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STAND ON THE ROCK OF REVELATION

By being grounded on the rock of revelation, we can find answers to the most important questions.

As part of an assignment I had as a General Authority a few years ago, I read through a great deal of material antagonistic to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the events of the Restoration. Since that assignment changed, I have not returned to wallow in that mire.

Reading that material always left me with a feeling of gloom, and one day that sense of darkness inspired me to write a partial response to all such antagonistic claims. I would like to share some of the thoughts I recorded that day, and although what I wrote was for my benefit, I hope it will help you as well.

Will We Stand Forever?

The prophet Daniel said that in the last days “shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:44).

The kingdom of God is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It will “stand for ever.” The question is, Will you and I stand or “will [we] also go away?” (John 6:67). And if we go away, where will we go?



Deception Is a Sign of Our Time

When the Lord described the signs of His coming and the end of the world, He mentioned many things, including wars and rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and many other signs, including this one: “For in those days [this day] there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22; see also Matthew 24:24).

I am not sure of all that is implied by the qualification “if possible, they shall deceive the very elect,” but I think it means, at least, that everyone will be challenged in our day.

There are many who deceive, and the spectrum of deception is broad. At one end we meet those who attack the Restoration, the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon. Next we see those who believe in the Restoration but claim the Church is deficient and has gone astray. Others claim to believe in the Restoration but are disillusioned with doctrine that conflicts with the shifting attitudes of our day. Some without authority lay claim to visions, dreams, and visitations to right the ship, guide us to a higher path, or prepare the Church for the end of the world. Others are deceived by false spirits.

At the other end of the spectrum we come to an entire universe of distractions. Never has there been more information, misinformation, and disinformation; more goods, gadgets, and

games; and more options, places to go, and things to see and do to occupy time and attention away from what is most important. All of that and much more is disseminated instantaneously throughout the world by electronic media. This is a day of deception.

Knowledge Is Crucial

Truth enables us to see clearly because it is the “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:24). Knowledge is crucial to avoid deception, to discern between truth and error, and to see clearly and chart a course through the hazards of our day.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “Knowledge is necessary to life and godliness. . . . Knowledge is revelation. Hear . . . this grand key: knowledge is the power of God unto salvation.”¹

People say, “You should be true to your beliefs.” While that is true, you cannot be better than what you know. Most of us act based on our beliefs, especially what we believe to be in our self-interest. The problem is, we are sometimes wrong.

Some people may believe in God and that pornography is wrong and yet still click on a pornographic website, wrongly believing that they will be happier if they do or that they can’t help but click or that they aren’t hurting anyone else. They are just wrong.

Others may believe it is wrong to lie and yet lie on occasion, wrongly believing they will be better off if the truth is not known. They are just wrong.

Someone may believe and even know that Jesus is the Christ and still deny Him not once but three times because of the mistaken belief that he would be better off appeasing the crowd. Peter wasn’t evil. I am not even sure he was weak. He was just wrong. (See Matthew 26:34, 69–75.)

When we act badly, we may think we are bad, when in truth we are just wrong. The challenge is not so much closing the gap between our actions and our beliefs; rather, the challenge is closing the gap between our beliefs and the truth.

How do we close that gap? How do we avoid deception?

Primary Questions and Secondary Questions

There are primary questions and there are secondary questions. Begin by answering the primary questions first. The primary questions are the most important. There are only a few primary questions. I mention four:

1. Is there a God who is our Father?
2. Is Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Savior of the world?
3. Was Joseph Smith a prophet?
4. Is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the kingdom of God on earth?

By contrast, the secondary questions are unending. They include questions about Church history, plural marriage, people of African descent and the priesthood, women and the priesthood, the translation of the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, DNA and the Book of Mormon, gay marriage, different accounts of the First Vision, and on and on.

If you answer the primary questions, the secondary questions get answered too, or they pale in significance. Answer the primary questions, and you can deal with things you understand and things you don't and with things you agree with and things you don't without jumping ship.

The Divine Method of Learning

There are different methods of learning, including the scientific, analytical, academic, and divine methods. All four methods are necessary to know the truth. They all begin the same way: with a question. Questions are important, especially the primary questions.

The divine method of learning incorporates the elements of the other methodologies but ultimately trumps everything else by tapping into the powers of heaven. Ultimately the things of God are made known by the Spirit of God, which is usually a still, small voice. The Lord said, "God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:26).

The Apostle Paul taught that we cannot know the things of God except through the Spirit of God (see 1 Corinthians 2:9–11; see also Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 2:11). He said, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him." We see that every day. Paul continued, "Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).





