

3 An Unfortunate Perspective

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A story is told about a man who became very ill. Not knowing what was wrong, his health continued to deteriorate. After a time, he was admitted into the hospital where they began to conduct numerous tests hoping to discover what his illness was and how to restore him back to health. The doctor consulted with the man and his wife and told them that yes, there were some problems, but they would require a few more tests to be run over the next few days. After the tests were completed, the doctor requested to speak with the man's wife...alone.

Taking the man's spouse into another room, the doctor began to explain that her husband could return home. However, the illness the man had was stress related and would lead to his eventual early death, *unless* he could be given time at home without stress of any sort. *If* this condition was met, her husband eventually could regain his normal health. To that end, the doctor recommended that when the husband returned home that she agree with everything he said and not make him want or wish for anything, give him the food he wanted to eat, let him watch his favorite TV shows, etc. In other words, she was to create a stress-free environment for her husband in order to prolong his life and help him recover.

The woman thanked the doctor for his counsel and returned to her husband's hospital room to prepare him for the trip home. The husband, naturally curious, asked his wife what she and the doctor talked about. She somberly looked at him for a moment and said, "You're going to die."

Everything is based on perspective: where you are, what you see, what you think you see, and what you might want to see. In order to make the best decisions, it is best to have multiple perspectives. To that end, the church is organized into presidencies, committees and councils, to present different points of view and experiences for a better decision. This broadened perspective will lead to a better delegation of responsibility.

The more an individual knows and understands about a given subject, the better perspective they will have. The greater the informed perspective, the better the decisions and actions should be.

The issue of disbelief and apostasy affects almost every family in the church today. For some, it already distresses immediate family members or extended families. Eventually, it may touch all. It is frustrating from a researcher's point of view to witness active members of the church question their faith and lose the testimony they once had (or thought they had) over issues that most often stem from a lack of knowledge and ignorance of scripture and doctrine.

Collecting "anti-Mormon" literature has been a personal hobby since the late 1960's, not to question faith or to become a self proclaimed 'apologist,' but to better understand which latter-day saint issues and beliefs are being attacked, and in what manner. What became clear, based on the examination of these attacks against LDS beliefs, is that the issues seldom change. However, the speed and availability with which they are presented to the public has changed considerably. Historically problematic issues are no longer invisible or difficult to find. They are presented to

unwary latter-day saints with every turned page and keystroke of the computer. Hence, the need to discuss these matters and address these questions. Every member should be prepared for the intellectual attacks that will come from within and without the church. The purpose of presenting this material is to help parents and individual members of the church recognize the real focus and foundation of a true and lasting testimony. The accomplishment of this goal will require answers from a scriptural point of view that address the basic questions behind this falling away. It is hoped this information will arm adults and youth with the answers needed to pass through the dark mists of doubt.

Lost Sheep

All are familiar with the Parable of the Lost Sheep as taught by the Savior in the New Testament.

- 4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?
- 5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
- 6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.
- 7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (Luke 15: 4-7)

The "lost sheep" is a phrase used by many to refer to those who have fallen away from the Church and who seem unlikely to return. Everyone cares about family and friends who have begun to tread that path through "the mists of darkness." A sense of duty to support them, love them and build their faith is a major concern and worry for concerned loved ones. Yet all have their agency. And because of this personal agency, none should become too *overly stressed* or condemn or question themselves over an individual's or loved-one's personal choice and use of agency. A parent or family member cannot pray away the agency of a loved one. There is a big difference between the plot and cast of characters in the Parables of the "Lost Sheep" and that of the "Prodigal Son."

Based on the results of a recent survey of disaffected members, it was observed that there has not been as much apostasy or falling away within the Church since the years of apostasy in Kirtland from 1834-1835.¹ Any amount of falling away should cause all active members to stop and ask the questions: Why is this so? What is causing it? What are the issues or questions? Two even more important questions should follow those: 1) What should be done to help those who have already fallen away? 2) How do we pro-actively secure the testimonies of the rising generation?

Some statistics report that about 50% of members between the ages of 18-31 are falling away. Given these statistics, it must be asked: Are parents, grandparents, or even great-grandparents willing to watch half of their family members break away from the influence of the Church and gospel? Is it acceptable for family members to fall away over simple issues and questions, which, if properly understood, would not trouble them? This trend has the potential of leaving a big hole in the hearts of parents who have hoped to see their children become faithful members of the

1. Peggy Fletcher Stack "The Salt Lake Tribune" published February 3, 2012.

Church. Viewing this current reality, one can only wonder what the fallout will be like in five to ten years. Will whole families and even leaders become casualties?

