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CULTIVATING A RESISTANCE TO TRUE
KNOWLEDGE
MORMON EPISTEMOLOGY (PART 1)

By **BILL YOUNG**
TRUTH TO MORMONS MINISTRY

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INTRODUCTION

As we begin a series on Mormon and Christian epistemology, it would be good to first consider some reasons why LDS can be so closed-minded to biblical evidence that doesn't agree with LDS doctrine. But first, what is *epistemology*? Epistemology is essentially a big word that considers how we know what we know. It is a branch of philosophy dealing with knowledge, along with the nature and scope of what we can know. It asks "how do we know what we know" and whether this knowledge is adequately justified. We'll look at these descriptions and elements in future articles, but for now, it is informative to recognize some problematic beliefs and practices of Mormonism that make it difficult to simply apply reason and the clear words of the Bible to derive truth. This is not an exhaustive treatment, but let's consider some significant obstacles.

I. Appeal to Feelings

One reason LDS can readily dismiss Bible scripture opposing Mormon doctrines is because of a conditioned approach of trusting personal feelings to confirm truth and error. We might call this an *affective epistemology*. While I have touched on this in a website blog, a refresher here is important before we move on to other challenges.

One official Mormon website instructs readers to trust their feelings to affirm spiritual truth:

Feelings from the Holy Ghost are personal revelation to you that confirm the truth of the Book of Mormon and the gospel of Jesus Christ as restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith.¹

This experiential-based test for truth becomes readily apparent when reading a 2004 church handbook used by LDS missionaries to prepare for service.² Within its 228 pages, the need to identify and trust one's "feelings" is mentioned no less than 129 times! Prior to the 2004 missionary guide, the 1973 missionary teaching booklet was even worse. Within its 217 printed pages, "investigators" were asked no less than *160 times* about their feelings on every subject discussed. The general instructions coached missionaries to "*Keep in mind how you want the family to feel.*"³

1 www.mormon.org/mormonorg/eng/basic-beliefs/heavenly-father-s-plan-of-salvation/how-can-i-know-this-is-true

2 *Preach My Gospel, A Guide to Missionary Service*, 2004 ed., by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

3 *The Uniform System for Teaching Families*, p. A-1, Item no. 4

Rather than point people to the Bible for answers, the 2004 missionary guide informs LDS missionaries to coach prospective converts to discover personal feelings to confirm their answers to prayer:

In answer to our prayers, the Holy Ghost will teach us truth through our feelings and thoughts. Feelings that come from the Holy Ghost are powerful, but they are also usually gentle and quiet.... Help them understand that our Heavenly Father will answer their prayers, typically through feelings of their hearts and thoughts in their minds.⁴

Following are a few talking points LDS Missionaries are instructed to ask of their investigators:

- *“Mr. and Mrs. Brown, what you are feeling right now is the Spirit of the Lord testifying to you that we are teaching you the truth. You are beginning to receive your own testimony of the truthfulness of this message.”*⁵
- *“Mr. Brown, in your own heart, how do you feel about Joseph Smith? Do you feel that the Lord can speak to prophets today?”*⁶
- *“I know that you will feel the truth of our message if you will make the effort to ponder these things and will seek the Lord in sincere prayer.”*⁷ Mr. Brown is further instructed that *“What you are feeling now—that good feeling of confidence (assurance, peace, warmth,)—is the Holy Ghost telling you that you are receiving the truth. This is one feeling a person has when the Holy Ghost is helping him.”*⁸
- *“Do you feel that reading and studying the Book of Mormon would be a good way to determine the truth of our message?”*⁹ Notice that the investigator *is not* encouraged to consider the Bible in his quest for truth. The investigator is then assured that *“As you read it sincerely you will feel its power and truth.”*¹⁰

Extra-biblical Mormon scripture records the Mormon Christ instructing Oliver Cowdery to seek a feeling to confirm his work as scribe for another book of extra-biblical LDS scripture, the Book of Mormon:

Doctrine and Covenants, Section 9:8-9

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.

4 *Preach My Gospel, A Guide to Missionary Service*, by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004, Lesson 1: The Restoration, p. 39

5 *The Uniform System for Teaching Families*, p. A-3, item no. 4

6 *Ibid.*, p. E-19

7 *Ibid.*, p. C-28

8 *Ibid.*, p. F-28

9 *The Uniform System for Teaching Families*, p. C-27

10 *Ibid.*, p. C-27

This “burning of the bosom” is a familiar phrase used by Mormons to describe a good feeling about your prayers. One Mormon lesson manual explains what this burning bosom feels like:

Perhaps we can recall meeting the missionaries for the first time and learning the gospel, or associating with a person who helped us gain a testimony. Or maybe we remember the warm feeling we had when we heard someone bear testimony to us. This feeling is the Holy Ghost bearing witness to our souls that what we are hearing is true. It is a feeling of calm, unwavering certainty. By this feeling, we know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that Joseph Smith was a prophet, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church on the earth. This feeling can also give us a testimony of the Word of Wisdom, of the principle of tithing, or of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.¹¹

Not only does Mormonism use feelings as a standard for determining the truthfulness of the Mormon Church, but members are conditioned to trust their feelings as affirmation that they have been converted. Mormon President David O. McKay explained:

The phrase, 'born again', has a deeper significance than many people attach to it. This changed feeling may be undescribable, but it is real.¹²

Knowing that LDS are often confronted by Christians with disquieting facts concerning Mormonism's extra-biblical scriptures, Mormon Apostle James Faust assured church members that they shouldn't get hung up on knowledge, but should trust their feelings to understand scripture:

The test for understanding the sacred book is preeminently spiritual. An obsession with secular knowledge rather than spiritual understanding will make its pages difficult to unlock.¹³

To be fair, many LDS explain that feelings must be backed up with scripture. A Mormon missionary preparation manual gives this qualification:

As you pray for inspiration, you should also confirm your feelings. For example, compare your decisions with the scriptures and the teachings of the living prophets. Be certain that the feelings are consistent with the assignment you have; for example, you will not receive revelation to tell a local bishop how he should perform in his calling.¹⁴

While this instruction may be reassuring to LDS, its method is circular, as Book of Mormon scripture *itself* is validated through feelings (D&C 9:8-9). Moreover, the extra-biblical teachings

11 The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood*, p. 192

12 *Conference Report*, Apr 1962, p.7, or *Improvement Era*, June 1962, p.405

13 James E. Faust, *Ensign*, January 2004, p. 5

14 *Preach My Gospel, A Guide to Missionary Service*, by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004, p. 98

of Mormon prophets are subjective in themselves and cannot be objectively qualified if God's written scripture is still an open book.

