

Foundational Principles Shouldn't we Believe God in the Temple, Rather than Lucifer?

Ian R. Harvey (November, 2016)

“The greatest lesson we can learn in [im]mortality,” President Thomas S. Monson has taught, “is that when God speaks and we obey, we will always be right.”

—Originally from Ensign, Oct., 2007, with [notation] to indicate the active eternal principle

I was struck with the irony of this October, 2016 First Presidency Message “The Blessings of Obedience” (Ensign, p.4). I know it is a true statement. You know it is a true statement. It is also an eternal principle —timeless and unchanging—not subject to events, circumstances, situations, opinions, or cultural mores. ‘Eternal Principle’ means that it is true for all immortality as well as mortality. Then the irony is in *why-oh-why* do we culturally work so hard to justify *one single exception*— the exception of God’s commandments to our first parents just as they were being invited to Eden? This paper explains why we do not need to so justify any longer: because we can easily identify the source of the one perceived exception: Lucifer’s un-rebutted lies repeated to us over and over¹ in the temple pre-endowment.

The timeless foundational principle of believing God at face value has tremendous impact when applied beyond our own lives, and projected back to the Garden of Eden.

Let’s trace the boundaries of our foundational doctrine, beginning with belief in God.

We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.
—First Article of Faith

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them. Mosiah 4:9,10

Elder Bednar reinforced in the October 2016 conference that it is insufficient to believe *in* God, but that we also must *believe Him*: Believe His words. Believe His promises. Act accordingly. Square-one foundations are therefore set in: Believe in → *Do*. And *believing* God is the intermediate bridge between believing-in, and doing.

Is it possible to exercise faith in Him, follow Him, serve Him, but not believe Him?

I am acquainted with Church members who accept as true the doctrine and principles contained in the scriptures and proclaimed from this pulpit. And yet they have a hard time believing those gospel truths apply specifically in their lives and to their circumstances. They seem to have faith in the Savior, but they do not believe His promised blessings are available to them or can operate in their lives. I also encounter brothers and sisters who fulfill their

callings dutifully but for whom the restored gospel has not yet become a living and transforming reality in their lives. We come to know the Lord as we not only believe in Him but also believe Him and His assurances.

...

Believing Him is trusting that His bounteous blessings are available and applicable in our individual lives and families. Believing Him with our whole soul comes as we press forward along the covenant pathway, surrender our will to His, and submit to His priorities and timing for us. Believing Him—accepting as true His power and promises—invites perspective, peace, and joy into our lives.

— Elder David A. Bednar, “If Ye Had Known Me”, October, 2016

Others have also reflected on the importance of active *believing*, versus passive belief-in:

Discipleship is believing Him in seasons of peace and believing Him in seasons of difficulty, when our pain and fear are calmed only by the conviction that He loves us and keeps His promises.

— Elder Neil L. Andersen, “What Thinks Christ of Me?” April 2012

May we love Him so deeply and believe Him in faith so completely that we too obey, keep His commandments, and return to live with Him forever in the kingdom of our God is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

—Elder Robert D. Hales, “If Ye Love Me, Keep My Commandments”, April, 2014

God bless us all to believe Him, to accept Him, to worship Him, and to fully trust in Him, and to follow Him is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

— President Ezra Taft Benson, “Jesus Christ: Our Savior and Redeemer”, October, 1983

Once we truly believe God, then we can begin to realize the bounteous blessings He has in store:

Teach of faith in God’s plan of salvation. Teach that our sojourn in mortality is a period of probation, a time of trial and testing to see if we will do whatever the Lord commands us to do.

Teach of faith to keep all the commandments of God, knowing that they are given to bless His children and bring them joy. Warn them that they will encounter people who pick which commandments they will keep and ignore others that they choose to break. I call this the cafeteria approach to obedience. This practice of picking and choosing will not work. It will lead to misery. To prepare to meet God, one keeps all of His commandments. It takes faith to obey them, and keeping His commandments will strengthen that faith.

