



Type: Book Chapter

---

## A Discussion of Lectures 3 and 4: The Imperative and Unchanging Nature of God

Author(s): Rodney Turner

Source: *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*

Editor(s): Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

Published: Provo, UT; Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University,  
1990

Page(s): 199-220

---

**Abstract:** No abstract available.



The Religious Studies Center is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of the Religious Studies Center.

<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

*A Discussion of Lectures 3 and 4*

# The Imperative and Unchanging Nature of God

---

Rodney Turner

**I**n the winter of 1834-35, the Prophet Joseph Smith instructed the “school of the Elders” in Kirtland, Ohio, on the subject of faith. The first of the seven discussions subsequently published in the Doctrine and Covenants defined faith, while the second established the fact that God was its ultimate source and object. We will now treat the third and fourth lectures concerning God’s character, perfections, and attributes, and how those divine qualities relate to one’s ability to exercise a saving faith. In doing so, a certain amount of interweaving of the ideas in the two lectures will occur.

Thirty-nine verses from the Bible and two from the Doctrine and Covenants are quoted to “prove” the premises of these lectures. In the Lectures on Faith, God’s moral nature is extrapolated from the Bible, not the Book of Mormon or other modern scriptures. An even stronger argument can be made using these latter-day sources. However, we must understand that such proof is textual, not empirical. No wholly spiritual or other-worldly proposition can, in the scientific sense, be demonstrated. This is necessarily the case. If the validity of scripture was, like gravity, self-evident, there would be no need for faith, virtue, or the witness of the Holy Spirit. Hence Moroni’s admonition to those who have read the Book of Mormon to “ask God . . . if these things are not true” (Moroni 10:4). If the validity of the Book of

Mormon were self-evident, there would be no necessity to “ask God.” Likewise, had mankind’s knowledge of the premortal first estate been retained, the exercise of moral agency in this second estate would have been significantly compromised.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, if the consequences of good or evil were immediate, again there would be no need for faith in God’s eventual justice. In mortality, to protect the unworthy, and therefore the unprepared, actual proof of spiritual realities must be merited. Hence, Moroni’s statement: “Ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

### True Faith Versus False Faith

But the trial of faith is only as valid as the faith itself. A vain or false faith can only produce erroneous results. Still, many religious people view faith pragmatically as an end in itself: faith in faith. It does not matter what you believe as long as you believe in *something*. This utilitarian approach to faith is the equivalent of whistling past the graveyard—a psychological crutch for limping through a dark world. The notion that one god, or one religion, is as good as another is an attempt to democratize the principle of faith. But faith has no saving power if it is directed toward false gods or false religious concepts and practices. Jesus taught: “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the *only true* God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3; emphasis added). No matter how fervent one’s supposed faith, to be ignorant of that God and his will is to be without a valid hope of salvation. A faith compounded from religious error is the ultimate “vanity of vanities” (Eccl 1:2).

“If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. . . . *It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the Character [sic] of God*” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 343, 345; hereafter

---

<sup>1</sup> Scripture teaches that the physical universe is a witness for Christ. See Moses 6:63; Alma 30:44; Hel 8:24; D&C 88:41-47.

*TPJS*). These remarks by Joseph Smith, alluding to God's material character as a resurrected being, summarize the central issue of religion. God is the key to man's true identity; to know who and what God is, is to know who and what we are. Conversely, ignorance of God is ignorance of oneself.

False gods beget false religions. The primary reason contemporary Christianity is riddled with misconceptions about the gospel of Jesus Christ is that it is blind to the essential truth about the God it purports to worship. The gospel is an extension of God's nature. It is precisely what it is because God is what he is. How can we understand the gospel if we do not understand the God who authored it?

## God's Existence

Faith cannot exist in a vacuum; a measure of knowledge—real or imagined—must precede it. We must know *about* before we can believe *in*. We cannot have faith in someone or something of whom, or of which, we have no knowledge (LF 2:18; 3:6). Paul asked: “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom 10:14). Contrary to the views of most social anthropologists, the origin of belief in a supreme being was not human reason, but divine revelation. Man did not rationalize God into existence; man did not invent God as an explanation for the then- mysterious workings of nature. Rather, the Almighty appeared to Adam and Eve “and it was through this means that the thought was first suggested to their minds that there was a God” (LF 2:31). The almost universal belief in God originated with the patriarch of the human family.