Biblical Position

The fact is that with the strong appeal made toward acquiring good feelings, LDS become insulated from Bible passages that expose Mormonism's heretical doctrines. If we assume that most Mormons feel *good* about their chosen faith, we can likewise assume that the opposite reaction will be felt by Mormons when a Christian explains to them that Mormonism is a false religion. Since an informed and biblical Christian witness will inevitably make most Mormons *feel* uncomfortable, LDS are naturally conditioned to dismiss conflicts with the Bible and doggedly cling to unbiblical and spiritual deadly theology taught by the Mormon Church.

So, the question that begs an answer is simply this; are subjective feelings a reliable indicator of truth? What we know is that emotions are one of the shallowest parts of human nature. As such, feelings can be and often *are* wrong. For every Latter-day Saint who has left the Mormon Church for the true gospel of Christ, there is a similar thread of having trusted feelings that lead to accepting a lie. Eve learned this lesson the hard way, as she followed her heart and accepted the deceptive message of Satan rather than following the personally delivered words of God. It was a deadly mistake.

While Mormonism says "follow you heart," the Bible warns that *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). We're warned again that *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12). And once again, *"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered"* (Proverbs 28:26).

Because of our proneness to follow our own way, the Bible *never* says to search the heart for truth. Instead, the Bible says to "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). To the contrary, while Mormonism makes an appeal to one's emotions, the Bible points investigators to objective fact found in the written Word. This was the method of Jesus, as He said to His disciples:

Luke, Chapter 24:44-45

...These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses,

and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.

The apostle Paul never asked his listener to cultivate feelings as a confirmation of gospel truth. To the contrary, Paul appealed to the scriptures account, *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scripture might have hope"* (Rom. 15:4). These same apostolic witnesses testified not of feelings but to those historical facts *"which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life [Christ]"* (1 Jn. 1:1). Of this living Truth the apostle John reasoned that *"we have seen it, and bear witness"* that which *"was manifested unto us"* and *"that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you"* (vv. 2-3). Again, the first century apostles never said trust your feelings. Instead, followers were to trust the testimony of their eyewitness, factual accounts of Christ.

While the apostolic era has closed, we have the message of these eyewitness preserved for us today in the precious Word of God, from which we learn that *"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom. 10:17). Because the strongest conclusions are found in using the cognitive person over the affective, the Bible tells us to *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim. 2:15). It was Christ Who prayed to the Father for his disciples, *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth"* (Jn. 17:17). Our doctrine, teaching, and worship must therefore be validated from the Bible. We find the ancient Bereans following this same biblical model:

Acts, Chapter 17:11-12

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed...

The apostle John never pointed believers to their feelings to obtain knowledge, but he spoke of a more sure foundation in the written scriptures:

1 John 5:13

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

The apostle Paul told his listeners to watch for evil men and seducers, who are both *"deceiving, and being deceived."* Paul's admonition was not to train your feelings, but to follow the *"holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ"*

Jesus." For "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:13-17). This same battle-tested man of God exhorted his fellow brethren not to ask lost people how they feel about gospel doctrine, nor to persuade the lost through emotional testimonies, but rather, Christians were to "Preach the word....For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Yes, Christianity employs both the head and the heart, but if we are to guard ourselves from following false religious fables, then our feelings must always be subordinate to what we can objectively conclude from the written Word of God. Consequently, if your doctrine contradicts the Bible, it cannot be true no matter how strong your feelings on the matter. For the Latter-day Saint reader, be warned—Mormon leadership has desensitized you from the biblical witness you have heard from Bible-believing Christians. Your uneasy feelings *do not* indicate that the Christian's witness to you is false. Your feelings are more likely your God given conscience, as the Holy Ghost shows you that Mormon doctrines *cannot* be supported from God's Book, the Bible. Your predisposition to trust your gut and stay in your personal comfort zone is the fatal flaw of Mormonism's experiential-based standard of truth. Don't make this mistake.

II. Appeal to Personal Testimony

Mormon leadership defines a testimony as "a solemn attestation as to the truth of a matter."¹⁵ Testimonies are a frequently emphasized aspect of the Mormon's faith validation system. One Mormon Lesson Manual states:

A testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ is one of the most valuable possessions we can have. President David O. McKay realized this in his youth. He said: "I hungered for it; I felt that if I could get that [a testimony], all else would indeed seem insignificant" ("A Personal Testimony," *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1962, 628).¹⁶

Those who have witnessed to Mormons know that without fail, LDS resolve doctrinal conflicts and logic contradictions by bearing their testimonies concerning the truthfulness of what they known to be true. Building on Mormonism's heavy emphasis on feelings, a heartfelt testimony carries the same weight to LDS as a well reasoned deduction based on the actual God-

¹⁵ Talk entitled *The Power of a Personal Testimony*, Mormon Apostle Dieter Uchtdorf, *Ensign*, Nov. 06, p. 37

¹⁶ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood*, p. 192

breathed words of the Bible. For example, listen to some excerpts from one Mormon Apostle during the Mormon Church's 176th Semiannual General Conference in Salt Lake City:

For members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the term testimony is a warm and familiar word in our religious expressions. It is tender and sweet. It has always a certain sacredness about it. When we talk about testimony, we refer to feelings of our heart and mind rather than an accumulation of logical, sterile facts. It is a gift of the Spirit, a witness from the Holy Ghost that certain concepts are true....These promptings of the Spirit, rather than human logic alone, will be the true foundation upon which our testimony will be built.¹⁷

A testimony is the sure knowledge or assurance from the Holy Ghost of the truth and divinity of the Lord's work in these latter days.¹⁸

Our firm conviction of gospel truth is an anchor in our lives; it is steady and reliable as the North Star.¹⁹

So here we are to believe that a belief need not be logical, as long as you have strong feelings for you logical contradictions. Sit and ponder that for a while Mormon reader. Would you apply the same standard to any other area of life other than your testimony and faith? And are firm convictions really as reliable as the North Star? What are we to make then of my former Mormon testimony, which was at the time a firm conviction. What about the convictions once held by every other former Mormon's testimony? Every former Mormon would now acknowledge that their sincere testimonies were *anything but* confirmation of knowledge from the Holy Ghost, and their convictions were *certainly not* as reliable as our solar system. This kind of soul-stirring rhetoric in Mormon General Conferences may feel good to true-blue Mormons, but it is the death of logic and reason, as the testimony of every former Latter-day Saint would affirm.

