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# CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

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## REFLECTIONS OF A RELIGIOUS NATURE

### INTRODUCTION

**A**lthough I made some reference to religion in the last chapter, I also mentioned that any reflections or deeper thought I might have on the subject would be given in more detail in this chapter. Consequently I begin here to take the reader on a review of my musings about this subject, which having fueled the acts that brought me to my present position in life. It is hardly necessary for me to say that I have traveled at different speeds, stumbling at times; reversing field at others and even become tired of the required effort at still others and simply treaded water. Not infrequently I have asked myself just where I was in my journey and where I felt I was going. By that I mean I was simply searching and trying to figure out in my own mind just what life was all about. The four or five years I took in investigating the LDS Church reflects the consternation I was going through.

At the time I finally made the commitment required in joining the Church, I had put enough answers together to satisfy myself that this step was on the right track. Even so, I still had many unanswered questions, which continued to plague me. Of course, my effort to understand doctrine, during my working years, was somewhat less than sterling I suppose, because I was focused more on making a living and trying to get ahead in my profession. I had, however, learned some-where back in the dim past to accept many things I didn't understand as questions yet to be answered rather than invalid statements or doctrines. Thus, I compiled a list of things about religion for which I wanted to find answers and refrained from totally rejecting the same. In other words, I put them on hold, so to speak, believing answers would eventually come. I think that concept was an important principle in my search, because it kept my mind open to inspiration from various

sources, including God. I have since learned that we don't find answers for many questions immediately but have to be patient in developing the basic knowledge required to understand them. Isaiah points this out in the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter in verses nine and ten. I include the verses here for the reader's convenience, as follows; "*Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little*": ... Consequently, upon my retirement from Schlumberger I began to intensify my search for answers to questions still plaguing me.

That search for answers has involved multiple readings of the scriptures on my part, including the Old and New testaments of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price and the Doctrine and Covenants. These four, or should I say five, compilations of scripture constitute the standard works of the LDS Church. The LDS version of the Bible is that commonly called the St. James version. To those I add numerous books, which I have read regarding gospel subjects, written by various authors, most of whom are LDS. However, LDS authors are very good at citing sources from throughout the Christian faiths, which justify the conclusions they reach. Do I believe that that effort makes me a scriptorian or an authority on Christianity? Not in the least! In fact the more I read and study, the more I realize how little I know and that, in and of its self, teaches me a certain degree of humility. Many there are that have made scriptural study a life-long pursuit and where accompanied by the Holy Spirit, such people can be so recognized as authorities. If they are scriptorians from a secular standpoint only, their authority is also secular in nature and holds little divine validity, at least from my

viewpoint. As a result of the preceding remarks, the discussion that follows is mostly my opinion, as it stands at this point in life, some of which is a personal testimony given by the Holy Spirit. If the reader follows it in that light he or she can hardly be misled and will gain an idea of how I have arrived at this point in my search for truth. If he or she feels my conclusions have some merit, so much the better. If not, then he or she has lost little more than time and may have strengthened their own view in the mental rebuttal they have developed in the process.

I pursued the described course of study because I wanted to better understand why there are so many religions on earth and why so many Christian denominations exist? It doesn't seem logical to me that all denominations could be legitimate. I wasn't satisfied with science's explanation either, which I paraphrase as "*a primeval need for mankind to explain the unexplainable*". Such a need, they say, caused different cultures to come up with different gods and principles of worship. No, I accepted God as a reality as well as the adversary and felt a need to clarify both aspects of the foregoing question in my own mind. I couldn't believe the Lord would add to the confusion with multiple versions of the gospel, in view of the adversary's masterful job nor would he provide multiple religions for us to choose from. No, in my mind there had to be one true way to worship, designed and approved by God. Admittedly, I rather quickly dismissed religions other than Christianity but might have turned to them if I had found no solace in the latter. Consequently, I decided a more complete understanding of the issues of Christianity was necessary for me to fully appreciate the need for a restoration, as claimed by Joseph Smith and which I had now accepted. It would help me explain to my posterity and any other interested person my deep feelings for the restored gospel as they have developed and intensified over these last 47 years of my life.

Each of us is beset with numerous voices calling to us during our lifetimes. Though most are probably rejected, all vie for our attention through various means or even gimmicks designed to spur our interest. Such an interest may vary from material or spiritual gain to self-preservation. What is not of interest at one point in life may become so at another, as personal

priorities change. Such change comes about through life's experiences and a continuing personal evaluation of what life is all about or so it seems to me. Such a concept or deep seated need has lain semi-dormant it would seem, in my sub-conscious, until retirement gave me more time for such reflection. At that time I then began to really ponder the questions of life.

In trying to write about these feelings I have come to recognize, I find their presentation extremely difficult, at least in an organized and meaningful way. Maybe that is a result of the engineering gene that I feel must surely reside within me. How else can one explain the first 18 chapters of this rather questionable work I have assembled?

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These chapters were rather easily laid out and only required memory of the facts as I understood them. This chapter, however, involves trying to build my case with

concepts I am less knowledgeable of and consequently have difficulty in their explanation as well as in deciding just how I should fit them together. As a result, I beg the reader to be tolerant of my efforts and to mostly consider the principles discussed as opposed to the quality of the overall presentation.

One might ask, "Why should we question our existence? What good can it do for us?" Well, from my perspective, if we don't question its purpose, then it would seem creature comfort or stroking one's physical desires, automatically becomes that purpose. If we don't look beyond our obvious physical existence, there is nothing else to satisfy. If we do, we look for answers that may well extend beyond mortality and include the concept of a Supreme Being, as well as that of good and evil. We may well ask, "Did we exist in some other form and realm prior to mortality and is there a future beyond this mortal sphere?" That, of course, brings into our lives the concepts of philosophy and religion as well as the latter's legitimacy. Such questions as, "Is there a God" and "Is the devil a real being?" become fair game. Likewise, in our hope for a better existence beyond the grave, we try to determine its reality and whether our conduct during mortality has a bearing on it.

If we accept post-mortality as factual, we will, quite probably, conduct our lives in a manner, which will assure us, within our framework of understanding, the most favorable situation in

that future state. After all, most people who accept life beyond the grave as a reality also believe in its eternal or never ending nature. One would be crazy; it seems to me, to trade a riotous life of maybe 70 or 80 years for the lowest state or kingdom available in that eternal sphere and especially, if something significantly better is available.

In my view, the role of religion is to clarify to the extent possible, the reality of such an existence and to define the various available rewards therein, as related to our mortal conduct. In so doing, it will also define the conduct necessary for a given reward. If we accept a religion in principle but make little effort to understand its doctrines, it can hardly have a significant impact on our lives. We may go through certain motions required by the religion of choice but, it seems to me, we have to look deeper for it to have significance in our lives. I have tried to do that, asking many questions, searching for answers and trying to harmonize my life with what I have come to believe. Any other course, it seems, makes its acceptance irrelevant. So, I want to lead the reader through some of my thought processes along the way. If you don't agree with my conclusions, consider your effort an experience in evaluating various contradictory viewpoints.

## THE REALITY OF OUR EXISTENCE

### IS THERE A GOD IN HEAVEN

Whether we do or don't believe in God has nothing to do with his actual existence. It only impacts our ability as individuals to apply this particular principle in our lives. If God doesn't exist, the believer may make unnecessary sacrifices or decisions that compromise his temporal status. At the same time, he may be blissfully happy in his ignorance deriving satisfaction from some imaginary spirituality. If God does exist, the unbeliever stands in peril because of his failure to utilize the same in his conduct of life and thus prepare him-self or her-self for receipt of some eternal reward promised by God. As a result, he or she may well suffer eternal damnation or lack of eternal progression (which are one and the same according to my understanding) in whatever state we inherit beyond the veil, as resurrected beings. In addition, he or she misses the joy of spirituality, which is not apparent to such an individual but

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gives the believer great satisfaction. It would seem personal resolution of this question is of utmost importance to each of us as members of the human family. Those who accept God as a reality but do nothing to understand his purpose appear to me as being less logical than either the atheist or the devout believer.

It has been said that man cannot prove the existence or nonexistence of God. We can only know God as he reveals himself to man. I subscribe to that statement. The atheist will accept nothing as proof that is intangible to one of his five senses or that can, at least, be detected by some scientific system providing such tangibility. He tries to invent some scientific theory, which, in his mind, explains the existence of the cosmos as well as humanity and other living entities without even considering the idea of a Supreme Being.

To him, failure to prove the origin of such things simply means we as humans haven't yet found the secret to life and the cosmos around us. Spiritual manifestations of the

worthy believer are discounted by such an individual as sheer nonsense even though having a significant impact on the believer's life. Types of physical evidence such as the universe in which we reside are explained away by scientific theory, even though wildly improbable. Though suffering much disagreement among scientists, as a whole, such theory is still taken as their gospel.

Meanwhile scriptural accounts mean nothing to such an individual because they are legendary in his view. Thus, no amount of discussion can seem to bring that individual to agree that there might be a God. Since God will not reveal himself to such an individual he says, "There is no God". Of course, he or she doesn't grasp the concept of faith, as practiced by the believer. It is, of course, a prerequisite for such a revelation, as is a worthy life, both of which the atheist lacks in terms of God's purpose. He is, consequently, left in spiritual darkness. Maybe Paul says it the best in 1 Corinthians 2:14 where he tells us; "*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" This is akin to the average man trying to manipulate some complicated scientific instrument without training and saying, "This thing is no good because I can't get any results with it" when in actuality the

problem lies in him and his ignorance, which has come about as a result of his pride.

Obviously I can't and don't intend to try to prove God's existence but only to state that I know he exists because of personal manifestations of his existence in my own life. Besides spiritual affirmation, this includes such things as the miracle of the universe in which we reside and also that of human life. As mankind's knowledge grows, it further reveals the complexity of such things, which in my mind, reduces their probable occurrence through mere chance regardless of the wild theories proposed, as previously discussed. I see such things as requiring an Omniscient Being. He is the source of all truth, which he makes available to mankind according to his purposes and divine will.

### IS SATAN A REAL BEING

I accept the reality of Satan or Lucifer, as I do the reality of God. I suppose most any Christian does, as well. However, believing in him and being aware of his plans, tactics and activities is something else, just as believing in God and being aware of his plan and his means of accomplishment are. He is adversarial to God and man but was placed on earth for a purpose, to be described in more detail later. He is the source of all-evil, spreading his misinformation and lies through gullible mankind by virtue of their mortal weaknesses. He would have mankind believe that he (Satan) is a figment of their imagination and does not really exist, which allows them to rationalize their own evil deeds.

Such thinking fits in nicely with the idea that there is no God. Thus, according to such thought, there is no inherent good or evil, only the acts and thoughts man chooses to define as such. In such thinking, any act of man is acceptable if it is in compliance with man's laws, which, of course, vary in time and by types of society. Thus, there is no ultimate truth or evil nor is there any purpose to life. Truth changes with time and what our forefathers thought as being true isn't necessarily so today. Thus, changing mores are to be expected as man advances in his enlightenment. Obviously, this can give place in society to practices like those of Sodom and Gomorrah since we now have new truths, which reject the condemnation of such ideas as old fashioned and without real understanding. In that context, truth is then defined and enforced

by man's law with the adherent of such thought rejecting the higher law of religion, particularly that of the restored gospel. They adhere to truth as defined by man or the arm of the flesh.

In contrast, the believer accepts the rule of law in society but asks society to allow freedom to practice his or her religion. He or she knows that religious thought is the source of all just laws guarding freedom and emanates from the fountain of all truth, even God. As long as such a religion doesn't infringe on the rights of others, it is no threat to the society it exists within but rather an asset. The right of worshipping according to one's conscience is ordained of God and points out the need for separation of secular authority from religious expression.

As an outgrowth of the unbeliever's belief, truth is not universal in society or unchanging with time. Those exercising control therein at any given time define truth according to their law. This provides convenient ways to excuse the horrendous acts of various societies varying from domination of men's consciences to various forms of abuse and even death. They prevent the proper use of man's agency or his right to choose, which is fundamental to the purpose of life and the basic freedoms enjoyed by people of the United States. Such agency, when properly used, blesses society with increased knowledge as well as peace and prosperity. Its improper use degrades society due to the influence of the adversary, bringing about the multiple sins so prevalent today. Each individual has to make a personal decision as to which path he or she will follow. We, of society, thus become emissaries for either, or more

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likely, both sources, depending upon our knowledge, dedication and activities in life. Consequently, good people, as defined by society's standards, function to a degree in both camps. We, as individuals, unwittingly, become pawns of the adversary when we speak, act or teach thought or doctrine contrary to the truth. This reality emphasizes our need to be constantly in search of truth in whatever aspect of life we happen to be engaged in. Our search might well be summarized by the closing sentence of the 13<sup>th</sup> article of faith as given by the prophet Joseph. It reads; "... *If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things*" and is similar to Philippians 4:8. Joseph was a student

of the Bible and obviously considered Paul's admonition as being pertinent.

### **THE REALITY OF OUR MORTAL BEINGS**

Though I can't speak for other denominations of Christianity, the gospel as restored through Joseph Smith teaches mankind that they are eternal beings, having both a pre-existence and a post-existence beyond the grave. Mortality is only a temporary existence designed to test our worthiness to re-enter the presence of God at some future time. That concept will be dealt with in greater detail in a later chapter but let it suffice to say here that mortality has a purpose and all mankind should try to realize that purpose by seeking truth. Because our mortal circumstances vary so much among mankind, the degree of truth realized will depend both upon our effort to understand it as well as the degree to which it is available during our sojourn on this earth. The availability of truth as a gospel principle during a given mortal's life varies in time, geographical location, ethnic group and possibly other ways that don't come to mind right now. Mankind's only recourse, it seems to me, is to strive to know truth to the best of his or her ability and leave judgment up to God, the only Being capable of honest judgment. In my view, then, our worthiness is really determined by our effort to live in accordance with the truth we seek and understand with our eternal reward being given by grace through Jesus Christ in accordance with our worthiness that only He can judge.

### **RELIGION IN GENERAL**

Religion has a problem, it seems to me, in that the various forms available to mankind differ rather radically and contribute to the multiplicity of voices we hear throughout our lives. We might well ask the question, "Are all of these religions and the denominations therein of equal veracity? Where did they come from and who established the doctrines contained therein?" We all have an obligation to question our own choice of worship or lack thereof for our own well being. Just because we were raised in a religious home by well meaning people doesn't automatically mean the path learned therein is the best to follow. Such a question doesn't negate the significant well doing of parents or others in a given religion or denomination who, might well be following the truth they understand. That's all any of us can do, whether said religion is that founded by Christ, one

lacking its fullness as defined by Christ or one which is somewhat perverted by other means.

To think all religions and/or denominations are of equal value seems highly improbable and, in my mind, denies the possibility of our Heavenly Father having a plan for mankind's salvation. Why would a Supreme Being or God offer the truth or his path to eternal life in so many forms? After all, isn't man confused enough about the reality of life or whether there even is an existence beyond the veil of death without God exacerbating the situation?

If he has a purpose for man's life, it would seem improbable that he would muddy the waters. It seems to me, most people, who truly study the situation, would conclude that, at most, only one religion and denomination within it could be correct in the doctrines they advance. Thus, the need seems obvious, for each of us to sincerely seek the correct path, looking for possible avenues of truth. In so doing, we must evaluate the same through prayer and scripture study while being wary of man's opinions. Though the latter can be helpful, they can also be misleading, due to that individual's lack of correct knowledge. Ultimately, we must all seek the correct answer from God, having faith that he will not mislead. We can then adjust our course to meet the sum of all truth in our possession, including that which we receive by virtue of the Holy Spirit.

### **A MULTIPLICITY OF RELIGIOUS FAITHS**

#### **CONFUSION OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY**

So, a natural question, posed earlier, would be, "Where did all these religions and denominations come from?" Because we each have a mind and conscience as well as the freedom to choose, we necessarily have to answer that question for ourselves. As one would expect, mankind over the years has offered several answers to these and other religious questions. These are expressed in the very denominations and religions we are trying to evaluate, so we have little choice but to study the problem on our own and investigate those, which seem most likely to have the most truth. All will probably claim that theirs is the most correct, which makes our task a personal one. It is one that requires time, study and prayer with faith that the Lord will ultimately guide us to the right one, assuming it exists on the earth.

Of course, science also offers an answer, which many people accept because of the confusion

within the religious community. In actuality, it is nothing more than another religion that denies a personal God. Stated briefly in paraphrasing form but in more detail than earlier, we are told by science, *“Man has a primeval and innate or deeply rooted need to explain the consciousness of life and any purpose it may have. So, they invent a Supreme Being or God to explain the unexplainable. This need results in the multiplicity of religions and denominations therein as man evolved in various areas of the earth. However, only science, with maybe some help from philosophy, can ultimately answer that question through research and associated thought.”* Thus, they offer their own theories, which to the best of my knowledge at this point in time, can be summarized as the Big Bang Theory with its latest Multiverse addition and the Theory of Evolution as advanced by Darwin. Both were discussed in detail in chapter nineteen, pointing to their lack of such proof.

