

Brothers and Sisters, I would like to talk to you today about the Gift of the Holy Ghost, what it is, what it does, why we need it, and how to receive it. I am using my own words, not LDS jargon, and speaking from my own experiences, and things that have been revealed to me, and things that I have practiced in my own life.

We can read about somebody else's revelations, but they don't really become our revelations until we experience them for ourselves and can put them in your own words, so I hope and pray you can take something from what I say, and experience it in your own life and make it real for you by being able to express it in your own words.

I am speaking directly from the transcript I have written in order to emphasize certain words. I found so much material that I had to greatly condense it. Even condensing it, I had to break the talk down into three parts.

Part 1

The Difference between the Latter-day Saints and the other churches of the world

Elder LeGrand Richards, "The Gift of the Holy Ghost", General Conference, October 1979:

I humbly pray that the Spirit of the Lord will sustain me while I address you here this afternoon and discuss with you a statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith when he visited President [Martin] Van Buren, president of the United States. The President asked the Prophet what difference there was between the Prophet's church and the other churches of the world. The Prophet answered:

"We have the correct mode of baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands." Then he said: "**We considered that all other considerations were contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost**" (see *History of the Church*, 4:42).

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1979/10/the-gift-of-the-holy-ghost?lang=eng>

In other words, if a church doesn't teach the true principles underlying this doctrine, and if the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Ghost are not evident, then that church is the same as any other church.

Every **good gift** and every **perfect gift** is from above, and cometh down from the **Father** of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (Jas 1:17)

And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses' name then it be Moses' church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; **but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel.** Verily I say unto you, that ye are built upon my gospel; therefore ye shall call whatsoever things ye do call, in my name; therefore if ye call upon the Father, for the church, **if it be in my name the Father will hear you; And if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel then will the Father show forth his own works in it.** But if it be not built upon my gospel, and is built upon the works of men, or upon the works of the devil, verily I say unto you they have joy in their works for a season, and by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return. (3 Nephi 27:8-11)

Both Faith and Works are Necessary

We hear so much about works, and almost nothing about the faith, desires, and intentions, which are gifts of the Spirit, and which must be the motivation for our works, so I am going to emphasize, and even over-emphasize the need for **faith, desires, and, intentions that harmonize with our actions.**

If any of you lack wisdom, let him **ask** of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But **let him ask in faith**, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. (Jas 1:5-6)

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would **ask** God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall **ask** with a **sincere heart**, with **real intent**, having **faith in Christ**, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. (Moroni 10:4)

If any scriptures form the basis for our religion, it is the above two. But, you must not only ask; you must ask with a sincere heart, real intent, and have faith in Christ.

We are judged not only by our works, but by our desires.

And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be **judged according to their works**; and if their **works were good** in this life, and **the desires of their hearts were good**, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good. (Alma 41:3)

And by their **desires** and their **works** you shall know them. (D&C 18:38)

For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their **works**, according to the **desire** of their hearts. (D&C 137:9)

It is true that **“faith without works is dead”** (James 2:20), but it is also true that **works without faith are vain.**

Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: **for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.** (2 Cor 3:6)

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: **but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith** in them that heard it. (Heb 4:2)

Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, **which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.** (Helaman 3:35)

As we will show, the Book of Mormon teaches that **intent is everything.**

And after ye have **obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them;** and **ye will seek them for the intent to do good**--to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted. (Jacob 2:19)

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and **if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you,** that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. (Moroni 10:32)

Both faith and works are necessary, but if you are unable to perform the works, intent alone is sufficient. Having faith, with pure intent, but without the means to carry out works, is without condemnation. In other words, the right intentions are so important, the Lord will bless you, in this case, because of your intentions, alone.

And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give. **And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless, otherwise ye are condemned; and your condemnation is just for ye covet that which ye have not received.** (Mosiah 4:24-25)

Testing the Heart

The Lord asked me to ponder over my baptism of fire experience and I received the following insight. I had every intention of getting re-baptized by water. I had the prompting and the

confirmation to do it. I arranged for somebody to do it. Then, we had that really cold winter of 2020 and Covid began to spread, so we put off the baptism, but it was on the 29th of February, 2020 that I received my baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, despite not being re-baptized.