Obedience allows God’s blessings to flow without constraint. He will bless His obedient children with freedom from bondage and misery. And He will bless them with more light.

—Elder Russell M. Nelson, “Face the Future with Faith”, April, 2011

Obedience is God’s will and desire for us, so that He may bless us. Is there any margin for error here? Any leeway? Any tolerance for any exceptions? Elder Perry doesn’t think so:

“God reveals to His prophets that there are moral absolutes. Sin will always be sin. Disobedience to the Lord’s commandments will always deprive us of His blessings. The world changes constantly and dramatically, but God, His commandments, and promised blessings do not change. They are immutable and unchanging. Men and women receive their agency as a gift from God, but their liberty and, in turn, their eternal happiness come from obedience to His laws. As Alma counseled his errant son Corianton, “Wickedness never was happiness.” (Alma 41:10)

In this day of the Restoration of the fulness of the gospel, the Lord has again revealed to us the blessings promised us for being obedient to His commandments. In D&C 130 we read: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—“And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” Surely there could not be any doctrine more strongly expressed in the scriptures than the Lord’s unchanging commandments and their connection to our happiness and well-being as individuals, as families, and as a society. There are moral absolutes. Disobedience to the Lord’s commandments will always deprive us of His blessings. These things do not change.”

—Elder L. Tom Perry, “Obedience to Law is Liberty”, April, 2013

I believe that the words of the prophets have reinforced the well-established trustworthy nature of God, as well as our unbending obligation to both believe Him and to use righteous moral agency to act upon that belief. What do the living prophets have to say about the nature and characteristics of the adversary?

Like the fly fisherman who knows that trout are driven by hunger, Lucifer knows our “hunger,” or weaknesses, and tempts us with counterfeit lures which, if taken, can cause us to be yanked from the stream of life into his unmerciful influence. And unlike a fly fisherman who catches and releases the fish unharmed back into the water, Lucifer will not voluntarily let go. His goal is to make his victims as miserable as he is.

Lehi said, “And because he [Lucifer] had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind” (2 Nephi 2:18).

I add my voice today to the voices of my Brethren that Lucifer is a clever and cunning intelligence. One of the main methods he uses against us is his ability to lie and deceive to convince us that evil is good and good is evil. Right from the very beginning in the great Council in Heaven, Satan “sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him. ... “And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will” (Moses 4:3–4).

The battle over man’s God-given agency continues today. Satan and his minions have their lures all around us, hoping that we will falter and take his flies so he can reel us in with counterfeit means. He uses addiction to steal away agency. According to the dictionary, addiction of any kind means to surrender to something, thus relinquishing agency and becoming dependent on some life-destroying substance or behavior.

— M. Russell Ballard, “O That Cunning Plan of the Evil One”, October, 2010

To be without guile is to be free of deceit, cunning, hypocrisy, and dishonesty in thought or action. To beguile is to deceive or lead astray, as Lucifer beguiled Eve in the Garden of Eden. A person without guile is a person of innocence, honest intent, and pure motives, whose life reflects the simple practice of conforming his daily actions to principles of integrity.

...

If we are without guile, we are honest, true, and righteous. All of these are attributes of Deity and are required of the Saints. Those who are honest are fair and truthful in their speech, straightforward in their dealings, free of deceit, and above stealing, misrepresentation, or any other fraudulent action. Honesty is of God and dishonesty of the devil; the devil was a liar from the beginning. Righteousness is living a life that is in harmony with the laws, principles, and ordinances of the gospel.

— Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Without Guile”, April 1988

Satan, “the father of all lies” (2 Nephi 2:18), “the father of contention” (3 Nephi 11:29), “the author of all sin” (Helaman 6:30), and the “enemy unto God” (Moroni 7:12), uses the forces of evil to convince us that this concept applies whenever we have sinned. The scriptures call him the “accuser” because he wants us to feel that we are beyond forgiveness (see Revelation 12:10). Satan wants us to think that when we have sinned we have gone past a “point of no return”—that it is too late to change our course. In our beautiful but also troubled world, it is a sad reality that this attitude is the source of great sorrow, grief, and distress to families, marriages, and individual lives.

