

Light, Truth, and Grace: Three Interrelated Principles Necessary for Exaltation

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I have found over the years that as I read the scriptures closely, some are baffling. Some I have read over and over, and I still don't understand what they are saying. However, studying, pondering, praying, and meditating has, on occasion, brought insight and understanding. For example, two scriptures I initially found quite baffling were verses 6 and 7 of section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Speaking of the Savior, the scriptures state that "he descended below all things . . . that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth; which truth shineth." That seems to say that Jesus' descent below all things allowed Him to illuminate the truth; however, the second phrase doesn't seem to make sense. Just how does truth *shine*? In another scripture, D&C 93:42, the Lord castigates Frederick G. Williams for "not [having] taught [his] children light and truth." I feel comfortable teaching my children truth, but how do I teach them light?

What is light, anyway? When I took an astronomy class my sophomore year here, I learned that light has the properties of a particle and a wave but was not technically either. Instead, it was a wavicle. I have no idea what that is; therefore, I'm even more baffled as to what exactly I am to teach to my children or why it should matter.

It was in my junior year here that I ran into the above scriptures and first pondered them. I must confess that I simply could not get my mind around them. Then one day some years later, understanding came.

I was one of a number of Church Educational System faculty to make presentations in a weeklong symposium held in Tempe, Arizona. That particular day I had gone to a nearby Laundromat to do some much-needed washing. As I was waiting for my clothes to dry, I read Doctrine and Covenants 93. Once again I was brought up against light and truth, but this time something happened. A number of scriptures slotted themselves into place and I understood. It is this understanding that I have chosen to share with you today.

We begin with a scripture well known to those who attend BYU: "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (D&C 93:36). Quite frankly, that one also baffled me, but I liked the idea of God having glory.

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The Glory of God

The concept of glory is very prominent in the scriptures, especially as something bestowed on the faithful as part of their final reward. But what is glory? A modern dictionary gives us definitions such as “praise, honor, or distinction, . . . renown.”¹ Over the centuries many Christian theologians such as Milton, Johnson, Thomas Aquinas, and C. S. Lewis have felt that this was the sense of the scriptural use. Specifically, *glory* denoted appreciation or approval from God. Thus the glory of God was the favor and respect He granted those who met with His divine approbation.

The definition given in section 93 does not quite fit such a definition, at least so far as the glory associated with God is concerned. His glory, as defined under inspiration, is something associated with His very nature, not just something He bestows upon others. For example, Moses not only shared in the glory of God but also saw it. The account in Moses 1:2 states, “And he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence.” There is no doubt that Moses was under God’s favor, but this revelation shows that God’s glory was a capacitating agent that made it possible for Moses to bear God’s actual presence. That, however, was not all. Through that power, Moses was endowed with sufficient intellect to understand to a degree the nature of God’s work. The Lord stated that He would show Moses the workmanship of His hands, “but not all, for my works are without end, and also my words, for they never cease” (Moses 1:4). He then explained why He would not show Moses all His works: “No man can behold all my works,” He said, “except he behold all my glory; . . . and afterwards remain in the flesh on the earth” (Moses 1:5). This scripture suggests that it is God’s glory that gives him the capacity to be all-seeing. Further, the ability to behold all that glory would require such a

change in the basic constitution of a person that he would be more than mortal.

Light as an Aspect of Glory

A modern dictionary gives as a secondary definition of *glory* “a ring or spot of light.”² Here, glory is associated with radiance. The dictionary gives one the feeling that such association is very limited. That, however, is not the case in a dictionary available to Joseph Smith. According to that dictionary, glory is first and foremost “brightness” and “splendor.”³ Only in a secondary sense is it defined as “fame” or “praise.” The 1828 dictionary notes that, in a scriptural sense, glory is a manifestation of the presence of God.⁴ This meaning accords much better with Joseph Smith’s use of the term. For example, while recounting his First Vision, he wrote:

I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

. . . I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description. [JS—H 1:16–17]

Writing of this experience on another occasion, he stated, “I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision, and saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon day.”⁵ In these passages, glory is directly associated with radiance. This association fits nicely with the idea expressed in D&C 93 that light is a constituent part of glory.

