

Accept Divine Counsel

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The modern scriptures have received my attention and time during the twenty-six years I've been on the faculty at Brigham Young University—and for some time before then, in fact. I include in this body of material the sermons and writings of the General Authorities of the Church, especially the prophets, seers, and revelators of our dispensation. My special emphasis of study and teaching has been the Doctrine and Covenants.

The Gift to Believe in Christ

Two references from the modern revelations provide the principle basis for my remarks this morning. From the Doctrine and Covenants, section 46, the revelation on the gifts of the Holy Ghost, we read:

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

To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful. [D&C 46:13–14]

And from a revelation among the many which the Lord has given to Latter-day Saints that they might not be deceived, section 52, we have the following:

And let them journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith. . . .

And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations—

Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances.

He that speaketh, whose spirit is contrite, whose language is meek and edifieth, the same is of God if he obey mine ordinances.

And again, he that trembleth under my power shall be made strong, and shall bring forth fruits of praise and wisdom, according to the revelations and truths which I have given you.

And again, he that is overcome and bringeth not forth fruits, even according to this pattern, is not of me.

Roy W. Doxey was serving as a Regional Representative of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 30 July 1974.

Wherefore, by this pattern ye shall know the spirits in all cases under the whole heavens. [D&C 52:9, 14–19]

I believe that in these verses one will find the foundation for a life of peace and joy. Specifically, the following ideas may be derived from what I have read: First, among the gifts to which Latter-day Saints are entitled, if we seek for them, are the gifts to know that Jesus Christ is our Savior and, lacking this positive knowledge or testimony, we should prepare for it by seeking for the gift to believe on the words of testators. Second, our teaching should be that which the prophets and apostles give and that which is taught by the Holy Ghost to us individually through the prayer of faith. Third, a pattern against being deceived by Satan or against false spirits is to obey the Lord's ordinances—that is, not only the ordinances of baptism, confirmation, and temple ordinances, but also, as understood anciently, the other decrees of God, such as rules, regulations, and instructions.

Spiritually Dead

“To believe” are two words which, if really applied in one's quest for knowledge, may make the difference between being a faithful, devout Latter-day Saint or just a member of the Church. The latter point, I believe, was mentioned by President Spencer W. Kimball in a general conference in answer to the question “What is ‘being valiant’?”

There are many in this Church today who think they live but are dead to the spiritual things. And I believe that many who are making the pretenses of being active are also spiritually dead. Their service is much of the letter and less of the spirit. [Conference Report, April 1951, pp. 104–5]

President Harold B. Lee expressed the idea this way:

Conversion must mean more than just being a “card-carrying” member of the Church with a tithing receipt, a membership card, a temple recommend, etc. It means to overcome the tendencies to criticize and to strive continually to improve inward weaknesses and not merely the outward appearances. [Conference Report, April 1971, p. 92]

The prophet Joseph Smith made a similar observation about the Church at a certain period during his lifetime:

It is made up of all those different sects professing every variety of opinion, and having been under the influence of so many kinds of spirits, it is not to be wondered at if there should be found among us false spirits. [Documentary History of the Church, 4:580]

This condition in the early history of the Church brought forth these words from Elder George A. Smith, member of the Council of the Twelve and Church Historian:

There was a prevalent spirit all through the early history of the Church which prompted the elders to suppose that they knew more than the Prophet. Elders would tell you the Prophet was going wrong. Men who thought they knew all about this work, some of them thirty or forty years before the Lord revealed it, tried to “steady the ark.” The Church was constantly afflicted with such a class of men. [Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *The Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, 2nd ed. Rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., p. 290)]

I presume that today there are more subtle means being used by some—not perhaps the direct way of telling the prophet that he is wrong, but accomplishing the same purpose in trying to “steady the ark” by refusing to believe what the Lord reveals today through his prophets. The casting of doubt, and even unbelief, on the scriptures and the fact that

revelation is received by the leadership of the Church today is a common way of attempting to “steady the ark.” President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., counselor to three Presidents of the Church, pled in several priesthood sessions of general conference that all Latter-day Saints might accept this counsel from the Lord: “I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27).

A Zion People

I have often reflected upon the concept of Zion practiced in ancient days, revealed anew in our dispensation and prophesied yet to be the Lord’s divine program for this dispensation. In fact, if it is not realized by us, then the purposes of this last and greatest dispensation will be thwarted.