Satan tries to counterfeit the work of God, and by doing this he may deceive many. To make us lose hope, feel miserable like himself, and believe that we are beyond forgiveness, Satan might even misuse words from the scriptures that emphasize the justice of God, in order to imply that there is no mercy.

—Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Point of Safe Return”, April, 2007

The above timeless and unchanging principles constitute the most foundational aspects of our religion. There are pages and pages of doctrinal details that don't matter in the least, unless and until one aspect—uniformly and consistently conveyed above by modern prophets—is absolutely settled:

God is trustworthy and Lucifer is not.

On the surface, all we saints agree. The problem arises when we get into the details.

God is trustworthy—Especially in the Garden of Eden

I believe it is worth emphasizing that to believe God at face value is to absolutely believe Him when He speaks His intentions and expectations at all times without exception: during the Creation, when He issues His commands prior to introducing our first parents into Eden, and when He looks retrospectively back at how our parents treated the gifts and responsibilities they had been given:

Father's stated purposes and expectations prior to the Garden test:

And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them... ...they shall be very obedient. (Ab 3:25; Ab 4:31 emphasis added)

"If they should partake of the fruit thereof, then we shall provide a Savior for them" (from memory)

Father's intentions made clear at the introduction of the Garden test of moral agency:

And I, the Lord God, took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden, to dress it, and to keep it. [This phrase in no way suggests the man and his family would be ever confined to the garden... this is simply the first step, and it helps to consider the Garden as the first Temple of the world, the House of the Lord] And I, the Lord God, commanded the man, saying: Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it [agency to eat or not] is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Moses 3:15-17 with added emphasis)

Father's tender and angry response to our parent's unrighteous use of their agency:

The Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency; And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; [this is the essence of the test, and an expression of the touchstone² commandments] but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood; And the fire of mine indignation is kindled against them; and in my hot displeasure will I send in the floods upon them, for my fierce anger is kindled against them. Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name, also. Wherefore, I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also, and among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren. But behold, their sins shall be upon the heads of their fathers; Satan shall be their father, and misery shall be their doom; and the whole heavens shall weep over them, even all the workmanship of mine hands; wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer? (Moses 7:32-37)

President Packer told us when the Lord says "*Thou shalt not*", we had better pay attention".³ Does this instruction apply to us but somehow *not* apply to Adam and Eve? Of course it applies to everyone! Our God is infinite and eternal! When He conveys a commandment and a promise, we can absolutely trust Him that it is an eternal principle and that it applies in *all* situations, without rationalization (D&C 82:10). Here we have a thou-shalt-not commandment punctuated with "I forbid it", and yet culturally—in this single, isolated situation among our entire canon of scripture and among our entire body of doctrine—here alone do we go to great effort in spinning hypothetical rationalization why the Lord really intended, decreed, designed or needed *exactly the opposite*. Here alone do we find that blessings come as a result of *disobedience*. Here is the lone, isolated exception where we astonishingly find God being *cunning* and Lucifer being *true*.

For example, according to *traditional*⁴ LDS dogma of the Fall, Adam and Eve did not sin:

Joseph Smith taught that it was not a "sin," because God had decreed it. (see The Words of Joseph Smith, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980, p. 63)

—Elder Dallin H Oaks, *The Great Plan of Happiness*, October, 1993

We and all mankind are forever blessed because of Eve's great courage and wisdom. By partaking of the fruit first, she did what needed to be done. Adam was wise enough to do likewise.

—Russell M. Nelson, "Constancy Amid Change", October, 1993

"I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin. ... This was a transgression of the law, but not a sin ... for it was something that Adam and Eve had to do!"

—Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56, 1:114–15.*

I look at the contradiction and paradox between the clear, powerful statements of the prophets, earlier cited in the beginning of this paper, versus those directly above,⁵ as a comparison of timeless and unchanging *Eternal Principles* versus a specific attempt to understand a specific temporal event for which we have inherently conflicting information: The doctrines of Lucifer mingled with scripture.

