to question anything the leaders have said is heretical. The following quote from the Church News would seem to confirm this view:

"Any Latter-day Saint who denounces or opposes whether actively or otherwise, any plan or doctrine advocated by the prophets, seers, revelators' of the church, is cultivating the spirit of apostasy. One cannot speak evil of the Lord's anointed ... and retain the Holy Spirit in his heart. This sort of game is Satan's favorite pastime, and he has practiced it to believing souls since Adam. He [Satan] wins a great victory when he can get members of the church to speak against their leaders and to do their own thinking.

When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan - it is God's Plan. When they point the way, there is no other which is safe. When they give directions, it should mark the end of controversy, God works in no other way. To think otherwise, without immediate repentance, may cost one his faith, may destroy his testimony, and leave him a stranger to the kingdom of God.”⁶⁴

After reading this a local Unitarian church leader, Dr. J. Raymond Cope, wrote to President George Albert Smith, questioning whether this was “the position of the true leaders” of the LDS Church. President Smith responded, explaining that someone had inadvertently permitted the paragraph to pass uncensored, to the “upset” of many members and “embarrassment” of several leaders. He further stated that it did “not express the true position of the Church”, and that grossly “misrepresented the true ideal of the Church.”⁶⁵ Yet unfortunately, most members remained unaware of the Church President's views, as they were never published publicly. However, other Church leaders have made public statements about what the relationship between the leaders and the laity should be. Brigham Young warned the Saints in his day:

“If a bishop counsels the people of his ward to swear shall they swear? No. If he counsels them to steal shall they steal? No. If he counsels them to lie and bear false witness shall they do these wrongs? No. If he teaches them to break the Sabbath shall they break the Sabbath? No. If a bishop or any other officer in this Church shall

64 Ward Teachers' Message, *Improvement Era*, June 1945, pg. 354.

65 J. Raymond Cope Collection (Association no. 691) and the George A. Smith Papers (Manuscript no. 36, Box 63-8A)

counsel the people to violate any of the laws of God, and to sustain and build up the kingdoms of this world, I will justify them, and the Lord will justify them in refusing to obey that counsel. But if they counsel you to do right, which they do, take their counsel. Instead of supporting anti-christ we have agreed to give our time, our talent, our substance, our all, for the building up of the kingdom of God.”⁶⁶

Likewise, John Taylor, who spilt his blood alongside Joseph Smith, and whose last days were spent on the run from the government, felt that there were limits to what even God could reasonably ask of him, as is illustrated in this statement from his biography:

“I was not born a slave! I cannot, will not be a slave. I would not be slave to God! I'd be His servant, friend, His son. I'd go at His behest; but would not be His slave. I'd rather be extinct than be a slave. His friend I feel I am, and He is mine:—a slave! The manacles would pierce my very bones— the clanking chains would grate upon my soul—a poor, lost, servile, crawling wretch to lick the dust and fawn and smile upon the thing who gave the lash! Myself— perchance my wives, my children to dig the mud, to mould and tell the tale of brick and furnish our own straw! ... But stop! I'm God's free man: I will not, cannot be a slave! Living, I'll be free here, or free in life above—free with the Gods, for they are free: and if I'm in the way on earth, I'll ask my God to take me to my friends above!”⁶⁷

The concept of extreme obedience to religious leaders is a timeless one. The ancient Greek oracles were

66 Brigham Young; 12:164-165.

67 John Taylor, *Life of John Taylor* p. 424.

holy women, who were considered to be human portals through which the gods spoke. They were the highest religious authority, and their words were considered infallible. Roman author Claudius Aelianus, who put great trust in the Greek authorities, believed that “If then the omniscient god says that Tritons do exist” through the oracle, then “we should entertain no doubts on the subject.”⁶⁸ The logic of the Greeks was that if an oracle, who spoke on behalf of the gods, said that the monstrous mermen called “Tritons” existed, then it must be correct, and that no one was in a position to question it, because the gods didn’t lie (through the oracles).

The logical fallacy of this argument is simple – it requires accepting firstly that the Greek gods exist, secondly that those gods always speak the truth, thirdly that the oracles do speak on behalf of the gods, and fourthly that everything they say come from the gods. Which still leaves the question of “even if all this were true, how would someone know it for certain, unless they could obtain a divine answer from the gods, independent of the oracles?”

Apostle Stephen L. Richards feared that such a degree of unquestioning loyalty could arise amongst members of the Church. This was something which he feared was already happening on some issues, and he warned against it in the April 1932 conference:

“I have said these things because I fear dictatorial dogmatism, rigidity of procedure and intolerance even more than I fear cigarettes, cards, and other devices the adversary may use to nullify faith and kill religion. Fanaticism and bigotry have been the deadly enemies of true religion in the long past. They have made it forbidding, shut it up in cold grey walls of monastery and nunnery, out of sunlight and fragrance of the growing world. They have garbed it in black and then in white, when in

truth it is neither black nor white, any more than life is black or white, for religion is life abundant, glowing life, with all its shades, colors and hues, as the children of men reflect in the patterns of their lives the radiance of the Holy Spirit in varying degrees.”⁶⁹

Heber J. Grant took exception to his remarks, and his words were excluded from the official conference report. Elder Richard’s own views were in stark contrast to those of President Grant, who told a Marion G. Romney (whilst he was a Bishop):

“Always keep your eye on the President of the church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, even if it is wrong, and you do it, the lord will bless you for it, but you don't need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray.”⁷⁰

Grant's views were also diametrically opposed to principles previously taught in an official publication of the Church, as written by a fellow Apostle:

“We have heard men who hold the priesthood remark that they would do anything they were told to do by those who preside over them [even] if they knew it was wrong; but such obedience as this is worse than folly to us; it is slavery in the extreme; and the man who would thus willingly degrade himself, should not claim a rank among intelligent beings, until he turns from his folly. A man of God would despise the idea. Others, in the extreme exercise of their almighty authority have taught that such

69 General Conference, 9 April 1932

70 President Marion G. Romney (of the first presidency), quoting LDS President Heber J. Grant "Conference Report" Oct. 1960 p. 78.

obedience was necessary, and that no matter what the saints were told to do by their presidents they should do it without any questions. When Elders of Israel will so far indulge in these extreme notions of obedience as to teach them to the people, it is generally because they have it in their hearts to do wrong themselves.”⁷¹

Such has often been the case with civil authorities and authorities throughout history too – some of whom have claimed that they have either been divinely appointed, or that God expected complete obedience to them because of their position. An extreme example of this was found in Nazism:

“With pride we see that one man remains beyond all criticism, that is the Führer. This is because everyone feels and knows: he is always right, and he will always be right. The National Socialism of all of us is anchored in uncritical loyalty, in the surrender to the Führer that does not ask for the why in individual cases, in the silent execution of his orders. We believe that the Führer is obeying a higher call to fashion German history. There can be no criticism of this belief.”⁷²

There have, however, been civil leaders who have discouraged such a degree of blind obedience

“Every man who parrots the cry of ‘stand by the President’ without adding the proviso ‘so far as he serves the Republic’ takes an attitude as essentially unmanly as that of any Stuart royalist who championed the doctrine that the King

71 The Millennial Star, volume 14, number 38, pages 593-595

72 Rudolf Hess, speaking of Adolf Hitler.

could do no wrong. No self-respecting and intelligent free man could take such an attitude.”⁷³

In Robert Bolt’s acclaimed play “A Man For All Seasons” based on the life of Sir Thomas More, More, who is considered a traitor for choosing his principles over his king, asks his interrogator:

“Some men think the Earth is round, others think it flat; it is a matter capable of question. But if it is flat, will the King’s command make it round? And if it is round, will the King’s command flatten it?”⁷⁴

His words are seen to confirm the suspicions of his accusers, but leave them with a question they do not wish to consider, and would dare not answer – is there any earthly authority so powerful that it can change reality? Or is there any authority so important that we should still follow it even when it is wrong?

The answer to this question, as given by already quoted prophets, is that we should not place more confidence in our leaders than we do in God, who has told us to “prove all things, and hold fast [to] that which is good.”⁷⁵

Some people, due to fear, or mental laziness fail to do this, and have only assumptions to rely on, which are unlikely to sustain them when intelligent faith is needed to meet the challenges of life and opposition.

Some want others to take responsibility for their salvation, to relieve them of any possible condemnation, and they are willing to suspend personal accountability, revelation, and judgment. However, they are no less guilty because they try to give someone else the duty of leading them correctly. Professor Hugh Nibley saw

73 Theodore Roosevelt.

74 A Man For All Seasons, Bolt, p. 133

75 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

these tendencies and condemned them thoroughly:

“...Many have noted the strong tendency of Latter-day Saints to avoid making waves. They seem strangely touchy on controversial issues. This begets an extreme lack of candor among the saints, which in turn is supported by a new doctrine according to which we have a Prophet at our head who relieves us of all responsibility for seeking knowledge beyond a certain point, making decisions or taking action on our own. From this it follows that one must never question a manual or lesson book, even though it may swarm with errors and evasions. But obedience, the first step in enlightenment, is not the last.”⁷⁶

Such an attitude stunts spiritual growth, and - taken to its inevitable conclusions - will show a man unworthy of exaltation, until he matures spiritually and mentally enough to overcome such insecurities, as President Young explained:

“What a pity it would be, if we were led by one man to utter destruction! Are you afraid of this? I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation, and weaken the influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know,

76 “Endowment History,” June 1986, unpublished manuscript, p. 74-75.

themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. This has been my exhortation continually.”⁷⁷

Too many place much confidence in leaders because of their ‘high’ positions, and it robs them of the blessings that come with conscientiously discerning and gaining a knowledge of the rightness of the course they are on. Whereas, those who do follow blindly will not be entitled to the same glory as those who follow because they have gained a testimony that the counsel they have been given is inspired:

“... 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 cannot rule themselves, to say nothing of ruling others, but they must be dictated to do in every trifle, like a child. They cannot control themselves in the least, but James, Peter, or somebody else must control them. They never can become Gods, nor be crowned as rulers with glory, immortality, and eternal lives. They never can hold scepters of glory, majesty, and power in the Celestial Kingdom. Who will? Those who are valiant and inspired with the true independence of heaven, who will go forth boldly in the service of their God, leaving others to do as they please, determined to do right, through all mankind besides should take the opposite course. Will

77 Brigham Young, “Eternal Punishment,” *Journal of Discourses*, reported by G.D. Watt 12 January 1862, Vol. 9 (London: Latter-Day Saints Book Depot, 1862), 150.

this apply to any of you? Your own hearts can answer.”⁷⁸

This is a sobering statement that should awaken every Saint to their God-given responsibility and privilege to ask, learn, and know God’s will for themselves.

Part 2 - When is dissent justified?

Although often overlooked; the scriptures and Church history have several examples of ordinary Church members having to disobey their file leaders on matters of conscience and covenant, and being supported by God and being rewarded for doing so. One of the earliest examples of this can be read in the Old Testament story of Jeremiah and the Rechabites.

The Rechabites were one of the Twelve tribes of Israel, who the prophet Jeremiah called to a special feast in which they were expected to drink wine. Lorenzo Snow noted how this presented a problem for them:

“...I will refer again to the Rechabites, and the strong temptation that they were under when invited to the Temple of God, and there, in one of the apartments, asked by Jeremiah, one of the greatest prophets, to drink wine; or, in other words, to do something they had been instructed by their father not to do. But they could not be moved, the teaching of their father had found an abiding place in their hearts, and the consequence was that they utterly refused to do what the prophet of God told them to do. The Lord Himself admired the course that they took in this matter and was led as I before said, to make such a glorious promise to the house of Rechab;...”⁷⁹

78 Brigham Young, JD 1:312-3

79 Journal of Discourses 23:192.

Thus they disobeyed a prophet to hold true to their covenants, and God supported them in doing so, whilst condemning a prophet for asking them to disobey the covenant they had made with God.

Peter and Paul were the two most influential leaders in the early Christian Church, both completely committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but both still fallible men.

After Peter had a vision from the Lord in which he was told that the Mosaic dietary requirements were no longer binding upon him he began to eat with Gentile (uncircumcised) Christians⁸⁰, a practice that his more strict Jewish associates would have scorned. However, when a more conservative faction of Jewish Christians came, Peter and Barnabas withdrew from doing this.

To Paul this was cowardice. It must be remembered that at this time Paul was not one of the Twelve, Peter was his President, and yet we will see he opposed him on this matter of principle, and was correct in doing so. Paul later plainly recounted the experience, as an important precedent and lesson for his readers:

“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. [12] Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. [13] The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. [14] When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to

follow Jewish customs?''⁸¹

Peter recognized the rightness of Paul's stance, and subsequently gave a speech supporting it. From that point forward there was no more distinction between the circumcised and uncircumcised, those who followed the Mosaic dietary laws and those who didn't, and such controversies were completely done away with.

In Mormonism this would be equivalent to a newly-called apostle correcting the Church President - something which has not been seen for some time within the LDS Church, but - as we will see - is not without modern precedent.

19th Century Examples

The Willie and Martin handcart companies left in England in the May of 1856, having hoped to have departed a couple months earlier, but they faced difficulties in chartering the ships, and then upon arrival found themselves unexpectedly facing further delays. Ultimately they were unable to leave Nebraska until mid-August. Levi Savage who was serving as one of their trail guides, felt impressed to warn them about the human cost that would come to them for leaving so late in the season:

“I said to him that if I spoke I must speak my mind, let it cut where it would. He said certainly to do so. I then related to the Saints the hardships that we should have to endure. I said that we were liable to have to wade in snow up to our knees and shovel at night, lay ourselves in a thin blanket and lie on the frozen ground without a bed.”⁸²

His remarks were responded to by the captain,

81 Galatians 2:

82 Levi Savage, Jr. Journal.

who questioned the faith of any who might worry about the potential dangers of such a trek at that time of year. Levi, still willing to help, despite his disappointment, closed with his testimony:

“Brethren and sisters, what I have said I know to be true, but seeing you are to go forward, I will go with you, will help you all I can, will work with you, will rest with you, will suffer with you, and if necessary I will die with you. May God have mercy, bless and preserve us.”⁸³

Later, Apostle Franklin D. Richards would also condemn Levi’s worries, but Levi’s predictions proved to be true, with the death of a fifth of the pioneers that set out on the arduous journey. Later, Brigham Young would chastise Apostle Richards for acting impractically. A leader of the Saints had done wrong in ignoring the counsel of one more experienced and more inspired.

In that case an ordinary member’s knowledge and inspiration, if listened to by his leaders, could have saved the lives of many. Another potential tragedy was barely averted by the superior knowledge of a young missionary disobeying his leader. In this case too, his leader was an Apostle, but also a future Church President, and the ordinary member would also one day become a President of the Church too.

In 1865 Joseph F. Smith was serving a mission in Hawaii. He had served there previously and had a great knowledge of territory and its surroundings. Thus, when Lorenzo Snow came to visit he knew the potential dangers that could be faced. We will take up the story from its official version:

“The ship upon which they arrived lay anchored in the channel in which the sea was nearly always rough. A breakwater had been built, under shelter of which the natives skillfully

steered their boats ashore. There was much danger, however, in approaching it. When it was proposed that the party should land in the ship's unwieldy freight-boat, President Smith strongly opposed the proposition, telling the brethren that at the breakwater there was great danger of capsizing, the boat being a clumsy old tub, unfit for such a load. He refused to go ashore, and tried to prevail upon the others to abandon the attempt until a better boat could be obtained. He offered to go ashore alone, and to return with a safer boat to land the party. So persistent, however, were some of the brethren, that he was chided for his waywardness, and one of the apostles even told him: 'Young man, you would better obey counsel.' But he reiterated his impression of danger, refusing positively to land in that boat, and again offering to go alone for a better boat. But the brethren persisted, whereupon he asked that they leave their satchels with their clothes and valuables on the anchored ship with him, and that he be permitted to stay. This they reluctantly consented to do, and set out for land.

Joseph stood upon the ship and saw them depart, filled with the greatest apprehension for their safety. When the party reached the break-water, he saw one of the great waves suddenly overturn the boat, dropping the company into twenty or thirty feet of water. A boat came out from shore, manned with natives, who set to work to gather them up, and obtained all but President Snow, when the boat which picked them up started for land. It was then that Elder W. W. Cluff demanded that they return for Brother Snow, who would otherwise have been abandoned and left for drowned. He was found and dragged into the boat for dead, his life being thus saved by Brother Cluff. All this time,

Joseph stood in the greatest agony as a witness, helpless, on the deck of the ship. His first information of his companions' fate came from some passing natives who replied to his inquiry that one of the men (Brother Snow) was dead. But through the blessings of God and self-effort it was, fortunately, not quite so serious, his life having been restored.