Continuing, sixth Mormon President Joseph F. Smith deemphasized evidence and encouraged training your feelings to validate truth:

Testimony bearing is chiefly for the benefit of those who bear the testimony, in that their gratitude and appreciation are deepened. Testimony bearing is not the accumulation of arguments or evidences solely for the satisfaction and testimony of others. Let the testimonies, then, of the young people include the training of their feelings by way of making them more appreciative and more thankful for the blessings they enjoy....²⁰

Once again we see Mormonism fostering a deference to one's *affective* domain over the *objective*. Don't be bothered by the facts, just bear your testimony, do it often, and "train your

¹⁷ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 30 Sep 06, *Ensign*, Nov. 06, pp. 37-38

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 38)

¹⁹ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 30 Sep 06, *Ensign*, Nov. 06, p. 38

²⁰ Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 208

feelings." Mormon Apostle Dallin Oaks made the case that when necessary, LDS should check historical facts at the door and just testify how you feel about church teaching:

Our individual, personal testimonies are based on the witness of the spirit, not on any combination or accumulation of historical facts. If we are so grounded, no alteration of historical facts can shake our testimonies.²¹

James Faust, LDS Apostle, and Second Counselor in the First Presidency, said that the LDS testimony is indisputable:

I believe that every person's individual testimony of Jesus as the Christ comes as a spiritual gift. No one can successfully dispute or challenge it because it is so personal a gift to the one to whom it has been given.²²

Really? So because I have deeply personal convictions, these stand as self-attesting evidence of truth that can't be challenged by anything....even from the Bible? Comments like these are intended as thought-stopping techniques used by Mormon leadership to shut down critical thinking and any consideration of contravening evidence. Dear Mormon reader, this kind of indoctrination is exactly what keeps you trapped in your strong delusion that feels so right and good, but in fact is deadly heresy.

LDS missionaries make good use of these feelings, as they're instructed numerous times in their teaching material to testify to the truthfulness of their message. Furthermore, testimonies are routinely practiced for all church members during monthly "fast and testimony" meetings, whereby the main church service provides an open floor for all members to come and stand before the congregation to bear their testimonies on what they know to be true.

To non-Mormons, all Mormon testimonies are seen as remarkably similar. Each gives their heartfelt assurance that they know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, and that the Mormon Church is the one and only true church on the earth today. Most will affirm that they *know* that the Book of Mormon is true, and that they're thankful that they have a modern-day prophet and the priesthood to lead the Church. After both hearing and practicing these almost self hypnotizing testimonies over and over again, they become truth, even though biblical scripture is never presented to demonstrate *why* they know these things to be true. With this personal, self-validating standard in place, LDS and their prospective converts are ripe for accepting the extra-biblical and anti-biblical doctrines of the Mormon Church.

21 Dallin H. Oaks, article entitled "Elder Decries Criticism of LDS Leaders," quoted in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Sunday, August 18, 1985, p. 2B

Biblical Position

While Christians don't doubt a Mormon's sincerity, it must be understood that believers can bear testimonies until they're blue in the face and it won't "prove" the truthfulness of Christian doctrine. In fact, if a testimony is in contradiction to the Word of God, it can actually be disproven. As such, a Christian's testimony *must not* be based on a subjective standard. A Christian's testimony must be rooted in foundational truths preserved in the text of the Bible. The Bible never says to discard historical facts and evidence, but rather, we are to *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good"* (1 Thess. 5:21).

For the Latter-day Saint reader, be warned, you have been conditioned to dismiss unbiblical and heretical doctrines through substituting the warm feelings you naturally have while bearing your testimony for the Mormon Church. Whether you realize its full impact now or not, you have been set up to be spiritually blinded to the truth that Christians are trying to share with you.

III. Appeal to Exclusivism

Mormon scripture says that the Mormon Church is *"the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth"* (D&C 1:30). Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie limited salvation exclusively to LDS when he wrote, *"There is no salvation outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."*²³ Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism reasoned, *"Will everybody be damned but Mormons? Yes, and a great portion of them, unless they repent, and work righteousness."*²⁴

To fairly represent LDS, by being "damned", LDS *do not* mean hell, but simply that non-Mormons will not inherit the highest Mormonism heaven, the Celestial Kingdom, which is where LDS become Gods to rule over their own peopled planets.

Continuing, Joseph Smith Jr. taught that he was told during a personal visit by the Mormon Jesus that the *entire* Christian Church had fallen into apostasy soon after the death of the original twelve apostles, and that Joseph Smith was to join none of them. Smith recorded this event in Mormon scripture, which says in part:

22 James A. Faust, talk given at the 173rd Semiannual General Conference of the Mormon Church, Oct. 2003, Salt Lake City; also *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, p. 22

23 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 670

24 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 119

I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt...²⁵

What is important to understand is that to a Mormon, the idea of leaving the Mormon Church is unconscionable, as it is the equivalent of losing one's salvation. Listen to second Mormon President and Prophet, Brigham Young, who warned:

No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith....[E]very man and woman must have the certificate of Joseph Smith junior, as a passport to their entrance into the mansion where God and Christ are....[Joseph Smith] reigns there as supreme a being in his sphere, capacity, and calling, as God does in heaven. Many will exclaim— 'Oh, that is very disagreeable! It is preposterous! We cannot bear the thought!' But it is true.²⁶

Joseph Smith Junior's influence in Mormonism cannot be overstated and Mormon leadership routinely emphasizes acceptance of this man for personal salvation. Tenth Mormon President and Prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith, declared:

[There is] no salvation without accepting Joseph Smith. If Joseph Smith was verily a prophet, and if he told the truth...no man can reject that testimony without incurring the most dreadful consequences, for he cannot enter the kingdom of God.²⁷

²⁵ *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:19

²⁶ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 7, p. 289-91

²⁷ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 1, p.190

Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie said:

It is because the Lord called Joseph Smith that salvation is again available to mortal men. ...If it had not been for Joseph Smith and the restoration, there would be no salvation....²⁸

Mormon Apostle, Orson Hyde, was emphatic that Joseph Smith was essential to salvation when he said:

I tell you, Joseph holds the keys, and none of us can get into the celestial kingdom without passing by him. We have not got rid of him, but he stands there as the sentinel, holding the keys of the kingdom of God; and there are many of them beside him. I tell you, if we get past those who have mingled with us, and know us best, and have a right to know us best, probably we can pass all other sentinels as far as it is necessary, or as far as we may desire. But I tell you, the pinch will be with those that have mingled with us, stood next to us, weighed our spirits, tried us, and proven us: there will be a pinch, in my view, to get past them. The others, perhaps, will say, If brother Joseph is satisfied with you, you may pass. If it is all right with him, it is all right with me. Then if Joseph shall say to a man, or if brother Brigham say to a man, I forgive you your sins, 'Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them;' if you who have suffered and felt the weight of transgression— if you have generosity enough to forgive the sinner, I will forgive him: you cannot have more generosity than I have. I have given you power to forgive sins, and when the Lord gives a gift, he does not take it back again.²⁹

The prophet, Brigham Young, even tried to co-opt scripture by twisting it to support Joseph Smith:

I will now give my scripture—"Whosoever confesseth that Joseph Smith was sent of God ...that spirit is of God; and every spirit that does not confess that God has sent Joseph Smith, and revealed the everlasting Gospel to and through him, is of Antichrist...."³⁰

He that confesseth not that Jesus has come in the flesh and sent Joseph Smith with the fullness of the Gospel to this generation, is not of God, but is anti-christ.³¹

Biblical Position

While Young claimed that whoever doesn't confess Smith has not the spirit of God, the Bible has a very different message:

1 John 5:12-13

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

²⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 396, 670

²⁹ Orson Hyde, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 6, pp. 154-155

³⁰ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 8, p. 176

³¹ Ibid., Vol. 9, p. 312

Unfortunately for LDS, the Bible says nothing about looking unto Joseph for your hope of salvation. Instead we read in Colossians 1:27 that it is "*Christ in you*" our "*hope of glory*." Regarding Joseph Smith being the passport or ticket into heaven, the Bible has someone else in mind:

John 14:6

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

The Bible tells us that "*...he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep*" (Jn. 10:2). May I respectfully say then that Joseph Smith Junior isn't guarding the door to heaven—Christ is. The Bible also affirms that we should be "*Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...*" (Heb. 12:2)—not Joseph Smith Junior.

For the Latter-day Saint reader, keep in mind that you have likely been desensitized from the true gospel because of Mormonism's self-qualification as the only true church, including required gate-keepers for you to enter Heaven. May God help you to see the need to be faithful foremost to God's biblical revelation, before following the contradictory doctrinal positions of the Mormon Church.

IV. Appeal to Extra-biblical Authority

To be fair to the LDS viewpoint, most Mormons temper their subjective appeal to fact by explaining that all teaching, including any subsequent revelations from LDS prophets, must agree with the written scriptures, and this provides a final authority and objective method for detecting truth from error. Reading after some LDS authorities, one might actually come to that conclusion. Tenth Mormon President and Prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith, gave this impression when he taught:

It makes no difference what is written or what anyone has said, if what has been said is in conflict with what the Lord has revealed, we can set it aside. My words [the words of a prophet], and the teachings of any other member of the Church, high or low, if they do not square with the revelations, we need not accept them. Let us have this matter clear. We have accepted the four standard works as the measuring yardsticks, or balances, by which we measure every man's doctrine.³²

32 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 3, p. 203; also *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 18

Mormon Apostle Bruce McConkie also affirmed the Bible as the final rule for LDS doctrine:

The books, writings, explanations, expositions, views, and theories of even the wisest and greatest men, either in or out of the Church, do not rank with the standard works. Even the writings, teachings, and opinions of the prophets of God are acceptable only to the extent they are in harmony with what God has revealed and what is recorded in the standard works. When the living oracles speak in the name of the Lord or as moved upon by the Holy Ghost, however, their utterances are then binding upon all who hear, and whatever is said will without any exception be found to be in harmony with the standard works. The Lord's house is a house of order, and one truth never contradicts another.³³

Biblical Position

Like so many things in Mormonism, however, the promises given for a safe standard of judging truth amount to nothing more than carefully worded double-speak. Consider why LDS are unable to use the scripture to determine truth from error.

A. Written scripture is equaled by the words of Mormon Prophets.

Tenth Mormon President and Prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith, said:

What is scripture? When one of the brethren stands before a congregation of the people today and the inspiration of the Lord is upon him, he speaks that which the Lord would have him speak. It is just as much scripture as anything you will find written in any of these records, and yet we call these the standard works of the church.³⁴

Because Mormon Prophets purport to speak today with scriptural equivalency, Latter-day Saints cannot use the written Word to exclusively judge their prophet's modern-day teachings. Consider several statements, starting with the LDS Jesus, affirming that LDS prophets speak with the equivalence of written LDS scripture:

Doctrine and Covenants 1:38

What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.

Mormon instructional materials emphasize parity of prophetic teaching and the written Word:

In addition to the Bible, any message given by God's prophets through the power of the Holy Ghost is scripture.³⁵

³³ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 765

³⁴ *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.1, p.186, 1954

³⁵ *Teachings of the Living Prophet*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 17

When God gives a message to mankind, it is not something to be lightly cast aside.
Whether He speaks personally, or through His prophets, He himself said, it is the same.³⁶

Second Mormon Prophet, Brigham Young, thought that his words were scripture:

I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture. Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon, and it is as good Scripture as they deserve.³⁷

Mormon Apostle Bruce McConkie agreed:

Any message, whether written or spoken, that comes from God to man by the power of the Holy Ghost is *scripture*.³⁸

B. Written scripture is less relevant than the words of Mormon Prophets.

Once LDS accept that scripture continues to flow today, the next logical stop is to accept that current and new scripture is more important than past revelation. Mormonism does this by avoiding descriptions of the Bible as a book of doctrine, but rather, as a progressive book of "principles" that can be modified, added to, or deleted from based on the current spiritual maturity of the people at any given time in history. Third LDS President and Prophet, John Taylor, reasoned:

Those books are good for example, precedent, and investigation, and for developing certain laws and principles. But they do not, they cannot, touch every case required to be adjudicated and set in order.³⁹

Notice that Taylor conveniently failed to mention that the Bible is also good for "doctrine" (2 Timothy 3:16). Taylor's relegation of God's Word to merely a book of "principles" make it more agreeable when LDS tweak its meaning or add new, extra-biblical scripture to the cannon that conflicts with those pesky Christian doctrines in that stale, outmoded Bible (in the eyes of LDS anyway). Once the Bible is reduced to a collection of mere "principles," then theological liberals and cults alike can bend the Bible's message to fit the needs of the day. An official Mormon Church publication on modern-day prophets makes this very point:

The scriptures contain eternal, unchanging principles; the circumstances and needs of people, however, may vary in different dispensations.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid., p. 63

³⁷ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol.13, p. 95; See similar statement in Vol. 13, p. 264

³⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 682

³⁹ John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom*, p. 34; also *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 19

⁴⁰ *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 18

Let just clear off a spot right here and address this idea that the “principles” of God need adapting to each generation or dispensations. No matter what culture or generation, God's Word is sufficient, as it endures forever (Ps. 100:5; 117:2). People and cultures will change, but God's word—and the doctrine therein—endures forever (1 Pet. 1:24-25).

The people of the prophet Jeremiah's day reflecting this doctrinal relevancy question that Mormons use today. Jeremiah gave God's attitude regarding the relevancy and timelessness of His truths:

Jeremiah 6:16

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

The “old paths” are the timeless and unchanging truths of God's word. Jeremiah's problems is the same one we are seeing in our culture today. The God's standard hasn't changed, and neither has the basic nature of mankind, no matter the generation.