So why are they leaving? What is really going on? The main issue that is causing good people to fall away from the faith of their fathers has to do with perspective. This more often than not is the result of ignorance, or trusting in their own flesh and education, which is a form of ignorance. Socrates put it clearly when he made the statement: “The only true wisdom is knowing that you know nothing.” All too often men begin to trust in their own abilities and experience, even while in the darkened paths of youth. Often this misty path will not begin to clear until death’s door is partly open at the end of a long life of learning and experience. Learning begins when the individual realizes how little they really know.

Like the teenager who believes a parent just does not know anything, those who are educated with letters and degrees often believe that they know better than those who have lived a long and faithful life full of experience. A common intellectual conceit by the spiritually ignorant is the belief that if a spiritual experience or religious manifestation personally hasn’t happened to them, that it cannot happen to anybody else. Death is an event all will live through. This formidable door of the unknown will become the great equalizer, educator, and revealer of personal spiritual sacrifice, through which all mankind must pass.

Everyone has a personal outlook on life that becomes the filter through which they process the information and experiences that happen around them. This becomes a ‘philosophy of life’, which determines how they see the world—their ideas, their beliefs, their faith or lack of faith, their values and their morals. These views on life are not formed naturally at birth but are developed based on experience and the perspectives of those they accept and trust. The wisdom to make good choices is largely a result of experience. The experience that fosters this wisdom is often the result of the bad choices one has made.

This philosophy of life is formed in part by the examples and teachings of parents and teachers. Other significant influences are the books read, music heard and videos/TV watched. Thus the choices we make and the ideas we are exposed to form the lens through which life is viewed and defined. Through that lens, all the beliefs, values, and ideas that we use to make decisions are filtered. The problem is trying to determine which lens will provide the most correct view to live a purposeful life. Will it be the education, philosophies and filters of men, or the teachings of God, scriptures and the prophets? The fool’s errand begins when one’s own reflection in the mirror is chosen as the defining and ultimate authority.

The Intellectual

It is a well-known statistic that a belief in God decreases as an education of the world increases. As individuals place their trust in the philosophies of men and the two-dimensional reflection in the mirror, purer eternal realities appear out of focus. Today among graduates there is a greater movement away from a basic belief in God toward atheism. The traditional methods used in teaching the gospel to Bible believers may need to change to adapt to the popular philosophies of life embraced by the atheist and the agnostic.

Among the evangelical faiths, statistics show 80% of youth fall away from their faith by the time they graduate from high school, and of those, nearly 70% declare themselves to be atheists. As the world accepts and teaches the philosophies of the Anti-Christ Korihor, church missionaries will need to be better prepared to teach them. Ammon and Aaron, in Alma 18 and 22 respectively, both ask the Lamanite kings if they believe in God. This is done to know where to begin the gospel discussion.

Only mankind was created with a mind that can conceive of a God, the concept of life after death and a reward or punishment given after death for actions performed in this life. The ignorant and non-reasoning animal cannot do this. The dog may roll over for an immediate reward of a treat, but he doesn't roll over with the belief that he will receive the treat after death. The intellectual attainment of the atheist philosophy, which denies this larger picture, can reduce man's nature to that of an animal, with no real understanding of, or interest in, changing one's character for the better. Again, the philosophies of Korihor are worthy of reflection.

If one is to view life through the best lens it should be the lens of the one who created the world, man, and the cosmos. This lens should be the scriptures that a loving God and Father has provided for mankind. Any other philosophy that is not from the creator Himself will have at best a blurred and perhaps a blinded point of view. God is the same 'yesterday, today and forever.' His vision and view for what is best for individual happiness has not changed. This scriptural lens is spoken of in the Book of Mormon:

7 And behold, ye do know of yourselves, for ye have witnessed it, that as many of them as are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and to know of the wicked and abominable traditions of their fathers, and are led to ***believe the holy scriptures, yea, the prophecies of the holy prophets, which are written, which leadeth them to faith on the Lord, and unto repentance, which faith and repentance bringeth a change of heart unto them—***

8 Therefore, as many as have come to this, ye know of yourselves are firm and steadfast in the faith, and in the thing ***wherewith they have been made free.*** (Helaman 15:7-8)

This passage teaches that the understanding of life found in scripture and the lens through which one should view life leads to faith, repentance and a change of character 'wherewith they have been made free.' The understanding of God's perspective endows an individual with enlightenment and a power in this life over the problems of mortality. If those who provide another individual with a philosophy of life use the wrong lens, then the person who accepts those individuals as authoritative will be unable to view life, morals, and values correctly. A person cannot be any smarter than the individual they choose to believe or choose as their authority. If a person's viewpoint or lens is distorted, then their understanding and conclusions about life and eternity will also be out of focus.