According to Father's own words, He placed a cherubim and flaming sword to guard the way of the Tree of Life, so that our exiled parents might not partake of the fruit thereof, and live forever in their *sins*. Our Holy Father used the words "thou shalt not", "command", and "forbid". Do we *believe Him*? Why should we not? This is the essence of setting persistent belief in the garden infertility paradox⁶ as a foundation of greater import and precedence than the simple trusting and believing God's words.

Lucifer is not trustworthy

My agenda is to promote the cultural acceptability of speaking openly of Lucifer's lies—made to us in the temple—in firm confidence in our people: by listening and openly questioning, we will individually and collectively recognize the lies for what they really represent, and thus place ourselves in a position to receive great and long-promised blessings from the one true God.

In David Ridges' [The Book of Mormon Made Easier, Part 1](#), we read about 2 Ne 2 on p. 186:

"Satan only told one lie in the Garden of Eden, namely that they would not die. Otherwise everything he said was true. This is a reminder that he is a master at mixing enough truth into his temptations that it makes them seem okay."

I would like to quibble first about any idea that we should be sifting through Lucifer's great cesspool of lies looking for *any* small nugget of truth, and secondly question presumed experts'

reference to what Lucifer says in the temple, vaguely suggesting that his truths told there are so sacred that we must not speak them. Here I look to the Savior for guidance:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.
—John 8:44

Murderer: Murder well describes what Lucifer did to our many, many brothers and sisters who were cast down with him at the Council of Heaven: He separated them from the divine, and from the opportunity to have a body. This is also unquestionably what he did to Eve in beguiling her to eat the forbidden fruit. In both purpose and consequence, Satan, through the beguiled suicides of Eve and then Adam, committed human genocide.

There is no truth in him: If we take this phrase literally, there is not even a nugget to find in all his cesspool of lies. By openly questioning each of the statements he makes in the holy Temple, we flay his lies with the words of Life, as found in the scriptures.

When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it: I find nothing either sacred or secret about his works of darkness and find only cultural support for the ridiculous notion that his words in the temple should not be discussed. Within the scriptures on the other hand, Paul prophesies that the man of sin and his lies told in the temple should be revealed prior to the coming of the Lord; his secret works to be shouted upon the housetops.⁷ I find it utterly ludicrous that we should culturally defend—to the teeth—Lucifer's lies that he tells us in the temple. Lucifer is not trustworthy.

Knowing what the Savior said, and knowing it was not just the bitterness of sibling rivalry⁸ speaking, would our rationalizations of Lucifer's words carry any weight if we were to make them to the Lord Himself? When Eve was so brought to account, she made no claim that God had decreed what she had done. Instead she rightly indicated that the serpent had beguiled⁹ her.

We frequently hear intimated references to Lucifer's statements in the temple, directed to those who have ears to hear because they have been there. I find it disconcerting that we routinely quote or paraphrase Lucifer to justify certain precepts, while also demonstrating clear reluctance to actually attribute the quote to *him*. Do we not attribute him because most people rightfully do not accept Lucifer as an authoritative source of truth? Is it more acceptable to anonymously quote him because it strengthens or draws on the supposition that every word spoken in the temple must be true *because it is spoken in the temple*, in spite of who is actually doing the speaking? The most recent case of quoting Lucifer to rationalize all the bad that is happening in the world comes to us in the Sunday afternoon session of our Oct., 2016 conference, through Elder Evan A. Schmutz (emphasis added):

As we apply our “hearts to understanding,” we can increase in our ability to both endure our trials well and learn from—and be refined by—them. Such understanding provides an answer to the ageless question “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

Everyone listening today is acquainted with some measure of loneliness, despair, grief, pain, or sorrow. Without an “eye of faith” and an understanding of eternal truth, we often find that the misery and suffering experienced in mortality can obscure or eclipse the eternal joy of knowing that the great plan of our Father in Heaven really is the eternal plan of happiness. There is no other way to receive a fulness of joy. (God Shall Wipe Away All Tears)

Elder Schmutz referenced Elder Neal A Maxwell, who was slightly less cryptic when he astonished us with the ultimate source of our doctrine:

So much depends, therefore, upon our maintaining gospel perspective in the midst of ordinariness and the pressures of temptation, tribulation, and deprivation. As we come to love the Lord more and more, we can understand, rather than resent, his purposes. He who should know has said that there is no other way.