In earlier dispensations, the sacred historian recorded that these Zion people were the most blessed of all the peoples of the earth. Why? “Because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness” (Moses 7:18). How might we become of one mind and one heart? Would not the scriptural admonition cited in the Doctrine and Covenants help us to achieve the Lord’s ideal for us? Acquire the gift to believe the words of the prophet. Make sure that your believing heart is coupled with a positive knowledge of the divinity of this latter-day work. In harmony with these truths, we would accept this counsel from the published statement of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1839:

Be careful that you teach not for the word of God the commandments of men, nor the doctrines of men, nor the ordinances of men, inasmuch as you are God’s messengers. Study the word of God, and preach it and not your opinions, for no man’s opinion is worth a straw. Advance no principle but what you can prove, for one scriptural proof is worth ten thousand opinions. [Documentary History of the Church, 3:395–96]

And if we have prepared ourselves by believing the prophets and apostles, I believe we shall be directed by the Holy Ghost.

The Twelve Apostles of 1839 continued:

And if you unitedly seek after unity of purpose and design; if you are men of humility and faithfulness, of integrity and perseverance; if you submit yourselves to the teachings of heaven and are guided by the Spirit of God; if you at all times seek the glory of God and the salvation of men, and lay your honor prostrate in the dust, if need be, and are willing to fulfill the purposes of God in all things, the power of the priesthood will rest upon you, and you will become mighty in testimony. [Documentary History of the Church, 3:397]

In my teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I have accepted this fundamental truth: what we know about God and our relationship to him come from what God has revealed, the standard works of the Church, and the teachings of the living prophets. I believe that if we could follow, without reservation, this principle, we of this dispensation could also become of “one heart and of one mind.” We would *be one*, and in that oneness we would be the Lord’s.

It is as true today as in 1831, when the Lord said, “And he that will not take up his cross and follow me, and keep my commandments, the same shall not be saved” (D&C 56:2). That is an interesting and meaningful phrase, “to take up one’s cross.” I wonder if taking up one’s cross might mean to sacrifice whatever is necessary to be a true member of Christ’s church, to accept *full membership* in the kingdom of God, to be a loyal, willing subject—that is, to put the kingdom of God first above all other considerations.

The men and women who have lived as honored, faithful, and revered Latter-day Saints in the history of the Church are those who have contributed to the building of the kingdom of God and the eventual

establishment of Zion. Because they have been one with the Brethren, they have been accepted of the Lord. We know that these Saints have exercised their free agency in a manner that brought great blessings to themselves. They have believed that loyalty to the living prophets is of great necessity in demonstrating their faith in God although it requires setting aside personal feelings, ideas, and even comforts. In fact, the Prophet Joseph Smith said:

The sacrifice required of Abraham in the offering up of Isaac, shows that if a man would attain to the keys of the kingdom of an endless life, he must sacrifice all things. When God offers a blessing or knowledge to a man, and he refuses to receive it, he will be damned. [Joseph Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938), p. 322]

Later in this dispensation, President George Q. Cannon said:

I say to you this day in the presence of God and the holy angels of this assembly, if we expect to attain the fulfillment of the promises God has made to us, we must be self-sacrificing. There is no sacrifice that God can ask of us or his servants whom he has chosen to lead us that we should hesitate about making. In one sense of the word, it is not sacrifice. We may call it so because it comes in contact with our selfishness and our unbelief, but it ought not to come in contact with our faith. [Conference Report, April 1899, p. 65]

Accepting the Lord's Servants

These honored Saints about whom I have spoken believed these words in a modern revelation:

And if my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place.

But if they will not hearken to my voice, nor unto the voice of these men whom I have appointed, they shall not be blest, because they pollute mine holy grounds, and mine holy ordinances, and charters, and my holy words which I give unto them. [D&C 124:45–46]

I am convinced that salvation in this world and the world to come is contingent upon how well we accept the Lord's servants—not give lip service, but genuinely accept their counsel and teachings. After all, the attainment of salvation in God's kingdom fulfills the purpose of life, and this blessing, according to the Book of Mormon prophet King Benjamin, is dependent upon “retaining a remission of your sins” (Mosiah 4:26), which is received in baptism, and then walking guiltless before God.

