

# 10 Satan's Control

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According to the Book of Mormon there are two specific ways by which Satan gains control over mankind; the first is the will of the flesh and the second is ignorance. Both are obviously based on the *agency* that mankind has been guaranteed by God. The choice to satisfy the desires, appetites and passions of the flesh develops a character described by King Benjamin as the “natural man.”

To seek for light and truth, with a *desire* for understanding, requires a broken heart and contrite spirit. This *desire* is another choice that is made by the same agency. The desires of the flesh and the desires of the mind are the two appetites of life an individual has total control of, making this life a truly probationary state. Because of this, the Book of Mormon declares that all will be judged according to one's words, works and thoughts (unless physically or mentally handicapped).

## The Flesh

After Lehi describes our dual natures and the need for opposition in all things, he concludes his discussion on agency and choice and the evil of the flesh:

...and not choose eternal death, according to the *will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate*, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom. (2 Nephi 2:29)

Everyone inherits at birth a physical machine called a body, which in its infancy is created to seek satisfaction for every need and want of body and mind. As the infant begins to grow, so does the desire and sometimes the ability to manipulate others to satisfy every appetite, desire, or passion. The natural man becomes awakened and begins to develop a character that must be overcome. By the time the age of accountability is reached, every trick in the book has been learned and perfected. When 8 years old, the child of record is baptized, receives the Gift of the Holy Ghost and is confirmed a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. After years of sharpening manipulative skills, this new Christian will spend the rest of his or her life trying to stop thinking about themselves, learning respect for others, and exercising self-control and restraint. Moving from this pride to humility turns out to be harder than it sounds because the 'machine' (the natural man running the show in the background) wants what it wants. There seems to be no way out of this dilemma because we live in a physical world with a physical body that has its own physical needs and desires. This wonderful body, hardwired with natural man inclinations from youth and a prideful nature, is vulnerable to temptations of the flesh, which Satan exploits. Lehi teaches his children about agency and the “will of the flesh and the evil which is therein” which will give the “devil power to captivate” our bodies, our spirits, and our minds. The only way out is through the action of choice. For the rest of our mortal lives—a choice at a time—all must learn how to bridle their physical passions and submit their will to God (Alma 38:12) for exaltation requires all to eventually develop the same will that God has.

## Ignorance

The second way Satan gains power over us is *ignorance*. Spiritual ignorance may be the result of our own choices. However, it can also be the result of evil designs by others who seek control over us. When Nephi sought to understand the vision his father had, it was revealed to him how Satan gains power over mankind when they are intentionally left ignorant of the truth. Speaking of spiritual ignorance, the verse below discusses the plain and precious things that were removed from the Bible:

And after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles... thou seest—because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God—and *because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them.* (1 Nephi 13:29)

As this verse explains, Satan began to have power over the people because they did not have the true points of the Lord's doctrine and His word. Without plain and precious truths, many are vulnerable to error, giving Satan power over them. The control of information and truth can only lead to a 'non-belief' or 'wrong-belief' and therefore a fall from the truth. Since Satan was a liar from the beginning, and is the 'father of all lies' (2 Nephi 2:18) the control of information, and the ignorance it inevitably leads to, may cause some to fall away. Without an understanding of truth, by choice or by design, there will eventually be problems.

People who harden their hearts against the truth when it is presented (pride), believing they already know it all (the definition of ignorance), are described by Alma as being in the "chains of hell."

10 And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full.

11 And *they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.* (Alma 12:10-11)

"The only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance," said Socrates. "The wisest among us (concerning God's understanding) are only fools until they learn to recognize their ignorance." A person cannot expect to know the mysteries of God until they first realize just how little they know (a broken heart and contrite spirit). One cannot even begin to understand the processes of knowing and learning if they believe they already know it all. "A man cannot be saved any faster than he gains knowledge," taught Joseph Smith (*TPJS* pp. 217, 357). Thus, beside one's righteousness, the surest path to *exaltation* is the conscientious and continued search for light and truth. At the opposite end of the spectrum, those who believe they have already acquired all of the spiritual knowledge they need, or who are complacent in their spiritual ignorance, are setting themselves up to have the *end of their progression made sure*. All need to be seeking for further light and knowledge, just like Abraham, whose desire for more led to the covenants and knowledge of the fathers being given to him. For Abraham, good was not good enough—he wanted *more* light and truth. He understood that if he only knew what God knows, he would act the way God acts

and do what God does. Abraham saw the link between righteousness and the obtaining of knowledge.

