

SCRIPTURE: John 16:12-16

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mind; therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

Send out thy light and thy truth, and let them lead me, and let them bring me to thy holy hill.

A number of years ago a vacation trip took me and my family far into the woods of northern Minnesota, almost to the Canadian border. On recommendation of some friends who had been that way and who described in glowing terms the beauties of the scenery, we took a little travelled road which led for some sixty miles through utterly wild virgin timber. The road we were following was indicated on our road map, so we had every assurance that it would come out where the map said it would.

All went well until we came to a fork in the road. The fork did not appear on the map, and there was no road sign to indicate which fork would lead me to the main highway town that I wanted to reach. One road seemed to be about as well improved and as much travelled as the other. Direction meant nothing, because the road literally wound in all directions, following the ridges through the woods. Arbitrarily we chose the left fork, and in a few minutes wound up at a dead end in a logging camp, where we found the information that set us on the right road.

I couldn't blame the map-maker for this error and delay. The map was correct as of the time when he drew it, but a logging camp has moved in after the map was drawn, and cleared a new roadway. If the map had shown the roadway before it was cleared, the map would have been wrong. But by trying to follow a map that was not adjusted to changed conditions, I got on the wrong road.

This experience somehow reminded me of one line from a hymn we sometimes sing -- "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me," which goes, "Chart and compass come from thee," and remembered how surprised I was one day when I picked up a hymnal from another denomination and found the verb in the past tense: "Chart and compass came from thee." Perhaps in that little one-letter change lies much of the difference between the philosophy of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the philosophy of their Christian friends of other churches. Others say that revelation came from God in time past, and was preserved for us between the covers of the Bible -- which is our unchanging, unchangeable chart and compass for the voyage of life. We believe that revelation comes today -- that the chart and compass are still coming, are corrected and kept up to date daily.

Lest this statement give you a wrong impression let us hasten to add that we too believe that revelation came in time past. We agree that there is no need to change or add to the basic principles of salvation revealed in the Bible. The main highway of salvation is still there, and it is still in the same old place; it still leads in the same direction. We may fully trust the Bible, the chart or road map which shows the way to salvation. But increasingly we find that we need to supplement the old charts with corrections and additions designed to meet new conditions and new needs. A lot of the side roads that lead to the main highway have been changed, and a lot of new side roads have been opened up since the Bible was written. There have been tremendous upheavals in our religious, social, economic, and political worlds. We need not throw away the old chart and compass, but we do need to check the chart

and compass that came in times past by the chart and compass that continues to come day by day, to be sure that they are adequate for today's changed and changing needs. On the other hand, we also need to check the chart and compass that come today by those that came in the past, to make sure that we do not miss the main highway of salvation towards which we are heading, and which is still in the same place that was shown on the old map.

God does not change. His plan of salvation does not change. But the needs, the environments, the capacities of men do change, and God's revelation to each succeeding generation needs to be adapted to the needs and capacities of that generation. All of God's word has never yet been given to man, once and for all, and indeed it can never be. The reason is simple and obvious. At any given time, man's capacity to receive is vastly and inconceivably inferior to God's desire and capacity to give and to reveal. Have you ever tried to answer a simple childish question like "What makes it rain?" in terms that a five year old could understand? Have you ever tried to tell your two-year-old how much you love him? If so, you have some faint idea of the problems God faces in revealing himself to men. In the first place, to answer a childish question you are forced to use a childish vocabulary, which does not contain any words adequate to convey the meaning which you understand perfectly. In the second place, there is an utter lack of capacity in the child to understand the principles involved in the production of a rain storm, and an even greater lack in capacity to understand the depths of parental love.

When God tries to reveal himself to man, he is confronted with much these same difficulties in us. To speak to us, he is forced to use our vocabulary, which is utterly inadequate to convey the meaning he comprehends perfectly well. And even if there were adequate words which God might use, we are still much too immature spiritually and mentally to comprehend even the fractional part of what he is talking about. There is an indescribably longing as well as great truth expressed in Jesus' statement, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." The apostles, though they had been in the closest association with him for three years, were still babes in understanding.

The Bible, which was written by these men and their associates, was to some extent limited by their limited capacities to receive and to understand. The Holy Spirit could not teach them the deeper truths of eternity until they had learned the fundamentals. Men cannot learn multiplication and division until they understand the principles of addition and subtraction; they cannot learn plane or solid geometry until they know the principles of algebra. God's ability to give is limited by man's capacity to receive. We limit God by our want of expectancy, by our lack of moral cleanliness and worthiness to receive. Much truth waits to be revealed to men, and will continue to wait, until men are able to bear, to use properly, to understand that which God has long been ready to give to them.

