Week 20 is scheduled for study May 10-16, 2021. Light and dark. Truth and error. How do we tell the difference? Why does it matter?

Day 1

Doctrine and Covenants 49:5-23 - The truths of the gospel can help me recognize false teachings.

"He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (Doctrine and Covenants 50:24). Ponder how you are receiving light by continuing in God.

The title of today's lesson may, on the surface, seem like a self-evident truth - sort of a "Duh!" comment. In reality though, this is a deep and wondrous promise that can only be found in the Lord's Church.

How many years did the Christian churches exist without the Spirit to teach them right from wrong? We don't know the answer to that question, but it was a long time from the Apostasy to the Restoration. And look at all the false doctrines and practices that were introduced into the religious practices of those who wanted to follow Christ during that time. They simply had no way of identifying what was false from what was true. Why? Because they did not have the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The whole premise of sections 49 and 50 is that even the prophet Joseph Smith needed to be taught how to discern the truth from the error in these issues he was confronting. Joseph was learning right along with the Saints. After centuries of false doctrines being introduced into the various churches, much was needed to clarify and enlighten the Lord's Saints so they could feel comfortable that what they were doing was the right way. This is a privilege that only God's own Saints can experience.

There were many, even before Joseph's time that knew the churches had gone astray, but they had no way of clearly identifying exactly where the churches had gone astray, and how far off base they really were. All they knew was that what they had during their lifetime didn't match with what they were reading in their New Testaments. These good Christians wanted to worship in the spirit and practice of truth, but lacked the ability to fix the problems they saw by themselves. They lacked the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the Lord's priesthood needed to set things right again.

Other topics we'll discuss during this week's lessons will help to further clarify today's topic.

Day 2

Doctrine and Covenants 49:15-17 - Marriage between man and woman is essential to God's plan.

"He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (Doctrine and Covenants 50:24). Ponder how you are receiving light by continuing in God.

Until very recently, the concept that marriage between a man and a woman was essential to our happiness was like saying we need light to be able to see. Well of course we need light to be able to see. What an idiotic statement! It only seems idiotic, because everyone believed it and we took that to be a self-evident truth that needed no restating. But this is no longer the case with the issue of marriage. Now we have people marrying themself, marrying others of the same sex, and wanting to marry their pet. The world has lept off a very steep cliff of reason and sound thinking on this issue, and the bottom of the fall is still nowhere in sight.

This is why the Lord has caused His servants to write the Proclamation on the Family. This is why we have Conference talks on the subject. We need, as Saints, to remember that God's ways are not the same as the ways of the world. We also need to be reminded that the world is moving further and further away from God's declared norms, and that if we adopt any of the world's beliefs and practices it will only bring us misery and sorrow in the end.

The Shakers being addressed in section 49 were no different than any of the others whom Satan had convinced that celibacy was the only way to go in order to please God. Catholic monks and clergy had been doing that for centuries. This was a great opportunity for the Lord to emphasize one of His earliest revealed doctrines, which is the importance of the marital union and the families they enable to be created. It makes sense that if marriage brings happiness, furthers God's plan for His children, and is essential for our exaltation, that Satan would do his best to convince us that marriage was anything but good for us. The further he can drive us from cherishing the covenants of marriage, the more ultimate misery and damage he can do to us.

The principle that men and women need each other in order to be exalted is not just about helping out God's plan. Note that the statement in the title of today's lesson says that marriage is "essential." That means we cannot experience the greatest blessing God has to offer us without it. Whether we marry in this life or the next, we all need to look forward to this blessing and prepare for it. And once we receive the opportunity to marry, we need to do everything in our power to treat it with all the respect and sacredness we can muster. After all, a good marriage, sealed in the temple, and by the Holy Spirit of Promise is the holy grail we all should be seeking. Most will not find it until the next life, but many can find it here. But we must remember that it has to be done the Lord's way, for His ways are the way of happiness, and lasting happiness can be found no other way.

Day 3

Doctrine and Covenants 50 - The Lord's teachings can protect me from Satan's deceptions.

"He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (Doctrine

and Covenants 50:24). Ponder how you are receiving light by continuing in God.

As a master of deception, Satan has to be able to cloak and disguise many of his teachings to mankind so they aren't refused, but appear beneficial, and are accepted willingly. There were so many ways in which people were receiving manifestations of one sort or another that even the prophet Joseph Smith had to go to the Lord and ask for help in what to do about them. He didn't know which were right and which were wrong either. The Lord is always patient with His children, and He taught Joseph, as the first in the priesthood, how to discern for himself what was from God, and what was from Satan. Even the prophet had to test these practices to see what spirit brought them to the people. He was given the keys to discern whether they were from God or from some other source.

This is just one more reason for staying close to the scriptures and the prophets' teachings. As mentioned in yesterday's lesson, Satan is a master of deception, and he works very hard to cloak his false and damning practices in robes of supposed righteousness. Most of what Satan introduces to the children of God are partial truths, wrapped in false practices and premises. Only occasionally does he introduce false practices cut wholesale from the fabric of outright lies. But even these outlandish lies serve a purpose. For they make his less noticeable lies seem even more innocent to our eyes.