The “great first cause” has never been identified; indeed, there probably never was such a “cause.” God not only exists, he has always existed. He—like his priesthood—is “without beginning of days or end of years” (Alma 13:7; Moses 1:3). He is “God over all, from everlasting to everlasting” (LF 3:19). In this timeless sense, “God” is not one solitary being, but the sum

total of all those men and women who achieve a fulness of exaltation. President Brigham Young spoke to this point: “How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and when men were not passing through the same ordeals that we are now passing through. That course has been from all eternity, and it is and will be to all eternity” (*Journal of Discourses* 7:333; hereafter *JD*). William W. Phelps, a close associate of Joseph Smith, reflected this sentiment in verse:

If you could hie to Kolob in the twinkling of an eye,  
And then continue onward with that same speed to fly,  
Do you think that you could ever, through all eternity,  
Find out the generation where Gods began to be?  
(*Hymns* #284).

However, in speaking *only* of the Father of Jesus Christ, the Prophet Joseph Smith said: “We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see.” The Prophet then explained that the Father once lived as a mortal on another earth and “worked out his salvation with fear and trembling”—presumably under *his* Father and *his* God (*TPJS* 345, 347). When understood in their contexts, the statements of Brigham Young and Joseph Smith are in perfect harmony. While we know of no identifiable personage who has always existed *as God*, yet God—at least in *principle*—has always existed. As far as has been revealed, “God” simply *is*.

## The Material Nature of God

Zophar, one of Job’s “comforters,” asked: “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (Job 11:7). The answer is no (LF 3:7). God’s divine nature cannot be discovered by human reason. His *genuine* nature was no more a product of human reason than was belief in his existence. Indeed, reason at its presumed best (as represented by the ancient philosophers and the Christian creedmakers)

defined God as a totally transcendent, formless, immaterial, spirit essence, which definition Parley P. Pratt once called “a pious name for atheism.” This type of “piety” suited the unembodied spirit Lucifer perfectly: unable to overthrow the Almighty, he sought to redefine him out of existence.

Unfortunately many have wrested the Bible into a game of “Trivial Pursuit.” In spite of the preponderance of passages describing God in anthropomorphic terms, one brief verse in John, “God is a Spirit” (4:24), is seized upon to *prove* the contrary.<sup>2</sup> However, the Son of Man came into the world to manifest both the spiritual and material natures of the Father. The resurrected Lord told Mary Magdalene: “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). The evening of the same day he invited his astonished disciples to: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39).

Yet Christian theologians ignored the plain doctrines of these scriptures and twisted the identities of the Father and the Son into a philosophical pretzel—endowing the Son of God with two totally distinct natures—one divine, one human. His divine nature was with the Father in heaven at the same time his human, incarnate, nature was with mankind on earth! Unable either rationally or scripturally to explain how God can be absolutely one supreme being of immaterial essence, and yet be absolutely three distinct persons (one having a corporeal body of flesh and bone),<sup>3</sup> the theologians resolved the dilemma by begging the question and declaring the doctrine an incomprehensible mystery. Thus the subjective creeds of men were given precedence over God’s objective revelation of himself. Thanks to the learned philosophers who chose to ignore the plain teachings of Jesus and Paul,

---

<sup>2</sup> The JST reads: “For unto such hath God promised his Spirit” (John 4:26).

<sup>3</sup> Catholic doctrine is to the effect that the resurrected corporeal body of Christ became transcendently spiritual—though still real—when (as recorded in Acts 1:9) he ascended into heaven.



Athens' "Unknown God" remains unknown (see Acts 17:22-23; *JD* 6:318).

## False Gods

### *Ancient Gods*

What ungodly gods Satan, the "god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4), has concocted! Sin, ignorance, and devilish revelation filled the ancient world with a pantheon of sightless, soulless idols. Because these dumb horrors were symbols of power rather than principle, religious morality as we think of it played a very minor role in the overall scheme of things. The result was a nightmare of fanaticism, cruelty, and depravity: torture, human sacrifice, prostitution, and incest figured prominently in the work of the devil's "priesthoods."

For example, in homage to the Mother Goddess of Western Asia (who went by many names: Aphrodite, Astarte, Artemis, Diana, Venus, etc), "sanctified harlotry" in her temples was widespread (see Frazer 330-32).