Consider this scripture from the Doctrine and Covenants regarding how one may have his sins pardoned: “Behold, thus saith the Lord unto my people—you have many things to do and to repent of; for behold, your sins have come up unto me, and are not pardoned, because you seek to counsel in your own ways” (D&C 56:14).

When a member of the Church refuses to accept the counsel of the prophets, seers, and revelators, he lays the foundation for insecurity. The members of the First Presidency, the Council of the Twelve, and the Patriarch to the Church are the prophets, seers, and revelators. These Brethren have a special spiritual endowment above all other members of the Church. As President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., said:

They possess a special gift; they are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, which gives them a special spiritual endowment in connection with their teaching of the people. They have the right, the power, and authority to declare the mind and will of God to his people, subject to the overall power and authority of the President of the Church. Others of the General Authorities are not given this special spiritual endowment and authority covering their

teaching; they have a resulting limitation, and the resulting limitation upon their power and authority in teaching applies to every other officer and member of the Church, for none of them is spiritually endowed as a prophet, seer, and revelator.

*Furthermore . . . the President of the Church has a further and special spiritual endowment in this respect, for he is the prophet, seer, and revelator of the whole church. [Quoted in Roy W. Doxey, *The Latter-day Prophets and the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1963), 1:ix–x]*

In refusing to receive the teachings of the Brethren, we're expressing contrary ideas, or, in my opinion, false teachings. President Joseph F. Smith categorized Latter-day Saints who are guilty of false teaching as the following:

First—The hopelessly ignorant, whose lack of intelligence is due to their indolence and sloth, who make but feeble effort, if indeed any at all, to better themselves by reading and study; those who are afflicted with a dread disease that may develop into an incurable malady—laziness.

Second—The proud and self-vaunting ones, who read by the lamp of their own conceit; who interpret by rules of their own contriving; who have become a law unto themselves, and so pose as the sole judges of their own doings. More dangerously ignorant than the first.

Beware of the lazy and the proud; their infection in each case is contagious; better for them and for all when they are compelled to display the yellow flag of warning, that the clean and uninfected may be protected. [Gospel Doctrine (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971), p. 373]

Do not find yourselves in either one of these classes. Yours is the opportunity at Brigham Young University to study the gospel, to grow in faith and testimony. You have the opportunity to set a life pattern of study that will continue after you leave this institution. I have learned that by and large the informed

Latter-day Saint, the student of the gospel, accepts the teachings of the Lord's anointed and conforms his life to gospel standards.

If you have a tendency to be aligned in the second class, the proud and self-vaunting who become a law unto themselves in picking and choosing the teachings of the Brethren which they believe compare to their own ideas of truth, then remember that the purpose for which you are here in life will be thwarted. President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., said:

But I had thought I might give you just a little different turn to that great sermon on the unity in the Church of Christ. I thought I might point out that our gospel comes in one package. We may not choose a particular thing that we like and ignore everything else, nor submerge nor subdue it. . . . We may not, I repeat, say to ourselves, nor to one another, that this is the important thing or that is the important thing, the others being nonessential or unessential. We have no right to draw distinctions and differences among the commandments of God.

The Lord has given us nothing that is useless or unnecessary. He has filled the scriptures with the things we should do in order that we may gain salvation.

When we partake of the sacrament we covenant to obey and keep his commandments. There are no exceptions. There are no distinctions, do differences.

And so I have thought that I might urge as a part of the unity concerning which I have taken the liberty always to speak in this meeting of the Priesthood [the general conference priesthood meeting], as a part of this unity we should try to be united in the matter of Gospel doctrines and practices, each and all of us trying so to serve the Lord that we might meet and satisfy the covenant which we make when we eat the bread and drink the water in remembrance of his body and of his blood.

I do not think that this is a slight matter. There are groups, not many but some, who take this road to the left and call it the most important, another takes the road to the right with the same plea, another emphasizes this point, another that point,

belittling some other points, and declaring that certain things are of the essence, and other things may be ignored. I do not read anywhere that the Lord has given to us, individually, the right to say which is most important. We should seek to keep all of the commandments. I repeat, speaking in the language of today, the gospel is one package.

