

How to Know if Revelation Is from the Lord

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It's a great honor and a privilege to greet you here this morning in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I look upon this University as being the Lord's university. I understand some don't, but I believe we should because it's due to him that this University is here. I don't believe it would be here if it weren't for the Lord, and I'm very sure that everything we do in this life, you and I, that is really worthwhile comes through the Lord.

We are Christians. We'd like the whole world to know that. Sometimes we're accused of not being Christians. Many times it's not because we don't act like Christians, but it's because people have preconceived ideas of what Christians are.

I have a message that I would like to deliver to you this morning that concerns a problem I face frequently as I have visitors in my office—good people who want to do something worthwhile in the kingdom of God. They are anxious about their own salvation and they want to serve the Lord. They have fasted and prayed. They have received revelation, and they want to know if the revelation they have received is from God. They remind me of a missionary one time who came to me and said he didn't think his call had come from

the Lord. I said, "Well, do you have a piece of paper signed by the prophet of God?"

And he said, "Yes."

I asked him if he thought he could get a more direct call than to have the prophet sign the call. He said, "Yeah, I guess I could. The Lord could speak to me directly if he wanted to."

I said, "Yes, that's true, but if he did that, do you know what we would have to call *you*?"

He thought a moment and said, "A prophet."

I said, "That's right. Don't you think that would be a little ridiculous?"

He allowed that it would. He went on his mission. He had wanted to be reassured that his call came from the Lord. I think we all want to be assured that what we receive as we pray to the Lord *is* from the Lord, because everything we receive is not from the Lord—that's for sure.

Hartman Rector, Jr., was a member of the First Council of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 6 January 1976.

Appropriateness to Church Callings

To illustrate this, I'd like to tell you of an experience I had just recently. I received a telephone call from a brother we'll call John. He wanted an audience, and so I asked him why. He said, "Because the Spirit has told me to come and talk to Elder Rector."

"Oh," I said, "what about?"

He said he couldn't tell me, but he wanted to bring someone to see me.

I said, "Have you talked to your priesthood leader?"

"No, the Spirit told me to talk to Elder Rector." With some misgivings, I agreed that he could come and see me.

He came in, and he brought his friend with him. We'll call his friend Bill. It seemed that Bill had driven up to John's filling station, and when he had gotten out of the car, John immediately saw Bill's spirit. He said it was a noble and great spirit, bright and shining like Abraham. (I'm not sure how he knew what Abraham's spirit looked like.) Immediately John began to tell Bill what a great and noble spirit he was, and that he had a great work to do in the kingdom of God. Then he asked Bill what he was doing in the Church. It turned out that Bill had been a convert some years ago, but he was having a bit of a problem with his testimony: he wasn't living the Word of Wisdom, he wasn't paying his tithing, and he wasn't doing very much of anything in the Church. Then John immediately called Bill to repentance and told him that he was supposed to be a great leader in the kingdom of God, even a bishop and a stake president, and I'm not sure what else he promised him. But it was very exciting to Bill, and he got all worked up about it. But since John couldn't go beyond what he had told Bill and he definitely felt he should, he had prayed about it and the Spirit had told him to come and see Elder Rector! Now he said, "Why did the Spirit tell me this about Bill?"

I said, "Well, I'm not really sure that the Spirit did tell you that. To begin with, are you his bishop?"

"No."

"Are you his quorum president?"

"No."

"Are you a priesthood leader at all with respect to Bill?"

"No."

"Are you his home teacher?"

"No."

"Are you his patriarch?"

"No."

"Then I seriously question that you had any right to tell him the things that you told him."

This kind of situation develops many times because people want to do something good in the kingdom of God, but they don't recognize the fact that you must act within the bounds the Lord has established. The Lord makes it very plain in section 42 of the Doctrine and Covenants, where he says, "Again, I say unto you, that it shall not be given to any one to go forth and to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church" (D&C 42:11). You don't just decide that you're going to go out and do something great in the kingdom without being called and ordained and set apart to do it. If we'll follow this guideline, we will stay out of very serious trouble. This applies to everyone who is a member of the Church.