The cruel gods of the ancient world were fashioned in the image of their cruel worshippers. But inhumane acts were not limited to the idolatrous nations of antiquity. The histories of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and other contemporary world religions are rife with devilish chapters of fanaticism, torture, murder, and immorality. Only God knows the full catalogue of crimes committed in his name.

### *Modern Gods*

If the gods of Greece and Rome—tempered somewhat by philosophy—were somewhat less immoral than those of earlier millennia, still they were far from patterns of piety. The Olympian myths ascribe to Zeus (or Jupiter in the Latin myths) and his celestial entourage many of the same weaknesses and vices common to mankind. The ten commandments were not an issue

for these gods and the men they ruled. Ritual, not righteousness, was the central issue.

Such is often the case even now among the world's religions, sects, and cults. Millions of Christians and billions of non-Christians not only continue to worship false gods (Hinduism has thirty million deities), but often with a credulous emphasis on man-contrived rituals. They flourish along a continuum from the very simple and prosaic to the most outlandish and bizarre. Light the candles, burn the incense, bang the gongs, bathe in sacred rivers, parade the images, intone the mystical formulas, and pray the prayers—all this serves to meet the demands of whatever gods there be. And so confusion abounds as a result of mankind's efforts—eagerly abetted by the god of this world—to fashion gods in his own kaleidoscopic image.

For others, God is either dead, irrelevant, or his existence is highly questionable. Some prominent scientists, intellectuals, and even religionists are secular humanists whose creed states:

As secular humanists . . . we find that traditional views of the existence of God either are meaningless, have not yet been demonstrated to be true, or are tyrannically exploitative. Secular humanists . . . find insufficient evidence for the claim that some divine purpose exists for the universe. They reject the idea that God has intervened miraculously in history or revealed himself to a chosen few, or that he can save or redeem sinners. They believe that men and women are free and are responsible for their own destinies and that they cannot look toward some transcendent Being for salvation. We reject the divinity of Jesus, the divine mission of Moses, Mohammed, and other latter-day prophets and saints of the various sects and denominations (Kurtz 17-18).

For such thinkers, man has not simply created a god in his own image; man is his god. Man is the author of moral law and the determiner of what is morally acceptable. Science has presumably emancipated mankind from the ancient myths that kept it in bondage to foolish illusions about the supernatural. There is no supernatural, metaphysical, or spiritual opposition to temporal or physical reality. All reality is circumscribed by the natural order—the experiential order that can be weighed, measured, analyzed, and controlled by man.



The secular humanists believe that, while man, of necessity, must work in harmony with such manifest natural laws as gravity and electromagnetism, he does not need a corresponding moral order, and indeed it does not exist. Man—individually and collectively—will provide the moral framework for human happiness and security. Such is the position of secular humanism, pure existentialism, and naturalism. These philosophies permeate much of higher education in Europe and America today.

### The One and Only True God

*As we are indebted for the idea of his existence to a revelation which God made of himself to his creatures, in the first instance, so in like manner we are indebted to the revelations which he has given to us for a correct understanding of his character, perfections, and attributes. Because without the revelations which he has given to us, no man by searching could find out God (LF 3:7).*

Regardless of who or what men worship, the fact remains that they can only be as moral as their gods. Likewise, their faith is only as valid and their salvation is only as assured as their gods and religions are true. A false faith may have a certain pragmatic value in time, but it is of very questionable worth in eternity.

Christ declared the creeds an abomination because they produced an abominable harvest of religious tares choking and obscuring the wheat of truth—especially the truth about the literal fatherhood of God upon which the doctrine of eternal marriage and exaltation is based. For if God is not an exalted man, he can have no children to aspire to a like glory. But he is the Man of all men, the measure by which they will be judged. To the extent that any life falls short of his perfection, it is a less successful, less significant, and less glorious life than a life can be. We will look now at the character and some attributes of the one and only true God as listed in Lectures 3 and 4, and will show how latter-day revelations and prophets support the teachings of the Lectures.

### *An Almighty God*

*For unless God had power over all things . . . men could not be saved (LF 4:12).*

Nothing exists outside of God. As Paul told the Athenians: “For *in* him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28; emphasis added). His Spirit emanates from his presence “to fill the immensity of space” (D&C 88:12). His dominions are co-extensive with all matter, space, and time. And matter, space, and time are subject to his will; he can compress, expand, or modify them as he sees fit. The Almighty is as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent as it is possible to be.

