

Opinions, Traditions, Interpretations and Scripture

The smorgasbords of doctrinal interpretation, opinion and tradition blind the ‘eyes and make ears heavy’ (Isaiah 6:9-10) when it comes to comprehending doctrinal truths. Those who feed themselves and serve others at the table of tradition and opinion rather than the nourishing feasts found in the standard works fail to realize the scriptures are the best commentary on the scriptures, especially when the scriptures are allowed to speak for themselves. Every individual is an expert on personal opinion to the point of infallibility, but when views have no root in scripture as a standard of eternal truth, true doctrines, concepts, and principles are often discarded with the proverbial bath water. When the lens of scripture is not used to determine doctrinal truths, the resulting views will be out of focus and blurred. Who can argue against personal opinion, belief, or thought? Unless there is an accepted standard source of truth that can be referred to, the discussion is over when one states, ‘I believe, I think’ or even ‘I was taught’. The modern culture has subtly taught the individual to trust in their own arm of flesh and to question everything based on personal learning, opinion, and choice, be it politics, health, food and even religious beliefs and doctrines. Changing a person’s mind is difficult, but changing a tradition is almost impossible.

To preserve energy, time, and thought many members of the church often base their doctrinal beliefs on personal feelings or the opinions of their accepted authority, be it the statements of family members, teachers and leaders. This is seen in the overwhelming market of scriptural *Cliff Notes* authored by those who profess to make the scriptures easy to understand if one would just look through *their* personal lens. Some, but not all, Latter-day Saints justify their obligation to read scripture by purchasing ‘made-easy scripture commentaries’ and the never-ending supply of supposed enlightenment found in the LDS Harlequins and fiction mingled with scripture. God has already provided (for the ‘weakest of saints) the best seller of the ‘*Scriptures Made Easy*’ and the ‘*Scriptures for Dummies*’ in what is labeled as: “*The Standard Works*”.

The greatest revelatory source available is a personal study of scriptures, combined with prayer. Read and study the words of God rather than a secondhand commentary sometimes flawed by the imperfections of education and opinion. Think of what the Lord has done through the centuries from the prophets and early apostles, writing and transmitting their inspired teachings, to the reformation that was founded on personal reading of scripture without commentary. Even the founding of our great Gentile nation was based on religious freedom with the protected right to interpret the word of God personally rather than a controlled understanding. The Lord delights in plainness and that plainness he made available for everyone to read and understand without the need to be trained for the ministry.

When entering almost any church bookstore, the scriptures will be found only in the most remote and unseen part of the establishment, while the LDS fiction often consumes more shelves than does books on scripture and doctrine. This is not necessarily the fault of the bookstore establishment, but most often the fiscal economy of demand. Looking at the table nearest to the door displaying the bestseller selection and hottest trends will overtly reveal where the minds of the mass market might be found. There should be no surprise at the plethora of opinions propagated that might be incongruent with the standard of scripture, especially when the standard works are forced by today’s traditions to take a back seat in the bus and are hidden on the back wall of the store.

Tradition is almost always stronger and will endure longer than true doctrine. Today the greatest hurdle in missionary work is overcoming tradition and opinion. One purpose that The Book of Mormon was written is the intent to dispel the 'traditions of the fathers' that blind the mind as well as the eyes. This was an underlying obstacle in teaching the gospel in the New Testament and was addressed specifically by Christ and the Apostles. Christ taught that a broken heart and contrite spirit is required to move beyond tradition and beyond personal opinion. It is not just hard to be wrong, its hard to even think one might be wrong, and the religious ego desperately fights to be right for self-survival, refusing to believe that one's basic beliefs and life-views could be wrong. Scripture should be used to abolish the traditions of the past and create a change of heart.

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

The teachings of the Savior and the Apostles, even though founded on scripture, began a war against the Pharisaic egos and traditions that eventually led to the crucifixion of Christ in Judah and martyrdom of the Apostles throughout the Roman world. Eternal truths found in scripture often become much too volatile for false traditions. This being said let's take a scriptural and traditional look at the Garden of Eden and our first parents.