—Neal A. Maxwell, “Grounded, Rooted, Established, and Settled”, address given at Brigham Young University on 15 September 1981 (added emphasis)

Someday, I may undertake a serious reflection on the ridiculousness of suggesting that rape, war, abuse, torture and all the other instruments of Lucifer’s horrific reign constitute any possible path to happiness, rebutting that these and other forms of power mongering, brutality, privation and tribulation were designed and intended by God merely to provide ‘opposition’ for us. I suggest we do not understand what moral agency is, at all, when we persist in such delusions. Neither do we understand the nature of Godliness when we permit (or promote) characteristics of cunning and duplicity¹⁰ to cloud His character. Neither then, can we fully understand the Atonement.¹¹

From my perspective, we clearly live in Plan-B, described by the prophets as the Plan of *Salvation* in unmistakable terms—filled with meaning—of lost opportunity, contingency, predicament and our utter inability to help ourselves in any way: *snatch, rescue, ransom, probation, redeem, save, recover, restore and grace*. I have, elsewhere, prepared for publication a detailed analysis of the Plan-A, direct route to Happiness that must have existed because I *believe Him*, but which plan is totally lost to our awareness. The reader may find for him or herself the same principles conveyed in C.S. Lewis’s “Space Trilogy”, which allegory first describes mature, un-fallen¹² (righteous) races on one planet; then describes an extended garden temptation scene on Perelandra in which the isolated First Lady is tried and tempted over a period of months—but never succumbs. In the final book, Lewis describes the adversary’s ‘hideous strength’ in our own world.

From our hearts to our heads

I mentioned that my interest is to promote a cultural change making it acceptable among the LDS to speak openly of the things we hear Lucifer say to our first parents in the Garden and to us in the Temple. By being able to talk about his lies in our Gospel Doctrine classes, Relief Society, Priesthood, YM and YW meetings, we can ask fundamental questions such as: how does this apply to me today? Is Lucifer telling the truth? Why or why not? What are his motivations? Can't we always trust what God tells us? Are there exceptions to the question of obedience to Him, or to the irrevocability of the source of His blessings? Which god among the contending rulers of our earth is cunning, full of stratagem and feint? Which god's words can be taken at face value? Sister Bonnie Oscarson, Young Women General President said the following:

To believe, we need to get the gospel from our heads into our hearts! It is possible for us to merely go through the motions of living the gospel because it is expected or because it is the culture in which we have grown up or because it is a habit. “Do I Believe?”, April 2016

We attend the temple ritually—now culturally—and have become desensitized to the fact that Lucifer is speaking there. His words do not miraculously become more truthful or less treacherous *just because they are spoken in the temple!* I claim that to believe God we need to get what is in our hearts into our heads! We believe God in our hearts. We fundamentally distrust Lucifer! Let’s get that heartfelt intuition *back* into our heads! Let’s create a rational theology that is perfectly consistent in believing God and disbelieving Lucifer!

The following questions have surely passed across the collective and individual consciousnesses of many saints.

“Why were Adam and Eve unable to procreate in the garden after having been so commanded?”

“Why would God require disobedience to one Law to enable the fulfillment of another?”

“Why was subjugation to Lucifer required to demonstrate obedience to God’s will and intent?”

“Why do we say Eve was beguiled if she was only doing that which Adam was unwilling or unable to do?”

“Why was Eve punished and apparently placed subservient to Adam if she was merely obeying the inspiration to be disobedient?”

The problem, though, is that none of these paradoxical questions can possibly be answered, because each one is based on a false premise or assumption— that God *intended* it to happen this way.

