

# The Four Testimonies

In the Parable of the Sower, the Savior describes four types of church members. As you will see, this parable is about strength of faith and testimony, not activity in the Church.

3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;  
4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by *the way side*, and the fowls came and devoured them up:  
5 Some fell upon *stony places*, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:  
6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.  
7 And some fell among *thorns*; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:  
8 But other fell into *good ground*, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.  
(Matthew 13:3-8)

“*The Seed*” is the “word” (Alma 33:1); *The Ground* is the heart, faith and testimony of the individual in their relationship with the seed”; and “*The Word*” is Christ (Alma 34:6).

Whether the seed finds good ground has less to do with their activity in church (as with the Pharisees in Luke) than their activity in the Gospel, which leads to *the exercise of faith in Christ and his Atonement unto repentance*.

Lehi sees the identical types of church members in his dream. Both the parable and the dream explain why some members fail or fall away from the gospel. In every case the faith--or falling away--boils down to the individual’s testimony and their relationship to the word, which is in Jesus Christ and His Gospel. Below, the four groups found in the Parable of the Sower are compared to the four groups in Lehi’s Dream.

## The Way Side

Matthew 13	1Nephi 8
19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.	21 And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood. 22 And it came to pass that they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree. 23 And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.

The "way side" represents those who have not taken the necessary time or effort to understand the Gospel or develop a testimony founded in the Savior and His Atonement. "The evil one" finds it easy to "catch away that which was in their heart" because they were already lost by their lack of understanding of the doctrine of Christ. Lehi adds the insight that they evidently let go of--or didn't bother to use--the "iron rod" that might have helped them stay on path. The Iron Rod represents the scriptures, which, being the word of God, are the standard of truth that will not fail one on the path toward the Tree of Life. In this dream it is made clear that **no one** makes it to the Tree of Life without holding on to the Iron Rod.

## Stony Places

Matthew 13	1 Nephi 8
<p>20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;</p> <p>21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.</p>	<p>24 And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.</p> <p>25 And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.</p> <p>26 And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.</p> <p>27 And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.</p> <p>28 And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.</p>

The "stony places" represent those members who quickly and enthusiastically embrace the church culture only to slide back to their old ways when things get the least bit hard. Without a foundation in Christ and a conversion to the Gospel they don't have the faith to persevere in the face of opposition and quickly find reasons to leave.

## The Thorns

Matthew 13	1 Nephi 8
<p>22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.</p>	<p>31 And he also saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.</p> <p>32 And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads.</p> <p>33 And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building. And after they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.</p> <p>34 These are the words of my father: For as many as heeded them, had fallen away.</p>

Born in the Church, these members are more concerned with the “cares of the world”--its fads, fashion, music and technology--than with developing a relationship with Christ. It has been said that the definition of “God” is: *“The motivating force of one's life.”* These members focus their energies on the gods of this world: the gods of wood and stone (grand homes); the gods of metal and money (cars and mammon); and the gods of pride and selfishness.

## The Good Ground

Matthew 13	1 Nephi 8
<p>23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.</p>	<p>30 But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.</p>

Christ said that: “...strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). There will always be a remnant that will be saved; a remnant that is listening; a remnant that remains righteous and faithful in their testimony of Christ and His Atonement. These members unconsciously display their love of God and their fellow man, it being a natural expression of their discipleship. This love is the fruit of true testimony.

## The Iron Rod--A Standard of Doctrine

The ideas, concepts and scriptural discussions presented in this work, might help explain some of the discrepancies and questions that are often generated between the traditional and correlated or 'prescribed' teachings, the scriptures, and the words of Joseph Smith. It should be understood that the author, is not trying to present new doctrine or teach 'mysteries' of any sort, nor trying to change the Church or any accepted position, doctrine or tradition espoused or taught by the General Leadership of the Church. However, traditions are strong and sometimes become more important than true doctrine and scripture. Every business and organization must sometimes make determinations between problems or traditions that could be changed without much effort or cost, and those that cannot be changed without resulting in a cost that would prohibit the needed change. These costs and repercussions might necessitate better machinery, rewriting of the many manuals of instruction and publications. It may require the correction of public statements of executives, which correction would cause a disruption within an organization, creating a lack of faith or trust in leadership that would be better left alone. Thus, many traditions and policies are perpetrated over time causing the 'traditions of men' to eventually become; an assumed doctrine. In succeeding generations as these traditions become accepted as "doctrines of the church" and cannot be changed because the costs outweigh the benefits. These doctrinal traditions are not perpetuated intentionally, but on the contrary, become accepted by all exposed to the traditions or interpretations over time.