While serving as a mission president, I came home once to general conference. It's always very dangerous for a mission president to leave his mission—I don't recommend that. While I was away, four of my missionaries had decided that a sister was too good for her husband, and they had counseled her to divorce him and leave him. That's right. A missionary, you see, is called to preach the gospel by the

Spirit, and he has great responsibility with respect to *nonmembers*. But when it comes to *membership* in the Church, we have branch presidents and bishops who are called, ordained, and set apart by the Lord to give this kind of direction and guidance. I would even be concerned about a bishop who would counsel a wife to leave her husband. I transferred those missionaries, got them as far from this situation as I could as quickly as I could. Then it took a month before I was able to get the husband and wife back together again! It worked out all right. They are still corresponding with me even now, so I think it's going to work out pretty well. But when we get out of our areas of assignment, we get into trouble. It makes no difference who you are.

In the early days of the Church, Hiram Page had a stone through which he was receiving "revelation," and he caused great unrest in the Church because many of the leading Brethren of the Church believed his revelation. He didn't realize that he hadn't been called to receive those revelations. In section 28 of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord gave a revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith, outlining the way in which we are to follow the priesthood leaders. He told Oliver Cowdery here:

And again, thou shalt take thy brother, Hiram Page, between him and thee alone, and tell him that those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me, and that Satan deceiveth him;

For behold, these things have not been appointed unto him, neither shall anything be appointed unto any of this church contrary to the church covenants.

For all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of faith. [D&C 28:11–13]

Here we have a guide as to what we're supposed to do and how we're supposed to do it.

I don't think this is the only guide. There are other things that we have to keep in mind

as we go forth to serve in the kingdom. But let me hasten to say I don't believe that my visitor John was malicious in what he was trying to do. I think he was deceived. When we got that understood, Bill was angry. He said, "Well, what about me?"

I said, "Well, all you have to do is repent and keep the commandments, and you'll be all right. I'm not going to say you won't be a bishop or a stake president, but we'll let the Lord decide that! We do not decide in areas where we do not have authority to act."

One of the guidelines would be this: Is it within the bounds and limitations of your calling and does it require a service consistent with your calling? Be sure that it does before you start to act. Once again, I know I could get in trouble here because we believe that we ought to act on our own accord. There's a revelation which says that "men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves" (D&C 58:27–28). But that does not mean you get outside of the bounds of your calling. There is plenty to do within the realm of your own assignment.

Many times we think our calling is so small and insignificant that obviously the bishop doesn't recognize our potential, or he wouldn't give us this little ignominious task to perform. I had missionaries who felt that way sometimes. I transferred a missionary one time from Jacksonville, Florida, where there were 750,000 people (which he felt was commensurate with his ability) to the little town of Bristol, Florida, where there were 4,227 people, as I recall. He wrote me a letter and said, "President, is this inspiration or desperation?" He didn't feel that this was revelation from the Lord.

I learned a verse that I think depicts the attitude we have to have if we're going to be effective and successful in carrying out the work the

Lord has given us—no matter how small or insignificant the calling may seem:

*“Where shall I serve today?” I said,
And my love flowed warm and free.
Then he pointed me out a little spot
And said, “There, tend that for me.”*

*I said, “Oh no, not that,
Not that little place.
Why, no one would ever see—
No matter how well my work was done—
Not that little spot for me.”*

*The words he spoke—they were not stern.
He answered me tenderly,
“Little one, search that heart of thine,
Art thou serving them or me?
Nazareth was just a little spot
And so was Galilee.”*

You see, there are no small spots in the kingdom of God. To be called as a home teacher and be made responsible for the spiritual and physical well-being of a family, which is the basic unit of exaltation—there’s nothing more important than a family to the Lord—could that be a small calling, do you think? I tell you, it isn’t. It is so important that we accept calls as they come to us and put our hearts in them, that we operate and act within the bounds the Lord has set.

Consistency with Revealed Truth

Second, it is also important to know if the answer we have received is consistent with the revealed word of God. That would mean we ought to know something about the scriptures, and we ought to be familiar with the handbooks of instruction which have been prepared to give us guidance and direction.