Joseph had saved himself and the satchels, and he has always considered that while the brethren fatefully said of the incident: 'It was to be,' that a prevention in this case would have been much better than a cure. The incident illustrates two predominating traits in his character: When he is convinced of the truth, he is not afraid to express himself in its favor to any man on earth. When he does express himself, it is often with such earnestness and vigor that there is danger of his giving offense."⁸⁴

An Apostle and file leader told Joseph F. Smith to obey his counsel, but such counsel almost cost several lives, and young Joseph F. was vindicated.

That disagreements should not be a matter that decides a fellow Saint's standing and membership is illustrated in our final story.

Edwin D. Woolley, father of later Fundamentalist leader John W. Woolley, was a friend to Brigham Young, but was outspoken and the two didn't seem to always see eye to eye - at least on business matters. As one LDS history recounted:

"Woolley family members today who admire the contrariness of their progenitor enjoy the story that once Brigham Young said that if Bishop Woolley should fall off his horse while crossing to the other side of the Jordan, they should not

84 Joseph F. Smith, Gospel Doctrine, Pg.534-5.

look for him floating downstream. Instead, they would find him swimming upstream, obstinately contending against the current.

On one occasion, according to the family, the bishop and Brigham had a heated discussion about a business deal. President Young, who could be very sarcastic, turned as he was leaving and said, ‘Now, Bishop Woolley, I guess you will go off and apostatize.’ To which Edwin rejoined, ‘If this were your church, President Young, I would be tempted to do so. But this is just as much my church as it is yours, and why should I apostatize from my own church?’ [It is said that President Young smiled at this.]

Despite their disagreements, Brigham Young dearly loved his outspoken bishop. In a painting commissioned by Brigham Young called ‘President Young and His Friends,’ Bishop Woolley is depicted along with Heber C. Kimball, Daniel H. Wells, George A. Smith, and four others.”⁸⁵

Perhaps the problem so many Saints have is expecting too much from their leaders, as if they were demi-Gods, infallible, or supermen. Whereas the scriptures tell us they are chosen because they have like weaknesses, so that they can exercise understanding and compassion:

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: [2] Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with

85 Saints Without Halos, Chap. 6. Edwin Woolley: Bishop of the Thirteenth Ward, p. 61.

infirmity.”⁸⁶

But what should our attitude be when we are faced with the failings or mistakes of those who preside over us? Should we use it to justify rebellion? When we come across something that seems to be wrong, we can react to it in several ways -

Obliviousness - we are too distracted or disinterested to consider it.

Apathy - we don't care enough to think about it.

Avoidance / Willful Ignorance - we are determined not to be involved with it.

Delegation - we hold someone else responsible to do something about it.

We have already given ample examples to show that none of these responses is typical of being truly faithful to God and His principles. Many may fall back into such reactions anyway, but there will always be some who cannot follow such a course - their conscience or desire to do what is right will not allow them to stay silent.

Of course there are those who are the chronic complainers or the malcontents who constantly look to make issues, but aside from them, there are those who speak up because they love the Gospel and seek to support it. They are the whistle blowers, the voices crying in the wilderness, and they sometimes, are only acknowledged after their fears come to pass.

As individuals, when we are faced with such contradictions we could be tempted to react rebelliously, using it as an excuse to attack what's wrong, or who we believe caused it, but taking no personal responsibility to help fix it; or we can dissent faithfully, investigating the situation, raising the questions, making our views known, and standing by true principle. Such men and women are not looking for an excuse to accuse, they are

86 Hebrews 5.

reluctant, they are not wanting to upset others, but they can't let a possible wrong go on without saying something, they are devout, and don't lack faith, but are seeking understanding and consistency.

When the time comes for us to have the faith like the Rechabites, Paul, Levi Savage, or Joseph F. Smith, may we exemplify the counsel of men like Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor, who taught us to be prepared to stand up or stand alone if we need to.

“I believe it is good to investigate and prove all principles that come before me. Prove all things, hold fast that which is good, and reject that which is evil, no matter what guise it may come in. I think if we, as “Mormons,” hold principles that cannot be sustained by the Scriptures and by good sound reason and philosophy, the quicker we part with them the better, no matter who believes in them or who does not. In every principle presented to us, our first inquiry should be, “Is it true?” “Does it emanate from God?” If He is its Author it can be sustained just as much as any other truth in natural philosophy; if false it should be opposed and exposed just as much as any other error. Hence upon all such matters we wish to go back to first principles.”

John Taylor, March 14, 1869. Journal of Discourses 13:15.

“I do hope and pray my brethren and sisters to pay attention, that the Spirit of the Lord may be in your hearts, that you may see and understand things as they are. I would say, still further, if there be error advanced here, do not receive it, pass it by, and live so that you will know truth from error, light from darkness, the things that are of God from those not of God; and if an error should drop from the lips of one of our Elders, do not receive, believe, or practice it. Truth is what we

want, and we ought to live so that we can understand and know it for ourselves. This is our privilege and duty; and we request of the Latter-day Saints, and of all people, to live so that they may know and understand the things of God, and receive and embrace them in their faith, and practice them in their lives.”

Brigham Young, May 5, 1870. Journal of Discourses 13:345.

Priesthood and Obedience

Men in their ambition have ever sought for power, to rule and to exercise a controlling influence over their fellow men, and generally but little regard has been had to the way and means by which they have come into possession of such power, neither when obtained, has it always been used with an eye single to the salvation or benefit of mankind. The desire, we admit, is a very natural one, from the fact that man is designed by God, and capacitated in his organisation to be a ruler in a greater or less degree in the many grades that exist, from having rule over his own passions, propensities, and person, to that of a family, tribe, community or society, a state or nation an empire or a kingdom; and even his ambition may aspire to rule the world, or like God, peradventure, to sway the sceptre of unnumbered worlds.

All power is not immediately derived from the same source, but all legitimate right of Government is in the Priesthood of God. Tyrants and usurpers, under the titles of Emperors, Kings, and Presidents, have dominion upon the earth, which has been maintained and is maintained, by the sword and by blood, all of which is a usurpation of power, gained by might, and not by right. The very sound of the word Priesthood, to every man who has a correct idea of the government of God, imparts a sensation that either elevates his soul with joy, or if he feels its influence is not within his reach, it abandons him to despair. It implies a divine right to govern and control, exercised by God, and imparted to whom He will; and when held by man under His approbation, is superior to every other power, and therefore cannot virtually be called in question by any other. This right of government is so secured that no man can take the honour or power thereof unto himself, for God calls whom He will, and confers it upon him in His own appointed way; hence no man can obtain it without

believing and confessing that there is a medium of immediate communication between him and his God; and all men who are called as was Aaron, by direct revelation, and ordained unto the Holy Priesthood are ordained for men, in things pertaining to God, that reconciliation may be brought to pass.

By this we learn that the Priesthood administers in a perfect organization of government, because it is the government ordained and upheld by a perfect Being; it is a holy and just authority, because it administers in things pertaining to God, and partakes of the value of all His attributes. It is reasonable, then, for us to conclude, that God would require obedience and respect to be paid to His government wherever found, and that those who hold the Priesthood should be recognised as his messengers.

Upon a point so self-evident, we have no need to reason further to authorize us to remark, that in the administration of a perfect law, there must be perfect obedience to that law, on the part of the subjects who are governed by it; otherwise there is a violation of the law, which must be atoned for by the transgressor; if it were not so, the honour of the law would not be maintained; but the law of God being perfect, not only provides for the salvation of all through mercy, but it is also armed with justice that its supremacy may be maintained by meting out a just recompense to the transgressor.

This priesthood is now among men upon the earth, and is in successful operation for their salvation. The King himself, who holds all power in this Priesthood, was upon the earth more than eighteen hundred years ago, and desired to reign by virtue of it, but mankind would not suffer him. He was holy, but men were so wicked they could not appreciate his goodness, nor his power; therefore they destroyed him, and would not suffer him to live upon the earth. And what was the result? That same holy power and influence which he possessed he conferred upon men, who were not so perfect as himself, and ordained them to be the medium

of his power, that peradventure their labours and ministrations might be more adapted to the low grovelling and degraded condition of those who were to receive them, and because of it, be better appreciated than His labours and motives were.

The minds of men generally do not have the capacity to receive the ministrations of perfect beings; hence each grade of intelligences is administered unto by the next above in capacity, power, and glory, like unto the way of life to a Saint, which is from grace to grace, and from faith to faith, living by that which is in part until that which is perfect shall come. When the government of God is thoroughly established upon the earth, through the immediate agency of men and angels under God's own supervision, and as so far gained the supremacy over contending powers, that the King's person can be safe among men, and be duly honoured by them, then will he again come to reign, and bring in that which is perfect; then shall a universal day of peace and righteousness be enjoyed by those who inherit the earth; for the King has decreed that all who cannot abide and honour the perfect administration of his laws in that day, shall be destroyed from off the earth.

According to examples which are recorded in sacred writ, and which have actually been witnessed by many of the Saints of the present dispensation, men are called to receive the Priesthood, and in virtue of it, perform a certain work for which they seem adapted, and afterwards they are suffered to dishonour that Priesthood by using the influence which they have gained, to lead others astray; and thereby dishonour and reproach have at times been brought upon those who consider it a duty to listen to their counsel. By being enabled thus to accomplish their covetous, lustful, and unlawful ends, they have brought disgrace and suffering upon others, incurred the wrath of God and the disapprobation of His people upon themselves, and the power of the Priesthood has altogether departed from them, for its virtue will not abide with those who violate its laws.

Because of these facts, and the apparent imperfections of men on whom God confers authority the question is sometimes asked, to what extent is obedience to those who hold the Priesthood required? This is a very important question, and one which should be understood by all Saints. In attempting to answer this question we would repeat, in short, what we have already written, that willing obedience to the laws of God, administered by the Priesthood, is indispensable to salvation; but, we would further add, that a proper conservative to this power exists for the benefit of all, and none are required to tamely and blindly submit to a man because he has a portion of the Priesthood. We have heard men who hold the priesthood remark, that they would do anything they were told to do by those who presided over them, even if they knew it was wrong: but such obedience as this is worse than folly to us; it is slavery in the extreme; and the man who would thus willingly degrade himself, should not claim rank among intelligent beings, until he turns from his folly. A man of God, who seeks for the redemption of his fellows, would despise the idea of seeing another become his slave, who had an equal right with himself to the favour of God; he would rather see him stand by his side, a sworn enemy to wrong, so long as there was place found for it among men. Others, in the extreme exercise of their almighty authority, have taught that such obedience was necessary, and that no matter what the Saints were told to do by their Presidents, they should do it without questions.

When the Elders of Israel will so far indulge in these extreme notions of obedience, as to teach them to the people, it is generally because they have it in their hearts to do wrong themselves. and wish to pave the way to accomplish that wrong; or else because they have done wrong, and wish to use the cloak of their authority to cover it with, lest it should be discovered by their superiors, who would require an atonement at their hands.

We would ask, For what is the Priesthood given unto men? It is that they may have a right to administer the law of God. Have they then a right to make void that law? Verily no. When the law of God has gone forth from His own mouth, and been declared by the mouths of His Prophets and Apostles, saying, "Thou shalt not lie"; who can say by virtue of the Priesthood. You may lie and be approved? The Lord and His Prophets have declared it as a law unto His People, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Then who can say, Thou mayest commit adultery, and it will be no sin? It is written as a law unto the Saints "Thou shalt not kill." Then we ask again, Who can kill and be forgiven? And in like manner it might be asked of all the laws of God, who has the right to make them void? None can revoke the decree but Him by whom it was given; neither can the laws of God be trampled upon with impunity or revoked by a lesser power than that by which they are framed. It is written of God that He cannot lie; then none need suppose that He will approve of it through His authority which is on the earth; neither is He the Son of Man that he should repent, therefore He will maintain the law by which His kingdom is governed. Should any think that they can give counsel to gratify their lusts, or answer avaricious ends, and say, "No one seeth us," while they indulge therein, and indulge in sin as a sweet morsel, they will learn with sorrow, that an eye which never sleeps has been upon their path, and He that seeth in secret shall make manifest, and reward openly every man according to his deeds, whether good or evil. If a man could have as much authority as the Almighty, it would not authorise him to do wrong, nor counsel another to do wrong, and the man that will administer with partiality, for the sake of screening iniquity, will find his stewardship will be taken from him.

In administering the government of God, there are three parties concerned, viz., the subject who is governed, the person who governs, and the person by whose permission or under whose approbation, he

governs. Should a person be required to violate a known law by his President, or if he is not satisfied with the counsel which he gives, he should not openly rebel against that President, but if they cannot see eye to eye, he should appeal privately to the next higher power or President, and where there three are thus brought together who have a spirit to do right, right will prevail, and harmony be maintained. While such is the character of God's government that its genius and policy is to the end that iniquity may be swept from off the earth, persons need not think to excuse themselves for performing a known unlawful act simply because they were told to do it by another; if such an excuse as this would justify, none would ever need to come under condemnation; for men would be sure to find someone on whom to lay the burden of their sins. The day has come when every one may expect to answer for their own sins, without attempting to cloak them with another's Priesthood.

Great is the responsibility of that man who is called to give counsel which involves the salvation of another; and when such counsel is given, it should be of that pure character, that the powers above him upon the earth, with angels and God, can approve. He will then have no occasion to destroy his own influence and power by telling others that it will be no sin for them to commit adultery, to lie or steal etc., if they are told to do it by the Priesthood, and thereby pervert the right ways of the Lord, and bring reproach upon the honour of His cause. The Lord asks for no such confidence in His Priesthood as this, neither do good men who are under its influence. The Priesthood never demands a wrong at the hands of another, though men who hold the Priesthood may make such a demand, as has sometimes been the case, and for which they have had to suffer. Where the authority of God is, there should the confidence of all men be reposed, sufficiently to obey its laws, but not to violate them; for we have not yet learned that it has power enough to save the transgressor in his

sins. Some men have been so wise as to think the little authority they had was enough for them to set aside law and revelation, and mete out justice and judgement upon their own responsibility. But in the end they have found that responsibility to be greater than they could bear.

These sentiments are not advanced with the idea of defining the limits of Divine authority, nor that any one can find language to portray the extent of the rights and powers of the Priesthood: for to fully comprehend it, would be to comprehend God. But they are offered with the consideration that Saints may be led to see the skill and manifested in its organisation; how safely it is guarded from the impositions of men, and the impossibility of sin prevailing where it is duly and wisely administered, and that none need be imposed upon if they understood the rights and privileges which it guarantees to them: then, if they do not avail themselves of this rights, they are left without excuse. Extreme exercise of power, in cases of such importance, and upon matters of such infinite moment, should be studiously avoided, when we consider that every one must render a faithful account of his stewardship.

Some have supposed that the more authority men have in the kingdom of God, the greater is their liberty to disregard His laws, and that their greatness consists in their almost unlimited privileges, which leave them without restrictions; but this is a mistaken idea. Those who are the greatest in authority are under the greatest restrictions; the law of their sphere is greater than that of those who are in less power, and the restrictions and penalty of that law are proportionately great; therefore they are under the greater obligation to maintain the virtue of the law and the institutions of God, otherwise confidence could not be reposed in them, but distrust and evil surmisings would be the result: disaffection would be found lurking in every in every avenue of society and by thus severing the cords of union, it would prove the destruction of any people.

A voice from the heavens has again been heard

breaking the silences of ages, with a purpose and determination to establish the kingdom of God, and introduce a celestial government upon the earth; and if mankind will respect and obey those laws when revealed to them, they shall be saved and inherit a celestial glory. Therefore, had we the voice like the sound of a trump of the Archangel, that could be heard by all living, or had we the power of a God to penetrate and make every heart to feel and realize the truth, we would proclaim it abroad in the ears of all living - Repent ye, repent ye for the hour of God's judgement has come, and the transgressor shall perish from off the earth, while the meek shall be redeemed to inherit it forever.

(Millennial Star, 14:594 Nov 13 1852)

A Real Representative of The Most High

Millennial Star, Vol. 20, October 9, 1858, pp. 641-644.

Concerning Jesus Christ, who may be termed his Father's disciple, it is said that through Him was the Father "manifested" to the world. In other language, the virtues, the disposition, and the character of the unseen Father were manifested in the life and conduct of the Son, who had studied Him, practiced Him, and was then acting Him out; so that all who wanted to see what kind of person the Father was could behold Him in the words and actions of the Son.