Continuing now on how Mormonism undermines the Bible, LDS Apostle Orson F. Whitney did his best to undermine the final rule of the Bible when he said:

...No man ought to contend for what is in the books, in the face of God's mouthpiece, who speaks for him and interprets his word. To so contend is to defer to the dead letter in preference to the living oracle, which is always a false position. . . .

...God's work is progressive. It changes its appearance, but never its principles. The truths upon which it is founded are eternal, unalterable, but there are many regulations that change and change and change, as the work of God goes on.⁴¹

Eleventh LDS President and Prophet, Harold B. Lee, said that a mere book—that would be the Bible in this case—is stale stuff compared to the current info LDS prophets are putting out:

Sometimes we get the notion that if it is written in a book, it makes it more true than if it is spoken in the last General Conference. Just because it is written in a book does not make it more of an authority to guide us.⁴²

Thirteenth LDS President and Prophet, Ezra Taft Benson, made the case for the superiority of the modern-day spoken word over the written Word of God when he gave a talk explaining the

41 Elder Orson F. Whitney, Conference Report, Oct. 1916, pp. 55-56 (check pp. Quote shortened); also *Teachings of the Living Prophet*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 20

42 Harold B. Lee, *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 19

fundamentals of following a prophet. Fundamental number two was that *"The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works [scripture]".*⁴³

C. Double-speak on prophetic pronouncements not contradicting scripture.

Mormonism bates their membership with assurances of the standard works to safely guide their paths. The switch is inevitable after accepting that the modern-day words of LDS Prophets are literal and more current scripture. Once this concept is accepted, LDS have opened the door to false prophecy, with no objective arbiter of truth to identify a false prophet from the genuine Word of God. This hasn't stopped LDS leadership from taking both sides of the coin, however. Consider the circular reasoning demonstrated in the following LDS church publication excerpt:

That which a living prophet tells us will always be in harmony with the standard works, but this is not to say he is limited by them. Although a prophet speaking under the influences of the Holy Ghost will never contradict principles found in the standard works [the 4 books of Mormon scripture, including the KJV Bible], he will expand, or even go beyond them. A prophet may also give or take away principles or programs, according to the spiritual readiness of the people.⁴⁴

It is beyond the scope of this article, but many Mormon prophets and doctrines clearly contradict the Bible, which is one of the four books of scripture in the Mormon "standard works". As such, LDS appeals to scripture as a check and balance against false prophets are empty. Listen again to Mormon's attitude toward bending the Bible for the needs of the people:

The world is not static. New and different problems (or variations of old problems) continually challenge us. That is why the Lord continues to send living prophets. In addition to interpreting existing scripture, a prophet acts as the agent through whom the Lord can give new scriptures, according to the needs of the people. When prophets, who are inspired by the Holy Ghost, speak, their words take precedence over other statements on the same issue. Their inspired counsel will be in harmony with the eternal truths in the standard works and will be keyed to the needs and conditions of their day.

The President of the Church is the only man on earth authorized by God to go beyond or add to the scriptures....⁴⁵

This is significant. LDS argue that prophets may expand or add to scripture, but that new information will always "be in harmony with the eternal truths" in scripture. Yet, the very same quote gives the circuititious logic that if an LDS prophet speaks, his "words take precedence over other statements on the same issue." Now how, pray tell, is one to juxtapose this concept?

⁴³ Ezra Taft Benson, *Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet*, p. 30; also *Teachings of the Living Prophet*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 16

⁴⁴ *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 18

Either the Word of God (written or spoken by LDS prophets) is settled—and therefore usable to detect error from a plethora of false prophets—or it is not usable at all.

Biblical Position

The statements we have visited thus far show that Latter-day Saints have abrogated their one and only modern-day, objective yardstick to determine truth. In accepting the written Word of God as an open book, subject to the whims of modern-day Prophets who alone speak for God and can never be wrong, LDS have accepted a host of unbiblical doctrines that ultimately result in the spiritual suicide of every well-meaning Mormon who steps into eternity having accepted doctrinal deception. To the Mormon reader, your only hope of seeing through the cleverly disguised and deadly heresies of the Mormon Church is to without equivocation, trust the more sure word of prophecy found in the Holy Bible and backed up with thousands of manuscripts of antiquity attesting to its timely trustworthiness. The Apostle Peter knew the danger here, as he warned his listeners not to be deceived with cunning stories. How were they to guard against deception? Note that even though the apostles spoke of Christ as eyewitness to his ministry, the overruling standard for truth was the prophecy of the written Word:

2 Peter, Chapter 1:16, 19-21

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty....We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scriptures is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

V. Appeal to Outsource Critical Thinking

Another significant obstacle for LDS knowing the truth is that their church conditions its members to outsource or defer their sense-making to Mormon leadership. For example, Joseph Smith Junior said of himself:

God made Aaron to be the mouthpiece for the children of Israel, and He will make me to be God to you in His stead, and the Elders to be mouth for me; and if you don't like it, you must lump it.⁴⁶

45 Ibid., p. 18

46 Joseph Smith Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p.363

The Mormon Church owned newspaper, Deseret News, explained who is to do the thinking in the LDS church:

Any Latter-day Saint who denounces or opposes whether actively or otherwise, any plan or doctrine advocated by the "prophets, seers, or revelators" of the Church, is cultivating the spirit of apostasy. One cannot speak evil of the Lord's anointed (as Abinadi and Alma did), and retain the holy spirit in his heart...When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan-it is God's plan. When they point the way, there is no other which is safe. When they give direction, it should mark the end of controversy. God works in no other way. To think otherwise, without immediate repentance, may cost one his faith, may destroy his testimony, and leave him a stranger to the kingdom of God.⁴⁷

Another church owned magazine similarly explained how much discernment freedom church members really have:

Lucifer...wins a great victory when he can get members of the Church to...'do their own thinking.'...When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done.⁴⁸

Mormon Apostle and future fourth President and Prophet, Wilford Woodruff, encouraged church loyalty over principle when he said:

Now, whatever I might have obtained in the shape of learning, by searching and study respecting the arts and sciences of men,-whatever principles I may have imbibed during my scientific researches, yet, if the Prophet of God should tell me that a certain principle or theory which I might have learned was not true, I do not care what my ideas might have been, I should consider it my duty, at the suggestion of my file leader, to abandon that principle of theory.⁴⁹

Mormon Apostle Dallin Oaks said during a May 1, 2007, interview with PBS that *"It's wrong to criticize leaders of the Church, even if the criticism is true."*⁵⁰

Mormon Apostle, Marion G. Romney, intimated that Mormon Prophets will never lead people astray, but on the outside chance that they do, you should obey him anyway and the Lord will bless you:

I remember years ago when I was a bishop I had President [Heber J.] Grant talk to our ward. After the meeting, I drove him home....When we got to his home I got out of the car and went up on the porch with him. Standing by me, he put his arm over my shoulder and said: "My boy, you always keep your eye on the President of the Church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it."