Both of the preceding scientific theories seem almost universally accepted by our educational institutions and confuse the struggling child who has a religious background

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as he tries to harmonize them with his religion. Those that come from non-religious homes, of course, find such instruction to be logical or even in harmony with that taught at home, unless and until they encounter religion and ponder its purpose. Does that make science right? I don’t think so; it simply means that those touting science’s explanation have gained control of secular education. That leaves the serious investigator in a quandary, evaluating the available material on hand as best he can, to get to the truth of the matter; or at least that is the way I see the challenge we face.

#### **ANOTHER EXPLANATION FOR THE CONFUSION**

Is there another logical answer to the multiplicity of religions? I believe so and will try to state it in the shortest and simplest form I can. If we consider Adam and Eve as the first humans and accept them as being created by God, we then have to describe a process whereby the many religions of today came to be.

The scriptures tell us that God is the same yesterday, today and forever with never a shadow of turning in his purpose. This constancy is described in Psalms 101:25-27 wherein David, I assume, tells us, *“Of old thou*

*hast laid the foundations of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: **But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.**”* Paul refers to this same quote in Hebrews 1:10-12 with a slight modification. James also tells us, *“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) After describing Christ as being in the express image of his person (speaking of the Father) in Hebrews 1:3, Paul tells us, *“**Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.**”* (Hebrews 13:8). Similarly, Christ tells Philip in John 14:9, *“**he that hath seen me has seen the Father**”*. Thus, it is proper to extend such constancy to both the Father and the Son.

With this constancy in mind, logic tells us that God, through Jesus Christ, extended the same gospel to Adam as he did to Israel in the meridian of time, *“He being no respecter of persons”* (Acts 10:34). In fact there is reference to that very fact

in Moses 5:15 and 5:57, which is a latter day scripture. For those that want biblical verification, consider Paul’s remarks in his letter to the Galatians, chapter 3, verse 8, where we read, *“**And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel to Abraham, saying, ‘In thee shall all nations be blessed’”**”*. Likewise, in Hebrews chapter 4, speaking of the children of Israel, Paul said in verse 2, *“**For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it**”*. (Bold print in all the above is for emphasis). These two scriptures give specific instances of the gospel of Christ being preached to others at times long before Christ was born and it is a reasonable assumption to carry that further back to Adam as indicated in Moses previously. From a Biblical view, we may lack the confirming scripture but that doesn’t mean it isn’t true.

My purpose in the above is to point out that the gospel, as taught by Christ, had been taught since Adam’s creation and was essentially the same throughout history. Only the means of true observation of the great and eternal sacrifice of Christ changed, that is from that of

unblemished animals to that of the sacrament. The Law of Moses, as taught by the Jews, didn't come about until the exodus from Egypt and, paraphrasing Paul, as Paul tells us, "It was a school master to bring Israel unto Christ". Thus, they would have had the gospel under Moses, had they had the faith, the lack of which Paul speaks of in Hebrews 4, as stated above. That makes its eternal nature evident in my mind.

In my mind, the preceding illustrates that the gospel has always been the same and has simply been altered in various ways through heretic teachings of mankind. These heretic teachings resulted from apostasy at various points in time, the first being among the sons of Adam (Genesis 4 and 6). Men also altered such teachings, I suppose, as they strived to correct errors of apostate versions through reason. Even so, God at various times removed the gospel of Adam from the earth because of man's wickedness and later restored it as he called righteous men such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Moses as prophets. The uncorrupted gospel was given to them in each case, creating various dispensations of the gospel among men or periods of time when the true gospel or that preached to Adam was on the earth. During those times corrupted forms of that given to Adam remained or were renewed on the earth with mankind free to choose among them.

When Christ was on the earth, he brought the uncorrupted gospel back to Israel to replace the Law of Moses for all who would listen and accept the same. Later, Paul spoke of a future falling away, i.e. an apostasy, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and later in Ephesians 1:10, as he spoke of the 'Dispensation of the Fullness of Times', indicating that yet another apostasy was waiting after which the gospel would be restored in the last days. That restoration was to be a fullness of "all things in Christ" or all that had been given to man in previous dispensations from Adam through that given by Christ in the Meridian of time. Thus, it would, undoubtedly, contain doctrine and activities, not present in all dispensations.

All of these historical events clearly describe an explanation for the multiplicity of religions as well as the denominations in Christendom today with their resulting confusion for mankind. My challenge, as well as that of all sincere seekers of truth today, it would seem, is to look for a church, which claims to have the fullness of the gospel as revealed by God in heaven and then

to sincerely evaluate the validity of their claims. If one finds them to be false, then such people should look elsewhere and/or wait with patience for that blessed event. However, if they should appear to have merit, then for his or her personal and eternal destiny, they should sincerely evaluate the claims, while seeking guidance from the scriptures and from God through prayer. One can be sure that God will not mislead those who sincerely seek the truth, the keys of such an activity being sincerity and effort. Should we reject such claims without sincere examination, we stand the chance of passing up that diamond of truth through our own stiff-neckedness or obstinacy. Such an attitude Christ severely condemned during his tenure on earth.

I believe I have found that church claiming to have the restored gospel in the LDS Church or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I spent some 4 to 5 years investigating the LDS Church before joining and have since spent 47 years studying the doctrine therein. My initial doubt gave way to hope and then faith to take the necessary step of baptism therein. Since that time, my knowledge and faith have increased, with a certainty in my own mind, that their claims are true. I no longer question the reality of the first vision as expressed by Joseph Smith nor do I question the veracity of the Book of Mormon, another witness of Jesus Christ. In sampling the fruit thereof, I find it delicious.

## A REVIEW OF THEOLOGICAL TERMS

As I continue my effort of discussing religion in general and the so-called "great apostasy or the last one prior to the "dispensation of the fullness of times", according to my understanding, I want to clarify, at least in my own mind, some terms, which frequent theological discussion. If nothing else, the review will help me in their proper use.

### RELIGIOUS DISPENSATIONS

Though I mentioned this term previously in the discussion of the source of multiple religions and denominations, I will now provide a definition taken from Webster in the theological sense. It is as follows: "*a religious economy prevailing at a given time, [i.e.] the **Mosaic dispensation***" Compare this with that taken from the LDS Bible Dictionary, i.e. "*A dispensation of the gospel is a period of time in which the Lord has at least one authorized servant on the earth who bears the holy priesthood and the keys, and who has the divine commission to dispense the gospel to the*

*inhabitants of the earth.”* The latter is more specific because, I suppose, the LDS Church understands and applies the principles therein more completely than does any other church of which I am aware. To increase the clarification of the latter, I will now add the latter’s discussion, which follows the basic definition. *“When this occurs, [speaking of a new dispensation], the gospel is revealed anew, so that people of that dispensation do not have to depend basically on past dispensations for the knowledge of the plan of salvation”* [This step is essential to the purity of the gospel, which cannot be derived from apostate forms preceding it, regardless of the leader’s (by whatever name he or she is known) best intentions. In such a situation, only the Lord himself has this pure form necessary for the salvation of mankind]. *“There have been many gospel dispensations since the beginning. “The Bible suggests at least one dispensation identified with Adam, another with Enoch, another with Noah, and so on with Abraham, Moses and Jesus with his apostles in the meridian of time. Paul writes of ‘the dispensation of the fullness of times’ in which the Lord will gather together in one all things in Jesus Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; [Ephesians 1:10]. The fullness of times is the final dispensation, and began with the revelation of the gospel to Joseph Smith. It is the dispensation of the restoration and of the fulfillment of the Lord’s plans and purposes since the world began. There are also things reserved for the fullness of times that have not been revealed previously; [Doctrine and Covenants 121:26-32; 124:41]. It is a glorious time, the time in which we live today. [See Acts3:19-21; Doctrine and Covenants 27:13; 110:11-16; 112:14-32; 128:18-21; 136:37-40].*

I realize anyone not belonging to the LDS Church may view the LDS definition or references in the Doctrine and Covenants with some suspicion. However, if they are to fully evaluate the LDS Church’s claim in the light of the historical evidence, which will follow later, they need to review the same because such a claim is plausible, demanding their consideration in any honest and sincere evaluation.

#### **ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY**

Ecclesiastical authority is that authority, which pertains to a given church through its clergy and necessarily applies only to those who accept its

precepts, except in those cases wherein it is combined with the secular authority, as in many Islamic societies. Such ecclesiastical authority would emanate from deity through a designated authority among men, i.e. a prophet or other individual, called and ordained in accordance with the divine will as recognized and described in that religion or denomination thereof. Of course, the divine will is that of a given religion’s god, whether it is Allah or by some other name. In the case of Islam, I assume but don’t have real knowledge, that authority claimed by any recognized Islamic official comes from Allah via Mohammed, the prophet (570 to 632 a. d.) who founded Islam according to Webster.

In reality, of course, there is only one God or Supreme Being, which Christians hold to be our God and other concepts of the same are in error. I suppose the final resolution of this will be when Christ returns in his glory. In the case of Christianity, it follows that there can be only one ultimate ecclesiastical authority that being the only true God, our Father in heaven and Jesus Christ with that authority being exercised through his chosen prophet and not man’s.

As indicated, mankind has the option of accepting or rejecting such authority because of agency, unless secularly enforced. Even in the latter case, such acceptance is in name only because secular authority can’t control our will. God has given to each and every one of his children on earth agency, often called free will, which can only be expressed in a free society. Even Christianity, many times in the past, did not recognize the concept of agency and enforced the existing church’s views through state mandated authority. The United States was founded on the concept of agency or freedom of conscience to worship as one pleases, leading to the separation of church and state, which is constantly in the headlines.

The LDS (Latter Day Saint) position regarding this authority (ecclesiastical) is set forth quite plainly in Doctrine and Covenants 134: 4, 9-10, which I include here for ease of reference, even though it is quite lengthy. It was written by Joseph Smith and, by the way, was adopted by the Church Aug. 17, 1835, just a little over 5 years after its organization. Quote, *“We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that*

human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul. ... We do not believe it is just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges, and the individual rights of its members, as citizens, denied. We believe that all religious societies have a right to deal with their members for disorderly conduct, according to the rules and regulations of such societies; provided that such dealings be for fellowship and good standing; but we do not believe that any religious society has the authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world's goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship”.

The right to direct this authority on earth is known as the key or keys of the kingdom, which, in Christianity, are believed to be vested through Christ in the aforementioned designate, recognized by that particular denomination, if there is such an individual. In the LDS Church he is the prophet or presiding High Priest of the Church, who has received the same through previous prophets from Christ, as described in Hebrews 7, Isaiah 22:22, Luke 11:52 and Revelation 1:18. In the meridian of time, Christ bestowed those keys upon Peter, as His earthly representative or prophet to lead the Church after His ascension (see Matthew 16:19). We, as Christians, can readily accept this principle, whereas other faiths, i.e. Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., not accepting Christ as their Savior, would not. Even so, in my opinion, only one faith and denomination can be correct or true, which further demonstrates our need to pursue the principle of truth at all costs.

As indicated by Webster, Catholicism claims these keys and thus the authority to direct the priesthood in all its duties here on earth. Webster defines key in a religious sense as being **“the ecclesiastical authority vested in the pope as a successor to St. Peter”**. This definition presupposes the pope to be Peter’s successor, which is certainly open to debate. However, if that is the case, then all protestant faiths as well as “The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter Day Saints” have no Divine authority, being either breakaways or apostate organizations through heretical teachings or in the latter case, a false church based on deceit and supposed revelation. By refusing to follow the authority of the pope or God’s designated authority on earth holding the keys of the kingdom, they necessarily have no divine authority. This would render their ordinances invalid, placing their claims of bringing souls to Christ in serious question. I understand the various protestant denominations claim scriptural authority, which has no legitimate basis, again according to my understanding. In fact, Paul tells us in Hebrews 5:1, 4 that no man can take this honor [speaking of the priesthood] unto himself but he that is called of God as was Aaron. Furthermore, Moses is given clear directions from God on how to confer authority to lead Israel after he (Moses) is taken. This is expressed in Numbers 27:23. Exactly how the various protestant denominations claim authority through the scriptures is a mystery to me regardless of how they explain it.

Of course, if Catholicism is apostate in nature to an extent requiring God to remove His priesthood authority, then the true Church was removed along with the keys and of necessity has to be restored before the second coming of Christ. Such restoration would then include the keys or the right to direct the work of Christ once again in a new dispensation preceding His return. This latter scenario is the one, which “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints” holds to be true, it being the Church restored by Jesus Christ through the prophet Joseph Smith in 1830. It would seem then, that either the Catholic Church or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints can be the only legitimate Church on the earth today depending upon which claim is true. This would leave all Protestant churches as heretical in nature, having refused to obey the pope but lacking the receipt of any authority from Christ to direct his work.

While it is true they have been given secular authority to worship and perform weddings according to their own understanding and consciences they have never received authority from Christ to administer his ordinances. Obviously they, as individuals and organizations, do many good works in harmony with their pursuit of scripture but that doesn’t provide the authority to administer the saving ordinances of Christ’s Church and thus cannot provide power

to save. This principle applies to other religions, which may also be involved in many good works. Though their works are admirable and will receive recognition from God; that is the extent of their value. It simply makes no difference how well intended those involved are. The principle of requiring secular authority to perform ordinances of significance in this life certainly extends to holier spheres, it seems to me but the reader has to make up his own mind.

The need for such authority is a concept similar to that of performing a civil ordinance, such as marriage, without the designated authority from government. In this case, each society's government is the ultimate authority that must recognize such a union. Only legitimate members of the clergy, designated by those churches or other offices approved of civil government may perform the ceremonies. Without it, the union is of no effect in the eyes of that society. No matter what the official's intent, good or bad, the marriage would be invalid in the sight of the presiding civil authority. Likewise, no person claiming to represent a given business or organization, can execute business proceedings in their behalf unless granted said authority by the governing body of that organization. So likewise are other ordinances invalid that are performed in a church in Christ's name but without His authority or keys. Those keys, if present on the earth, lay in one person, i.e. God's designated representative, whether it is the pope or His chosen prophet. If the pope no longer holds the keys and the Lord has not called a prophet, then no one has the authority to administer the life saving ordinances of the gospel. All faiths, religions, denominations or forms of worship lack the authority of Christ to function in those sacred ordinances and consequently, must rely upon the authority of men only. Such churches may be filled with good people, having nothing but the best intentions to live the gospel according to all the principles provided in existing scriptures but the keys or authority are still missing, making all ordinances administered of no effect. Once again, we might add, God will undoubtedly recognize any good work men do.

To further emphasize the importance of the authority just discussed, consider a quote taken from a book by Tad R. Callister [The Inevitable Apostasy] regarding Roger Williams. "*Roger Williams (A.D. 1603-1683), the founder of Rhode Island and a strong proponent of religious freedom, sensed something was*

*missing in his day and age: 'The Apostasy ... hath so far corrupted all [Christian churches], that there can be no recovery out of that apostasy until Christ shall send forth new apostles to plant the churches anew.'* At one point he declined to continue as pastor of the Baptist Church because there was **'no regularly constituted church on the earth, nor any person qualified to administer any church ordinances; nor can there be until new apostles are sent by the Great Head of the Church for whose coming I am seeking.'**" Again, the italicized type is a quote with the bold being attributed to Roger Williams. Others of the early reformers also recognized this need and so stated in various ways.

Consequently, without a living prophet or designate recognized by Christ on earth to direct his work, people are left to glean what they can from existing scripture, which may not be complete, correctly copied and/or correctly translated. Consequently, certain ordinances may be missing; known ordinances incorrectly administered and unauthorized ordinances added to those approved. Similarly, new scripture, relevant to today's problems will not be given, as in the past because of the prophet's absence. The very absence of recent scripture would signify the absence of a prophet and thus, the lack of keys and authority to carry on the work (see Amos 3:7). In spite of this, all people would still reap the blessings associated with the laws God has instituted by virtue of their obedience, as given in Doctrine & Covenants 130:20-21 and quoted earlier but they must await a restoration of the gospel for authority and keys to administer the ordinances therein. From my viewpoint then, there are at least three questions a sincere seeker of truth today must consider and answer in his mind, as he embarks on his quest for the truth regarding ecclesiastical authority. I itemize these questions as follows.

- 1) Was there a complete apostasy of the Church after its foundation by Christ in the meridian of time?
- 2) Is the pope a legitimate successor to Peter in terms of ecclesiastical authority with its keys?
- 3) Was there a restoration of the gospel in 1830 through God's chosen prophet Joseph Smith?