For this same purpose were we ordained before the foundation of the world, when many of us received the priesthood by ordination, and by decree the promise that we should inherit it in the flesh. In this promise was conveyed the condition that we should walk not merely in the authority of the appointment, but in the virtues and qualities that are its necessary accompaniments.

The ages of our probation in the spirit world have rolled away; we are inhabitants of the flesh; and, according to promise, the priesthood has descended upon us, through the hands of our brethren, who led us once before in heavenly councils above. The authority to be the Father's representatives has been given us, and the legality of our administrators has been acknowledged on high. But whether we are the Father's representatives beyond holding his authority remains yet to be seen.

One thing is certain — Divine Authority alone is not sufficient to make us representatives of God. Some men possess that, but nothing else. There is scarcely an attribute of Almighty God about them. They walk in the authority of their appointment, but not in the virtue, the grace, or the righteousness of it. Strip such men of their authority, and there is nothing of God left to be counted. They may be successful managers, wise economists, and

excellent teachers of the things of God, because the faith of their associates and the Saints draws the Spirit down upon them and yet, otherwise, they have scarcely an enduring quality of righteousness in their possession.

Why, then, are they called to fill certain positions in the Priesthood? For a very good reason; God requires a certain kind of business done, and they are able to do it. They are taken on trial; but it is not thereby proved or affirmed, because they have certain gifts and powers, which it suits the Lord to use, that therefore they are really representing the Almighty, or advancing themselves towards celestial life. It may suit a gentleman to employ a man to preside over his workmen who are building him a house; but it is not thereby shown that that man, as a necessary consequence, is getting sufficiently refined or educated to live and associate with that gentleman in the house, after it is finished.

Neither does faithfulness or energy in carrying out the external duties of our callings prove we are getting much nearer the Almighty, or progressing towards celestial perfection. Fidelity in carrying out any Church business that may be entrusted to us is an indispensable requisite; and a man would be damned who did not possess it; but indispensable as it is, it is not a very wonderful acquirement. It is so little an affair, that, viewed in the light of celestial principles, a man would be scouted [observed & evaluated] who did not possess such a very, very first principle of gospel life, and many other good qualities into the bargain.

Any sectarian — any member of a mere party in politics would consider himself a poor tool, if fidelity to his party and energy in the business belonging thereto formed his greatest acquirement. Anybody and everybody worth mentioning in any little system is supposed to be capable of that. Shall, then, the priesthood, whose aim is endless life — whose ambition is the perfection of the Godhead and its glories, — shall they consider that they meet the demands of God upon them, simply because they are faithful to truth, obedient

to orders, or willing to support by their means the religion of their choice? As God lives, we may do all this, and have it done apparently well, too, and then be no better than any sectarian who sincerely believes his faith and earnestly upholds it. The highest principles of righteousness, that give grace, beauty, and dignity to the character, and that live and burn in our exalted Father, may have to be begun in us after this is done; or, if it begun, the foundation only may be laid. If we came into the church aright, with a reformed character, of course we laid a foundation, but what is the use of that, except as a foundation? We are called to be exemplifiers of the very virtues of the eternal God. Jehovah's principles should shine in us, so that, seeing us, He may be seen. If we are content to be less than this we are shams, instead of a royal and holy Priesthood. He who only represents God's authority, bare of his goodness and his truth, is but a poor apology for a Priest of the Most High God.

When a man is called to the priesthood, he is then and there ordained to put down evil. He is not merely called to form part of a splendid organization. That organization is principally valuable because it is so well adapted to enable the Almighty and his servants to spread and keep alive the influences of the Holy Ghost, communicate their will to men, and carry out their purposes.

We are not called simply that God may have a number of men called Priests upon the earth. No. The holy Priesthood has been conferred on us for the express purpose that the Father and Son may have representatives of their Spirit and their actions upon the earth. We are ordained and appointed to act them out. The world are to comprehend God through us. As God was said to be "written in the face of Jesus Christ," so he is to be told out and made plain in our words and ways.

Godliness is not going to be loved, understood, or appreciated by the world, by the preaching of a cold theory of its nature. We have got to make them feel God by the force of his very nature diffused in us. "Holy

Father,” said Jesus, “the world hath not known thee”; but, says John, “the Son who hath dwelt in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Such is our position in regard to God, if we really possess the Spirit as well as the authority of the Priesthood; we also are declarers of the Most High.

The heavenly authorities of the upper worlds, whose glorious characters shine white, and pure, and free, and innocent, and whose virtues have lifted them up to their high estate, have stooped to attach us to their ranks. They have delegated us to stand and speak for them, to impersonate them, and to establish their order of society among men. Shall we not, then, be true and pure? Since heaven is made by the working of heavenly laws — by the practice of principles that work peace and goodwill within the bosom, they have called us not merely to preach principles, but to let their principles live in us.

To carry out these views, Eternal Wisdom has devised a glorious Church organization to exist among men. Some men actually seem to think that to get working this grand system of powers and authorities on the earth is the principal thing aimed at by God, and the principal thing worth rejoicing about. Hence they glorify themselves immensely over the wondrous power and increasing influence of the organization. They are very proud of it, and are anxious to roll it on. But they do not seem to care a straw about the internal principles of their religion, and scarcely appear to know that they exist. They do not appear to see that this glorious order of Priesthood, with the authority accompanying it, is but so much machinery created to bring forth, cherish, and establish on earth the virtues and characteristics of the upper worlds, and that the priesthood is established solely, wholly, and entirely that it may work to that end.

And as, in establishment of the latter-day dispensation, the great thing aimed at was not merely the erection of a gigantic, almighty organization, that should awe the world and rule it with an iron rod; so, as far as

we are individually concerned, the great thing, the ruling desire with us should not be merely the getting distinction in that Priesthood, either by ordination or appointment, only so far as we make that a means towards the same great purpose that exists in the Almighty — namely, the celestialization of the world by the introduction of celestial practices in ourselves and others. We cannot think that our ordinations or appointments have necessarily advanced us one particle towards celestial life, only so far as we have made them do it, by taking advantage of the right opportunities and get an insight into the real sources of celestial life. Ordinations do not celestialize; appointments do not elevate; they only authorize us to be channels of light to others and to ourselves, if we will. Our present standing in the Priesthood, therefore, does not necessarily represent our progress in salvation, although there will come a day when it will; for eternal authority will, finally, only be vested where the eternal attributes of God exist. But under the present state of things, if the whole world were ordained Apostles, that in itself would not make it a whit more heavenly; that alone would not bring it forward towards celestial life; it would only put the means within its reach. It takes intelligence, ruled by meekness, benevolence, justice, mercy, and uprightness in spirit and in deed, to celestialize. They will refine; and refinement of this class is celestialization. The Priesthood, with its authority and order, is a glorious framework, destined to guard and nourish these principles, and to bring them to maturity and perfection.

The Almighty, then, has only given to us the naked priesthood. The virtues, the graces — in a word, the power of it, we have to get ourselves. We have to clothe it and make it beautiful. A plentiful store, however, through the intelligence revealed, lies close to our hands to do it with. Let us arise and shine, and let old sterile priestcraft and those that live under its influence see our light. And let us live so in the purity of our religion — in the immaculate integrity of all its

principles, till our every presence is a poison to the wicked, and misery to the corrupt in heart. No testimony against evil can be given with power by any man who is under the influence of that evil. A heart that is pure from selfishness or greed can roll out thunders against those particular sins; and so with all the rest. Appointments and ordinations cannot confer ability to testify properly against the popular sins of this generation. To be a real disciple and representative of Jesus Christ, bearing witness against the sins of the age, we must be clean every whit. Then from the depths of a pure soul will come a testimony that will burn where it goes, and condemn where it is rejected.

This, then, is true priesthood — to be images of the living God, exhibiting in our characteristics His brightness and His strength; to be girt and endowed with the purity of His nature; to be unsullied in heart and mind; to stand by the strength of redeeming, saving qualities; to bless, and bless, and bless again, notwithstanding ingratitude in some — building, sustaining, and protecting all the time; to fight all spirits of division and all principles of death; to help the weak, the down-trodden, and the helpless, till helping becomes our natural food, working on all principles that yield nourishment, support, and strength — till our very presence is as the sun, cheering and blessing all. So shall God increase within us, refreshing our own spirits, and watering all around, and the characteristics of the Holy Priesthood will grow out from us like the branches of a fruitful tree that yield shelter, shield, and fruit.

Let a man do this, and he shall be a priest indeed. His authority shall be like a two-edged sword. It shall be confirmed on him for all eternity; for God shall love him and shall bless him. His heart shall increase in richness, and his mind shall grow in strength. No good thing shall be withheld from him. He shall save and gain influence over the hearts of men. He shall be as God among his own; and they shall feel the attributes that live within him, till their hearts are stolen from them and

linked to him forever. So shall he gain dominion, and increase in strength, and be really, truly, and eternally a representative of the Most High.

Appendix

The Simple Faith

Brigham Henry Roberts, President of the Seventy

Mental Effort Required to Master the Things of God

It requires striving—intellectual and spiritual—to comprehend the things of God—even the revealed things of God. In no department of human endeavor is the aphorism "no excellence without labor"—more in force than in acquiring knowledge of the things of God. The Lord has placed no premium upon idleness or indifference here—"seek and ye shall find;" "knock and it shall be opened unto you;" "seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning even by study and also by faith"—such the admonitions God gives in reference to our pursuit of knowledge of divine things.

Oliver Cowdery thought the work of translating from the Nephite plates would be easy. He sought the privilege of translating and was given an opportunity. He, it appears, believed that all that would be necessary would be for him to ask God, and without giving further thought the translation would be given him. His expectation in this was disappointed. He failed to translate. Then the Lord said: "You supposed that I would give it [i.e., the power to translate] unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me; 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." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. 9.)

The incident illustrates the truth here contended for—achievement in divine things, progress in the knowledge of them, comes only with hard striving, earnest endeavor, determined seeking.

IV: The Plea of "Thus Far, But No Further"

Mental laziness is the vice of men, especially with reference to divine things. Men seem to think that because inspiration and revelation are factors in connection with the things of God, therefore the pain and, stress of mental effort are not required; that by some means these elements act somewhat as Elijah's ravens and feed us without effort on our part. To escape this effort, this mental stress to know the things that are, men raise all too readily the ancient bar—"Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther." Man cannot hope to understand the things of God, they plead, or penetrate those things which he has left shrouded in mystery. "Be thou content with the simple faith that accepts without question. To believe, and accept the ordinances, and then live the moral law will doubtless bring men unto salvation; why then should man strive and trouble himself to understand? Much study is still a weariness of the flesh." So men reason; and just now it is much in fashion to laud "the simple faith;" which is content to believe without understanding, or even without much effort to understand. And doubtless many good people regard this course as indicative of reverence—this plea in bar of effort—"thus far and no farther." "There is often a great deal of intellectual sin concealed under this old aphorism," remarks Henry Drummond. "When men do not really wish to go farther they find it an honorable convenience sometimes to sit down on the outmost edge of the 'holy ground' on the pretext of taking off their shoes." "Yet," he continues, "we must be certain that, making a virtue of reverence, we are not merely excusing ignorance; or under the plea of 'mystery' evading a truth which has been stated in the New Testament a hundred times, in the most literal form, and with all but monotonous repetition." (Spiritual Law, pp. 89, 90.)

This sort of "reverence" is easily simulated, and is of such flattering unction, and so pleasant to follow—"soul take thine ease"—that without question it is very often simulated; and falls into the same category as the simulated humility couched in "I don't know," which so often really means "I don't care, and do not intend to trouble myself to find out."

V: The Praise of Simple Faith

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 the gift of 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.

But, to resume: This plea in bar of effort to find out the things that are, is as convenient for the priest as it is for the people. The people of "simple faith," who never question, are so much easier led, and so much more pleasant every way—they give their teachers so little trouble. People who question because they want to know, and who ask adult questions that call for adult answers, disturb the ease of the priests. The people who question are usually the people who think—barring chronic questioners and cranks, of course—and thinkers are troublesome, unless the instructors who lead them are thinkers also; and thought, eternal, restless thought, that keeps out upon the frontiers of discovery, is as much a weariness to the slothful, as it is a joy to the alert and active and noble minded. Therefore one must not be surprised if now and again he finds those among religious teachers who give encouragement to mental laziness under the pretense of "reverence," praise "simple faith" because they themselves, forsooth, would

avoid the stress of thought and investigation that would be necessary in order to hold their place as leaders of a thinking people.

VI: The Incentives to, and the Glory of, Knowledge in the New Dispensation

Against all the shams of simulated humility and false reverence which are but pleas to promote and justify mental laziness, I launch the mighty exhortations and rebukes of the New Dispensations of the Gospel of the Christ—the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, in which God has promised "to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him." They are as follows:

"The glory of God is Intelligence." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. 93.)

"It is impossible for a man to be saved in Ignorance." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. 131.)

"Whatever principles of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. 130.)

"If a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. 130.)

"A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power, than many men who are on the earth." (Joseph Smith—History of the Church, Vol. IV., p. 588.)

"Knowledge saves a man; and in the world of spirits no man can be exalted but by knowledge; so long as a man will not give heed to the commandments he must abide without salvation. If a man has knowledge he can be saved; although he has been guilty of great sins, he will be punished for them. But when he consents to obey the Gospel, whether here or in the world of Spirits, he is saved." (Joseph Smith—Minutes of the General Conference of the Church, April, 1844. "Improvement Era," Jan., 1909, p. 186.)

"Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom: seek learning even by study, and also by faith." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. 88:118.)

"I give unto you a commandment, that you teach one another the doctrine of the Kingdom."

"Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;

"Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land, and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms,

"That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling

whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. 88:79-90.)

"It is important that we should understand the reasons and causes of our exposure to the vicissitudes of life and of death, and the designs and purposes of God in our coming into the world, our sufferings here, and our departure hence. What is the object of our coming into existence, then dying and falling away, to be here no more? It is but reasonable to suppose that God would reveal something in reference to the matter, and it is a subject we ought to study more than any other. We ought to study it day and night, for the world is ignorant in reference to their true condition and relation. If we have any claim on our Heavenly Father for anything, it is for knowledge on this important subject." (Joseph Smith—History of the Church, Vol. VI., p. 50.)

"God shall give unto you (the saints) knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now: which our forefathers have waited with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last times, which their minds were pointed to, by the angels, as held in reserve for the fullness of their glory; a time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many Gods, they shall be manifest; all thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ; and also if there be bounds set to the heavens, or to the seas; or to the dry land, or to the sun, moon, or stars; all the times of their revolutions; all the appointed days,

months, and years, and all the days of their days, months, and years, and all their glories, laws, and set times, shall be revealed, in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times, according to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other Gods, before this world was, that should be reserved unto the finishing and the end thereof when every man shall enter into his eternal presence, and into his immortal rest. How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven, upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints." (Doc. and Cov. Sec. 121, 26-33.)

VII: Necessary Attitude of the Church in the Matter of Mental Activity and Intellectual Development

Surely, in the presence of this array of incentives, instructions and commandments to seek for knowledge, taken from the revelations and other forms of instruction by the Prophet of the New Dispensation—taking into account also the scope of the field of knowledge we are both persuaded and commanded to enter—whatever position other churches and their religious teachers may take, the Church of Jesus Christ in the New Dispensation can do no other than to stand for mental activity, and earnest effort to come to a knowledge of truth up to the very limit of man's capacity to find it, and the goodness and wisdom of God to reveal it.

The New Dispensation having opened with such a wonderful revelation respecting God, making known as the very first step in that revealed knowledge not only the being of God but the kind of beings both the Father

and the Son are—its representatives may not now attempt to arrest the march of inquiry and plead "mystery" or "humility" or "reverence" as a bar to entrance into those very fields of knowledge God has commanded us to enter, and reap in, and of which he gives us assurance that our harvest shall be abundant.

VIII: The Limits of Our Inquiries

Let me not be misunderstood. Again I say, I am aware that there are limits to man's capacity to understand things that are. That God also in his wisdom has not yet revealed all things, especially respecting the Godhead; and that where his revelations have not yet cast their rays of light on such subjects, it is becoming in man to wait upon the Lord, for that "line upon line, and precept upon precept" method by which he, in great wisdom, unfolds in the procession of the ages the otherwise hidden treasures of his truths. All this I agree to; but all this does not prevent us from a close perusal and careful study of what God has revealed upon any subject, especially when that study is perused reverently, with constant remembrance of human limitations, and with an open mind, which ever stands ready to correct the tentative conclusions of today by the increased light that may be shed upon the subject on the morrow. Which holds as greater than all theories and computations the facts—the truth. These are the principles by which I have sought to be guided in these five Year Books of the Seventy's Course in Theology, and in some more than in the one herewith presented.