To know all that can be known is to possess all the power that can be possessed. Knowledge is the source of power. Knowing all things enables the Almighty to organize, control, and sustain all things. His faith in himself is absolute: “There is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it” (Abr 3:17).

The seventh lecture on faith states: “Faith, then, works by words; and with these its mightiest works have been and will be, performed” (LF 7:3). God’s own works are works of pure faith, unadulterated by physical effort on his part. He *speaks* and “the power of his voice” causes all creation to obey: “Yea, and if he say unto the earth—Move—it is moved. Yea, if he say unto the earth—Thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours—it is done. . . . And behold also, if he say unto the waters of the great deep—Be thou dried up—it is done” (Hel 12:13, 16). Jehovah told Abraham: “I stretch my hand over the sea, and it obeys my voice; I cause the wind and the fire to be my chariot; I say to the mountains—Depart hence—and behold, they are taken away by a whirlwind, in an instant, suddenly” (Abr 2:7).

Truly, the Almighty is a miracle-worker whose ways and works remain a yet-to-be-revealed mystery to the most knowledgeable of mortals. The recognition of this fact is one definition of humility. Unfortunately this quality is sadly lacking in a growing number of self-ordained “intellectuals” who persist in

defining the Creator's moral and intellectual character in their own finite image. Joseph Smith noted: "It is the constitutional disposition of mankind to set up stakes and set bounds to the works and ways of the Almighty" (*TPJS* 320). In other words, men seek to shrink God down to their own intellectual size, to de-miracle-ize the Miracle Worker. But Moroni wrote: "God has not ceased to be a God of miracles" (Mormon 9:15). As long as God is God, there will be miracles.

Having the power to organize, control, and sustain all things, the Lord can also sanctify, immortalize, and exalt all things. Our faith in God is contingent upon God's faith in himself. The motivating confidence we have in the reality of those as-yet-unexperienced immortal wonders which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor 2:9), together with our hope of attaining them, rests upon our unshakable trust in that divine power resulting from God's own perfect faith and knowledge.

### *The Moral Attributes of God*

Jesus said: "There is none good, but one, that is, God" (Matt 19:17; *TPJS* 303). In every way, the Most High is infinitely more than man at his best. Because of the vast gulf created by that essential, but cataclysmic, event called the Fall, the noblest of men only approximate his glory. Being holy, God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts. And yet the Lord is a man of passions. He *really* loves, and he *really* hates. He does not speak in monotones. His reactions are not impersonal, mechanical, or contrived. He *feels*. And those feelings run the gamut from love and compassion to wrath and judgment.

He is responsive to the ever-changing circumstances stemming from the moral agency he has given his children. The Redeemer told some Saints in Missouri: "I, the Lord, was angry with you yesterday, but today mine anger is turned away" (D&C 61:20). He also said: "I command and men obey not; I revoke and they receive not the blessing" (D&C 58:32).

The Lord, not man, is the ultimate determiner of what is right and wrong. Joseph Smith wrote:

That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. . . . God said, “Thou shalt not kill”; at another time He said, “Thou shalt utterly destroy.” This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire (*TPJS* 256).

It is for the Lord with his “all-searching eye” to judge men; it is not for myopic men to judge the Lord, or even to presume to judge in his stead. To do so is “the greater sin” (D&C 64:9).

### *God Is Unchanging*

*For without the idea of unchangeableness in the character of the Deity, doubt would take the place of faith (LF 3:21).*

God is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (1 Nephi 10:18; Heb 13:8). He “changes not”; he is ever the same, and “his course is one eternal round” (D&C 3:2). That course is centered in his never-ending work: “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Mormon testified: “For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity” (Moroni 8:18). Consequently, the principles of life and salvation emanating from him are likewise unchanging. It is because God is unchanging that men must change. They must repent and put off “the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19) if they are to achieve sanctification and become one with God’s unchanging nature.

Because God is ever the same, his government—wherever it may be found in the eternities—is ever the same. It is government by unchanging principles—government by priesthood. The plan of salvation reflects heaven’s government and is likewise ever the same. As there is but one God, so is there but one priesthood, and one plan of salvation. Favoritism is not

shown one eternity or one world over another anymore than it is shown one person over another.