I will, to the best of my ability, present the answers to the first two questions in the next

chapter, which I feel are yes and no respectively. My answer to question number three will have to wait until chapter 22 describing the restoration. In all reality, one may easily detect that my answer to it is an emphatic yes, though my points of validation will have to wait until then. Arriving at that emphatic yes has involved both study and prayer over an extended period of time, which is obviously required for any secure testimony. Of course, each individual who has a desire to accept Christ as his Lord and Savior must do so by his own volition and ultimately we all will reap a resurrection consistent with that choice and the justice of God. Of this I have no doubt and would encourage all mankind to study and pray for guidance in their decision seeking the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in their final choice.

### GOD'S DESIGNATED PROPHET

The term prophet, without being capitalized, is defined by Webster rather loosely and includes one who receives divine inspiration, a person who foretells the nature of future events and one who is a spokesman or leader of a cause or party. He tightens the definition up somewhat when it is capitalized. In so doing he mentions the Major and Minor Prophets of the Old Testament as well as the Prophet Mohammed. He also speaks of a prophetess or female prophet as referred to in the Bible.

Now, consider the definition given in the LDS Bible Dictionary. I'll quote it verbatim for the benefit of the reader. *"The work of a Hebrew prophet was to act as God's messenger and make known God's will. The message was usually prefaced with the words 'Thus saith Jehovah', He taught men about God's character, showing the full meaning of his dealings with Israel in the past. It was therefore part of the prophetic office to preserve and edit the nation's history; and such historical books as Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings were known by the Jews as the former Prophets. It was also the prophet's duty to denounce and foretell its punishment, and to redress, so far as he could, both public and private wrongs. He was to be, above all, a teacher of righteousness. When the people had fallen away from a true faith in Jehovah, the prophets had to try to restore that faith and remove false views about the character of God and the nature of the Divine requirement. In certain cases prophets predicted future events, e.g., there are the very important prophecies*

*announcing the coming of the Messiah's kingdom; but as a rule the prophet was a forthteller rather than a foreteller. In a general sense a prophet is anyone who has a testimony of Jesus Christ by the Holy Ghost, as in Num. 11:25-29; Rev. 19:10. I assume the term 'forthteller' is, in this case, used to describe the primary work of a prophet, i.e. to tell forth or bring forth the will of God, although the*

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dictionary doesn't list it. So, you will have to search for one or may make your own.

As intimated earlier and in harmony with Matthew 16:19, LDS doctrine teaches that right to exercise the keys of the kingdom for the Church is vested only in one man at a time, he being designated as **'The Prophet'** or president of the Church. He is the senior apostle, defined according to length of time since ordination as an apostle. The other apostles also hold the keys but they are dormant until the prophet passes away. At that time, they are exercised by the remaining apostles, as a quorum, to call the next senior apostle to the office of president of the Church after which he has the right to exercise his dormant keys in directing the affairs of the Church. This is necessary to maintain order and consistency in the direction of the Church; at least that is my understanding.

We speak of the president as being **'The Prophet'**; though all the apostles are prophets in their own right. This is consistent with Old Testament teachings in which more than one prophet was often on the earth at a time and taught the people the will of God. I include these latter thoughts to clarify the term prophet and **'The Prophet'**, as used in the LDS Church. The apostles of the LDS Church act as prophets and special witnesses of Christ and make up the Quorum of the Twelve.

### ORTHODOXY

According to my dictionary, an orthodox view of a given religion would constitute holding to the official, standard or accepted opinion of an organization, particularly a Christian church. In the case of Christ's Church, the orthodox view is the correct view as given by Christ through his

prophets and any deviation is necessarily in error, being in opposition to Christ and thus our God in heaven. In any other organization or church, such opposition might well be a doctrine closer to the truth, it being different to the view of the governing body, which is questionable because such is based on man's fallible opinion.

### HERESY

Heresy is to teach an opposing view or, at least, a differing view to that of the orthodox view of a given doctrine accepted by a particular church. In and of itself, it may or may not be true, depending upon its source as well as the validity of the doctrine with which it is in opposition. Thus, the teachings of the Gnostics were considered heretical to that of Catholicism but may still have been harmonious with that taught by the ancient Church or Christ's Church. As I understand the term, a heretical view implies advocating an opposing view with full knowledge of the orthodox view. Thus, it would seem, an honest seeker of truth may hold a heretic view but not be a heretic because of his ignorance. Such an individual would willingly abandon his heretic view upon learning the truth and would eagerly grasp the truth once known.

### APOSTASY

Apostasy constitutes a public abandonment of a religious faith, particularly Christianity, for another, according to Webster. It would begin through conscious opposition to true doctrine but might be perpetuated through ignorance, or so it seems to me. Thus, if the gospel is removed from the earth by God because of wickedness, such opposition has begun as rebellion but is perpetuated through ignorance of the masses that wander in darkness. Once the gospel with its directing authority is gone, there is no one to look to for truth and the leaders of apostate forms of worship can only do their best through study of remaining records and human reasoning. They become the blind leading the blind regardless of their sincerity until God, once again decides to restore the gospel through an individual he and he alone calls and ordains to teach the truth, which God reveals to him. Such truth will be in harmony with any and all valid records of previous religious dispensations.

### GOD'S PURPOSES

I believe in God, the creator of the universe or the heavens and the earth and all that is contained within them. I also believe that such a Supreme Being created mankind for a divine

purpose, which mankind cannot comprehend in and of their selves. In fact, I surely believe he has a purpose for each and every creation he has seen fit to bring into existence. Man, an intelligent being, has a purpose in his creations, whether for evil or for good. That being so, one can hardly fathom a Supreme Being creating something as magnificent as the universe, without a purpose. Such is without logic, let alone any reasonable proof. Man creates, for satisfaction of his physical being, including appetite, security and what he perceives as his advancement. God's purpose is spiritual, in that it encompasses our entire existence, including

**That being so, one can hardly fathom a Supreme Being creating something as magnificent as the universe, without a purpose.**

the pre-mortal realm and that beyond the grave, as well as mortality.

Man can only wonder about such things, not being able to prove or disprove God's existence or the reality of states other than mortality, while relying wholly upon his divine will for revelation of the others. Thus, we gain understanding of his purposes and means, only as he chooses to reveal them to us. The truths we gain through revelation, science and intelligent pondering all emanate from him and are given to us according to his will and for purposes, which we don't necessarily understand at this point of our existence. He reveals such things to us, individually and collectively, according to his divine purpose and we can only hope to merit additional revelation for ourselves through obedience to his ordained laws. I will now provide a scripture from the Doctrine and Covenants as given to the prophet, Joseph Smith. He taught the following, "There is a law irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated". I accept this statement unequivocally and maintain that scientific truths come about because such laws are followed in scientific research. The inclusion of God's existence in such research will, in my opinion, prevent conclusions being reached, which lead the scientist down false pathways or blind alleys such as the theory of evolution and the big bang theory. In the latter cases, their research may be valid but their conclusions are left wanting. They will only establish correct

conclusions in their research, when it is in harmony with truth as guided by the Holy Spirit according to the Lord's time and his will.

## RELIGIOUS REFLECTIONS

I will begin with my personal religious views, which have already been expressed to a small degree herein as well as to a greater extent in the previous chapter. If you find some of my remarks too repetitive, you can skip them and I will never know or, obviously, care. The main difference one will find, regarding the remarks on religion contained in this chapter, is an explanation of why I accept a given view as correct, at this point in time, but not an insistence that it is right. Why? Because I believe all mankind is a work in progress, less than perfect beings and my views are correct only to the extent that I understand the truth. Similarly, the reader's view is correct only to the extent he or she understands the truth. It would be extremely naïve of me, or anyone else, no matter how intelligent, to believe otherwise. Only the Lord is omniscient and mankind is very much in the learning stage.

We, as mere humans, are making our way through the sea of mortality to an unseen distant shore we perceive in our vision of life and its purpose. We use various charts, both secular and religious, as our guide, hoping they will bring us to our desired destination. Many are the voices trying to sell us their version of what life's purpose or lack thereof is and thus the course we should pursue. They come from various sources, philosophical and scientific as well as various religious denominations and sects. Any hope we have of success rests with our ability to acquire and follow the one that is most accurate. We may well try different ones to help us ascertain that which we believe is the most accurate, thus providing the best path to ultimate truth through life's stormy seas. This includes our judgment of the sources of the various guides. Just how fallible are they? Do they rest on the intellect of man? Do they consider only the trip's immediate comfort and pleasure? Do they involve the use of navigational aids that respond to some tried and true signal and is that aid the most accurate available? Is their origin based on secular wisdom or does it ultimately rest on the word of God? These questions harken back to the comment in chapter 19 wherein I

**We, as mere humans, are making our way through the sea of mortality to an unseen distant shore we perceive in our vision of life and its purpose.**

indicated, in my opinion, that the ultimate source of any of our authorities will eventually be that of man, the arm of the flesh, or that of God, the arm of God.

The above are all questions the serious navigator of life must ask him or herself to find the truth. In their pondering, **an essential act for success**, they must evaluate their course to date; while studying the various available manuals and discussing the concepts therein with those they deem knowledgeable, possessing both wisdom and integrity. To do otherwise places them in jeopardy of error, unwise advice and even prey of a charlatan seeking personal gain. Errors may well be made and course corrections become necessary as we personally evaluate our position from time to time. Pre-conceived opinions of the accuracy of our route as well as excessive involvement in tempting sights and pleasures we encounter along the way can lead to an erroneous route and/or stagnation of progress. These bode ill for the traveler's sure confrontation with the storms of life. Thus, the wise traveler will seriously consider all these factors during the course of life's trip. Though I can't claim to be the most accurate of sailors and thus to have always followed the best course, I am now confident I have come across the best navigational data

available to man, that is, the restored gospel as given by God to man through Joseph Smith, he being fore-ordained for this work. My challenge, as I

see it, for my remaining time on the sea, is to follow the course I now conclude as true. In so doing, I also offer my observations to my posterity and anyone else who has now fallen victim to this marvelous work.

Though my progress in the gospel has had its ups and downs with moments of doubt and many questions, I have learned to accept such doubts and questions as principles yet to be understood. My experience has been that effort on my part to understand and apply gospel principles to life inevitably brings answers and greater satisfaction with added beauty for my original vision (the puzzle) of the purpose of life. It, (my vision, that is), is no longer restricted to mortality but has expanded to include both post mortal and pre-mortal considerations. I must now consider my life in terms of where I came from and what lies ahead for me as well as my potential in that future realm we know so little

about. In so doing, I must factor in mortal activity with its impact on that future state just as our pre-existence impacts our mortal existence. As I have repeatedly stated, I believe this mortal life is a time of testing whereby God, our Father in heaven, evaluates our worthiness for various rewards beyond the veil. He will rescue the errant sailor who in all humility and sincerity has done his or her best to reach the eternal rest he offers but the rebellious, proud and/or slothful will be left to the course and destination they are willing to accept. I repeat these assertions here because they will have a direct bearing on the remarks I expect to make later in this chapter, as indicated previously. Similarly, it is true of my comments on science, politics and other secular activities, which I described in chapter 20.

Consideration of a post mortal existence isn't out of the ordinary, being a doctrine of virtually every Christian denomination and most other religions. As mentioned in chapter 20, the concept of a pre-existent state for mankind is, however, rather unusual even though inferred in the Bible and taught as doctrine in the primitive Church, or that of the meridian of time. It is part of LDS doctrine and, I suppose, doctrine of some other churches outside my acquaintance. At least, it appears to be because of comments found in some literature. For instance, William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) "Ode On Imitations of Immortality" contains these inspiring words, words that attracted my attention early in my investigation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and became a part of my pondering.

*"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come,  
From God, who is our home."*

How he developed this concept in his mind, I don't know but he either received it through religious training or through personal pondering. Similarly, as mentioned in the last chapter, this concept provides a degree of understanding for the wide range of abilities and personalities existing among siblings in spite of their common genetic origin. Such differences become evident soon after birth if not before. In fact, a recent

show on the National Geographic channel spoke of these differences being apparent in the womb among mothers having twins, triplets, etc. Likewise, I see it among my own siblings and my own children. I suppose the reader has also observed these things manifested in their families and wondered a little. Not that those differences prove the concept but they certainly provide a possible or even probable explanation.

I am confident all real Christians accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and likewise the concept of an after-life with a resurrection through Christ. The logic portrayed by Wordsworth should have a familiar ring to them. If life after death is a reality and our spirits return to God, then logic tells us those same spirits must have come from his presence, giving rise to the address used by

Christ when he counseled his disciples about their method of prayer, namely "Our Father which art in Heaven (Matthew 6:9)."

**Thus, the spiritual side of life has become more important to me than the physical, which we all develop an understanding of through life itself.**

Though I won't get into scriptural or historical evidence regarding a pre-existence in this chapter, I repeat this affirmation because of its profound impact on the understanding of my own personal talents and limitations, as well as my own purpose in life or mortality. Gaining such appreciation has provided me with a greater sense of self worth, as well as a greater appreciation for others, including both sexes. It has altered my values and priorities in life and also given me a more positive attitude in meeting its challenges. It helps me understand how God blesses us individually through other people as well as in our own pursuits. These capabilities or talents displayed by mortals in life I accept, as attributes or traits of the spirit.

Thus, the spiritual side of life has become more important to me than the physical, which we all develop an understanding of through life itself. Even so, I now value the importance of mortality more than I did before. By similar means, I know the spiritual side of life impacts the physical and life has shown me that the latter is much more satisfying when the former is being nourished. We entered life from the spiritual and will exit life through the spiritual prior to our resurrection, which is a free gift to all mankind. The spiritual side has always been with us and will continue to be with us in the eternities to come, whereas the temporary physical body might be viewed as the vehicle we travel through life in to our ultimate destination, life after death.

My vehicle is a 1928 model and is certainly showing the signs of wear including various scratches, dings, dents and a faded exterior. In spite of this it has served me well, even though some recipients of that model year appear to have received one with more style and beauty than I. I am aware that my vehicle has been somewhat abused through ignorance but a better understanding of life's purpose has, in my opinion, extended its mortal tenure. Even so, I look forward to its glorious renewal in the resurrection where we will all receive a newer, more advanced model (1 Corinthians 15:40-42) and am now striving to position myself so as to be worthy of the deluxe model or celestial version in that state yet to come. Naturally, you will or already have become aware of that particular characteristic of mine, as you continue to wade through my reflections of chapters 20 and 21, both secular and religious. As always, I continue to visualize and strive for the best available to me or, in altering the words of a certain axiom slightly, which was so aptly expressed by my dear mother, "I would like to make a purse out of the sow's ear" I now carry in life. I suppose that's true of all people.

The concept of a post mortal existence can also have a tremendous impact on the way we conduct our lives. Its acceptance as reality necessarily entails belief in some sort of a supreme being and, in the restored gospel at least, the concept of such is diametrically opposed to the idea of evolution as a means of origin of the various species existing today. According to my understanding, adaptation within a species is accepted, as a means of adjusting to changing climatic or environmental situations. That seems well established. However, there is a dearth of scientific evidence proving evolution from one species to another or even development from a simple single cell originally, by chance. The evolutionists express undying faith in man's ability to eventually establish the validity of man's evolvment by natural selection or pure chance while denigrating those of us who express faith in God as our Creator. We keep hearing of new geological and microbiological evidence filling in the gaps but nothing definitive seems to materialize beyond the "What If Stories" provided by those accepting evolution as fact, which have already been discussed.

Evolution may have its place in God's work, I don't know, but man has yet to define its proper role beyond that of adaptation. At some time,

which God deems proper, he may reveal unto us its reality or lack thereof. In the meantime, I prefer to accept a divine creation over unfounded theories of men, which have yet to establish all of the empirical data necessary to convert it to fact. I believe the adversary has confused them, the proponents of evolution, through their pride, regardless of their sincerity. Obviously, such confusion is the seed of Atheism and thus denial of man's origin as God's spiritual sons and daughters. It leaves only temporal success as a measure of man's worth rather than the beautiful potential divinely appointed by God. It likewise removes any purpose for life or a need to grow beyond any temporal level we deem satisfactory.

Reaching back to chapter 20 and rephrasing a principle therein I hope to further clarify my reasons for dismissing evolution in man's

**However, there is a dearth of scientific evidence proving evolution from one species to another or even the development of a simple single cell by chance.**

creation in the following. First, the psychology of evolution is depressing. To accept it means one perceives his ultimate progenitors as one celled amoebas crawling out of ancient sediments in primeval oceans. What a depressing thought when compared to a belief that we are children of God; our Father in Heaven, as expressed by Wordsworth and that life has a purpose. The latter, even if it were false, provides a much more satisfying base for life's psychology. It provides motivation for improvement and growth, continuing through old age, which has ramifications extending beyond this life. It gives rise to virtuous desires far beyond the appetites of the physical being. I believe such appetites were given to mankind as mortal challenges to overcome and properly apply through faith in God and his Son, Jesus Christ. If evolution were a fact, the counsel of "eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" would not only have meaning but would also be the logical course for mankind. What purpose would there be for love, kindness, sacrifice and other virtues that make life joyous rather than simply various processes of creature satisfaction for our short mortal existence? The satisfaction derived from virtuous emotions far out-weighs satisfaction of physical appetite and, to the believer; extends into the eternities whereby associations with both progenitors and progeny are enjoyed. Yes,

in my book, evolution is depressing, being a tool of the adversary to counteract the joy that faith in God and his purpose for mankind bring.