In the experiences leading up to that baptism, I met with a man who traveled all over the world teaching the Gospel and bringing people to Christ. He told me the reason he and his family went to Texas was that there were people there that the Lord wanted him to see. The Lord must have wanted him to meet me, because he told me something that led to my baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, which happened the very next day. What he told me was that I needed to pray and ask the Lord some questions that would be revealed to me. Next day I prayed, first, to be revealed the questions to ask, then to ask the questions. My object in going to pray in the first place was to gain a testimony of what the man was teaching so that I could be his companion on his missionary journeys. I had every intention of joining him, but I never saw the man again, but because of that desire and intention, I was blessed with an incredible experience with the Lord.

The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: **but the LORD trieth the hearts.**
(Prov 17:3)

Search me, O God, and know my **heart**: try me, and know my **thoughts**: (Ps 139:23)

Let the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his **ways**, and according to the **fruit** of his doings. (Jer 17:10)

Sometimes the test is merely a test of our heart and mind -- of whether we fully intend to do. This could explain Abraham's test. The Lord just wanted to see where his heart was at.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matt 6:21)

Turning that around, you will know what a man treasures most, when you look into his heart.

More scriptures showing the need for a pure heart and real intent. (Moroni 6:8, 10:4)

Behold, **the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind**; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days. (D&C 64:34)

For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart? (Mosiah 5:13)

Lip service and checklists are not enough. The affections of our heart should be centered on the Lord. We should obey the Lord's commandments because we love Him, not out of fear, a desire to appease Him, or to impress the world.

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their **lips** do honour me, but have removed their **heart** far from me, and their **fear** toward me is taught by the precept of men: (Isa 29:13)

For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is **poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.** (Isa 66:2)

To truly do good, you must also be good

There is a great discussion of this principle in Moroni 7:5-17, but to briefly summarize: **a good tree cannot produce evil fruit and an evil tree cannot produce good fruit.** The tree is you and the fruit is your works: what you do in life and how you treat other people. What makes you good or evil are your thoughts, intentions, and desires. In other words, what **motivates** you.

You might think you can fake good intentions, but if you do so, your true intentions are not good intentions, but intentions to deceive yourself and others. God knows and the universe knows whether your intentions are real or false, and if false, nothing you try: prayer, repentance, faith, miracles, revelation will work. The heavens will be closed to you.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.** (Heb 4:12)

The Holy Ghost changes your heart

And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them. And they all cried with one voice, saying: **Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.** (Mosiah 5:1-2)

And **according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart.** Behold I say unto you that this is all true. I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances? (Alma 5:12,19)

And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, **changed**

from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; (Mosiah 27:25)

For, said he, I have **repented** of my sins, and have been **redeemed** of the Lord; behold I am **born** of the Spirit. And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, **changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they become new creatures;** and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. (Mosiah 27:24-26)

Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the **purifying and the sanctification of their hearts**, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God. (Helaman 3:35)

For the natural man is an **enemy** to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, **unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit**, and putteth off the natural man and **becometh** a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

How do you treat your enemies? You hate them; you fear them; you avoid them. How does God treat His enemies? God **loves** His enemies.

Part 2

More Supporting Quotes from Scriptures

You need both faith and works, and the closer you become to the Lord, the more the Holy Spirit influences you, the more aligned your thoughts, desires, intentions, and understanding will be aligned with the Lord.

My son, forget not my **law**; but let thine **heart** keep my commandments: Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (Prov 3:1,5)

The natural impulse of mankind is to fear the Lord, to run and hide, and to cover their sins. We need to realize, instead, that the Lord's love is constant, not conditional, and if we turn to him and confess our sins, He will forgive us. The Lord doesn't hold grudges or play mind games.

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their **mouth**, and with their **lips** do honour me, but have removed their **heart** far from me, and their **fear** toward me is taught by the precept of men: (Isa 29:13)

When Samuel came to Jesse, searching which one of his sons would be the next king of Israel, Jesse introduced all of his sons, except David, who was out tending the sheep. This is a solid reminder of how the Lord sees and judges us.

