



Type: Book Chapter

---

## Lecture 3

Source: *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*

Editor(s): Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

Published: Provo, UT; Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University,  
1990

Page(s): 65-73

---

**Abstract:** No abstract available.



The Religious Studies Center is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of the Religious Studies Center.

<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

# Lecture 3

## ON FAITH

1. In the second lecture we showed how the knowledge of the existence of God came into the world and by what means the first thoughts were suggested to the minds of men that such a being did actually exist. We also showed that it was by reason of the knowledge of his existence that there was a foundation laid for the exercise of faith in him as the only being in whom faith could center for life and salvation. For faith could not center in a being of whose existence we had no idea, because the idea of his existence, in the first instance, is essential to the exercise of faith in him. “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (or one sent to tell them?) (Rom 10:14). So, then, faith comes by hearing the word of God.

2. Let us here observe that three things are necessary for any rational and intelligent being to exercise faith in God unto life and salvation.

3. First, the idea that he actually exists;

4. Secondly, a *correct* idea of his character, perfections, and attributes;

5. Thirdly, an actual knowledge that the course of life which one is pursuing is according to His will. For without an acquaintance with these three important facts, the faith of every rational being must be imperfect and unproductive. But with this

understanding, it can become perfect and fruitful, abounding in righteousness unto the praise and glory of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. Having previously shown the way that both the idea and the fact of his existence came into the world, we shall proceed to examine his character, perfections, and attributes, so this class may see not only the just grounds which they have to exercise faith in him for life and salvation, but the reasons that all the world, also, may have to exercise faith in him, the Father of all living, as far as the idea of his existence extends.

7. As we are indebted for the idea of his existence to a revelation which God made of himself to his creatures, in the first instance, so in like manner we are indebted to the revelations which he has given to us for a correct understanding of his character, perfections, and attributes. Because without the revelations which he has given to us, no man by searching could find out God (see Job 11:7-9). "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:9-11).

8. Having said so much, we proceed to examine the character which the revelations give of God.

9. Moses gives us the following account in Exodus: "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex 34:6). "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Ps 103:6-8). "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that

remember his commandments to do them” (Ps 103:17-18). “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Ps 90:2). “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail” (Heb 1:10-12). “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). “For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal 3:6).

10. “For God doth not walk in crooked paths; neither doth he turn to the right hand nor the left; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said: therefore his paths are strait and his course is one eternal round” (Book of Commandments 2:1; D&C 3:2). “Listen to the voice of the Lord your God, even Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, whose course is one eternal round, the same today as yesterday and forever” (Book of Commandments 37:1; D&C 35:1).

11. “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent” (Num 23:19). “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8). “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35).

12. From the foregoing testimonies, we learn the following things respecting the character of God:

13. First, he was God before the world was created, and the same God he was after it was created.

14. Secondly, he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness, and he was so from everlasting, and will be to everlasting.

15. Thirdly, he does not change, neither does he vary; but he is the same from everlasting to everlasting, being the same yesterday, today, and forever; and his course is one eternal round, without variation.

16. Fourthly, he is a God of truth and cannot lie.

17. Fifthly, he is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him.

18. Sixthly, he is love.

19. An acquaintance with these attributes in the divine character is essential so the faith of any rational being can center in him for life and salvation. For if, in the first instance, he did not believe him to be God, that is, the creator and upholder of all things, he could not *center* his faith in him for life and salvation, for fear there should be a greater one than he who would thwart all his plans, and he, like the gods of the heathen, would be unable to fulfil his promises. But seeing he is God over all, from everlasting to everlasting, the creator and upholder of all things, no such fear can exist in the minds of those who put their trust in him, so that in this respect their faith can be unwavering.