⁴⁷ Ward Teachers Message, *Deseret News*, Church Section, p. 5, May 26, 1945

⁴⁸ *Improvement Era*, June 1945, p. 354

⁴⁹ Wilford Woodruff, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 5, p. 83

⁵⁰ Dullin Oaks, PBS documentary by filmmaker Helen Whitess entitled *"The Mormons,"* 30 April and 1 May 2007

Then with a twinkle in his eye, he said, "But you don't need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray."⁵¹

Mormon Assistant to the Twelve Apostles, future Apostle and First Counselor to the President, Heber C. Kimball declared that "*If you are told by your leader to do a thing, do it. None of your business if it is right or wrong.*"⁶²

Biblical Position

And so it becomes quickly evident why Mormons can easily dismiss conflicts in doctrine presented to them from the Bible. Faithful LDS have a duty to fall in line with their leadership's teaching, even if they know that they are putting forth false information. To do otherwise is to place the Latter-day Saint in jeopardy of being shut out of the kingdom of God.

While Christians certainly respect the pastoral headship of the churches that they attend and have a requirement to support and follow their bible-based teachings and leadership, this obedient attitude is *never* subordinated into following church leadership into doctrinal heresy. Therefore, despite Apostle Kimball's instruction, it is *very much* the Christian's business whether their leadership's teaching and doctrine is right or wrong:

1 John 4:1

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Timothy 2:15

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

For what purpose would this admonition serve if Christians cannot call out a leader who is teaching heresy? The Apostle Paul told his flock to verify his doctrine against that which was already given. If it differed, then Christians were to view such false leadership as accursed:

Galatians, Chapter 1:6-9

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we

51 Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, Oct. 1960, p. 78; also *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 15

52 Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 6, p. 32

said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Once more, the book of Acts tells us of Christian followers who carefully ensured that the messages they were receiving from church leadership were doctrinally correct before they believed:

Acts, Chapter 17:11-12

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

Once again, these citations are toothless instructives if the rank and file Christian is to keep his mouth shut and fall in line behind bogus teaching, even it is known to be wrong. We can also safely infer that if the false teaching is accursed before God, then those who knowingly place loyalty to their church over the truth will not be blessed by God by acquiescing to heresy. God takes heretical teachers very seriously and the rebuke is strong. Christians, validating, and if it necessary, rebuking or leaving false leadership is not an option. It is a Biblical imperative. Consider yet another warning *not* to "like it or lump it" with regard to counterfeit revelation:

2 Corinthians, Chapter 11:3-4

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

This instruction to "bear with him" is to hold against or to oppose something. Clearly, Christians are not to keep their mouth shut and "follow the prophet" when the prophet is preaching a false gospel. As we will see through this book, Mormonism teaches a very different gospel than the historical Christian faith. To the Mormon reader, you will one day personally give an account as to why you trusted Mormon doctrines opposed to the Bible. Joseph Smith won't be your advocate and "the prophet said" won't cut it. You and you alone will be accountable.

One last thing; the Bible is clear that Christians do not need modern-day prophets and apostles to do the official thinking for the Church of Christ.

1 John 2:27

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

VI. Appeal to Infallible Leadership

When confronted with unbiblical or changing doctrines, many Mormons today emphasize that their prophets are not perfect. Of course Christians know that, and the issue isn't perfection—the issues is, are Mormon prophets infallible in their prophetic pronouncements.

Early Mormonism left no doubt, giving assurances that their prophets would never teach bogus doctrine. For example, first Mormon President and Prophet, Joseph Smith Junior, asked the question:

When did I ever teach you anything wrong from this stand?...I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught.⁵³

Mormon Apostle, Heber Kimball, said of President Brigham Young:

Do just as brother Brigham tells you; for he always tells you what is right. . . . and if there is anything wrong, he will correct it and give you the truth. . . .⁵⁴

Second Mormon President and Prophet, Brigham Young, issued a series of infallibility assurances, recorded in the Church's official Journal of Discourses:

The Lord almighty leads this church, and he will never suffer you to be lead astray if you are found doing your duty. You may go home and sleep as sweetly as a babe in its mother's arm as to any danger of your leaders leading you astray.⁵⁵

What man or woman on the earth, what spirit in the world can say truthfully that I ever gave a wrong word of counsel, a word of advice that could not be sanctioned by the heavens?⁵⁶

I would to God that the Latter-day Saints would take the word of Brigham Young to be law! I will defy the inhabitants of the whole earth to tell one word that he ever counseled that was wrong...⁵⁷

53 Joseph Smith Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 368

54 Herber Kimball, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 5, p. 218

55 Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 13, p. 289

56 Ibid., Vol. 12, p. 127

57 Ibid., Vol. 14, p. 226

You may go home and sleep as sweetly as a babe in its mother's arms, as to any danger of your leaders leading you astray, for if they should try to do so the Lord would quickly sweep them from the earth.⁵⁸

LDS have more modern assurances from a church booklet on living prophets, where they are assured that Mormon Prophets and Apostles will never *"lead the Saints astray or send forth counsel to the world that is contrary to the mind and will of the Lord."*⁵⁹ An instruction manual for LDS missionaries says that *"Those who listen to and follow the counsel of living prophets and apostles will not go astray."*⁶⁰ Ironically, even while issuing instructions to abandon the everlasting polygamous practices of the Mormon Church, fourth Mormon President and Prophet, Wilford Woodruff, assured the flock that *"The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the programme."*⁶¹

So, while LDS explain that their leaders *are not* personally infallible, we are to believe that they are also incapable of leading the Mormon Church astray when acting in an official capacity. This is also assured with the added safeguard of counselors found in the First Presidency and the LDS Twelve Apostles. Under the title *"The Apostles Help Keep the Church from Going Astray,"* one Mormon Church student manual makes the case for the watch care of LDS Apostles:

Following the counsel of the Apostles is a safe path for the Saints, for the Apostles devotedly follow the President of the Church and, like the President or the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve will never lead the Church astray.⁶²

As is often the case in Mormonism, however, this check and balance is effectively powerless, since even Mormon apostles do not have the authority to receive or authoritatively interpret new or amended revelations made by the Mormon Prophet. LDS Apostle and Second Counselor in the First Presidency, J. Reuben Clark Jr. taught:

...[O]nly the President of the Church, the Presiding High Priest, is sustained as Prophet, Seer, and Revelator for the Church, and he alone has the right to receive revelations for the Church, either new or amendatory, or to give authoritative interpretations of scriptures that shall be binding on the Church, or change in any way the existing doctrines of the Church.

