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## Testimony/Spiritual Witness Concerns

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## Chapter 9

### Testimony/Spiritual Witness Concerns

*43) Every major religion teaches that God bore witness to their beliefs/prophets/scriptures.*

Answer: The Spirit can teach all people truth for which they are prepared (all according to their own “language” and “understanding”). All that is good comes from God and if any righteous person seeks to do good, God will give them the truths that lead them to that goodness. Mormonism asks others to bring all of their spiritual manifestations and then add to them by embracing the additional blessings that can be had in the restored gospel.

Critics imply (or outright claim) that non-Mormons receive spiritual witnesses to things that cannot be harmonized with the witness received by Mormons. Nonsense. While it’s certainly possible that someone might claim to receive a spiritual witness that Joseph Smith was a fraud or that the Book of Mormon is a work of fiction (and to those people I would simply say, “Follow the dictates of your own conscience”), few non-Christian religions ask their members to seek spiritual witnesses for anything. Most non-Christian religions don’t ask their follower to pray to know if their holy books or doctrines are true. They may receive an unsolicited testimony of truth in their books or doctrines, but that’s likely because there is much truth in most religions of the world.

A Christian may ask to know if the Bible is true, and good for them. How does that prove that the Book of Mormon is false? A Catholic may ask to know if the Pope is led by God. I believe he is. A Protestant may pray to know if her minister is led by God. An affirmative answer is probably a good sign that they are.

In 1978 the First Presidency, under the leadership of Spencer W. Kimball, published the following:

The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.<sup>22</sup>

God knows that His children are all different and that what works for one may not work for all. He also knows that we are all at different individual levels of spiritual understanding, devotion, and exploration. As we read in James:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father.... (1:17).

One of the special things about Mormonism is that we don’t claim to have the corner on truth. Joseph, in fact, said: “One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive

truth, let it come from whence it may.”<sup>23</sup> You can’t receive truth from “whence it may [come]” if you already have all truth or expect it to come only from established sources.

The LDS Church *does* claim to have authority which is unique to Mormonism. We claim, for instance, to have a prophet whose sphere of stewardship—the family for which he is authorized to receive revelation—is the entire human family. A pastor can receive revelation for his congregation. The Pope can receive revelation for Catholics. A mother can receive revelation for her family.

All of these people can receive revelation for their realm of stewardship—and all within the confines of their own “language” (which as noted before includes gospel understanding). Obviously, if they have not accepted revelations given to modern prophets or for unique LDS scriptures, then some of their gospel understanding may be curtailed. This doesn’t prevent them from receiving revelation but it does limit their ability to understand certain revelations or to obtain revelations on things for which they are not prepared (back to the algebra after basic math analogy).

The second unique thing about Mormonism is authority—heavenly endowed keys which authorize and ratify covenants between God and His children. While the covenants are a necessary part of becoming like the Father and the Son, the Lord knows that not everyone will get the chance in this life to understand and reject or accept these covenants. His plan, therefore, includes an option for those who may need to make the choice in the afterlife.

These unique elements of Mormonism in no way minimize the spiritual power, direction, and influence of righteous non-Mormons. While critics try to make it an us vs. them dispute, nothing could be further from the truth.

*44) It’s arrogant to deny others’ spiritual experiences.*

Answer: See above. We don’t deny such spiritual experiences. We accept them. Joseph Smith said, “Have the Presbyterians any truth? Yes. Have the Baptists, Methodists, etc., any truth? Yes. They all have a little truth mixed with error. We should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up, or we shall not come out true ‘Mormons.’”<sup>24</sup>

*45) Feelings are an ineffective way to determine God’s truth.*

Answer: I might ask what method would be more effective in determining God’s truth? A scientific test, perhaps? A discussion addressing this query in detail is far beyond the scope of this booklet, but it should at least be pointed out that a scientifically proven God opens all kinds of other weird dilemmas regarding agency, a collapse of God’s plan for His children, and the simple fact that *no scientific evidence* can convince (will compel) every person to accept a truth—it ain’t happenin’. I know there will be some who might disagree with me on this point, but for those, I’ll just have to say—wait for my next book when I discuss this issue in greater detail.

A spiritual witness is more than just feelings. Spiritual things—including the existence of God and the reality of the Resurrection and Atonement—cannot be tested under a microscope.

Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned. Can we know spiritual truths without feelings? Science tells us that all of us use feelings all of the time in determining truth. It's just plain hooey to think that smart people only use logic and rationale in making important decisions and in determining what they choose to believe.

*46) Joseph Smith received a revelation to obtain a Canadian copyright for the Book of Mormon but failed—i.e., his prophesy failed and therefore he was a false prophet.*

Answer: Balderdash! (I could say baloney again but I like using these fun old-fashioned terms instead.) The revelation on securing a copyright in Canada was conditional. Basically God said that they would be successful if the people in Canada didn't harden their hearts. They did, and the copyright wasn't secured. God doesn't force us (or anyone) to conform to what's in our best interest. We all have the agency to reject God.

*47) After the failed Canadian copyright prophecy Joseph told David Whitmer that some revelations are from God, some are from the Devil, and some come from our minds. How are we supposed to be able to tell the difference if he couldn't?*

Answer: David Whitmer made this claim 57 years after the event occurred (let's sample *your memory* 57 years later and see how accurate it still is on the specific words of a conversation). It's also important to remember that Whitmer never returned to Mormonism and believed that Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet. Intentionally or unintentionally our minds reconstruct our memories to fit what our positions are when we attempt to recall the event. In Whitmer's case, he undoubtedly would have painted Joseph with a brush that colored him as a fallen prophet—that brush would have included Whitmer's selection of wording when reconstructing Joseph's attitude on his failure to secure the Canadian copyright.

*48) Paul Dunn was a lying General Authority. Many members felt the spirit when he spoke despite the fact that the stories were false.*

Answer: Paul Dunn made some unfortunate errors in judgment. While *some* of the stories he told were fabricated or embellished, the principles he taught were true. Jesus deliberately told fictional stories—parables—yet I'm sure that many of his listeners felt the Spirit testify to the truths of the doctrine He was teaching. The Spirit testifies to the truth of those things which ultimately lead people to God, not to ancillary details—fictional, embellished, or misremembered—which serve as mere vehicles for the larger message that they are used to convey (see, for example, my discussion on the Old Testament in #79).

*49) Many members have made bad life decisions based on inspiration.*

Answer: We are taught to make decisions by study and also by faith (D&C 88:118). As Oliver Cowdery learned when he attempted to translate the plates, we are expected to work out our issues first, then turn to the Lord to see if we've come to correct decisions. When we rely on only some of the available tools that the Lord has given us, it may decrease the likelihood that our

decisions are the ones which God would recommend. It's also important to remember that sometimes things that look like failures to us are events that lead us in inspired directions. The Smith family's Vermont crop failure, for example, is what caused them to move to Palmyra, New York, where Joseph was able to retrieve the Book of Mormon plates.

*50) You can feel the "spirit" watching a touching movie.*

Answer: A witnesses of the spirit isn't just something that makes you feel good or cry, it often affects both the heart and mind and brings a sensation to both that is different than the tears that are brought on by a sad or feel-good movie or book (see my four-legged table metaphor above).