But some would protest against investigation lest it threaten the integrity of accepted formulas of truth—which too often they confound with the truth itself; regarding the scaffolding and the building as one and the same thing. The effective answer to that may be given in the words of Sir Oliver Lodge: "A faith dependent on blinkers and fetters for its maintenance is not likely in a progressive age to last many generations." (Science and

Immortality, p. 130.) "From age to age, our knowledge is growing from more to more," remarks John Fiske, in his "Century of Science." "By this enlarged experience our minds are affected from day to day and from year to year, in more ways than we can detect or enumerate. It opens our minds to some notions, and makes them incurably hostile to others; so that, for example, new truths well nigh beyond comprehension, like some of those connected with the luminiferous ether are accepted, and old beliefs once universal like witchcraft, are scornfully rejected. Vast changes in mental attitude are thus wrought before it is generally realized." ("Century of Science," p. 145.) This holds good in theology as in science. Not that the universal and fundamental truths in theology which God has revealed change, but that men's method of viewing them and expounding them changes, and, let us hope, changes for the better, for the more clear and perfect understanding and development of them—else there would be no progress in theology—while in all things else there is progress. But here let me conclude Fiske's noble passage:

"In this inevitable struggle [between vanishing old ideas and incoming new ones] there has always been more or less pain, and hence free thought has not usually been popular. It has come to our life-feast as a guest unbidden and unwelcome; but it has come to stay with us, and already proves more genial than was expected. Deadening, cramping finality has lost its charm for him who has tasted of the ripe fruit of the tree of knowledge. In this broad universe of God's wisdom and love, not leashes to restrain us are needed, but wings to sustain our flight. Let bold but reverent thought go on and probe creation's mysteries, till faith and knowledge "make one music as before, but vaster."

Following the Prophet

Ogden Kraut

April 6, 1980

President Ezra T. Benson
Church Office Building
47 East South Temple
Salt Lake City, Utah 84103

Dear President Benson:

It was with particular interest that I listened to your lecture to the Brigham Young University student assembly on February 26, 1980, on the subject of "Following the Prophets." However, it appears that one important and essential factor was overlooked. If we are to obtain the blessings we anticipate, by following the prophets, we must first make the proper distinction between true prophets and false prophets! Our salvation depends upon which kind of prophets we choose to follow.

It was prophesied that in the last days there would be an abundance of both false and true prophets. This is certainly evident today, as many are claiming to be prophets; but since they are contradicting each other, they cannot all be true prophets.

As Jesus sat upon the Mount of Olives with his Apostles, Peter asked Him what would be the signs of His coming. The first response Jesus made was, "Take heed that no man deceive you." In other words deception would be one of the major signs of His coming, and He warned, "Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." (Matt. 24:11) Deception by false prophets is perhaps the most damaging power and influence of the latter days, but it is a purifying process that is very necessary. Paul

the Apostle said that "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that all might be damned who believed not the truth...." (II Thes. 2:12)

The Prophet Joseph Smith has also warned:

“When a man goes about prophesying, and commands men to obey his teachings, he must either be a true or false prophet. False prophets always arise to oppose the true prophets and they will prophesy so very near the truth that they will deceive almost the very chosen ones.” (TPJS, p. 365)

But the false prophets are just as necessary as the true ones, which God revealed to Apostle Orson Hyde by saying:

“Evil men, ambitious of power, must needs arise among you, and they shall be led by their own self-will and not by me. Yet they are instruments in my hands, and are permitted to try my people, and to collect from among them those who are not the elect, and such as are unworthy of eternal life. Grieve not after them, neither mourn nor be alarmed. My people know my voice and also the voice of my spirit, and a stranger they will not follow; Therefore such as follow strangers are not my people.” (Unpublished Revelations, compiled by Fred Collier, p. 104-105, Part 65:3-6)

When people use the proper keys of knowledge for detecting false prophets, then these false prophets become as evident to them as when the innocent child looked upon the naked emperor and declared that he had no clothes. These keys are necessary to help us pass the crucial tests which lie ahead so that we will be victorious in spite of Satan's deceptions.

I have written fourteen simple fundamentals used to expose false prophets, which you should find interesting. I call them "Fourteen Fundamentals for Distinguishing True Prophets from False Prophets."

FIRST: False prophets always teach infallibility.

A week after you delivered your lecture to the B Y.U. students, Pope John Paul delivered a sermon at Rome in which he said:

Belief in the infallibility of the church does not mean in any sense believing in the infallibility of man but rather in the gift of Christ, in that gift which permits fallible men to infallibly proclaim and confess the revealed truth of our salvation.

Here then is one of the common declarations inferring that some men's words are the infallible words of God. How often we have heard religious leaders erroneously say, "When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan, it is God's plan." Or, "We should always follow our leaders for they will never lead anyone astray," and "We are safe if we put our trust in our leaders."

Claim of infallibility is really a cover-up for personal failure. When men find themselves incapable of receiving God's word, then they make this substitution by saying their own words are infallible. It is impossible for infallibility to exist among the leadership in even the true Church of Christ, for, as the Prophet Joseph Smith explained:

“...the people should EACH ONE STAND FOR HIMSELF, and DEPEND ON NO MAN OR MEN in that state of corruption of the Jewish church (he was reading from Ezekiel)--that

RIGHTEOUS PERSONS COULD ONLY DELIVER THEIR OWN SOULS--applied it to the present state of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints--said if the people departed from the Lord, they must fall--that THEY WERE DEPENDING ON THE PROPHET, HENCE WERE DARKENED IN THEIR MINDS,...” (T.P.J.S., pp. 237-238)

SECOND: False prophets teach and practice priestcraft.

A false prophet must live by priestcraft or else he will fail to obtain the power and means necessary for his survival. Without priestcraft, a false prophet cannot have a following, nor the material means of support that he needs. The larger his following, the larger his financial support will be. Priestcraft is a craft, or business, that renders financial remuneration for being a priest. Priestcrafters accept money from their followers in tithing, offerings, or gifts with a promise that God will shower blessings upon them for their financial support. Priestcrafters then place these tithings and donations into investments, banking, insurance, business enterprises, and even for personal living expenses. To accomplish this kind of priestcraft, false prophets instruct their followers to put all their trust in their leadership--without question. Nephi best described this kind of priestcraft by explaining that:

“He [God] commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.” (2 Nephi 26:29)

But true prophets have always warned people not to put their trust in the arm of flesh:

“I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh.” (2 Nephi 4:34)

“Thus saith the Lord: Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.” (Jer. 17:5)

“The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh...” (D. & C. 1:19)

And President Brigham Young also warned the Saints:

“How often has it been taught that if you depend entirely upon the voice, judgment, and sagacity of those appointed to lead you, and neglect to enjoy the Spirit for yourselves, how easily you may be led into error, and finally be cast off to the left hand?” (J.D. 8:59)

“Now those men or those women who know no more about the powers 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 never will be capable of becoming Gods.” (J.D. 1:312)

“Let every man and woman know themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates or not. This has been my exhortation continually.” (J.D. 9:150)

When a true prophet speaks, he admonishes men

to follow God, Jesus Christ, and the dictates of the Holy Spirit. He urges men to place these three as their personal guide, and not some mortal man.

THIRD: False prophets place their teachings above the scriptures.

When a man proclaims that his own words take precedence over the scriptures, it is usually because his teachings contradict the scriptures. A subtle trick of false prophets is to say that their words can justifiably contradict the doctrine of the scriptures because those principles are no longer in vogue for our day. Joseph Smith taught, however:

“If any man writes to you, or preaches to you, doctrines contrary to the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, set him down as an imposter.”
(Times & Seasons, Apr. 1, 1844)

Even the Savior of the world taught that men should "search the scriptures" (John 5:3.9) because they pointed the correct way towards eternal life. And again He said:

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven...” (Matt. 5:19)

The Prophet Joseph Smith would have agreed with the following statement:

“If the principles by which any of us attempt to save ourselves are contrary to the Bible, we may know they are man's teachings, not God's for the Lord and His Gospel remain the same - always.”
(Church News, June 5, 1965, p. 16)

And from the scriptures:

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isa. 8:20 and 2 Nephi 18:20)

“...If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” (Luke 16:31)

Even a more recent authority stated: (Joseph Fielding Smith)

“If I ever say anything which is contrary to the scriptures, then the scriptures prevail.” (Church News, Aug. 23, 1975)

FOURTH: False prophets live by worldly standards.

Very few people in the world recognize a true prophet. It has always been that when a true prophet came into the world, the world rejected him. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained:

“The world always mistook false prophets for true ones, and those that were sent of God, they considered to be false prophets, and hence they killed, stoned, punished and imprisoned the true prophets and these had to hide themselves ‘in deserts and dens, and caves of the earth,’ and though the most honorable men of the earth, they banished therefrom their society as vagabonds, whilst they cherished, honored and supported knaves, vagabonds, hypocrites, impostors, and the basest of men.” (T.P.J.S., p. 206)

Jesus also told His disciples of this fact when He

said:

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” (Matt. 5:11-12)

False prophets will be honored by the political leaders of the world. Gentile ministers will heap platitudes and laurels to their name. The worldly will recognize their own.

There is one principle reason for persecution to cease:

“...when the spirit of persecution, the spirit of hatred, of wrath and malice ceases in the world against this people, it will be the time that this people have apostacized and joined hands with the wicked.” (Brigham Young, J.D. 4:327)

“When all the chief features of the Gospel are obliterated, when we can float along the stream and do as the world does, then and not until then will persecution cease...” (George Q. Cannon, J.D. 22:374)

FIFTH: False prophets contradict eternal doctrines of the Gospel.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness is a stumbling block to every false prophet. They find it to be an offense to their teachings and to their objectives. A false prophet will try to altar, discard or condemn the true doctrines of Christ. How often false prophets garnish the sepulchres of the former prophets, yet contradict every doctrine they taught! But there should

be no contradiction of doctrines because they are eternal, everlasting and unchangeable. How can a prophet change an unchangeable doctrine? How can an eternal law of the Gospel be substituted by any other law? But false prophets always seem to be on hand to make substitutions for the laws of God.

However, God has said:

“What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away...” (D. & C. 1:38)

An editorial in the Church News a few years ago explains the eternal nature of the unchangeable gospel:

“One of the most important things we may learn about our religion is that God is unchangeable, the same yesterday, today and forever. By this we may know that the principles of salvation will always remain the same, and that we need not be disturbed by "new ideas" or "modern innovations" in the Gospel which may come our way. The Gospel cannot possibly be changed. The heaven we hope to achieve is eternal and unchangeable. Therefore, to bring the same human nature to the same goal, regardless of the time in which a person lives, requires the same steps and procedures. For that reason the saving principles must ever be the same. They can never change.” (Church News, June 5, 1965, p. 16)

All true prophets have advocated the same principles and doctrines in every dispensation.

“Now taking it for granted that the scriptures say what they mean, and mean what they say, we

have sufficient grounds to go on and prove from the Bible that the gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfill its requirements, the same, and the officers to officiate, the same; and the signs and fruits resulting from the promises, the same..." (Joseph Smith, TPJS, p. 264)

Only false prophets teach conflicting doctrine. They try to enter heaven by another set of doctrines and ordinances, but Jesus cautioned His followers:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." (John 10:1)

False prophets fear the words of dead prophets because one or the other must be wrong. For this reason they attempt to cover up or set aside the teachings of the true prophets, lest the people discover the deceiver. The Prophet Joseph Smith gave the key to know what comes from God and what comes from the devil:

"A key: Every principle proceeding from God is eternal and any principle which is not eternal is of the devil." (TPJS, p. 181)

SIXTH: False prophets try to be the mediator between man and God.

When men arise to positions of leadership, they are tempted with their power and influence. They want to become the "fileleader" standing between men and God. But,

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

“For there is one God, and ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN, the man Christ Jesus.” (I Tim. 2:5)

The reason no man can be a mediator is because "...there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Ecc. 8:20, Prov. 20:9, I John 1:8)

And President Brigham Young taught:

“...the greatest and most important of all requirements of our Father in heaven and of his Son Jesus Christ, is, to his brethren or disciples, to believe in Jesus Christ, confess him, seek to him, cling to him, make friends with him. Take a course to open and keep open a communication with YOUR ELDER BROTHER OR FILELEADER--OUR SAVIOR.” (J.D. 8:339)

A false prophet wants to be a fileleader or mediator between men and God because of the authority it gives him over others. But gods of stone and wood do less damage than these false prophets who act as mediators with God.

SEVENTH: False prophets cannot say "Thus saith the Lord."

True prophets have always brought the "word of the Lord" to the nations of the world. The ancient prophets of Israel would have been laughed at and scorned if they had tried to tell people that whatever they said was "God's word" without the endorsement of "thus saith the Lord." False prophets cannot obtain the word of the Lord because God does not speak to them. For this reason they must pretend to receive the word of God, but they can never produce fit. God spoke to Ezekiel and told him to warn every false prophet by saying:

“And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!” (Ezek. 13:1-3)

The Prophet Joseph Smith gave us this important key for determining what is binding from the Lord.

“If anything should have been suggested by us, or any names mentioned, except by commandment, or thus saith the Lord, we do not consider it binding.” (D.H.C. 3:295)

If a revelation from God had the endorsement of "thus saith the Lord" anciently then it should certainly be so in our day.

EIGHTH: False prophets do not speak by power of the Holy Ghost.

It is written that Jesus "spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees." Jesus spoke by the spirit and power of prophecy and revelation, but false prophets always depend on their own education and learning. The false prophets write out their sermons beforehand and require others to do the same. They have no confidence or faith in the Holy Spirit to dictate their preaching--neither do they trust people who do. The Savior taught His disciples:

“But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it

is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” (Matt. 10:19-20)

The Lord also commanded the members of His church in these last days to conduct "all meetings" in this same manner:

But notwithstanding those things which are written, it always has been given to the elders of my church from the beginning, and ever shall be, to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit. (D. & C. 46:2)

Missionary work must also be done by the "Spirit" and not by the "letter". This was a firm requirement of the missionaries in this dispensation.

“Therefore, verily I say unto you, lift up your voices unto this people; speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say.” (D. & C. 100:5-6)

The great missionary Alma was a noble example of this system of missionary work, for he said, "I have been called to preach the word of God among all this people, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy,..." (Alma 8:24) Alma never used a missionary guide book.

The Latter-day Saints let the Spirit dictate in all of their meetings as Apostle George A. Smith said:

“With the Latter-day Saints the idea of writing sermons or preparing addresses beforehand is entirely discarded; it never was practiced amongst them.” (J.D. 13:292)

And President Wilford Woodruff added:

“It is well known to the Latter-day Saints-- though perhaps not to strangers that no Elder or member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who enters into this Tabernacle knows who is going to be called upon to speak to the people. Hence no man spends a week, a day, an hour, or a moment to prepare a discourse to deliver unto the people. We are all of us dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord, upon revelation, upon inspiration, upon the Holy Ghost, in order to be qualified to teach the people before whom we are called to speak,...”
(J.D. 24:236)

False prophets must depend on their worldly education for their sermons. You can spot those impostors everywhere you see them, reading their sermons. This is a key by which they are known:

“Hence the folly of sermons written beforehand; and unless the written beforehand sermons are by revelation, or prophecy, all men the world over, may know when they hear a sermon read from the pulpit, that God has no hand in that matter; and the preacher is not sent of God; and is not God's servant.” (Editorial, Des. News, Sept. 4, 1852)

Readers of sermons do not teach by the Holy Ghost. They do not speak by the Holy Ghost. They are "not sent of God" and certainly "God has no hand" in any of their sermons.

NINTH: False prophets do not enjoy the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

A false prophet claims to be the vicar of Christ,

or His prophet, seer, and revelator. Yet there is almost no evidence that he is. He does not have the gift of translation, the gift of tongues; he has no seer stone or Urim and Thummim; he never speaks with the gift of prophecy and has that prophecy fulfilled; he bears no testimony of seeing angels or having visions, nor has he ever talked face to face with God or Christ. True prophets have said:

“Because faith is wanting, the fruits are. No man since the world was had faith without having something along with it. A man who has none of the gifts has no faith; and he deceives himself, if he supposes he has.” (Joseph Smith, TPJS, p. 270)

“...all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men.*** And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one.” (Moroni 10:19, 25)

“...and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief...” (Moroni 7:37)

False prophets are impostors. They claim things which they do not have. They make a pretext of being close to God and enjoying His gifts, but they have failed to be blessed with such gifts. Because the gifts of the Spirit are absent, so are the influence and power of God.

