



Type: Book Chapter

Prophets Concerns

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Source: *Bamboozled by the CES Letter*

Published: Self-Published, 2015

Pages: 57-60

Chapter 7 Prophets Concerns

35) *Brigham Young taught that Adam is our God.*

Answer: The Apostle Paul said we see through a glass darkly. While Brigham Young undeniably taught that Adam was our God, he never fully developed the idea and it was therefore never ratified as official doctrine. Adam is both a title and a name. Adam is both a child of God and stands at the head of the human family. We are also taught that we can become like God and that He was once like us. Brigham Young himself once taught that no revelation is given in its perfect form—I suspect that’s because A) our minds aren’t able to handle the entire truth (almost sounds like a line from a movie), B) we have to filter revelation through the weakness of human “language” (which includes misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and assumptions, as well as worldviews, knowledge of science and other gospel principles, etc.) and C) because we may not have human words to accurately describe what we might see in the heavens.

36) *Yesterday's doctrine is today's heresy.*

Answer: There are very few things that have been described as “doctrine” that have changed since the Restoration. I am unaware of any eternal “doctrines” which have changed since the Restoration. Critics often create a list of supposed doctrinal changes which include: Polygamy, Adam God, Blood Atonement (see the next item below), Endowment Ceremony, etc., but not a single one of these concerns a *doctrinal* change—at least not if we are defining “doctrine” as those teachings which have eternal applications and are required of all humankind. The necessity of a Savior and baptism, the reality of God, the power of prayer, and the need for repentance, are all eternal doctrines and affect every one of God’s children.

If we define “doctrine” as God-given directives through prophets to the members of the Church, well then of course things will change—that’s why we have *living prophets*. The directives will change depending on what we need, what we’ve sought, and maybe what we can handle. That’s part of the “line upon line” as well as God working with our individual or collective circumstances. The fact is, that the overwhelming majority of things which have changed in the Church are policies, practices, and opinions.

37) *Blood Atonement: Brigham Young taught that some sins required the shedding of one’s own blood—that Christ’s atonement wasn’t enough.*

Answer: In concern #1 I quoted D&C 1:24 which reads: “Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.” God has more to say on this topic, however.

And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed; And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent; And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time (v: 25-28).

God knew there would be errors and but that, in time, they would eventually be corrected. He doesn't force new doctrines, corrections, or modifications down our throats. He lets us make mistakes. He, at times, lets us make fools of ourselves. It's all part of the learning process. One of the wonderful things that I really like about the restored gospel is that God asks us to use more than just our spiritual inspirations. He expects us to use our brains as well—that's why He gave each of us big globs of gray matter. A friend once likened our options for determining truth to the four legs of a table: Scripture, Modern Prophets, Personal Revelation, and Common Sense.

A) Scripture can teach how God has worked in the past, and reading scripture is a powerful means for opening the door of divine communication.

B) Modern prophets speak to us in *our* time. Not every generation needs to build an ark. Modern prophets can give counsel that may only fit our unique situations and may not really be applicable in other situations (polygamy?).

C) Personal revelation. We can't really commit fully (even in faith) to a proposition unless we have some witness (or even the seed of hope) that what we are doing is true. Personal revelation can, like modern prophets, speak to our unique situations, but with inspiration that is fine-tuned to us personally (or for those in our spheres of stewardship).

D) Lastly, we have to use our brains, our common-sense, our intellects, our gut-feelings. Joseph Smith once said,

“Knowledge is necessary to life and godliness. Woe unto you priests and divines who preach that knowledge is not necessary unto life and salvation. Take away Apostles, etc., take away knowledge, and you will find yourselves worthy of the damnation of hell. Knowledge is revelation. Hear, all ye brethren, this grand key: knowledge is the power of God unto salvation.”²¹

If something doesn't sound right to our minds, then the other three legs better be really steady or the table will fall over (it may still wobble, but it won't be safe at all if one or more of the other three legs are weak as well). The same applies to any of the other four legs. For some people (or for some circumstances) the sure and steady iron rod leads through the mists of darkness, at other times (or for other people) a Liahona points in the general direction we need to go. In those cases we have to figure out a lot for ourselves. We may stub our toes, we may go hungry (for food, information, or conviction), and we may even wander off course if we're not paying close attention, but if our hearts are converted then all those mistakes and bruises will be for our betterment.