The scriptures are the best commentary on the scriptures and all members of the Church should acquiesce to the doctrines and teachings found in the "standard works" or canonized scriptures. The words of the Prophets and Apostles at general conference are those things, members of the Church need to know and understand to survive the spiritual and temporal calamities of the last days. As policies, programs may change often in the Church for benefit and better administration of the gospel to the general membership of the Church; true and eternal doctrines do not change. Doctrines that need to be changed will be done so, first by revelation, which can only come only through the Prophet and President of the Church and then by 'declaration' to the Church. The two examples of doctrinal changes are the 'Declarations on the Plurality of Wives and the Priesthood to all Worthy Males' found in the Doctrine and Covenants. There exists 'revelation' or scripture; 'declaration' that changes a revelatory position or doctrine, and 'proclamation' that establishes or emphasizes the position of the Church on a given issue or subject based on existing revelation or scripture.

The scriptures are often referred to as the "standard works," have for some reason have not remained the "standards" of doctrine and truth among the general membership of the Church. Because of a 'lay ministry' (thus, the need for the prepared manuals of instruction) even though the stress has been to 'stick with the manual' the "standard" for teaching has become one's belief, feeling, understanding, or opinion because of education or tradition.

The scriptures as a standard have taken second place to the Ensign, the Church News and other sources of information. Many members have found it more secure and profitable to quote books, talks and articles by church authorities as sources that seem more entertaining, important and reliable than the scriptures. When scriptures are quoted or read in a classroom setting or discussion that teach something different than tradition; the first cry is: what did Elder 'so and so' say? Many teachers and speakers scramble to find quotes from some publication, internet blogs, using some web-site of a self appointed savior of gospel doctrine teachers, rather than the prepared manuals and the scriptures for security in their thoughts and traditions. Sacrament talks are based mostly from the words of the authorities than from scripture, not that this is wrong or bad, but the scriptures are the "standards" of truth and unfortunately, are not even in second place when it comes to doctrinal learning or teaching. Some leaders feel that the Ensign should take the place of the scriptures, and

Some leaders feel that the Ensign should take the place of the scriptures, and that they (the scriptures) are only to be used as secondary sources rather than the primary words of God. The words of modern priesthood leaders are important for the day and age in which we live. Their counsel for our daily life and testimony in this wicked world is needed and invaluable as we plod through the struggles of daily life, seeking to become free from the sins of our times. Nevertheless, the scriptures should set the doctrinal standards and should be the source of light, truth and doctrine, rather than opinion, tradition and personal interpretation.

The scriptures or 'standard works' have become a secondary source because; it takes effort and time to study them well enough to know the doctrines contained in them, much less where to find them. Everyone has their favorite scripture verse and quote to pass along in Gospel Doctrine class, but to know the scriptures requires constant effort and study. Few times (if that many) the word "read" is used in reference to the scriptures, mostly words are found like: "lay hold, obtain my word, grasp firmly, feast upon, ponder in your hearts, seek diligently and study." All these phrases imply more than 'reading' to justify our obedience as we reach the gratifying goal of; time, verses, or chapters fulfilling the perceived requirement set by a righteous guilt. The scriptures should always be read consecutively (by chapters, verses, or time) however, one should be studying, searching pondering and feasting, topically besides the reading that one might accomplish.