To ancient Israel, one of the important aspects of God was His ability to display His power through the manifestation of burning light. Indeed, Israel stood in awe because of the display of a brilliance like a devouring inferno on the top of Sinai (see Exodus 24:17). Moses proclaimed, “The Lord thy God is a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24). His presence was manifest on more than one occasion by a pillar

of fire, which gave light to Israel but vexed the Egyptians (see Exodus 13:21; 14:24). The cloud of His glory dwelt upon the tabernacle while its radiance filled the court (see Exodus 40:34). Such a phenomenon belongs not only to the past but also to the future. The Lord has promised Saints that

this generation shall not all pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord, and a cloud shall rest upon it, which cloud shall be even the glory of the Lord, which shall fill the house. [D&C 84:5]

Like Moses, Joseph Smith knew well the glory associated with the presence of the Lord. Of His appearance in the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith reported, “His eyes were as a flame of fire; . . . his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun” (D&C 110:3). When He comes the second time, we are told that He will be “clothed in the brightness of his glory” (D&C 65:5). These are only a few of many references suggesting that light—or radiance—is an important aspect of glory.

Light and the Process of Salvation

But I have to ask again, what is light? A careful look at the way the term is used in the scriptures suggests that it is more than mere luminosity. We get a glimpse of the breadth of meaning ascribed to the word when the Lord stated, “The light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings” (D&C 88:11). This phrase defines light not only as something that makes vision possible but also as that force that activates and stimulates the intellect. Further, scripture tells us that light “is in all things,” gives “life to all things,” and “is the law by which all things are governed” (D&C 88:13). Thus a more full definition would make light an ever-present, life- and law-inducing power that manifests itself, among other ways, as natural light, intellectual activity, and the living

energy in all things. The scriptures declare that this “light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space” and that it is “the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things” (D&C 88:12–13).

To rephrase for emphasis, these scriptures suggest that the term *light* is used to describe an aspect of God’s power that radiates out from Him, expanding with His work and will, enlightening, organizing, capacitating, and quickening as it does. Perhaps the best definition would be living and capacitating energy. This idea is expressed in the scripture that states, “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” (D&C 50:24). This scripture suggests that the continual reception of this living energy endows one with ability—one ability of which is to draw ever closer to perfection. Thus, the Lord states:

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. [D&C 88:67]

As one increases in light he increases in ability until he is able to comprehend all things.

The Relationship Between Light and Truth

One is not, however, glorified in light—or, as here defined, in power or energy. Exaltation is contingent upon the reception of the other, all-important element of which glory is composed, namely, truth. Section 93 teaches us, “He that keepeth [God’s] commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (D&C 93:28). The glorifying principle is truth. Defining truth, the scripture states that it is “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they

are to come” (D&C 93:24).⁶ In other words, truth is knowledge of what a Latter-day Saint hymn proclaims as “the sum of existence.”⁷ Truth defined in this way is always associated with light because truth can only be acquired through the power or the capacitating force of light. Without the faculty created by light, a fulness of truth could never be gained.

For example, if my spiritual mind is pint-sized, I can only hold a pint of truth. If God is to give me more, the capacity of my mind must be expanded. Light does the expansion. It enlarges, as it were, my mind. Thus if God wants to give me a quart of truth, He sends the light that enlarges my capacity and, thus, makes it possible for me to receive the larger endowment of truth.

The Relationship Between Light, Truth, and Obedience

God does not give higher truths to just anyone. Indeed, the acquisition of both light and truth is dependent on obedience. Explaining the need and the reason for obedience, the Lord stated, “You shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 84:44). The explanation is simply this: If you want to have quality of life, you must be obedient. Again, the Lord explains why: “For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (D&C 84:45). The factors of bringing quality of life—light and truth—are equated with the Spirit of Christ. And because He alone controls their dissemination through the bestowal of His Spirit, He can stipulate the means by which they are granted. Thus obedience to His will is absolutely requisite for those who would gain life.

