

Stand Forever

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As part of an assignment I had as a General Authority a few years ago, I needed to 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. There may not be anything out there of that nature I haven't read. Since that assignment changed, I have not returned to wallow in that mire again.

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 with you 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.

I wanted to give a different talk today. I wrote other talks more entertaining, with more stories—more engaging than this one—but each time I wrote a new talk, I was directed back to this one.

Will You 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.*¹

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? Will you stand forever, or will you go away? And if you go, where will you go?

Deception Is a Sign of Our Time

When the Lord described the signs of His coming and the end of the world, when He described our day, 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.*²

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.

Paul said, “We see through a glass, darkly.”³ Similarly, one of the most prominent features of the vision of the tree of life is a “great mist of darkness [in which] they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.”⁴

The Broad Spectrum of Deception

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. There are others who also claim to believe in the Restoration but are disillusioned with doctrine that conflicts with the shifting attitudes of our day. There are some who, 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 far 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. And all of that and much more is disseminated instantaneously throughout the world by electronic media. This is a day of deception.

Knowledge

Truth enables us to see clearly because it is the “knowledge of things as they [really] are, and as they were, and as they are to come.”⁵ 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, all ye brethren, this grand key: knowledge is the power of God unto salvation.*⁶

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.

Someone may believe in God and that pornography is wrong and yet still click on a site wrongly believing that he will be happier if he does or he can't help but not click or it isn't hurting anyone else and it is not that bad. He is just wrong.

Someone may believe it is wrong to lie and yet lie on occasion, wrongly believing he will be better off if the truth is not known. He is 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.

When you act badly, you may think you are bad, when in truth you are usually mistaken. You 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. That is the challenge.*

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

Primary Questions and Secondary Questions

Begin by answering the primary questions. There are primary questions and there are secondary questions. Answer the primary questions first. Not all questions are

equal and not all truths are equal. The primary questions are the most important. Everything else is subordinate. There are only a few primary questions. I will mention four of them.

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 the earth?

By contrast, the secondary questions are unending. They include questions about Church history, polygamy, people of African descent and the priesthood, women and the priesthood, how the Book of Mormon was translated, the Pearl of Great Price, DNA and the Book of Mormon, gay marriage, the 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 and you can deal with things you understand and things you don't and things you agree with and things you don't without jumping ship altogether.

Different Ways of Learning

How can we know the answers? There are different methods of learning, including the scientific, analytical, academic, and divine methods. The divine method of learning incorporates elements of the other three but ultimately trumps everything else by tapping into the powers of heaven. 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 Scientific Method

With the scientific method, a hypothesis is framed in response to a question. Experimentation is then conducted to test the hypothesis. The results are then analyzed, and conclusions are drawn that either confirm, disprove, or modify the hypothesis—in which event the process continues. Alma invited us to “experiment upon [his] words.”⁷ The Lord said:

My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*⁸

In regard to tithing, the Lord also said, “Prove me now herewith . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”⁹

Truth can be discovered by doing, which is faith. Experience plays a vital role in coming to know the truth.

The Analytical Method

The analytical method is also important. It involves gathering, organizing, and weighing evidence relevant to a question. Based on the weight of the evidence, conclusions

are drawn as to what the truth may be. The Lord instructed Oliver Cowdery, saying:

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it 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.*¹⁰

Evidence and reason also play a role in preparing us to know the truth.

The Academic Method

The academic method involves, of course, study of the written word. Study as well is essential. Mormon said that the word of God has a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people [how we think] than the sword [which might be the fear or threat of death], or anything else.”¹¹ The word of God is more powerful than anything. It is more powerful than fear, addiction, pornography, or anything else. It stands to reason, therefore, that the Lord would say, “Treasure up in your minds continually the words of life.”¹² He also said, “And whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived.”¹³

The Divine Method

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.”¹⁴

The apostle Paul taught that men only know the things of men and that the things of God are known by no man except through the Spirit of God.¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶

Of all the problems you encounter in this life, there is one that towers above them all and is the least understood. The worst of all human conditions in this life 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. 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. That is the worst.