...When any one except the President of the Church undertakes to proclaim that any scripture of the Church has been modified, changed, or abrogated, we may know he is

58 Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 137

59 *Teachings of the Living prophets, Student Manual Religion 333*, pp. 26, 30

60 *Preach My Gospel, A Guide to Missionary Service*, 2004, Lesson 4: The Commandments, p. 75

61 Doctrine and Covenants, Declaration—1

62 *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 30

not 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost,' unless he is acting under the direct authority and direction of the President....⁶³

Moreover, if LDS think their prophets can't lead the church astray, then we should consider Mormon scripture, which contains procedure to deal with wayward Church leaders—Prophets included:

Doctrine and Covenants, Section 107:81-83

There is not any person belonging to the church who is exempt from this council of the church. And inasmuch as a President of the High Priesthood shall transgress, he shall be had in remembrance before the common council of the church, who shall be assisted by twelve counselors of the High Priesthood; And their decision upon his head shall be an end of controversy concerning him.

The sitting LDS Prophet is the "President of the High Priesthood," as further clarified in verses 91-92. Clearly then, LDS Prophets can error to the point of invoking a church hearing by the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles.

VII. Subjective Discernment Standard

Another defeater in LDS safely knowing what is true is the subjectivity of their discernment standard. Mormon President and Prophet, Joseph Smith Jr., taught that *"a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such."*⁶⁴ This caveat is effectively negated, however, when LDS are also taught that it is their duty to follow *all* the words spoken by LDS prophets, no matter what capacity they are speaking in:

There are those who insist that unless the Prophet of the Lord declares, 'Thus saith the Lord,' the message may not be taken as a revelation. This is a false testing standard. For while many of our modern revelations as contained in the Doctrine and Covenants do contain these words, there are many that do not....The prophet does not have to say 'Thus saith the Lord' to give us scripture. Sometimes there are those who haggle over words. They might say the prophet gave us counsel but that we are not obligated to follow it unless he says it is a commandment. But the Lord says of the Prophet Joseph, 'Thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you' (D&C 21:4; italics added).⁶⁵

63 *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 13. Printed originally in an article entitled, "When Are Church Leader's Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture, *Church News*, 31 July 1954, pp. 10-11.

64 Joseph Smith Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 278

65 *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual, Religion 333, Para. 4-7

So if Mormons are to avoid being deceived, how are they to safely and objectively identify when Mormon Prophets are acting as prophets, or merely sharing opinion? One official student manual of the Mormon Church gives partial criterion, as follows:

Prophets have the right to personal opinions. Not every word they speak should be thought of as an official interpretation or pronouncement. However, their discourses to the Saints and their official writings should be considered products of their prophetic calling and should be heeded.⁶⁶

LDS President Harold B. Lee gave a much more subjective test, however:

We can know that they [the living prophets] are speaking under inspiration if we so live that we can have a witness that what they are speaking is the word of the Lord. There is only one safety, and that is that we shall live to have the witness to know.⁶⁷

President J. Reuben Clark Jr. was no less objective when he said:

The question is, how shall we know when the things they [the Brethren] have spoken were said as they were "moved upon by the Holy Ghost?"

I have been giving some thought to this question, and the answer thereto so far as I can determine, is: We can tell when the speakers are "moved upon by the Holy Ghost" only when we, ourselves, are "moved upon by the Holy Ghost."

In a way, this completely shifts the responsibility from them to us to determine when they so speak.⁶⁸

Biblical Position

Not surprisingly, we have come full circle. Apart from "official" statements in LDS journals, each individual Mormon must determine if their prophet was "moved by the Holy Ghost," but only after they themselves are "moved by the Holy Ghost." And how are LDS repeatedly conditioned to determine whether something is true or not? Prospective converts and LDS alike will no doubt recall the suggestive test given by Mormon Missionaries:

"Mr. and Mrs. Brown, what you are feeling right now is the Spirit of the Lord testifying to you that we are teaching you the truth. You are beginning to receive your own testimony of the truthfulness of this message."⁶⁹

So once again, ultimately the final and controlling truth standard for Latter-day Saints comes back to subjective, personal feelings. If Mormon prophets are teaching error, as long as you can

⁶⁶ Ibid., Para. 4-6

⁶⁷ *Teachings of the Living Prophet*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 21, brackets in original

⁶⁸ J. Reuben Clark Jr., "When Are Church Leader's Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?" Church News, 31 July 1954, p. 9; also *Teachings of the Living Prophet*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 21

⁶⁹ *Preach My Gospel, A Guide to Missionary Service*, 2004, Lesson 1: The Restoration, p. A-3, Item no. 4

gain and maintain a "burning bosom" that an LDS Prophet hasn't led you astray, then the matter is settled as true. In the end, Mormonism has turned the biblical, objective, Christian standard for truth on its head.

The Bible is plain; judge truth by its alignment with the word—not a warm and fuzzy experience:

Isaiah 8:20

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light (truth) in them.

The Apostle Paul gave the New Testament Church a clear, objective prophetic discernment standard:

1 Corinthians 14:37

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

Mormonism teaches myriad doctrinal departures from the teachings of the Apostle Paul. This is enough to know that Mormonism is a false religious system. We should note at this point that the office of prophet ended with the New Testament dispensation and the founding of God's church (Heb. 1:1-2). However, when God was speaking thru prophets in the Old Testament, believers were given clear and objective discernment standards to identify false prophets.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

Mormon friend, Joseph Smith and other prophets have pronounced objectively false prophecies. This exposes them as deceivers. Examples are beyond the scope of this article but will be addressed elsewhere.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet...And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death...

Mormon friend, the gods of Mormonism are far from the Christian God of the Bible. This should also disqualify every Mormon prophet if you were a Bible-believer.

But not only do LDS dismiss this biblical standard, but an early Book of Mormon witness shared a chilling event he had with Joseph Smith. David Whitmer, whose name is listed in the front matter of every Book of Mormon as a witness to its truthfulness, was eyewitness to a striking comment made by Joseph Smith Junior. Whitmer explained a failed revelation given by Joseph Smith, whereby Smith received instructions from the Mormon Christ to send Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery to Canada with the directive to sell the copy-right of the Book of Mormon to raise money needed to finish its printing. Whitmer writes:

Joseph...received a revelation that some of the brethren should go to Toronto, Canada, and that they would sell the copy-right of the Book of Mormon. Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery went to Toronto on this mission, but they failed entirely to sell the copy-right, returning without any money. Joseph was at my father's house when they returned. I was there also, and am an eye witness to these facts....Well, we were all in great trouble; and we asked Joseph how it was that he had received a revelation from the Lord for some brethren to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right, and the brethren had utterly failed in their undertaking. Joseph did not know how it was, so he enquired of the Lord about it, and behold the following revelation came..."Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of men: and some revelations are of the devil." So we see that the revelation to go to Toronto and sell the copy-right was not of God, but was of the devil or of the heart of man. When a man enquires of the Lord concerning a matter, if he is deceived by his own carnal desires, and is in error, he will receive an answer according to his erring heart, but it will not be a revelation from the Lord.⁷⁰

So, we conclude what—the Devil can make Mormon Prophets utter false statements? Does this concern any LDS readers?