With repetition of the foregoing tirade, one can see my reflections include, as a theme, a Supreme Creator with a purpose for life. This purpose has matured through faith and a witness of the Spirit to certainty, driving my own efforts to achieve what I believe he has in mind for me. This certainty, in my mind, constitutes empirical evidence Mr. Sowell spoke of, even though others may doubt their existence, let alone the reality of receiving such a witness through the Holy Spirit. Having never experienced it, a witness of the Holy Spirit, they don't accept it but that doesn't make it less real. It becomes personal empirical evidence, not scientific. After all, only those who support a given theory commonly accept legitimate evidence, as such. Those in opposition to a theory will always find another explanation for what seems obvious to those that support it. One need look no further than the global warming controversy to witness such acts. It now appears that Al Gore's book "An Inconvenient Truth" might better be called "A Convenient Distortion", given the cooling of the earth's atmosphere since 1998. This concept, global warming, has been far from universally accepted even in the scientific community. Yet he won a "Nobel Prize" for it. That gives me hope for this work of mine. I might just send a copy to the committee making such judgments.

Finally, it should be remembered that so-called legitimate evidence comes via man's intellect, whether it be of a spiritual or temporal nature and may have to be re-evaluated, as our understanding of a subject continues to develop. In the end, I am confident that scientific and religious truths will harmonize, as previously stated and as some of my comments included hereafter so indicate. After all, God is the source of all scientific truth, which is a part of all truth.

The Lord, being omniscient, is the source of all truth and dispenses it in accordance with his divine purpose. Much of mankind doesn't accept that source of truth, of course, which is only obtained through the Holy Spirit. They insist on mankind's proof. Even so, they are also given that portion that the Lord deems appropriate for their role in bringing about his

purpose while defining their own attributes of character. In so doing, they provide the Lord with the evidence necessary to properly judge their sincere desires when all mankind will finally appear before him in the final judgment. We, then, will be given the measure of salvation merited by those desires. This conclusion, I have arrived at, now guides my deepest interests and effort to properly express my sincere desire to the Lord. Through the same I hope to merit his divine grace and in due time become worthy to return to his presence, even receiving Eternal Life or that greatest reward God has to give the faithful.

As I understand the gospel, we arrive in mortality at a time and place the Lord has deemed appropriate for us to be properly tested and to contribute our small portion to his purpose. We are both blessed and cursed in varying degrees by the age and environment we find ourselves in. Only the Lord fully understands the whys and wherefores therein. It is futile to try to properly explain the complex verities of man's existence or to prove God does or does not exist because of what we see. It seems to me, our major interest and effort in life should be one of understanding its purpose and then conducting our lives, as best we can, in harmony with that purpose. I believe this can only be achieved through the acceptance of God, as a reality with a sincere effort to understand the purpose of creation. Of course, this requires study of some kind as well as quiet pondering. In harmony with that quest, we must strike a balance of sorts between the physical and spiritual sides of life.

In chapter 20, I emphasized the dual nature of man, i.e. physical and spiritual. In the restored gospel, we understand the mind or the intellect is in the spirit and is eternal in nature. It existed with our spirit being in the pre-mortal and will go with us to our final state in the resurrection. Its eternal nature accounts for our innate abilities or so-called talents with which we entered life. It is further developed in this life by the path we elect to travel, whether spiritual, physical, good or evil. I repeat the scripture in Doctrine and Covenants 130:18-19, as follows: "*Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than*

**It seems to me, our major interest and effort in life should be one of understanding its purpose and then conducting our lives, as best we can, in harmony with that purpose.**

*another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.*" In harmony with this scripture we find another in the Book of Mormon in Alma 34:34 "... for that same spirit which doth posses your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to posses your body in that eternal world." From these scriptures we understand that the spirit is the eternal part of mankind, not the mortal body. In fact, the condition of that spirit when appearing before the judgment bar of Christ will dictate the reward we will receive and thus, the type of glorified body given to us in the resurrection, i.e. telestial, terrestrial or celestial. All of this discussion points to the need for mankind to understand this dual nature and to act in accordance. Refusing to accept this concept doesn't change the nature of it, nor does it negate the damage we might inflict on the spirit in this life. Being aware of it and accepting it as valid allows us to approach life with a balanced and more temperate view. That is, we will make an effort to feed the spirit as well as the body and, in harmony with that, avoid environments and activities which damage it. I believe the health of body and spirit are inter-related, one being conducive to the other. That isn't to say that an unfortunate human, plagued with health problems, can't be spiritual or that a person of apparent good health is necessarily spiritual. Each of us is dealt certain cards in our lives not completely within our control but a balance approach to life helps us achieve our individual purposes in accordance with what the Lord has given us, without our knowing exactly why.

The Lord, in his omniscience, has given mortals in each age certain talents and opportunities to apply them according, once again, to his purpose. Though his purpose isn't typically understood by mankind in general, we, none-the-less, are players in bringing it about. Our participation constitutes the test required of us for the Lord to properly judge us. Why we come to earth in a given age, nation or family isn't necessarily clear to me or the majority of mankind, in my opinion. History can clarify it to a degree for some who study and gain a clear understanding of the roles played by various well known individuals. The scriptures describe the roles of some prophets and rulers, even evil men such as Nebuchadnezzar. The roles of good men including prophets also become apparent with time. Thus, the role of Columbus as well as Washington and others of our

founding fathers have now apparent to many through their study of the individual's life.

For the average individual, such as you or I, the purpose may be less clear but we play our role and make our contributions in varying degrees as we take the test of life. In our day, we are particularly blessed with all kinds of comforts and conveniences. These come by virtue of the Lord pouring out his Spirit upon mankind for his purpose, as described in Joel, Acts and other scriptures. Both good and evil come with these technical advances. Man's physical well being is richly blessed and the Lord utilizes them to spread the gospel to people everywhere as well as to bless those who are long deceased by virtue of temple work. Virtually every good thing coming from God is also used by the adversary to spread his evil purpose. Thus, we see pornography and genealogy as being those Internet sites visited most in recent years.

Our trial, it seems, is to discern between good and evil and be anxiously engaged in the good.

<p><b>I think it is important for all mankind to realize the adversary accomplishes most of his work through us, even as God does.</b></p>
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We don't experience the physical rigors that confronted our forefathers nor the physical dangers they encountered. Even so, the challenges of life today are every bit as great but maybe less obvious because of their nature. The challenges of raising a family are infinitely more complex than even a generation ago. Though temporal success is desirable, the greatest blessing we can give to our children is to guide them in building a righteous spiritual foundation. Certainly the world won't do that. We have never been bombarded more by various types of media than we are today. Through their propaganda we are enticed to soak in the waters of affluence in our society, which is blessed beyond anything previous generations have experienced. To enjoy a nice bath is fine but to only concentrate on the physical luxuries of life is detrimental to our spiritual well being. It is infinitely more important to actively guide our children in their early years so they will be prepared for the massive indoctrination carried out by the adversary in various forms of media and, unfortunately in many cases, our public schools as well. Then and only then will they really understand the importance of spiritual development and the peace and joy it provides in this life.

I think it is important for all mankind to realize the adversary accomplishes most of his work through us, even as God does. Thus, each of us can be an instrument of the devil or of our God. This fact does not condemn us in and of itself. It is the fruit of our desires and actions in this life that ultimately determines our worthiness in God's eyes. We may well follow the adversary through lack of understanding and especially so in refusal to accept him as a reality. Even with an awareness of his reality, we are all sorely tempted, at times through our temporal appetites and the incessant bombardment of our minds by the modern media. That doesn't make the average member of society a bad person but only displays his ignorance and weakness or hopefully, his wisdom and strength. This further emphasizes the need for spiritual growth and commitment to follow our righteous desires. Doing so is a major step in the process of becoming or sincerely seeking truth but still leaves the never ending need in this life for spiritual growth. This is the test of mortality within which we will all slip and fall at times. Such temporary failures become learning experiences and make the need for such virtues as humility and repentance evident while one strives to walk the walk of our beloved Savior. Perseverance in our quest demonstrates the sincerity of our faith and if sufficient, will result in reception of that divine grace we all need to become perfected in Christ.

Achieving prominence, power or affluence is nothing unless we use it for good. Thus, protecting and developing the spiritual side of the life of our children becomes more important than placing them in the best schools, secularly speaking, because this life is short. The reality of existing throughout the eternities is factual as is the knowledge gained by pursuing the source of such fact. One may not accept such existence as factual but that doesn't change the reality of it. The only way one will develop a witness of its reality is through the Holy Spirit, which requires a moral life style. The intellectuals of the world that have ignored their spiritual development, at the expense of academia or another secular activity, can make no valid judgment because of their refusal to understand that concept and their consequent rejection of it. As I indicated earlier, such an attitude is akin to rejecting the existence of atomic particles because we can't see them and then refusing to take the steps necessary to develop an understanding of them while acting

as though they don't exist. One must develop the qualifications God requires for guidance by his Holy Spirit, which includes real faith that God exists and an effort to follow his various forms of guidance through obedience to that which we have received. We must also have hope that he will reward the faithful by pouring out the same on them in their need. Thus hope and faith work together to build our spirituality.

Though the foregoing may be taken as my trying to portray a degree of expertise on the subject but nothing could be farther from the truth. As I have repeatedly said, I don't see myself as a theological expert or even well informed but my arrival at this point in life has not included blind acceptance of the organization I now hold to be true. The more I have studied gospel precepts common to most Christian faiths, the more convinced I become that Christ's Church or the true gospel is found in the LDS Church today. In fact, I know of no other church that encourages personal study with its revelatory rewards, as does the LDS Church, nor do I know of one which insists that real faith and knowledge can only be arrived at by living in accordance with the same and thus becoming more like Christ or striving to walk in his footsteps. The truth of a principle is gained by living in accordance with it, i.e. becoming or making that principle part of one's character rather than the persona we project in society. This is what Paul was trying to tell the Ephesians, I believe, in his epistle to them (see Ephesians 4:12-13). To pretend acceptance in a hypocritical manner only compounds the seriousness and the reality of one's rejection through deceit while portraying, as well, one's ignorance of the same.

As I understand it, the sum of the gospel message is found in becoming or achieving the potential God has placed in mankind. That is, being perfected in Christ, as is so clearly described by Paul in the foregoing reference. Thus, it is a life-long pursuit and extends beyond the veil of death, as well. Becoming that which our potential describes is also the purpose of God in creating mankind and the earth on which we reside. That purpose is expressed in Moses 1:39, a latter day scripture, wherein the Lord says; *"For behold, this is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."* If one rejects this concept or accepts it in a light-hearted manner, without serious pursuit, I believe he or she is asking for failure and will never reach the ultimate destination mentioned by Paul.

The Lord, in my opinion, will make up for our personal limitations through grace but will still demand a sincere and serious effort on our part, which in truth, expresses the reality of our desire and commitment. Anything less than that is nothing more than hypocrisy, which seems to permeate much of the Christian world. Neither is it absent in the members of the LDS Church but at least, we are exposed to a fullness of the truth and have more reason to pursue it. We also have more need to fear personal hypocrisy because of our access to truth. What we do with it is up to us and many there are who come into the Church and far outstrip some life-long members in the seriousness of their faith and commitment to grow. Acceptance, without effort, causes the best of intention to stagnate and lose the promised blessings.

I talked a lot about truth in the preceding dissertation of my religious reflections. It seems important to me to ask one's self just what is truth, which we often toss around so lightly? So, let me spend a moment in that part of the arena.

## TRUTH

How do we discern truth or know what is right and what is wrong? I believe we learn through education, which may come voluntarily or through the school of hard knocks. That education may be of the secular variety, of a spiritual nature or preferably, a combination. We can choose to accept it or reject it. Often we reject certain of its aspects by ignoring it and going about life without it. This is particularly true of the spiritual variety because the secular world doesn't require it for temporal success. When received voluntarily, it is typically received in humility. That is, the recipient recognizes the greater knowledge and understanding of the dispenser of knowledge. In the school of hard knocks, we usually learn through experience such as the laws of society, job acquisition, etc. and profit from our mistakes. The child that learns to eat a healthy diet when young carries that over into adulthood and reaps the benefits. The child that is taught the importance of education and a work ethic by his parents is that much better off as an adult than if not. So it is with moral aptitude and religious values. Those who learn these values early in life are much better off than those who don't. Some people only subscribe to those moral values that pertain to the secular world, which we might term ethics

**We often speak of truth, as we know it, which implicitly denotes incomplete facts and probable inaccuracy.**

and deny the relevance of the religious morality. However, the importance of all moral laws will come home to roost eventually.

Over-weight people really begin to suffer the ills of their problem most when mature in age. Such a serious condition aggravates other health issues, including joint damage, etc. Poorly educated people suffer in the level of affluence in their lives. Immoral people often suffer in this life through disease, jail, etc. but the real damage will become most apparent in the final judgment. If we believe that to be the case, we will order our life so as to prevent or minimize it. If we don't believe, we will not but that doesn't mean we won't suffer the consequences or reap the benefits. Surely, the investigator who truly ponders life's purpose will seriously pursue the very of their existence.

One might ask, "Just what is truth"? Webster tells us that truth is a noun meaning "*the state or quality of being true, accurate or having sincerity and integrity*". The term "true", however, covers a broader meaning including *straightness, genuine, an accurate fit*, etc. In each case it means accuracy as compared to a given standard. Sometimes the truth is colored, tainted or sullied with the intent to mislead. This

is a favorite tactic in rhetoric. In legal proceedings truth may mean observing the letter of the law even when less than perfect. Some

people maintain that truth is relative and changes according to the evolution of society. They say there is no absolute truth. Such people apparently refuse to recognize the existence of God or have an imperfect understanding of his attributes. Yet, others, including myself, believe real truth is absolute and continues unchanged throughout eternity because it emanates from God. That is, God is the source of all truth while the devil, being adversarial to God, as well as mankind, is the source of all lies in their various manifestations. He is absolutely opposed to man's success in life, that is, man's realization of God's purpose.

We often speak of truth, as we know it, which implicitly denotes incomplete facts and probable inaccuracy. Though we may do the best we can in such cases, the results will be less than ideal by virtue of the inaccuracies involved. A person of integrity will strive to deal with others as well as with his own conscience in absolute truth. We honor such a man and want to do business

with him because we can depend upon his honest effort and probably the results as well. No one likes to be taken or misled. However, we, as humans, primarily deal with and accept "truth as we know it", not having complete and absolute truth, which is vested in its fullness only in God. In that sense, truth or information of value emanates from God and must be honored to achieve genuine success in life. The degree to which we successfully tap into this source and honor it constitutes authentic joy, as I see it.

Decisions and actions based on anything less than absolute truth necessarily lead to results with some error and, in being less than perfect, a level of joy or happiness blemished or flawed by the degree of error contained therein. Even so, those involved may be unaware of their situation, not recognizing the source of absolute truth and its associated joy, which is only achievable through the grace of God. Latter day scripture defines the necessary truth leading to it as follows. *"And truth is the knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come"* (Doctrine & Covenants 93:24). Webster tells us that one definition of thing is "fact". I believe that word speaks to the reality of a situation, word or principle. It reminds me of a phrase often used to describe a person whose mind is apparently made up wherein he says; "don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up". If we substitute facts for things the aforementioned scripture reads; "and truth is the knowledge of facts as they are, and as they were, and as they are to become". An opinion of a given situation, principle, etc. may not be factual or truthful; being limited by one's understanding, analytical ability, etc. It may also be distorted for devious reasons; an activity common in political discussions. Only honest analysis by one possessing the ability and facts or reality of a given situation, principle, etc. can arrive at the truth. Such truth and thus joy is absolute and constitutes the ultimate success available to mankind because, *"... men are that they might have joy"* (2 Nephi 2:25). This success necessarily includes recognition of the reality of God and requires faith in his purposes, his love of mankind and a sincere effort to learn of him. Such faith and effort by the sincere seeker of truth is rewarded through divine grace and will ultimately lead him to Jesus Christ, our Advocate with the Father.

Acceptance of him as our Lord and Savior, learning of his covenants, ordinances and commandments with obedience to the same,

leads the sincere seeker along a path to perfection in Christ, as expressed by Paul once again, in his letter to the Ephesians, which I quote here for convenience. *"Till we all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:13). Though this perfection may have to wait until after the resurrection, the journey towards that destination provides peace and happiness, which grows brighter and brighter with each step of added truth available to the obedient. Of this I have no doubt, being now engaged in that trek, along with many others, with its challenges and attendant joy. It provides hope for the weary individual as they approach the inevitable end.