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his **countenance**, or on the **height** of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the **heart**. (1 Sam 16:7)

From Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we read:

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

In order to truly love God with all our heart, might, mind, and strength and love our neighbor as ourself, we need an endowment of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, none can fulfill these Two Great Commandments except an endowment is given unto them for the fulfillment of such; for, herein are the principles which reach unto eternity! Behold, I say unto you collectively that ye must **individually** seek after this endowment; yea, ye must all seek **individually** so that the **body** may be endowed collectively with the endowment of charity. For, this is even as my Servant Enoch taught his people diligently so to do! (HTP 9:7)

The Lord's Invitation to Come to Him is Universal

The Lord invites all to come to Him, regardless of their station in life, and without regard to worldly church affiliation. He sees things from a higher perspective which transcends all terrestrial church affiliations. This is a mystery and a harsh lesson that we need to learn.

And he said unto me: Behold **there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil;** wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth. (1 Nephi 14:10)

Therefore, I will unfold unto them this great **mystery;** For, behold, I will gather them as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if they will not harden their hearts; **Yea, if they will come, they may, and partake of the waters of life freely. Behold, this is my doctrine--whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church. Whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me, but is against me;**

therefore he is not of my church. And now, behold, whosoever is of my church, and endureth of my church to the end, him will I establish upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. (D&C 10:64-69)

For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and **he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him,** black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33)

No mortal man can claim to possess the power of God, while denying that power to others. God lends it to us to use as stewards, but it remains God's power, channeled **through** us. Not even Peter, considered by many to be the greatest of the apostles, had the power or the authority to deny the Gift of the Holy Ghost when the power of the Holy Spirit descended upon the righteous Gentiles. (Acts 10)

And they deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Hearken unto us, and hear ye our precept; **for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men;** (2 Nephi 28:5)

Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved? (Moroni 7:36)

These are the words of Jesus Christ, which He uttered from the heavens, before He descended to the earth. He appeared to the Nephites, but His message is universal, and it echoes down to this day. May these words burn in your heart and mind, and may you have a deep and burning desire to join the Lord in His work, and extend these promises and blessings to all the world.

Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.

...

And as many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God; and even so will I to as many as shall believe on my name, for behold, by me redemption cometh, and in me is the law of Moses fulfilled.

...

And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not.

Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the **world** from sin.

Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved. (3 Nephi 9:14-22)

Learning and exercising personal revelation

The laying on of hands is only an invitation and a command to **receive** the Holy Ghost. As we have established, what **changes** your heart, mind, desires, and intentions is the Holy Spirit, which gift you do **receive** when you actually receive the unspeakable Gift of the Holy Ghost

God shall give unto you knowledge by his **Holy Spirit**, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the **Holy Ghost**, that has not been revealed since the world was until now; (D&C 121:26)

There is a mystery revealed in this verse. Did you catch it? The Holy Spirit is the **Gift**, and the Holy Ghost is the **Giver** of that gift.

How do you receive that knowledge?

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, I suppose that ye ponder somewhat in your hearts concerning that which ye should do after ye have entered in by the way. But, behold, why do ye ponder these things in your hearts? Do ye not remember that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels? And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost? Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. **Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.** Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye **ask** not, neither do ye **knock**; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark. For behold, again I say unto you that **if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do.** (2 Nephi 32:1-5)

The gift of the Holy Ghost changes your heart, mind, desires, and intentions in order to put you in a position to **receive revelation for yourself** and show you how to draw even closer to the Lord and more fully partake of His salvation. Salvation isn't just for the world to come. It's for the here and now.

Joseph Smith tried to teach the principle of revelation. It is both a **doctrine** that we must **understand** and a **skill** that we need to **learn**. The Holy Ghost manifests sometimes in words, or in intelligence, which we can express in words. It is not a feeling or an emotion, though we may experience feelings and emotions in connection with the intelligence we receive. We may also experience a burning in our hearts, or throughout our entire bodies. The Holy Spirit touches every aspect of us: spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical, beginning with the spiritual, and working its way down.

The Spirit of Revelation is in connection with these blessings. A person may profit by **noticing** the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel **pure intelligence flowing into you**, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by **noticing** it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.,) those things that were presented unto your **minds** by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by **learning** the Spirit of God and **understanding** it, you **may grow into the principle of revelation**, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus. (TPJS p.151)

Part 3

The Three Voices of Personal Revelation

A common problem with experiencing the gifts of the Spirit is we don't have the faith to **look** for them, or **notice** them. Another problem is we assume it's our own voice, or the voice of evil, instead of the voice of the Lord. Some people are **afraid** to even try to listen because they assume, it's always going to be their own voice or the voice of evil.