TENTH: False prophets honor the laws of the land over the laws of God.

False prophets do not condemn many of the sins

of people, states and nations, nor the folly of other false prophets. On the contrary, they seek their fellowship and association. False prophets find great happiness in the good will and friendship of the world. Instead of persecution, they sacrifice principles of the gospel to obtain these happy associations. Their counsel is to encourage business according to the practices of the world and sustain every law of the land, no matter if it be unjust, unrighteous or against the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When this problem arose with the disciples of Christ, it was resolved: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

"This is evident, for we know that "He who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory." (D. & C. 88:22)

Abraham, Daniel and the three Hebrews were all breakers of the law of the land. True prophets live by the laws of God even if they must suffer the consequences of breaking the laws of men. False prophets are willing to abandon the laws of God and justify it by "obeying the laws of the land."

True prophets exhibit courage as Joseph Smith did when he said:

"It mattereth not whether the principle is popular or unpopular, I will always maintain a true principle, even if I stand alone in it." (D.H.C. 6:223)

The Prophet also wrote:

"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.” (D. & C. 134:4)

ELEVENTH: False prophets are wolves that scatter the sheep.

False prophets tell the sheep, or the Saints of God, to remain in their native countries and "by so doing, the kingdom of God can grow and prosper and that God will bless them for doing so." But God never said that. In latter-day revelation, it is recorded that:

“...God will gather out the Saints from the Gentiles, and then comes desolation and destruction, and none can escape except the pure in heart who are gathered.” (D.H.C. 2:52)

The gathering of the Saints is a very important item of our faith. It is founded upon divine revelation, both ancient and modern. *** None of the Saints can be dilatory upon this subject, and still retain the Spirit of God. To neglect or be indifferent about gathering is just as displeasing in the sight of God as to neglect or be indifferent about baptism for the remission of sins. (Mill. Star 10:241)

If men have not the spirit of gathering, they are blind and cannot see afar off, and are nigh unto burning. (Mill. Star 9:310)

The keys of gathering were given to Joseph

Smith in the Kirtland Temple by Moses to gather the house of Israel. Those keys were never taken back, so the commandment of gathering is still in force. Furthermore, they were to gather "in unto one place upon the face of this land." (D. & C. 29:8) The gathering must continue until the destruction of the wicked occurs.

When the Gospel went forth among the people, after the appearance of Moses in the Temple, and the committing of the Keys of the Gathering, when you Latter-day Saints received the Gospel of baptism for remission of sins and the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost, you also received the spirit of the gathering. (John Taylor, J.D. 19:125)

True prophets have given the warning:

“What is Babylon? Why, it is the confused world; come out of her then, and cease to partake of her sins, for if you do not, you will be partakers of her plagues.” (Brigham Young, J.D. 12:282)

“It is the word and commandment of the Lord to his servants that they shall never do another day's work, nor spend another dollar to build up a Gentile city or nation.” (Joseph Smith, J.D. 11:294-5)

But false prophets scatter the sheep of Israel leaving them to be destroyed with the wicked nations of the earth. And God has said, "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord." (Jer. 23:1) Then God proceeds to tell these wicked pastors that He will bring the evil of their doing upon them.

God wants His people to be together, unitedly living every higher principle of the Gospel, but the false

prophets encourage them to live with the rest of the world in a scattered condition.

TWELFTH: False prophets do not bring people to God.

Since false prophets have never seen or talked to God, it is certain they can never show anyone else how to do so. The mission of a true prophet is to teach others how to enjoy the gifts, powers and personal manifestation of their Savior, Jesus Christ. True prophets tell people how to get such revelations for themselves. False prophets, on the other hand, tell people they themselves will get all the necessary revelations. But Joseph Smith said;

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. (T.P.J.S., p. 324)

And President Brigham Young added:

“Without revelation direct from heaven, it is impossible for any person to understand fully the plan of salvation.... I say that the living Oracles of God, or the Spirit of revelation, must be in each and every individual, to know the plan of salvation and keep in the path that leads them to the presence of God.” (Disc. of Brigham Young, p. 58)

(NOTE: He gives the definition of "living oracles" as being the spirit of revelation--it is not man.)

God also has given many reasons for men to receive direct revelation from Him, but the foremost reason was "That every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world." (D. & C.

1:20)

President Heber C. Kimball prophesied that a testing time was coming when men could not simply put their trust in their leaders to show them the way to God. He said:

“To meet the difficulties that are coming, it will be necessary for you to have a knowledge of the truth of this work for yourselves. The difficulties will be of such a character that the man or woman who does not possess this personal knowledge or witness will fall. *** The time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on borrowed light. Each will have to be guided by the light within himself.” (Life of Heber C. Kimball, pp. 460-61; also Golden Kimball, p. 365)

And President Joseph F. Smith said that particular testing time had arrived:

“The time has arrived in the history of this people when every Latter-day Saint must stand on his own responsibility as a tub stands on its own bottom; ...” (Truth 2:88; September 1903)

Since we are no longer tested with mobs, armies, crickets, famine, poverty, unjust laws, hostile Indians, etc., it is evident that we are undergoing another kind of test. The only test that we can ascertain now is [12] that of deception. Every member must assume the responsibility of receiving revelation for his own guidance. True prophets do not bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost on new members for guidance and then tell them to "follow the brethren."

THIRTEENTH: False prophets do not honor personal rights of freedom.

During the Dark Ages men were told by their ecclesiastical leaders that they must believe what they were told to believe or they would be punished. If members of the Church were suspected of believing something other than what the Church taught, they were told to sign prepared documents. These statements of belief had to be signed or they would suffer excommunication.

False prophets still use this mode of coercion and compulsion. However, those who use these wicked tactics are stripped of their priesthood, if they have any. (See D. & C. 121:37) Instead of opposing tyranny, they practice it. Free men can live by pure reason, the scriptures and the dictates of the Holy Ghost; but these things expose the false prophets. For this reason, phony prophets must dominate the thinking and beliefs of the people. The quickest and surest way to make men conform to their mandates is to force them to sign these prepared documents of belief. Sometimes they are brave enough to call them in privately and question them. But coercion and extortion of the mind is the false prophet's objective and his only defense.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning." (T.P.J.S. p. 313) He demonstrated this in the case of Peliah Brown who was called in by the High Council and questioned on his interpretations of the Bible:

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

doctrine. (D.H.C. 5:340)

True prophets respect the freedom of conscience. They affirm that the Spirit of God is the spirit of freedom. A true prophet will never enter into the sacred precincts of the mind; but a false prophet always does.

FOURTEENTH: False prophets are known by their fruits.

Jesus taught his disciples to judge a tree by its fruit. Rotten fruit, or a wicked society, reflects the kind of leadership that it comes from. A society filled with crime and corruption is a reflection upon the kind of leadership that either created it or else tolerates it. False prophets dwell in the midst of the wicked and the worldly. Their environment is identified by the same abominations as any other gentile city of Babylon. The crimes of murder, rape, adultery, robbery, dope addiction, add every other kind of corruption that plagues the rest of the nations, will also be found around false prophets. Even businesses, schools, entertainment, fashions, etc., are molded after the devil's gentile system. False prophets either do nothing, or can do nothing, to change it.

These worldly attributes were practically unknown in Salt Lake City for many years after they settled this valley. However, there has been a gradual change, as Joseph F. Smith noted many years ago.

There was a time when we could walk up and down the streets and tell by the very countenances of men whether they were Latter-day Saints, or not; but can you do it now? You cannot, unless you have greater discernment and more of the Spirit and power of God than I have. Why? Because many are trying as hard as they can to transform themselves into the very shape,

character and spirit of the world. (J.D. 11:310)

And things have gradually been getting worse, even since his day. In a speech by Eugene E. Campbell entitled "This Was the Place", in July 23, 1959, he observed:

Utah is rapidly succumbing to the wave of uniformity that has been growing in the nation. Our system of transportation, communication, our nation-wide T.V., radio, chain stores, packaged food, theater chains, clothing styles, are rapidly ending our uniqueness. We are no longer a peculiar people. ("Speeches of the Year," Extension Publications, p. 9)

By the fruits of Salt Lake City's society, it appears that false prophets have slipped in amongst us. Wolves in sheep's clothing have entered into the flock, and probably not with the Shepherd's permission.

True prophets seek for Zion. The definition was explained by the Lord who called His people Zion, "because they were of one heart, and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there were no poor among them." (Moses 7:18) Here in the Salt Lake Valley, it is evident that we are not all of one heart and mind; we certainly do not dwell in righteousness; and there are plenty of poor among us (spiritual and financial). Therefore, we are not in Zion. True prophets either lead the elect of God out of Babylon--or else manifest enough power and righteousness to change it into a Zion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to summarize these fundamentals, they are:

1. False prophets always teach infallibility.
2. False prophets teach and practice priestcraft.

3. False prophets place their teachings above the scriptures.
4. False prophets live by worldly standards.
5. False prophets contradict eternal doctrines of the Gospel.
6. False prophets try to be the mediator between man and Cod.
7. False prophets cannot say "Thus saith the Lord."
8. False prophets do not speak by power of the Holy Ghost.
9. False prophets do not enjoy the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
10. False prophets honor the laws of the land over the laws of God.
11. False prophets are wolves that scatter the sheep.
12. False prophets do not bring people to God.
13. False prophets do not honor personal rights of freedom.
14. False prophets are known by their fruits.

The principles the Gospel of Jesus Christ are eternal, everlasting and unchangeable. But how strange that men who follow a false prophet will raise their hand to sustain every change he makes in the unchangeable gospel. They condemn every other church for having made such blunders; but when their false prophet does it, then it becomes a divine proclamation. Every dispensation has claimed their leaders could never fail them, never lead them astray, and never introduce an apostate doctrine; but they all enjoyed the fruits of apostasy. In our dispensation, even Joseph Smith was warned that if he was not careful, he would fall. (See D. & C. 5:21; 35:18; 64:5-7; 93:47) Hence, we can certainly see the possibility of any other man being susceptible to the same temptations and weaknesses. The Prophet Joseph warned the Saints that such would happen when he declared:

And if any man preach any other Gospel than

that which I have preached, he shall be cursed; and some of you who now hear me shall see it, and know that I testify the truth concerning them. (Historical Record 7:548)

Also, Jesus warned His disciples that they, too, could fall. Even the possibility of the leader of the Church could fail in his duty:

And if shine eye which seeth for thee, him that is appointed to watch over thee to show thee light, become a transgressor and offend thee, pluck him out. It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God, with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. (Mark 9:46-47; Inspired Trans.)

The Savior never told the people to “follow Peter because he holds all the keys.” Peter had enough of his own weaknesses to cope with; he didn't need others to give him theirs. Besides, Jesus never forfeited His right of being the Good Shepherd to the flock.

Deception is one of the crucial instruments used by the devil, through his false prophets. But Joseph Smith gave many keys for the Saints to use if they were not mentally lazy or spiritually dead. If they will apply these keys, they can avoid the penalty and plight of the deceived. As already mentioned, Joseph said:

“A key: Every principle proceeding from God is eternal and any principle which is not eternal is of the devil.” (T.P.J.S., p. 181)

He also said that one of the signs of a false angel or prophet is "by his contradicting a former revelation." (TPJS, p. 215) Furthermore, "If there is no change of ordinances, there is no change of Priesthood." (TPJS, p. 158) Therefore, it follows that if there is a change of ordinances then there is a change, or loss, of the

Priesthood.

“It signifies, then, that the ordinances must be kept in the very way God has appointed; otherwise, their Priesthood will prove a cursing instead of a blessing.” (TPJS, p. 169)

The Prophet was very clear in his concern for the Latter-day Saints and he warned them:

“... do not betray the revelations of God, whether in Bible, Book of Mormon, or Doctrine and Covenants, or any other that ever was or ever will be given...lest innocent blood be found upon your skirts, and you go down to hell.” (TPJS, p. 156)

Putting trust in a false prophet is like the strange group of people that went searching after the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Lacking certain qualities in their own character, they sought for the Wizard to provide them. The Wizard was acclaimed to possess all the wonderful powers of the universe. In their vain delusion, they all went merrily down the yellow brick road to the Land of Oz. Finally they reached their destiny but fate revealed the Wizard to be a fake. He was, after all, a mortal man like themselves. What a disappointment! Their hopes, desires and efforts were dashed to pieces at the exposure.

However, the great Oz had some redeeming qualities not found in false prophets. He told them that the potentials for intelligence, courage, etc., were within themselves if they would only use and develop them. Luckily for them, it was not too late to learn that lesson.

How similar will be the story of those who trusted their salvation in the arm of some mortal, thinking that they could be exalted merely by following him. It was revealed to Joseph Smith that the Terrestrial

Kingdom was filled with people who were the "honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men." (D. & C. 76:75)

Like Esau of old, they will awaken to an everlasting sorrow that they were willing to be satisfied with a mess of pottage rather than the rich inheritance they could have had. For this reason the heathen gods of wood and stone are less dangerous than the false prophets who lead people into deception.

True prophets give people more spiritual advice than to paint their barns and fix their fences. Their whole objective is to move the people into establishing the Kingdom of God, building up a Zion, and redeeming the New Jerusalem.

Who then are the people who will avoid these calamities? The Lord said:

“For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived - verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day.” (D. & C. 45:57)

We also know that the day is coming when all the false prophets will be exposed for the Lord said:

“And they who are not apostles and prophets shall be known. And even the bishop, who is a judge, and his counselors, if they are not faithful in their stewardships shall be condemned, and others shall be planted in their stead.” (D. & C. 64:39-40)

In that day men will say to their fellowmen, "seek after God", instead of "follow the leader". Then we

will know that men are led by the Holy Ghost and are helping others to be led by the Holy Ghost. Those then who pilot the Old Ship Zion will also be led of God.

Sincerely,

Ogden Kraut

OWK/abw

cc: Members of the First Presidency and Quorum of Twelve Apostles

The Sanctity of Dissent

Originally delivered to the B. H. Roberts Society in Salt Lake City, Utah, on 13 May 1993.

I wish here to explain why I think dissent should be embraced by the church as holy—that is, inspired and ordained of God as necessary to the spiritual well-being of the church.

To dissent is to differ in sentiment or opinion, to disagree with the philosophy, methods, or goals of others, especially the majority. It is to withhold one's assent. Dissent is almost always disruptive. It can be dangerous, even violent. There exist forms of dissent as acceptable as casting a ballot, as provocative as crossing a boundary, as intolerable as terrorism or hate crimes. Moreover, the purposes of dissent may range from the sublimely noble to the utterly contemptible. Clearly, a community need not endure every manifestation of dissent.

Nevertheless, dissent, in its essence, is holy. Jesus himself was a dissenter, and this fact alone hallows dissent. "Think not," he said, "that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). The sword is asserted here not as a metaphor for physical violence, but as the cruciform symbol of opposition. The cutting edge of contrary opinion can divide a complacent community, challenging its received wisdom and settled opinions. Actual physical confrontation, though sometimes necessary, is not essential. The essence of dissent—that is, dissent stripped of any specific form or context—is the fundamental right to disagree and to express that disagreement. In this essay when I speak of dissent, I mean this essential freedom of opposition. In the first part of this essay I will discuss ten reasons why I believe

dissent is sacred; later I will show how dissent is further sanctified by the adoption of certain means and objectives.

Dissent is holy because without it there can be no consent. Consent is a voluntary meeting of the minds. It is the agreement of free individuals who share a perception of what is mutually beneficial or at least acceptable to them. Consent is meaningful only where dissent is permitted and protected. Consent draws its power from the possibility of dissent. Unless the consenting parties are free to dissent, their consent is without substance and pointless. Thus if dissent is proscribed, assent is illusory. Like a fascist election, it is a counterfeit—a fraud—because behind it there is no true accord. To eliminate dissent, then, is to curtail personal freedom, to forbid individuals from voicing their true opinions. It is to silence both their hopes and their fears. It is to force people to accept what they deem unacceptable, even harmful. By eliminating dissent, a community takes from its members the power to resist or contradict. It neutralizes opposition by abridging an individual's right to protest, to object, to cry out in pain. Such a system is a prison in which every act of kindness may be an exploitation; and every act of love, a rape.