### PONDERING

According to Webster, pondering means *"to consider or examine attentively or deliberately. It implies a careful weighing of a problem."* The act of pondering life or quietly thinking about it and its purpose or any other serious problem is almost a lost art in today's high energy society. People seem caught up by their secular cares that demand and consume all the time one is willing to give them. I know that was true for me during my years of employment, though I did think rather deeply about religion before seeking membership in the Church, as previously mentioned. Granted, we have limited personal time in life while raising and caring for a family but our assessment of priorities determines how we spend the little extra time we might have. Though such time is more available to the retiree, I believe pondering is a valuable practice for all mankind. Without it, the current of life pushes us along with little heed for the rocks and rapids contained therein. With it (pondering, that is) we can dictate our own path through life more effectively; avoiding rocks and selecting the quieter reaches of the stream. It provides foresight and acts a set of oars or a helm to help us choose the better path and avoid the more treacherous parts of life's current. It can, in my opinion, also help one face daily rigors with more confidence, as well as establish purpose and better priorities for the little available time one finds. Improved priorities will lead to greater knowledge, further clarifying one's purpose. The combination will then bring a greater degree of understanding in pursuing the rigors encountered in life and doing so with greater confidence born of past success. This culminates in greater meaning and joy for life.

## SPENDING OUR TIME

As a subset of pondering, I want to make a few comments on the way we spend our time. Our life spans give to all a specific amount of time, unknown to us at birth and not made fully evident to the recipient until they approach death's door. It makes little difference, it would seem, whether we are rich or poor, intelligent or slow of mind, persons of power and authority or average citizens, the time we have in mortality is governed more by our choices and genes than by our mortal status. It is true that differing societies, oft times, provide differing health issues, levels of violence, etc. and thus longevities beyond the individual's control. Even so, in ours and similar societies, personal choices become paramount to not just longevity but also happiness and satisfaction. They weigh heavily in establishing the degree to which we realize life's real purpose in the eternal scheme of things that the Lord has ordained.

President Thomas S. Monson of the First Presidency of the Church made this comment in the October 2000 general conference and as given in a recent Church News article. *"We cannot call back time that is past, we cannot stop time that now is, and we cannot experience the future in our present state. Time is a gift, a treasure not to be set aside for the future but to be used wisely in the present"* (The December 16, 2006 Church News).

The editor of this article of the news then added this comment to that of President Monson, which will expand our understanding a little. *"The ringing telephone, the list of commercial e-mails and pile of DVDs are, in truth, often just more impediments between us and the more weighty duties. Yet, who among us can say he has not had 24 hours in each day?"*

*If there is one lesson to be taught by a clock or calendar, it is that time, not money, is the true currency of life. Mortality is finite and all its experiences are held tightly in temporal traces – as with life itself, every life experience has a starting time and an ending time. The experiences we choose will be the occupants of this most precious, non-renewable resource."*

As one ponders those statements, I believe few would disagree that the time we have been given in life should be used wisely. The earlier we come to understand our individual purpose and direct our course towards it, the surer will be our arrival there at some later time. Such

pondering can and should then be taken, while yet young, as a guide or compass directing our future activities. Then, when we arrive at the age of reflection, our memories and sense of accomplishment will seem more fulfilled, pleasant and meaningful to each of us.

## VIEWING MY LIFE'S MORAL STANCE

Webster tells us that to reflect on a subject is to *"ponder or meditate"* regarding it. I have, indeed, done that, a fact you are now aware of. With that subject being life, itself, I believe such pondering should eventually include virtually everything we have experienced in the past from secular life with its education and rewards through family life and one's religious leanings, yearnings and even philosophical understanding and commitments. Let me kind of give you an overview of what I see, morally speaking, as I look back and ponder my life's activities.

I don't intend to dwell on my religious views, per se, at this point in time, except where they clarify my position regarding life. Obviously, my joining the LDS Church just before I turned 34, along with my commitment to the principles embodied therein, has had a great influence on my views. Though the influence came gradually through study and application of principles, the total change has been significant. Things I now hold to be of value and even of extreme importance didn't even register in my mind as a young adult. Many values and hence concepts or maybe attitudes and beliefs, I now hold regarding the secular side of life, had yet to materialize and consequently didn't really impact my decisions and actions early in life. My acquisition of religious values came gradually, as I accepted them as practical guides to reality, sincerely applied them to life and then observed the benefits I felt I had received.

From my present vantage point, I now realize that my religious understanding was minimal, at best, early in life and there was little effort on my part to increase it. I simply wasn't that interested in religious concepts. I had accepted the existence of God because of my parents' teachings and I had established certain values as a result. I remember, however, asking myself, *"Is there really a God? If so, is there any tangible evidence for me to consider?"* Well, I don't remember exactly what I thought was evidence at the time but I concluded that there must be a God because of the complexity of our very existence. In spite of my engineering and scientific background, the idea of the universe

with all of its life forms, etc. just accidentally happening seemed highly improbable. Likewise, the good things in life, i.e. moral values, seemed tied to religious belief and not to the secular aspects one experiences. Thus, I decided God was a reality and I would try to live in accordance with religious teachings in so far as I understood them. I felt they helped a person lead an honorable life but I never really acquired a deep commitment to them. I had essentially been following the example of my father and was, in my mind, a good husband and father. I had a family to raise and a need to achieve engineering success or so I reasoned.

Even so, many accepted practices of society, such as a little cussing, smoking, occasional drinking, etc, became part of my life style. Though I tried to impersonate my distorted concept of manhood during my college years or prior to my first marriage, I soon gave up on smoking and drinking. Smoking brought little satisfaction and fell completely from my life style after graduation from college. The "Joe College" image, that once seemed important, lost its appeal. Though I tried "hard liquor" during my college years, I never learned to like the stuff and any further drinking simply consisted of an occasional beer. How someone could learn to like the taste of scotch or bourbon, regardless of its age, seemed beyond my comprehension. In my view, however, cussing seemed to have its place especially in expressing distain for a thing or an act I felt abominable. I seldom cussed around the house because of family but during my forest service and early oil field years, I could hold my own when on the job.

As I look back on those years, I now realize such acts were part of an effort to be accepted by the society I was in and didn't spring from any innate desire of my own. They were meant to impress while they really defined a weakness in character on my part. It wasn't until I joined the LDS Church and began to take religion seriously, that I gave up beer completely and struggled for some time with the elimination of cussing from my vocabulary. Even to this day, I have to bite my tongue occasionally in an effort to exercise control. If I slip, such an event usually comes from some stupid act on my part, like banging my head or mashing a finger, and is spontaneous rather than calculated. I then have

to humble myself through the realization that I still have plenty of room for character improvement and am in little danger of a transfiguration that the scriptures speak of.

Why am I telling you all this? Because it seems to provide a starting point from which I intend to verbally assemble my present philosophy of the spiritual side of life. The individual elements of that philosophy stem from life's experiences on the job, in the family and in the church, as well as observation of the societal activities we all experience on a daily basis. Not that living or observing such elements qualify me as any sort of authority but they do provide a synopsis of that aspect of our dual being as taken from my viewpoint these past 80 plus years of negotiating mortality. Given the same or similar experiences, another well-meaning individual may reach quite different conclusions. Be that as it may, I offer these reflections to the reader for their consideration. In so doing, I emphasize that they may be incomplete in both number and definition. I also should add the changing nature of my own values and understanding during the

process. I haven't always understood things around me in the same way nor have I held the same values all my life. Likewise, the values I now hold are standards I try to live up to,

not always successfully but ever reaching out to attain a greater measure of the same. This effort, if nothing else has been a catalyst for my own spiritual growth and it has added significantly to my appreciation for life.

I realize one's opinions may or may not be true and the validity of the same depends in large measure upon the effort made to arrive at truth and its associated success. The success realized is contingent upon one's ability to analyze life's experiences accurately and objectively. That is to say, a given experience may contribute little to one's understanding if it is simply adsorbed rather than reviewed and analyzed to determine its whys and wherefores. Likewise, that same experience may contribute little to ones understanding if it is analyzed in a biased manner without a real desire for truth, seeking a predetermined conclusion rather than letting the chips fall where they may.

In my humble opinion, to progress we have to be willing to accept reality and try to perceive the truth whether it is in our apparent favor or not.

***"The total quality of a person's behavior, as revealed in his habits of thought and expression, his attitudes and interests, his actions and his personal philosophy of life."***

Where truth is found and necessary corrections made, the resulting course will point one's future more accurately towards realization of life's purpose. Similarly then, consciously seeking truth by building on apparent successes and avoiding repetition of recognized mistakes, results in a more successful and satisfying life in both temporal and spiritual senses. Equating this thought to the concept of a school, I believe one can say such a person sought the truth about life to the best of his or her ability. They paid attention to the lecture life provides and applied the principles therein to the various decisions they made. In so doing, the school of life brings more pleasure and success to the individual than to the unobservant or those that ignore truth in its many manifestations.

I firmly believe that our Father in heaven and his son Jesus Christ will take such an individual by the hand and help them over those obstacles of life that seem insurmountable when left on his or her own. We can't return to God's presence by virtue of our own intelligence or effort. We must accept Christ as our Lord and Savior and strive to obtain perfection in him through obedience, so we may one day be found acceptable to return to our Father's presence. Our effort cannot bring us to perfection in and of itself but it is positive evidence of the sincerity of our desire and faith to become as he is. He then, through divine grace, will make up the difference, no matter how weak and insignificant we are. Even the most intelligent of mankind has but a modicum of that fullness Christ received from the Father. Thus, the difference in assistance needed by them in comparison to the least of humanity is insignificant in the eyes of our Savior. Humility is essential for both or they won't be able to obey his commandments. In fact, the more intelligent and more educated often have more difficulty acquiring that characteristic (humility) because of pride in their own secular accomplishments. Even though attaining such accomplishments may be admirable, they are not essential to salvation. If used righteously, they benefit mankind and those, so endowed with such accomplishment, likewise progress in developing further knowledge and ability.

#### CHARACTER AND ITS VIRTUES

Since I have emphasized the need for developing the spiritual side of life, I want to describe some facets of the character, which I take as partially defining one's spirit. The

following attributes, then, as I describe them, constitute my understanding of them, which is not only imperfect but also marginally described. Though I will refer to Webster and try to follow his descriptions, I will add my own comments, which you can evaluate. Many, if not all, of these attributes affect our physical or secular activity and may be thought of as physical characteristics as well as spiritual. Even so, I take them to be traits of the spirit in addition to the physical being and thus, the means by which the spirit motivates and guides us secularly in mortality and eternally in our eternal quest.

***“The total quality of a person's behavior, as revealed in his habits of thought and expression, his attitudes and interests, his actions and his personal philosophy of life.”***

The term character is given several different definitions by Webster. To clarify the following, I will list the one those comments pertain to, as follows; *“The total quality of a person's behavior, as revealed in his habits of thought and expression, his attitudes and interests, his actions and his personal philosophy of life.”* In that sense, I believe a person's character resides in his or her spirit, though admittedly, some people may disagree. I also submit that the virtues of life, those pertaining to morality (termed moral excellence and goodness by Webster), define one's character and thus his spirit, at least to a degree. I suspect I have missed some traits others would include in the following. One can probably separate virtue into two parts namely secular virtue and spiritual virtue but I believe both apply to one's spiritual condition and thus define his character.

Because I hold that the purpose of life is to become more Christ like, by perfecting one's spirit or at least coming as close as mortality allows, I want to speak of elements that help us build the bridge that spans the torrents of life, which threaten to drown us in secularism. I will equate the virtues and other character traits that follow with elements of that bridge, which are essential to its soundness and thus our safe arrival on the other side. This thought process stems from a recent article in the “Ensign”, a monthly magazine of our church. It was written by Thomas Monson, a member of the First Presidency and now the prophet. It seems to apply to what I am trying to convey. The only quote I will use from it is a poem written by Will Allen Drumgoole, titled ***“The Bridge Builder”***.

It aptly introduces a desire most of us as grandparents have and would like to leave for our posterity. It is born of our life's experiences and our love for them. It follows.

*"An old man, going a lone highway,  
Came at the evening, cold and gray,  
To a chasm, vast and deep and wide,  
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.  
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;  
The sullen stream had no fears for him;  
But he turned when safe on the other side  
And built a bridge to span the tide.*

*'Old man', said a fellow pilgrim near;  
'You are wasting strength with building here;  
Your journey will end with the ending day;  
You never again must pass this way;  
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide –  
Why build you the bridge at the eventide?'*

*The builder lifted his old gray head:  
'Good friend, in the path I have come,' he said,  
'There followeth after me today  
A youth whose feet must pass this way.  
This chasm that has been naught to me  
To that fair haired youth may a pitfall be.  
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;  
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him.'"*

My father and mother built their own bridge for my siblings and me with the elements of truth they had and understood. I will be forever grateful for their fine examples, which I believe have given me the desire to develop a better understanding of life and thus build a more secure and beautiful bridge of my own. We build our bridge with the materials we find available as we search the resources of life. That further emphasizes the need to search diligently the world around us for real truth and utilize the same in the bridge we build for our posterity. We are besieged with many principles in life that are posed as truth but when seriously investigated, they prove somewhat less than real. This I have done, though in an imperfect way. I might add that these last four chapters of my autobiography constitute a summary of what I have learned. I leave it primarily for the many beautiful progeny the good Lord has seen fit to send me via my children. As most grandparents, I love them dearly and it is with sincerity that I leave my reflections with a prayer, hope and faith that they will successfully negotiate life's sullen tide. To do so, they must reflect on life themselves and strive to find truth with its purpose contained therein as they expand and improve on what I have left them.

Now, I'll move on to the various elements of that bridge of life, which I am using as an analogy for building our spiritual self or character. For simplification, you might think of the elements involved as pieces from a set of Tinker Toys.

#### THE ELEMENT OF FAITH

Believing in God and accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior provides the foundation for ultimate faith. As we gain understanding through that faith, we gain a witness of the truth, which further bolsters it. It is interesting to me, however, that the secular world tends to discount faith in God even though they seem to display a great deal of faith in themselves. Everything that is true and can be accomplished without a full knowledge of the process is, in fact, accomplished by the principle of faith. Just

**As we begin to follow the directions in the scriptures or of those individuals who have already done so, we begin to see the reality of his existence.**

as the farmer plants with faith the seeds that will germinate and produce a crop, so does the scientist approach and investigation with faith that he can succeed. Neither is guaranteed success but the farmer has faith in the germination process he has seen before and the scientist believes that he can devise an appropriate experiment to validate a theory. They only succeed if their plans and efforts are true. If partially true, they achieve less than expected. If totally false, they end up with dismal failure. It is through faith that an individual launches him or herself on a given quest, whether it is secular in nature or spiritual. In each case true principles must be followed whose ultimate source is God. Without faith human kind would be without accomplishment. We would all wait around for something to be proven and/or the instructions given to us so we will have the necessary knowledge to proceed.

So it is with faith directly in God. The means of developing faith in God is given in the scriptures but if we refuse to read the same and act on it, then we continue without it. The mere fact we can't see God doesn't mean he doesn't exist. It simply means we must follow the principles that lead us to knowledge of him. As previously stated, our forefathers probably didn't know there were such things as gamma rays, protons or neutrons, let alone the many other sub-atomic particles we have been told of but can't see. We

can accept the concept of electrons, conductors and insulation because they are manifested in our everyday lives. Likewise, I can accept the concepts of gamma rays and neutrons because I utilized them in my engineering work as a geophysicist. However, I have never seen one of the critters nor have you seen an electron but we accept their reality because of the things they manifest. As our electronic world around us continues to expand with increasing complexity, we learn to accept the many theories voiced by those who are expert in the fields involved. We do so by virtue of the many wonders they perform, as evidence of their validity and not because we have a sure knowledge of them.

Once again, so it is with faith in God. As we begin to follow the directions in the scriptures or of those individuals who have already done so, we begin to see the reality of his existence. That bolsters our faith and causes us to be more confident and hopeful in the rewards he promises. We then follow other directions regarding faith, which may be more difficult but if we do so in truth, we are rewarded. If we fail to follow the scriptures or only comply with parts of them, then our rewards are something less than they might have been. The dispenser of spiritual benefits as well as many physical benefits is God who has set certain requirements for their receipt. It is not unlike the requirements to be an astronaut or to have access to the telescope of an observatory. The requirements set by those in charge must be met for one to participate and reap the benefits.

What happens when we express faith in God but only follow those requirements we want to? Well, we are rewarded according to God's divine wisdom. If it appears we are learning and are sincerely interested in following his commandments, we will be rewarded to some degree. Similarly, if we are contributing to his purposes, regardless of our faith, he may well bless us with success in that endeavor. Consider Nebuchadnezzar and his use in chastising Israel. If we flagrantly disregard important commandments while obeying ones that, in our opinion, seem to add to life's satisfaction, we may end up having a serious or even deadly experience with little or no genuine benefit.

