

Doctrine & Covenants Lesson 8 Notes: Revelation & the Holy Ghost

*And now I say unto thee,
put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—
yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously;
and this is my Spirit.*

D&C 11:12

OUR OWN CONNECTION

In John, the fifteenth chapter, Jesus taught his disciples just before his death, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” (John 15:5) Christ is the central stalk that sends its roots into the soil and brings life and nutrients (the “sap”) to the branches so that they have the nutrients they need to be fruitful. If the union between branch and trunk is broken, no life can flow outward to the branch and no fruit will grow. Jesus says of these branches that have lost their connection to the vine¹: “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” (John 15:6)

It is the flow of life between the trunk and the branches that we wish to study in this section. The connection between the two is revelation. Jesus said, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63) For the branches to be alive, there must be a connection with the trunk of the plant, Jesus Christ himself.

This connection is first established when the person is born again. When we are baptized, the atoning blood of Christ washes sin away. Into our clean new life, the Gift of the Holy Ghost comes, bringing, essentially, a member of the Godhead to “dwell in us.”² Now we have the ingredients of a birth: water, blood and spirit (Moses 6:59). We were born by water, blood and a spirit entering our infant body. We become spiritual children in the kingdom of God through water (baptism), blood (Christ’s shed blood of the atonement) and a spirit entering our body (the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands). We are now connected into the “true vine” and receiving revelation should become a regular part of life. We take the sacrament to cleanse ourselves of the build-up of sin that disconnects us, “that we might always have His spirit to be with us.” (D&C 20:79)

THE OLD COVENANT

Religion, throughout Biblical history, has not always been characterized by this revelation connection between God and man through the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. Under the Mosaic Law, ordinary individuals did not connect to God in this way. The priests were the intermediaries between God and the people when they sinned. The prophets, received revelations for the people. When the people heard the voice of God from Mt. Sinai themselves, they begged Moses to tell God to stop because it frightened them. “You talk to God for us,” they pled. “We don’t want to hear His voice anymore.” So Moses led the children of Israel for forty years as he was guided by revelation.

No greater example exists than the moment when he guided them out of impending disaster. The mighty Egyptian army was rushing down upon them, tall canyons on each side and the Red Sea at their back. What were they to do! “Help!” they cried. And into their desperate hour came the still, small voice of God whispering to the prophet. *Raise your staff and the sea will part; then tell the people to go forward, walking through the Red Sea on dry ground.*

When the Lord introduces the subject of personal revelation in D&C 8—a revelation given to Oliver Cowdery, but through him to all the saints—he says, “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground.” The God that spoke to Moses, in the very moment when he needed direction, is the same

¹ When we see the word vine, we may mistakenly think of the thin, wispy, trailing part of a plant. No. He is using a vineyard metaphor. The thick, heavy vine stock is the main body of the plant. The fruit is borne by the branches that connect to it.

² Interestingly, Section 130 states that it is a false notion that the Father or Son can “dwell in our hearts,” but says that the Holy Ghost does indeed “dwell in us.” (D&C 130:3, 22) See also D&C 8:2 “...the Holy Ghost...which shall dwell in your heart.”

God that will speak to you and give you direction in the moment when you need it. And as Israel was delivered from her enemies by revelation, so "it shall deliver you [Oliver] out of the hands of your enemies." (D&C 8:4) The process is the same, whether for Moses or for us—thoughts will come into our minds and hearts through the Holy Ghost.

In the camp of Israel, two men were prophesying and some bystanders ran and told Moses, saying, "My lord Moses, forbid them." Moses replies, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" It seems that day is here, when the Lord has provided for *all* his people to have the Holy Ghost, dwelling in their hearts, and giving them the gift of revelation³.

THE NEW COVENANT

When Christ died on the cross, the great veil that hung in the Jewish temple and separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place split in two from top to bottom. Only the High Priest had been allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and only once a year. When the barrier came down it symbolized the fact that now *any* person could go into God's presence and offer their own sacrifices for sin by offering up a broken heart and contrite spirit in prayer.