Let us hew, therefore, to the timeless and unchanging principles believing God as we attempt to understand the paradox that comes to us in our traditional interpretation of the Fall. We cannot have two contradictory statements be taken as true principles, at the same time: believe God; disbelieve God. Obey god; disobey god. Do not fall for the temptations of the adversary; yet succumbing is not only okay in this one time and instance, it is required....

Over the years I have heard our anointed leaders urge caution regarding known limitations in our traditional understanding of the Fall of Eve and Adam. I accept their counsel that it is not enlightening to speculate on the above (or the many other related paradoxes). Instead I choose to believe that truth is revealed only by operating within the bounds of a set of assumptions focused on the true and eternal nature of God:

Agency sets the rule of law in our existence. This embodies:

Our right to make choices (be they righteous or not) according to our own will, without the superposition of *anyone* else's will.

Also the right to fail, for without this, there can be no *legitimate* opportunity to succeed.

Also the right to experience the consequences of choices, whether desired or not, whether anticipated or not. Without consequences, there can be no accountability. This is the essence of agency. Agency-enabled exaltation is the purpose of life: We can *choose* to become like Father—or like Lucifer. Sinful failure brings us to Lucifer's brand of death and the need for merciful intervention and salvation.

God is consistent and unchanging in His adherence to the principle of agency as embodied in the Law of Justice. He does not manipulate the daily tragedies and ecstasies of our lives. God's word is good. He says what He means. He harbors no hidden agenda.

I have discovered great joy in the application of the above assumptions within our existing canon of scripture and within the beautiful, revealed truths of the Temple. Paradox and mystery both flee from the Spirit when truth illuminates the shadows. So I want to share a different set of questions, directed at understanding the foundational events of the Fall. Constructed from true assumptions, these questions are worthy of generating a response from the Holy Spirit of Truth:

- 1) If I am commanded not to seek the fruit of the father of lies, what is the eternally prescribed method—the divinely preferred plan—for obtaining wisdom and understanding? What does God *always* expect from *all* His children within this divine plan?
- 2) What is different about this world as compared with all the others in Father's vast creation portfolio? What is different about the events in *our* Garden of Eden? Why does God seem angry and punish Lucifer *this time* for doing 'that, which has been done in other worlds'? Why is *this world* now so wicked, prompting the God of Heaven to weep over *this particular* earth and its inhabitants? Why is *this* the only one that would crucify its own God? How much should I trust Lucifer's words when distilling information obtained in this search?
- 3) If a means for fulfilling the first commandment had been prepared—if it was not God's will or intent that they should fall—then in what context should I understand Eve's perceptions? (e.g., Moses 5:11 and her statements to Adam: "...and you will be left a lone man in the garden"; "It is better that we should pass through sorrow, that we might know the good from the evil.")
- 4) What is to be gained or divinely revealed from retrospective "what might have been" conjecture, or from "what would have" happened speculation? Is there any truth to such statements at all? If not (hint: it's in the scriptures), what is the source of such speculations?
- 5) What could Lucifer have possibly said to frighten, intimidate, or 'sell' 1/3 of the hosts of heaven into forsaking their first inheritance to follow him? What was his marketing sales pitch?
- 6) What is the meaning of the Tree of Life? What is the meaning of "knowledge of Evil" with respect to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Are the trees real or merely symbolic?

Summary

Returning to the timeless and unchanging principles of the October, 2017 First Presidency Message “The Blessings of Obedience” (Ensign, p.4). Now imagine these principled words being conveyed by a modern prophet retrospectively to our First Parents in un-fallen Eden, and the reader may closely approximate what C.S. Lewis did in having Edwin Ransom of Earth visit the First Lady of Perelandra during her trial:

“The greatest lesson we can learn in [im]mortality,” President Thomas S. Monson has taught, “is that when God speaks and we obey, we will always be right.” (Ensign, Oct., 2007,7)

We [and they in unfallen societies] will also be blessed. He reminds us that the commandments are the surest guide to happiness and peace. As President Monson said during a recent general conference: “When we keep the commandments, our lives will be happier, more fulfilling, and less complicated. Our challenges and problems will be easier to bear, and we will receive [God’s] promised blessings.”