**I well remember a common saying voiced by many adults when I was growing up that went something like this. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." There is a message therein, which applies to secular activities as well as religious activities.**

Consider one who experiments with drugs or maybe the inexperienced driver such as a 16 year old that has too much confidence (faith) in his or her own driving ability. If road conditions require a speed under say 45, and the youth confidently revs his car up to 70 or so, the odds are he or she will kill themselves and anyone with them. Such is the case several times a year in the state of Georgia. Thus, serious infractions through poor judgment frequently bring about serious consequences regardless of what the youth may believe or how much faith he has in his ability. This extends to moral infractions as well when people fail to follow a proper code. Faith in man's safety devices is often insufficient whereas obedience to a true moral code will always result in safety. That safety or any spiritual/physical gain also increases or nurtures our faith. Though faith protects in many instances, it doesn't in all, for reasons beyond our understanding, depending upon God's ultimate purposes. He may test our faith with various setbacks or trials to see our reaction and our effort to learn from them.

As mentioned earlier, faith must be founded in truth. Expecting something to happen because

it would be nice or kind or even for some other worthy reason won't result in success unless the principle upon which it is founded is true. When we first venture out in sincere prayer, we can be

expected to be rewarded according to God's wisdom. Our Father loves all of his children and will reward even our weakest efforts if done so in sincerity and humility. If we recognize such rewards and express our gratitude in prayer, our faith will continue to grow with greater rewards even as Isaiah described, i.e. "line upon line, here a little there a little, precept upon precept".

Now, paraphrasing one of our apostles, we might compare faith and its rewards to an individual standing in a circle of light, representing the knowledge he or she has accumulated. They have no problem negotiating obstacles nor do they especially fear experiences in the light or within their knowledge. However, it takes faith and courage to venture out into the darkness beyond, where the unknown lies. There, one might find rewards or danger beyond his present understanding. However, having faith in God as the source of truth, he ventures slowly forward and much to

his surprise, with each step, the light seems to precede him sufficiently to allow him to see his way. So it is with faith in God. As we express our faith by learning and following his commandments, our understanding increases, allowing us to avoid dangers and reap the rewards we find ahead. Patterning our lives after gospel principles improves our success and thus our lives because they guide us to the source of all truth. By following these true principles, our success validates their truth, giving rise to increased hope and faith.

I believe I have beaten this particular concept to death. We could go on ad infinitum with similar examples and concepts, which, I dare say, would soon become boring if it hasn't already.

#### THE ELEMENT OF PERSEVERANCE

Tenacity of purpose or will power also describes this characteristic appropriately. One might wonder how this particular facet of one's character pertains to religious reflections. It is, of course, an essential element of obedience, the first law of the gospel, a soon to be facet of character discussion. Without will power, one can have the best of intentions and fail miserably. I well remember a common saying voiced by many adults when I was growing up that went something like this. "*The road to hell is paved with good intentions.*" There is a message therein, which applies to secular activities as well as religious activities. When one considers real accomplishments in life, all must admit that perseverance, will power, tenacity of purpose or whatever name one gives it, plays a big part in their success. So it is with religious progress. We are faced on every side with various choices, some bad, some good and some better and even best. We face temptations in various degrees and in various forms. They require us to make a choice. If we have a purpose and a plan, logic tells us we should make the best choice even though it may involve problems, heartache and pain. People who are successful in any effort of importance expect such rigors in achieving that which is desirable.

All facets of life involve perseverance for success, some more than others. I believe such experiences were given to man by God to help us develop that all important quality contained in its fullness in our Father in heaven, as well as the obedience he requires of us. Different people face different challenges but all require tenacity of purpose for success. Let's take

something as simple as obtaining an education. To truly be successful in that endeavor, one must be willing to sacrifice considerable fun and good times. Oh, some people seem to coast through school with little or no effort but that only means they were not as successful as they might have been, not gaining what they should or could have. It takes a degree of maturity to understand the need for education, which many young people don't seem to have until they are ready to enter the work place. Even then, some may coast by or try to, at least but they are only cheating themselves. In due time, we accomplish that which we have adequately prepared for. Education is a life-long activity participated in voluntarily or by force. When forced upon an individual, he or she gains the minimum required to satisfy the situation. When gained voluntarily, it becomes more satisfying and is sought after.

Many adults stagnate after accomplishing the minimum required by life, including their workplace. They then plateau, wasting too

**Thus, many people take it to indicate less than average ability, dedication or even mentality. Yet, humility is really the beginning point of knowledge and learning.**

much time on entertainment and other pleasantries, which, too often, becomes their purpose for life. As they approach life's end, as we all must, they have no faith and no understanding of life, which then develops into a bitter and purposeless closure to an apparent meaningless existence. Meaningless because they never bothered to define its purpose and live in harmony with the same.

One has to make up his or her mind and utilize will power to achieve that which they deem of value. Let's consider health and fitness next. Admittedly, some of that seems to lie in the genes but such things as maintaining a proper weight, eating a healthy diet or obtaining exercise to a sufficient degree all require one to exert will power. So it is with morality in life as well. There are many things out there in the secular world, which tempt the normal human being in moral soundness just as there is for our physical well being. The two are inter-related. We can either submit to such things or exert our will power and refuse to engage in things detrimental to our well being. The choice is ours and it is part of the test of life. All of these things, in my opinion, were given to us to help us

develop tenacity of purpose. Such purpose is required to follow a moral pathway amid a beckoning secular world with temptations at every turn. Without it one can hardly progress towards that fullness, which Christ has.

#### THE ELEMENT OF HUMILITY

Humility is a much maligned element of virtue, being abandoned by society in general it seems, because of a connotation of weakness often derived from a lack of success in worldly pursuits. Thus, many people take it to indicate less than average ability, dedication or even mentality. Yet, humility is really the beginning point of knowledge and learning. Without it, we tend to look with disdain on the instructor or source material and consequently underestimate the value of the subject. The scriptures frequently speak of people being stiff necked or hard hearted. Such comments point out the lack of humility so common among mankind in general, today as in times past. They won't change because that would admit some error in their lives and sting the pride by which they judge themselves.

We tend to measure our success in life by our social status or our secular achievement. When we do well, we tend to swell up in pride, taking all credit for ourselves without recognizing those who might have taught us or assisted in our education. We even speak of pride in our accomplishments or those of a loved one. Even though worthy accomplishments are admirable, a better term for such an attitude would be gratitude. That is gratitude for those who assisted as well as for God who gives us life, intellect, inspiration, etc. while we simply apply the same. Not that the effort needed to apply shouldn't be recognized but such an approach recognizes the assistance one received. We, as human beings, can really only claim credit for the mental and physical effort we make and not for the health, intellect and inspiration that comes from above.

Even the most intelligent of mankind have but a limited amount of truth or knowledge when compared to Jesus Christ or God the Father who are omniscient. We only gain truth by exposing ourselves to the source of the same, which the gospel tells us is God. We may be exposed to that source by inspiration in mortality or by instruction from a real authority. Even so, such truth originated with God. Innate talents came with us at birth. We may expand and improve them, having that responsibility through

the gift of life but we are not responsible for their origin nor should we receive credit for them.

We listen humbly to a recognized authority, whose field interests us, through respect and a desire to learn. Likewise, we have every reason to listen humbly when something unusual and of primary importance to man, occurs such as the first vision. Of course, the majority of mankind doesn't believe in revelation from God, let alone a heavenly theophany. However, if one believes in God, the mere fact that such a claim is made, makes it worthy of our audience. We know God has spoken to prophets in the past, so why wouldn't he speak to mankind through a prophet in our day? The only reasonable answer is that he will, according to his divine purpose. Because it is a reasonable question, the real test

**Acceptance must be voluntary to allow an individual to exercise his or her agency, which is the means by which we grow as well as a means by which we will be ultimately judged.**

for mankind is to evaluate such a claim in all sincerity and make an informed decision. Humility on one hand or pride on the other will determine how we look at such an event. Our ultimate success in learning the real purpose of life hinges on our humility or lack thereof.

#### THE ELEMENT OF OBEDIENCE

Why is obedience important? Some feel it is an unfair imposition required by whoever may be in charge. Others pride themselves in being rebels and ignoring authority of every kind. They are proud of their abilities, given by God and not really obtained from their own efforts. Usually such rebelliousness is founded in ignorance, the individual being too close minded to gain a complete understanding of the purpose of such an authority. That isn't to say confidence in one's God given abilities isn't admirable but they should be used within the framework of legitimate authority. Thus, all are expected to obey the laws of the society they live in. If not, they are punished, sometimes unjustly, by the authority in charge. There is a purpose for such an authority. It stabilizes society giving equal opportunity to all within; that is, in a free society such as ours. Without it and its accompanying laws, self interest would reign giving dominance to the strong and unscrupulous. Thus, it is essential to a free and thriving society as well as in other types. People often flaunt the lesser

laws such as a speed limit because of their confidence in themselves, belief in lax control (enforcement and fines) and their own self interest. Few there are that haven't been guilty of this type of infraction including yours truly. Even so, people often times suffer unexpected consequences such as an accident or at least a fine, through their disobedience. In either case, they were acting unwisely.

Just as obedience to civil law is essential to a well functioning free society, obedience to authority within a family promotes a more peaceful atmosphere in the home. Similarly workplaces have their rules. Obviously, reasonable laws or rules fairly administered promote obedience by appealing to the conscience of the individuals involved. Those who choose to break the laws or rules involved usually suffer some sort of punishment by the authority in place, which may only have a limited impact on the law-breaker. He or she may mend their ways or they may continue their wayward actions bringing more severe forms of punishment upon themselves as well as further distress to their society, workplace or family. The cost of maintaining a degree of civil obedience is now a large financial burden for society but one, which is essential to safety, peace and prosperity therein.

Obedience in a gospel sense is voluntary acceptance of moral laws instituted by God through his prophets, as well as covenants, ordinances, commandments and the natural laws that govern his creations. Acceptance must be voluntary to allow an individual to exercise his or her agency, which is a means by which we grow as well as a means by which we will be ultimately judged. Such compliance promotes gospel growth towards realization of eternal life because it is in compliance with truth. Truth is a beacon, lighting the way to real knowledge and progress. To the extent that we choose not to be obedient to gospel truths, we impede our own progress towards perfection and eternal life. Obviously, we must know the law to comply with it, which points out the need to find that Church that has all of the laws, etc. given by the Savior. Though serious moral infractions can lead to excommunication from the Church but most frequently, the punishment is something less, such as revoking fellowship, with its associated

**Love of a child is better expressed through the gift of personal responsibility than through the largess of granting their every want.**

lack of progress in development of Christian virtues.

Obviously, those not associated with a Church can receive no disciplinary action of any kind from that institution. Thus, it may appear there is no punishment for them because life seems to go on in the same way day after day. Views of that nature often lead to agnosticism or even atheism with their indifference to God's existence. However, the punishment inflicted by one's self upon one's self is very real in that it is a refusal to embrace the values, which lead a person to knowledge of God with its associated truth and virtue. The path they walk is devoid of the blessings available to the obedient, which they may or may not recognize as having value. It is akin to one's refusal to get a secular education, wherein they suffer the inability to compete in the temporal world. In a similar way, failure to develop in a spiritual way through disobedience will deprive one of various spiritual rewards made available to the faithful.

In exceptional circumstances, history recounts the temporal punishment of several wicked societies through disasters of various kinds, including war, famine, floods, disease, earthquakes, etc. Examples include the flood of Noah's time and the exile of the ten tribes of Israel as well as the later destruction of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar's legions and even later by the Romans. There are many other examples in the scriptures, as well. Some scriptures speak of the voices of various elements warning mankind to mend their ways or face punishment, in various dramatic ways. Mankind tends to look upon such events as naturally occurring disasters and so they are in many cases, I suppose but God is the God of nature, controlling the elements as he chooses. Refusal

to recognize them as God given punishment doesn't change their reality but only our perception of why they occurred. Some of the righteous may suffer along with the wicked but they are secure in their faith, having passed the test of life through obedience. They can meet their God with confidence.

Unbelievers may question the authenticity of such historical narratives and their occurrence as well due to sin, but that doesn't make them any less real. Only time will convince such individuals through the return of Jesus Christ,

our Lord and Savior. Of course, today's society is rampant with examples of disease occurring through immorality. Society may explain their existence in various ways but irrefutable evidence points to their eruption through disobedience to moral law or immoral conduct. Obedience then, in its fullest sense, is simply complying with the laws God has instituted as well as those decreed by the governing of men. Those of the latter may well be unjust but change is best sought through law-abiding effort to make the change and, of course, by appropriate example. Here, like so many other facets of life, example teaches best.

#### THE ELEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY

True self-esteem is established through personal accomplishment, which demands responsibility. Love of a child is better expressed through the gift of personal responsibility than through the largess of granting their every want. In fact, the latter expression of love actually detracts from real self-esteem because all individuals are aware of real accomplishment as opposed to that which is feigned. Such a virtue comes in small steps over a long period of time, not by an instantaneous demand or act. Isaiah's counsel, referred to earlier from chapter 28 of that book, verses nine and ten seems to apply here, wherein he said, "*Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little*". That wise counsel may apply primarily to righteous living but who can say it doesn't apply in gaining many, if not all, of the virtues of life as well as in any challenging venture we choose to become involved in. It points out the need to begin teaching when a child is very young.

Few of the lessons that stick with a child are assimilated in one application and few are they that can be fully taught in the same way. They really become life-long pursuits before their beauty can be fully realized. If we don't demand the development of responsibility in our children, we impede their ability to gain a personal virtue essential to success in life, including the pursuit of religion. In secular things, they either settle later for a vocation demanding little responsibility and yielding little reward or they eventually learn responsibility through the painful experiences of

life imposed by reality of the world. Once free of their parents, the responsibility demanded by the world will set in. Thus, well-meaning parents may actually replace small doses of responsibility, an essential part of growing up, with the more painful reality imposed by the world in their adult lives. There is little question that responsibility will eventually appear at one time or another in their lives. Denying our children such experiences, though well intentioned, shields them from consequence and will eventually haunt the child more painfully. Likewise, failing to accept moral responsibility will also eventually be answered upon a person's head in the final judgment. Ignorance through dismissal of opportunity to comply will not prevent it being eventually invoked. How much better is being taught in the loving atmosphere of home than by the world.

#### THE ELEMENT OF A WORK ETHIC

The work ethic is really an offspring of accepting responsibility for one's life. Irresponsibility looks on work as a bore and seeks after temporal rewards by any other means from welfare to lotteries and gambling. On the other hand, responsibility finds purpose, satisfaction and even joy in work and particularly so when such

**Satisfaction through work lies in a sense of worthwhile accomplishment more so than the monetary rewards it may bring.**

opportunity for work was found through acts of personal responsibility. Satisfaction through work lies in a sense of worthwhile accomplishment more so than the monetary rewards it may bring. Though the latter is essential and may constitute the primary reason for work, satisfaction comes primarily through doing well and growth of the inner self or in the ability to compete in worthwhile disciplines and exercise other virtues of life. Acquiring knowledge and capability in any admirable or even acceptable pursuit contributes to such value, providing growth of the inner self.

That growth is taken with us beyond mortality for eternities to come as given to Joseph Smith by revelation in Doctrine and Covenants 130:18-19, restated here once again for convenience, wherein we are told, "*Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than*

another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come". I believe those accepting resurrection as a reality will also accept this statement as reasonable in spite of their opinion of Joseph. I believe, personally, that it is simply another manifestation of his being a prophet, called by the Lord. Those who don't accept him as such will have to find another reason for their satisfaction, I suppose.

Emphasis on developing a work ethic should begin early in life by helping children find joy and satisfaction in learning through accomplishment of small tasks. Recognizing these attributes as the primary reward with the material benefit being secondary, prepares the child for future effort in developing a meaningful life. Thus, rewarding him or her in a material sense for lack of effort or even for every effort will be counter-productive. If taught the principle properly, their primary interest and effort will point towards becoming a useful member of society rather than simply existing to find fleeting happiness in whatever temporal objects he is able to acquire. His mental attitude is now one of "becoming" rather than one of simply "consuming". Economic welfare dispersed by the state, through chance or any other means is not a motivating force because it deprives him or her of becoming the individual he or she is capable of. He or she will "become" because of the challenges imposed by society and a personal philosophy demanding it, rather than through the largess of a welfare society.