20. But secondly, unless God was merciful and gracious, slow to anger, long-suffering and full of goodness, such is the weakness of human nature and so great the frailties and imperfections of men that unless they believed that these excellencies existed in the divine character, they could not have the faith necessary to salvation. For doubt would take the place of faith, and those who know their weakness and liability to sin would be in constant doubt of salvation if it were not for the idea which they have of the excellency of the character of God, that he is slow to anger, long-suffering, and of a forgiving disposition, and does forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin. Having an idea of these facts does away with doubt and makes faith exceedingly strong.

21. But in order to have faith in him, it is equally as necessary that men should have the idea that he is a God who does not change as it is to have the idea that he is gracious and long-suffering. For without the idea of unchangeableness in the

character of the Deity, doubt would take the place of faith. But with the idea that he does not change, faith lays hold upon the excellencies in his character with unshaken confidence, believing he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that his course is one eternal round.

22. And again, the idea that he is a God of truth and cannot lie is equally as necessary to the exercise of faith in him as is the idea of his unchangeableness. For without the idea that he is a God of truth and cannot lie, men could not have the confidence in his word necessary to exercise faith in him. But having the idea that he is not a man who can lie gives power to the minds of men to exercise faith in him.

23. But it is also necessary that men should have an idea that God is no respecter of persons, for with the idea of all the other excellencies in his character, and this one wanting, men could not exercise faith in him. Because if he were a respecter of persons, they could not tell what their privileges were, nor how far they were authorized to exercise faith in him, or whether they were authorized to do it at all. All must be confusion. But no sooner are the minds of men made acquainted with the truth on this point, that he is no respecter of persons, than they see that they have authority by faith to lay hold on eternal life, the richest boon of heaven, because God is no respecter of persons, and every man in every nation has an equal privilege.

24. And lastly, but not less important to the exercise of faith in God, is the idea that he is love. For without this one characteristic to influence all the other excellencies in his character, they could not have such powerful dominion over the minds of men. But when the idea is planted in the mind that he is love, who cannot see the just ground that men of every nation, kindred, and tongue have to exercise faith in God so as to obtain eternal life?

25. From the above description of the character of the Deity which is given him in the revelations to men, there is a sure foundation for the exercise of faith in him among every people, nation, and kindred, from age to age, and from generation to generation.

26. Let us here observe that the foregoing is the character which is given of God in his revelations to the Former-day Saints, and it is also the character which is given of him in his revelations to the Latter-day Saints. So the Saints of former days and those of latter days are both alike in this respect: the Latter-day Saints have as good grounds to exercise faith in God as the Former-day Saints had, because the same character is given of him to both.

### Questions and Answers for Lecture 3

1. *Question*—What was shown in the second lecture?

*Answer*—It was shown how the knowledge of the existence of God came into the world (Lecture 3:1).

2. Q—What is the effect of the idea of his existence among men?

A—It lays the foundation for the exercise of faith in him (Lecture 3:1).

3. Q—Is the idea of his existence, in the first instance, necessary in order for the exercise of faith in him?

A—It is (Lecture 3:1).

4. Q—How do you prove it?

A—By Romans 10:14 (Lecture 3:1).

5. Q—How many things are necessary for us to understand, respecting the Deity and our relation to him, so we may exercise faith in him for life and salvation?

A—Three (Lecture 3:2).

6. Q—What are they?

A—First, that God does actually exist; secondly, correct ideas of his character, his perfections and attributes; and thirdly, that the course which we pursue is according to his mind and will (Lecture 3:3-5).

7. Q—Would the idea of any one or two of the above-mentioned things enable a person to exercise faith in God?

A—It would not. For without the idea of them all, faith would be imperfect and unproductive (Lecture 3:5).

8. Q—Would an idea of these three things lay a sure foundation for the exercise of faith in God, so as to obtain life and salvation?

A—It would. For by the idea of these three things, faith could become perfect and fruitful, abounding in righteousness unto the praise and glory of God (Lecture 3:5).

9. Q—How are we to be made acquainted with the before-mentioned things respecting the Deity and ourselves?

A—By revelation (Lecture 3:6).

10. Q—Could these things be found out by any other means than by revelation?

A—They could not.