This is a **faithless** and a **fearful and lazy** approach. Take the approach of **faith**. Assume it is the voice of the Lord and ask for a confirmation. If you are wrong, have faith that the Lord will correct you and coach you. I highly recommend that you check with the many sources on the Internet, written by people who have already learned or are learning the "principle of revelation". Google "the three voices of personal revelation". Here is a brief summary of each of the voices.

- **Our own voice:** Fearful, tentative, uncertain, wavering, changing.

- **The voice of the Adversary:** Subtle, persistent, fear-based, Invitations to cover your sins, satisfy your pride or vain ambition, compare yourself to somebody else, think more of yourself, think less of yourself, dig a pit for your neighbor.
- **The voice of God:** Subtle, sure, stable. Invitations to improve yourself, and to serve others. Gentle, meek, love unfeigned. You'll only receive a prompting a couple of times, and if you ignore it, the prompting will cease.

The more we listen to the voice of either God or the Adversary, the more we get in tune with their enticings, the clearer the voices become, and the easier it will be to understand and follow their enticings.

The "Two Wolves" parable is a Cherokee story about an internal battle between two forces: one evil (anger, envy, greed) and one good (joy, peace, love). When a grandson asks which wolf wins, the grandfather replies, "The one you feed".

Opposition in All things vs Opposition in Everything

Some people claim that half the time you will hear the voice of Satan and half the time, you will hear the voice of God. Their basis for this reasoning is "opposition in all things". But, there is a difference between **opposition in ALL things** and **opposition in EVERYTHING**. Do you actually think that every time Jesus received something from the Father, He had to question, whether it came from the Adversary, or was He so attuned to the Father's voice within him that He immediately recognized it so often that Satan had no influence on Him? The Book of Mormon says that He ministered in power and great glory. The light shined in darkness, but the darkness could not comprehend it (put it out). (John 1)

And because of the righteousness of his people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the **hearts** of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth. (1 Nephi 22:26)

But, never forget that you aren't immune to temptation, and you need to learn to recognize it for what it is. As you learn and use these principles, you will grow and learn to discern. And you will have the best coach in the world: the Lord, at your side, and instead of 50-50, your chances of hearing the Lord will be greatly increased.

Personal Testimony

What I have given here comes from things I have natively known all my life and also from many hard-won lessons of life. I hate the term, but my "faith crisis" came when I realized all the Mormon platitudes and cliches were not improving my life, as promised, and I began to seek the Lord, and "work out my own salvation", just between Him and me, with no middle-man. But,

before I realized this, I had to go far away, get lost, and realize that I was lost, before I could truly be found. A “crisis” is a judgment that brings decision, and I needed to make a decision of my own free will and choice, not a decision that was chosen for me, and imposed upon me.

Over the last 30 or 40 years, I have tried to apply the principles taught here: to actually receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost, to enter upon the Way, and to commune with the Lord upon the Way. Both the effort and the result have brought a great change into my life. Just the journey of simply seeking the Lord and following His direction from day to day will make you a better person. And, I say this in the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the transcript for this speech, I have included a few excerpts from a podcast from “Uncorrelated Mormonism” called *The 8 Woes of Mormonism*. I would recommend reading the quotes and listening to the entire podcast. It covers in detail exactly what I have been talking about, as related to the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ time, as well as to the LDS church of our time.

Appendix: Selected Quotes from “The 8 Woes of Mormonism”

From: <https://youtu.be/bGLFDICBFU>

In the book of Matthew chapter 23, Jesus gave one of the strongest rebukes possible against the organized religion of his time. It was an incredibly pointed attack against the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees, which they couldn't see. Today, we naturally think that it only applies to them, who Jesus continually railed against.

However, it applies to us as well, more than ever. In many ways, we are falling into the same mental traps that they did anciently. And just like them, we fail to see our own hypocrisy.

In Matthew chapter 23, Jesus describes eight woes against the scribes and Pharisees of his day. These woes attack the external rules and performances of organized religion and address the lack of inner transformation that they produce. These external rules create a blindness that causes us to lose sight of the purpose of the religion.

Instead of focusing on approaching the divine, we focus on meeting the obligations and rules of the religion and treat meeting those performances as a replacement for divine acceptance. If we can appear to be outwardly righteous, then in our minds we are righteous, regardless of a lack of inner transformation. In Jesus' day, the scribes and Pharisees were perfect examples of this blindness.