Some may think such an approach is idealistic or it is beyond our capability of parental teaching. Though children will accept it in varying degrees, like any other principle, all will profit from the effort. To say maybe admits probable defeat. To believe children can't absorb such a concept negates the possibility. They certainly won't if parents don't think they can, nor will they in one fell swoop. As mentioned earlier, learning such a concept comes in degrees, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little there a little. Whether children do accept and assimilate such a concept will depend in large measure on the example of parents and siblings. Example lends veracity to instruction. Successful and meaningful lives of parents and older siblings provide incentive to younger observers. To the child, loving help through communication,

instruction and guidance, becomes desirable rather than a means of control or intrusion. That doesn't mean, of course, that they will love everything a parent requires of them. Also, the realities of life, i.e. stress brought on by health, employment or the lack thereof, spousal relationships, differing personalities of children, parental limitations, etc. may make such an ideal impossible to realize in its fullness. However, the concept is valid and teaching work, as a means of developing the inner self rather than simply a means of acquiring temporal goods, portrays it as an activity to be sought after rather than one to be avoided or distained.

If one accepts the concept of the inner self and the reality that self image, including peace and joy is achieved therein, they will realize that development of that aspect of their lives necessarily becomes the prime challenge of life.

**Integrity is essential to well functioning societies. Lack thereof is at the root of many family problems including its disintegration and legacy of maladjusted children.**

The importance of material rewards and even the comforts of life begin to fade, as interest in acquiring mental and spiritual ability grows. Even so, such an understanding will motivate a person to do their best in a material sense and consequently, reap the associated benefits. Likewise, such an attitude helps one to appreciate the physical side of life more fully and encourages a healthy life style.

There are many things that contribute to developing the inner self including practical knowledge and skills, as well as an appreciation for the arts and religion. Each takes work of some sort whether physical, mental or spiritual. Just as one will never become a skilled mechanic or sportsman without the effort associated with so becoming, neither will he or she achieve a working knowledge of the arts or religion without the mental and spiritual effort required there from. I can attest to this by virtue of my own late interest. In my view, however, there is no doubt that interest can be stimulated by involvement and acquiring some degree of understanding of a designated field.

Obviously, time to become involved in multiple areas is limited by the responsibilities one faces in life and choices are governed largely by a given individual's interests. The point I am trying to make, however, is first; all worthwhile activities of life, whether mental, spiritual or physical, can contribute to one's satisfaction and aid in the growth of the inner self and second; a

reasonable balance or moderation in the pursuit of any one is desirable. Moderation allows the involvement in more worthwhile areas whereas extreme involvement in one or two limits the time available to experience others that might be of interest. A person may find an interest he or she wasn't aware of if they take time to explore. On a personal basis, I have found an interest in politics, various languages and religion, none of which attracted me as a young engineer. Now I find them not only interesting but also important to my sense of fulfillment and even fulfilling my sense of responsibility as a citizen. I believe this concept was discussed at length in chapter nineteen wherein I spent a good deal of time describing my political stance.

#### **THE ELEMENT OF INTEGRITY**

My dictionary defines integrity as moral soundness or probity (scrupulous honesty) whereas scrupulous is defined as strict honesty and adhering to moral principles. Though a white lie may be excused under this definition, most people have probably struggled to an extent with perfection in this virtue, including myself, as they went through life's experiences. Though many, if not most, people adhere to certain portions of perfect integrity, they may slip a little here and there as they face the rigors of life. That's part of becoming perfect. Others blatantly disregard integrity and pursue a course governed only by their temporal desires and what society will allow them to get away with. Society excuses many abuses of integrity because of the existence of several definitions of right and wrong. There is no doubt that the lack thereof is rampant in politics, business, spousal relations and a host of other areas in life. In most cases, we probably measure a man or woman by the degree of integrity visible to us when we do business with them, vote for them or support them in any way. Our own understanding of integrity, our level of integrity and how we view someone's activities in this area necessarily modifies our actions. Some are willing to excuse a private issue of integrity made public, even though it reflects on the character of the individual involved, such as the morality of our ex-president Clinton. However, such failure in one important issue of integrity is a flag indicating possible and even probable failure elsewhere.

Unwise legislation, including pork barrel additions and various types of special earmarks, indicate other probable failures. In many

cases and particularly in politics, we are faced with deciding between two rather imperfect human beings whose total integrity we must weigh in our minds to reach a decision. Then we must make our best choice for society's sake, which isn't necessarily gratifying to our immediate interests or gain. Even so, in the long term such choices will, indeed, be for our personal benefit as well as society's, while demonstrating an important principle to friends and associates.

Integrity is essential to well functioning societies. Lack thereof is at the root of many family problems including its disintegration and legacy of maladjusted children. Lack of integrity in business and greed for gain at all levels of society has spawned the almost unfathomable level of lawsuits that choke our courts. Self interest legislation results from lack of integrity in politics. In general, lack of integrity in our society pits one element against another, stirring up all types of hatred and social warfare. Though we can't control society, we can control ourselves and teach the value and necessity of this virtue to our children by example and discussion. Example is more important because its application provides the necessary credence in discussion. Integrity is essential to real happiness because it is a truth within which the key to that enjoyment is found. Also, it is required to a high degree for real success among the moral segment of society. Though the average citizen may have less than perfect integrity, recognition of its value starts him on the journey of its acquisition. Developing a desire for that virtue, with continuing effort to overcome exposed weaknesses, will one-day produce habits essential to a character with integrity. Likewise, such effort applies to all worthwhile acquisitions we make in life.

#### **THE ELEMENT OF COURAGE**

Webster tells us that courage is the capacity to meet danger without giving way to fear. Thus it is not the absence of fear nor is it necessarily a characteristic of the big and the strong but can be displayed by the small, the physically weak or even the feeble. It may well be a virtue born within us to a greater or lesser degree. However, I believe it can also be learned or acquired, to a degree, through experience and the acquisition of faith in God; one's self or even some cause. This requires both effort and perseverance or trying hard and continuously to overcome obstacles. History is full of examples

of people who have accomplished much through faith in themselves, as well as others who have suffered and died rather than deny their faith in their Creator. I believe those who act as human bombers for the terrorist's today display courage in their own peculiar way through blind faith or faith in a false and satanic cause. It would appear that courage is a spiritual attribute or one of the mind or inner-self, whether used for evil or good. This reality points out the fact that evil mental characteristics come by virtue of our association with and embracement of doctrines of the adversary. Our challenge as parents is to encourage the development of courage through true principles or proper moral values leading to faith in God and his purpose for mankind. Like all virtues, it is best taught through example because, once again, example provides the credibility necessary to bring about change. As parents display courage in meeting life's rigors, the child observes, even though quietly.

#### THE ELEMENT OF CHASTITY

I decided to take my remarks on this element of virtue from an article by Jill C. Manning, a licensed marriage and family therapist who testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee on the harms of pornography. She expresses what I know to be true much better than I can.

*"The gospel teaches that **'the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife'** [The Family: A Proclamation to the World]. The laws and commandments that guard the sanctity of this unique relationship are referred to as the law of chastity. The reason why sexual relationships are given distinct and specific safeguards is they play an integral role in the plan of salvation, eternal relationships and our happiness in this life.*

*The Apostle Paul taught that living the law of chastity is one of several ways we can be identified as a follower of Jesus Christ. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul states, **'Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou and example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.'***

*Learning to be steadfast when we are 'despised' for striving to be virtuous is part of maturing spiritually. Thankfully, we can find encouragement from scriptural examples of believe4rs who were tested for living the gospel, including the law of chastity. As President Thomas S. Monson taught, **'Some find it***

***difficult to withstand the mocking and unsavory remarks of foolish ones who ridicule chastity, honesty, and obedience to God's commands. But the world has ever belittled the adherence to principle. When Noah was instructed to build an ark, the foolish populace looked at the cloudless sky, then scoffed and jeered' — until the rain came** (Conference Report, April 1967, p. 5).*

*Although the world treats chastity as something unnatural, backward and even unhealthy, the blessings of chastity remain. Just as the Word of Wisdom has been affirmed through modern day science, research supports the importance of the law of chastity in our day. For example, we know that adolescents who abstain from sexual relations are less likely to be depressed, contract sexually transmitted diseases, have*

<p><b>This defines a truly righteous life and thus a life of joy resulting because one lives in harmony with the truth of their existence, even God's laws.</b></p>
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*children out of wedlock, live in poverty and drop out of high school. As well, teens who live virtuous lives are almost twice as likely to graduate from college; are more likely to have stable marriages as adults; and, on the average, have incomes that are 16% higher than sexually active teens from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. (Rector, R & Johnson, K. A., 2005. Teenage Sexual Abstinence and Academic Achievement. Retrieved December 9, 2008, from <http://www.heratige.org/research/abstinence/whitpaper10272005-1.cfm>)*

*While these blessings and benefits are compelling, the peace of mind that comes from obedience to God's commands is one of the choicest blessings of all. C. S. Lewis further put the blessings of living a virtuous life into perspective when he stated, **'For however important chastity ... may be, this process trains us in the habits of the soul which are more important still. It cures our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on God.'** (C. S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity", 1996). May we find the strength, with God's help, to exemplify this unpopular yet much needed virtue."*

#### THE ELEMENT OF CHARITY

Charity is more than just giving to the needy in life, as is often thought and described. In the

Book of Mormon, it is defined as “the pure love of Christ”. Paul defined it thusly in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*” As one can see, acquiring a fullness of charity, or that which Christ possesses, encompasses perfection in a host of virtues. It too might be thought of as a summation of many other virtues including those embodied in morality, though it encompasses much more than the latter. One can see patience, humility, purity of mind, the seeking of truth and unselfishness as well as lack of envy embedded in Paul’s description. Such an effort defines a truly righteous life and thus a life of hope and joy that results because one lives in harmony with the truth of their existence, even that of God’s laws.

Humans, by and large, possess only a portion, i.e. not a fullness of those attributes described by Paul. We give in too often to pride and personal interest, though people often say happiness is in getting outside one’s self. However, aspiring to obtaining a fullness of charity is certainly a worthy goal, which when striven for, moves the inner man towards perfection, bringing an additional measure of joy to life. I think it is true that when human beings get outside their selves, they invariably become happier people. In my opinion; such action negates that ridiculous saying mentioned earlier, i.e. “*He who dies with the most toys wins*” because when selfishness gives way to charity, the person so endowed finds that inner joy people talk about but few seem to find. Of course, charity is easy to talk about but difficult to acquire to a significant degree. Some seem to be born with a greater portion than others but it can be gained through righteous living. Developing it in a significant portion is a life-long pursuit for most individuals. Even so, I believe, one who sincerely seeks truth will necessarily strive for charity because he rejoices in truth, as mentioned by Paul and is drawn towards it in his search for truth. As mentioned earlier, Moroni describes charity as “*the pure love of Christ*”,

which in my opinion, makes it the ultimate virtue encompassing virtually all worth-while attributes. It seems to embody a good many if not all other virtues, ultimately leading the faithful soul to perfection in Christ.

#### THE ELEMENT OF PATIENCE

Patience is a virtue wherein my competence might be soundly criticized because of a life-long difficulty in exercising the same. Its lack is evident on the highway by those striving to meet the demands of their busy lives without considering others. Its ultimate expression thereon is road rage whereby others are abused through the actions of the impatient. Though I don’t believe I have ever been guilty of this latter manifestation, feelings of impatience on the road have often resulted in my mental comments of knucklehead or even idiot, sometimes bursting forth vocally to myself as well as others in the car. Whether age, lack of stress in retirement or success in patience management has minimized such outbursts today, I will probably never know. In conjunction with that statement, I have no difficulty admitting patience is a virtue in which there is little danger of my achieving perfection. I will probably always find room for improvement with my progress often in the plateau mode.

I still remember one step I took forward while living in Louisiana and commuting to and from the office in New Orleans. I arrived at my office one day a little late after experiencing a particularly exasperating day on the road. Being aware of my agitated mental state, I came to realize that those several persons who had upset me so, were probably sitting at their place of employment calmly drinking a cup of coffee with no

**I believe a person of mediocrity with a balanced life style leads not only a happier more fulfilling life than the talented and famous individual who doesn’t but he may also contribute more to a healthy, vibrant and stable society.**

knowledge or concern of my situation. I was my own worst enemy. That day I vowed to become more patient. Though progress has been slow in the intervening years, it has occurred but admittedly more work is needed. Patience is a virtue requiring self-discipline in its exercise. It helps one to think more of others while lessening selfishness. It promotes worthwhile interpersonal relations and attracts friends while eliminating those outbursts one regrets later. It relieves stress and helps calm one’s nerves resulting in a quiet, thoughtful and more effective mind. Patience promotes peace in one’s life, even love of one’s fellow man in the everyday

setting. In short, it is a virtue that polishes the human soul, making possible a more Christ like life.

#### THE ELEMENT OF MODERATION

As my life has progressed, I have become more and more aware of a principle in life called moderation. It is most often found in people who don't exhibit an outstanding expertise in any particular area, or so it seems to me. That is, they do many things in life reasonably well but nothing to bring them fame and fortune. I now look upon this principle as a virtue because it seems to be the mark of an individual with a healthy life style embracing family harmony with proper care and support, a work ethic, a degree of political savvy, a measure of charity as well as religion and even some appreciation for the various arts. Obviously, I haven't had such balance much of my life nor do I claim the proper ratio of such factors today, if there is one. However, I would say my appreciation for moderation has grown by acquiring it to a greater degree in these latter years. I have found that each area of effort seems to produce an appreciation for those individuals who seem to have mastered the same and even found some joy in each as well.

I am well aware that extreme personalities are often responsible for many of the blessings of life in which we all share such as art, music, scientific advancement and various other technical marvels of today. Others of the same ilk, however, spend countless hours involved in their favorite pastime, giving little thought to the desires of society or even other family members. Such examples often result in failure or at least dysfunction in marriage because of dedication to their one or two extreme talents or maybe just interests. It would seem that such a person's all-consuming desire for pleasure, success or maybe recognition subjugates any effort in other areas necessary for real interpersonal relationships. Their ability to be charitable is lost amidst their striving to find personal satiation or become the best in a particular field. Granted, such individuals have a right to conduct their lives as they see fit, being persons of agency.

I believe a person of mediocrity with a balanced life style leads not only a happier more fulfilling life than the talented and famous individual who doesn't but he may also contribute more to a healthy, vibrant and stable society. He or she values the marriage relationship and family stability more than individual recognition.

Through their example and teaching a covey of children are often raised who make meaningful contributions to society rather than adding to its woes. They emphasize the source of happiness as being the inner self with its virtues rather than material possessions obtained through fame and recognition. In short, they seek to find and live after true principles, which promote harmony with God rather than seeking after secular rewards. In so doing they help their children meet the frustrations of life as they begin to realize the real mark of a successful life is joy, coming from the inner being rather than the fame and material gain of the world.

This latter comment brings to mind the fact that there are many people of tremendous competence in the world who seem to be good in anything they touch, including family and children. Whatever weaknesses they have aren't readily apparent. Because of their talents and effort, we of society benefit immensely. Even so, for their own benefit, they need to achieve spiritual growth, as well. I suppose, such individuals are the chosen few, destined to lead society onward and upward if they and their offspring can stay focused on the real values and purpose of life. Unfortunately, there are many that claim such a gift and want to force their beliefs on mankind, especially in the political arena.

Contrast that with an average individual, such as myself, who has had to struggle for competence in any area I deemed of personal value. Maybe my attitude is one of sour grapes. I suppose many reading this section will so state and take issue with my thoughts contained herein. Be that as it may, I believe balance is preferable to extremism even among the gifted of humanity in achieving happiness. Those of us with lesser talents are not doomed to unhappiness. We may not find fame knocking on our door but we can and usually do find a sense of satisfaction by displaying a reasonable degree of competence in many areas of life including the spiritual side, or the real source of joy. Consequently, we see life as good, due to a good self-image. One, which in spite of less than sterling talents, brings a sense of purpose to life and its attendant joy.

#### THE ELEMENT OF TOLERANCE

Tolerance is kindred to patience. It is a quality that promotes forgiveness of another's apparent mistakes. It may cause one to re-evaluate his own actions and either promote change within or

strengthen his belief in his present stance. A level of tolerance is necessary within a free society to maintain a degree of reasonable functioning. Even so, in paraphrasing a wise man, we may say, *“A vice once distained but not avoided may soon be tolerated. Once tolerated it may later be accepted. Once accepted it will not be long until it is fully embraced by those who originally distained it”*, thus giving limit to the virtue of toleration. Where practices and actions of others are in serious conflict with one’s own beliefs, the limits of toleration are the laws governing society but toleration doesn’t necessarily require close association. One would then be wise to distance himself from such practices rather than risk contamination. Where such actions are less serious, tolerance can promote discussion, better interpersonal relations, friendship and possibly an eventual agreement on the higher standard. Thus, its acceptance within limits is indispensable in promoting harmony within a free society and its associated organizations. It allows everyone to exercise their agency within the limits of the law. Such agency is the epitome of our free society and should be embraced by all. Legitimate exercise of agency is the overriding reason for separating government and religion. Of course one can, and in my opinion should, seek to help establish civil laws, which limit the practice of things they find abhorrent, such as abortion.