This is the difference between the Old Covenant—with priests and prophets between the Lord and the people—and the New Covenant—offering each one access in a personal way to God. This is a long introduction to the subject of revelation and the Holy Ghost. But it is important to see how revolutionary this idea was in the new Christianity.

Once a person is born into a new Christian life, he or she is "abiding in the vine" and can "bear fruit" to the Master. We are back where we started in John 15. Remember, Jesus said "without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5) Few things are more critical than actually having revelation's flow in our lives. "For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day." (D&C 45:57) Remember the fate of the branches that were not connected into the true vine? They were "gathered, and cast into the fire, and burned." (John 15:6)

THE SYMBOL OF OIL

Oil in the scriptures is always a symbol for the Holy Spirit. The symbol of oil and anointing was common in the Old Testament and is still in use today by Latter-day Saints in their holy temples. When a person was anointed with oil, it was poured upon their head to symbolize the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would sanctify the person and fill him. Priests and kings were anointed with "holy anointing oil." They had special need for the Holy Spirit to act on behalf of Israel's people. Of King David we read, "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." (1 Samuel 16:13) It is the presence of the Spirit of the Lord that sanctifies a person or thing, and the oil itself is the symbol.

The parable of the Ten Virgins shows the folly of being caught unprepared, without the oil of the Spirit of God in your life, at the moment it is most needed. This parable refers to the second coming of the Lord but it equally applies to anytime of judgment that comes upon a person without warning, such as death. The needful thing to have at that moment is the Spirit of God. We miss the significance of the symbolic meaning of oil if we think this parable is another version of the Boy Scout motto: Be prepared. A person can have a year's supply of food, a current temple recommend, and have done many wise and needful things in their life to prepare for all kinds of emergencies. Yet without the Spirit of God, they will be lacking the very thing they need to gain entrance to the "wedding feast."

The Doctrine and Covenants makes this clear. "And at that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins. For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day." (D&C 45:57) The 5 wise virgins had taken the Holy Spirit for their guide. The 5 foolish virgins no longer had the Holy Spirit. Though they once did, they had not refilled their lamps.

SOWING TO THE SPIRIT

³ Book of Mormon peoples were an exception. They did know about the new birth and gift of the Spirit to all believers before the earthly ministry of Christ. Their prophets understood and taught the whole plan.

You can't buy oil at midnight, and a crop cannot be grown in a day because the agricultural inspector is coming through town. Paul said, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." The seeds we sow, are the things that will grow. If a woman spends hours following the lives of celebrities, watching silly reality TV shows, shopping and pouring over fashion magazines, gossiping and going to movies, should she be surprised that she doesn't have in her life the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, faith, long-suffering (patience), meekness (humility), goodness and temperance (self-control). (Galatians 5:22,23)

Sowing seeds of the Spirit would include things like going to the temple, family home evenings, church attendance, fasting, prayer, reading and studying the word of God, and any kind of positive up-lifting interaction with another human being, from visiting with a friend to doing missionary work or genealogy. Of course, it is necessary to remember that, "I, the Lord, require the hearts of the children of men." (D&C 64:22) Right actions done with wrong motives will not "grow" the spirit in our lives (using our farming metaphor).

COMMANDED VERSUS COUNSELED

Not all revelation from God comes as commandments. D&C 89, the Section we know as the Word of Wisdom, begins like this: "A word of wisdom...to be sent greeting; *not by commandment or constraint.*"⁴ Commandments come through prophets and are binding upon every follower of God. The classic example would be the Ten Commandments, etched in stone by the finger of God. There is not one set of commandments for you and another for me.

The other type of revelation given by God is *counsel*. This is the specific wisdom that the Holy Ghost can tailor to each person's situation. Thousands of years ago Isaiah described God as a "wonderful counselor." The King James translators of the Bible put a comma between wonderful and counselor, but there was no punctuation in the original Hebrew. The best Hebrew form would be to have the two words together, one noun and one adjective, in the parallel list with "everlasting father", "almighty God", and "peaceful prince" that makes up the rest of the paragraph. Although putting in the comma assured Handel of a marvelous text for the Hallelujah chorus, it throws off the teaching.