Dissent is holy because it is the backbone of individual freedom, the freedom from arbitrary compulsion. Any proscription of dissent is an attack on this hallowed principle. Such attacks are being made by church leaders at all levels. The prevailing view of the current leadership is that we are free only to choose what is good. "After all," the argument goes, "the commandments are clear. There are prophets to guide us. Why be free, when you can be right?" This is the most succinct summation of the salvation plan of compulsion scripturally attributed to Satan as I ever expect to hear.

Goodness, however, does not result from obedience, even obedience to someone good. It results from spiritual transformation, a change of heart, a rebirth. Goodness is personal spiritual maturity. We

cannot mature spiritually if we are under compulsion, if we are required to yield to others the responsibility for our words and deeds. Goodness results from turning our hearts to God, from listening to the voice of God within our hearts, within the hearts of our family and friends, within the hearts of all the concerned members of our religious community. We cannot be free and slavishly follow a prescribed catechism. We cannot be organization men and women. We must work out our own salvation, not with smugness and certainty, but “with fear and trembling” (Philip. 2:12).

Dissent is holy because it is essential to salvation. Adam and Eve dissented in Eden as a necessary step toward spiritual growth. Christ’s dissent led him to the cross and beyond. A child dissents when he or she follows the scriptural admonition to “leave father and mother” (Gen. 2:24). An adult dissents whenever he or she exercises independent judgment or personal initiative. Jesus intended for us to dissent. He said,

I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. A man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me (Matt. 10:35-38).

Hard words from the Prince of Peace. They mean that essential to salvation is the sacred freedom to dissent from the wisdom of the group—the family, the church, the state—in order to be true to the wisdom of God. Easy to say. That is why so many find it easier simply to consent, even when consent is cajoled or coerced. Many such members are fond of saying of the church to their dissenting brothers and sisters: “Love it

or leave it.” These souls cannot accept the possibility that the church might be wrong, might be headed toward idolatry. But it can. It always has in the past. And it always will. The church is no purer than its members. It can sin. And it can also be corrected and improved, not just by leaders, but by members who take responsibility for its health, spirituality, and well-being. In defense of dissent, Brigham Young once said: “Now when I was an Elder I was as willing to correct an error in the Brethren as I am now. But the people do not see it so. Now if you should be with the 12 or anybody you would have a right to correct an error as well as with a member but you could not correct them by cutting them off from the church because they are over you in the priesthood” (in Wilford Woodruff’s journal, 2 June 1857, LDS archives). The Doctrine and Covenants urges every member to cry repentance to his or her generation. What is such a cry, but the voice of dissent?

Dissent is holy because it is the root of personal responsibility and spiritual maturation. Without dissent, self-determination is not possible. Only those who are free to disagree with the prevailing views of the group can learn the full implications of their personal views. Only those free to dissent can fully take part in the decision-making processes that shape their lives and destinies. Only they, by participating in the governing decisions of the group, can experience spiritual and intellectual development. For this reason, dissent is an indispensable component of every moral organization dedicated to the empowerment and salvation of the individual. A system that punishes dissent thwarts personal growth, perpetuates childishness, and promotes arrested adolescence. It will come, eventually, to value compliance and obedience above the personal sanctity of its members. In such a system individuals will be valued only if they repress their personal spiritual insights in the interest of conformity. Those who do not or cannot comply will be scapegoated or marginalized. Such a system will urge or even compel its members to live by

principles they do not truly value and to submit to values they do not truly accept. Inevitably such a system will become joyless and unforgiving in its denial of the truth. It will become evil.

Dissent is holy because it is essential to continuing, personal revelation. The most vital role of revelation is to initiate change, correction, reproof, not to reinforce the status quo. To eliminate dissent, then, is to risk silencing the “still small voice” of the holy spirit speaking to us the discourse of dissent. Though Mormonism is based on the concept of continuing revelation, the church does not accept God as dissenter, in spite of his incarnation as a rebellious rabbi. The argument against the sanctity of dissent goes like this: “The church is not a democracy. It is a theocracy. It is governed by God through his chosen prophets and apostles. When we sustain them, we give our consent, we agree to obey our leaders because they have been chosen by God and are inspired to know what is best for us.” This view contradicts the weight of scripture and religious experience. Prophets do not always speak as prophets. Prophecy is a spiritual gift, not an office. Contact with God is uncertain at best, even for the best of us. Jesus said, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Salvation and spirituality are like the wind—real but uncertain, powerful but outside human control. It is improper for the church to insist that our authorized leaders may be relied upon with certainty. This assertion wrongly suggests that members may rely upon the church and its leaders for salvation. But the church is not the source of salvation. The church is what needs to be saved. Salvation is God’s work, not our work. In scripture God states emphatically, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of [men and women]” (Moses 1:39).

Unfortunately, divine salvation seems fairly unpredictable to many of us. We long for certainty, for security, for safety. And the institutional church is all too willing to assume the burden of providing these. Individuals are encouraged to follow the Spirit in the process of conversion or reactivation; but once in the fold, they are told to “follow the Brethren.” Inspiration and revelation are then limited to the variety that confirms that leaders are right or, even if wrong, that they are to be obeyed. In this way, the church establishes itself as the principle agent of salvation and in doing so contravenes such warnings as: “Trust not in the arm of flesh” (D&C 1:19), and “I am the Lord thy God... thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:2-3). The church cannot substitute for the Spirit of God, because the church has no divine power to heal us, forgive us, redeem us, resurrect us, exalt us, or fill us with the love that is stronger than the cords of death. The church does, of course, have a divine role: to encourage repentance and forgiveness, to mitigate fear, foster faith, raise hope, and promote charity. But it can do this only if it permits dissent. If it prohibits dissent, it will undercut its divine role and relegate itself to the profane business of hawking self-improvement schemes and motivating material success. Its main mission will be limited to the production of respectable citizens who make good employees rather than Saints, and fine family members rather than friends of God.

Mormonism without dissent is what Hugh Nibley calls “world’s fair Mormonism,” what Michael Quinn calls, “cookie cutter Mormonism,” and what I call “McMormonism, or fast food Mormonism.” The McMormon church favors sin avoidance over repentance, purity over holiness, and morality over mystery. Preachments focus on safety— safety from the “thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to” (Hamlet III, i, 62-63), safety from the very experiences of life that, as premortal spirits, we are said to have been so anxious to encounter as essential to the attainment of

wisdom. By quashing dissent the modern church discourages members from relying on the voice of the Spirit in their hearts and encourages them to rely on idols, both sacred and secular, both living and dead.

Dissent is holy because it is an antidote to idolatry. The essence of idolatry is to mistake the part for the whole, to see as simple what is complex. The divine nature is whole and dynamic, while the symbols, texts, rituals, and myths of the divine are, in comparison, incomplete and static. When the corporate church fixes the attention of its members on these lesser constructs rather than the greater, it begins to distance them from authentic worship. When this happens, the voice of God is muted in the ecclesiastical institution, but it continues to speak a discourse of dissent through the church's loyal critics. The prohibition of dissent in such times facilitates idolatry. It stimulates the adulation of authority, priesthood, church affiliation, theology, scripture, rules, and traditions rather than the worship of God. Brigham Young said:

What is commonly termed idolatry has arisen from a few sincere men, full of faith and having a little knowledge, urging upon a backsliding people to preserve some customs—to cling to some fashions or figures, to put them in mind of that God with whom their fathers were acquainted... Idols have been introduced ... to preserve among the people the idea of the true God (Journal of Discourses 6:194).

Idolatry is the invention of well-meaning persons attempting to preserve some semblance of faith. It is often promoted in the name of spiritual certitude or purity. But a truly religious life is not one of certainty, security, or safety. No fixed patterns or formulas were meant to work for everyone. The spiritual journey is tailor-made for the individual taking it. It is through the instrumentality of dissent that idolatry is contradicted, the personal dimension of religion restored, and the right of each individual to worship God according to the dictates of his or her own conscience preserved.

Dissent is holy because it gives sight to the blind. A system that proscribes dissent blinds itself. There are many kinds of sight: foresight, insight, hindsight. Perhaps the most valuable is ironic sight. Usually, we think of irony as sarcasm, but it has a broader literary meaning: irony is the technique of seeing or communicating two or more meanings in a single utterance. In a religious context ironic vision is the vision that sees simultaneously the natural and the supernatural, the spiritual and the physical, the sacred and the profane, the cosmic and the mundane, that sees in a symbol, event, or experience various levels of meaning at once, that sees ourselves as others see us. Ironic vision allows us to escape the prison of our egos and view our lives and relationships from new and differing perspectives. To see ourselves as we are seen by those who employ us and whom we employ, by those who depend on us and on whom we depend, by those who teach and learn from us, who lead and follow us, who love and hate us. To see from these shifting perspectives is probably one of the most repentance-inducing experiences any individual can have. This may be the greatest, if not least valued, of the spiritual gifts.

A religious system that proscribes dissent, that requires its members to accept the party-line on all important questions contrary to their true feelings, robs its members of ironic vision. Introspection will become more and more difficult. Individuals will find themselves increasingly unable to see the world, their organization, themselves, or their relationships from the vantage point of other members or of non-members of their group. Specifically, without ironic vision in the church, individual Mormons will not be inclined to ask important questions: How is the LDS church in its second century like the Christian church in its second century? How is the current leadership and membership of the church responsible for the continued practice of polygamy by Mormon fundamentalists? How do others view us when we brag about our living prophet, and then

show them the actual condition of the president of the church? What does the church look and feel like from the point of view of a conservative? a widow? a survivalist? a bishop? a divorcee? a troubled teenager? a homosexual? a high councilor? an apostle? an apostle's wife? In the absence of dissent, members will have little impetus to ask: What are the church's problems? What causes those problems? What must be done to eliminate those problems? The Old Testament proverb states: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). Dissent is crucial to this very vision.

Dissent is holy because it can also heal institutional blindness. In the New Testament, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of blindness as if it were a sin (Matt. 23). I used to be confused by this denunciation. Why should Jesus treat blindness as sin? Blindness is a sin when it is self-inflicted by those who do not wish to see the sins they have committed or enabled, who do not wish to see their own pain and suffering, or the pain and suffering they have caused others. This type of blindness is denial. It is the ultimate mechanism of control to which abusers retreat when their abuses are exposed. Self-inflicted blindness may be institutionalized. Institutions do this by punishing truth telling and rewarding the denial or repression of truth. This cannot happen in an institution, unless there exist individual leaders willing to enforce such punishments and rewards.

How are such accomplices identified and empowered in the church? By the following mechanism: First, the leadership of the church must be stratified into descending classes of power: First Presidency, Council of the Twelve, First Quorum of Seventy, right down to the bishops and quorum presidents. Then rules, spoken and unspoken, must be developed to govern each of these groups and, more importantly, an individual's advancement from one of these groups to another. If an individual is to move into a higher strata of leadership—with its increased power, privileges, and tenure—he

must demonstrate not only obedience to all church policies, but political correctness and acumen in recognizing and submitting to the personal views of the top brass. To advance one must “anticipate counsel,” to use the phrase of one general authority. Thus only the truly correlated may ascend to the inner circles of leadership, with all their benefits and rewards. The system ensures that only those juniors who have become faithful replicas of their seniors will participate in the most important decisions of the leadership elite.

This is precisely the system that was employed by Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev to ensure the stability of communism in the Soviet Union. For this reason, I refer to this system in Mormonism as the Brezhnevization of the church. Its problem, however, is that it not only screens out the uncorrelated and undesirable, it also screens out the capable and creative. In the Soviet Union, the leadership became incapable of responding to the needs of the people or of the group. Corruption and incompetence crippled the country. The leadership responded to criticism by becoming evermore rigid and authoritarian. Finally, compelled by desperate circumstances, the leadership had no other choice than to make concessions. This was like putting a crack in an already weakened and swollen dam. The internal pressures caused a breach and a flood that no amount of renewed authoritarianism could avert or contain. The problem with rewarding consent and punishing dissent is that it causes self-inflicted blindness that deprives the institution of vision, ironic or otherwise. Dissent is holy because it is, perhaps, the only corrective to institutional blindness, the only means of giving to its blind members insight, foresight, and hindsight into perspectives to which their minds would otherwise be closed. Dissent is holy because, even if the blind refuse to see, its purpose is to prepare against the hour of disaster, when the blind lead the blind into a ditch.

Dissent is holy because it is the foundation of peace. Though the principal reason for the elimination of

dissent is to avoid discord and disruption, the elimination of dissent does not promote peace. Instead, the absence of dissent is evidence of unspoken turmoil hidden by repression, suppression, or oppression. Yes, dissent is noisy. And some feel dissent should be silenced in the interest of tranquility. But tranquility is not peace. Silence is not peace. In fact, silence when imposed by the strong on the weak is one of the most efficient mechanisms of control. The first act of physical, sexual, or spiritual abusers is to silence their victims. Real peace is based on freedom, authenticity, and love. These cannot flower in the inhospitable climate of suppression and repression. We should not listen to those who cry “peace, peace,” when there is no peace—when peace is merely a euphemism for subjugation. The Book of Mormon admonition, “Wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion! Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!” (2 Ne. 28:24-25), warns us to avoid confusing peace with its counterfeits: politeness, pseudo-community, feigned love, and the comfortable familiarity of the status quo.

Dissent is holy because it safeguards the community from self-destruction. To eliminate dissent is to doom the organization. Unless the discourse of dissent is permitted, protected, and encouraged, an organization has no way to test the adequacy of its decisions to meet the problems of the group. It has no way to assure that its policies accord with spiritual truth, with natural reality, or with the needs of its members. Only by allowing dissent to be expressed and to accumulate support on the basis of merit alone can a group be assured that its decisions are made in light of the experience of all its concerned members rather than the limited experience of its leadership enclave. Of course, there are [p.145]problems with democratic governance. The majority almost never has the technical knowledge possessed by an expert minority; and the wisdom of the majority is by no means infallible. This is precisely the point. What is necessary to protect the community from both the wrongheadedness of the multitude and the

narrow-mindedness of the elite is a courageous and loyal opposition. When the wisdom of the many and the prudence of the few fail, an organization is most likely to find the vitality and vision to survive in the voices of its dissenting members.

Let me now discuss briefly seven means and objectives that can add to the sanctity of dissent: Dissent is hallowed when its objective is the eradication of evil. Many of us do not believe in evil. Or if we do we see it as only illusory or superficial. Many do not believe in evil people, evil groups, or evil systems. This view informed England prior to World War II. Many Britons believed Hitler was not evil, merely misunderstood, and that it was possible to make peace with him. This view obtained even after the Anschluss of Austria, the attack on Czechoslovakia, and the invasion of Poland. For those who do not believe in evil, there seems little justification for dissent. The holiest dissent, with all its discord and cantankerousness, is asserted to oppose evil, to expose evil, to resist evil. I believe in the reality of evil. But, for me, evil is something quite specific: it is the persistent or systematic abuse of power by the strong to the detriment of the weak. Evil in this sense can corrupt individuals and institutions. The church is not exempt. Within its divinely authorized structures, evil can and does manifest itself as spiritual abuse, which I have defined and discussed in other places.

Evil must not be confused with one's personal sins. I am not here calling for personal perfection in leaders or in members. I understand that everyone is susceptible to foolishness, bad judgment, contrariness, selfishness, and sin. These are not the issue. They should not be confused with spiritual abuse. Spiritual abuse is systemic. It is a sin of relationship. It is a community sin. Church leaders who commit spiritual abuse do so not simply because they are imperfect, but because they hold a false concept of authority which is shared by the membership. When church leaders perpetrate spiritual abuse, it is only because church members enable them to

do so. Let me emphasize that it is dangerous to permanently stigmatize any person or institution as evil. This too is an abuse. Notwithstanding, it is critical to see that the heart of darkness, the soul of evil, is the deliberate perpetuation and exploitation of powerlessness by the strong, often with the complicity of the weak. The antidote to such unhallowed control is the sanctity of dissent.

Dissent is further sanctified when its substance is truth. Truth telling is the holiest discourse of dissent. But truth telling is hard. We do not deal in truth directly. We deal in shifting perceptions of truth. Our knowledge, whether attained by study or by faith, whether sacred or secular, is incomplete, limited, inaccurate, and flawed. We see through a glass darkly. Different people see the same events and hear the same words differently. Intentions are often misunderstood. The same facts give rise to differing conclusions depending upon one's assumptions, convictions, intentions, and expectations. Each of us is flawed and often disposed to manage or mismanage the truth in our own interest. In the hands of controlling people, truth becomes a terrible weapon.