### *If God Changed*

Since God's fundamental nature cannot be improved upon, it follows that his nature must remain what it has always been if he is to remain a perfect God (see Alma 42:15; 3 Nephi 12:48). To modify or abandon any essential attribute of that nature would inevitably diminish him and alter the very meaning of God. He would forfeit perfection. Not that he would cease to exist as an organized intelligence, or that he would be dethroned (for who or what could dethrone him?),<sup>4</sup> but he would no longer be the God he has always been.<sup>5</sup> He would be transformed into a new and different deity ruling over new and different realities. Such an eventuality would have an unimaginable impact on the moral character of eternity. The very nature of truth and law would be altered. Certitude would be lost, because a god who abandoned one attribute could abandon another. Shock-waves of uncertainty would rumble from world to world destroying the very foundation of faith as we know it.

Applying this purely theoretical argument to the aggregate of the gods in eternity, if one of them were to modify or discard even a single attribute, the perfect unity that makes all gods one god would be violated (see D&C 38:27). To restore that unity, such a fallen being would, like Lucifer, have to be cast down (see Isa 14:12-15).

---

<sup>4</sup> "God" is a general or generic title as well as a specific one. In LDS thought it may pertain to one Being or to all of those achieving any degree of divinity—from the lowest to the Most High—even as the Melchizedek priesthood pertains to one or all of those ordained to any office therein. A renegade individual such as Lucifer (D&C 76:25-27) is subject to being cast down by the Gods. However, in saying that God would cease to be God, Alma is speaking of God in the collective or universal sense rather than in any relative sense of the word.

<sup>5</sup> That God is ever the same is stated six times in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 10:18; 2 Nephi 2:4; 27:23; 29:9; Mormon 9:9; Moroni 10:19), twice in the Doctrine and Covenants (20:12; 35:1), and once—in reference to Christ—in the Bible (Heb 13:8).



## *A God of Truth*

*For without the idea that he is a God of truth . . . men could not have the confidence in his word necessary to exercise faith in him (LF 3:22).*

*For without the idea of the existence of this attribute [truth] . . . all would be confusion and doubt (LF 4:16).*

Truth is the sum of reality or, as John Jaques wrote, “the sum of existence” (*Hymns* #272). God is omniscient in part because he is omnipresent via his Spirit throughout all reality or existence. He is above, in, through, and round about all things (D&C 88:41). He possesses a fulness of truth, being the very “Spirit of truth” (D&C 93:26). He is the Supreme Intelligence whose wisdom excelleth that of all other organized intelligences combined (see Abr 3:19; also *TPJS* 353). He is the totality of that light and truth constituting his immortal glory (see D&C 93:36).

Unlike his rebellious son Lucifer (who was “a liar from the beginning”—D&C 93:25), God, by nature and by definition, “cannot lie” (Enos 1:6; Ether 3:12; D&C 62:6). A lie is a contradiction of the truth. A God of truth cannot be a self-contradiction. Nor does he deal in illusions. His “Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13).

The Lord is a holy being because he is a *whole* being. He is, in every sense, the *mature* Man. His integrity is absolute. Zion—unity in all things—is his supreme objective (see Moses 7:31). It results from each being bound to each in one grand kingdom of light and truth. Because “truth embraceth truth” (D&C 88:40), it can be added upon, but never discarded. Unlike the theories of men, there is no cause to fear that time and circumstance will negate an eternal truth, or that new facts will prove one false. Rest assured, the truths God has made known to us are constant, compatible, and in accordance with “things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24).



### *A God of Mercy*

*For without the idea of the existence of this attribute [mercy] in the Deity, the spirits of the Saints would faint in the midst of the tribulations, afflictions, and persecutions which they have to endure for righteousness' sake (LF 4:15).*

God is a merciful God: gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, patient, and long-suffering. If he were not, human nature—a relative compound of ignorance, immaturity, instability, and impotence—would render the hope of eternal life an impossible dream. The gulf between divinity and humanity, holiness and unholiness, is so vast that any faith we might muster would eventually be swallowed up in paralyzing doubt. How could we ever become acceptable to a flawless God with his “all-searching eye” (Mosiah 27:31)? How could we ever be at ease, much less happy, in his presence? But because of our faith in the redemptive power of Christ, we can “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help [us] in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Without divine mercy, heaven would be hell. Moroni understood this point: “Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you” (Mormon 9:4-5; compare Alma 12:14-15; Mosiah 27:31).