According to Doctrine and Covenants 131:7–8, “all spirit is matter.” If this includes the Spirit of Christ, then its bestowal upon an individual is an impartation of actual celestial substance—actual elements of spirit producing

higher power, higher capacity, higher life. The result of its infusion would be spiritual and intellectual capacitation, which would allow the individual to progress to the point that he could enjoy eternal life.

But the capacitating force of light would have to precede the possession of this celestial substance. The scripture continues:

And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth [I take this to mean “gives truth to”] every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.

And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. [D&C 84:46–47]

Light (the capacitating power) and enlightenment (or truth) are received by acquisition of celestial element through the Spirit of Christ to those who obey the word. But first comes obedience to the word, then light, and finally truth.

Thus, all—word, light, truth, spirit—become united. They are inseparably welded together so that a person cannot be touched by one without being touched by all. Accordingly, the scripture states, “My voice is Spirit; my Spirit is truth; truth abideth and hath no end; and if it be in you it shall abound” (D&C 88:66). As noted already, that body which is filled with light—the power of God—can comprehend all things, namely, all truth.

For emphasis, let me say again that truth is the basis of glorification. Section 93 helps us understand why. In verse 30 we read, “All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.” The very essence of existence is the ability of truth and intelligence to act for themselves. But here we find another baffling scripture. How can truth—which has been defined earlier as knowledge—act? It would be more compre-

hensible if the scripture stated that truth impels or causes righteous action. But that is not what the phrase states. And what does the scripture mean by “all truth”? Does it mean all kinds of truth? Can there be more than one kind of truth?

Understanding comes from the latter part of verse 30, which states that “all intelligence” is free to act for itself. As noted above, intelligence is equated with the glory of God—i.e., light and truth. But intelligence here is equated with a specific spiritual substance. Verse 29 of section 93 states that “intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be,”⁸ and that this eternal material is the substance from which humankind’s spirit is made.

Thus intelligence has two scriptural definitions. One is an abstraction designated as “light and truth,” conveying the idea of mental acuity by which existence is cognized. The other is more concrete. It designates the central spiritual substance of being that is called “the light of truth.” The context of verse 30 suggests that intelligence in this instance should be understood in the latter sense. Thus all intelligence—that is, humankind from spirit birth through resurrection—is free to act within the bounds in which God has placed it.

If *intelligence* has two definitions, so may truth. The Lord says all truth is independent in the sphere in which He has placed it. If truth is the knowledge of the sum of existence, then “all truth” would seem to define existence itself.⁹ Thus all existence (or all things that exist—that is, truth) has a measure of independence in which it is free to act. Of this totality, that portion designated as intelligence and associated expressly with humankind is also free to act. Because it is a portion of the whole of reality, it is designated as the spirit part of truth.

To sum up this portion, “all intelligence” identifies a component of the spirit aspect of existence. The phrase “all truth” defines the

whole of that existence. The condition for glorification is cognition of that whole. Cognition comes only with obedience and the acquisition of light, which allows truth to follow as the capstone and seal. Thus one is glorified in truth.

Note that God is the One who sets the bounds and conditions that make cognition possible. He has determined that man will be glorified only as he receives truth. But man can receive a fulness of truth only as he receives a fulness of light. Emphasizing this point are the verses that state:

Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them [i.e., truth], and they receive not the light [or capacitating power].

And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation. [D&C 93:31–32]

Intelligence is free to choose or reject light. When it willfully rejects light, it also rejects truth, and condemnation follows.

Christ as the Source of Light and Truth

But what is the process by which mortals receive the glory of Christ? The Savior has answered, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). He here emphasizes that the only way to eternal life is through Him, and He explains the reason, stating that He will appoint nothing unto man “except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was.” Going on, He states, “I am the Lord thy God; and I give unto you this commandment—that no man shall come unto the Father but by me or by my word, which is my law, saith the Lord” (D&C 132:11–12).