For all these reasons, authentic truth-tellers must first search their own hearts for and rid themselves of any inclination to be self-serving, or to perpetuate or exploit the weak, even if the weak seem to deserve it, even if the weak have the outward appearance of being strong. Truth telling requires us to face and admit our own weaknesses, shortcomings, and sins. As truth tellers we must be willing to reveal our own lack of knowledge, flawed logic, faulty intuitions, misunderstandings, inexperience, fears, doubts, fantasies, false hopes, egotistical dreams, and uninformed or unsettled opinions. We must be willing to confess the abuses we have perpetrated or enabled and to acknowledge how we have been controlled, compelled, and dominated by others. We must make these disclosures at the proper level of abstraction. It will not do for us to reveal the

abuses of others with great specificity and then to relate our own with great generality.

In other words, we must not only be forthright but even-handed, not only factually accurate but intellectually honest. Our motives and agendas must be clear. We cannot allow ourselves to hide our hurt, our pain, our anger behind facades of composure and value neutral rhetoric. Disinformation and nondisclosure merely postpone the moment of truth. If we wish to tell the truth, we must be willing to make fools of ourselves, rather than to cover our sins, gratify our pride, and deflect humiliation. Our stories must be without melodrama, without romantic excess, without flawless characters, without deceptions. We must accept that, as truth tellers, we will often appear politically incorrect and less astute than our opponents.

Our dissent is further sanctified when we take seriously the views of others. Dissent, if it is to be effective, must follow the golden rule. It must treat others as it would be treated. It must listen, even when its opposition is unpleasant, confused, discordant, and controlling. We cannot be like those in the free-speech movement of the 1960s who, in the interest of the cause of free speech, suppressed the speech of their opponents. Listening is not easy. There is always the temptation to stop listening, to be defensive, to protect ourselves, to anticipate rejection by rejecting others first. Dissent does not allow us to withdraw from others. Dissent is to criticize, not to trivialize. True dissent is not possible if we associate only with those who are like us, who comfort us, who tell us what we want to hear. We cannot truly dissent if we cease to hear our loyal opposition. Dissent is holiest when it treats the views of others as it wishes its own views to be treated.

Dissent is further sanctified when it promotes genuine community. By telling truth and listening to truth, we come to terms with our own experiences of abuse and the experiences of others; we breakdown facades; we take responsibility for our personal and our

community shadows. Through dissent we provide each other with the common bread of authenticity and the common cup of charity. However, to take responsibility is not to take blame. No person can assume the culpability for the freely chosen beliefs, acts, and words of others. Those who do will invariably try to impose righteousness to avoid this vicarious guilt. Too many church leaders think this way. But leaders are not responsible for the wrongs of members; nor can members avoid personal responsibility by blindly following leaders. We are, however, all responsible for the well-being of the church.

Such responsible dissent possesses the spiritual power to awaken consciousness, raise awareness, create paradigms, alter opinions, heal wounds, and bring wholeness and holiness to our community. But it must be remembered that dissent raises the stakes. It is by nature confrontational. Even when carefully and artfully advanced, truth telling and dissent are usually not well-received. One of the recurring mistakes of my life has been my silly belief that I would somehow endear myself to others by telling them what I believe to be the truth. Jesus, however, did not say that the truth would make us well-liked. He said that “the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). What he did not say was that it would first make everybody madder than hell.

But this is just another reason why dissent is holy: it fosters accountability. To tell the truth is to call to account, to call to repent. This is unpleasant business. It invites reciprocity. It invites calls to repentance to be levelled in return. When this happens, we must listen to each other. If we do not, we risk entering a vicious cycle of mutual distrust and backbiting that will postpone healing. Confrontation is often necessary to break this vicious cycle, especially if abusive individuals respond to calls to account with denial, with self-inflicted blindness. In such instances, confrontation is to dissenters what a scalpel is to a surgeon: it inflicts the wounds that heal. Nevertheless, hurt feelings may be

lessened if our call is not petty, trivial, or mean-spirited—if the discourse of dissent is not directed against personal short-comings, petty sins, and pet peeves—but in favor of liberty and love and against the perpetuation or exploitation of powerlessness.

Dissent is sanctified when it is sacrificial, tactful, hopeful, charitable, clear, courageous, and grace-filled. Jesus cautioned us to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. Those church members who dissent vocally or publicly must be prepared for criticism and censure, for accusations of impurity, impiety, and impropriety, for charges of unchristianlike conduct and apostasy. They must be prepared to lose their temple recommends, to be disfellowshipped, and to be excommunicated. Let there be no mistake, these are highly punitive actions which, if not administered with the utmost care and the utmost consideration for fairness and due process, become acts of abuse and even violence. Nevertheless, when these abuses come, dissent is made holier if abused dissenters do not become heartless, reckless, or cruel; if they face abuse without returning abuse; if they remain fair and forthright in the face of denial; if they rely on the inner strength and authorization of the Holy Spirit when abandoned by family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, fellow members and when threatened with the loss of jobs, careers, and financial security. Clearly, dissent is not for everyone, nor is it necessary that everyone dissent. For this reason, too, dissent is holy: it is a spiritual vocation. Not all are called. But those who are will probably not find peace or spiritual fulfillment in any other way.

There is one more reason I believe dissent to be holy. It is, perhaps, the most important of all. I will make my point with a story: In 1412, there was born to French peasants of Domremy-a-Pucell, a girl—Jeanne to the French, Joan to us. When she was twelve, she began to see and hear in vision St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret. In 1429, during the Hundred Years' War, just when the English were about to capture Orleans, Joan

was exhorted by these heavenly beings to save France. She presented herself to the king and a board of theologians approved her claims. At the age of seventeen and with no experience of combat, she—clad in armor, mounted on a charger, and holding aloft a white banner emblazoned with the fleur-de-lis (the symbol of God's grace)—led the French in battle after battle to a stunning and decisive victory against the English. At the dauphin's coronation she held the place of honor beside him. Later, King Charles withdrew his support for further campaigns, but Joan continued, engaging the English at Compiègne, near Paris. There, captured by Burgundian soldiers, she was sold to the English, who turned her over to an ecclesiastical court at Rouen to be tried for heresy and sorcery. She underwent fourteen months of interrogation. She was accused of consorting with demons, of wearing a man's apparel, and of insubordination. But her most seditious crime, her most heinous sin was that she believed that she was directly responsible to God and not to the Catholic church. She penitently confessed herself a sinner and was sentenced to life imprisonment rather than to death. But once in prison, she set aside the counsels of the church and, in direct response to the revelations of God, resumed wearing men's clothes. For this she was condemned as a relapsed heretic and, on the 30th day of May of 1431, in the Old Market Square of Rouen, Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. Twenty-five years later, the church retried her case and proclaimed her innocent. In 1920 she was canonized St. Joan by Pope Benedict XV. Dissent is holy because it requires us to be ultimately responsible not to any earthly power, but to God directly.

I know that what I am saying now will not touch some of you. Some have lost faith in Mormonism. Some have no faith in spiritual callings or religious ideals. The pain and disillusionment have been too great. I have no judgment for you. I hope you have none for me. But the current state of our faith does not matter. God, whose grace is sufficient for us, can raise even our lost faith

from the dead. What matters now is that we acknowledge to ourselves the evil and abuse that are occurring all around us in our community; that we accept that the heartache of its victims is real; that their pain is real; that in our church the dysfunction, the breakdown of faith, the loss of hope, the rejection of love are all real; and that real, too, is the long litany of our community sins: pride, compulsion, egotism, and fear.

Earlier, I said that the sword is the cruciform symbol of dissent against cruelty, corruption, unhallowed control, against denial, false peace, and forced silence. Jesus spoke the discourse of divine dissent against such evils in history.

The Holy Ghost continues in the present to speak this same discourse in the hearts of many of us. Those who hear that voice, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, must give up all hope of banal material success, must take up—not the sword—but the cross and, like St. Joan, find sanctuary in the sanctity of dissent.

Honoring the Truth-Teller

Dr. Roger W. Sapp

The Meaning of Truth / Leaders Need Truth in Proportion to Influence / Recognizing the Truth in Different Packages / Actions and Attitudes Reveal Values / Speaking the Truth Wisely

The Greek word that is translated truth in the New Testament is a very powerful and meaningful word. It is alethia. The a (alpha) at the beginning of a Greek word often means that it is a negation of the rest of the Greek word. For instance, the English word atheist comes from a- theos which means literally no god. In the case of alethia the literal meaning of this word is nothing hidden. This means that the phrase found in Scripture that describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth literally would be the Spirit who allows nothing to be hidden. Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words defines this Greek word that is translated as truth as meaning: The reality lying at the basis of an appearance, the manifested, veritable essence of a matter. This definition should inform us that the Spirit of Truth is always working to move us as believers beyond the appearance of a person, a matter or an organization to discover its reality and essence.

The Bible speaks a great deal about the value of truthfulness in relationships. The subject of reproof in Scripture is a good example of this. Only the fool and the wicked man according to Proverbs cannot hear godly reproof. Reproof is always the truth as someone else sees it. Consider King David's words about his need for those around him to speak to him truthfully from their perspective: "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head..." (Psalm 141:5) Our responsibility to hear the truth from

individuals around us grows in proportion to the sphere of our influence. The larger the influence, the more we need people around us to speak their perception of the truth to us and the less likely they are to do it. Leaders must teach and emphasize truthfulness or they will more likely get affirmation from their subordinates rather than truthfulness.

The leader must also recognize truth when it comes. It seldom will come in a nice package and identify itself as truth. Truth can come to us in the form of the unflattering opinions of others, angry words, criticisms and even slander. The speakers will almost always see themselves as telling the truth. As King David said in the passage above, sometimes the truth-teller will smite us. Nearly all of these kinds of smiting events will have an element of truth that needs to be discerned. The leader who is insecure will not glean the truth about himself and his organization from these uncomfortable truth events and can dishonor the person seeking to tell the truth. Embraced truth will set us free no matter what package it comes in.

The leader who verbally encourages truthfulness must be prepared to continue his instruction when he actually gets truthful feedback from his subordinates. If the feedback comes in one of these uncomfortable packages, if he is not careful, he may shut down the flow of information to him by his response. If he acts insecure, angry or quietly withdraws from that person, he teaches by his actions that he does not value truthfulness. In other words, value systems are always observable in the behavior of leaders. For instance, if the leader judges the input of the truth-teller by how well he or she offered that input, the leader will receive decreasing truthfulness from those around him. He has taught by his attitudes and behavior that truthfulness is not valued. If individuals around him must earn the right to speak the truth to him by proven loyalty, he is training and producing subordinate leaders that will value loyalty over the truth. Leaders who have been trained this way

will speak very little truth to him and confuse affirmation with truthful feedback. Neither will they honor the truth-teller when he speaks to them.

Because the truth is often difficult to hear, it is necessary for those who feel responsibility to speak truth to do it as wisely as possible. Failure to do this insures that we will not spiritually grow up. The Bible connects our spiritual growth with speaking the truth. It tells us that speaking must be out of the motive of love. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ...” (Ephesians 4:15) This means that the truth-teller must have sincere concern for the person and organization that he is speaking to. This is where truth telling becomes an expression of love. In the military, the value system of officers says that they should speak the truth to their commanders. However, there is also a value that says loyalty to the leader means that you speak to him in a way that does not embarrass the leader or damage his reputation within the military organization. Normally, that means that confrontational truth is spoken in private and with proper military courtesy. Conversely, the commander has the responsibility to hear the truth no matter how poorly it was spoken by the subordinate. This requires him to be secure in himself and to earnestly desire the truth from his subordinates. The reaction of the commander to the subordinate’s truth-telling will teach the subordinate whether or not he can continue to speak the truth to this particular commander. The same thing is true in the Church and all organizations. Leaders must love the truth, even when it smites them, and appreciate the truth-teller if they want all their subordinates to continue keeping them properly informed. Leaders of local churches and all organizations of the Church must allow subordinates the right to speak the truth as they see it. They must maintain a value system that honors the person seeking to tell the truth. They must not see truth-telling as disloyal behavior. Failure to do this will produce serious

hidden problems within the organizations of the Church and make the truthful person an outcast. This cannot be what the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit who allows nothing to be hidden desires in the churches and organizations of the Kingdom of God.

Part 2

Values Produce Predictable Behavior / Reactions of Different Abused Groups / Not Valuing Truth Results in Blindness / Different Values and Expectations

Prior to 1993, I was an active duty Army Chaplain. During that season in my life, I taught leadership skills to officers and non-commissioned officers in leadership retreats as a part of my ministry. I often used management games to teach these leaders about leadership. In one management game called "Powerplay", a scenario is created where these leaders were arbitrarily divided into groups by virtue of winning in a trading scenario. The winning group is then given authority over the other groups. The winning group is given the right to make the rules for future trading and to dictate these rules to the other groups. Without exception, the group that has the authority always begins to make rules to keep its authority and to benefit it as a group in trading. Given enough time the winning group will begin to clearly abuse the other groups. This group will justify its behavior on the basis of winning the earlier portion of the game and by virtue of having the authority.

In those retreats where non-commissioned officers (sergeants) were involved, the sergeants would allow themselves to be abused. Their overriding value was loyalty to the authority no matter what transpired or how unfairly they were treated. They were unhappy and grumbled among themselves during the abuse but did not do anything productive to deal with it. They offered no feedback, no confrontation, and no truth from their

perspective to the abusive group of sergeants. This was characteristic of nearly all the sergeants that I played this game with. This revealed that their values were highly loyal but truthfulness was weak as a value. (Of course, there were a few exceptional sergeants that would have been better officers by nature.) The reactions of the officers in the officer leadership retreats were entirely different. As the group of officers who abused them became more abusive, the officers became increasingly active and alert to their responsibility to deal with the unfair situation. They offered feedback that was largely ignored. They devised strikes; in other words, they withdrew and would not cooperate with the abusive authority. They often tried to continue to confront the abusive group. They tried to negotiate a more just situation. In nearly all cases, the group in authority would become increasingly authoritarian and created more rules strictly for their own benefit and to keep the rebels in line. The abusive group would often say that the other officer groups were not playing fair when they rebelled, withdrew or failed to cooperate. In other words, the group with the authority became blind to their abuse and blamed the abused groups for withdrawing and not wanting to play the game anymore.

Blindness is characteristic of organizations and leaders that do not value truthfulness in their relationships. This is because truth telling has been stifled in a loyalty-based organizations or individuals. Because there is no honest feedback, they will often be blind to their abusive behavior and honestly wonder why others are reacting. There will be no one to tell them that it is wrong to shift the blame for difficulties in the relationships to the victims of their abusive behavior. The value of truth is what keeps a local church or any organization from becoming like a cult. Honoring the truth-teller is a characteristic of godly relationships. Dishonoring the truth-teller is a characteristic of cults. Cultic behavior, which always includes blindness, will result from an overemphasis of loyalty above the truth.

Leaders must understand that their own desire for loyalty may overcome truthfulness in their subordinates. They must actively cultivate truthfulness along with loyalty in their subordinates.

This game also revealed that different kinds of people have different values and expectations. Commissioned Officers are taught in the military that proper submission means that they will speak to the superior officer with courage and candor (truthfulness) about organizational problems. Officers who will not confront their commander when necessary are poor excuses for leaders. Commanders who will not hear the honest, truthful input of their subordinates without penalty are poor commanders. The officer type of leader expects to be treated well by other leaders. He expects his input to be valued and genuinely considered. When the behavior of an organization and its primary leaders do not match the officer type leader's values, he will withdraw or try negotiation. If the negotiation fails, he will leave the organization and move on, similar to an officer resigning his commission. The officer type of leader will want to fix the organization's larger problems and will not ordinarily be silent about them. If the organizational values lean too far to loyalty and not enough on truthfulness, this type of leader will often be seen as not being a team player and be penalized by being privately labeled as such. As a result the organization may lose this valuable leader as he discovers the truth of how the organization actually sees him. The sergeant type of leader will remain loyal to a fault. He will adjust to the problems and not necessary ever speak truthfully to the organization. There is nothing wrong with this type of person; in fact, they are greatly needed in all organizations. However, in unhealthy organizations, the sergeant type of leader is valued above the officer type of leader. The officer type of person can help an organization to deal with its problems and therefore grow. If an organization creates an atmosphere for genuine honesty and truthfulness, it

will attract many of the officer types of persons and will be able to keep them. It will not lose its sergeant types either. In fact, the sergeant type of leader will be much happier since problems will be dealt with. Loyal and truthful leaders will ensure that the Church will be prepared to meet the One who declared Himself to be the way, the truth, and the life.