I hope and pray the Lord will give us that unity along with all the other unities about which we know. I repeat what I have said so often here, that we being truly united, there is nothing that the Lord wants to be done that will fail of doing if we set our hands and our hearts thereto. And I pray again that we may see the necessity of accepting the gospel and all of it, that we may be saved and exalted in his presence. [Conference Report, April 1955, pp. 10–11]

Eventual sorrow and regret owing to the loss of exaltation will be the condemnation of those who, having begun life’s journey, finish short of their potential because of a love of the things of this world—false education, false theories of life—in fact, all ideas and teachings that are contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I’ve always appreciated the following key to truth given by President Joseph Fielding Smith because it is the letter and the spirit of the gospel:

If members of the Church would place more confidence in the word of the Lord, and less confidence in the theories of men, they would be better off. I will give you a key for your guidance: any doctrine, whether it comes in the name of religion, science, philosophy, or whatever it may be, that is in conflict with the revelations of the Lord that have been accepted by the Church as coming from the Lord will fail. It may appear to be very plausible; it may be put before you in such a way that you cannot answer it, it may appear to be established by evidence that cannot be controverted, but all you need to do is bide your time. Time will level all things. You will find that every doctrine, theory, principle, no matter how great it may

*appear; no matter how universally it may be believed, if it is not in accord with the word of the Lord, it will perish. Nor is it necessary for us to try to stretch the word of the Lord to make it conform to these theories and teachings. The word of the Lord shall not pass away unfulfilled. I realize that we are all weak, and at times may place false interpretations upon the written word, but the revelations are so clear regarding Adam, the fall, the atonement, the resurrection, the redemption of the earth when it shall again be proclaimed “good,” and so many other things which fall under the ban of present-day teaching that we need not be led astray. The theories of men change from day to day. Much that is taught now will tomorrow be in the discard, but the word of the Lord will endure forever. [Quoted in Roy W. Doxey, *The Doctrine and Covenants Speaks* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1964), 1:370–71]*

Receiving Blessings Through Obedience

How would you like to receive the blessings promised Lyman Sherman, one of the first seven presidents of the seventy, given in a revelation to Joseph Smith? Notice, as I read these verses, that he is granted forgiveness of his sins by keeping his vows or covenants, including obedience to the counsel of the Prophet:

Verily thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant Lyman: Your sins are forgiven you, because you have obeyed my voice in coming up hither this morning to receive counsel of him whom I have appointed.

Therefore, let your soul be at rest concerning your spiritual standing, and resist no more my voice.

And arise up and be more careful henceforth in observing your vows, which you have made and do make, and you shall be blessed with exceeding great blessings. [D&C 108:1–3]

How may one receive these blessings? By not resisting the Lord’s voice. Recall the verses from a revelation about abiding by the

teachings of the Lord's servants: "And if my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you; they shall not be moved out of their place" (D&C 124:45).

Lyman Sherman was told of four ways he could strengthen the brethren. He was given counsel which is applicable to all Latter-day Saints in all periods of time: "Therefore, strengthen your brethren in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings" (D&C 108:7). If these instructions are followed, it would mean that in our conversation, teaching, preaching, and prayers we would increase our right to the Spirit of the Lord and keep our covenants by increasing our leaders' usefulness and thereby contributing to the onward march of the kingdom of God. But we must be a *believing people*. We must have *belief* in the truth that God has spoken from the heavens and endowed his servants with the power to speak for him as though he were speaking, as expressed in this revelation:

*For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me;
And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father;
And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my
Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath
shall be given unto him. [D&C 84:36–38]*

Believe that his revelations in the standard words of the Church contain the sure way to peace and happiness here and forever. Believe that the living prophet, President Spencer W. Kimball, is the most important prophet to us because it is he who leads the way to solving the problems of the day for us individually and as a group. The prophet Joseph Smith received the following revelation in answer to the prayers of the Saints about world conditions:

*I tell you these things because of your prayers;
wherefore, treasure up wisdom in your bosoms, lest*

*the wickedness of men reveal these things unto you
by their wickedness, in a manner which shall speak
in your ears with a voice louder than that which
shall shake the earth; but if ye are prepared ye shall
not fear. [D&C 38:30]*

Where may I receive this help? Do as the Prophet Joseph Smith said: "Look to the First Presidency and receive instructions" (*Documentary History of the Church*, 3:391). If the Latter-day Saint does not listen to the prophet, he may not be aware of the answer to his own prayers.