However, he is imploring them to also see that the leaders themselves were not examples of the inward change that should be a result of a religious life. The leaders themselves didn't even

follow the rules they prescribed, and they failed to even see the hypocrisy of that situation. This is because the leaders now personally identified as the role they performed.

They were the role, and the role was godly. Therefore, they were godly. This is, of course, a direct attack against the general concept of organized religion with prescribed rules and rights.

In fact, they want all of the same things that Jesus railed against. In addition, their set of rules and performances lack the inward change that would show the validity of the rules. They hide this in increasingly clever ways, however, it will never go away.

If the rules of Mormonism produced the inward change that Jesus consistently described, then the leaders of Mormonism would be excellent examples of this. Instead, they are examples of using public opinion to shape church policy, examples of focusing on dead works while the living suffer, and examples of placing themselves as lights between us and God. Each of the eight woes applies to the leaders of Mormonism today just as much as they applied to the leaders of the past.

Jesus says the leaders shut the kingdom of heaven from before the people and instead require them to see the leaders as the only valid path to God. Anyone that steps out of line is then excommunicated from the church, which eliminates the potential challenge to the leaders' authority. Today, this is no different in Mormonism.

Anyone that claims an encounter with the divine is labeled a heretic or an apostate and excommunicated from the church. In this way, the leaders eliminate any challenge to their authority or status and shut the door to heaven to all those seeking God. In the second woe, Jesus attacks the scribes and Pharisees for using their legal system to take advantage of the most vulnerable among them.

In order to compensate for this lack of inner transformation, converts would quite often prioritize the rituals and become more dogmatic in the hope of legitimizing their decision to convert. In this way, the blind were truly leading the blind, and the converts' new zealotry was actually mistaken for righteousness. This greater separation from God meant that the converts were in fact spiritually going backwards and hence becoming children of hell.

[We all know those who take some temporal commandment and carry it to the extremes, and then claim to be living a so-called "higher law", which is really a lower law. The way is **strait** (strict) and **narrow**. Keep this in mind, but also keep in mind the Lord's teaching against teaching for commandments, things which are "more or less" than what He taught, and establishing it for His doctrine.]

In this way, we are told to trust in the doctrines, the performances, and the rituals of the church instead of trusting in a living God. Prior to baptism, a convert could be seeking God, however

after baptism, they are seeking to align themselves more with the church and its doctrines in the hope of approaching the divine. This is a key distinction and is how a religion of external rules, exact doctrines, and performances can make a person fit for hell instead of holy.

Their view of righteousness had become how closely a person follows the law, not how closely the person mirrors the divine. Today, this is no different in Mormonism. We are told not to focus on a connection with the divine, but instead on our connection with the church, instead with its doctrines and rituals.

According to the LDS church, in order to approach God and be worthy of his presence, then we must comply with all the minutia of the church. Not once is there a discussion about how closely we follow the teachings of Jesus, how merciful we are to those that seek it, how much we care for the poor and the needy, or how much we are seeking to be transformed by Jesus. Instead, our righteousness is determined by how closely we align with the church and its teachings.

They had to carefully maintain public persona to mask the truth and couldn't see the hypocrisy of their situation because they were now identifying with their religious role instead of their actual behaviors. In many respects, they were ceremonially clean, however, were in fact religiously far from God and didn't even know it. They believed their exterior image was who they really were, however, the image was simply a fake facade over an inward nature that was in opposition to God.

Leaders have repeatedly taught that the only way to God is through the church with them and their priesthood keys. There is no other way. In addition, the leaders of the church today celebrate the bravery and courage of the prophets of the past who openly opposed their religious institutions, all while directly teaching that it is apostasy to oppose them today.

I'm not quite sure what is more hypocritical. They openly admit that opposing those in the past was God's will while teaching that any opposition to them today is ungodly. According to the doctrines of the church, they try to spiritually kill the current prophets just as much as they would physically the ancient ones.

How can we really approach the divine more fully when our very church is teaching us to approach them instead?

We must first, however, stop our dependence on the church and its leaders for our relationship with God and instead start being willing to trust in Him. The most important thing we can do is to trust God and follow Him, even if this means we sacrifice our standing in the church. The real church of God has no artificial requirements for entry, while organizations of men do.