Conversely, the best of all human conditions in this life is not wealth, fame, prestige, good health, the honors of men, security, or even—dare I say it—good grades. As wonderful as some of those things are, 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.”¹⁷ It is the power by which we “may know the truth of all things.”¹⁸ “It will show

. . . [us] all things . . . [we] should do.”¹⁹ It is the fountain of “living water” that springs up unto eternal life.²⁰

Although the voice of the Spirit is usually a still, small voice, it is nevertheless ever sure, penetrating, pervasive, edifying, and sustaining—so much so that the Lord said:

*And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*²¹

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. Everything depends on that.

“That Which Doth Not Edify”

So what was the gloom I felt several years ago while reading antagonistic material? 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—the gloom that came as I waded, chest deep, through the swamp of the secondary questions—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. That is what it is. It is the condition of man when “left unto himself.”²² It is the gloom of darkness and the “stupor of thought.”²³

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.*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, and 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. The Spirit of God is not in those voices. I don’t know much, but I do know the voice of the Lord, and His voice is not in that dark choir, not at all in that choir.

In stark contrast to the gloom and sickening stupor of thought that pervades 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 ask God if they are the words of lies, deceit, delusion, or truth.

You Can’t Learn the Truth by Elimination

There are some who are afraid the Church may not be true and who spend their time and attention slogging through the swamp of the 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.* That approach only works in the game of Clue.

Life, however, is not nearly as simple. There are unlimited claims and opinions leveled against the truth. Each time you track down an answer to any one antagonistic claim and look up, there is another one staring 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.* That will never work. 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.*²⁵

The Church of Jesus Christ is grounded on the rock of revelation, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. We are the Church. 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. And if we do, the gates of hell shall not prevail against us and we will stand forever.

Believe “with God All Things Are Possible”

Finally, believe. Believe “with God all things are possible.”²⁶ We may all be taken back from time to time by the extraordinary—such as walking on water, multiplying bread and fish, raising the dead, translating gold plates with special lenses or a stone and hat, and the visitation of angels. Some people are hard-pressed to believe extraordinary things. While it is understandable that we may be challenged by the extraordinary, we shouldn’t be, because ordinary things are actually far more phenomenal.

The most phenomenal occurrences of all time and eternity—the most amazing wonders, the most astounding, awesome developments—are the most common and widely

recognized. They include: I am; you are; we are; and all that we perceive exists as well, from subatomic particles to the farthest reaches of the cosmos and everything in between, including all of the wonders of life. Is there anything greater than those ordinary realities? No. Nothing else even comes close. You can't begin to imagine, much less describe, anything greater than what already is.

In light of what is, nothing else should surprise us. It should be easy to believe that with God all things are possible.

The healing of the withered hand is not nearly as amazing as the existence of the hand in the first place. If it exists, it follows that it can certainly be fixed when it is broken. The greater event is not in its healing but in its creation.

More phenomenal than resurrection is birth. The greater wonder is not that life, having once existed, could come again but that it ever exists at all.

More amazing than raising the dead is that we live at all. A silent heart that beats again is not nearly as amazing as the heart that beats within your breast right now.

That one could see on a stone or through a special lens the modern translation of ancient text written on plates of gold is far less amazing than the human eye. The wonder is not what the human eye may see, rather, that it sees anything at all.

How can you believe in extraordinary things such as angels and gold plates and your divine potential? Easy, just look around and believe.

I don't know if pigs will ever sprout wings and fly, but if they do, flying pigs will never be nearly as amazing as the ordinary pig in the first place.

Doubts and Questions

I heard someone say recently, "It is okay to have doubts."

I wonder about that. The Lord said, "Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not."²⁷ I have a lot of questions; I don't have any doubts.

Conclusion

There is a God in heaven who is our Eternal Father. I know this by my experience—all of my experience. I know this by the evidence, and the evidence is overwhelming. I know it by study, and, most surely, I know it by the spirit and power of the Holy Ghost.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. I know this by my experience—all of it. I know this by the evidence, and the evidence is overwhelming. I know it by study, and, most surely, I know it by the spirit and power of the Holy Ghost.

Joseph Smith was a prophet of God who laid the foundation for the restoration of the kingdom of God. I know this by my experience—all of my experience. I know this by the evidence, and the evidence is overwhelming. I know it by study, and, most surely, I know it by the spirit and power of the Holy Ghost.

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 it by study, and, most surely, I know it 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. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.