11. Q—How do you prove it?

A—By the scriptures (Job 11:7-9; 1 Cor 2:9-11; see Lecture 3:7).

12. Q—What things do we learn in the revelations of God respecting his character?

A—We learn the six following things: First, he was God before the world was created, and the same God that he was after it was created. Secondly, he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness, and he was so from everlasting, and will be so to everlasting. Thirdly, he does not change, neither does he vary, and his course is one eternal round. Fourthly, he is a God of truth, and cannot lie. Fifthly, he is no respecter of persons. And sixthly, he is love (Lecture 3:12-18).

13. Q—Where do you find the revelations which give us this idea of the character of the Deity?

A—In the Bible and the Book of Commandments [the Doctrine and Covenants], and they are quoted in the third lecture (Lecture 3:9-11).

14. Q—What effect would it have on any rational being not to have an idea that the Lord was God, the creator and upholder of all things?

A—It would prevent him from exercising faith in him unto life and salvation.

15. Q—Why would it prevent him from exercising faith in God?

A—Because he would be as the heathen, not knowing but that there might be a being greater and more powerful than he, and thereby he would be prevented from fulfilling his promises (Lecture 3:19).

16. Q—Does this idea prevent this doubt?

A—It does. For persons having this idea are enabled thereby to exercise faith without this doubt (Lecture 3:19).

17. Q—Is it not also necessary to have the idea that God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and full of goodness?

A—It is (Lecture 3:20).

18. Q—Why is it necessary?

A—Because of the weakness and imperfections of human nature and the great frailties of man. For such is the weakness of man, and such his frailties, that he is liable to sin continually. And if God were not long-suffering, full of compassion, gracious and merciful, and of a forgiving disposition, man would be cut off from before him; consequently, he would be in continual doubt and could not exercise faith. For where doubt is, there faith has no power. But by man's believing that God is full of compassion and forgiveness, long-suffering and slow to anger, he can exercise faith in him and overcome doubt, so as to be exceedingly strong (Lecture 3:20).

19. Q—Is it not equally as necessary that man should have an idea that God does not change, neither does he vary, in order to exercise faith in him unto life and salvation?

A—It is. Because without this, he would not know how soon God's mercy might change into cruelty, his long-suffering into rashness, his love into hatred. In consequence of this doubt, man would be incapable of exercising faith in him. But having the idea that he is unchangeable, man can have faith in him continually, believing that what he was yesterday he is today, and will be forever (Lecture 3:21).

20. Q—Is it not necessary, also, for men to have an idea that God is a being of truth before they can have perfect faith in him?

A—It is. For unless men have this idea, they cannot place confidence in his word. And not being able to place confidence in his word, they could not have faith in him. But believing that he is a God of truth and that his word cannot fail, they can rest their faith in him without doubt (Lecture 3:22).

21. Q—Could man exercise faith in God so as to obtain eternal life unless he believed that God was no respecter of persons?

A—He could not. Because without this idea, he could not certainly know that it was his privilege so to do, and in consequence of this doubt his faith could not be sufficiently strong to save him (Lecture 3:23).

22. Q—Would it be possible for a man to exercise faith in God, so as to be saved, unless he had an idea that God was love?

A—It would not. Man could not love God unless he had an idea that God was love; and if he did not love God, he could not have faith in him (Lecture 3:24).

23. Q—What is the description which the sacred writers give of the character of the Deity calculated to do?

A—It is calculated to lay a foundation for the exercise of faith in him, as far as the knowledge extends among all people, tongues, languages, kindreds, and nations, and that from age to age, and from generation to generation (Lecture 3:25).

24. Q—Is the character which God has given of himself uniform?

A—It is. In all his revelations, whether to the Former-day Saints, or to the Latter-day Saints, God's character is uniform so that they all have the authority to exercise faith in him and to expect, by the exercise of their faith, to enjoy the same blessings (Lecture 3:26).