“God’s commandments are not given to frustrate us or to become obstacles to our happiness. Just the opposite is true. He who created us and who loves us perfectly knows just how we need to live our lives in order to obtain the greatest happiness possible. He has provided us with guidelines which, if we follow them, will see us safely through this often treacherous [im]mortal journey. We remember the words of the familiar hymn: ‘Keep the commandments! In this there is safety; in this there is peace’ [see “Keep the Commandments,” *Hymns*, no. 303].” (Ensign, Nov., 2015, 83)

I maintain that the only reason why it is worthwhile to portray the garden scene in the temple, prior to the endowment ordinance, is to give *us* the same test that was given to our first parents. It no longer matters what they chose, because they also chose to repent. But it matters a great deal what *we* think our God intended, because *now* it is all about whether *we* choose to partake of Lucifer's brand of knowledge. Who's on the Lord's side, who?

May we maintain the courage to defy the consensus. May we ever choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong. As we contemplate the decisions we make in our lives each day—whether to make this choice or that choice—if we choose Christ, we will have made the correct choice.

—President Thomas S. Monson, *Choices*, April Conference 2016

Notes

¹ “Repeat a lie often enough and it becomes the truth”, is a law of propaganda often attributed to the Nazi Joseph Goebbels. Among psychologists something like this known as the "illusion of truth" effect. “How Liars Create the Illusion of Truth” By Tom Stafford, BBC on-line news, 26 Oct. 2016

² Teachings of the Prophets (Pres. Howard W. Hunter) lesson 20, when he first defined the word ‘touchstone’ as a reference standard, then described the touchstone of our faith:

"...an outward measurement of inward discipleship that marks our faithfulness..."

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." ... (Matt 22:40; Lk 10:25-28). Love God and love your neighbor. The two work together; they are inseparable. In the highest sense they may be considered as synonymous. And they are commandments that each of us can live." ("The Lord's Touchstone," Ensign, Nov. 1986, 34)

Love God, love (and serve) others. An Eternal Principle! Timeless and unchanging! Independent of events, circumstances and opinions! Hand-in-hand, these two principles form the New Testament commandment, from the Old Testament law; but they are also precedent to the Fall! An Eternal Principle! God intended for His children in the Garden to be exactly obedient to Him, just as He expects *us* to be exactly obedient to Him, as our demonstration of Love to Him!

It strikes me that while most of our efforts in priesthood meetings rightly seem to focus on the need for and method of implementing the penultimate commandment (charity), yet the principal commandment bears sufficient importance as to merit some deeper understanding which would place it solidly within the foundation of our belief: 'Love God' ("choose me") means to Believe *in* Him, Believe Him, obey Him, and serve others.

³ "The code for moral law is found in the scriptures, stated simply as, "Wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). The scriptures speak in general terms, leaving us free to apply the principles of the gospel to meet the infinite variety of life. But when they say "thou shalt not," we had better pay attention." (Elder Boyd K. Packer, "Our Moral Environment", April, 1992)

⁴ *Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God. And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers.* (D&C 93:38,39)

⁵ One editor was concerned that this notion of plain contradiction among seemingly foundational principles represented among statements from the Brethren would undermine the faith of those who might be wavering. Please don't panic! Priesthood keys, ordinances and covenants are all in place and in full force. The truth of moral agency is that we can choose to allow the light to elevate us and inspire our commitment: Believe God! Or we can allow fear and doubt to draw us back to solitude and isolation from the gifts of God. See D&C 13, where it is plain that the keys shall never be taken again from the earth. The Church was restored to bring the Good News of the Gospel to all the earth. The Church is the steward of God's authority and power to act in His name. The keys are intact. The covenants and ordinances enable the power of the Atonement to enter our lives on a daily basis even after we are saved.

First, believe God! Then follow the Prophets!