The ability to recognize truth from error comes from the gift of the Holy Ghost. And our ability to listen to His voice and impressions comes from our consistent study of the scriptures, our habit of praying regularly, and our studying and following God's called and properly ordained servants. Yes, I do believe we have to actually follow the prophet in order to stay in the good graces of the Holy Ghost. I do not believe we can ignore or malign the prophet and still receive revelation from the Holy Ghost. That is contrary to reason, and the operations of God's plan for our happiness.

Day 4

Doctrine and Covenants 50:13-24 - Teachers and learners are edified together by the Spirit.

"He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (Doctrine and Covenants 50:24). Ponder how you are receiving light by continuing in God.

Have you ever considered why "teachers and learners are edified together by the Spirit?" How does this happen? The scriptures are very clear that if we don't have the Spirit with us we cannot teach. Why is that? Can't we still state the truths of the gospel and have them learned by those to whom we share our message? Yes, we can talk about the gospel. Yes, those who listen can learn facts about the gospel. But no, without the Spirit no one is converted to the gospel and its teachings. And the whole point of sharing and talking about the gospel is to lead everyone to deeper conversion to the gospel of Christ. Learning facts about the gospel can save no one. Only conversion leads to salvation.

This makes inviting the Spirit paramount when we pray, teach a class, have family discussions about Christ and his gospel, or talk to those of other faiths about Christ's gospel. The Spirit is the one who converts people. We have no ability to convert, only God can do that. The Spirit's role in the Godhead is to testify of truth and of the reality and supremacy of God and Christ. The Holy Ghost is the member of the Godhead our Father in Heaven has given to us to be our personal instructor and tutor in all things spiritual in nature. Without the Holy Ghost, we simply cannot understand or comprehend spiritual truths. It is the Spirit who opens the eyes of our understanding to help us see and understand things of an eternal nature. Intellectual knowledge alone doesn't save anyone.

FHE/Personal Study

Doctrine and Covenants 50:23-25 - Understanding light

It is so important that we grasp the difference between light and dark that I am restating the verses you have already read so they are fresh in your mind.

> 23 And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness.
>
> 24 That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.

> 25 And again, verily I say unto you, and I say it that you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from among you;

I'm not quoting Star Wars here, but real truth. Light is perceptible, recognizable, and leads to knowledge and true understanding. There is power in light. It is through light or truth that God organizes and governs all things. It is through the light that comes from God that all things are kept in order and are governed.

Satan chose the dark. There is power in darkness, but it is of a chaotic nature and doesn't bring order and happiness as light does. Darkness thrives on secrets, mystery, and selfishness. Darkness is demonstrated and is manifested in ignorance and fear. It is through the darkness of ignorance and lies that Satan forges the chains of hell that bind the human family down to struggle in misery and to do Satan's bidding, being tossed as a rudderless vessel on the waves of the sea. There is a reason the world is confused today. Satan divides, splits, and pits factions against each other. He does this with ideas and philosophies as well. His darkness is designed to make it impossible to recognize truth, even when it is right in front of our faces, for he mixes it with so much misinformation and outright lies that it is impossible to tell how it is wrong.

The Lord does not deal in darkness at all. All good things come from God. Just as Satan beckons to us to embrace the mysteries that entice us to explore greater darkness, so too does God show us truth and help us learn good from evil so we are free to choose which we want to govern our life.

In mortality the issue between light and dark is all about the use of our agency. The Lord, by teaching us clearly, and by giving us understanding, through our own obedience to His commandments, shows us how we can better use our moral agency to obtain greater light and truth. Satan would have us walk in ignorance. That ignorance allows him to slowly take our agency from us until he has it all. At that point we can no longer choose right from wrong, for our agency has been freely given to another, and once he has our agency in full, he is not going to give it back. The Lord would have us be free to choose for ourselves. That is what the whole war in heaven was about.

The war continues here on earth. At the moment the world is rapidly giving all their moral agency to Satan, who is convincing them they have rights that need reclaiming, sins God prohibits that they can justify and take pleasure in, and so much more. Each time someone accepts one of Satan's lies and decides to live by it and defend it, they

give a bit more of their moral agency to him. Only repentance can reclaim it. So Satan tells them they don't need to repent, that repentance is slavery and entrapment.

Those who repent and are forgiven of their trespasses are shown how they have been freed from the entrapments of their former ways. They are now free to choose to continue on to greater freedom or to return to their old way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. But when we have repented and have been shown the light, the truth, the punishment for returning to our old ways is far greater, for we are rebelling against the God of Heaven with our eyes wide open.

The value of light and truth is that we do indeed learn how things are, were, and are to come. We begin to comprehend the eternal nature of our own beings, and come to better appreciate our relationship to the God who rules the heavens and all of eternity. Light brings with it love and all the virtues that create godliness.

This life really is just a continuation of the war of beliefs we fought in the premortal world. The darkness that Satan promotes can only survive if he can pit us against God and each other. His ways are ways of defiance and hate. God's ways promote unity, cooperation, love, peace, growth, and happiness. It is important that we realize there are no other forces at play here. There is God and His ways, and Satan and his ways. We will choose one or the other, for to not choose one is to choose the other. Mortality was set up this way, to make us choose. This is the only moral thing we cannot avoid choosing, and our judgment in the end will reflect which path we chose and how well we lived up to that choice.

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That Which Is of God Is Light

Week 20