Here we see the central place that the word of Christ plays in the process of salvation. Man can only come to know God through the word

of the Lord. But we have already seen that His “word” is equated with Spirit, light, and truth. Therefore, the reception of the word is the reception of light and truth. The Savior’s objective is to bring obedient souls to a fulness of glory. He knows how, for He followed the way set down by the Father. And if man receives glory, it will be in the same way through which Christ received it.

God’s glory consists in a fulness of light and truth. Christ was glorified as He, too, came to possess a fulness of light and truth. It did not happen all at once. Section 93 states:

And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness. [D&C 93:12–13]

The Role of Grace

The role played by grace in the process through which the Lord received a fulness of the glory of the Father was twofold: “He received . . . grace for grace” and He “continued from grace to grace.” But what does it mean to receive grace for grace and to go from grace to grace? The answer lies in the very nature of grace. The word denotes favor, kindness, and goodwill. Out of this comes the theological definition “the free unmerited love and favor of God” that brings divine assistance to His chosen ones.¹⁰ The key expressions here are love and favor that motivates the Father to assist His children. To receive grace for grace is to receive assistance on the condition of giving assistance. But not just any kind of assistance will do. What transforms assistance into grace is the kindness and favor felt by the giver that is extended to the receiver when such service may not even be deserved.

But grace does not have to be given without condition. Indeed, an important aspect of the word is reciprocity. The scripture states specifically that man receives “grace for grace” (D&C

93:20). Thus the extension of favor is meant to obligate the recipient so that she or he will extend the same. As they meet this condition, more grace is extended to them, which further obligates them to greater assistance to others.

Apparently it was necessary for the Lord to grow through this process. In order to do so, He first received grace, or divine assistance, from the Father. This grace He extended to His brethren. As He did so, He received even more grace. The process continued until He eventually received a fulness of the glory of the Father—or all light and truth. The implication of this process is interesting: in a very real way, Christ Himself was saved by grace.

It is the same with us. The Lord promised, “If you keep my commandments you shall receive of his [God’s] fullness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace” (D&C 93:20).

Thus to those who serve, the Lord gives grace. That is, He imparts to them light and truth—that is, capacity plus enlightenment.

Summary

An essential part of the glory of God is light—or living, life-giving energy. In the scriptural sense, light is a capacitating power through which the righteous are given the faculty to receive truth. Possession of truth is the condition of glorification. A fulness of truth—or the knowledge of the sum of existence—requires the acquisition of the fulness of light. The grace of God plays a direct part in the reception of light and truth. Grace expresses itself through impartation. That which is imparted is light. The agency of man is expressed in accepting or rejecting light. But he is not free to accept or reject grace. Grace comes to all men freely, as it is the unmerited favor that God holds for all His children. Grace allows light to flow unto each person. Thus light, through grace, is freely manifest unto all. When people reject light, they reject God’s

favor and cut themselves off from truth. Thus they stand under condemnation. When they accept grace by accepting the light, they are capacitated to receive truth. As they continue from grace to grace by giving grace for grace, they receive more light and truth until they are eventually glorified in truth.

It is my prayer that we may grow in light and truth as we extend loving service to others unto the perfect day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes

1. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. "glory," 533.

2. *Merriam-Webster's*, s.v. "glory."

3. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 1 (1828; reprint, New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970), s.v. "glory."

4. See *American Dictionary*, s.v. "glory."

5. HC 4:536.

6. *An American Dictionary*, in standard use during Joseph Smith's lifetime, defines *truth* as "conformity to fact or reality; exact accordance with that which is, or has been, or shall be" (s.v. "truth").

7. "Oh Say, What Is Truth?" *Hymns*, 1985, no. 272.

8. The Prophet Joseph Smith elaborated on this thought: "Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it" (*Teachings*, 354). B. H. Roberts believed this referred to the primal substance from which each person's spirit was organized and thus referred to a person or individual (see Roberts' note 9, *Teachings*, 345).

9. This is the definition in "Oh Say, What Is Truth?" cited above. The hymn is a piece of poetry that was once part of the Pearl of Great Price. It was set to music and placed in the LDS hymnal.

10. *American Dictionary*, s.v. "grace."