I came through Denver some years ago, and a stake president asked me if I would interview a man whom he had placed under some sanctions. It seems that this brother

would attend fast and testimony meeting, and as soon as testimony time came he would arise and take the entire period, every Sunday. No one else could say a word. He consistently preached what he called his four basic “doctrines.” (I call them ideas.) First, he said, divorce is not approved of God; therefore the Lord does not recognize divorce. Second, he said, meat should not be eaten—not at all, none! Third, he said, polygamy was not ordained of God. Fourth, he said it was an angel of the devil, not an angel of the Lord, who told Nephi to slay Laban. They could not deter him. He believed the gospel, yes, and he requested a temple recommend, but they couldn’t issue the temple recommend because he had problems with his basic beliefs. They had forbidden him to speak in testimony meeting, but he did the same thing in priesthood meeting. As soon as a question came up, he immediately jumped up and took the whole time, preaching these doctrines. So they were having membership attendance problems at all the meetings where he was present.

Since he had had sanctions placed upon him, he felt his rights had been violated and he was appealing to the President of the Church. When I came through they asked me if I would interview him. I did. It was a most interesting interview. He had much scripture to back up these particular points. I said, “Where did you get these ideas?”

He said, “The Holy Ghost gave them to me.”

I said, “How did he give them to you?”

He said, “Well, he came to me, and I talked with him.”

I said, “Did you see him?”

He said, “Yes.”

I said, “What did he look like?”

He said, “He looked like lightning.”

I said, “He looked like lightning? Was it sheet lightning, or snake lightning?” That made him a little angry. I tried to kid him a

little bit because I couldn't believe he was really serious about this!

He said, "He looked like lightning."

I asked, "Was this in the daytime or nighttime?"

He said, "The nighttime."

I said, "Were there any thunderstorms in the area?" Once again, he didn't appreciate my implication. I could see he was serious about what he was talking about. He went through the scriptures to educate me that these were true doctrines and that the Holy Ghost had called him on a mission to preach these four things. I said, "Well, have you ever had any other experiences like this?"

He said, "Yes, when they dedicated the chapel here (the stake center), I saw the Father and the Son and my grandfather standing above the pulpit."

I said, "Well now, your grandfather was in some pretty high-class company, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he was, as a matter of fact."

Well, this man had good reasons for all of his beliefs. When he started to tell me about divorce I was impressed to ask him, "Have you ever been divorced?"

And he said yes, he had, and it was wrong. He knew it was wrong; therefore it was not ordained of the Lord.

"What about eating meat?" I said. "The revelation says that it should be sparingly."

He said, "That's right, but if you'd ever eaten any meat, and then you didn't eat any meat for five years, that would be sparingly. Then if you didn't eat it for another five years, that's even more sparingly. If you never ate it for the rest of your life, that would still be sparingly. So, if you've ever had a bit of meat, from then on you shouldn't eat meat at all."

When he came to polygamy, I said, "Well, we don't practice that, you know. It's not authorized at the moment, so you don't have to worry about that." But he was sure it never had been authorized.

His fourth point, the idea that an angel of the devil had told Nephi to slay Laban, came from the fact that the Lord had said, "Thou shalt not kill." There was nothing that could be done to deter this man. No way could we do it. So I told him, "You follow your priesthood leader." He wrote then to the President of the Church, who had me write a letter to this brother and tell him in writing essentially what I'd already told him in person.

Subsequently he wound up excommunicated from the Church. The problem was that what he was teaching was not consistent with the word of God, even though he could find scriptures that seemed to substantiate it. It is very important that what we teach be consistent. We need to study the scriptures, know what the Lord has said, and know that no scripture is of any private interpretation. We should get and follow the revealed word of the living prophet of God. That is scripture to us.

Personal Worthiness

Number three: Is the receiver of the communication a fit receptacle? Is he in condition to receive such communication from God? That's very important. If you're going to get revelations, then you'd better be in condition to get them. There are some interesting scriptures on this. Section 50 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which of course deals largely with determining whether or not a revelation comes from the Lord, indicates, "No man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin" (D&C 50:28).

Mormon told us the story of the great destruction that took place on this continent at the crucifixion of the Master. Mormon was a great preacher, but like other great preachers, he sometimes got led away from his subject, and he had to be brought back to it. He started out to tell us about the destruction on this continent; he said, "And now it came to pass that according to our record, and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just

man who did keep the record.” Then he threw in this little-off-the-cuff comment, just as kind of an aside thought—“For he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus; and there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every whit from his iniquity” (3 Nephi 8:1). The qualification has to do with being cleansed every whit of our iniquity if we’re going to receive revelation from the Lord.