Part 3

When Loyalty Overcomes Truthfulness / Truth-Tellers are Unappreciated / Unintentional Training of Subordinates / Maintenance of a False Righteousness / Revolving Door Organizations / Key Leaders in Crisis / Reputation Saturation Points / Sincere Relationships in the Church

Loyalty and truthfulness are two covenant values that must be held in tension against one another. Loyalty binds us together. The truth sets us free. If one value is emphasized over the other, then serious problems develop and both values will become distorted. If loyalty is overemphasized, then only affirmation will be given and heard as feedback. If truth telling is practiced without love and without loyalty, it does not build but tears down. If truthfulness is considered a fundamental component of loyalty, then the organization will be built on integrity. If loyalty is considered a fundamental component of truthfulness, then the organization will have true unity. Often in an organization, whether it is the local church, a business, a denomination, or a fellowship of churches, loyalty becomes the overriding value and begins to overcome truthfulness. This is often revealed in private words, actions and attitudes rather than the official position of the organization. The leaders of an organization may say that they value truthfulness but reveal in their actions that this is not really so. There are several predictable results when this happens:

Individuals who strongly value honesty and truthfulness are unappreciated, and often rejected as disloyal. Some people are particularly oriented to truthfulness and may be seen as not being team players by those who highly value loyalty. This may create a value conflict in the organization between the truth-tellers and those who highly prize loyalty. The loyalty value normally wins over truthfulness in these kinds of situations because those in authority will often value loyalty over truthfulness. When the loyalty value wins over truth, it often takes the form of a suppression of free expression, particularly dissent. This does not make the elements of truth in dissent go away; truth will surface again and again in different, even more destructive forms, until it is dealt with properly. This is precisely why political tyrants are unable to completely silence free expression and why they feel the need to silence it. The truth will find a way to express itself simply because it is the truth and God stands behind it.

Every time loyalty wins over truthfulness, loyal individuals are unintentionally trained by the leadership to hide the truth or to put an organizational spin on it. Truthful individuals are trained that they are not really welcome. Perceptions are created that success and promotion in the organization comes by telling the leadership what they want to hear rather than the truth. Loyal yes men can seem to become valued over those who have strong individual integrity and truthfulness.

The loyalty-based local church or any organization can defend its righteousness at a high cost to the reputation of individuals. Often the organization fails to deal with its failures in a scriptural way. Instead the organization may blame its failures on the person it failed, even unfairly damaging the person's reputation. The truth is sacrificed to the need of the organization to maintain a false appearance of not making any serious mistakes. Organizational problems are defended when they are brought to light by distorting the truth by putting an organizational spin on it. In contrast, the

balancing value of truth persuades all Kingdom organizations to repent, confess their failures, fix their problems and seek forgiveness of the persons that they failed. When failures are handled in a godly way, grace, forgiveness and mercy flow into relationships and healing occurs. When the organization defends its failures at the cost of the reputation of individuals, then it becomes a revolving door type of organization.

Weakness in the value of truthfulness produces a revolving door type of organization over a period of time. Individuals come into the organization, then after perceiving the truth, they try to adjust the organization or adjust to the organization. Often after becoming disillusioned by the reality, they leave the organization. Those who do stay long-term within the organization may also prize loyalty above truth. However, because problems are hidden and often neglected, they create hidden turmoil and strife for these people as well. Hidden disunity becomes a way of life for the loyal members of the organization. They tolerate each other for the sake of the organization. Only open conflict is considered disunity after a time.

The revolving door organization becomes a house of cards over a period of time because of hidden problems and disunity. A key leader may have a profound dealing from the Spirit of Truth and wake up to the seriousness of the organization's hidden problems. This can create a destructive crisis between leaders as a key leader begins to speak the truth in a loyalty-based organization. Truth must be highly valued or the integrity of an organization becomes weakened and cannot maintain its membership. Loyalty alone cannot keep an organization together. Truth will always be necessary for long-term success.

The reputation of the organization will begin to suffer for failure to listen to the truth. Many people will come through the revolving door over a period of time. They will know the details of the problems of the organization and the organization's capacity to hide or to

put a spin on them. They may have become embittered by the organization sacrificing their reputations to maintain its own. The organizational growth stops and begins a long and steady decline because of reaching a reputation saturation point with many people speaking badly about the organization's treatment of individuals and failure to deal with problems. The loyalty-based organization, however, will be blind to the real reasons for its decline. This is because it has few truth-tellers anymore. Its spiritual eyes have been dishonored and are now gone. It will offer alternative explanations and shift the blame once again.

The concept of sincerity may be the best blend of the values of loyalty and truthfulness. A sincere person is a person who out of loyalty to God and others speaks the truth without mixture. The word sincere comes from the Latin word *sincerus*. It literally means without wax. This word comes from the time when the Romans were building great buildings using marble columns to support the weight of these monumental buildings. The builders would go to the marble cutters in the quarries and inspect the columns. The cutters would put wax in the cracks of columns to make them deceptively appear to be solid in order to sell them. The builders could only use the sincere columns to build with. The columns that were what they appeared to be, that were actually solid, without wax hiding cracks, were the only thing that would sustain the weight of the building. If a builder built a building using a column that lacked sincerity, the entire building could fall down. The parallels are evident. The Spirit of Truth needs sincere people to build the Church; people that value loyalty and truthfulness in harmony with each other.

The Prophet & Weakness

Joseph Smith was a man known for his physical strength, but also for the strength of his faith and his determination when persecuted and opposed. There was nothing about him that seemed weak. One of his friends recollected “He possessed a noble boldness and independence of character; ... his rebuke terrible as the lion;”⁸⁷ This does not sound like a man who was weak in any way. Yet Joseph would remind the Saints that although he was a prophet he was still a man.

Even though prophets are as human as we are it is not uncommon for the Saints to think of them as more advanced in many areas, and to presume they were selected by God because of this. To those who have made such an assumption it may come as a surprise that the Lord stated on more than one occasion that was because of Joseph’s weaknesses that he was chosen, as we can see from this revelation toward the end of the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant Joseph Smith, I am well pleased with your offering and acknowledgments, which you have made; for unto this end have I raised you up, that I might show forth my wisdom through the **weak things** of the earth.”⁸⁸

Here the Lord tells us that Joseph was raised up to show wisdom through the weak things of the earth. He wasn’t raised up through his own power or any special abilities he possessed, but because it was part of the Lord’s purposes. But, in case some might suppose that the weak things here spoken of are just others, the Lord makes it clear in another passage that He is selecting a weak instrument who was unlearned (as

87

88 D&C 124:1.

Joseph was called in prophecy⁸⁹) to bring forth the gospel:

“And there are none that doeth good except those who are ready to receive the fulness of my gospel, which I have sent forth unto this generation.

[13] Wherefore, I call upon the **weak things** of the world, those who are unlearned and despised, to thresh the nations by the power of my Spirit; [14] And their arm shall be my arm, and I will be their shield and their buckler; and I will gird up their loins, and they shall fight manfully for me; and their enemies shall be under their feet; and I will let fall the sword in their behalf, and by the fire of mine indignation will I preserve them.

[15] And the poor and the meek shall have the gospel preached unto them, and they shall be looking forth for the time of my coming, for it is nigh at hand—⁹⁰

This passage might seem to confirm the idea that Joseph, strengthened by God, was to raise up the weak (of which he was one). It tells us that as they rely on the Lord’s arm their enemies will be defeated. But the next part of the revelation lets us know who this revelation also extends to:

“And I have sent forth the fulness of my gospel by the hand of my servant Joseph; and in **weakness** have I blessed him; [18] And I have given unto him the keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed, even things which were from the foundation of the world, and the things which shall come from this time until the time of my coming, if he

89

90 D&C 35:12-15.

abide in me, and if not, another will I plant in his stead.”⁹¹

Joseph himself is blessed in his weakness, and warned what will happen if he is not faithful. But does this just mean that Joseph is classed amongst those that are weak? The first section of this book of revelations perhaps reveals it the most clearly:

“Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments; [18] And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—

[19] The **weak things** of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—

[20] But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; [21] That faith also might increase in the earth; [22] That mine everlasting covenant might be established;

[23] That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the **weak** and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers. [24] Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.

[25] And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; [26] And inasmuch as

they sought wisdom they might be instructed;
[27] And inasmuch as they sinned
they might be chastened, that they might
repent; [28] And inasmuch as they were
humble they might be made strong, and
blessed from on high, and receive knowledge
from time to time.”⁹²

Joseph was called as someone with weaknesses, even because of those weaknesses, to show what the Lord could do with what was weak, that through someone so weak he could still work such wonders, and that because of that weakness God’s power could be recognised, and others (including Joseph) could be humbled. Joseph recognised in his personal writings, sermons, and prayers that this was what the Lord was trying to teach him:

“Now hear the prayer of your unworthy brother in the new and everlasting covenant:-
O my God! Thou who hast called and chosen a few, through thy **weak instrument** by commandment ...”⁹³

“We are called to hold the keys of the mysteries of those things that have been kept hid from the foundation of the world until now. Some have tasted a little of these things, many of which are to be poured from heaven upon the head of babes; yea, upon the **weak**, obscure, and despised ones of the earth. Therefore we beseech you, brethren, that you bear with those who do not feel themselves more worthy than yourselves ...”⁹⁴

Why does the Lord choose such men? Of course

92 D&C 1:17-28.

93 Teachings p. 37.

94 Teachings p. 137.

all men sin and fall short, but a man who recognises his weakness and reliance upon God is one the Lord can work with. There is another reason, however, why such men are selected for high and holy office, as the Apostle Paul explains:

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: [2] Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. [3] And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.”⁹⁵

A man who has imperfections and recognises them and has experienced forgiveness can have compassion on those who also sin, and fail, and have foibles. It also shows us that if God can raise up such a man he can offer us the same advancement too, if we follow Him. As Lorenzo Snow recognized:

“I saw the imperfections in [Joseph Smith] ... I thanked God that He would put upon a man who had those imperfections the power and authority He placed upon him... for I knew that I myself had **weaknesses**, and I thought there was a chance for me... I thanked God that I saw these imperfections.”⁹⁶

Imperfections

One aspect to Joseph Smith’s first vision than many people are unaware of is that one of his primary purposes in going into the grove to pray was to seek for forgiveness for his youthful sins. He speaks most about

95 Hebrews 5:1-3.

96 Lorenzo Snow.

this in his earliest account:

“At about the age of twelve years my mind became seriously impressed with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul ... [*by his fifteenth year he was*] exceedingly distressed for I became convicted of my Sins ... I felt to mourn for my own **Sins** ... therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and to obtain mercy ... I Saw the Lord and he Spake unto me Saying Joseph [my son] thy Sins are forgiven thee. go thy [way] walk in my Statutes and keep my commandments.”⁹⁷

Most Latter-day Saints have already read a reference to this in the Doctrine and Covenants without realising it, written a couple of years previously, and now part of Section 20 of that book of scripture:

“After it was truly manifested unto this first elder that he had received a remission of his **sins**, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world; [6] But after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness;”⁹⁸

Verse 5 speaks of him receiving a remission of sins, then later falling back into temptations, followed by the visit of an angel. Later he wrote more about these circumstances:

“During the space of time which intervined

97 1832 account, excerpts.

98 D&C 20:5-6.

between the time I had the vision and the year eighteen hundred and twenty-three—having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends and to have treated me kindly, and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me—I was left to all kinds of temptations; and, mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors, and displayed the weakness of youth, and the foibles of human nature; which, I am sorry to say, led me into divers temptations, offensive in the sight of God. ...

29 In consequence of these things, I often felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections; when, on the evening of the above-mentioned twenty-first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all my **sins** and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one.”⁹⁹

This angel, Moroni, entrusted the plates of the Book of Mormon to Joseph four years later, once he had reached a level of understanding and maturity necessary to be ready to begin their translation. However, after translating the first 116 pages of the Book of Lehi he lent them out and they were lost. At that time the Lord reprimanded him for this and some associated sins:

“And behold, how oft you have **transgressed**

99 Joseph Smith History 1:28.

the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. [7] For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words—

[8] Yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble.

[9] Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall.

[10] But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work; [11] Except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift.”¹⁰⁰

Once Joseph became President of the Church he was no less warned of temptations, nor any less reprimanded for his mistakes. At that point he was not just in danger of losing the gift of revelation, but his position:

“And I have sent forth the fulness of my gospel by the hand of my servant Joseph; and in **weakness** have I blessed him;

[18] And I have given unto him the keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed, even things which were from the foundation of the world, and the things which shall come from this time until the time of my coming, if he abide in me, and

100 D&C 3:6-11, see D&C 5:21-22.

if not, another will I plant in his stead.”¹⁰¹

Our foibles and potential

Despite his imperfections - even his sins - the Lord chose him, and worked with him and through him. Could he do the same with and for us? The Lord tells us in the book of Ether that weakness itself serves a part in God’s plans for our lives:

“And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness; [27] And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

[28] Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness.¹⁰²

Weakness helps us maintain humility, and recognise our reliance upon God. It can also be turned to our advantage if we learn the lessons from it that God intends us too, and gain the strengths in response to it that God can help us to. *(The last line is interesting because it reminds us righteousness comes from God, not from us – He is the source of it.)*

Joseph was not alone in being a prophet with weaknesses, who had foibles and failings, who considered themselves inadequate in many ways, as the

101 D&C 35:17-18, see D&C 64:5-7.

102 Ether 12:26-28.

following passages show:

“Nevertheless, I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred. And now, if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh, I would excuse myself.”¹⁰³

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

[18] I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. [19] And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.¹⁰⁴

As with Joseph it is sometimes because of such weaknesses, at least in part, that the Lord calls such men:

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

[27] But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the **weak** things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; [28] And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought

103 1 Nephi 19:6.

104 2 Nephi 4:17-19.

things that are.”¹⁰⁵

The question is not whether we have weakness, which have, or whether we sin, which we all inevitably do. The real question is what do we do in response to this? It is interesting that sin itself is not considered the source of apostasy in the scriptures. We all sin, it is usually not solely the sinning that causes a person to fall, but actually the lack of repentance.

“But if he repent not of his sins, which are unbelief and blindness of heart, let him take heed lest he fall.”¹⁰⁶

“... when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.”¹⁰⁷

An unwillingness to acknowledge weakness and error is sometimes more dangerous than the wrongs committed themselves. It comes from fear and pride¹⁰⁸, and humility is the only antidote.

Compassion

Having looked at the extent to which weakness is a characteristic of even the best of us it raises the question of how do we treat others weaknesses? In this area the Prophet Joseph had much to say as well:

105 1 Cor 1:26-28.

106 D&C 58:15.

107 D&C 121:37.

108 See Alma 4:6-12, 5:32.

“We ought at all times to be very careful that such high-mindedness shall never have place in our hearts; but condescend to men of low estate, and with all long-suffering bear the infirmities of the weak.”¹⁰⁹

“I told them I was but a man, and they must not expect me to be perfect; if they expected perfection from me, I should expect it from them; but if they would bear with my infirmities and the infirmities of the brethren, I would likewise bear with their infirmities.”¹¹⁰

In this area the maxim “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” holds just as true. The compassion we show to others will return to us:

“I charged the Saints not to follow the example of the adversary in accusing the brethren, and said, “If you do not accuse each other, God will not accuse you. I you have no accuser you will enter heaven, and if you will follow the revelations and instructions which God gives you through me, I will take you into heaven as my back load. If you will not accuse me, I will not accuse you. If you will throw a cloak of charity over my sins, I will over yours — for charity covereth a multitude of sins. What many people call sin is not sin;”¹¹¹

But how do we approach others weaknesses and imperfections? With harshness? Here the Prophet instructs us in the more powerful approach of

109 Teachings, p. 141.

110 Teachings, p. 268.

111 Teachings, p. 193.

tenderness, and teaches us it is the most likely strategy to help people improve:

“Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand and to watch over them in tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what pow’r it has over my mind.”¹¹²

While we are judging others and presuming that this might prevent God from working through them Joseph used himself as an example of the principle that human weakness does not necessarily reduce God’s ability to work through someone:

“I was this morning introduced to a man from the east. After hearing my name, he remarked that I was nothing but a man, indicating by this expression, that he had supposed that a person to whom the Lord should see fit to reveal His will, must be something more than a man. He seemed to have forgotten the saying that fell from the lips of St. James¹¹³, that Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, yet he had such power with God,
...”¹¹⁴

Thus we see the wisdom of leaving judgements to God, and to remaining humble and open to what he might accomplish through imperfect people such as us. Then when we do see His hand or are moved by it personally we can ascribe to Him the glory, knowing we are stronger through Him than rely on anything else, including ourselves.

112 Teachings, p. 240.

113 James 5:17.

114 Teachings, p. 89.