

The Teachings of Church Authorities

Question: “To what extent should the laymen of the Church accept as the absolute truth the statements which church authorities make in their books and sermons? Some members state that they are of no value only when quoted verbatim from the Standard Works. If this is so, where can we turn for guidance and detailed instruction about the finer points of our doctrines?”

Answer: First it is in order to say that there should be no “laymen” in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If there are any such, then they have neglected their responsibilities and obligations which the Lord has placed upon them. The Lord has restored his gospel and his priesthood, and it is the duty of every male member of the Church to know the truth, for each is entitled to the guidance of the Holy Ghost if he is faithful, and to be a bearer of the priesthood. Even the female members are under obligation to understand the doctrines of the Church and walk in them.

The Lord in speaking to Jeremiah in relation to the day in which we live made the following prediction:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah;

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD.

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.¹

STANDARD WORKS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH

The Lord has given us the four Standards which lie at the foundation of our faith. Each member of the Church should be so well versed that he, or she, would be able to discern whether or not any doctrine taught conforms to the revealed word of the Lord. Moreover, the members of the Church are entitled, if they are fully keeping the commandments and covenants the Lord has given us, to have the spirit of discernment. The fact remains, however, that too many of the members have not taken advantage of their blessings and obligations, and therefore they are unable to distinguish between truth and error. The "lay" members of the Church are under obligation to accept the teachings of the authorities, unless they can discover in them some conflict with the revelations and commandments the Lord has given. There are times when the leading brethren have expressed their own opinions on various subjects. This they have a perfect right to do. They have divided on political questions; some belong to one political party and others to another. This they have a perfect right to do,

¹Jeremiah 31:31-34.

but when the Lord has spoken through his servant who holds the keys, there should be unity among the members of the Church.

A KEY TO UNDERSTANDING

The Lord has given us a key by which we may be guided. It is found in Section 68 in the Doctrine and Covenants:

And behold, and lo, this is an ensample unto all those who were ordained unto this priesthood, whose mission is appointed unto them to go forth—

And this is the ensample unto them, that they shall speak as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost.

And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God, unto salvation.²

There is nothing more important in the lives of members of the Church than to have the gift of the Holy Ghost. There is nothing of greater importance to the individual member of the Church than the gift of knowledge, and this does not come by observation but by constant study and faith. Each member holding the priesthood should be so well versed that the light of truth would be constantly in his heart. No authority of the Church when guided by the Holy Ghost will ever teach a doctrine that will be contrary to the revealed word of the Lord. He may express an opinion, a personal view, but in doing so he should so declare it. The writings of Paul were not sent forth to the saints in various parts of the world in their completeness as doctrine. There were times when Paul expressed his own

²D. & C. 68:2-5.

opinion. The authorities of the Church have the same privilege, but when they do, they should make it perfectly clear that it is their personal view. When they have the inspiration of the Spirit of the Lord the members of the Church should likewise, by their faith and obedience, have the same Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord will bear witness to our spirits, under such conditions that what has been said is true.

MANY TRUTHS WOULD BE REVEALED

There are many things that the Lord would reveal to his people, if they were prepared to receive them. He said to the members gathering in Missouri in the year 1831—

Yea, blessed art they whose feet stand upon the land of Zion, who have obeyed my gospel; for they shall receive for their reward the good things of the earth, and it shall bring forth in its strength.

And they shall also be crowned with blessings from above, yea, and with commandments not a few, and with revelations in their time—they that are faithful and diligent before me.³

The Saints were not in all cases faithful and true, therefore these blessings were withheld, and we still wait for them.

Nevertheless let us remember that the Lord is guiding his people. He is giving them revelation and counsel for their guidance. The presiding brethren are teaching the divine truth and laboring under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and every member of the Church should be so in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord that he would be able to have the discernment and know if, at any time, something contrary to the revealed word is being taught.

³*Ibid.*, 59:3-4.

One great difficulty today is that the world is turning away from God. Doctrines and theories are prevalent that are contrary to divine truth, and the word of the Lord to the members of the Church should be heeded today, perhaps more than ever before, lest the members be deceived and lose their faith.

But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally; and that which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men; for some are of men, and others of devils.

Wherefore, beware lest ye are deceived; and that ye may not be deceived seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given.⁴

⁴*Ibid.*, 46:7-8.