Most Christian people believe in some form of revelation. They pray, and believe that God will answer prayers for guidance and enlightenment. They pray that God will speak through the minister who expounds the scriptures from the pulpit, and believe that their prayers are often answered. We, too, believe most whole-heartedly that God answers prayer with this kind of revelation. Any man who is needy, and who has at least a degree of capacity and worthiness, can go to God with problems, and receive an answer adjusted to his needs and his capacity. But the answer to one man's problem may not be applicable to the problems of an entire congregation, or of the worldwide church. For revelation in this field, we Latter Day Saints believe that the office of prophet is set in the church.

What is a prophet? To some who do not know any better, a prophet is one who foretells the future. This may be one of his functions, but at best it is a minor one, for the future is always contingent on human choices. A prophet is a "forth-teller." It is his business to speak forth in the name of God, giving to the people

the word of God, the will of God, the warnings of God, the instruction and counsel of God. It is foolish to assume that the prophetic ministry of two thousand years ago is adequate for us today. The children of Israel while in the bondage of Egypt needed one type of prophetic ministry which was given under Moses. Later when an Assyrian invasion threatened the very existence of the kingdom, a completely different type of prophetic ministry was needed, and God spoke through Isaiah. Still a different type of prophetic ministry was given under completely different conditions by Ezekiel and Daniel and the minor prophets, and by the New Testament writers. But now we are living in the atomic age. Is the prophetic ministry of two thousand years ago adequate for us today? Or do we not need some new interpretation of age-old truth, some help in adapting that truth to modern needs and modern conditions? Do we not need some divinely called and heavenly inspired "forth-teller" to call us to repentance today, and to show us the way of salvation in a world so complicated by the wonders and inventions of science that man's power to harm and destroy his fellow man has been multiplied a million-fold?

Latter Day Saints believe that the prophetic office was restored to earth with the restoration of the church and the priesthood authority to represent God. Joseph Smith is accepted as a prophet. His descendants who have succeeded him in the office of prophet and president of the church are regarded as prophets. Through them there come to the church from time to time, as God sees need and capacity and wills to speak, the instruction, counsel, warning, reproof, or direction which will guide the church in choosing its official personnel, aid it in interpreting and understanding doctrine, charting its future course, and accomplishing its divinely decreed purposes. No one else save the prophet who is divinely called and set apart by ordination to that official position in the church may receive revelation binding upon the church as a whole. Any man may receive revelation for himself, but only the prophet receives revelation for the church.

When such revelation comes, it is the prophet's duty to put it into the best possible language, and present it in documentary form to the legislative body of the church -- its General Conference. Here it is studied first by the quorums, or the official groups of such ministers as the apostles, seventies, bishops, high priests, and elders. They seek the confirming witness of the Spirit to its validity as the word of God. They use their best intellectual powers to check its doctrinal and moral teachings with the standard of the Bible, which is our first scripture. From these quorums of official ministry, the document goes to the delegates on the conference floor. If all these bodies approve, this new revelation of the will of God is ordered published in our Book of Doctrine and Covenants, which is our open canon of scripture, not to take the place of what has gone before, but to supplement it, to bring it up to date, and to relate anciently revealed truth to modern needs and conditions.

The Book of Doctrine and Covenants is much like any other book of Scripture. It has its high points and its low. It contains some instruction intended primarily for individuals, and a great many revelations calling men to official positions in the church. On the other hand, many of its revelations are rich in the testimony that Jesus lives and that he is the Son of God -- and after all, this is the heart of revelation. "The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy." Many of its revelations make clear the doctrinal teachings of the Bible in such a way that the church can teach them with plainness and conviction. At least some of its revelations were more than a hundred years ahead of their time in revealing scientific truth concerning the relation of physical and the spiritual, and the nature of the physical universe -- truth revealed in 1832 which the scientists of this atomic age are just now beginning to understand. Many of its revelations give warning of the consequences of godless, unrepentant living if we continue until we are ripened in iniquity as a nation and as a world. Many of these warning predictions have come to pass; the fulfillment of others is at the door.

The Book of Doctrine and Covenants can teach any open minded man marvelous truths concerning the nature, will, and purpose of Deity; can teach him of the mysteries that lie beyond death and the grave, of judgment, of reward and punishment, or resurrection and eternal life.

More important perhaps than any of these is the knowledge that whenever the church has need, whenever it is confronted by a problem which human wisdom cannot solve, we have an officer in the church whose duty and function it is to receive the will of God when God chooses to speak, to supply our need, and to help in solving our problems. The gift of prophecy, which may be diffused throughout the membership as each individual has need, is implemented through a prophetic office to bring instruction, edification, and counsel to the church.

We invite you to read, to study, to investigate our contemporary scriptures, and to share with us in the benefits which flow from them to those who are willing to receive.