The prophet Nephi taught 600 years before Christ: "For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have." (2 Nephi 28:30) The Holy Ghost is that member of the Godhood who dwells in our hearts and leads and guides the individual believer.

CASE STUDY--DOCTRINE & COVENANTS 58

Section 58 is an interesting study in the subject of revelation. The church was young and the saints were excited that God once more had a prophet on the earth. Many asked Joseph Smith to get revelation for them. Several early sections in the D&C were given to individuals who so asked⁵. Section 11 is typical. Verse 6 says, "as you have asked, behold, I say unto you..." In this case the "asker" was Hyrum Smith. But the Lord goes on to give Hyrum *confidence in his own ability to receive knowledge from God*. "And now I say unto thee, put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good...I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy; And... by this shall you know, all things whatsoever you desire of me, which are pertaining unto things of righteousness." (D&C 11:12-14)

The background to section 58 is that Joseph Smith had received a revelation that Missouri was Zion, the New Jerusalem. He also received revelation telling several brethren to leave Ohio and settle in Missouri. These men went to the prophet and asked him to get *more* revelation, telling them exactly *how to travel* to Missouri. Section 58 was the revelation that followed. Here are the four verses we often quote:

"26 For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. 27 Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much

⁴ Later this section was presented in the 1851 General Conference by Brigham Young and adopted as binding on all church members.

⁵ This became a bit of a problem in the early church. Joseph had received a number of revelations for individuals (see D&C 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, etc). Soon many came to Joseph seeking their own revelations. They were learning spiritual self-reliance through these experiences.

righteousness; 28 For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. 29 But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.”

Some think that these verses mean we should not trouble the Lord with the details of our lives but it's important not to omit verse 25: “Wherefore, let them bring their families to this land, as they shall counsel between themselves and me.” Verse 25 shows that God is quite willing to counsel with us on these things. What they didn't need to do was bother the prophet Joseph about everything. By getting revelation for our own lives we are showing spiritual-self reliance.

WHEN THINGS MATTERETH NOT TO THE LORD

Sections 60 through section 64 are more instructions to the elders on moving to Missouri. In Section 62 the Lord says, “And then you may return to bear record, yea, even altogether, or two by two, as seemeth you good, it mattereth not unto me; only be faithful...7 I, the Lord, am willing, if any among you desire to ride upon horses, or upon mules, or in chariots, [Chevys or Fords], he shall receive this blessing, if he receive it from the hand of the Lord... 8 These things remain with you to do according to judgment and the directions of the Spirit.” Both good judgment and the directions of the spirit are important.

WISE OR SLOTHFUL

The slothful servant waits till he is compelled to do something by a commandment. The slothful servant wants to know the Minimum Daily Requirements. A wise servant is “anxiously engaged in a good cause.” She wants to do the Maximum Good Possible. A wise servant is using her free will to seek opportunities to do good things for God's kingdom, thus “bringing to pass much righteousness” (D&C 3:4) You either give the least you can, or you seek to give the most you can. That is the real difference between the wise and the slothful servants of D&C 58.

GOD: OUR ABBA

Many times what we need to know is not in a commandment. Sometimes we just need to talk to someone. Jesus knew every single commandment, yet he still needed to talk to his Father. He often spent many hours in prayer. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me.” (Mark 14:36) He used the word that meant Daddy or Papa in that culture. And amazingly, we are told we can pray this way too, because we have become the covenant sons and daughters of Christ. “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby *we* cry, Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15)

The relationship we can have with the Wonderful Counselor is reserved for those who seek it and ask for it. We should always seek the precious influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives. It is the “sap” that flows between the True Vine and the branches, enabling us to have life and bear fruit. It enables one to have what is called a “personal relationship with God” through his Spirit. This is what is offered to us if we choose to accept it. This is God's invitation:

*Pray always, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you,
and great shall be your blessing—yea, even more than if you should obtain treasures of earth
and corruptibleness to the extent thereof.*

Behold, canst thou read this without rejoicing and lifting up thy heart for gladness?

Or canst thou run about longer as a blind guide?

Or canst thou be humble and meek, and conduct thyself wisely before me?

Yea, come unto me thy Savior. Amen.

D&C 19:38-41