2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; *having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.* (Abraham 1:2)

Because Abraham was "perfect in his generation," the Lord's command to Latter-day Saints in this generation is to "go and do the works of Abraham" (D&C 132:32; John 8:39). As the "Father of the Faithful," Abraham represents every man, as every man *should be*.

A statistic has shown the higher an education one has, the less religious one becomes in their demonstration of faith and belief in God. This is because the educated often place their confidence in their own education and knowledge (their own arm of the flesh), making them less teachable. Jacob warns us about the pride of education:

28 O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! *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.*  
29 *But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.* (2 Nephi 9:28-29)

With insight born of experience, Hugh Nibley remarked: "it was better to be in the company of a smart baby than a stupid department dean," as one might more successfully teach a crying baby than an arrogant professor. As this dispensation began, Joseph Smith was told by the Lord that one purpose of the restoration was to teach man that he "should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh" (D&C 1:19). Our trust should always be in the Lord's counsel and not on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

There is nothing wrong with obtaining an education. The warning in scripture is about the *pride* that often accompanies education, letters and degrees. The more one knows and understands about a given subject, the better and more correct one's decisions and choices about that particular subject will be. Mortal life is but a fleeting moment and dream compared to eternal life. What subjects and truths will be relevant through the eternities? What knowledge will do the most good in immortality? Remember, *reality exists only in the realm of the sacred*.

There are some in the Church who believe if they haven't heard it before that it can't be true, and that everything that should be known is found in the manuals. There are others who cannot be taught because of their trust in the arm of flesh belonging to themselves or others. The rejection of light and truth is a perilous decision. Joseph Smith stated that a man would be "held more accountable for what he doesn't believe than what he does believe" (TPJS p 374). The desire for further light and truth is a character trait that separates the prophets and patriarchs from all others.

29 Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!

30 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.

31 Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost. (2 Nephi 28:29-31)

Some may say, “A Quad, a Quad, I have a Quad...we need no more.” Others might believe, “If it does not come from Deseret Book, it cannot be true and should not be read.” Brigham Young once said that if there were truth in Hell that he would go there to get it (JD 14:160). Even the Thirteenth Article of Faith teaches that we should be seeking for all that is praiseworthy and of good report. The LDS bookstore does not have a monopoly on all truth or righteousness!

The tendency among members is to feel satisfied and secure in the knowledge they have, crying “all is well.” To shut one’s ears, heart and mind to the issues of today that affect our children or grandchildren is the apathy of apostasy. All should be looking for ways to strengthen the testimonies of Christ and the Atonement in ourselves and every member of our family, not turning a blind eye to the questions and issues that plague this generation. Nephi warns about the attitude and apathy of apostasy:

21 And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:21)

24 Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!

25 Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!

26 Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost! (2 Nephi 28:24-26)

Nephi's prophetic warning to all believers is to not let their spiritual guard down. None should think they are safe just because they might live in Happy Valley or any other part of Zion. The evil one never sleeps nor does he take vacations. No one, from prophet to pauper, can afford to become complacent because of prosperity, ease, or education. The location of a Temple and working therein is no indication of the righteousness and spiritual security of the members in that area. This same problem and issue caused the Children of Israel to be taken captive as they began to trust in the ‘lying words’ of complacency and security:

4 Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these.

5 For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor;

6 If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt:

7 Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.

8 Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

9 Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not;

10 And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?

11 Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.

12 But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.

(Jeremiah 7:4-12)

The Lord told Jeremiah to tell the children of Israel not to trust that all was well in Zion just because there was a Temple across the street, or close by. Their attitude was not unlike ours today: “We are not only in Zion, we *are* Zion, and His temple is here so we are safe, and there is no need to worry.” By way of warning Jeremiah told them to remember what happened in Shiloh (v14), *(Shiloh was the spiritual capital of the nation, in the land of Ephraim; the place where the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant was, until the wickedness of Israel caused the Ark to be lost (Bible Dictionary p 773).*

Nephi’s and Jeremiah’s warning was and is directed to those who know the gospel law. Their message and warning is as valid today as anciently since the 'nature and disposition of man has not changed'. The Saints in Far West, Nauvoo, and Independence fell into the same complacent trap as the Israelites did in the Old Testament and The Book of Mormon. Spiritual security exists only for a little season, because the gospel is new to every generation.