⁶ We must begin with absolute faith in God and total distrust of Satan. God had the means to realize and bring to fruition every promise He made in the Garden of Eden (1 Nephi 3:7). If not, then He is not a God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. If not, He indeed varies from that which He has said (Mosiah 2:22; Alma 7:20; Mormon 9:10; D&C 3:2).

All rationalizations to the contrary rely on the hypothetical *what might have been* (see D&C 93:24,25). This dogma I refer to as the ‘garden infertility paradox’ is the single lingering remnant—in fact the original *basis*— of the now-debunked, false Adam-God doctrine: that the fruit of mortality was essential to beget progeny, *even for a god*. The foundation for our Fall doctrine rests with Lehi’s *suppositions* (his word, 2 Ne 2:17) after he had studied the brass plates (1 Ne 5:11) and read the objective record of statements from *beguiled* Mother Eve (Moses 5:11) *just after* she and her husband had been commanded to repent (back in v.8). In other words, Eve’s perspective as captured in Moses 5:11 did not yet represent the benefit of light that comes from repentance, as she had not yet had the *opportunity* to repent. In fact, the whole episode is a lesson in why the hypothetical and conjectural is so useless, helping us to refocus on the here and now, and reflect in gratitude how Eve and her husband *did* eventually repent, and teach us how to do the same (Father Adam is mentioned specifically in Moses 6:51-68, esp. 59-62; Eve is mentioned in D&C 138:38,39)—thereby showing us the way to return from exile into a path capable of leading us to everlasting Joy!

⁷ Lucifer’s doctrines cannot be held either secret or sacred for two reasons: first, they are critically important in how we interpret the events that transpired in the Garden of Eden; and second, because it is prophesied that Lucifer’s pretended lordship inside the temple must be revealed, his dark works must be shouted upon the housetops and his lies spoken openly before important events can occur in our lives.

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” (2 Thes. 2:3-4)

Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding? (Isaiah 29:15-16)

“Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops” (Luke 12:3)

And the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed. (D&C 1:3)

⁸ The rivalry, though, was almost certainly a motivating factor for Lucifer in demanding a horrible ransom in exchange for his hostages, since it was his brother who had earlier cast him down, per Moses 4:3 *“Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;”*

⁹ Genesis 3:13 *And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.* (also Moses 4:19)
2 Corinthians 11:3 *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

¹⁰ Cunning: the false perception that God manipulated Lucifer to get Eve to accomplish God’s secret intentions. Duplicity: Commanding one thing; intending the opposite.

¹¹ “The simple truth is that we *cannot* fully comprehend the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ and we *will not* adequately appreciate the unique purpose of His birth or His death—in other words, there is no way to truly celebrate Christmas *or* Easter—without understanding that there was an actual Adam and Eve who fell from an actual Eden, with all the consequences that fall carried with it.” —Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Where Justice, Love, and Mercy Meet”, April, 2015

¹² Moses’ vision of the rest of creation’s vast portfolio created a stark contrast with our own fallen world:

And were it possible that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still; and yet thou art there, and thy bosom is there; and also thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever;

And thou hast taken Zion to thine own bosom, from all thy creations, from all eternity to all eternity; and naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end; how is it thou canst weep? (Moses 7:30,31)

Nothing but Justice, Truth and Peace in all the other millions and millions of worlds from here to the throne of God. Only in our fallen world do we find the machinations of Satan dominant from root to canopy. These verses conclusively lay to rest the common rationalization that what we are experiencing now is so much better than being stuck in a (albeit, pretty) garden all our lives! Lewis greatly expands our minds and enlarges our imaginations with images of how righteousness and peace are made manifest in entire un-fallen societies. Better to think of Eden as a Temple, the House of the Lord, where one visits periodically for specific purposes, rather than where one resides permanently. The world is their home and laboratory where challenges, opportunities and learning experiences abound, without sin! What scripture indicates that such learning would exclude the making of mistakes, or even preclude the learning from bad choices?

But why should we ever assume that betrayal (primal sin) is essential for learning and growing to take place?