Studying and Following the Counsel of the Brethren

For twenty-five years I have sat in every session of every general conference of the Church and listened to the prophets. I commend it to you. If you cannot be at the conference, listen by radio or television or read the proceedings of the general conferences in the Church publications. Absorb the inspiration available in these proceedings. Enjoy the experience of having the Holy Spirit bear witness to what is being said. Assimilate the truths spoken so well that they become part of your daily life and increase your believing capacity.

President Harold B. Lee, in the last general conference he addressed, said:

Now, you Latter-day Saints, I think you have never attended a conference wherein these three days you have heard more inspired declarations on most every subject and problem about which you have been worrying. If you want to know what the Lord would have the Saints know and to have his guidance and direction for the next six months, get a copy of the proceedings of this conference, and you will have the latest word of the Lord as far as the Saints are concerned. And [also] all others who are not of us, but who believe what has been said has been the mind of the Lord, the will of the Lord, the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation. (See D&C 68:4.) . . .

Where else can you go for guidance? Where is there safety in the world today? Safety can't be won by tanks and guns and airplanes and atomic bombs. There is only one place of safety, and that is within the realm of the power of Almighty God that he gives to those who keep his commandments and listen to his voice as he speaks through the channels that he has ordained for that purpose. [Conference Report, October 1973, pp. 168–69]

To be a believing person in the gospel sense is to have singleness of purpose. To live so well in observing covenants received that nothing—neither pride of learning, the love of money, pleasures contrary to commandments, nor resistance to the counsel of those who preside over us—will prevent us from receiving eventual exaltation in the kingdom of God. The Lord's promise to those who accept his truth is expressed in these words from the Olive Leaf revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants:

And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.

Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will. [D&C 88:67–68]

Revelation to the Lord's servants has been known throughout the dispensations. In many ways they have been inspired in the selection of officers in the Church, in prophecy, in the solution of problems. When it was necessary for President Joseph F. Smith to select counselors in the First Presidency, it was not difficult for him to select Anthon H. Lund as one counselor, but he was not able to determine who the other counselor should be, so he prayed for guidance. On the morning he was to meet with the Quorum of the Twelve to announce his selection, he received an audible

revelation. He heard plainly the words "Choose John R. Winder as your first counselor." The voice was heard again stating the same command. Brother Winder, though a member of the Presiding Bishopric, had never been considered by President Smith until he heard the voice that morning. President Heber J. Grant had a similar revelation when he had the first opportunity to appoint an apostle. He related on several occasions how he had made up his mind to choose a close friend, but the word of the Lord came to him to appoint a comparative stranger, Elder Melvin J. Ballard.

Students, make it a part of your experience at BYU to acquire believing hearts and minds. Always keep in mind the purpose for which you are here in life as revealed in the scriptures. Reflect upon it often. Never lose sight of the need to look to the Presidency and receive instruction. I believe that we should also follow faithfully the counsel of those who preside over us in the branches or wards of the Church. I should like to challenge you to measure your acceptance of counsel from the following experience related by President Marion G. Romney in a general conference of the Church just two years ago:

I was greatly impressed by the President's [President Joseph Fielding Smith's] remarks. I am glad he said what he did. Listening to him, I was taken back in my thoughts a quarter of a century ago to an experience I had with President Heber J. Grant. We were discussing some criticism that had been directed against an action taken by him in his official capacity. Putting his arm across my back and resting his hand on my left shoulder he said, "My boy, you always keep your eye on the President of the Church, and if he tells you to do something wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it."

And then he added, "You don't need to worry, however; the Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead his people astray."

I haven't forgotten his counsel. I think I have been faithful to that charge ever since. [Conference Report, April 1972, p. 111]

With half a century's experience of being a priesthood bearer and of serving on the Lord's errand much of that time, I testify to the strength and power that comes to one who accepts counsel. There has been borne to my soul the witness that to be a believing Latter-day Saint is the way of happiness and

joy, peace and solemnity of spirit. There is nothing in this world that can equal full membership in the kingdom of God. I know that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is divine, that Joseph Smith is a prophet, that President Spencer W. Kimball is the Lord's anointed today, that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer, and that God lives. I bear witness to these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.