I'm a firm believer that revealed religion works (intentionally I am quick to add) a lot like real science. There are starts, turns, and dead ends, but ultimately science—as a self-correcting discipline—prevails. The same can be said about revealed religion. Problems will be corrected as things progress. God holds us accountable for what we know—what light we have—and how we use that knowledge to bless others (which, of course, in turn blesses us).

He's not going to care if we got some things wrong because we didn't know that what we were doing or thinking was based on naïve religious assumptions that would later be corrected by newer revelation or better science. He's going to care about what we've done with the two great commandments—did we love others, and did we love God? Did we jeopardize those relationships through sin? Prophets, scripture, personal revelation, and the insights of our intellects are all designed to help us navigate through temptation, conquer sin, and to restore (at-one-ment) our relationship with the Father. Blessings come from living the Gospel and doing the work of the Lord.

Latter-day Saints believe in Baptism for the Dead. Why? We believe that a just God doesn't punish His children for not knowing about the gospel. All of us are judged by the light we have and if our intentions, our hearts, are working with or against an alignment with the Light of Christ. Did we find room in our heart for love and growth, or did we shut out others and the soft whisperings of the spirit because we wanted our heart for ourselves and were not willing to sacrifice our own desires by serving others.

That's why God says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). Elder Dallin Oaks says it's not about what we've done, but what we've become. It's about changing into better people, becoming new creatures in the image of Christ. This change comes individually but is motivated, strengthened, and supported by the programs found in the church—not by getting all the details right or wrong. "I never hear of a man being damned for believing too much," said Joseph Smith, "but they are damned for unbelief."

38) Brigham Young taught that Polygamy is necessary for exaltation.

Answer: "My Pa always said 'Never trust a Hogwallop!'" (Pete, *O Brother Where Art Thou?*). Quotes used to support the claim that only polygamists will be exalted are always taken out of context—a context which also mentions the exaltation of those who did *not* engage in polygamy as well as those who did.

39) Blacks were banned from having the priesthood.

Answer: Quite frankly, we don't know fully why black members were banned from the priesthood during the early days of the Church. Joseph Smith didn't ban them and a few black members, such as Elijah Abel, were ordained in the earliest years of the restoration. It appears that Brigham Young, interpreting doctrine according to his Protestant upbringings, was responsible for the ban.

Like all people (and I *do mean all people*), Brigham Young (and other early Church leaders) tried to support their already pre-determined views with what they saw as evidence that strengthened, or justified, their position. Every human makes decisions based on reasons that are often non-rational, and then they try to rationalize or support their decisions with evidence they can muster to confirm what they already believe.

Unfortunately, it wasn't until later generations questioned some of the supporting "evidences" that it became apparent that the evidence did *not* favor the earlier Protestant views that black members were somehow cursed by God. This, in turn, gave Church leaders reason to question the ban and to ask the Lord for direction. When people are ready *and ask*, the Lord is able to respond.

This "ask and receive" counsel, it should be noted, is again limited to our personal areas of responsibility. Because I'm not the bishop, I don't receive revelation for my ward. The bishop doesn't receive revelation for the Stake, and the Stake President doesn't receive revelation for the entire Church. Now, can I receive inspiration for ways to help my bishop? Can the bishop receive revelation for suggestions to help the Stake President? Sure. There is nothing wrong with using our minds, talents, and personal inspirations to offer suggestions for those who administer to a larger sphere than our own. But *their* calling and keys entitle them the authority to not only accept or reject our advice, but to also decide if the suggestions have merit.

There are some Church members, for example, who badger Church leaders to come around to their way of thinking. If they have some suggestions, the Church doesn't chastise members for voicing their thoughts in a respectful and humble manner. When such persons seek to create a movement, however, to claim that they know more than the Prophet and that the Brethren are either being led astray or are turning their backs on what God really wants (at least in the protestor's mind), then such a person may be called to meet with their local leaders to discuss intent and motive.

40) Mark Hofmann fooled prophets who should have had the spirit of discernment.

Answer: There is no doctrine that a prophet will discern the evil or treachery in all people (or even in most or many people). While the Lord can certainly inspire any member to avoid someone or some situation, as a general principle He is more likely to answer our queries and petitions. Unless we ask we may not receive.

41) Why follow a prophet if he's just a man of his times/day?

Answer: Prophets are both men of their day as well as spokesmen for God's word. All of us are able to receive revelation that a prophet speaks for God and all of us are able to receive revelation for our individual spheres of stewardship (and for those things which are expedient for our salvation [D&C 75:10]). A prophet's stewardship includes directives that are not included in our own individual sphere of stewardship.