Paradoxically, it is his very holiness which makes mercy essential if we are “to be received into the kingdom of the Father to go no more out, but to dwell with God eternally in the heavens” (3 Nephi 28:40). For salvation depends far more upon what God is and does, than upon what we, of ourselves, are or can do. Hence, Nephi’s words: “It is by grace [mercy] that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). We are hopelessly lost unless a higher nature overwhelms and transforms our fallen natures.

This higher nature—with its attendant powers—is found in Jesus Christ. Elder James E. Talmage wrote:

Without Him mankind would forever remain in a fallen state, and as to hope of eternal progression would be inevitably lost. The mortal probation is provided as an opportunity for advancement; but so great are the difficulties and the dangers, so strong is the influence of evil in the world, and so weak is man in resistance thereto, that without the aid of a power above that of humanity no soul would find its way back to God from whom it came. The need of a Redeemer lies in the inability of man to raise himself from the temporal to the spiritual plane, from the lower kingdom to the higher (26-27).

When we have demonstrated all of the faith, repentance, and obedience required of us, it will still be insufficient; we must still rely “wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:19). Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God’s indispensable mercy. The Father can be merciful only because the Son atoned for the sins of his fallen brothers and sisters.

Divine mercy is not limited to those moral and spiritual issues which dictate our destiny in some future life; he is merciful in the here and now. His invisible hand is extended to us far more often than we realize. Only at the last judgment when the full account of God’s dealings with mankind—collectively and individually—are revealed, will we learn the full extent of his providential care. But that this care is available to us all is unquestionable. Alma testified: “I do know that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day (Alma 36:3; compare 38:5). We are never alone, even when we feel abandoned. God is not some remote, disinterested “force” in the universe. Jehovah, in the person of Jesus Christ, left his high mountain and joined his people in the low valley of mortal trials, temptations, and suffering (see Mosiah 3:7; Alma 7:11-12; Heb 4:15).

Human nature being what it is, there is a danger that God’s mercy will be interpreted as divine weakness or indifference (see Rom 2:4-6). This would be a fatal error. We must not be slothful

simply because God is merciful. The Almighty has infinite patience, but he will not extend it to us infinitely. “For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction” (2 Nephi 26:11). There comes a day when—where repentance is concerned—there is “time no longer” (D&C 88:110). We are given adequate opportunity to reveal our true selves to ourselves, to establish what we everlastingly are. God can do no more; he will not coerce us into being what we do not choose to be. The last judgment is the finish line. When we reach it, the race with ourselves is over, and “the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed” (Alma 34:33) will descend upon mankind’s day of probation.

### *A Law-abiding and Just God*

*For without the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity, men could not have confidence sufficient to place themselves under his guidance and direction (LF 4:13).*

Whether by necessity or design, the fact remains that God operates within a framework of law. And law—to be law—must be constant and consistent. It must be dependable. There is a network of independent, but harmoniously interlocking systems of law governing all things, organic and inorganic, in the numberless kingdoms filling the immensity of space: “And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions. All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified. . . . [God] hath given a law unto all things, by which they move in their times and their seasons; and their courses are *fixed*” (D&C 88:38-39, 42-43; emphasis added; compare Abr 3:6-10).

Law did not create God; God created law. The Almighty did not begin his career as a cosmic Columbus who stumbled upon supposedly self-existing natural laws. If there was “a great first cause” of all things, he was it. He is, as President Spencer W. Kimball said: “The Creator who originated every law” (5).

The Prophet Joseph Smith is quoted as saying that God, “finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to *institute laws* whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself” (TPJS 354).

Justice—the righteous, impartial application of law—is God’s quintessential attribute. Whereas mercy, redeeming grace, is contingent upon an infinite atonement, justice is a non-contingent principle. From the divine perspective, God—to be God—need not always be merciful, but he must always be just. He gives the unrepentant sinner justice, but not mercy (see Alma 42:13). Were God to cease to be just, he would become an arbitrary monarch, ruling by will and whim without regard for truth and law. Lucifer aspired to be just such a monarch. Had he succeeded, the chaotic scenes of blood and horror Satan has promoted on this earth would doubtless become eternity-wide. In time, all reality would dissolve itself into one vast hell, and death would envelope all things (see 2 Nephi 9:9). Of course, this will never happen, but if it did, the cruel gods of the ancient world would come alive at last.