#### THE ELEMENT OF OBJECTIVITY

In my earlier tirade on truth I made a comment about our need to be objective when examining our own lives. It’s probably more difficult to be objective about one’s self than it is in other beings or things because of our direct involvement with the results. We might not only find error in our ways but also recognize the need for change, which brings discomfort. While musing about objectivity, I ran across an article by one, David Brooks, a journalist who writes for the New York Times among his many other activities. He was discussing objectivity and described it as having 6 stages, which we might call elements. His message was about the need for objectivity in reporting and why journalists need to see reality wholly and truly. The first stage or element he called negative capacity or the ability to suspend judgment while looking for the facts. The second element he termed

***“I’m someone who fails every day at being objective. But I still think that’s the old fashioned virtue that has to be respected above the good of partisan opinion – the reason being again, that there is something that exists out there called truth”.***

modesty, a lack of pride or the need to stroke one’s ego. The third element is the ability to process data, the ability to take all data, not just the data you like, and form it into a generalized whole. The fourth he termed the ability to betray friends, which he really explains as an ability to be loyal to the truth in spite of friendships. The fifth element was the ability to ignore stereotypes, which he calls crucial to objectivity. The sixth and last stage or element is the willingness to be dull, i.e. don’t try to paint a picture, which really doesn’t portray the facts. We might describe it as a willingness to pursue and describe the facts even though they may be less interesting to society. It’s about truth as we best understand it and not about describing a picture that brings recognition. It takes integrity to be truly objective in preference to self-interest. Such a principle is important in all areas of life including that of the average individual.

He then concludes with this paragraph wherein he says, *“I’m someone who fails every day at being objective. But I still think that’s the old fashioned virtue that has to be respected above the good of partisan opinion – the reason being again, that there is something that exists out there called truth”*. In reviewing my own thoughts on truth and the need for objectivity in its search, I found the same six elements applied to a greater or lesser degree. Yes, objectivity is a virtue and our expertise in that area will help govern our success in finding truth. Thus it aids our quest for the purpose of life or that which we finally come to believe is the purpose by removing our blinders of pride. Pre-conceived ideas on a subject are often kept through pride and prevent a real search for truth.

#### THE ELEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge doesn’t meet the definition Webster gives to virtue but I include it here as a worthwhile acquisition, which can be used to make a virtuous person more effective. It constitutes gaining an understanding of laws, principles, processes, events, surroundings, etc., which appear to influence one’s life. It is gained through study, investigation, observation and experience. If rooted in error or the lies of the adversary, it leads to ultimate ruin. If rooted in truth or the inspiration of God, it leads one towards God, he being the source from which all

truth springs. Knowledge is frequently applied in greed and temporal lust, for the pursuit of power and dominance as well as other forms of evil. When sought after in one's quest for truth, it is uplifting and beneficial. When acquired to feed the lusts of the flesh, it places one on the path to destruction. The adversary has a purpose in his dissemination of knowledge, i.e. captivity and ultimate destruction of our God given potential.

Similarly, God has a purpose for his creations and accomplishes the same by various means including the dissemination of knowledge through faith, spiritual, intellectual and other means. He provides mankind with various talents and inspires them in their use, resulting in scientific discovery and more rudimentary forms of technical accomplishment, as well as various forms of art. All of these combine in synergistic fashion to achieve his purpose, which is largely accomplished through mankind. The latter statement is hardly surprising since we are told in Moses 1:39, the following: *"For behold, this is my work and my glory — to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."* That is, God's purpose in all his creations is to raise up celestial beings who are worthy of exaltation to glorify him through their righteous endeavors or the works they perform.

Man often loves to lay claim to such knowledge, thinking it is his own discovery but at best he identifies through inspiration certain laws and principles instituted by God and then applies them to satisfy his own wishes. However, our Father in Heaven often utilizes such wishes to aid in achieving his divine purposes. The scriptures are full of such examples. Conversely, the adversary makes use of God inspired knowledge to further his agenda. One has to look no further than the Internet to see such application. Not long ago, a study revealed that the number one subject sought thereon was pornography whereas the second most sought subject was family history or genealogy. The first is one of the greatest evils heaped on mankind whereas the second is essential to the work of the gospel. This life gives us opportunity to choose between them, that is, between its good and evil applications.

The concept of God being the revealer of all truth is scriptural in nature, being described by the prophet Daniel, as well as by others. I

include Daniel 2:19-23 as evidence of this important concept. *"19) Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of Heaven. 20) Daniel answered and said, blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his.: 21) And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and **knowledge to those that know understanding:** 22) he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. 23) I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast made known unto us the king's matter"* [bold added for emphasis]. For our edification I looked up the term blessed as used in verse 19 in the "New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance" for the King James Version of the Bible and found it came from the Hebrew 'barack', pronounced bawrack. As used it implies an act of adoration, as one expects. Where Obama picked that up as a first name, I'll never know, though his supporters appear to adore him.

Some apparent knowledge and theories of man are paraded as fact but prove to be something less than the truth as additional research and discovery expose their error and need for additional empirical evidence for validation. Beneficial knowledge or that springing from truth

**The Holy Spirit, when communicating with man, speaks directly to the spirit of man through the intellect resulting in pure knowledge or an impression of certainty.**

will not contradict valid gospel truths because all elements of truth are compatible by virtue of their source. Thus,

revealed truth, where available, becomes the standard to which we should compare other discoveries. Additional research or revelation will eventually resolve apparent contradictory conclusions. The acquisition of beneficial knowledge is laudable and is pursued by righteous individuals but with the intent of establishing compatibility with that which has been revealed by prophets.

There is a scripture in 2<sup>nd</sup> Nephi, which reads as follows, *"When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God."* The last sentence of the quotation provides the advice

sincere seekers of knowledge must follow if they are, in all reality, pursuing truth. Obviously, there are many in society; who don't accept God as a reality, much less hearken to his counsels, given by inspiration. In fact, it is said that scientific research can't include the reality of a Supreme Being because such a fact explains all laws and elements therein, making research of no use. I don't accept that but rather believe such research can bring us closer to God with a deeper understanding of his omniscience.

Joseph Smith taught that the intellect resides in the spirit. The Holy Spirit, when communicating with man, speaks directly to the spirit of man through the intellect resulting in pure knowledge or an impression of certainty. It acts to increase one's faith and confidence. Thus it is, in essence, a sixth sense, which can be honed to a high degree of sensitivity through righteous living or in harmony with God's laws. A true prophet has accomplished the development of this particular characteristic, thereby receiving Spiritual direction to guide his decisions, counsel and acts. We, as human beings, can elect to follow the prophet's example or we can move forward through life by virtue of man's intellect alone. In either case, we are the beneficiaries of the consequences they entail in our daily lives. It would seem that knowledge is a desirable ingredient, which appears to season or improve life. Knowledge seems to guide experience and certainly precedes the development of talents and skills. Incorrect knowledge is adjusted through experience or experience provides the empirical evidence necessary for a theory or assumption to become fact.

#### THE ELEMENT OF EXPERIENCE

In my view, experience appears to be the best teacher of mankind. Books and other forms of educational material are obviously helpful but we seem to pay more attention to and remember longer the lessons gained through experience. If one subscribes to the concept of a pre-existence, it would seem logical that we would gain both knowledge and experience in that particular realm, as well. However, it would also seem that the degree of opportunity to gain these attributes would be limited when living in the presence of God because, like a child in this life, we would constantly run to our Heavenly

Father or Mother to obtain answers. Children don't obtain true adulthood until they are on their own and have to develop their own answers to the problems of life. This might well explain the need for this estate, mortality, wherein a veil shields us from his presence and we can only communicate with him through his approved methods, which of course, requires faith as well as several other virtues.

It's not unlike a young adult going to his or her father or mother, even after marriage, to gain their opinion regarding a particular problem. They would do so because of the wisdom displayed by their parents over the years and the faith they have in their counsel. After gaining such opinion, they will make their own decision in the face of the

**If this is true, as I hold it to be, then mortality is a necessary condition given to us of God for the express purpose of gaining additional knowledge and experience whereby we can be properly judged.**

problems surrounding them, using or ignoring the advice given. As life goes on, they, as well as we, mature and find our parents can't always help with the wisdom they gained in life. Thus, we are now on our own, so to speak.

If we believe in God and have real faith, we can, of course, still go to God in prayer. Unlike our parents, he is the source of all truth and can still help, regardless of our maturity and wisdom in all aspects of life. If done in faith, we will eventually find the inspiration necessary to deal with even the most perplexing problems. The answer received won't necessarily be the one we want or expect but the counsel therein will guide us to a solution, which will help us grow and gain the experience he recognizes as necessary for us in this life. As we utilize the inspiration given, we realize its value and make our petitions on a more regular basis, even once or more daily. We now find inspiration guiding all our decisions and when followed, only those vicissitudes deemed necessary for us by the Father come into life. They constitute the experience God deems necessary for us during our mortal probation.

If this is true, as I hold it to be, then mortality is a necessary condition given to us of God for the express purpose of gaining additional knowledge and experience whereby we can be properly judged. Here, we are left with our own choices between right and wrong or truth and evil. When we refuse divine guidance through rebellion, pride, indifference or the many other avenues contrary to humility, we suffer the

consequences and learn through our error. Because none are infallible, repentance was granted to man and our mistakes atoned for by virtue of humility and faith in Jesus Christ. Those who refuse this blessed gift will one day meet him, as we all will and be judged in accordance with his divine standards.

#### THE ELEMENT OF THRIFT

The last element of character I intend to discuss is thrift. People seem to learn thrift in hard times because they have little choice and must provide the necessities of life. Luxuries or waste of any kind must often be done away with so as to provide the really important things in life. There was an old pioneer saying that I remember reading a while back, which went something like this. **“Use it up, wear it out. If that won’t work, do with out.”** I can remember these concepts embedded in thrift from my childhood days in the thirties. We learned to darn socks, patch jeans and other clothes and wear hand-me-downs. This wasn’t by choice but by necessity. My folks had their hands full just putting food on the table, a roof over our heads and a few clothes for the children in those days. My dad’s refusal of welfare and saying, “I can take care of my own family without the government’s help,” still burns in my memory. He valued freedom and accepted the associated responsibility. He never wanted, much less asked, for any kind of help from anyone, according to my memory. Those principles so aptly practiced by my parents, provided we children with that most valuable character trait, responsibility. It seems that affluence softens the apparent need for thrift by most, if not all of society and yet it should be an ongoing trait, which helps us to spend our assets wisely and do the most good with what the Lord has blessed us with.

I read an interesting article in the Weekly Standard recently entitled, “There Is No Paradox Of Thrift”, which was written by a David Blankenhorn. I want to include a few of his remarks.

It seems that many economists feel thrift is harmful to society as a whole but of value to the individual in difficult times such as the country now finds itself in. We are told today that our economy is powered by consumption and the government is using various ploys to get people to spend. However, the average individual has to watch out for him or her self in managing the few assets such an average family has. It is fool

hardy to run up debt in normal circumstances, let alone in today’s economy when the near future is so unsure. This gentleman, Mr. Blankenhorn, refutes the wisdom of spending what we don’t have just to drive the economy regardless of what economists may advocate. He points out that the government or society as a whole may be wise to accrue debt to some degree to stave off a serious recession but the individual must practice thrift within his or her area of responsibility. He then lists five benefits for the individual in practicing thrift. I include them for the benefit of my posterity and feel they are always of value in our individual lives. I list them in his ascending order of importance.

1. Saved money is likely to be productive money
2. For individuals and families, it’s always wise to live within your means.
3. Governments, not individuals or families, are responsible for any deficit spending needed to moderate economic downturns.
4. Assuming there is a paradox of thrift encourages waste.
5. Properly understood, “thrift” means the ethic and practice of wise use.

This particular secular virtue has spiritual implications that are obvious. First, it teaches one’s self restraint or the ability to put off rewards until they are both affordable and proper. Secondly, it can lead to greater charity and a desire to help others rather than to simply indulge oneself in some temporal pleasure that does little for the spirit. Thirdly, it can bring a sense of satisfaction for not only helping the less fortunate but also the realization that you are in control of your physical appetite and don’t really base a sense of personal importance on material possessions. In so doing, it helps one realize that the development of the inner being or spirit is more important than physical consumption and brings one closer to God. It can help one better understand the purpose of life is to become, not consume.

Though many factors may have been at work in precipitating the present financial crisis, I am convinced that the federal governments mandate to loosen credit restrictions for home buyers was among the more important ones. People simply bought beyond their means. Some bought bigger homes than they could afford on a continuing basis. Others bought homes through dishonest credit statements. Still

others bought homes that simply could not afford one and should have been renting. This occurred through unwise lending practices encouraged by the federal government as well as greed or the desire to have something beyond one's means on the part of the buyer.

Thus in my opinion, the importance of thrift for the individual is summed up in Mr. Blankenhorn's fifth principle and should be practiced on an ongoing basis throughout life.

#### **ASSEMBLING THE BRIDGE**

The bridge of life is assembled by degrees as we travel its course and the needed elements of proper quality are obtained. We utilize the ones we have acquired in the construction of our bridge, some of which we find are not of sufficient integrity. We may also substitute temporal materials for elements not yet recognized as necessary or obtained. Early in life, we may have only a single buttress (our awareness of the inner self and faith in God) as well as a few essential trusses (elements) we have seen in those around us. Some of the materials we are forced to use as substitutes have flaws, being temporal in nature while other legitimate elements are not yet strong enough to assure a secure structure for our future spanning of the "sullen tide" of life. They may well give way under the stress of life and then we find ourselves dangerous circumstances above the raging tide of life. Fortunately, we may rely on the moral segments of society to provide a degree of protection if we will but listen to their advice. They may well pull us out of the raging stream if we fall in but we must have faith in their knowledge and ability to do so. We learn from our mistakes and improve the strength of those elements we employ. If we move forward in wisdom with that knowledge, strengthening the elements we use, which are essential in spanning the tide, we began to see their need as the temporal strains of life are experienced.

In so doing, our bridge projects out over the raging tide below and we find we can move securely to and from the land because of the buttress securing us thereto and the elements we are using. Others around us fail to understand the importance of both buttress and truss, while utilizing the temporal materials being hawked by those who only profit as a motive. These are readily available and allow bridge construction to move forward quickly. Such people seem to build more quickly; erecting what appears to be beautiful and even well

founded bridges. Their bridges are quite visible and seem to offer the best in life. Others, who observe them, marvel at the beauty, magnitude and speed with which they progress. They follow suit and soon have their individual; bridges projecting through the air above the stream. Many of these structures fail, some early, some midway across and others as they approach the other side of life. There, those who make it to that point find nothing to secure the bridge to the other bank, having forgotten to acquire the necessary buttress. The beautiful structure they erected now seems futile because they don't know how to complete it, having no vision or time for replacement of the necessary buttress that will anchor them to the eternities ahead. Consequently, they must leap blindly from the bridge to the bank, not knowing where they will land or what fate awaits them when they do land, as they surely must.

Meanwhile, those who proceed more slowly and with less grandeur, find joy in their security as well as in the vision they have of the buttress their bridge will be secured to, when they reach the other side of life's raging tide. They find beauty in the truth of their structure with the peace and security it provides, never fearing the sullen tide or the place they will be secured to upon arrival at the far bank. They have built with confidence and leave their structure with confidence in their exit to the other side. They are secure in the sure knowledge of the example they have left for posterity and associates in life. Yes, those who come behind must build their own bridges but they have the example of the success of their fore-bearer to pattern it after. They have seen the fruits of their forbearer's bridge of life and may well improve on the old man's bridge with increased knowledge, dedication and obedience to the laws that govern bridge construction. Their bridge may be more secure in meeting the problems of the day as well as more beautiful for all to see. The old man hopes and even prays this is so. However, his bridge will stand as an ever-lasting example of just how the sullen tide is best spanned for all who look thereon and learn from his experience. They are free and even encouraged to use its principles as well as his experience to build a more beautiful and useful structure for themselves and for mankind.

So it is with my wishes for my posterity and, I suspect, the wishes of all people who sincerely believe that the family is essential to the well being and perpetuity of mankind. We leave our

best wishes behind as we exit mortality to enter a more glorious and beautiful realm. For me personally, this autobiography with its sometimes questionable material and even clumsy effort to explain the purpose of life has now become my representation of the bridge I assembled. I have tried to point out weaknesses in the bridge I have built along with the fixes I applied, as well as the sections I found most interesting and beautiful. Even though my bridge has much room for improvement, I feel secure in my testimony of life, which has been gained through experience and the redemption of our Lord and Savior. In leaving this autobiography behind, I sincerely hope my posterity will adjust their own efforts to avoid my mistakes and will be able to meet the challenges of life with optimism and gratefulness. May they view life's challenges as opportunities for learning, building the beauty of the inner self and preparing to meet our Lord and Saviour. In applying in life the lessons the Lord places in their paths; they will be prepared for the receipt of his greatest blessing, even eternal life.