CONCLUSION

Those witnessing to LDS should know that if a Latter-day Saint wants to keep the Spirit of the Lord and avert God's displeasure, then they are bound by covenant to be loyal to their prophet. LDS Apostle and Second Counselor in the First Presidency, Harold B. Lee, indicated that LDS make this covenant upon raising their hand to sustain their leadership:

Everyone is perfectly free to vote as he wishes. There is no compulsion whatsoever in this voting. When you vote affirmatively you make a solemn covenant with the Lord that

⁷⁰ David Whitmer, *An Address To All Believers in Christ*, p. 31

you will sustain, that is, give your full loyalty and support, without equivocation or reservation to the officer for whom you vote.⁷¹

Once LDS affirm a prophet, to oppose potential false teaching makes one a covenant breaker. As a Mormon Church student manual says, *"Truly converted Saints recognize that prophets are bound to reveal God's will to them and that they are bound by covenant to follow."*⁷² LDS are further warned that *"We cannot oppose the Lord's prophets without bringing upon ourselves the Lord's displeasure. Rejecting the prophets causes the Lord to withdraw his Spirit."*⁷³ LDS Apostle, George Q. Cannon, warned:

" . . . No man, however strong he may be in the faith, however high in the priesthood, can speak evil of the Lord's anointed and find fault with God's authority on the earth without incurring His displeasure. The Holy Spirit will withdraw itself from such a man, and he will go into darkness. . . . "⁷⁴

What should be instructive about the information presented in this chapter is that Latter-day Saints are conditioned to substitute the final rule of authority for Christian faith and doctrine—the Bible—for a series of experiential, subjective, and ultimately false substitutions that all but guarantees that LDS *will* be deceived and *will* be desensitized from achieving a true knowledge of Christian doctrine and the God of the doctrine.

Mormon friend, by elevating your feelings, your testimony, and the words of your prophets as acceptable methods for knowing truth from error, you have built your faith upon a most tenuous and perilous foundation. By placing subjective evaluation criteria on parity with the Bible, you have *no safe standard* to avoid deception by false prophets. Think about it. You have been trained to find truth by using either written scripture, or the equivalent utterances of your prophets, but only when your prophets are acting in a prophetic capacity. Keep in mind, however, that no prophet has to say "thus saith the Lord" to be acting in an official capacity and you are to follow *all their words*, nevertheless.

You have the assurances of Brigham Young and David Whitmer that Mormon prophetic utterances are true revelations from God, as long as they are granted the opportunity to correct their past statements, and only when they're not mistakenly passing on bogus revelations as the unsuspecting secretaries of Satan. And in the unlikely event that you suspect a Mormon prophet

⁷¹ Harold B. Lee, Conference Report, Apr. 1970, p. 103; also *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 50

⁷² *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 51

⁷³ Ibid., p. 55

⁷⁴ George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth*, p. 278; also *Teachings of the Living Prophets*, Student Manual Religion 333, p. 55

may have fallen into error, remember that it is your duty never to question your leadership's authority. Frankly, it's none of your business if they be right or wrong, as your prophets have done the thinking for you. What's more, even if your prophet contradicts current Mormon doctrine, remember that they could be giving more current doctrine, since the words of a living prophet are more important than the words of a dead prophet. And if all else fails, remember to bear your testimony, thus "training your feelings" to suppress that nagging conscience about certain unbiblical things the Mormon Church teaches. My friend, is this any way to safely determine truth from error?

It was John Rippon who in 1787 wrote the Christian Hymn favorite, *How Firm a Foundation*. The first stanza begins with:

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

Concerning the settled text of the Bible, what Mormonism calls "sterile facts," the Christian calls a firm foundation. This foundation is firm in the fact that the Christian's faith and salvation are grounded not in a sterile book, but in the steady, unchanging, and living Word of God. It is the only way that is safe. It is the lighthouse of truth that will safely guide you through the Devil's counterfeiting schemes designed to shipwreck your life. It is and must always be the Christian's guide and final authority in all matters of faith. We have confidence in the Bible, which exclaims that *"For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven"* (Ps. 119:89).

During my professional career as a pilot, I learned the important practice of trusting what aircraft instrumentation was telling you, rather than what your proprioceptive senses were telling you, as gravity exerted forces on your body, creating a false sense of reality. Depending on flight conditions, the dangers outside were not always apparent to the naked eye, but they were there, nonetheless. When flying "in the soup," (an aviator euphemism for flying entirely by instrumentation in the clouds), to have acted upon the turbulence-induced feelings transmitted by one's inner ear canals would have resulted in flying the aircraft into an unusual attitude, and ultimately into the ground. The body's natural, "seat of the pants" feelings had to be ignored while the aircraft's attitude indicator had to be trusted. It was the only way to enjoy a long aviation career and stay out of the five o'clock news. Feelings could never be subordinated to objective evidence displayed in the cockpit.

And so to the Mormon reader, we finish where we began. Will you purpose in your heart to trust a life course that is piloted by the settled and trustworthy Word of God; or will you ignore biblical warnings and fly by your feelings, trusting your reasoning skills to safely reach your heavenly destination? Will you decide to deliberately open your eyes and make the pursuit of truth more important than your feelings, your testimony, or anything else; or will you stay within your indoctrinated comfort zone, trusting your feelings to sort through the competing voices of knowledge? The choice you make will result in nothing less than determining irrevocably and forever, what eternal home you will some day inhabit.

May I say respectfully that until you defer to the objective standard of the Bible, you have little hope of seeing through the spiritual blindness that holds your soul for an inevitable day of justice and punishment before a Holy and just God. Hell will be full of people who trusted their spiritual walk of experience and feelings, rather than obediently trusting the Word of God in faith. As the Lord God warned, *"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them [Christ speaking], I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"* (Matt. 7:22-23). This was the salvation verse that God used to convict me of following feelings and personal desires over the settled and clearly written facts of God's Word.

While you trust the warm feelings of familiarity with the Mormon gospel, it is this former Mormon's prayer that you *"Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you"* (Deut. 11:16-17a). I join the apostle Peter's desire that ye not *"stumble at the word"* (1 Pet. 2:8) as did the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day, but that you would follow the Christ most plainly revealed in the Bible, that you may come *"out of darkness into his marvellous light"* (vs. 9) before it is eternally too late.

And to every Bible-believing Christian, may we share the truth in love to Mormons, *"Holding fast the faithful word,"* that we *"may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers"* (Tit. 1:9). Amen, and Amen!

In Christ,

Bill Young