Of all the knowledge, information, and truths that exist in the universe, mankind understands only a fraction. And of that fraction, the individual—no matter how smart or how long they may live—has a lifetime so short that only a small portion of available knowledge on the earth will ever be learned. This underscores the conceit of those who declare that they know everything about the temporal and spiritual worlds, that God does not exist, and/or that there is no life after death. These smug claims, and the confidence with which they are touted, make the modern-day intellectual atheist look as ridiculous as those who proclaimed and argued that the world was flat.

Many seek to become a victim of circumstance. They blame Satan or the devil for the wrongs committed in life. But Holy Scripture teaches us that Satan uses mankind to teach his philosophies and way of thinking. He uses people like Korihor, Sherem, Zeezrom, political leaders, judges, teachers and professors, Hollywood celebrities and other popular TV hosts to lead people away from the lens of the scriptures. The New Testament warns all about this:

8 Beware (be on guard) lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Colossians 2:8).

A look at how Satan used the serpent to ‘beguile’ Eve, and the dialogue between them, will illustrate how her lens and view began to change as the serpent began to teach his philosophy.

5 And now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which I, the Lord God, had made.

6 And *Satan put it into the heart of the serpent* (for he had drawn away many after him), and *he sought also to beguile Eve*, for he knew not the mind of God, wherefore he sought to destroy the world.

7 And he said unto the woman: Yea, hath God said—Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (And he spake by the mouth of the serpent.)

8 And the woman said unto the serpent: We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;
9 But of the fruit of the tree which thou beholdest in the midst of the garden, God hath said—Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

10 And the serpent said unto the woman: Ye shall not surely die;

11 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Moses 4:5-11)

Eve’s first inclination (point of view) was to obey, but the serpent began to convince her to think differently by adjusting words to make her out to be a victim of God. This change of thinking eventually led to partaking of the fruit.

12 And ***when the woman saw*** that the tree was good for food, and that it became pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make her wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and also gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat (Moses 4:12).

The view or philosophy presented by Satan through the serpent convinced Eve that the fruit was what she wanted. Satan seeks to infect the mind and heart by persuading one to believe in his (or his teacher’s) philosophies and concepts that are not congruent with scripture and the word of God. Thus, Satan will use others, as he did with the serpent, to blind mankind from the fact that the truth can be found in the scriptures. Unaware, many ‘reject the commandments of God to keep their own traditions’ (Mark 7:9) thus, “making the word of God of none effect *through your tradition*” (Mark 7:13). Satan clearly understands, as do the atheist professors in the institutions of higher learning, that the first focused effort should be to ‘*infect*’ one’s way of thinking by causing one to use the wrong lens or point of view for life. “For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). The characters that men and women develop is directly influenced by the choice of lens through which they view the temporal and spiritual aspects of life

The eyes and ears are the gateways into the mind. The music that is listened to, what is watched and read, will affect the choices that are made as these things become part of the lens through which life is viewed:

What you have been exposed to determines your thinking
The way you think determines how you feel,
How you feel will determine the decisions you make,
Your decisions will determine your actions,
Your actions will determine your habits,
Your habits will determine your character,
Your character will determine your destination.

To change a destination, one must change one's life, and to change a life one must first change the way one thinks. To change the way one thinks, they must first change the lens through which truth is viewed. This is just another way of saying that life is a sum total of what is in the heart, which is based on one's thinking, which is made up of that which has entered the mind through the flood gates of the eyes and ears.

Latter-day Saints may fall from the faith as Satan, in his subtle and sure way, infects their way of thinking. He doesn't control people by making them float in the air or spin their heads. Always using other people, satanic control begins by the introduction of a new philosophy or thought to see if the individual will take *the suggestion*, then change their mind and eat of the forbidden fruit.

Ironically, when the mind is blurred because of the lens through which life is viewed, the supposed enlightened unbeliever will judge the spiritual experiences and the faith of friends, family members and loved ones as ignorance, tradition and the vain imaginations of a frenzied mind (Alma 30:16). Some of those who fall away claim they are free, blinded to the reality that they are now the spiritual captive of the being who seeks the 'misery of all mankind' (2 Nephi 2:8). This "captivity" is embraced by those who place their trust in the theories and traditions of men, secularism and the vast amounts of miss-information.

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath *blinded the minds* of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is in the image of God, should shine unto them (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

The *spiritual* benefit of living gospel standards provides a power and lifestyle that can lead to eternal joy and exaltation. The *temporal* benefit alone of having a gospel-centered life is a happiness and joy in this life that will *never* be found in the symbolic bars and brothels nor the campuses and corporations of humanity.