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## REVELATION

### REVELATION AND MAN

For quite some time there has been the idea among us that receiving of revelation was an exclusive practice of the Latter Day Saint Movement. Now the thought is rather widespread among many Christian sects. In its broadest sense, the revelation of God relates to the very life of man, regardless of his philosophy or geographical location. And it is not exclusively Christian. All religions are based on some quickening spirit, and their foundations are laid on movements completely outside of man. As man looks upward, God looks downward; that is why prayer is universal. John tried to explain this when he called Jesus Christ “the true light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world” (John 1:9; see also D&C 85:2-3).

Knowledge, which has been unfolding in multiple discoveries in the physical world, is the result of a spirit of revelation. This spirit has always been working in man, though man may prefer to attribute his increase of knowledge to natural causes and evolutionary processes. Nevertheless, the germ thought for every major invention must be regarded as revelation, a disclosure of things unknown to man before. We may dismiss it as an “idea” or a “hunch,” but where does an idea or hunch come from? It comes from that light “which lighteth every man who cometh into the world.” The same is true of art, literature, music, and the like. Something was born within the heart of the artist and gave him a picture of that which his hands were able to paint into a most glorious scene.

### REVELATION AND THE SAINTS

Revelation to the Saints brings a recognition of Jesus Christ. It is quite possible for one to be quickened by the Spirit of Christ and yet not recognize Him. John made that very clear when he wrote: “The world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (John 1:10). But to those recognizing Him and receiving Him “gave he power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). As sons, they are accessible to the intimacy of the heavenly family circle (see Ephesians 3:13-19).

The beginning of revelation is found in the reaching out of both man and God. This outreach must be with intensity or else it will be unproductive. “Blessed are all they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled,” said the Lord (Matthew 5:8). This hunger led Peter to say, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:17). There was a hunger in the souls of the early followers of Jesus for the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. We have a glimpse of this hunger in the joyous announcement of Philip to Nathaniel. “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

Paul made the emphatic statement: “No man can know that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Corinthians 12:3). This revelation comes to the individual soul, convincing him of the divinity of Christ. When the individual accepts the redeeming message, he becomes entitled to further revelation as the adopted child of God (see Romans 8:14-17). This may come directly to the individual to help in particular needs as is the case with the manifestations of the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:3-11), or it may come to the individual as part of the body of Christ.

### REVELATION TO PROPHETS AND SEERS

Revelation that comes to prophets and seers does not as a rule consider the personal needs of an individual but the needs of the Church. When it is given to an individual, it is given in consideration to the part he may play in the greater movement.

The revelation experienced by Paul on his way to Damascus to persecute the young Church was not given for the sole purpose of edifying Paul (see Acts 22:1-15). The revelations to both Saul and Ananias were given in view of the need of the work (see Acts 9:6-18). The revelation to John on the Isle of Patmos was given for the benefit of the Church as a whole. The seven churches of Asia are symbolic of the universal Church. Revelation was also given to seers and prophets for the

clarification of doctrine and policy. The vision to Peter while in prayer on the housetop of Simon, the tanner, (see Acts 10) opened the doors of the Church for the reception of the Gentiles and settled an important controversy.

The apostle Paul was so careful in his teachings on doctrinal matters that he nearly always attributed them to the Lord. When he had no revelation, he said so plainly (see 1 Corinthians 7:25). The heavenly light which came to the Church through the seers and revelators distinguished her wisdom from worldly wisdom (see 1 Corinthians 2:7-14). This prophetic gift through seers and revelators is the property of the Church for all time, providing she is faithful to her mission (see 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-14).

## **THE CREDIBILITY OF REVELATION**

There is one test for the credibility of revelation, and that is “experience.” The high moral precepts taught by the prophets of the Old Testament could not have survived until our day had they been so many empty words. Experience has told us time and again that departure from them meant ruin. When prophecy foretells the future, experience again is the standard of its truthfulness (see Matthew 24:35).

Jacob’s statement expresses the need and grandeur of the revelation of God: “Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord! How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways! And no man knoweth of his ways, save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God” (Jacob 3:9-11).

Revelation in its truest meaning points to Christ. This is true of the prophets who came before Christ as well as of those who appeared after His advent. Christ and His teachings have become an experience in history as well as in the lives of noble men. If we depart from Him and His message, we do not enjoy the fullness of life. This has been true of the individual and the group. Credibility of the revelation in the Restoration also depends on experience. In its predictions, as well as in its moral teachings, the revelation that came to Joseph Smith is true. There was —and still is—a need for it.

## **CONDITIONS FOR REVELATION**

It is important that we consider the conditions for revelation. We may say that a saintly life is all that is needed, but that would be an over-simplification of the point. There are certain qualities in the saintly life that need to be present. We tend to limit the receiving of revelation to a prayer service or a conference. We need to seek to discover the revelation of God that surrounds us, in all times and in all places.

John on the Isle of Patmos, Paul, Daniel, and the sons of Mosiah all sought for God’s Word. John’s revelation came as the result of his suffering for the Word of God and concern over the seven churches which were located on the mainland (see Revelation 1:9ff). It is also obvious that he was in prayer and fasting on Sunday, the Lord’s day. How else could he be “in the spirit on the Lord’s day?” He certainly gave heed to the command to “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). The intensity of His concern, suffering, service, and prayer led the Spirit to show John that the seven churches and their ministers were in the hand of God.

Paul was zealous for the Word of God, even receiving stripes and being put in prison (see 2 Corinthians 11:23ff). Behind Daniel’s visions was a concern which led to study, prayer, and fasting (see Daniel 9:1-5). The same is true of the sons of Mosiah (see Alma 12:1-13).

Finally, we must not ignore the statement of the Lord on this subject: “If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). Only as we are obedient to the commandments of Christ can we receive of Him.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why can it be said, “Revelation is in the life of every man, and it is not exclusively Christian”?
2. How are art, literature, and music examples of God’s revelation?
3. How does revelation to the Church differ from the kinds of revelations discussed in the first two questions?
4. What are the requirements for individual revelation?

5. How does revelation to prophets and seers differ from revelation to individuals?
6. Give scriptural examples of individual revelations and prophetic revelations.
7. How can revelation be tested?
8. Why is revelation so important in the Church and in the life of man?