In the administration of his laws and their attendant blessings, the Lord is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34; Moroni 8:18; D&C 1:35). He is blind to gender, color, race, material wealth, social position, and intellectual attainments. All such purely temporal factors are swallowed up in his glory. All stand equal before his law; there is no double standard. Heaven’s blessings are based on obedience, not favoritism (see D&C 130:19-20). He is not merciful to a predestined or chosen few; all have access to his grace regardless of when they learn of his will. “All men are privileged the one like unto the other; . . . he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Nephi 26:28, 33). Being no respecter of persons means that all are equally blessed or deprived according to principles of law.

Although Jesus Christ labors in every possible way to save mankind, he will not forever continue to do so. In time, even God finally gives up on the incorrigible among us. He told Joseph

Smith: “I will take vengeance upon the wicked, for they will not repent; for the cup of mine indignation is full; for behold, my blood shall not cleanse them if they hear me not” (D&C 29:17; compare 133:51-52). The Prophet warned: “God . . . passes over no man’s sins, but visits them with correction, and if His children will not repent of their sins He will discard them” (*TPJS* 189). The democratic notion that one individual’s deeds are as noble and deserving as any other’s is clearly false. We hear much about the sacredness of life, but life is only as sacred as we make it. The life of a murderer or rapist is a defiled life and will remain so unless there is repentance. To equate such a life with that of a virtuous person is a mockery of reason.

While the Lord is impartial, yet heaven has its “favorites” (LF 6:4). They are spoken of as the “noble and great” (Abr 3:22-23), the “chosen” (D&C 121:40), the “sanctified” (D&C 20:34), and so forth. They constitute what Elder Matthew Cowley called “the aristocracy of righteousness” (253). But they are not born aristocrats, they are exalted by merit, not by chance. “Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God” (1 Nephi 17:35). We read that “Nephi was more faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord—therefore he was favored of the Lord, for the Lord heard his prayers and answered them” (Mosiah 10:13). And James wrote: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Justice is a minority voice in this world. Although moral agency is a gift of God, because of wickedness it comes at a high price and continues to take a fearsome toll among the innocent. But the Lord hears the cries of the oppressed. They are assured of eventual deliverance via divine judgments. One of the greatest evidences of true conversion is the ability to accept injustices with the grace with which Jesus accepted them (see 1 Peter 2:19-25).

Faith embodies the conviction that, despite any notions to the contrary, when the members of the spirit family of the Almighty stand before him at the last judgment, “every nation,



kindred, tongue, and people shall see eye to eye and shall confess before God that his judgments are just” (Mosiah 16:1).

### *A God of Love*

*And lastly, but not less important to the exercise of faith in God, is the idea that he is love (LF 3:24).*

“God is love” (1 John 4:8). Every act of God is an act of love. Every act is dictated by his benign wisdom. Love encapsulates all godly virtues even as it sums up all human duties. Jesus equated love with doing good to all men, friend and enemy alike (see Matt 5:44). Paul wrote the Romans: “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (13:10; compare Gal 5:14.)

*Agape* or divine love is a quality of the spirit. It is more than mere sympathy or concern, it is a personal, emotional identification with someone or something outside one’s self. It is garnished with a profound sense of compassion. God could be holy, just, unchanging, impartial—even merciful—and still remain dispassionate. But love weeps (see 3 Nephi 17:21-22; Moses 7:28-40; John 11:35). It is acquainted with grief. It was personified in Jesus. He not only died for love’s sake, but was its greatest living exemplar. Both as a mortal and as a resurrected being, he involved himself in the pains of a sick and suffering humanity (see D&C 133:53). He was a caring Christ.

The Lord expresses his love for us as much as we permit him to. As with any parent, the Father’s love can be rejected and rendered impotent. The question then, is not does God love us, but do we love God? For while God is a loving Father, he is not an indulgent one. He practices law-abiding love. So it is a false idea that love forgives all and conquers all. If it did, the sacrifice of the Son of God would bring the whole human race to its knees, and there would be no need for perdition. But goodness has its limits; its ability to triumph over evil is not absolute. The sin of sins is not only to reject, but to betray, the sacrifice of love offered up by the Father in the person of his Beloved Son (see D&C 76:35; 132:27).