The importance of the scriptures or 'standard works' are easily seen below in a few quotes from Church leaders as they explain that not just priesthood leaders, but even prophets are held accountable to the doctrines and teachings, found in scripture rather than traditions or opinions. This accountability rests upon all, from prophet to primary teacher:

#### Joseph Fielding Smith

It makes no difference what is written or what anyone has said, if what has been said is in conflict with what the Lord has revealed, we can set it aside. My words, and the teaching of any other member of the Church, high or low, *if they do not square with the revelations, we need not accept them.* Let us have this matter clear. We have accepted the four standard works as the measuring yardsticks, or balances, by which we measure every man's doctrine. (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.3, p.203)

You cannot accept the books written by the authorities of the Church as standards in doctrine, only in so far as they accord with the revealed word in the standard works. (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.3, p. 203)

The Lord has given us the four Standards which lie at the foundation of our faith. Each member of the Church should be so well versed that he, or she, would be able to discern whether or not any doctrine taught conforms to the revealed word of the Lord. . .The fact remains, however, that too many of the members have not taken advantage of their blessings and obligations, and therefore they are unable to distinguish between truth and error. *The "lay" members of the Church are under obligation to accept the teachings of the authorities, unless they can discover in them some conflict with the revelations and commandments the Lord has given. There are times when the leading brethren have expressed their own opinions on various subjects. This they have a perfect right to do.* They have divided on political questions; some belong to one political party and others to another. This they have a perfect right to do. (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, Vol.2, p.113)

Harold B. Lee

We have the standard Church works. Why do we call them standard? *If there is any teacher who teaches a doctrine that can't be substantiated from the standard church works—and I make one qualification, and that is unless that one be the President of the Church, who alone has the right to declare new doctrine—then you may know by that same token that such a teacher is but expressing his own opinion. If, on the other hand, you have someone teaching a doctrine that cannot be substantiated by the scriptures, and more than that, if it contradicts what is in the standard Church works, you may know that that person is teaching false doctrine, no matter what his position in this church may be.* The President of the Church alone may declare the mind and will of God to His people. No officer nor any other church in the world has this high and lofty prerogative. When the President proclaims any such new doctrine, he will declare it to be a revelation from the Lord. (Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye In Holy Places*, p.109-110)

It is not to be thought that every word spoken by the General Authorities is inspired, or that they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost in everything they write. *I don't care what his position is, if he writes something or speaks something that goes beyond anything that you can find in the standard church works, unless that one be the prophet, seer, and revelator—please note that one exception—you may immediately say, "Well, that is his own idea." And if he says something that contradicts what is found in the standard church works, you may know by that same token that it is false, regardless of the position of the man who says it.* (Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye In Holy Places*, p.162-163)

Ezra Taft Benson

We know that Satan has great power to deceive, and because of this, we must be aware. The safeguard against his sophistry and deception has been specified by revelation. We are to give heed to the words of eternal life. In other words, we must understand and live by the revelations the Lord has granted to His prophets. These are contained in the four standard works and the written and public declarations of our current prophet. (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p.404-405)

Bruce R. McConkie

*The books, writings, explanations, expositions, views, and theories of even the wisest and greatest men, either in or out of the Church, do not rank with the standard works. Even the writings, teachings, and opinions of the prophets of God are acceptable only to the extent they are in harmony with what God has revealed and what is recorded in the standard works.* (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 764)

If scriptures are to be added, or doctrines changed it can only be done by the “President of the Church” not by any other general authority or church leader. The scriptures are the standards for prophet and apostle alike and only the ‘Prophet and President of the Church’ has the authority to make any changes.

These are just a few of the quotes about the Scriptures as ‘standard works’ many more are available. Nevertheless, the ‘standard works’ are the standards of doctrine and truth and the modern day prophets and apostles are held accountable to these standards of truth.

Everyone has a favorite General Authority to quote and rely on for insights and teaching. However, the scriptures are the standard even for the prophets and all priesthood leaders. Without a standard there is no standard for doctrine and truth, remembering God is the same yesterday, today and forever. The priesthood leaders teach when they speak in local and general settings how to become better saints. They teach those concepts and principles that will help all listeners develop a better character in striving to develop that relationship with God. Leaders must adhere to their call to ‘perfecting the saints for the work of the ministry and the edifying the body of Christ.’ In doing this great work of teaching and ministering the scriptures are always the standard of truth and doctrine.