Of all the problems you encounter in life, one towers above them all and is the least understood. The worst of all human conditions is not poverty, sickness, loneliness, abuse, or war—as awful as those conditions are. The worst of all human conditions is the most common: it is to die spiritually. It is to be separated from the presence of God, and in this life, His presence is His Spirit or power.

Conversely, the best of all human conditions is not wealth, fame, prestige, good health, the honors of men, or security. The best of all human conditions is to be endowed with heavenly power. It is to be born again, to have the gift and companionship of the Holy Ghost, which is the source of knowledge, revelation, strength, clarity, love, joy, peace, hope, confidence, faith, and almost every other good thing.

Jesus said: “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, . . . shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). It is the power by which we “may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5). “It will show . . . [us] all things . . . [we] should do” (2 Nephi 32:5). It is the fountain of “living water” that springs up unto eternal life (John 7:38; see also verse 37).

Pay whatever price you must pay, bear whatever burden you must bear, and make whatever sacrifice you must make to get and keep in your life the spirit and power of the Holy Ghost. Every good thing depends on

getting and keeping the power of the Holy Ghost in your life.

“That Which Doth Not Edify”

So, what was the gloom I felt several years ago while reading antagonistic materials? Some would say that gloom is the product of belief bias, which is the propensity to pick and choose only those things that accord with our assumptions and beliefs. The thought that everything one has believed and been taught may be wrong, particularly with nothing better to take its place, is a gloomy and disturbing thought indeed.

But the gloom I experienced as I listened to the dark choir of voices raised against the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ is different. That gloom is not belief bias, and it is not the fear of being in error. It is the absence of the Spirit of God. It is the condition of man when “left unto himself” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:38). It is the gloom of darkness and the “stupor of thought” (Doctrine and Covenants 9:9; see also verse 8).

The Lord said:

“And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness.

“That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (Doctrine and Covenants 50:23–24).

Revelation from the Spirit of God supersedes belief bias because it is not premised only on evidence. I have spent a lifetime seeking to hear the word of the Lord and learning to recognize and follow the Spirit of God. The spirit associated with the dark voices that assail the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the Restoration is not the spirit of light, intelligence, and truth. I don’t know much, but I do know the voice of the Lord, and His voice is not in that dark choir.

In stark contrast to the gloom and sickening stupor of thought that pervade the swamp of doubt is the spirit of light, intelligence, peace, and truth that attends the events and the glorious doctrine of the Restoration, especially the scriptures revealed to the world through the

Prophet Joseph Smith. Just read them and ask yourself and God if they are the words of lies, deceit, and delusion or if they are the truth.

You Can't Learn the Truth by Elimination

Some who are afraid that the Church may not be true spend their time and attention slogging through the swamp of secondary questions. They mistakenly try to learn the truth by process of elimination, by attempting to eliminate every doubt. That is always a bad idea. It will never work.

There are unlimited claims and opinions leveled against the truth. Each time you track down an answer to one antagonistic claim and look up, another one stares you in the face. I am not saying you should put your head in the sand, but I am saying you can spend a lifetime desperately tracking down the answer to every claim leveled against the Church and never come to a knowledge of the most important truths.

Answers to the primary questions do not come by answering the secondary questions. There are answers to the secondary questions, but you cannot prove a positive by disproving every negative. You cannot prove the Church is true by disproving every claim made against it. It is a flawed strategy. Ultimately there has to be affirmative proof, and with the things of God, affirmative proof finally and surely comes by revelation through the spirit and power of the Holy Ghost.

To His disciples, Jesus asked:

“Whom say ye that I am?”

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

“And Jesus answered and said unto him,

Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

“. . . Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:15–18; see also verses 13–14).



The Church of Jesus Christ is grounded on the rock of revelation, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. You and I are the Church. We must be grounded on the rock of revelation, and although we may not know the answer to every question, we must know the answers to the primary questions. If we do, the gates of hell will not prevail against us and we will stand forever.

Stand on the Rock of Revelation

There is a God in heaven who is our Eternal

Father. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. Joseph Smith was a prophet of God who laid the foundation for the Restoration of the kingdom of God. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on the earth. I know this by my experience—all of it. I know this by the evidence, and the evidence is overwhelming. I know this by study. And, most surely, I know this by the spirit and power of the Holy Ghost.

And with that, I know everything I need to know to stand forever. May we stand on the rock of revelation, particularly in regard to the primary questions. If we do, we will stand forever and never go away. ■

From a devotional address, “Stand Forever,” delivered at Brigham Young University on January 22, 2019.

NOTE

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 265.