Hooray for repentance! I presume if there were no repentance there would be no revelation received. But we can repent, and if we need to repent we should get about it. It’s very important that we follow this particular principle.

I was serving some time ago as an area supervisor of the German-speaking missions. My area also included Italy, which had just been recently opened for the preaching of the gospel, and many were coming into the Church. We find that where the gospel begins to roll forth, all kinds of spurious communications also begin to roll forth. We lost our mission president there, so I was sent there for three months to be the mission president. I had a chance to visit almost all the branches in Italy. Down in southern Italy, after I finished speaking on tithing because that seemed to be a problem over there, as it is everywhere, a man came forward and said that he was receiving revelation from the Lord. “Oh,” I said, “what kind of revelation are you receiving?” He said he got it in a code, and he had found the key to the code on a piece of paper under a rock. He sat in his living room and these numbers came to him. He wrote them down; then he went to his key and translated and thought. In this way he received revelation from the Lord.

Well, he was speaking Italian, of course, and I couldn’t understand Italian, so one of the elders took down all the revelations, translated them, and put them on a tape so I’d know what kinds of revelations he was receiving. It was very interesting. It sounded very much like the Pearl of Great Price, only it

went much beyond the Pearl of Great Price. In the “revelations” he had received, three things came out that he particularly was going to do. He was going to lead the lost Ten Tribes out of the north country. Second, he was going to bring forth the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon. Third, he was going to be one of the two prophets to withstand the forces of Gog and Magog in Jerusalem in the last days. I said, “You are really going to be busy!”

“Well,” he said, “if it’s not of the Lord, where does it come from?”

“Well—may I interview you?”

He said, “Yes, I am willing.”

I asked, “Are you morally clean?”

He said, “Yes.”

I said, “I mean, have you ever had relations with a woman other than your wife since you joined this Church?”

He said, “Oh, yes.”

“When was the last time?”

“Well, it was two months ago.”

“Do you pay your tithing?”

“No.” We didn’t have to go much beyond that.

I said, “You may rest assured this is not of the Lord. The Lord does not operate from this kind of polluted stream.”

It is important that we be in condition if we are going to get revelation from the Lord. You may rest assured that if you are not in condition you will not get it. However, if you are not worthy but you fast and pray and work at it, you’ll get communication, because Old Scratch is great at giving it, and he loves to give it. He gives it all the time, but it’s important that we know from whence it came. When we know that, it gives us some way to handle it.

Edification and Rejoicing

Number four: Does the communication edify and cause you to rejoice? Generally speaking, when it comes from the Lord you’ll feel good about it. We’ll say that it

speaks peace to your heart. But if it's mixed up and confused, then you should seriously question that it came from the Lord. In other words, the Holy Ghost does not look like lightning. I told the brother who thought he did that Nephi had seen the Holy Ghost, and he recorded that the Holy Ghost was in the form of a man. But this man insisted that he looked like lightning. You should question the source of that revelation just because it wasn't clear and concise. It wasn't vivid to the understanding; it left a cloud and a haze. Section 50 of the Doctrine and Covenants seems to indicate exactly what's expected: "Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that if you behold a spirit manifested that you cannot understand, and you receive not that spirit, ye shall ask of the Father in the name of Jesus; and if he give not unto you that spirit, then you may know that it is not of God" (D&C 50:31). The Lord will interpret it to you.

Prayer is very important; in fact, it's absolutely vital. "If ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. But know this, it shall be given you what you shall ask" (D&C 50:29–30). The Lord will help you, even in your prayer, to find out if it is from him. He'll tell you what to ask, and if you ask, harmonizing your will with the will of the Lord (which, by the way, is the way we get our prayers answered anyway), if you ask the Lord for the things that are the Lord's will, I guarantee he'll answer every one of them in the affirmative. If you ask the Lord for something that is not his will, then it will be very difficult to bring it to pass.

Peace or Confusion

Number five: Does it cause your bosom to burn or speak peace unto your soul? Or are you left troubled by the communication? All too often we go to the Lord to see if we can get an answer for something we want to do. I've had young people come to me and say,

"Look, Elder Rector, I know you said that we're supposed to get a witness from the Spirit, have a testimony about the girl that we marry, just as we have a testimony that the gospel is true." I believe that we *can* have that kind of a witness.