As spirit is drawn to Spirit, so is love drawn to Love (see D&C 88:40). John wrote: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Above all other attributes, it is the love of the Father and the Son that ultimately draws the souls of men and women to them “without compulsory means” (D&C 121:46). It is a compelling power. Few men have experienced such visions, revelations, and angelic visitations as were granted Joseph Smith. If ever a man would seem unneedful of others it was he. And yet the Prophet remarked: “When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind” (*TPJS* 240). The pure love of Christ is at the very heart of the Father’s plan of salvation. It illuminates every divine attribute in the sanctified until they are ablaze with light and truth and become one with love as God is one with love.

### *A Happy God*

To the character and attributes listed in Lectures 3 and 4, I would add the characteristic that God is a happy God and that happiness is man’s goal. Lehi taught, “men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). Alma called the gospel “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8, 16). Benjamin assured the obedient that they would “dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness” (Mosiah 2:41).

The Father—the happiest of men—endowed his Beloved Son with a “fulness of joy” (3 Nephi 28:10). He is in the business of “happifying” his children by sharing his own nature with them. Heber C. Kimball remarked:

I am perfectly satisfied that my Father and my God is a cheerful, pleasant, lively, good-natured Being. Why? Because I am cheerful, pleasant, lively, and good-natured when I have His Spirit. That is one reason why I know; and another is—the Lord said, through Joseph Smith, “I delight in a glad heart and a cheerful countenance.” That arises from the perfection of His attributes; He is a jovial, lively person, and a beautiful man (*JD* 4:222).

Our individual capacity for happiness was first developed in the premortal estate. It was there that we learned the rudiments

of joy from the gods set over us. As we partook of their spirit, we experienced a measure of the happiness righteousness produces. In this world of oppositions, joy is veiled; it cannot be experienced in its fulness—a fulness of joy comes only with resurrection (see D&C 93:33; 101:36). But, from time to time we can—like Elder Kimball—partake of the joy of the Spirit. Indeed, we not only have the opportunity, but the obligation, to do so. A perpetually unhappy Saint is an oxymoron, a self-contradiction. President Spencer W. Kimball remarked: “If you are not happy today, you may never be happy” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* 173). “Happiness,” said the Prophet Joseph, “is the object and design of our existence” (*TPJS* 255). Righteousness alone can bring it to pass. To the degree that each of us acquires the divine nature, we will enter into “the joy of the Lord” (see D&C 51:19). Consequently, when all is said and done, each of us will be as happy as we have chosen to be, which is to say, we will be as much one with God as we have chosen to be.

## Conclusion

The Lectures on Faith testify that the great plan of salvation is compatible with, and a reflection of, the virtues and powers of the one and only true God. To that testimony I add my own. We have every reason to exercise faith in him unto salvation. Our gracious Father has revealed himself through his Son, his Spirit, his prophets, and his scriptures. To that extent we know him. And, to the extent that we know him, we know ourselves (see *TPJS* 343). It only remains for us to magnify that knowledge until we are perfected and glorified in him.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cowley, Matthew. *Matthew Cowley Speaks*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954.

Durant, Will. *Our Oriental Heritage*. Vol 1 of *The Story of Civilization*. 10 vols. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954-67.

Frazer, James G. *The Golden Bough*. Abridged ed. in 1 vol. New York: Macmillan, 1922, 1931.

*Hymns*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985.

*Journal of Discourses*. 26 vols. 1854-86.

Kimball, Spencer W. "Absolute Truth." *Ensign* (Sep 1978) 8:3-8.

Kurtz, Paul. *A Secular Humanist Declaration*. N.p.:n.p. 1980. Pamphlet reprinted from *Free Inquiry* (Win 1980) vol 1.

McConkie, Bruce R. *Mormon Doctrine*. 2nd ed. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979.

Pratt, Orson. *The Great First Cause or the Self-Moving Forces of the Universe*. Liverpool: Franklin R. James, 1851.

———. "The Pre-existence of Man." *The Seer* (Aug 1853) 1:113-21.

Talmage, James E. *Jesus the Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981.

*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Comp. Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976.

*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*. Ed. Edward L. Kimball. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982.