Two young returned missionaries came to me one time and said that they'd both prayed, and they'd both gotten the same answer—they were supposed to marry the same girl! I said, "I want to see the girl!" And so that beautiful little girl came into my office; it was very obvious to me how they got that answer. I asked her how she felt about the two elders.

She said, "I don't want anything to do with either one of them!"

You see, it's a two-way street. Both of you need to get that kind of communication, and it's very important that you both get it, that you are united on it, that it is clear, and that you know by the Spirit, by the peace, by the burning (if you want to call it that), the convincing influence that it is of the Lord. Then you go get married in the temple.

Clarity or Stupor of Thought

I've known young people who would fall on their knees and say, "Lord, help me. Show me what to do with my life." I don't believe the Lord answers those kinds of prayers. No, you have to work it out in your own mind. I think it's best if you take alternatives before the Lord. Perhaps you could say, "Now, father, I'm not sure what I should do. Perhaps I could talk over a couple of possible courses of action with thee. If I did this, probably this and this (list the possibilities) would be the result. On the other hand, if I do this (something to the opposite), perhaps this and this would be the result! Now, I'm not sure which it is I should do, whether I should do the first and then this and then—" All of a sudden your second alternative just fades away and it's gone. Or, as the Lord says, you have a stupor of thought and you forget the thing that you have asked him.

But all of a sudden the first thought becomes very bright and very clear to your understanding. I'd recommend you go in the direction of that which has become bright and clear as you've prepared yourself to receive such an answer from the Lord.

Of course, I guess there are no set ways to get your prayers answered. The Prophet Joseph couldn't get all of his prayers answered. I suppose that you won't get all of yours answered, either. But if you'll be in condition (and condition comes through obedience—it doesn't come any other way), and go to the Lord with prayer, with fasting, you'll get everything you need answered. Whatever will be for your good and benefit you shall receive, because the Lord loves his children. He loves all of his children. I think he loves them all equally. There's some question about that. I have a friend who seems to think the Lord loves only Latter-day Saints. Others think he loves Latter-day Saints more than he does Baptists and Methodists. I don't believe that. I think the Lord loves all his children. He says he's no respecter of persons. I think he loves Baptists and Methodists and Catholics. . . . I know he loves Catholics: we baptize thirty-five thousand of them every year! He must love them! In fact, he even loves Jehovah's Witnesses—it's hard, but he does it. He loves all his children, and he wants to bless them. He wants to give them revelation—yes, I mean that, revelation—and he will do it. He will give it to anyone who will prepare himself to receive it. You have to have revelation before you can join this Church, and you certainly have to have revelation before you can bear witness that it is the Lord's true church. He'll give that revelation to every one of us. He delights to do it.

Just by way of review, here is how to know if an idea is from God: One, is it within the bounds and limitations of your calling, and does it require a service consistent with your calling? Two, is it consistent with the revealed word of God? The scriptures *and* the directions

of the living prophet of God today—those are the revealed words of God. Three, is the receiver of the communication a fit receptacle? Is he in condition to receive such a communication from the Lord? Four, does the communication edify and cause you to rejoice? Five, does it cause your bosom to burn or speak peace to your soul, or are you left troubled by the communication? Six, is the communication vivid to the understanding, or does it leave a cloud or a hazy impression?

Getting your prayers answered is hard work. As Longfellow said:

*The heights by great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.*

As representatives of the Lord, and you from this University represent him wherever you go, it is important that you have witness as to your work and as to what the Lord would have you do on specific occasions. I promise you can get that kind of witness if you seek it and if you stay in condition to receive it.

I bear you my witness that I know that God, our Heavenly Father, lives, that he loves us, every one, that he hears and answers prayers, for he has heard and answered mine. I bear witness to you that Jesus is the Christ, that he lives, that he has paid the price for our sins, and that if we need to repent, we can do it. We can repent of anything, except murder, shedding innocent blood—the Lord doesn't allow that in this dispensation—but anything else you can repent of because he died for our sins. I bear witness that we have a living prophet of God on earth today who gives directions to the Church and who receives revelation from the Lord, for he acts under the direction of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose church this really is. I leave you this witness in all soberness and leave my love and my blessing and my most fond affections to you

Latter-day Saints, upon whom so much depends. May the Lord bless you to get on

speaking terms with him, and I wish you a most obedient new year, in Jesus' name. Amen.